

*Università degli studi di Torino*  
*Dip. di Culture, politica e società*



*Università degli studi di Milano*  
*Dip. di Scienze sociali e politiche*



PhD PROGRAM

*SOCIOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY OF SOCIAL RESEARCH – 31st cohort*

**ENGAGING STATELESS AND STATE-LINKED DIASPORAS: ASSYRIANS AND  
ARMENIANS IN THE NETHERLANDS**

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## ABSTRACT

The central aim of this research is to examine the complexities of relations between state, homeland, and diaspora by putting the existence and absence of nation-states as a salient divide between diaspora groups. At present, there have been few systematic, comparative studies that reflect commonalities and differences of stateless and state-linked diasporic networks. As the Armenian and Assyrian diasporas are two of the oldest diasporic communities in the world, they provide a backdrop for an expansive illustration of diaspora engagement practices in stateless and state-linked environments. The Dutch-Assyrian and Dutch-Armenian communities represent also a timely research context for studying conflict-affected diasporas because of the tense situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.

The research studies pro-active diaspora engagement practices: *transnational justice-seeking* activities for conflict, post-conflict settings and human rights violations; *collective remittances* in support of the homeland and other transnational communities in need; *diasporas actions in support to newly-arrived migrants*.

The findings of this research contribute to the field of diaspora studies by expanding understanding of the importance of homelands for diasporas and the complex relation of diasporas with the statehood dynamics of their homeland. The dissertation argues that “statelessness” and “state-linkedness” are not static and dichotomous, but rather contested and nuanced categories. Despite being neglected and dismembered from the “official” diaspora discourses, stateless diasporas find alternative links with territories within states that they refer to as homelands. Diasporas do this through their trusted networks and transnational institutions. Likewise, the existence of states is not a sufficient condition for diaspora-state cooperation. Despite the influence of structural factors, diasporas have the autonomy to decide on how to position themselves towards their homelands “of nation-state” and “without nation-state.” The research offers a closer look at the plurality of non-state organised actors in shaping both institutionalised and unofficial, non-institutionalised diaspora engagement practices.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This PhD has been an important step for my career advancement and a life-changing journey. There are many people whose support I sincerely acknowledge.

Foremost, I wish to thank Professor Ambrosini not only for his excellent supervision and detailed comments on my work, but for keeping me enthusiastic and confident about my research. I am thankful to NASP (Network for the Advancement of Social and Political Studies) for my research funding. I have immensely benefitted from classes and consultation with professors at the University of Milan and University of Turin.

I spent significant periods of my dissertation at the Political Science Department at the University of Amsterdam and the Center for the Study of International Migration at the University of California Los Angeles. Many of my ideas were generated and developed within those research environments thanks to discussions I had with faculty members.

I am indebted to all of the Dutch-Armenians and Dutch-Assyrians who opened their homes to me and shared their stories. Most of them offered me more than just the desired information and gave advice and assisted during the very critical stages of my fieldwork.

I owe a special thanks to my family in Yerevan, Armenia for their constant support, courage, and patience. My father who inspired and guided me with his academic career, and my mother for giving me the persistence to reach my goals. A special thanks to my friend and family in Los Angeles, California as well for being so supportive during the most intense last months of dissertation writing.

Last but not least, I want to thank all of my colleagues and friends with whom I connected with as a result of this PhD journey.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AAF All Armenian Fund  
ACE Assyrian Confederation Europe  
ADM Assyrian Democratic Movement (ZOWAA)  
ADO Assyrian Democratic Organisation  
AFN Assyrian Federation, the Netherlands  
AGBU Armenian General Benevolent Union  
AGBU YP Armenian General Benevolent Union Young Professionals  
AJO Armeense jongeren organisatie  
AKP Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi / Justice and Development Party  
AMVE Assyrische Mesopotamische Vereniging Enschede  
ANC Armenian National Committee  
ARC Armenian Relief Committee  
ARF Armenian Revolutionary Federation  
AUA Assyrian Universal Alliance  
EU European Union  
FAON Federation of Armenian Organisations in the Netherlands  
ICMPD International Centre for Migration Policy Development  
IKF Iraqi Kurdistan Front  
IOM International Organisation for Migration  
ISIS Islamic State in Iraq and Syria  
MED Midyad El‘Aziz Diyarbakır (Cultural Association)  
NPPU Nineveh Plains Protection Unit (Military Organisation)  
PKK Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan (Workers’ Party of Kurdistan)  
RA Republic of Armenia  
UAF United Armenian Fund  
UCLA University of California, Los Angeles  
UN United Nations  
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.  
UNPO Unrepresented Nations and People Organisation  
USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



# INTRODUCTION

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During the last two decades, diasporas and migrant populations have become part of state policies in more than half of United Nation member states (Weiner 2017, Ragazzi 2014), including Armenia, Israel, Turkey, New Zealand, Azerbaijan, and Syria. The social, economic, and political potential of diasporas in conflict, peace-building, democratisation, and homeland development has also attracted scholarly attention (Castles 2009, Newland & Patrick 2004, Pandey et al. 2009, Baser 2015, Cochrane 2015, Van Hear and Cohen 2017). Diasporas are studied as actors with whom states design policies and develop institutional structures to harness their capital fully. Recent studies document the practical importance of diaspora-engagement in the country of origin, the country of destination, as well as at a transnational level. Most of these studies treat sending states as constant actors that shape diaspora engagement and rarely question the significance of the states for diasporas, diasporas' readiness to mobilise in response to calls of homelands and if diasporas' perception of the homeland corresponds to the actual nation-state.

The usage of "homeland" and "state" as undoubtedly conjoined categories is a fairly recent development in diaspora studies. Initial writings and classical conceptualisation of diasporas ascribed the term "diaspora" to groups that were forcibly dispersed from their homelands and have existed without statehood for thousand years, such as Jews and Armenians (Cohen, 2008). These groups stayed bonded together not based on their ties with home-states but due to shared nostalgic ideas about the homeland, a desire of homecoming, common history, religion, as well as a strong sense of solidarity with co-ethnics across the world that prevails throughout generations (Safran 1991, Burler 2001, Van Hear 1998). The downplaying of the vision of the "lost" or "imagined" homelands that correspond to existing nation-states is typical to modern conceptualisation of diasporas. The classical conceptualisation of diasporas as organic and unproblematic groups with a historically prescribed diaspora identity has been widely criticised by modern diaspora theorists and has not been engaged with academically in recent years. While accepting that classical diaspora theories are essentialising reality, I argue

that “stateness” and “homeland” categories need to be re-questioned in the modern conceptualisation of diasporas instead of taking them as given realities. Therefore, I suggest putting the existence and absence of nation-states as a salient divide between diaspora groups.

The comparison with the “contrasting” side of the same concept has the potential of questioning assumptions that are taken for granted and constructing more valid conclusions about the role of states for diasporas. Sheffer (2008) suggested making statelessness and state-linkedness as a salient divide between diaspora groups. He pointed out that there is a basic difference between the strategies made by stateless and state-linked diasporas, and underlined the importance of its further exploration. By doing so, he aimed at opening a discussion on the role of statehood. However, it has not been elaborated much in the literature. Recent literature has started to put increasingly more attention on the capacities and characteristics of the state and its interrelation with diaspora and transnational mobilisation activities. Levitt (2003) was one of the first authors who pointed out that the activities of strong states compared with those of weak states in relation to transnational communities needed to be addressed. While other scholars (Pearlman 2014, Østergaard-Nielsen 2003, Skulte-Ouaiss & Tabar 2015, Alonso & Mylonas 2017) have emphasised that states’ strengths and weakness can play a definite role in the mobilisation process of diasporas, they generally do not study diasporas that do not have a nation-state, and do not question diasporas’ links with their home-state.

The absence of discussion regarding stateless diasporas is not connected with the absence of phenomena, but with the lack of “voice” of stateless groups. The age of nation-states makes whatever is not a “state” an exception, which has perhaps influenced academic research production. Among stateless groups, such as Assyrians, Tamils, Kurds, Circassians, and Roma, much less attention has been given to groups such as Assyrians, where the perceived homeland has only mythical and ideological value, and there is no realistic hope to achieve statehood or an autonomous region in the future. Increasing numbers of migration and diasporic practitioners articulate different conceptions about diasporas as non-state actors that are not directly engaged with the state in aiding their homeland in times of crises and conflict situations, such as international organisations, NGOs, and religious organisations (Brinkerhoff 2016, Shain 2002, Shain & Barth 2003, Adamson 2005, Smith and Stares 2007, Orjuella 2008, Koinova 2011, Kainova 2017). Despite this, scholarship has not addressed the mobilisation

potential and practices of stateless diaspora groups that can contain considerable information on the role of diasporas as non-state actors.

Diaspora literature needs to be enriched not only by breaking the silence on stateless diasporas but by de-essentialising diaspora–state links for state-linked diasporas. There is a need to critically examine the position of diasporas as descendants of or belonging to nation-states, as well as exploring the relations of diaspora actors to the statehood dynamics of their homeland. Examining these issues can cover a range of questions that remain unanswered: How significant is the existence or absence of states for diasporas? Does diaspora engagement require a state as a centre? How do the strategies, actor dynamics, organisations, and engagement approaches of stateless and state-linked diasporas differ from or similar to each other?

For answering these questions, this thesis focuses on the engagement practices of a state-linked diaspora that has a homeland corresponding to an existing nation-state (the Armenian diaspora) and state-less diasporas that are far removed from having homelands even with contested sovereignty (the Assyrian diaspora). Several scholars have pointed that single-case studies dominate diaspora field and recommended future research agendas that include a comparative dimension (Gamlen 2014, Faist 2010, Ho 2011, Koinova 2010, Waterbury 2010). This comparative study aims at enriching the field of diaspora studies with a holistic understanding of the role of “stateness” for diaspora-engagement practices, in addition to learning more about state-linked and state-less diaspora engagement practices in general.

As the Armenian and Assyrian diasporas are two of the oldest diasporic communities in the world, they provide a backdrop for an expansive illustration of diaspora engagement practices in stateless and state-linked environments. Both cases have been referred to as conflict-generated diasporas and represent “classical” examples of diasporas that position the Genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire as the main cause for the forced separation from the homeland.

Armenian state sources report that the overall number of Armenians in the world is approximately 10 million (Kalantaryan 2015). This number is significant if we take into account that only 3 million of the population lives in Armenia, and the rest reside in more than 100 countries (Kalantaryan 2015). The Armenian diaspora lacked state support for many

centuries; it can be referred to as a state-linked diaspora only after the establishment of the Republic of Armenia in 1991. Nowadays, the Armenian government regards its diaspora as strategically vital for its political, social, and economic impact and established the Ministry of Diaspora in 2008. The Dutch-Armenian diaspora is a heterogeneous group as its members migrated from different countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Russia, and Armenia) and in different periods from 1950 until today. They ultimately migrated to the Netherlands for a number of reasons including decolonisation, fleeing civil wars, political and economic upheavals, and religious repression.

The world's total Assyrian population is estimated at 3.3 million, the majority of which live in the US, Australia, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands. Assyrians claim to be the Christianised descendants of ancient Assyrians. The Assyrian people refer to a geographic area within the borders of northern Iraq, northwest Iran, northeastern Syria, and southeastern Turkey as their homeland (Hanish 2013). Emigration of Assyrians to the Netherlands has similar patterns as those to other European countries. Migration to the Netherlands began in the 1970s through labour recruitment. Beginning in 1975, Assyrians entered the Netherlands as asylum seekers and many obtained refugee status with the help of Dutch churches and refugee organisations (Schukkink 2003, Phalet 1998). There is currently an ongoing migration of Assyrians from Syria and Iraq to the Netherlands due to civil war and war crimes of ISIS.

The Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian diasporas have a stratified and complex nature, and therefore their relations to homeland and statehood is highly contested. Armenian state policies are often being quoted as an exemplary case for diaspora-homeland engagement (Sahoo & Patanaik, 2014, Kuznetsov 2006). In comparison, statelessness is predominantly informed by an idea that indicates fear of marginalisation and absence of secure existence; stateless diasporas in contrast to state-linked nations have no means for securing their diaspora existence (Sheffer 2008). Consequently, they represent interesting cases for studying the significance of states in creation of their own diasporas, as well as the practical implications of statelessness.

Until recent years, Dutch migration policy followed a multiculturalist approach that supported the establishment of diaspora organisations. The Netherlands is a suitable context for comparing diasporas and highlighting the influence of declining multicultural policies on

diaspora communities. It is estimated that, at present, there are approximately 15,000 to 20,000 Armenians and 25,000 Assyrians living in the Netherlands. There are no official numbers available as the Dutch Bureau of Statistics does not collect information on the ethnic origins of its inhabitants, but interviewed representatives of churches and organisations in the Netherlands offer estimates that can be reconciled around these figures. The Dutch-Assyrian and Dutch-Armenian communities represent a timely research context for studying pro-active engagement practices as well, considering the tense situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. These conflicts contributed to a flow of newly-arrived migrants to the Netherlands as well, which leads to an interesting analysis on the presence or absence of pro-active engagement practices in relation to newly arrived co-ethnics.

I use the labels “state-linked” and “stateless” with an acknowledgement that there is a risk of simplifying the complex dynamics that occur within these diaspora communities, and that these concepts need to be unpacked. Often seen as a united entity, diasporas are heterogeneous groups that have ideological and motivational differences along geographic (both regarding origins and destinations) and historical lines. The “statelinkedness” of diasporas also needs nuanced analysis: do all “layers” of diaspora perceive their homeland as a state, and to what extent are they state-linked? Therefore, I suggest looking at diasporas’ heterogeneity and existing intra-group tensions on how to engage (or not) in response to homelands’ calls, instead of taking them as collectives that are undoubtedly interested in supporting their homeland and people. By exploring the heterogeneity of diasporas and their multiple layers, the thesis goes beyond commonly accepted analyses of the state, homeland, and diaspora as unitary actors. Instead, it seeks to understand how engagement practices in diasporas are constructed by multiple involved actors, and how their multiple connections with their homelands shape their mobilisation practices.

I avoid the essentialist tendency rooted in classical diaspora theories that represent the social world as a mosaic of static ethnic groups and deploy a modern conceptualisation of diasporas. Diasporas will not be conceptualised as a “natural” consequence of migration as forced dispersion; instead, I discuss diasporas as products of specific processes of development and mobilisation that are ongoing but remains incomplete (Reis 2004, Brubaker 2005, Tololyan 1996, Wahlbeck 2001). I counterbalance the state-centric tendency and develop further examination of diasporas from a non-state perspective by offering a diaspora-centric approach.



In this study, diasporas are discussed as a lived experience where diaspora interests, realities, and priorities are the main focus of analyses. I focus on the complexity of diaspora-engagement practices as a multilevel process with multiple structures and involved actors. I argue that the discussion at the macro-level misses the variety of actors, official and unofficial organisational structures, as well as the perspectives and experiences of diasporas. Following a contemporary approach, I study diasporas' attachment, presence, and absence of links with states at moments of mobilisation or engagement. However, diaspora engagement practices and mobilisation activities will not be discussed in isolation from structural factors: their historical development, migration patterns, and development of relations with the homelands and receiving states will be studied as an integral part of the diasporisation process.

I study the engagement practices of state-linked and statelessness in the social world without giving priority to any actor. Therefore, I focus at the level of diaspora communities where the interactions of different actors, as well as the absence or influence of state initiatives is observable. By taking the organised and conscious efforts of diasporas as the main unit of analysis, I aim at understanding the role of different actors involved in the process of diaspora engagement such as sending and receiving states and diaspora organisations, as well as the impact of different events on the mobilisation of diasporas. Considering the diaspora-centric focus of this study, I will also discuss diaspora relations with the states that constitute their homeland.

## 1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

The following questions have served as core guidelines throughout my research:

*How do diasporas relate to their homelands and to the statehoods of their homeland?*  
*How do the absence or presence of statehoods shape diasporas' engagement practices?*

I have examined these questions in three interrelated pro-active diaspora engagement practices: *transnational justice-seeking* activities for conflict and post-conflict settings as well as human rights violations; *collective remittances* in support of the homeland and other transnational communities in need; *diasporas actions in support to newly-arrived migrants*.

- *Justice-seeking activities:* To what extent are diasporas willing to mobilise for the “historical homeland” and present-day conflicts that are directly linked with the statehood of the homeland (territories considered to be homeland)? Who is responsible for the mobilisation of diaspora activities?
- *Collective remittances:* How is the remitting behaviour of diasporas shaped? What are the main channels of a diaspora’s collective remittances? Who remits? Are they state-supported or self-driven?
- *Support to newcomers:* How do the diaspora institutions position themselves in relation to newly-arrived groups and the statehood of their homeland when helping those newcomers displaced from the Middle East?

The choice to narrow down the study of mobilisation activities into three forms of engagement was based on the available data documented during six months of research of both communities in the Netherlands. I have conducted key informant interviews with the representatives of diaspora organisations, core members of diasporas, and in-depth interviews with Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian migrants (both second and first generation), as well as focus group discussions with newly arrived migrants. During fieldwork, I also participated in relevant community events in formal and informal gatherings. I conducted document analyses of media related to both communities, as well as information publicised by these communities. Qualitative methodology helped me open avenues for going beyond generalisations of state-centric approaches in order to develop a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences, practices, and perspectives of diasporas.

## 1.2 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

**Chapter 1.** This chapter reviews theoretical discussions related to the concepts of homeland-stateness-diaspora and diaspora engagement. I begin the discussion by examining the key aspects of classical and modern diaspora conceptualisation as well as transnationalism. By counterbalancing the essentialist approach routed in classical conceptualisation of diasporas, I refer to diasporas as a process and category of mobilisation.

Yet, I also point out that classical diaspora theories highlight the historical depth of diasporas as well as acknowledge that homeland and states are not necessarily conjoined categories. The chapter presents the grounds of a diaspora-focused perspective that takes into account the realities and connections of diasporas as the main units of analyses. I introduce different actors involved in the process of diaspora engagement such as departure and reception states, diaspora organisations, religious organisations, and NGOs, as well as possible forms of diaspora engagement.

**Chapter 2.** After discussing the current state of the diaspora studies field and identifying knowledge gaps, I present the methodological foundation of the thesis. I show the need of applying qualitative methodology as a means of grasping the full experience of migrants, their feelings of belonging, nuances of “stateness,” and perception of the homeland, which are the basis for diaspora engagement. I introduce the constructivist approach that allows questioning how and why diasporas develop their connections with states and homelands. The latter is particularly important considering that I examine “statelessness” and “state-linkedness” of diasporas not as given facts, but as categories that need discussion and further research. I present the theoretical relevance of applying a comparative approach considering the lack of research that problematises “stateness” and places “statelessness” and “statelinkedness” as a salient divide between diaspora communities. A case-study methodology with application of in-depth interviews, participant observations, document analyses, and focus group discussions enabled an in-depth understanding of each examined community and offered an opportunity for comparison. I also reveal the main ethical challenges that I faced during the research, such as the role of anonymity, my position as an insider of the Armenian community and outsider of the Assyrian community.

**Chapter 3.** The role of historical context and migratory patterns are essential for understanding the diasporisation process of migrant groups, the factors that may affect diaspora behaviour, and the forms that diaspora engagement activities may take. I present a historical overview of the evolution of the Assyrian and the Armenian diasporas, with a specific focus on the Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian diaspora communities. I also discuss the prioritised identity markers, general trends, and disagreements regarding Assyrian and Armenian diaspora identities found in available literature review.

The chapter reveals the elements that are at the core of the “diasporic transnation” based not only on the Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian contexts but also on global Assyrian and Armenian diasporas. The chapter shows that the homeland is an important marker of identity and is supported by immense mythology. Assyrians try to revive “Assyria” by keeping the language, culture, history, and vision of the nation alive; their statelessness serves as additional motivation for maintaining the religion, language, and culture in diaspora. This statelessness affected the capacity of Assyrians to construct coherent ethnic identification, causing various disagreements and contestations within the community. The chapter shows that even though Armenians have a homeland that is a recognised state, it is arguably “substituting” as a homeland for the part of the diaspora who are descendants of Genocide survivors from the Ottoman Empire.

**Chapter 4.** In this chapter, I examine the evolution of state-diaspora relations, as well as the opinions of diaspora members about the efficiency of existing policies. By doing so, I reflect on the role of structural factors that may encourage or discourage diaspora engagement. I analysed Iraqi, Syrian, and Turkish state policies, as well as the perception of Assyrians regarding these policies. The findings reveal that Assyrians do not consider themselves as being part of diasporas of the Iraqi, Syrian, and Turkish states despite being their (former) citizens. The selectivity of diaspora engagement is conditioned not only on the states' formal policies on diaspora engagement, but on the ideologies of nationhood of the sending state. I discuss changes in Armenia's diaspora policies and outline three periods of diaspora-state relations: the first Armenian Republic (1918-1920), Armenia in the Soviet system (1921-1920), and Armenia as an independent state (1991-present) following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The examination of the Armenian diaspora shows that the accumulation of historical experience of state and diaspora separation resulted in a diaspora that is not fully state-led. I also present the opinions of Dutch-Armenians on the role of Armenia's diaspora policies and their willingness to cooperate with state institutions. Dutch-Armenians reveal that the designed policies only partially meet the needs of the diaspora and exhibit a lack of trust towards the state institutions.

**Chapter 5.** In this chapter, I examine organisational structures through which diasporas “act” as a living organism. I provide a typology of organisations based on their engagement spheres, as well as the types of networks diaspora organisations are a part of:

transnational and local. I also underline the role of “non-formal” and “semi-formal” networks within diasporas. I present multiple socio-cultural and historical links of the Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian diasporas that go beyond their host-land and homeland. I show that their embeddedness in these contexts shapes the current organisational basis of these communities. I examine the ideologies and roots that shaped the organisational structure of the community, the effects of multiculturalist policies, and the impact of their decline in the Netherlands on diasporic organisations’ activities. I show that the existence and absence of the state is distinctly reflected in the positionality of the homeland in the transnational management system of both diasporas. The Armenian case reveals that influential pan-diasporic organisational centres are located in Armenia. However, diasporic communities retain their independence, since organisational networks are based on the principle of horizontal connections and free cooperation. Assyrian organisational networks are mainly concentrated outside the homeland at the international level, with the exception of the Church and some political organisations.

**Chapter 6.** In this chapter, I will present how different events affect diaspora mobilisation, as well as how different events relate to and are affected by the “stateness” dynamics of homelands. The first level of analysis is focused on historical events, i.e. the memory of the Genocide, the second on current-day conflicts in the homelands, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh war and the protection of the Nineveh Plains in Iraq, and the third on ongoing problems within the homeland, such as the Velvet Revolution in Armenia in 2018 and human rights violations in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. I also reflect on the cooperation, competition, and conflicts among Armenian, Assyrian, Turkish, and Azerbaijani communities in the Netherlands in the context of these events. The chapter claims that diasporas do not have a sustained commitment to mobilise, and their willingness for mobilisation varies for each event presented above. Moreover, the mobilisation and engagement activities of diasporas are internally contested and fragmented. The examination of the state-linked Armenian diaspora shows that the formal diaspora organisations are more willing to relate to past events than to causes linked to the current governments of their homeland. I show that new developments, such as the Velvet Revolution, give birth to new actors that bring new visions of how diasporas should be relating to the “stateness of their homeland”. In the case of state-less diasporas, an opposing trend is observed, as Dutch-

Assyrian organisations put forward fewer efforts for Genocide recognition than for opposing the governments of states that are referred to as their homeland. The Assyrian case shows that statelessness creates a lack of coordination between various ideologies, stances, and actors. The existence of the Armenian state contributed to creating more coherent ideological stances that the diaspora takes on.

**Chapter 7.** In this chapter, I will discuss the collective remittance practices of the Assyrian and Armenian diasporas in the Netherlands. I propose to aggregate existing remittances practice into three categories: state-driven remittances; remittances organised by quasi-governmental organisations such as pan-diaspora networks, churches, and transnational organisations; and remittances from below organised by migrants and the local networks of diaspora members that can have both official and unofficial characteristics.

Research shows that despite the existence or absence of state-initiatives, diasporas have their own preferences regarding how to engage and for which causes to remit. A state-driven level of analysis reveals that the existence of state structures does not necessarily lead to the mobilisation of the diaspora. Non-official remitting practices made up of neighbours, friends, and acquaintances that at times even transcend ethnic networks are an essential part of the current Armenian and Assyrian diasporas in the Netherlands. The role of brokers is crucial for both communities: people that are able to create and maintain trust between donors and beneficiaries, and are trusted to be reliable transfer agents. Trust makes quasi-governmental initiatives and initiatives from below the preferred channel for both diasporas despite state-created barriers or mechanisms aimed at diverting remittances through state channels.

**Chapter 8.** The chapter concerns the cooperation and collective caring practices of newly arrived “refugee or asylum diasporas” and the already established component of the same diaspora in the host society. Since the start of the conflict in Syria, there is an ongoing migration of asylum-seekers to the Netherlands. Among the migrants that have arrived in the Netherlands are religious and ethnic minority groups, such as Assyrians and Armenians. The chapter examines the support and aid that migrants receive from these networks and the main “collective” problems that these two groups have faced. Syrian-Armenians face deportation, as they were granted citizenship by the Armenian government based on their ethnicity, while

Syrian-Assyrians claim to face discrimination by Muslim asylum-seekers in the asylum camps. The chapter discusses diaspora organisations' role as non-state actors in attempts of overcoming shortcomings of more powerful formalised institutions that deal with forcibly displaced minority populations. The chapter shows that the narrative of trauma is used by both Assyrian and Armenian diasporas to emphasise their minority status and bypass their state-connections in order to assist migrants as well as influence home governments improving reception conditions for newly arrived migrants.

In the last part of the thesis, I will present the main findings of the research, elaborate on the contribution of this thesis to diaspora studies as a field, and offer a comparative overview of two diasporas.

## **CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: DIASPORA, STATEHOOD AND DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES**

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*“Diaspora is like a god of Janus: It looks both to the past and to the future. It allows dispersion to be thought of either as a state of incompleteness or a state of completeness. The issue of origin arises in both cases.” Dufoux (2003; 34)*

This chapter provides a review of theoretical discussions related to the concepts of homeland-stateness-diaspora and diaspora engagement. I offer thoughts on the need of including an extensively overlooked aspect, which is the existence or absence of “stateness” (i.e. state-linkedness and statelessness), in the studies on diaspora engagement practices.

I start the discussion by examining the key aspects of classical and modern diaspora conceptualisation. By rejecting essentialist approach, I discuss diasporas as a process and as a category of mobilisation. This approach brings the concept of diasporas close to transnationalism studies. Yet, I also point out some conceptual aspects that are well documented in classical literature: the historical depth of diasporas as well the acknowledgement that homeland and states are not necessarily conjoined categories.

I discuss existing studies on diaspora mobilisation and highlight possible engagement actors, as well as forms of engagement. By taking the organised and conscious efforts of diasporas as the main unit of analysis, I aim at understanding the role of different actors involved in the process of diaspora engagement such as sending and receiving states, diaspora organisations, religious organisations, NGOs, and the impact of different events on diaspora engagement practices.

### **1.3 DIASPORAS: FROM “STATIC GROUPS” TO “PROJECTS”**

The concept of “diaspora” has traditionally been ascribed to migrant groups that were forcibly dispersed from their homelands, such as Armenians, Jews and Greeks. In the



diasporic literature, these groups are referred to as “traditional”, “classical” or “historical” diasporas. The classical diaspora conceptualisation revolves around the concepts of ethnicity, a strong experience of victimhood, as well as orientation towards the homeland (Armstrong 1976, Smith 1986, Safran 1991, Vertovec 1997, Hovannesian 2007, Shain 1994). The “strictest” criterion for diaspora definition was given by Safran (1991). He suggests that migrant groups should match the following characteristics to be referred as a diaspora:

- Dispersion from a centre to two or more peripheral or foreign regions;
- Retention of collective memory, vision or myth;
- The belief that full acceptance by the host country is not possible, resulting in alienation and insult;
- Regard the ancestral homeland as the true or ideal home and place of final return;
- Commitment to the maintenance or restoration of safety and prosperity in the homeland;
- Personal or vicarious relations to the homeland in an ethnic-communal consciousness.

Safran (1991, 83–84) stresses the idea of “ethno-communal consciousness” that is based on shared ethnic roots, common belonging and heritage. Sheffer (2003) proposes three criteria for the definition:

- Maintenance and development of own collective identity in the “diasporised people”;
- Existence of an internal organisation distinct from those existing in the country of origin or in the host country;
- Significant contacts with the homeland: real contacts (i.e. Travel remittances) or symbolic contacts as in the sentence: “the next year at Jerusalem” at the end of the prayer for Pessah (Easter).

Butler (2001) suggests that there should be more than one destination of dispersion, and that the relationship (real or imagined) with the homeland must be continuous, and further that the group must also have a sense of its own identity as a diaspora, with links among itself, as well as with the homeland. Another important feature added by Butler (2001) and Van Hear (1998) is the need to exist over more than one generation: a “true” diaspora must be multi-generational.

Classical diaspora theories find that the preservation of distinctive identity and boundary maintenance from the host society is fundamental to a community to be considered being diasporic (Cohen 1997, Safran 1991). They share the idea that identity is based on common

ethnic and national belonging. Sheffer (2002) notes that biological factors, physical markers, such as skin colour and facial contours, and cultural attributes, such as common history, revered myths and legends, language, food, customs and folklore, are important in creating and perceiving the identities of ethnic groups, nations and minorities. He finds that these are also important for identities of ethnic- national diasporas.

Initially, writings on diaspora have always been focused on paradigmatic cases, mainly Jews, as well as Armenians, Greeks and Africans. Sheffer (1986) states that it is a mistake to maintain the concept of diaspora only for these groups because others may have existed before them (such as Nabateans, Phoenicians or Assyrians). Cohen (1997) further broadens the definition of diaspora and included different types of diaspora. He identifies the following types of diasporas:

- “Victim diaspora” dispersed because of violence, slavery or persecution. The examples that he discusses are Armenian, Jewish, and African diasporas. Similarly, the Assyrian diaspora can fall into the same category;
- “Trade diasporas” that represents mainly merchants;
- “Imperial” diasporas including colonisers;
- “Labour diasporas” such as indentured workers;
- “Cultural” diasporas with postcolonial, hybridised identities that have culture as the basis of their identity.

Thus, the term becomes broad and applicable to describe any population category that is to some extent dispersed in space, such as labour migrants, refugees, guest workers, etc.

The term “modern diasporas” began to be used after World War II, when huge migration waves occurred all over the globe. The movement accelerated in the 1950s by European acceptance of labour migrants and after 1965 by the Hart-Celler Act that facilitated non-European origin migration and entry to the US, Canada and Australia. These migration waves have become basis for the development of new communities, or new communities that join pre-existed ones. These developments required re-conceptualisation of these groups. The ever-changing nature of the globalised world made it even more difficult to develop strict criteria for the definition of diasporas. In modern conceptualization, the question turns to “how diasporas become into being?” When examining the new communities, scholars de-

substantialised the term “diaspora” and suggested using it as a category of practice, claim and stance, rather than a bounded and static group (Reis 2004, Brubaker 2005, Tololyan 1996, Wahlbeck 2001).

The first and main criticism towards classical conceptualisation of diaspora is its essentialist and oversimplified approach, meaning that the biological belonging to some ethnic groups already defines the diasporic commitment. The newer notions of diaspora conceptualisation criticises this approach of analysing identities as being crystallised and reflecting an essential ethnic attachment to the homeland (Anthias 1998). Modern conceptualisation criticises the naturalising tendency of identity, community, nation, and belonging. Hall (1990) stresses the idea of hybridity for the diaspora experience, intra-community differences, noting that it should be defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of "identity" which lives with and through, and not despite differences. Tololyan (1996) similarly emphasises that diasporas are a product of mobilisation and are kept alive by collective memory and collective action. His approach accepts the existence of diasporic “essence” upon which diasporas are constructed. Toloyan (1996) finds that to participate in a community, diasporic individuals must not only have identities that differ from those prescribed by the dominant hostland culture, but also diaspora-specific social identities that are constructed through interaction with the norms, values, discourses and practices of that diaspora’s communal institutions, honouring some and transgressing others. Tololyan (2000) finds that social, cultural and political elites are mainly responsible for taking organised and conscious efforts to create diaspora identities. These activities have continuous character and are transmitted over generations. If there are no efforts to maintain diasporic identity, it will lead to complete assimilation.

Brubaker (2005) addresses a fundamental criticism to the classical diaspora conceptualisation, that tries to portrait diasporas as a “*quasi-society*” within a given state. He offers to think of diaspora as a category of practice and as a “project”, and only then to ask whether and how it can fruitfully be used as a category of analysis. As a category of practice, “diaspora” is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilise energies, to appeal to loyalties. It is often a category with a strong normative charge. It does not so much describe the world as it seeks to remake it (Brubaker 2005, 4). Werbner (2015) agrees that diasporas do have boundaries, however, she adds that the boundaries of

diaspora are defined and highlighted situationally, dialectically and over time, in action, through performance and periodic mobilisations.

Debates about diaspora are parallel to the distinction one can find between “nations” and “nationalism”. The former is an essentialised community, and the latter is an ideology. Nationalism is used to render support to a particular state or creation of a state through a unification of population. The national identity construction is a project of the political elites similar to diaspora construction (Geary 2002, Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012, Barreto 2001). Brubaker (1996, 2) stresses the nationalising role of the state, he points the “unfinished and ongoing nature of nationalist projects and nationalising processes”. For overcoming the fallacy of representing the idea of “ethnic groups” and “nations” as static phenomena, Brubaker (2002, 164) criticises the idea of “groupism”, “the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis”. As an alternative to this tendency, Brubaker (2002) suggests the events, strategies and agents that trigger “group-making”.

Following to the idea of “group-making” I discuss “diaspora-making” as a project, where different strategies, discourses, and interests are deployed for reaching “increased levels of groupness” (that diasporas may succeed or fail to reach). The “*diaspora –making*” approach analyses diasporas as a dynamic process where both structural factors, (i.e. historical settings, the role of the homeland, and the role of departure and reception states) and diasporas themselves are active actors whose thoughts and actions matter (Dufoix, 2008, 56).

### 1.3.1 What Can Transnationalism Add?

The term “transnational” is commonly used to refer to various types of social relations and interactions that transcend “national” boundaries. It can cover a wide range of actions such as dual citizenship, transnational family ties, cultural exchanges, hometown associations, transnational community connections, and connections between homelands. Basch *et al.* (1992, 8) outline one of the fundamental definitions of transnationalism:

*“We define “transnationalism” as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasise that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders. Immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political – that span borders we call “trans-migrants”. An essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that trans-migrants sustain in both home and host societies”.*

Kivisto (2003) proposes three analytical types of immigrant transnationalism: kinship groups, circuits and communities. Among these, diasporas have more in common with transnational communities. Discussing the economic, political and social relations that cross international boundaries of migrants, scholars introduced the term “transnational field”. The latter includes maintaining kinship networks, engaging in political participation in both the country of emigration and the country of immigration, small-scale entrepreneurship across borders and the transfer and retransfer of culture (Faist 2010). One of the key differentiating factors of transnationalism and diaspora is that transnationalism can be an individual behaviour, whilst diasporas need communities (Ambrosini, 2013). Only some migration flows can be labelled as diasporas, while every flow can produce transnational links and behaviour.

In the case of modern diasporas and recent studies on diasporas, it is hard to find a ground for differentiating between “transnational communities” and “diasporas”. Scholars (Adamson 2005, Kissau & Hunger 2010) find that diasporas provide further specificity to transnationalism taking into account that the geographical dispersions have become defining features of it. Diasporic activities are being described as transnationalism from below, which stresses the role of migrants that build bridges between nation-states (Waldinger & Fitzgerald 2004, Faist 2010, Khoser 2003). Some scholars do not agree with this approach and find that diasporas and transnationalism have fundamental differences (Faist 2013). They mostly compare transnational communities with “classical” characteristics of diasporas and find that the identity basis, organisational structures and goals are different.

Similar to diaspora studies, transnationalism goes beyond national borders and analyses more closely the actual or real connection and social relationships between the society from which they originate and in which they have settled down. Levitt (2001) analyses how these activities can have an impact on non - migrants’ life, such as the flow of human resources, money, social remittances, ideas, norms, practices and identities. Thus,

Levitt (2001) refers to “expanded” transnationalism in contrasting occasional sporadic migrant responses to political crises or national disasters in the homeland with the “core transnationalism” of habitual, regular, patterned and predictable activity. Ambrosini (2008) refers to “narrow” and “broad” transnationalism in making the distinction between continuous and occasional transnational practices. Faist (2010), however, rejects what they see as a binary distinction between the different intensities of behaviour and instead argues for transnationality being viewed on a continuum of low to high.

The key differentiating factor between diasporas (primary from classical conceptualisation’s point of view) and transnational communities is that the latter do not have the historical depth of diasporas. Transnationalism is often seen as an attitude and practice of the first generation, while diaspora identification and solidarity tend to pass from a generation to another (Ambrosini 2018). Diasporas are about the experience of multiple generations, while migrant groups are about the experience of a single generation or two. Similarly, transnational practices and attachments continue to be widespread among the first generation and only fewer scholars find that these ties persist among subsequent generations (Levitt 2007). Transnational communities retain a strong anchorage in the place of origin, citizenship or institutional links with their country. In a diaspora, similar strong links usually decline over generations and are replaced by a nostalgic attitude towards the homeland. The transnational community, on the other hand, retains a strong anchorage in the place of origin, as well as citizenship or institutional links with their country. Bruneau (2008) finds that a “transmigrant” is far too dependent on the nation-state from which he originates, as well as on the state. The social group to which he belongs is most often restricted to his original community and the transnational network of its migrants, while a member of diaspora has the feeling of belonging to a nation in exile, dispersed worldwide, and being entrusted with an ideal. What typifies diasporas is the will to preserve their own organisation and autonomy, even if it entertains privileged relationships with the nation-state. Diaspora has an existence of its own, outside any state, and is rooted in a strong culture (religion, language, etc.) and a long history; it has created and developed its community and associative networks as an outcome of social and political construction (Bruneau 2008).

Another criterion is the reason why migrants leave their countries. While classical theories emphasise forced displacement, transnationalism theories state that migration can also be caused due to economic reasons. However, this criterion is difficult to follow for two

reasons. Firstly, because of growing migration waves around the globe, it is difficult to differentiate between forced and voluntary migration. Secondly, even cases of “classical” diasporas such as Armenians and Greeks were initially based on trade migration, such as the Greek merchant communities of Armenians and Greeks in nineteenth-century Europe. The diaspora literature usually emphasises the cultural distinctiveness of diaspora groups, while parts of the transnational literature have started to look more extensively into migrant incorporation and transnational practices.

Diaspora has been associated with exiled co-ethnics that have self-perpetuated further migration of other individuals to other locations linked by a desire to return to an idealised version of the homeland (Cohen 1997). Transnationalism, on the other hand, manifests itself through a diverse set of practices, made increasingly immediate by advances in communications and transport. Communities of transmigrants do not necessarily require a political goal to unite their dispersed community; rather illustrated, practical livelihood strategies, economic opportunities, the maintenance of cultural practices and the export of domestic political divisions can link transnational communities. Thus, transnationalism focuses more on connections that exist through actual networks. Diasporas, in contrast, imagine and recreate connections across migrant groups with a territorial basis for attachment, belonging and identity. Consequently, much research on transnationality has focused on the networks through which “communities” are constructed, alongside the creation of “transnational social spaces” (Faist and Ozveren 2004, Kivisto 2003). Levitt (2007) adds that the connections can be directed not only to the home and host countries, but can also be multi-layered and multi-sited, including other sites around the world that connect migrants to their co-nationals and coreligionists.

Social networks and social media have dramatically increased transnational connections among diaspora networks, civil society actors and policymakers (Brinkerhoff 2009, Diminescu 2008). Several scholars subsequently put forward the assertion that novel types of diasporic connectivity and a distinct online migrant community have emerged, referred to as digital, virtual or e-diaspora (Brinkerhoff 2009, Diminescu 2008, Swaby 2013). The web and new media technology rise transnational engagement in which diaspora groups are able to mobilise around a common diasporic identity, to express their identity publicly and to negotiate the terms of it, to provide solidarity and material benefits to its members and to engage in transnational political, economic and social-cultural activities (Al-Sharmani

2006, Diminescu 2008).

It is impossible to “afford” making a strict definition of diasporas considering the ever-changing nature of globalised world. As Cohen put it, the expression “‘diaspora’ is now being used, whether purists approve of this or not, in a variety of new, but interesting and suggestive context” (Cohen 1999). Diasporas have too complex and heterogeneous characters, therefore as soon as we delve into an examination of specific cases, it is nearly impossible to follow any strict set of characteristics and “qualify” whether it is a diasporic behaviour or not. I have presented the above –mentioned comparison as a reminder that the formation of diasporas is not a “*natural*” *consequence of migration but rather the product of specific processes of mobilisation that are ongoing but remain incomplete. In the same vein, a diaspora’s connection with the nation-state is not a “static” and “non-contestable” category.* Defouix (2002) has rightly noted that the issue of language in transnationalism studies matters. “The noun “transnationalism” and its adjective become so common that they often serve to distort different relations to physical space. This leads people to use the word “national” and its derived words as synonym for state and prevents us from considering any “non-state factors” (Defouix 2002, 123). He finds that this word should refer not only to state-driven connections but underline an ethnic, national or religious unity in spite of people living in different countries.

In summary, transnationalism can provide supplementary tools to go beyond identity discussions and to analyse channels and networks of diasporic connectedness and practical implications of their activities. Based on this, the chapter will further problematise the notion of and the links between stateness and homeland for studying diasporas.

#### **1.4 HOMELAND, DIASPORAS AND STATEHOOD**

The relation of diasporas to their homeland is a central aspect of diasporas that is highlighted both in classical and modern conceptualisations. The majority of scholars who try to construct a comprehensive definition of diasporas and to differentiate them from other groups agree that an orientation towards the homeland is a key feature of diasporic identity. They have stressed the importance of having a vision or a reminder of an idealised place to which the members of the diaspora wish to return when possible (Armstrong 1976, Smith



1986, Vertovec 1997). They state that even though the process of diasporisation may lead to the loss of actual homeland or its existence, it continues to be the key feature for diasporic identification. For Safran (1991) the Jewish and the Armenian cases of dispersion are “archetypical” models, where the absence of a physical homeland or statelessness is the most crucial factor in the formation of diaspora. In these discussions not all scholars focused on the transnational ties of diaspora with the homeland. Safran (2005) finds that homeland has a mythical value for ethnoreligious diasporas, places where their sacred places, monuments and memories of ancestors exist. By examining Jewish diasporas, he noted that they existed almost exclusively as a diasporic phenomenon (Safran 2005, 44). Furthermore, the real presence of the homeland, such as the Zionist hope of the end of the Jewish diaspora, renders the existence of homeland and the existence of diaspora as being mutually exclusive.

The main progress in the diasporic literature on the conceptualisation of the homeland so far has been the shift from primordialism to constructivism (Wilcock 2017). Recent theories look at how the concept is used as a basis of collective mobilisation (Reis 2004, Brubaker 2005, Tololyan 2001, Wahlbeck 2001). Similarly, instead of taking for granted that the idea of a shared homeland produces diasporic identities, it has been argued that homeland is “imagined” through the mobilisation process. For instance, Brubaker (2005) states that despite the dispersion of its meaning “three core elements remain widely understood to be constitutive of diaspora”: dispersion (either traumatically or voluntarily and generally across state borders), homeland orientation (whether to a real or imagined homeland), and boundary maintenance. Brubaker (2005) emphasises the historical perception of homeland and claimed that homeland is an important feature for diaspora invention or mobilisation. Moreover, according to him, if the homeland is missing, a diaspora becomes deprived of influence on international and national structures. Diasporas produce homelands by collectively imagining it even when the homeland itself is contested (Wahlbeck 2018).

By considering diasporas not as an essentialised reality but as a category of mobilisation, scholars have been able to study not only how diasporas mobilise themselves, but also how they are mobilised by others (e.g. states and other non-state actors). Parallel to the developments in the academic field, the term “diaspora” has become a catchword in social-public debates. Migrant organisations, home and host governments and international organisations refer to migrants as “diasporas” to facilitate mobilisation, construct shared grounds of identity and pursue social, economic and political projects. In the last twenty years

several states have created a variety of administrative organisations to address and govern their population abroad, such as the Irish Abroad Unit in Ireland, the Ministry of the Diaspora in Serbia, and the Ministry of Diaspora in Armenia. These developments of considering diasporas as part of the expenses of the nation or as part of the homeland in anticipation of social, economic and political benefits, also triggered major scholarly attention. As a consequence, recent migration literature is evolving on picturing diasporas as descendants of nation states. This development is quite paradoxical, considering that the key aspect of diasporas conceptualization was the acceptance that the “homeland” is accompanied by mythical value.

A large body of studies on diasporas is constructed around real connections and networks with the homeland (Abramson 2017, Tettey 2016). A growing number of scholars focus on transnational governmentality of diasporas by states (Larner 2007, Kunz 2012, Ragazzi 2014, Koinova & Tsoutapas 2018). This tendency urges to look what Durkheim (1905) called as a sociological perspective: “What matters is not to distinguish words; it is to succeed in distinguishing the things that are covered by the words”. Therefore, it is needed to study and unpack of what is covered by words “state” and “homeland”.

Recent studies mostly compare sending states’ strategies, institutions, policies and motives for linking up with emigrant communities abroad (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003, Chaander 2006, Gamlen 2006). Ragazzi (2014) clusters departure states into five categories. An extreme pole of taxonomy is a global nation-state, whose diaspora engagement mechanisms are most diverse and are grand diasporas abroad with a broad range of rights. He also typifies indifferent states that are characterised by general lack of concern with diaspora population, expatriate states that are mostly focused on cultural and educational policies, and managed labour states that are primarily concerned with developing investment frameworks for returning labour migrants. His typology also gives space to analyse departure states that hinder and restrict the engagement of diasporas naming them closed states. Gamlen (2008) reviews how states relate to their diasporas. He proposes looking at “diaspora building” mechanisms that cultivate or formally recognise non-residents as members of a diasporic community, and mechanisms of “diaspora integration” to grant membership responsibilities onto various extra-territorial groups. In doing so, states manage migrants and expect loyalty from diasporas. This research strand represents a state-centric approach referring to “homeland”-“state” as conjoined categories. It is essentialising diaspora’s

belonging by highlighting only the macro dimensions of state characteristics without acknowledging diaspora's characteristics. Craven (2018, 103) calls it "structure-centrism," meaning that these studies essentially erase the agency of both the diaspora and the various actors that are tasked with engagement. In this regard, it is worth quoting Brubaker who (2005, 12) states "*Not all those who are claimed as members of putative diasporas themselves adopt a diasporic stance*". Hence, he underlines the heterogenic nature of diasporas.

In state-centric studies, the diaspora-homeland relationship is examined from the perspective of the so-called "Solar System" (Levy 2015). Here, diaspora is viewed as a "periphery" connected and belonging to one "centre" (the homeland) to which all connections are directed. The "solar system" approach is especially problematic when there is a division between the concepts of "homeland" and birthplace: the places where the community members were born, raised and spent some significant time prior coming to the country where the diaspora community is placed. These diasporas violate the basic principles of a nation-state and question the link between state-nation-territory-homeland. As it will be further shown, in the case of the Armenian diaspora, the historical, idealised homeland does not always coincide with the current borders of the Armenian state. In the case of the Assyrian community, not only is the homeland not an actual nation-state, but is also fragmented into several states. In the latter case, the idealised "Assyria" lies in between the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Therefore, problematisation of these links helps to avoid the state-centric approach and essentialising "diasporas" (Brubaker 2005; Dufoix 2003). It gives space to focus on why and how they are made or remade by state-led diasporisation projects.

In recent studies, there have been attempts of overcoming the state-centric approaches by referring to three core aspects:

- Problematising the characteristics of states, i.e. whether they are weak or strong states, de facto or de jure states;
- Going beyond state-diaspora relations and understanding their multi-linked nature;
- Focusing on non-state actors, such as religious organisations, international and supra-national organisations etc.

Brinkerhorff (2017) states that state-centrism neglects to account for differentiating characteristics of the state and the environment in which diasporas operate. She raises several questions addressed to taxonomies developed by different researchers to capture state-

diaspora relations:

*“First, beyond political will, what is the capacity of the state both to formulate and to execute diaspora policy, whatever it may be? Is effective diaspora engagement and related policy possible in weak states with limited state penetration that is, in states with limited capacity and reach throughout society? What are the consequences of resulting intrastate coordination challenges? Might there be some benefits to less formalised policy frameworks?” (Brinkerhorff 2017, 1).*

Østegaard-Nielsen (2003) underlines that states manifest a range of “capabilities” to translate their rhetoric about diaspora outreach into actual policies. Levitt and de la Dehesa (2003, 599) likewise cite *“the capacity of state institutions to make and implement credible policies”*, Brand (2006, 222) finds that states’ capacities can explain the variations of institutions that connect with diaspora affairs. Levitt raises an important question, asking *“How do the activities of strong states compare with those of weak ones?”* Analysing the case of Lebanese diasporas as a weak state, Pearlman (2014) finds that transnational practices can work against the hegemony of the nation-state. The relationships that are “governed by states” can be counter-balanced by Sheffer (2003, 206) who finds that *“Diaspora members are quite autonomous in the decisions they make on behalf of their homelands.”*

The special edition on diaspora studies (Koinova, 2018), calls to analyse deeper statehood dynamics as a crucial aspect to understanding diaspora mobilisation. She examines the links of diasporas to de facto states, such as Kosovo, Nagorno-Karabakh and Palestine, which enjoy a certain degree of governance and domestic autonomy; and weak states such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Iraq, which enjoy domestic and international sovereignty. As weak states, they refer to the members of the United Nations whose domestic institutions are weak and divided respectively on ethnic-nationalist and sectarian lines. Examining stateless diasporas, Koinova (2018) underlines that the state capacities affect on diaspora mobilisation.

Koinova’s (2018) calls to go beyond the host states- diaspora-home states three-way connectedness. She stressed that diaspora linkages are connected to different contexts and embedded in these contexts that either shape diaspora mobilisations or are shaped by them. (Koinova 2018). Going beyond state-centric approaches also opens avenues for analysing how different events in the homeland and elsewhere in the globe effect on diaspora mobilisation. Koinova (2018) states that little has been said to understand the impact of critical junctures and transformative events on state-diaspora relations. Critical junctures are the

events that transform international and state structures and institutions and change the position of a strategic centre from “outside” to “inside” a homeland territory and vice versa. Transformative events are less powerful and can change diaspora mobilisation trajectories. Ongoing conflicts, violent events, and homeland crises, such as those in Kosovo, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, are classified as transformative events (Koinova 2018).

Another problematic aspect of state-centric approaches is that in examining diaspora-state relations, diaspora opinions, as well as the experience of dealing with state policies and state influence, are often missed. Despite the permanent presence of communications, a country's attitude towards the diaspora can be vague and ambiguous. It is not always the case that the homeland government unconditionally supports the diaspora (Baser 2015, Sheffer 2013). Similarly, not the diaspora does not always support the homeland government. The lack of consensus about its legitimacy abroad may give rise to a split within the community about the idea of homeland. These theories tend to consider the diaspora as an independent unit, which seeks to maximise the opportunities for self-expression reproduced over time, the economic and the cultural impact, challenging traditional players in international relations.

A major stream of literature calls to avoid state-centric approaches and move away from examining “state” and “diaspora” as static categories (Delano, Mylonos 2017). Delano, Mylonos (2017) call for the necessity to broaden the scope of research and to look beyond states by including other political actors and processes across a greater range of places and scales. The call to study the “microfoundations” of diaspora engagement, the ways that various actors participate in the design and implementation of diaspora policies at local, state, national, and regional levels, and their interactions with different groups that constitute diasporas, have been gaining ground (Delano, Mylonos 2017).

What can be concluded from the literature presented above is that whether directly or indirectly, states occupy a central role in diaspora studies. However, the uncontested links between diaspora-state-homeland should not be taken as a norm. Each of these concepts needs to be problematised and contested. Therefore, there is also a need to understand what role “statelessness”, the absence or presence of the “official centre,” plays for a diaspora. The approach of analysing the global order as being divided into nation-states, looks at the state as from a “groupist” standpoint, “discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups” that function as both “*basic constituents of social life ... and fundamental units of social analysis*” (Brubaker 2002, 164). Brubaker and Kim (2011)

similarly insist that there is a lack of problematisation of state-diaspora relations, since most studies presume a predetermined, static, and neatly delineated set of trans-border populations. Therefore it is needed to uncover two faces of stateness: “state-linkedness and statelessness”. Hence, a diaspora’s connections with state practices should be problematised, instead of taking the existence of such populations, as well as states, for granted.

#### **1.4.1 What about Stateless Diasporas?**

The core concept of diasporas that has not raised disagreements since the initial use of the term is the dispersed nature of these groups. Yet, as it was presented above, recent diaspora literature often examines it as being dispersed from a homeland of a nation-state.

The assumption that diasporas experience a feeling of “belonging” to the nation-state of origin may be problematic since it is not always the case that the territories diasporas refer to as “homelands” are existing as independent states. There are several groups, who despite being dispersed from the homeland and despite being nationals of host and home countries, name themselves as being stateless people. Sheffer (2003) proposes to distinguish between state-linked and stateless diasporas. State-linked diasporas have independent and internationally recognised states governing their homelands, while stateless diasporas do not, as their homeland has not yet achieved statehood or has yet to be internationally recognised (Sheffer 2003). He finds that the existence or absence of the state has an influence on the maintenance and reproduction of diasporic communities. Lacking states, stateless diasporas are particularly keen to keep historical memory, to nurture strong sentiments towards their homeland, and their ethnic-national kin elsewhere (Sheffer 2003). Though Sheffer (2003) touches upon these distinctions, this call generally has remained unanswered so far.

Tas (2017) suggests differentiating two types of statelessness: *de jure* statelessness or *de facto*/ social statelessness. Both *de jure* and *de facto* statelessness are connected with legal state protection. However, the case of *de facto* or social statelessness is not an individual problem. The example of Kurds Assyrians and Yezidis shows that when they were attacked by ISIS in 2014 was no state defending them despite their citizenship and national belonging (Tas 2017). The same study also points out that there are degrees of statelessness. For

example, Kurdish and Palestinians can be considered as “semi-stateless” groups, since they have territories or autonomous regions referred to as their homeland. While the Assyrians have only “imaginary homeland” since they have no political influence on the territories that are referred to as being their homeland.

Diaspora relations with the state is a ground for competing interests, identities, inequalities and stances (Brubaker 1996, 2005, Adamson 2016). States have symbolic capital to decide the groups that are considered as “their diaspora”, and along which lines “their diasporas” should be determined (e.g. ethnicity, language). Therefore the need of going beyond state-centric approaches is especially necessary in the case of stateless diasporas.

Migration and diaspora literature is lacking in research into statelessness. This silence obviously is not conditioned with the absence of these groups. The possible explanation is that these groups are lacking a voice in a world made of nation-states; therefore they have not succeeded in gaining high academic attention. A few studies that focused their attention on statelessness identified that the absence of a state affects how diasporas construct and negotiate diasporic behaviour. If a state has a diaspora, they can mobilise it for winning elections and solving conflicts. Diasporas can enjoy the safety of being protected by their home-states. In the cases of stateless diasporas, official links between diasporas and states are missing. Though stateless diasporas exist, they initiate multiple engagement practices, their experience is not being documented and analysed, and there is a significant dearth in diaspora studies about stateless diasporas. For example, Assyrian transnational organisations provide humanitarian help to Assyrian communities worldwide. Particularly in Iraq and Syria, they support the education of Assyrian students, initiate collective remittances, and provide help to newcomer migrants. Nevertheless, their experience, power relations, involved actors, and roles of the states cannot be examined if we take only a state-centric point. This opens up a wide range of issues for researchers in understanding what the mechanisms of diaspora engagement are, how they are organised, how diasporas are mobilised, and how their organisational structures and activities differ from state-linked diasporas.

Research done among the Palestinian and Kurdish migrants shows that homelands are as important to their understanding of statelessness (and at times even more important) as the absence of a nationality and state protection (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016). The absence of state support is used as a synonym of helplessness, fear of assimilation.

*“People from ethnic groups who consider themselves to be stateless, who have been de-territorialised, and who continue to face conflict with their state of origin, feel that they are living in a diaspora regardless of where they now reside. Not having a state of their own may be one of the main reasons why many people move to different parts of the world and create a transnational identity.” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016, 38)*

Studies also point out that the statelessness is a mean of solidarity creation (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016, Ellassi 2013). For example, the violent spread of ISIS across the Middle East has united Kurds by creating transnational solidarity and diverse modes of transnational mobilisation among the Kurds in diaspora and the Middle East. Lacking states, stateless diasporas are particularly keen to keep historical memory, to nurture strong sentiments towards their homeland and their ethno-national kin elsewhere (Sheffer, 2003). Experiences of alienation, depression and being regarded as the “other” remain wherever they live. Therefore the uniqueness of the diaspora experience for stateless people is that since they feel diaspora is seen by many as a safe environment within which to organise, it creates not only “long- distance nationalists” (Anderson 1998, 2006, Sheffer 2002 Schiller & Georges 2001, Schiller 2005) but also alternative institutions for a future, imagined state).

Among existing diaspora – homeland, diaspora –state relations, rarely any proposed typology can reveal their connections. Among the few ones that could be applicable for stateless diasporas is the typology of modes proposed by Dufoix (2003). It also acknowledges that populations are not united by nationality, and do not necessarily share the same referent origin.

- Centro-periphery mode: This mode corresponds to what Tololyan (1999) called a “transnation”: nationals whether inside or outside the borders of a country. This is a state-driven form of diaspora-state relations, where the existence of community is closely linked with the individual’s home country. Official institutions such as embassies and consulates play a central cultural role, in the meantime the expatriates own associations.
- Enclave mode: This involves local organisations within a host society. Compared with the centro-periphery mode, the enclave is not based on official connections. It operates locally and helps people stay in touch.
- Atopic mode: This is a trans-state mode that does not seek to require a physical territory. It refers to an identity that is built around a common origin, ethnicity or religion.



- Antagonistic mode. This represents what is called an exile polity formed by groups who refuse to recognise the legitimacy of the current regime in their country of origin, or who consider the country to be under foreign occupation. The goal is to liberate the country, nation, people, and land.

Centro-peripheric mode is comparable with state –centric approaches that portray diasporas as parts of states, as “local colonies” (Defoix 2003, 66). Stateless diaspora experiences can be framed based on an antagonistic mood that does not engage directly with states, has developed networks, and communicates the “reference origin”. Despite outlining the mode of cooperation, it does not answer some practical questions about diaspora, such as what happens with diasporas when they do not have the centre, leading point, or point of reference, and how their mobilisation differs from those that have one?

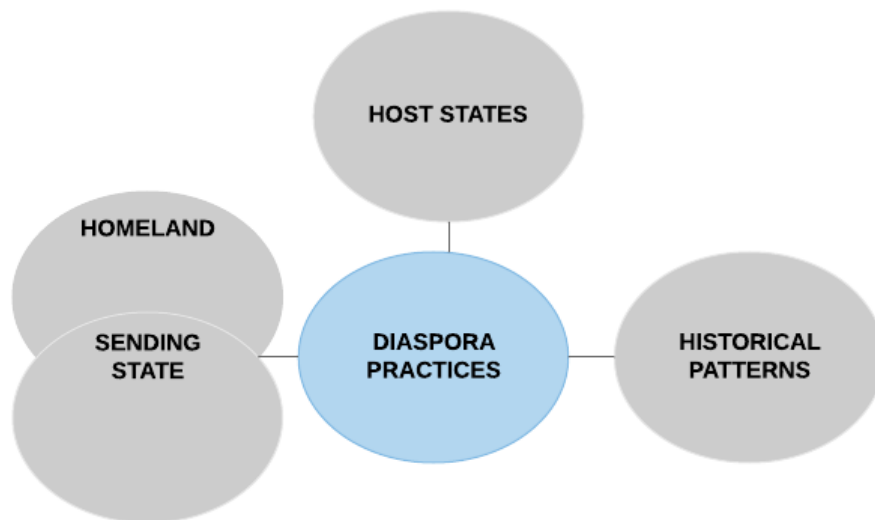
## 1.5 DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT FROM DIASPORA-FOCUSED PERSPECTIVE

There are two main approaches of analysing diasporas in relation to the statehood of their homeland: state-centric and diaspora-focused. State-centric approaches that picture diasporas as being recipients of homeland efforts, i.e. Ragazzi’s (2009), Gamlen (2014). Ostergaard-Nielsen (2009) also add the role of the state of residence considering that the origin state may pressure the host state to limit the activities of immigrant groups. On the other hand, the host-states can also overlook the activities of some diasporas because of relations with the home countries. Shain and Barth (2003) also find that host land regime determines the abilities of diasporas to mobilise. This approach recreates the state’s definition of nation, underestimating the role of social, political and historical context.

Another view acknowledges that diasporas are both autonomous actors and the receivers of homeland policies. According to Koinova (2018, 4), “regardless of how strongly original homelands aspire to govern their populations abroad, powerful diasporas individuals, institutions, and networks enjoy a relative autonomy vis-à-vis their homeland”. Such positionality does not neglect either diasporas as influential actors, nor structural factors, such as homeland and host land policies. I follow this approach and I aim at studying the diaspora engagement practices with diaspora-centric approach. Alonos (2018) referred to diaspora agencies as “micro-foundations”. I propose to focus the research on diasporas experience

along with structural factors that diasporas find themselves in, without giving a preference to any of the above-mentioned sides. Based on the existing literature, here is a figure that demonstrates diaspora –focused perspective:

*Figure 1: Diaspora-focused perspective*



Diaspora-focused approach is also rooted in Bourdieu’s practice theory (1990) by capturing the “internalisation of externality and the externalisation of intercity: *“This conceptual framework takes into account agency and individual action in reproducing practices as well as the role of structures in keeping these practices active and reinforcing them”*. Bourdieu (1990) shows that peoples “practical knowledge” is relevant and cannot be subverted by academics and theorists *“who would claim to know more or rather know better than the subjects that they study”* (Bourdieu 1990, 252).

For analysing diaspora at this analytical level, I use Craven’s (2018, 1) perspective that considers diaspora engagement as *“complex relations between human and non-human agents whose configurations shape the conditions of possibility for action in a particular circumstance.”* Such understanding focuses on the study of diaspora as being constructed through a relationship between elites and institutions, states at one end of the spectrum and the people and practices on the other.

### 1.5.1 Diaspora Engagement Spheres and Types of Contributions

The importance of researching diaspora groups in terms of their social, political and economic potential has been recognised not only by academics but also by home and host governments, as well as international organisations. Numerous authors agree that migrant communities turn into unexpected, but increasingly visible actors in the politics of their countries and communities (Vertovec 2004, Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004). The types of activities include (but are not limited to) community-to-community transfers, identity building, awareness raising, lobbying on issues relating to their ancestral home, transfers of tangible and intangible resources, circulation or return of skills and talent, humanitarian and community relief efforts, etc. (Sinatti & Horst, 2015) .

Werbner (2002) finds that cultural, political, and philanthropic sentimental performances are key defining aspects of diasporas. For making diasporic moral responsibility more obvious, she refers to it as *“when people suffer elsewhere, it hurts, the pain demands action”* (Werbner 2002, 125). The author notes:

*“When Muslim women in Bosnia or Kosovo or Kashmir are raped, or their husbands are tortured, it hurts Pakistani women in England. African-Americans mobilised politically in favour of sanctions against apartheid in South Africa. Irish-Americans mobilised to support the IRA. The main Jewish lobby supports the Israeli government in the name of existential claims to survival.”* (Werbner 2002, 125)

In other words, diasporas exist in their ability to mobilise fellow diaspora members to a common cause. Diaspora engagement is a “purposive action” (Brinkerhorf 2008) driven by ties of co-responsibility, which differentiates a diaspora from an ethnic community. Van Hear and Cohen (2017) proposed to distinguish three spheres of diaspora engagement:

- Household and extended family: this is a largely personal and private sphere of engagement. The most common form is remittances to assist extended family members, and participation in life-course events, such as birthdays, marriages and so on.
- Known community sphere: this takes place in spaces where one has lived, among people one knows. It is the sphere of encounters between people connected between past and present (schools, neighbourhood, workplaces, markets, shops and more). In this sphere, Van Hear distinguishes hometown associations, home village

associations, and school associations as a main form of diasporic organisations. Here he finds that it is more expected to observe collective remittances, the transfer of financial resources to the communities left behind.

- Imagined community: the term here is borrowed from Benedict Anderson (2006) who refers to the nation with which one has affinity without necessarily knowing the members. This is the sphere where a greater degree of mobilisation is required rather than the routine activities of household and known community. Engagement here includes membership of or involvement in political parties and movements, as well as social, cultural activities. This sphere goes hand in hand with “ethnic” conception of nations as opposed to “western or civic”. Ethnic and civic concepts of nation articulate different meanings of “territory” and “nation”. For the western nation, territory coincides with almost all political frontiers of nation - political, economic, legal, cultural etc., - and vice versa. In case of ethnic concept of nation, territory remains a more or less independent signifier and is flexible in articulation. Territory, articulated as a “historical homeland”, becomes a crucial imaginary for ethnic projects of national identity (Castles et al. 2013).

It presents the “ideal typology” of spheres and types of resources that diasporas can provide. Of course, there may be interplay and overlap. For example, imagined communities’ engagement may take the form of provision of material resources, while the known communities may be engaged in political activities. Van Hear’s (2014) typology gives room to analyse the experience of both stateless and state-linked diasporas as well since it can include engagement of the homeland that has only mythical character.

Diaspora engagement does not accrue as a natural outcome of migration. Several scholars have examined the conditions and motivations for diaspora mobilisation. Scholars examine diasporas based on social movement theory to understand why and in which circumstances strong identification turns into mobilisation activities. Several studies analyse political opportunity structure, the existence for leadership in the homeland or country of residence as a core factor for diaspora mobilisation (Sokefel 2006, Esman 1986). Different factors can contribute to diaspora mobilisation, such as shared social identity and social capital (Pratkanis & Turner 1996). They argue that heterogeneous networks create more favourable conditions for mobilisation than dense hierarchical networks since they create social capital by enabling diffusion of information and bridges between different actors. Uphoff (2005)

finds that diaspora engagement is possible when diaspora members have access to six types of power resources: economic, social (social status based on social roles or on complying with socially valued criteria), political (ability to influence the exercise of authority), moral (perceived legitimacy of actions), informational and physical power. The existence of these resources is typically rare in developing countries context.

Brikerhorff (2008, 1) finds that diaspora mobilisation is fundamentally about identity and identity construction strategies that may result in constructive or destructive contributions to the diaspora's host or home societies. Identity can influence how they feel about the group or the cause and determine whether they want to contribute to the cause. Timing has been also a highlighted topic for Koinova's (2018) special issue on "Diaspora conflict and post-conflict construction", which calls to look at a temporary aspect of diaspora mobilisation. Mostly scholars find that the crises and conflicts in the homeland turn diaspora potential into actual mobilisation practices. Mavroudi (2018) finds that the issue of time is important for both diasporas and crises. The length and timing of the homeland crisis affected those in diaspora and their propensity to mobilise. Jones (2014) showed that conflict and crises in the homeland can rise detachment, isolation and guilt, which can be translated into not wanting to mobilise or to get involved in homeland affairs. Berdal (2005) explored the role of economic support to influence homeland conflict dynamics. Brikerhoff (2008) argued that diasporas may be an important source of human capital reconstruction processes. They have an advantage over other actors as they are motivated by a sense of obligation or guilt to contribute to the homeland to overcome suffering. Horst *et al.* (2010) explored the topic of collaboration between diasporas and governmental and non-governmental actors with a focus on peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives. The authors consider diasporas as "peace-building partners" that can bring particular advantages since they are familiar with the country of origin and countries of residence. Mavroudi (2018), however, based on the study of Palestinian and Greek diasporas, shows that diaspora does not "automatically mobilise" if there are "good" conditions present. Mavroudi (2018) finds that homeland governments cannot necessarily rely on the support or help of diasporas. Strong emotional belonging to the homeland does not necessarily lead to mobilisation. Understanding that diaspora mobilisation can be linked to multiple factors both driven by identity discourse and opportunity structure, I stress the need to examine more closely the situations and contexts of selectivity or willingness of diaspora to mobilise.

Increasingly, more scholars are interested in diasporas aiding initiatives directed to their homeland in times of crises and conflict situations (Brinkerhoff 2016, Collier and Hoeffler 2000; Shain 2002; Shain and Barth 2003; Adamson 2005; Smith and Stares 2007; Orjuella 2008; Koinova 2011). In this context, scholars argue that diaspora members may have an advantage over other actors because of dense personal networks that make them adept at identifying dependable partners, and enforcing agreements even in places where banking and legal systems are fragile (Brinkerhoff 2011; Newland and Patrick 2004).

### **1.5.2 Types of Contribution**

Politically oriented activities such as advocacy, lobbying, long-distance nationalism, “diaspora diplomacy” and recently more known concepts of “justice-seeking” or “transitional justice” activities are most commonly linked to diasporas as transnational practices. Shiller (2004) finds that long-distance nationalism may include voting, demonstrating, lobbying. Diaspora communities tend to create the “alternative” version of conflicts in their host societies such as protests, theatre plays, lobbying activities, public demonstrations and more. In the literature, it is always underlined that diasporas’ responses do not always have peace-building and reconciliation outcomes and they can contribute to conflict escalation. According to Sheffer (2003), in case of conflicts diaspora members will be torn between the memories of homeland and wishing to recapture the past and trying to reconcile with the new norms in the host society. Diasporas’ role in conflict escalation is of concern in weak and fragile states, such as Kosovo, Iraq, Nagorno-Karabakh, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Palestine (Newman 2009, Clifford 2017). Notably, stateless diasporas’ are active and their activities are most studied especially in shaping long-distance nationalist activities, contributing to conflict resolution (and in some instances prolongation, as Tamils and arguably Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh) in the territories which they refer to as homelands (Koinova 2011, Baser 2018, Demir 2017, Godwin 2018).

On the other hand, growing attention is being paid to scholarship on transitional justice activities. Transitional justice standpoints help to clarify the stands that diasporas take and the message that they want to deliver to the homeland, host-land or supranational structures. Studies on transitional justice are mostly connected with the study of diaspora in

initiating truth-seeking mechanisms since they can voice their concerns about human rights violations in conflict settings (Mey 2008, Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010, Koinova 2018). One of the most discussed articles was published by Orjuela (2018), who explores diaspora engagement in commemoration, truth-seeking, and legal justice in relation to atrocities in Rwanda and Sri Lanka. The article makes use of the concept “past presencing” to reveal how the past is experienced and performed in the present through transitional justice and attributes both personal and political meanings (Orjuela 2018). She finds that transitional justice discourse and related practices make up an important context for diaspora mobilisation. Tint et al. (2014, 1) name the reasons why diasporas should be involved in transitional justice activities: *“they share the common experience of undergoing a life-altering transition aggravated by the reality that it is typically stemming from adversity”, “they endure various degrees of loss and trauma, including separation from family, isolation, breakdown of community, discrimination in their new environment and loss of identity, status and livelihood”*.

In migration literature, a growing field is evolving around the role of ethnic networks that voice the injustice happening in the homeland and try to ease their co-ethnics’ stay in the host society. Many already established communities are going through conflict and post-conflict phases, such as Syrian, Iraqi, and Turkish communities that receive newly arrived migrants. In this context, their shared traumas are also important since they create grounds for cooperation: *“Diaspora community members often need each other in different ways than they did in the home context. Their shared experience of loss, transition, adjustment challenges, and new minority status shifts the relational dynamics. Smaller communities may more feel the need to join for a greater sense of unity, connection and security”* (Tint 2014, 4).

Migration scholars agree that diaspora institutions and ethnic networks may turn into increasingly visible actors that ease entrance and stay of migrants in a new country (Ambrosini 2017, Wessendorf 2017). Scholarship on migrant belonging has generally focused on migrant diasporas of established communities with shared histories of migration and settlement (while acknowledging within-group differences, among others, social-economic or class lines, generation, etc.) (Brah 1996, Fortier 2000; Sigona et al. 2015, Wessendorf 2018).

Remittances and the study of their impact on senders and receivers both at the individual and collective levels are not a new phenomena in migration literature. The study

of remittances has started with interest in individual remittances. Individual remittances are defined by the World Bank (2011) as money that migrants send to their families back home. Individual transactions are considered an integral part of almost all migrants' transnational practices. One of the most influential works on individual remittances was written by Carling (2014). Carling (2014) introduces the concept of "script" and suggests that each script specifies, at a variable level of detail, the transactions' roles, actions and statuses and the relation between elements. By doing so, he aims at analysing the social aspects of remittances as mediators of relationships between individuals.

The less common form of transnational practices performed by migrants is collective remittances facilitated by migrant/diaspora organisations, political groups, and religious organisations. Goldring (1999) was one of the first authors that distinguished between family and collective remittances. In the discussion of diasporic remittances, the literature has been divided into two fields. A number of scholars that have addressed collective remittances have focused on state-driven forms of mobilising diasporas. The state-driven initiatives aim at building networks between the country of origin and the diaspora by offering various policies and programs, such as policy incentives (e.g. dual citizenship, tax-free investment opportunities, and matching funds) and investment opportunities (e.g. remittance-backed bonds and foreign currency accounts) to encourage diaspora contributions (Brinkerhoff, 2017). This has been driven also by the interest of states to bridge two shores of migration and treat migrants not as lost actors but as active members that can collectively contribute to the development of their country of origin. There have been various forms of migrant clubs and diaspora institutions formed, just like hometown associations that are connecting migrants and communities left behind (Goldring, 2003). However, the existence of state initiatives does not necessarily mobilise diasporas at a large scale to contribute to homeland development. De Wender (2017) finds that remittances can give a modest contribution to the country of origin compared to the vast development problems that it can face; moreover, migrants can have little reliance on their countries of origin due to corruption and failed states.

Brinkerhoff (2014) describes research on diaspora philanthropy as "in its infancy". There is little existing research that captures diaspora communities' official and unofficial remittance experience. Similarly, there has not been much effort to go beyond the quantitative aspect of the remitting experience and to look at the social aspect of remittances in shaping



community and establishing ties between states. There is a lack of knowledge base on who remits, how they remit, and by doing so to which homelands migrants connect to and how homelands shape the remitting behaviour of diasporas. Philanthropic and charity activities and development projects are the key aspects to define diasporas. Diasporas exist in their ability to mobilise fellow diaspora members for a common cause (i.e. organised action, driven by ties of co-responsibility); it is the key differentiating factor of diasporas from ethnic or migrant communities (Werbner, 2002). The importance to study diasporic groups in terms of their financial potential has been recognised not only by academics but also by home and host governments, and international organisations. Numerous authors agree that migrant communities turn into unexpected but visible actors for helping their home countries (Vertovec, 2004; Levitt and Glick-Schiller, 2004, Coy 2017, Minto-Coy 2016, Séraphin 2016).

### **1.5.3 Actors facilitating diaspora engagement**

The shift from the state-centric approach also implies a shift of attention from state-governed diaspora institutions to migrant-led organisations as less formal actors that facilitate diaspora engagement. In order to understand complex “state-diaspora” relations, the multiple actors that participate in shaping and implementing diaspora need to be examined. Unpacking diaspora institutions beyond state-centric approaches of analysing diaspora engagement facilitators opens avenues for analysing the heterogeneity of diasporic actors, their motivations and identity basis. In diaspora literature, diaspora engagement actors can be grouped as following:

- State-governed institutions and funded organisations: Gamlen (2014) defines state-governed diaspora institutions as formal offices of state dedicated to emigrants and their descendants. Diaspora institutions exist in more than half of the United Nations’ member states (Gamlen 2014, Cummings and Vaaler 2017). This definition includes only formally named, funded and staffed offices within the executive and legislative branches of national governments (Gamlen 2014), such as Diaspora Ministries, special departments within ministries, local embassies and so on (such as Mali’s Ministry of Malians Abroad, Armenia’s Ministry of the Diaspora, and the Jewish

Ministry of Diaspora Affairs). Armenia established a Ministry of Diaspora in 2008 aimed at reinforcing the identity and contributions of Armenians abroad to their homeland. The home government's will of mobilising diasporas can have an extensive influence on realising material (and immaterial) resources from or through diaspora networks.

- Faith institutions: More scholars started to discuss the benefits of less formal diaspora organisations' activities and less formalised policies especially within the post-conflict and conflict settings. The role of less formal diaspora organisations' is particularly important since they respond to the vital needs not met by programs or more established development agencies or formal diaspora institutions. In this regard, development initiatives undertaken by diaspora organisations often complement those implemented by mainstream donor agencies active in the country of origin (Brinkerhoff 2011). Brienkoff (2017) introduces the case of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt as a decentralised unit of governance that is de facto public service provider for Coptic communities. She argues that state-centric approaches are insufficiently responsive to localised needs and/or the state lacks the capacity and/or political will at the local level to effectively implement them. In the same vein, discussing the role of the Church, Kalliney (2010) suggests that there is a "citizen–state relationship" between the Copts and the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Church contains the elements of "state" by providing educational, cultural and even judicial support to the Coptic diaspora. He suggests that the Coptic Church's diaspora policy is of a "global-nation-state" model with a broad and diversified set of objectives and activities that encompass rights and obligations. The faith institutions are important not only because they provide various services, but also because they create communities and feelings of belonging.
- Less formal organisations, such as diaspora grassroots: The study of diaspora organisations opens a room to go beyond the studies of diaspora consciousness (Vertovec 1997, Cohen 1981, Cohen 1997) and analyse their importance in proactive engagement practices. Therefore, migrant/diaspora organisations play a central role in the modern conceptualisation of diasporas as they facilitate the structural mobilisation of the community. Schrover and Vermeulen (2005) emphasise the importance of migrant organisations for community formation and

consolidation. They outline that while migrant organisations do not necessarily represent entire migrant communities, they are still crucial for understanding migration and integration processes. The extent to which migrants cluster in organisations is a critical measure of collectively expressed and collectively ascribed identity (Schover and Vermeulen 2005). When migrants become active members of a migrant organisation, it can be assumed that they desire to retain ties with home countries and co-ethnics, as opposed to entirely immersing themselves in new host societies. Migrants who act in this way reject assimilation and often choose to be not only ethnic but also diasporic (Tololyan 1996). Tololyan (2000) posits that migrant organisations form an institutional base for diaspora communities and even goes so far as to name them, metaphorically, “governments-in-exile”. The so-called “governments” of migrant communities do considerable work in political and social organisation and mobilisation, particularly in Middle Eastern states where traditionally governments neglect the material and social needs of minorities. Sheffer (2007, 71) proposed that diaspora organisations’ act in three primary functions: maintenance of diaspora’s social, religious, and financial aspects; promotion of cultural, social and political issues amongst members of the diaspora; legal and physical defence of diaspora and homeland. Tololyan (1996,1) finds that *“the best taxonomic efforts do not adequately convey the complexity of nationalisms that involve both homelands and their diasporas, because the experiential and phenomenological aspects of nationalism are as intense as they are, and they have thus far proved elusive to scholarship.”* As an example, Waldinger (2015) argues that hometown associations exemplify the emergence of transnational communities, linking migrants in different states, and provide a strategic research site that allows taking apart the two very different aspects of the state and the nation. These popular transnational concepts have always been conflated (Waldinger 2015).

- Mavroudi (2018) and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013) argue that it is important to understand individual contributions as well, rather than assuming that diasporas act as a collective entity. Shain and Barth (2003) offer categorisation of diaspora members:
- Core members are organising elites intensively active in diaspora affairs and in a position to appeal for mobilisation of the larger diaspora.

- Passive members are likely to be available for mobilisation when the active leadership calls upon them.
- Silent members are a larger pool of people who are generally uninvolved in diaspora affairs but who may mobilise in times of crises.

This categorisation seems to take for granted sustained and unbroken commitment of core members and lack of involvement of passive and silent members. The categorisation and “labelling” of migrants is arguable considering that mobilisations are ad hoc processes, an unstable rather than stabilising static field (Mavroudi 2018, Mercer 2012). A closer look at the actors involved in diaspora mobilisation process is important for understanding how important and influential these facilitators might be in building bridges between homeland, host land and communities located in different countries. It will give systematic analyses of the strategies and prioritised areas of diaspora engagement in the case of stateless and state-linked diasporas and will outline the main challenges that the organisations face.

Brinkerhoff (2017) finds that the focus of state-governed diaspora institutions is also problematic in the countries with weak governing structures since diaspora policy is likely to have a less formal and more ad hoc character. Therefore, there is also a need to go beyond formal, state-centric institutions and unpack less formal institutions that facilitate diaspora engagement practices. The role of less formal organisations and individuals is important also in the case of stateless diasporas that do not have state support, therefore they tend to keep their transnational connections, material and non-material transfers at the community-to-community level.

## 1.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter’s main goal was to focus on the underlying fundamentals and gaps in diaspora research upon which the empirical chapters will be further developed. I position this thesis as counterbalancing the essentialising tendency and looking at diasporas as “projects” and acts of mobilisations. I underline that classical diaspora as a concept is that it appeals to too many existential concepts and is not based enough on practical and observable structures. Yet, transnational studies do not provide the analytical grounds of understanding the historical depth of community development, but they can be useful for understanding the

nature, intensity and scope of currently functioning diaspora networks.

The growing attention of mobilisation potential of diasporas focuses academic and public attention only on state-linked diasporas and essentialises homeland-state links. As a consequence, diaspora literature produces a significant gap by undertheorizing the heterogeneity and complexity of state-linked diasporas, as well as the experience of stateless diasporas.

The scholarship on diasporas identifies that the capacities and characteristics of states affect diaspora engagement practices. A growing scholarship also addresses non-state actors, however even in these cases they mostly focus on single actors (churches, international organisations). The comparative manner of examination of state-linked and stateless diasporas open a window in having a comprehensive understanding of the significance of stateness for diasporas. The literature so far has not bridged this gap into a single study. I suggest that diaspora-focused approach that can provide a nuanced analysis of all the state and non-state actors involved in diaspora engagement process, as well as diasporas' relations with these actors.

## CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

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The chapter presents the key methodological choices made for the implementation of the research. I overview state of the art methods in diaspora research, with critical evaluation of methodological approaches, and their relative strengths and limitations, as well as present the potential of qualitative methodologies in overcoming these limitations. This is followed by the justification of the case study methodology selection. I present the key points that induce academic interest to focus on Armenian and Assyrian diasporas, as well as the ways the study of these cases contribute to enhancing knowledge about diasporas. Next, I illustrate data collection methods and the kind of knowledge each generates, alongside data analysis procedures. Finally, I provide an overview of the core concerns and challenges that arose during fieldwork, and the measures that I applied for enhancing the credibility of the research findings.

### 2.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Two central questions have been at the core of this study. The first question aims to understand *how diasporas relate to their homelands and to the statehoods of their homeland*. The second question is: *How does the absence or presence of statehood shape diasporas' engagement practices?* Answering these questions implies deconstruction and problematisation of three core concepts: diaspora, homeland, and “stateness”.

Literature on diaspora research can be conditionally divided into two main streams: the positivist camp which finds that knowledge is based on observable behaviour, therefore studies should be limited to observable behaviour (Crotty, 1998; Phillips, 1983) and the constructivism camp that claims that social knowledge is constructed based on subjective interpretations of social actors that construct their own realities (Schwandt, 1994). The answer to the proposed research questions is not possible if I follow the positivist approach. Therefore, I chose to follow the constructionist approach that enables questioning “how” and “why” nations, diasporas, and homelands develop. It enables studying the formation of diaspora belonging, and loyalties to nation-states as a process of social interactions that

cannot be objectively determined. Brubaker's (2005) call for researching diasporas as a project and category of practice rather than a bounded group is the reflection of a constructivist approach. Constructivism helps to avoid methodological nationalism that essentialises the existence of nation-states (Brenner 2004). Glick Schiller and Wimmer (2002) find that as one mode of the methodological nationalism in empirical social sciences is taking national discourses, agendas, loyalties and histories for granted, without problematising them, or making them an object of analysis. The latter is particularly important considering that I examine "statelessness" and "state-linkedness" of diasporas, existence and absence of national structures not as given facts, but categories that need discussion and further research.

In opposition to positivist understanding of diasporas, I aim at researching diasporas as a complex process of reordering and refashioning, as well as reconstructing of diaspora identities and belongings. In order to grasp the full experience of migrants, diasporic culture, subjective interpretations of feelings of belonging, nuances of "stateness" and homeland perception, qualitative methodology can be applied. Boswell (2008) suggests that a qualitative approach can contribute to understanding cultural norms of a community, as well as reflecting what migration means to communities or individuals. For example, Drzewiecka (2002) uses qualitative methodology for researching how Jewish diaspora identities are reinvented, and how the feeling "we" emerges. Björklund's (2003) studied Armenian diaspora communities in Athens and Istanbul and argued that ethnographic study of diasporas is the most feasible way of mapping and accounting for ongoing realignments of community. Additionally, Kelly (2011) studied the diversity and unity of the Swedish Iranian diaspora based on in-depth interviews, and how Iranian diaspora identities are internally and externally defined in a transnational field influenced by both home and host-land politics. Qualitative methodology combined with a constructivist approach challenges states as unitary sovereign actors and opens avenues to avoid generalisations accepted in state-centric research scholarship.

In social sciences comparative research is known for providing valuable insight about not-yet-theorised aspects of social life. Comparative research as Tilly (1984, 145) noted has a "*rare clarifying power for posing novel questions*". For example, Green (1997) conducted a comparative study to fill in the gap of under-theorised aspects of modern Jewish diasporas. Koinova (2018) finds having comparison as a methodological focus is a reliable way to reach at middle-range generalisations about various aspects of diasporas. Yet, the field of diaspora

research is dominated by single-case studies, which is why several authors have recommended future research agendas that should include a comparative dimension of diaspora studies (Gamlen 2014, Faist 2010, Koinova 2010, Waterbury 2010). Most of the comparative studies construct aims at understanding the relationship between states and populations abroad (Ragazzi 2014, Gamlen 2014, Waterbury 2010). Fewer studies emphasise diaspora agencies, reveal inter-diaspora dynamics and the choices that diasporas make to relate to their homeland and co-ethnics (Koinova 2017, Brinkerhoff 2016, Carment & Sadjied 2017). The comparative approach is suitable for this research as well, considering the lack of research that problematises “stateness” and puts “statelessness” and “state-linkedness” as a salient divide between diaspora communities. The comparison with the “contrasting” side of the same “concept” has the potential of questioning assumptions that are taken for granted and constructing more valid conclusions about the role of states for diasporas.

I selected case study methodology as the most suitable approach to gain a detailed and in-depth understanding of each community selected. It *“explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple-bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information ... and reports of case descriptions and case themes”* (Crewell 2013, 2). I made use of naturally occurring sources of knowledge, such as people or observations of interactions that occur in the physical space (Stake, 1998).

Since the Armenian and Assyrian diasporas are two of the oldest diasporic communities, they provide a backdrop for an expansive illustration on diaspora engagement practices. Both cases have been referred to as “classical” examples of conflict-generated diasporas in state-linked and stateless environments. The Armenian diaspora has been considered one of the traditional and most institutionalised diasporas (Koinova 2018, Armstrong 1976, Tololyan 2000). State-diaspora relations were developed after the independence of Armenia in 1991. Currently, the Armenian state regards its diaspora as a strategic partner for development. The diaspora’s support is highly encouraged by state policy to overcome socio-economic problems that the country faces. Nagorno Karabakh as a de facto state is a peculiar site of the commitment of the Armenian Diaspora. Several authors have studied the Nagorno Karabakh Republic as a point of reference for an examination of the Armenian diaspora’s engagement practices (Adriaans 2017, Koeler and Zurcher 2017, Koinova 2018).



The Assyrian diaspora represents a bright example of a stateless diaspora, considering their homeland has only a “historical/mythical” value. They do not have a region, autonomous territory, or a de facto state to call their homeland. There are territories referred to as a “homeland” populated by Assyrians, but there is no influence on the government and no organised actions to reach diasporas. When selecting the Assyrian case, I had to consider Assyrian identification and naming problems (Assyrian, Aramean, and more generic term Suryoyo/Syriac). To reduce the confusion between Assyrian, Aramean and Syriac identifications, I chose to use the term Assyrian. However, I also refer to the Christian minorities who prefer to use the emic terms Suroyo and Suryoyo when referring to themselves (followers of the Syriac Orthodox Church).

The Assyrian and Armenian communities in the Netherlands represent a timely research context for studying conflict-affected diasporas as well, considering the tense situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East.

The Netherlands represents an interesting case for examining the effects that multiculturalist policies and their decline have on diaspora communities. Moreover, the Netherlands has received big migration waves from Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. The sub-groups of these migration waves have not received enough scholarly attention. There have been studies on Kurdish diasporas (Baser 2018, Demir 2017, Van den Bos 2006, Mugge 2012), but the experience of other ethnic groups (such as Assyrians and Armenians) has not been adequately examined. The presence of 20,000- 25,000 Armenians and Assyrians in the Netherlands remains modest in comparison with other European countries (such as Armenians in France, or Assyrians in Sweden) and the Netherlands cannot be considered the strategic centres of these diaspora networks. However, both communities have transnational links with other diaspora communities; therefore, they represent nodes in diaspora networks. I argue that while examining diaspora communities, it is important to grasp their experiences, not only in traditional countries’ of destination but also in the countries where diasporas are present at moderate numbers. Knowledge about diasporas will expand through an examination of not only the successes but failures of these communities as well.

The main characteristics of the selected communities are summarised below, and will be elaborated in the chapters to follow:

*Table 1: Comparison of Cases*

	<b>Assyrian</b>	<b>Armenian</b>
<b>Type of diaspora</b>	Stateless	State-linked
<b>Territories that diasporas refer as homelands</b>	Northern Iraq, north-eastern Syria, and south-eastern Turkey	Armenia
<b>State support</b>	None	Ministry of Diaspora, local embassy.
<b>Worldwide diaspora population</b>	3.2 million	7 million
<b>Population in the Netherlands</b>	25.000	20.000
<b>Migration dates to the Netherlands</b>	Starting from 1960s	Starting from 1950s
<b>Migration reasons to the Netherlands</b>	Labour migration, war, political and religious repression	Labour migration, war, political and religious repression
<b>Main sending countries</b>	Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Iran	Turkey, Armenia, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Russia, Greece, Syria

Being two of the oldest diaspora groups, having similar population residing in the Netherlands, yet being with and without state support makes the Assyrian and Armenian diasporas a suitable background for comparing the groups.

Collecting information implied mapping of two communities and their organisational landscape. Dutch-Assyrian and Dutch- Armenian organisations were grouped based on their main profile of occupation.

*Table 2. Organisational Landscape*

	<b>Assyrian</b>	<b>Armenian</b>
<b>Religion-based</b>	Syriac Orthodox Church Assyrian Church of the East	Armenian Apostolic Church
<b>Organisations with political orientation</b>	Branches of the main Assyrian political parties in Syria (Assyrian Democratic Organisation), Assyrian Federation of Netherlands	Branch of Armenian political party (Armenian Revolutionary Federation)
<b>Organisations with social-cultural orientation</b>	Assyrian Mesopotamian Association Enschede, Assyrian Foundation-Netherlands, The branch of “Assyrian Universal Alliance” ethnic organisation	“Ani” Armenian Community, Maastricht “Abovyan” Cultural Union, “United Armenians in the Netherlands”, “Dordrecht” Armenian union, AGBU, “Kilikia” Union
<b>Youth organisations</b>		Garegn Njdeh Youth Union Gladzor” Youth union AJO Youth Union AGBU Young Professionals “Homenentmen” Scout Union
<b>Humanitarian organisations</b>	Help Christians in Syria	“Tatev” Union “Ararat” Union

It should be noted that organisations do not have a strict focus but stretch their scope and activities across the categories mentioned above. The “confusion” between the fields would be more observable when studying diaspora engagement practices in further chapters.

## 2.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND TOOLS

I aimed at studying diaspora communities from the perspective of both individual and collective actors, or in other words, through the lived experience of individuals and diaspora community structures. The research included conducting key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participative observations, as well as document analyses.

**Key informant interview:** Under this category, I conducted in-depth interviews with the key figures of diaspora organisations and core/elite members of diasporas (who are not

members of diaspora organisations). The main aim was to collect interviews that could reflect a wide range of “key figures” claiming to be the “official voice” of diasporas and represent various diasporic stances related to the priorities of diasporas, homelands, states.

- *Key figures of diaspora organisations.* Diaspora organisations create and maintain transnational networks. The interviews with the key figures of diaspora organisations were essential for developing an understanding of organised, institutionally mobilised and sustained connections between diasporic communities, as well as between the diaspora and the homeland. Tololyan (2000) states that migrant organisations form an institutional base diaspora community, and even goes so far as to name them, metaphorically, “governments-in-exile”. So-called “governments” of migrant communities do considerable work in political, social organisation and mobilisation, particularly in Middle Eastern states where traditionally governments neglect material and social needs of minorities. Among the key figures of diaspora organisations that were interviewed are representatives of ethnic associations, religious associations, professional associations, political groups, and supplementary schools.
- *Core/Elite members of diaspora.* During the fieldwork I identified “elite” members who *were not members of diaspora organisations* that are in charge of controlling institutions and funds and deciding the direction and vision of diasporic identity. This category is complementary to the “key figures of organisations” since only in a few cases these categories did not overlap. Among diaspora elites included in the study were business owners and politicians. The main aim was to collect interviews with a wide range of “diasporic elites” claiming to represent different diasporic stances related to the homeland state and perceptions on its “diaspora policy” as realistically as possible

**In-depth interviews:** I have conducted interviews with “non-elite”, “ordinary” Dutch-Armenians and Dutch-Assyrians to understand their interpretations of homeland-state-diaspora relations, and their experience with engaging in diaspora activities. I aimed at having a maximum representation of these communities; therefore I have selected the following criteria as the basis of selection:

- *Participation in diaspora life:* those who are active in organisations and those who do not actively associate themselves with diaspora institutions and/or only

occasionally participate in community activities. This approach allowed me to have an inclusive picture of how diaspora ideologies and practices are spread across two communities, considering that some organisations have a central message that is widely carried only among its members, while other organisations are personal projects of one individual.

- *Generational difference:* I have conducted interviews both with the first generation of migrants, and migrants that were born in the Netherlands or moved to the Netherlands at an early age. In doing so, I represented first-generation migrants, and one and a half and second-generation migrants in two separate groups (Levitt and Watter 2002).
- *Country of departure:* Considering different migration waves that have shaped both communities, the sending country specificities could not be overlooked. Therefore, I have included representatives of sub-groups into my study. I have included Assyrians from Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon. For Armenians, I have included Armenians from Armenia, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Russia, and Indonesia.

**Focus group discussion with newly arrived Armenians/Assyrians.** Focus group discussions were conducted to create exchange of viewpoints and discuss disagreements. These dynamics will not be captured in face-to-face interviews. The focus group discussions were held in one Armenian and one Assyrian community organisation. The selection criteria of participants were based on “convenience” sampling. The participants were selected on their usual gathering day. The main criterion that they had in common was that they had arrived in the Netherlands due to the Syrian crisis. The reason for choosing focus group discussions was based on the belief that people talk more openly if they are in a group that shares the same background or experiences.

**Participant observations:** I combined the interviews with participative observations to fully understand the dynamics involved in diaspora engagement practices. These included participation in church gatherings, political and cultural activities, as well as other social events. Participative observations also gave me an opportunity to have several informal conversations with people involved in community events, and to have a broader and in-depth understanding of community life. I observed everyday operations and activities of diaspora organisations, including fundraising events, cultural events, Sunday masses in Church, social gatherings, marches, and demonstrations. I also maintained further informal contacts,

participated in informal gatherings that enabled me to be present at their “non-official” occasions of gathering as well, and not just diaspora-led events. Observation of different empirical situations provides richness to collected data. The observations of events, interviews, and focus group discussions gave me the flexibility to combine, compare, and triangulate whether what people say coincides with what they do or practice.

*“Participant observation....permits the researcher to hear, to see, and to begin to experience reality as the participants do ...this immersion offers the researcher the opportunity to learn directly from his own experience. Personal reflections are integral to the emerging analysis of a cultural group because they provide the researcher with new vantage points and with opportunities to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange”. (Marshall & Rossman 2006, 184)*

**Document analyses.** In addition to the above-mentioned methods, I have also reviewed a set of policy documents, media publications, and diaspora organisations programs, as well as reports of activities, journals and articles published about and by diaspora organisations. This helped me to have a complete understanding about the researched groups beyond the researched period, get familiar with discourses that are generated by or about researched groups, prioritise areas of diaspora practices and interests.

- *Information publicised for the community.* In order to receive all information being publicised for the community, I subscribed to organisational email list. This gave me an opportunity to be informed about the developments and on-going activities in the organisation during and after my fieldwork. It was also important for following relevant events, speeches, and developments of both groups.
- *Media and documentary materials* about the two communities were analysed (for example, the documentary movie “Blood Brothers”). This method helped me gain more information about the development of communities, as well as their representation in the national context.
- *Documents related to structure and formal regulations of migrant organisations.* This is important to study for understanding how organisational agendas emerge, and whether they are formed by wider diaspora networks or in a local context.

### 2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

I started the development of interview guides by outlining the main issues based on the literature review on diasporas and diaspora engagement practices. Stake (1995) notes that the identification of main issues may serve as a preliminary post of departure for developing interview questions. The author suggests implementing a flexible design to collect and analyse data since important adjustments or modifications may rise in the inquiry process of giving meaning to first impressions and final compilations. Stake (1995) also relies on the “progressive focusing” notion for collecting data. This notion permits researchers to gradually focus on the issues as they emerge under direct observation without the necessity of a rigid study plan. The main issues of the interview guides evolved around migration patterns, the Assyrian and Armenian communities’ structures, the role of homelands and home states, the barriers and/or facilitators for diaspora mobilisation, who the mobilisation events are supported by and how, as well as the motives and goals of establishing diaspora organisations and other similar questions. The outline of the main issues about each case was also important for analysing the main features of both communities and understanding whether cross-case analyses are possible. This has also served as a guide to focus my attention during the research. For example, in my preliminary interviews, I asked about the structure of communities, about the existing divisions within the communities, and main engagement spheres. These primary investigations showed me that the extent to which the groups are connected to the states still needs to be explored in detail. It pointed me that the role of non-state actors, host state policies, their transnational links need a nuanced study. The main issues also pointed at the main disagreements within the communities and guided me to select between two “competing communities”: Assyrian and Aramean. Moreover, it pointed to several lines of fracture inside both communities: for Armenians, an example being the division between Armenians from the Middle East and those from Armenia proper. Regularly redefining and revising these issues during the data collection process provided flexibility to develop the findings in detail.

Interview guides were developed based on the outlined issues described above, as well as the theoretical literature on diaspora engagement and transnationalism. Interview guides were piloted, during which questions were identified that were difficult to understand since they included terms borrowed from the academic literature. Therefore, the formulations of these questions were simplified. The data collection process was flexible and reflective.

Interviews often took on a discussion-based format, where I shared with them my knowledge and some theoretical insight on diaspora engagement practices, which motivated interviewees to give their feedback, and to clarify and refine their ideas. Below are social-demographic features of research participants excluding individuals with whom I had non-formal conversations.

<i>Table 3. Profile of Participants</i>		
	<b>Armenians</b>	<b>Assyrians</b>
<b>Key Figure of Organisation</b>	11	12
<b>Elite/Core Members</b>	2	2
<b>Non-core members</b>	14	14
<b>Focus Group Discussion</b>	6	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>34</b>

<i>Table 4. Sending States</i>		
	<b>Armenians</b>	<b>Assyrians</b>
<b>Armenia</b>	7	
<b>Turkey</b>	5	11
<b>Iraq</b>	6	6
<b>Iran</b>	4	
<b>Syria</b>	8	16
<b>Lebanon</b>	1	1
<b>Indonesia</b>	1	
<b>Russia</b>	1	

<i>Table 5. Gender</i>		
	<b>Armenians</b>	<b>Assyrians</b>
<b>Male</b>	19	19
<b>Female</b>	14	15



<i>Table 6. Age</i>		
	<b>Armenians</b>	<b>Assyrians</b>
<b>18-30</b>	10	9
<b>31-50</b>	14	15
<b>51 and more</b>	9	10

<i>Table 7. Years in the Netherlands</i>		
	<b>Armenians</b>	<b>Assyrians</b>
<b>0-5</b>	8	7
<b>6-10</b>	7	1
<b>11-20</b>	9	12
<b>20+</b>	9	13

<i>Table 8. Generation</i>		
	<b>Armenians</b>	<b>Assyrians</b>
<b>First</b>	23	22
<b>One-point-five and second</b>	10	12

## 2.4 FIELDWORK AND FIELD ACCESS

The fieldwork lasted six months (May 1st, 2017 – October 31st, 2017). For five months I was based in Amsterdam and travelled to various cities for conducting interviews in places that were suitable for the respondents, such as Amsterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, Maastricht, Alkmaar, Arnhem and more. The last month of my fieldwork was spent in Enschede, considering that Enschede, Hengelo and Oldenzaal (the neighbouring cities of Enschede) have the highest population of Assyrians while Almelo (the neighbouring city of Enschede)

has the highest population of Armenians. The research was designed following Merriam's constructivist approach (1988), who finds that in case study research "simultaneous data collection and analysis" should be applied to ensure the emerging and learning design of the study.

Interviewees chose locations for conducting interviews; they were mainly conducted in the diaspora organisations, and in respondents' homes. In a few cases, I also used Skype (8 interviews) when the initial contact with the participant was already established in person. As a result, I conducted fifty-five interviews, two focus group discussions, and direct observation of eight events. After finishing the fieldwork, I kept in touch with both communities and observed mobilisation processes using online platforms and Skype interviews. For example, after receiving news about the Assyrian petition for the mayor of Alkosh (Chapter 5), I contacted the initiators to have more in-depth information. Similarly, I conducted interviews with the participants using Skype to study the protests initiated by Armenians in the Netherlands in response to the Velvet Revolution in Armenia.

Following Stake's (1995) approach, I used exclusively qualitative data gathering tools: interviews, focus group discussions, observations and document analyses. Purposeful sampling techniques were used for the selection of cases. This method is used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases (Patton 2002). This sampling method involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark 2011).

Field access was quicker in case of the Armenian community, considering that I had previously conducted research related to the Armenian community in the Netherlands for my MSc thesis. I re-established my contacts with the leaders of diaspora organisations, and used personal contacts as well. For accessing the Assyrian community, I established contacts with possible gatekeepers that could give me access to the field: I contacted scholars that have researched the Assyrian community, conducted a desk review of the organisations to find contact information, and attended events that could grant me access to the field (such as the event "A Europe of Diasporas", organised by the European Parliament). Later, I applied the snowball technique for identification of further respondents. I was conscious about the application of the snowball technique because of the selection biases that it can raise, and the impact that it may have on the research results (Magnani et al. 2005). Therefore, I combined

different sources of identifying organisations and people to be interviewed. I also wanted to include the experience of people who do not actively identify with diaspora and diaspora organisations. Therefore, I employed several applications of snowball technique with various dimensions:

- Posting about my research on diaspora social network platforms;
- Calls/emails to individuals who had been associated with these diaspora groups;
- Mailing to community organisations;
- Attending community events;
- Personal contacts.

Following qualitative methodology, I aimed at reaching a theory-saturation point, which is a picture of all the aspects of the community that can generate an appropriate explanation of it. The data collection process was dynamic and ongoing, and I aimed at understanding the process rather than representing a population.

## 2.5 DATA ANALYSES

Interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed in full. I used ATLAS.ti to store field notes, minutes of interviews, observation notes, as well as documents that were to be analysed. The software was used for the initial coding process and for generating codes per case. The literature, however, indicates that the application of software for qualitative methodology may risk losing the context, depth, and meaning of the gathered data (Miles et al. 2012). Therefore, for further analyses, I used a traditional memo-writing and diagram drawing analysis. I conducted the analysis of gathered data in two stages: the first stage included independent, in-depth analysis of each case, while the second stage included cross-case analysis. Cross-case analysis helped to facilitate the comparison of commonalities and differences in the events, activities and processes that are the units of analyses in case studies (Ragin 1977, Khan 2008).

**In-depth analyses of the case:** Each case was analysed as an individual, unique research project by capturing the details of the individual cases being studied in the following order (Mason 2002, Matthews and Ross 2010).

- Recognising and reading gathered data: this included ordering and recognising data in order to make initial interpretive sense of it. This stage included thematic filing of field notes, as well as cross-referencing different types of data, such as interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and document analyses.
- Reading data literally, interpretively and reflexively. Literal reading was necessary for understanding context and structure, style, as well as the layout of the transcripts. Interpretive reading included preliminary consideration of what the data means or represents. Reflexive reading enabled me to analyse and explore my role in generation and interpretation of the gathered data. This is especially important since I share the same ethnicity with Armenians and therefore some answers could be generated based on my belonging to the group.
- Indexing. The purpose was to find different topics and types of data in interviews, documents, and observation notes. Indexing helped me to review data systematically and avoid losing any piece of information. This helped me to distance myself from the immediacy of elements initially striking or memorable, and therefore gained a more measured view of the whole picture. Indexes were made based on what were literal topics or points of substance. While examining cases, each indexed case was treated as an unfinished resource for a variety of further uses, rather than end products (such as variables) in and of themselves.
- Development of categories based on indexes. Memos from case categories were examined and combined to understand the shared and variant categories, commonalities and unique features, as well as how different topics were discussed in the data. Following Matthews and Ross' (2010) guidance, an analytical chart was prepared where codes, main quotes and summaries were included. In addition to interview transcripts, document analyses were also placed into the chart with the focus of main categories developed from the interviews and observation notes.
- Cross-case analysis. Based on the developed categories, cross-case analyses were performed, and each case was re-examined, and common trends and differences were underlined that had been addressed during the analyses. In addition, case-specific issues were examined that might affect the full picture of the case.

## 2.6 REFLECTION OF THE FIELDWORK: RESEARCHER AND CASES INTERACTIONS

The role and position of the researcher need to be examined to understand how it influenced interactions with participants (Merriam 2009). The fact that I share the same origin with one of the studied communities placed me in a dual position: on the one hand, I am an Armenian studying the Armenian community, and on the other hand, I am a non-Assyrian studying the Assyrian community. Being Armenian gave me relatively easy access and community trust. The main problem I was concerned with was my role affecting the objectivity of the information, and that Armenians would not present “socially desirable” answers. I also tried to avoid reinforcing my personal beliefs and assumptions about the Armenian diaspora in my research. In the meantime, for studying the Assyrian community, I had to neutralise my role as an “outsider”, and gain the acceptance and trust of the community.

Tololyan (2012) who is a scholar in diaspora studies with Armenian origins underlines that researchers who are interested in diaspora studies should know the culture and social life, as well as the traditions of the researched group. However, sharing the same origin also poses challenges. For example, the interviewees were usually not keen on elaborating on “common phrases” used in the diaspora. A common example was when interviewed people used the phrase “preservation of Armenianness in the diaspora,” thinking that as an Armenian I should understand the details. In similar situations, it was sometimes difficult to explain that I was interested in their interpretation of “Armenianness” and that the latter might be based on different values than my own ideas of being Armenian.

The Dutch-Armenian community is not a group of homogenous people since there are Armenians from different backgrounds, such as Iraqi-Armenians, Syrian-Armenians, Turkish-Armenians and Armenians from Armenia. These people carry the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of these countries. Moreover, since migration started since in the 1950s, there are now two generations of people with diverse experiences. Therefore, I have as much in common with an Iraqi-Assyrian as I do with a third generation Iraqi-Armenian. Despite my shared ethnicity, I had as many challenges as I did advantages of understanding the different layers of the Armenian diaspora.

To ensure my deep involvement with the Assyrian community, I gathered comprehensive information about Assyrians before my fieldwork. I studied Assyrian culture and history, statistics, as well as available yet limited information about the Assyrian

community in the Netherlands. Before entering the field, I had preliminary interviews with scholars that researched the Assyrian diaspora as well as representatives of the Assyrian diaspora in Belgium, Sweden, Armenia, and the Netherlands. These contacts not only gave me access to the field but also an understanding of socio-cultural features of the Assyrian community, as well as national, cultural, and religious particularities.

It was interesting that the historical commonality of Assyrians and Armenians was a bridge for me to connect with the Assyrian community since they accepted me as a person who is empathetic to their community problems. During interviews, Assyrians were interested in my national origin. They often paralleled the history of the two groups, such as the history of Armenians and Assyrians in the Ottoman Turkey, as well as terrorist attacks on Christian minorities in Iraq and Syria. Some of them expressed their satisfaction and curiosity for the fact that I had non-Assyrian origins and dedicated a part of my research to the problems of the Assyrian community in the Netherlands. Interestingly, I came across many Assyrian-Armenian families or people whose ancestors were Armenians from Syria, Iraq, or Turkey since in these countries Christians were usually in closer contact, and marriages among these communities were acceptable. These actors had a constructive effect and contributed to raising trust and confidence in the research.

The application of multiple qualitative research methods with flexible and dynamic procedures helped me gaining full access to both communities. Prolonged and intense involvement in the field helped me balance the information I gathered during the interviews with observations and casual conversations. During fieldwork, I participated in diaspora events, community gatherings, conducting interviews, and observations. I was also hosted in Armenian and Assyrian families, which gave me an opportunity to get acquainted with their habits, lifestyles, and customs. In these situations, our conversations were not only restricted to the questionnaires, but also to their personal lives and pre-migration history, which gave me an opportunity to observe the communities in their “natural” environment. My intense involvement in both communities’ formal and informal life made me “a familiar face” and made it possible to gain their trust. It gave me access to networks, organisations, people and situations that I otherwise could not access. I appreciated that both Assyrians and Armenians were sharing with me informal details about their community, their opinions about community development strengths and limits, as well as conflicts and disagreements within the community that helped me have a complete picture about the context of the research. I

actively strove to be self-reflective, but I also want to argue that my embeddedness into diaspora communities was fundamental to having access to intra-diaspora dynamics.

## **2.7 LANGUAGE BARRIER**

The language barrier was also one of the most critical issues because part of the first-generation Assyrians living in the Netherlands still communicated in their mother tongue (Aramaic), and only one and a half and second generations spoke English. The language of the interviews was mainly English, but several interviews took place in Aramaic. Dutch-Assyrians who were fluent in both languages helped me with interview translations and observations of events. I frequently asked the interpreter to note and later to explain specific expressions that had been used while speaking about homeland and identity elements.

As for the Armenian community, the main language of interviews was Armenian. However, there are two literary forms of modern Armenian: Eastern and Western. Armenians from Armenia speak in Eastern Armenian and Armenians from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria speak in Western Armenian. Both versions of the Armenian language are mutually understandable to Armenians. During the last thirty years, most Armenians visited Armenia, as well as communicated with people who speak in Eastern Armenian. Yet there can be difficulties in fully understanding the spoken version since there are differences in sounds and words. During interviews, I asked them for their preferred language, and they often preferred to speak in Armenian. However, we often switched to English if there were communication difficulties or words that we could not understand.

## **2.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE DATA**

One of the core ethical issues of social research is the principle of anonymity and confidentiality. Prior to the interviews, I asked the participants for their permission to use the information provided by them for further research. Though respondents were open to collaborating and sharing information, I had to be conscious about “deductive disclosure”

(Tolich 2004, Sieber 1992), which is when participants can be identifiable in the research report. The risk is exceptionally high when presenting detailed qualitative research about small communities. The research participants cannot be identifiable to the public, whilst someone, who is familiar with the community, can identify the participant based on age group and affiliation to the organisation.

For reducing the risk of “deductive disclosure”, I noted only the community belonging and, in a few cases only, I included more details (for example, age group) if I considered it as being useful for the reader to grasp the context of the research. I kept the anonymous nature of the research and changed the names of participants when quoting them.

Proceeding from the above-mentioned, the following measures can be summarised as means for increasing the credibility of the research:

- Prolonged and intense engagements in the field: Kreftling (1991) proposes to have a prolonged or intense involvement in the field for collecting multiple perspectives and reducing the risk of gaining socially desirable answers. The application of qualitative research methodology allowed flexibility for the involvement of participants in the research.
- Multiple methods and sources: The “truth value” of the research was also enhanced through data triangulation.
- Sharing with participants the key findings: I have been sharing the interpretations of the data with participants as they had the opportunity to discuss it, as well as to clarify the interpretations.
- Reflexivity of the researcher: Bonnerio & Francis (2006) find that articulating experiences through reflexive and analytical memos written prior to and during analyses help to achieve transparency.

I maintained a field journal to keep reactions and emerging interpretations throughout the analyses. Reflexivity entailed thinking about the way in which theoretical, cultural and political context and intellectual involvement affect interactions with both researched communities (Alvesson and Skoldburg 2000).



## 2.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I presented the reasons why I found that the constructivist paradigm, combined with qualitative research methodology, is a suitable approach of conducting the comparative study of state-less and state-linked diasporas. It enabled me to debate and question national discourses and agendas and problematise diasporas' choices of being linked to certain nation-states.

The need to conduct this study was driven by the absence of substantial comparative studies about diasporas. Only recently have more researchers started to question the effects of “stateness” on the mobilisation of diasporas (Sheffer 2003, Koinova 2017, Carment and Calleja 2017). The existing studies mainly focus on strong states versus fragile states, and/or de facto states, the latter which I call “semi-stateless” diasporas. I suggest taking this one step further and comparing the engagement practices of a stateless diaspora (Assyrian) and state-linked diaspora (Armenian).

Case-study methodology with the application of in-depth interviews, participant observations, document analyses, as well as focus group discussions enabled an in-depth understanding about each examined community and offered an opportunity for comparison.

My position as an insider of the Armenian community and an outsider of the Assyrian community has raised practical difficulties such as gaining equal access to both communities and language barriers. However, prolonged and intense involvement in both communities' formal and informal life, and the application of flexible qualitative methodologies enabled me to balance my access to both communities. Considering the research is focused on two rather small communities and touches on sensitive topics such as intra-diaspora dynamics, the issues of confidentiality and anonymity of respondents have been strictly addressed in this study. Cross-case analysis was adopted as the main method of identifying and comparing relevant features and patterns of the two communities.

## CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND MIGRATION PATTERNS

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The role of historical context and migratory patterns is essential for understanding the diasporisation process of migrant groups. These factors may affect diaspora behaviour and are important for contextualising the forms that diaspora engagement activities may take. The following chapter presents a historical overview of Assyrian and Armenian migration with a specific focus on the Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian diasporic communities. The chapter also discusses the basis of prioritised areas, general trends, divisions and contestations surrounding Assyrian and Armenian diasporic identities' discourses. The chapter serves as a background for the upcoming chapters to reveal the elements that are at the core of the “diasporic transnation,” not only based on the Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian context, but within the global Assyrian and Armenian diasporas as well.

### 3.1 ASSYRIANS: “WE ARE NOT ARABS, WE ARE NOT KURDISH, AND OUR RELIGION IS NOT ISLAM.”

The Assyrian empire was located in the upper Mesopotamian area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Assyrian: Beth Nahrain or “Land Between the Rivers”) where the modern-day countries of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria meet (Atto 2011). The Assyrian Empire, named after Ashur, lasted from approximately 2500 BC until 612 BC (with the fall of the empire to the Medes). After the fall of Nineveh, the major part of the homeland was occupied by several empires, such as the Iranian, Sassanid, Byzantine, Persian and Ottoman Empires, as well as the Turco-Mongol invasions.

Modern-day Assyrians identify themselves as descendants of the ancient people who built the empires of Assyria and Babylon. Until the late 19th century, the Assyrian population used to live in the territories they refer to as the historical homeland. Increasing aggression and violence towards the Christian population during the last decades of the Ottoman Empire culminated in the years of 1915 to 1918 with the Genocide of Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians (Khosroeva 2007). The Assyrian term for this period is “Seyfo,” meaning

“Sword,” which symbolises the principal weapon used against them. An estimate on the exact number of fatalities is uncertain. Jorum (2014) provides an estimate of approximately 300,000 Assyrian deaths, amounting to 45% of the Assyrian population at that time. As a result, the survived Assyrian population from the Ottoman Empire settled down in nearby Middle Eastern countries, where they experienced violence and aggression, such as the 1933 massacre in the city of Simele, Iraq (Björklund 1981). Subsequently, just one generation later, many fled from these Middle Eastern countries west into countries like Iraq, and then to the United States.

Though they have been stateless for thousands of years, Assyrians still have a vision of their ancestral homeland (named Atrā) that they consider falling within present-day northern Iraq, south-eastern Turkey, north-eastern Syria, and north-western Iran (Appendix 2). The remains of the ancient capital of Assyria (Nineveh) is located on the outskirts of Mosul in modern-day northern Iraq. Even though Assyrians do not have a clear hope to establish their own nation-state in the future, they find that the survival of Assyrians as a nation is possible if they reach the creation of an autonomous area in which they would be free to teach their own language and promote their culture without any persecution. However, most Assyrians are doubtful that they will gain autonomy under current Arab, Kurdish and Turkish rule.

Several studies agree that in the collective mind, statelessness plays a central role; therefore the label “Assyrian” is synonymous with “refugee” and “displacement” (Greg et al 2005, Atto 2011, Rabbo 2014). Throughout these periods, their identity has revolved around religious belonging as well as distinct language maintenance. Being a Christian minority in Muslim societies has always put them in a disadvantageous position. Therefore, an increasing number of Assyrians are joining the western diaspora in the United States, Europe and Australia. Continuous massacres, persecution, and discrimination made the Assyrian population build a counter-identity to the Muslim world, thus keeping a strong ethnic identity in their host societies which inevitably led to the formation of their own religious, cultural and social institutions (Payaslian 2007). *“Assyrians are not Arabians or Arabs, we are not Kurdish, our religion is not Islam. Assyrians are Christians with our own unique language, culture and heritage (Atour 2017).”* Tololyan (1999) describes counter-identity production as the process of an exclusion of their own to set themselves apart, to some degree, in an enclave created by conscious cultural territorialization.

Assyrians perceive statelessness as being embedded in everyday life. Often the interviewers stated that not having a homeland leaves an insecure feeling, described as “not having a roof over your head”, being “uprooted”, being in diaspora everywhere. Miriam, a 48-year-old woman, who was born in the “Assyrian” part of Turkey, expressed the feeling of statelessness as following:

*“I always think what it would feel to have a state of Assyria. Sometimes when I walking Enschede or in Södertälje , I listen our language I feel so good, so protected. For a moment I feel like being in Assyria. If we had a state I wouldn’t be so conscious about the future of my children, I would feel more secure.” (Miriam, 48)*

The absence of a territorial homeland is an important identification marker for Assyrians, since many of the interviewed people (especially the first generation of migrants) stated that statelessness is an additional reason to preserve language, their ancestries, history, and vision of a homeland, as well as insure its reproduction among the younger generation.

The Christian faith is an essential element in the Assyrian identity as it is for Armenians. Anyone who relinquishes their Christian faith also ceases to be an Assyrian. They believe that, had they not maintained a distinct religious identity, they would have undoubtedly assimilated into the Muslim world in which they have lived since the Arab conquests of the region in the seventh century. The Assyrian churches have long linked populations around the world. Whether in Baghdad, Mosul, Tehran, Amman, Damascus, Moscow, Chicago, or Sydney, Assyrians have long imagined themselves a global community via the Church (Greg et al. 2005). As religious institutions, the churches have major input into the shape of the community, and church leaders are regarded as authorities. While many Assyrians are not regular Sunday attendees, their Church remains an authority in their lives. The churches provide places where people gather and connect with their past and celebrate life stages (i.e. births, marriages, and deaths). The Christian faith, however, is internally fractured within the Assyrian population. As a result, there are many heated debates among academics from various social sciences (as well as among Assyrians) regarding the identity of the Assyrian people. So far, no consensus has been reached on the question of whether Assyrians form one group or if they form multiple groups of people with different identities. Some scholars even suggest (Deniz 2000) that the label “Assyrian” expresses a vision rather than an existing reality: it is intended to be an “inclusive identity label which includes different church communities and transcends local and regional localities and affections. But at least at the grassroots level, the Assyrians remain divided.” Assyrians are divided into three

subgroups based on their religious practice (Boháč 2010):

- Nestorians (Assyrians) – adherents of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East;
- Chaldeans – adherents of the Chaldean Catholic Church;
- Syriacs (Arameans and Assyrians) – adherents of the Syriac Orthodox Church (Jacobites) and the Syriac Catholic Church.

Boháč (2010) states that Syriacs and Chaldeans sometimes break Assyrian unity and deny their Assyrian ethnicity since they do not want to be marked as Assyrians. They construct their own ethnic identities. Similar patterns are observed in the case of the Dutch-Assyrian community. A review of these organisations' websites shows that there is a clear statement on division between Assyrians and Syriacs/Arameans. When explaining the identity grounds of the community "Aram Naharaim," a humanitarian organisation based in the Netherlands, states: *"Some Arameans today identify themselves with "Assyrians", because of the spiritual colonial hatred generating activities of the Western missionaries and diplomats in the Middle-East in 16th and 19th centuries. Other Arameans became known as "Chaldeans". However, all of them are Arameans"* (Aramnahrin 2017). To regain the unity of the population, leaders call to separate what is considered ethnicity and what is considered religion. The patriarch of the Assyro-Chaldeans states:

*"This is very important... we have people that do not understand this, and in the spirit of extremism call for Assyrian, Assyrian, Assyrian... I am an Assyrian. I myself, my sect is Chaldean, but ethnically, I am Assyrian"* (Petrosian 2006, 17).

The same tendency has been noted by Sargon Donabed and Shamiran Mako (2009) among the Syriac Orthodox Christian community in America. Donabed and Mako studied identity formation amongst Syriac Orthodox Christians and found out that religious dominance prohibited Assyrian identification.

The Syriac/ Assyrian polarisation tendency is also a matter of generational difference. For example, Wozniak (2015), who looked at identity construction and contestation in Sweden and in the wider diaspora, stated that despite common worries of assimilation, as migrants integrate, the role of ethnic churches stands to lose hold in such a highly secular society. Similarly, Cetrez (2011) underlined that the role of the church is declining amongst later generations compared to the first generation of Assyrians.

Language and culture are less debatable than ethnic identification. Language is the most significant identity marker for Assyrians. As a result, they have found that in the absence of state support, the preservation and transfer of the Assyrian language (Modern Neo-Aramaic) to younger generations is one of their biggest challenges. Assyrians are still at the beginning of the process of establishing their own schools in European societies, whereas Armenians have already established a number of them. Jorum (2014) remarks that even if in some cases language is not preserved, the Assyrian collective identity is cohesive by cultural symbols and by the idea of a shared destiny and future: *“It’s about identifying oneself with one’s folk, having and constantly seeking knowledge of one’s roots, defending Assyrian traditions and engaging oneself with the Assyrian issue.”* Jorum (2014) further makes a comparison between the Jewish situation and that of the Assyrians, as Jews can lack religious belief and knowledge of Hebrew but nonetheless have a strong identity “built on the consciousness of their Jewishness, kinship with other Jews and willingness to pass on Jewish culture.” My fieldwork impressions, as well as interviews, show that the Assyrian population is very proud of having a distinct and ancient language. They often started their introduction to the Assyrian nation by underlying: *“Do you know that the Aramaic language we speak today is a dialect of the dialect of the language that was spoken in Nazareth?”*

The Assyrian case confirms the assumption of scholars researching Palestinian and Kurdish diasporas, stating that *“homelands are as important to their understanding of statelessness (and at times even more important) as the absence of a nationality and state protection”* (Fiddian - Qasmiyeh 2015,42).

### **3.2 MIGRATION PATTERNS OF ASSYRIANS**

There is a lack of statistical sources about the population number of Assyrians; however, different community sources state that, there are currently approximately 3.3 million Assyrians worldwide. The Assyrian communities in Germany and Sweden are considered the largest in Europe (around 100.000) (Atto 2011) followed by the communities in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The Assyrian diaspora in the Netherlands has not been well recorded in academic literature. However, document reviews, as well as interviews, confirm

that the patterns of migration to the Netherlands were very similar to the migration patterns to other European countries (Schukink 2003, Phalet 1998). Atto (2011) has distinguished three main migration phases to Europe:

- 1964-1974: Assyrian migration from three different countries: Turkey, Lebanon and Syria. Similar to other Western European countries, the Netherlands recruited guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s from Turkey. The migration was mainly from Turkey since the Turkish government let its citizens travel as labour workers to European countries. Assyrians were among the Turkish citizens who applied to this program. Later, those people who were already settled in Germany helped their families and friends to join them. Germany introduced an immigration ban in 1972. Afterwards, many Assyrians who were unemployed did not return home. Instead, they moved to other European countries or applied for asylum. The migration from Lebanon was due to their stateless status, hence they were invited to settle in Sweden. In Lebanon, the politics of the delicate confessional balance between Muslims and Christians made it impossible for Assyrians to attain citizenship. Therefore, the first group of Assyrians migrated to Sweden in 1967 following “an appeal by the United Nations Refugee Commissioner and the World Council of Churches” (Gaunt 2006).

Parallel, there was a migration from Syria to Germany. Many students intended to go back to their country (the northeast region of Syria, which used to be the biggest concentration of Assyrians) once they finished their studies. Most of these migrants remained in Europe and formed the bases of current Assyrian communities.

- 1975-1984: The defenceless nature of being Christian in Muslim countries opened a wide door for Assyrians to migrate to Europe as asylum seekers. In this period, many Assyrians from Turkey seized the chance to apply for asylum in Germany. Though Germany had already closed its doors for labour migration, Assyrians found their way to Europe. This was caused by a Turkish military coup that took place in 1980, which generated violence and anarchy in the country. Many migrants chose to settle down in Sweden during this period since the Swedish asylum policy was less strict, and because migrants already had ties with family and friends, which opened more opportunities for them.
- 1985-2009. One of the significant migration waves was from the region of Tur Abdin

in Turkey, which is in the south-eastern part of Turkey. This migration wave almost completely emptied the region because of increasing tensions and persecution in the region. The Assyrians were denied their national and cultural rights, such as using their own language, running schools, and were subjected to religious intolerance. The war between the Turkish army and PKK forces for the past thirty years was a migration cause for a number of Assyrians to Europe.

During the same period, there was migration from Syria as well. Atto (2011) has identified two main reasons for migration from Syria. The first was for economic reasons, and the second, and less obvious, the reason was that Assyrian men that had already migrated out of Syria returned to find partners. Iraq also generated another large migration wave during the period between the Simele Massacre and the fall of Saddam regime. The selection of countries and cities of settlement was based on ties with family and friends that had emigrated before.

I have also added a fourth major migration phase to Europe:

- 2012-present. The persecution of Assyrian people in Middle Eastern countries culminated with the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. There are no official statistics, but a number of publications (such as *The Guardian*, Nov. 13, 2016), as well as interviews report that Syria's civil war nearly emptied all of the regions where Assyrians settled down after the Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. The war caused a majority of Assyrians to leave their countries and ask for refuge in European countries.

It should be noted that the distinction based on migration reasons - labour migrants, refugees, family reunification - is not very clear. The labour migrant is a label to refer to those who have settled down in the country for the formal reason of seeking employment. However, it is difficult to make a strict distinction between refugees and labour migrants, since labour migration can be only one reason for finding a new home. Many Assyrians who were interviewed revealed that for them (or for their parents), guest worker agreements between Turkey and the Netherlands was a way to find a safe home in Europe. Interestingly, one-point-five and second-generation migrants referred to the stories of migration with a strong identification of being "forced migrants." Below, I present the views of one-point-five and second-generation Dutch-Assyrians regarding their parents' reasons for migration:



*“Back in Turkey, they felt “second race” that’s why they made the decision to migrate. For my family it was because in this area there was a lot of textile industry and a lot of people from Turkey were invited to work there. He went because his old friend was there, too. Later, all the family made the decision to move to Holland to this small town where my grandfather was.” (George, Dutch- Assyrian).*

*“My parents choose to come to the Netherlands because we were scared about the situation in Turkey. I remember my father telling that it could be so that one night they would come and kill us all, it was possible. When he told this, we would always stay awake because we were scared.” (Nineveh, Dutch- Assyrian).*

*“Syriac people can’t live there, because you don’t have freedom, the example of it was the Genocide. My father was in the military there, they might have killed him, and parents were very scared about their children, so they left. I was very young when I came to the Netherlands, my parents came from Turkey in 1975, I grew up here in Holland. It was not my choice, it was my parents’ choice. My parents saw that many Syrians came to Europe, mainly to Sweden, Germany and Holland, so they also followed them. We come from a small village, we still have around 30 people in that village.” (Dinah, Dutch- Assyrian).*

Similar to this, migrants from Syria had a very strong feeling of traumatic experiences. A 20-year-old Dutch-Assyrian, covered with tattoos of Assyrian nationalistic symbols, told their family story of migration:

*“I was born here in the Netherlands, but my roots are in the holy land of Assyria, the modern-day Syria, Turkey and Iraq. My parents came to the Netherlands around 35 years ago, they settled down here in Enschede. They came originally from Syria, some of my family members were living in Lebanon. The reason was the persecution and absence of freedom. If you said 35 years ago, when there was the Assad regime, that you were Christian, it would have been all right, but if you said that you were Assyrian, you could be arrested and beaten up. We were looking for safety, because, yes, we are Christians, but we can’t forget our identity.” (Ashur, Dutch- Assyrian).*

Since there is no statistical source, the number of Assyrians living in the Netherlands is unknown. However, it is estimated that approximately 25,000 Assyrians are living in the Netherlands, mainly in the Twente region (Inanna Foundation, 2014).

### 3.3 ARMENIAN TRANSNATION

Pattie (1994, 2) rightly noted the delight Armenians feel in telling each other jokes about

meeting Armenians even in the most unexpected parts of the globe. They use the expression: "*Amen degh Hye ga*," meaning that there is an Armenian everywhere.

Armenia has always been at the centre of struggles and wars, which caused Armenian dispersion, whether voluntary or forced, to many states as well as continents. The emergence of the Armenian Diaspora goes back to the period from the 11th to 15th centuries. According to Tololyan (2000), the first great period of dispersion occurred when Central Asian conquerors destroyed the Armenian state and forced many to flee. Refugee Armenians settled down in two regions: the area around the Black Sea and in the region of Cilicia (now the south-eastern strip of Turkey's Mediterranean coast). In Cilicia, they achieved domination over a fragmented population and found a state. Tololyan (2000) names it a rare case of a diasporic minority creating a state in exile. The second period Tololyan (2000) names is "the period of diasporic adaptation to the great imperial urban consolidations in the Middle East." In 1453, the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople and renamed it Istanbul. Mehmed II, the Conqueror, invited various Christian (and later Jewish) communities to settle down in the sparsely populated area, among them many dispersed Armenians. The third period can be labelled the "merchant diaspora" (1605-1784). During this time, the Armenian merchants reached not only Iran and India but Europe, i.e. the Netherlands, as well. This is when the first Armenian community in the Netherlands was established.

The main cause of mass migration and diaspora development was the Genocide in the Ottoman Empire in 1915. An estimated 1.5 million Armenians were killed; hundreds of thousands of survivors scattered around the world, adding new dimensions to existing Armenian communities or establishing new ones in European countries, the United States, Canada, and Latin America. Armenian communities in Europe are very diverse due to different migration waves. The old communities that developed after the Genocide in the Ottoman Empire were later joined by other Armenian migrants that arrived mainly in the 1970s and 80s. These migrants were refugees and guest workers from Iran, Lebanon and Turkey. Afterwards, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s caused a new, large wave of migration of Armenians from Armenia and other post-Soviet republics to European countries. Some countries are predominantly third and fourth generations of migrants that are descendants of Genocide survivors (France), while in other countries there is no dominant generation, as is the case in the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. Today, the Armenian population worldwide can be estimated at around roughly 10 million. About 7

million live in Europe and around 3 million in Armenia (Kalantaryan 2015). The largest concentrations of Armenians in Europe are in Russia (2.5 million), France (0.6 million), Ukraine (400.000), Georgia (250.000), Spain (80.000), Greece (70.000), Germany (60.000), Bulgaria (50.000), Poland (50.000), Hungary (20.000), the United Kingdom (20.000), the Netherlands (25.000), and Belgium (20.000). Tololyan (2000) suggests that the populations of the Diaspora, the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh together to be named as the “Armenian transnation”:

*“Transnation includes all diasporic communities and the homeland; the nation-state relationship remains important, but the permanence of dispersion is fully acknowledged and the institutions of connectedness, among which the state is one side, become paramount.” (Tololyan, 2000).*

Panossian (2006), describes the Armenian nation-building process in two categories: “diaspora-style” and “Soviet-style”:

*“If what was going on in the Armenian SSR was ‘Soviet-style’ nation-building, in the communities abroad it was ‘diaspora-style’ nation building - particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. The process was typical of elite mobilisation efforts intent on moulding a conscious nation, except that it was done outside a homeland and without state institutions.*

*If Stalin and Russification were the main threats in Soviet Armenia, parochialism and voluntary assimilation were the main threats in the diaspora. Nonetheless, under the leadership of competing organisations, a heterogeneous group of people with fundamental differences in terms of regional identity, religion (Apostolic, Catholic and Protestant), language (Armenian, Turkish, dialects), occupation and class, social status (refugees, assimilated elites, intellectuals), political loyalties and cultural influences from host-states were moulded into a relatively coherent community with a collective consciousness as a diasporic nation.*

*In short, ‘Armenianness’ as the most important identity category was either created or reinforced in the diaspora, superseding the differences within and between the communities.” (Panossian 2006, 292)*

The differences and manifestation of “diaspora-style” and “Soviet-style” nation building can be found on identity grounds. One of the peculiarities of the Armenian diasporic identity relates to the homeland. A major part of Armenian diaspora consists of individuals who self-identify themselves with the region known as Western Armenia, which is currently in the territory of Turkey and was lost due to the Genocide. Therefore, they have no historical connection with present-day Armenia. Another major group of Armenians originate from portions of eastern historical Armenia following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. While

for the latter group the homeland and state mainly coincide as one territory, for the first group the homeland has mythical value, and current-day Armenia is what Kasbarian (2015) calls a “step-homeland in the shape of the present day Republic Armenia”. These people are already the third or fourth generation of migrants, and consequently, the ideas and vision of “historic Armenia” correspond to a largely mythological and historical place, with political claims to where their ancestors came from. Current-day Armenia has no territorial links with the “historical homelands”. Therefore there is a gap between historical and “step-homelands” for diasporas. Kasbarian’s (2015, 1) concept of “step-homeland” encapsulates a situation where “two entities that are not related by descent are forced into a familial relationship by external forces; that is, it is not a naturally occurring relationship but one that is forged through circumstances”.

Language and culture are important grounds for collective identity, since they not only enable communication with other Armenians across the world, but are perceived as a link to history. Preservation of language has always been the centre of Armenian identity grounds. For instance, there are language schools in almost all of the countries where there are Armenian populations and organisations. A notable fact about the language is that it is divided into Western and Eastern dialects. The Western branch is spoken by Armenians from the Ottoman Empire and, today in the diaspora, whereas Eastern Armenian is spoken in the current-day Republic of Armenia. There are many differences in vocabulary and syntax, as well as in spelling. This, however, does not prevent mutual understanding. The idea of preserving Western Armenian in the diaspora is important, provided that it is not presented as the “pure” and “true” Armenian idiom as opposed to Eastern Armenian. Language schools usually face the problem of choosing between Western or Eastern Armenian. The decisions made about this issue may not satisfy all Armenians in the community and, as a result, parents may choose not to send their children to these schools.

Religion has traditionally been one of the strongest binding factors of the Armenian community worldwide. Tololyan (2000, 2) notes that the “*Armenian Church assumed several responsibilities soon after the Christianization of the Armenian state in the first years of the fourth century of our era.*” Christianity in general, and the Armenian Apostolic Church in particular, have been mentioned by several scholars as being one of the most important institutions for the preservation of the Armenian identity throughout history of continuous migrations, wars and uprooting (Panossian 2002, Adamson 2013, Ter-Matevosyan et al.

2017, Tololyan 2000). Similar to Assyrians, religion played a major role in the unification and defence for Armenians from Muslim countries (i.e. Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria). For example, Armenians did not have opportunity to maintain their ethnic belonging through other institutions, such as political parties in Turkey, since it was forbidden by the Turkish state. Consequently, the Church has been the central binding institution for their community. Armenians from Armenia, however, had to endure the atheist Soviet regime where religious rituals and traditions were pushed to underground.

### **3.4 MIGRATION PATTERNS OF ARMENIANS TO THE NETHERLANDS**

There are two main phases of Armenian migration to the Netherlands. In the 17th century, the first Armenians migrated to the Netherlands from the Ottoman Empire. At that time, the main reason for migration was trade. There were approximately 500 Armenians living in Amsterdam. In 1714, they opened the Armenian St. Karapet Church, which can be considered the first Armenian organisation in the Netherlands. However, the community did not last long. Document sources claim that the main reasons for the decline of the Armenian community were migration to other European countries and assimilation into Dutch society. These sources state that Armenian surnames became completely “Dutchified” and were no longer recognizable: e.g. Sirkus Boghus became Joris Paulusz, and Eghehiah di Petros was transformed into Elias Pietersz (Turkish Weekly 2001). The next generations were not identified as Armenians and the community completely declined. Therefore, there was no need to keep St. Karapet Church and it was consequently sold on the condition that the building would be used only for educational or cultural purposes. The Catholic Church bought it and the building began to be used as a school. However, in the 20th century, the building was purchased again by Armenian migrants, re-opened, and is still in function today.

The second phase of Armenian migration to the Netherlands started after the Second World War. Armenian migrants travelled to the Netherlands from various locations, including Indonesia, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Armenia itself. The following is a timeline of Armenian migration to the Netherlands:

- 1948: approximately 50 families migrated from Indonesia, a former Dutch Colony. These people were the descendants of the first community in Amsterdam that had migrated to Southeast Asia in the 19th century to trade.
- 1956: Armenians from Greece migrated to the Netherlands due to economic and political reasons.
- 1963: migration flows began from Iran following the Iranian Revolution.
- 1960-1970: nearly 400 Armenian families from Turkey arrived in the Netherlands due to a guest worker agreement between Turkey and the Netherlands. Their relatives and family members would later join them, and they concentrated mainly in the Twente region.
- 1970-1980: due to economic crises, socio-political reasons, and wars, a number of Armenians living in the Middle East (Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Syria) arrived in the Netherlands as refugees.
- 1990-2000: a migration wave is created after the collapse of the Soviet Union when many Armenians from Armenia migrated to the Netherlands. According to the representatives of the organisations, the majority of them arrived as asylum seekers, due to the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the 1990s, as well as for socio-economic reasons.

*“Sveta moved to the Netherlands in 1994, because of the political situation in Armenia. Her ex-husband was a businessman who was prosecuted by the government. Her husband chose the Netherlands because of, as Sveta called, “the presence of the rule of law”. (Fieldnotes).*

- Present-day: there is an increasing number of Syrian-Armenians struggling to reach the Netherlands to obtain refugee status. It is estimated that at present there are approximately 15-20,000 Armenians living in the Netherlands. There are no official numbers available as the Dutch Bureau of Statistics does not collect information on the ethnic origins of its inhabitants.

Research also identified less common migration reasons, such as educational migration and the migration of highly skilled workers who moved to the Netherlands to work in international organisations. 24-year-old Andranik, for instance, migrated to study in one of the universities in the Netherlands from Armenia. Ashot migrated from Armenia in the 1990s:

*“I moved from Armenia in 1990 as an exchange scholar. I used to work as a professor at the Yerevan State University. Since the situation in Armenia was quite difficult I decided to stay and to study in one of the universities in the Netherlands.” (Ashot, Dutch-Armenian).*

Similar to the Assyrian case, many Armenians that fled from Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Lebanon are the third or fourth generation of Genocide descendants. For example, Hovig (Dutch-Armenian) is from Kirkuk in Iraq; he moved to the Netherlands because of the Iraqi civil war. He chose the Netherlands because he had relatives residing there. Hovig’s grandparents escaped the Ottoman Empire during the Genocide. The Armenian experience reveals the heterogeneous nature of diaspora formation that is based on different migration waves as well as fragmented elements of identity grounds.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter looked at the migration patterns and identity grounds, as well as the fragmentations and contestations within diasporas that are important for understanding the current-day structure of Assyrian and Armenian communities, and their potential to be mobilised and engaged in social, political and economic activities as diasporic groups. Currently, Assyrian and Armenian diasporas in Europe are very heterogeneous because of migration from different countries (Syria, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Turkey). Key identity grounds for both Armenian and Assyrian diasporas are the ideas of homeland, religion, culture and language. There are a number of internal fragmentations based on identity grounds. This is more problematic in the case of the Assyrian diaspora, since some of claim to be separate ethnic groups and do not want to be unified under the common name of “Assyrian.” This chapter shows that as stateless nations, the Assyrians lack capacity to construct coherent ethnic identification that does not cause disagreements and contestations. The chapter also introduced main division between “diaspora-style” and “Soviet style” Armenians. Though Armenians have fewer fragmentations, the Armenian “imagined community” still lacks coherent grounds. The chapter shows that the homeland is an important marker of identity and it is supported by immense mythology and tabulation despite the existence or absence of physical land. Assyrians try to revive Assyria by keeping the language, culture, history and vision alive, and their statelessness serves as additional motivation for maintaining the

religion, language and culture in diaspora. Even though the Armenians have a homeland that is a recognised state, it is also immensely challenged historically and surrounded by a mythical vision. The Armenian state is “substituting” for the homeland, especially for the part of diaspora who are descendants of Genocide survivors from the Ottoman Empire that considers current-day Eastern Turkey as part of the original homelands.



## **CHAPTER 4: THE ROLE OF POLICIES OF THE STATES OF REFERENCE (ARMENIA AND “ASSYRIA”) IN CONSTRUCTING DIASPORAS**

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In this chapter, I analyse state-diaspora relations as an important factor for shaping diaspora behaviour. By relying on a diaspora-focused perspective, this chapter historically contextualises the involvement of diaspora in the homeland, interprets the role of structural factors that encourage or discourage diaspora engagement, and examines the extent to which prioritised themes in the rhetoric of state officials match with the experience of the diaspora in question. I will analyse the position of Assyrians in the homeland by referring to three countries: Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Although the Armenian diaspora is multi-layered and diverse as its members come from different countries, in this chapter, I will only focus on the Republic of Armenia as an "official" homeland. I focus on three aspects of state-diaspora relations: a) state policies, which are identity policies that address stateless groups, or as Mugge (2012) suggests, the ideology of nationhood, b) states of reference policies to reach their diasporas, and c) diasporas' perception of the role of the states' implemented diaspora and minority policies.

Recently, more studies are interested in reflecting intra-diaspora heterogeneity and diversity, as well as highlight selectivity and inequalities produced by states. Mugge (2012) analysed the selectivity of diaspora engagement by focusing not only on the state's formal policy on diaspora engagement but also on the ideology of the nationhood of the sending state. Levitt (2004) typology also highlighted “selective” states that encourage some forms of long-distance economic and political nationalism and selectively and strategically manage what immigrants can and cannot do. The examination of these aspects is important for going beyond official rhetoric of diaspora policies considering that migrants who belong to minority or stateless groups can experience or possibly resist the discriminatory policies that prevent them from accessing diaspora membership fully and effectively (Cohen, 2017). In the case of state-linked diasporas, policies may lack practical value due to poor governance, mismatch of the priorities of the diaspora and the homeland, and distrust towards the homelands. As a result, diasporas may “dismember” themselves from their homelands and find alternatives, non-official ways to access homelands.

To examine the outlined issues, I discuss in the first chapter how the states of Iraq, Syria and Iran positioned Assyrians as a minority group<sup>1</sup>, how diasporic community members perceive their positioning in the countries to which they refer to as a homeland, and what the existence of diaspora policies is in these three countries. I argue that the formation of diaspora engagement strategies is related both to the formal position as a minority group within the state and state's positioning of its diaspora. Being positioned as "alien" vs "strategic partner for development" may affect the essence of diaspora behaviour, the perception of their role in the homeland as well as the homeland itself.

In the second part of the chapter, I discuss changes of Armenia's diaspora policy throughout time. I discuss the changes in diaspora policies and the positioning of diasporas by the Armenian state starting from the first Republic of Armenia in 1918. The chapter not only is based on analyses of policies and historical contexts, but also relies heavily on interviews to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of diaspora policies in bonding and connecting the diaspora with their homeland, as well as explores power relations between diaspora and homeland. Opinions on diasporas, as well as the experience of dealing with state policies and state influence are generally ignored when studying diaspora-state relations. State-diaspora relations are discussed by paying specific attention to the introduction of different legislative and institutional tools by the state of reference for facilitating or banning state-diaspora relations. Though Armenia-Diaspora relations are discussed as having an active role in designing diaspora engagement (Gamlen 2006, Kuznetsov 2006), there is a lack of research in understanding how diaspora policies are being perceived and interpreted by migrants, and whether state interventions are being translated into actions.

The chapter extensively relies on Gamlen's (2008) and Ragazzi's (2014) classification of state-diaspora ties, which opened doors for qualitative case studies of the Assyrian and Armenian diasporas. The result will serve as enrichment and specification of

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<sup>1</sup>I will limit the study to three countries and will not include Iran, for two reasons. Firstly, because not all scholars position Iran as a homeland for Assyrians; secondly, because people that can be considered as a part of the Assyrian diaspora in the Netherlands migrated mainly from these three countries.

state-diaspora relations by illustrating that not all instances and aspects of state-diaspora cooperation can be captured in official diaspora policies.

#### **4.1 ASSYRIANS AND TURKISH, IRAQI, SYRIAN STATES: STRANGERS AT HOME**

The examination of diaspora policies in sending countries would be incomplete without an examination of two “shores” of migration. Many Dutch-Assyrians I have interviewed pointed to and presented their status before migration as being "strangers at home". This feeling affects the construction of their ties with the homeland. This attitude has been created not only by the diaspora policy but also by policy towards minorities in pre-migration context. The latter developed the belief that they were being discriminated against in their homeland throughout their history.

In this chapter, I offer historical and policy analyses of the Assyrian experience in the Middle East, illustrating the extent to which diaspora policies developed by sending states encourage or discourage their involvement in the homeland.

##### **4.1.1 Assyrians and Turkey: Alienation from the State**

The Genocide in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War shocked Christians of the region, one from which survivors never truly recovered. The events of the nineteenth century link the fate of the Assyrians closely with that of Armenians. As in the case of the Armenians, these events triggered mass migration and shaped the Assyrian identity and current discourse of group identification. Assyrian survivors who remained in Turkey mainly in Istanbul and Tur Abdin today. Tur Abdin is a region situated in southeast Turkey, which includes the eastern half of Mardin Province as well as Şırnak Province, west of the Tigris and on the border with Syria at the centre of the Syriac Christian population.

After the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, the Turkish Republic was granted sovereignty and solidified their borders. Lausanne became the basis for minority rights in the Turkish

Republic. Contrary to the agreements concerning the protection of minority rights signed after the First World War that recognised race, language and religion as criteria for identifying minorities, Turkey embraced a very narrow definition of the term “minority.” It only employed religion as a primary criterion for defining minorities. This situation gave rise to the emergence of two different groups of minorities in Turkey: the officially recognized non-Muslim minorities (Greeks, Jews and Armenians) and minorities that exist but are overlooked by the treaty’s official scope (Assyrians, Alevis, Laz, etc.). Turkey created a Turko-centric state ideology to establish a modern state based on a single secular national identity, which dictated that all Muslims were Turkish regardless of their ethnic background (Toktas & Aras, 2010). Consequently, "non-Muslims" became citizens but not Turks, and their legal rights were not recognized (Yegen, 2006). The “Turkification” period is also associated with denial of the Genocide, which resulted in the imposition of Turkish names on villages with formerly non-Turkish names, bans on the use of other languages other than Turkish in public and private (Onder 2012, 106), and the exclusion of non-Muslims from employment opportunities (Icduygu and Soner 2006, 458). As a result, these legal changes only emphasised further "the otherness" of the Assyrian ethnic group rather than establishing a harmonious and consensual relationship between majority-minority groups.

The 1960 Revolution brought a rise of democratic movements, and freedom of thought and speech became more acceptable in Turkey. The Revolution ensured relative freedom for Assyrians also. For the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic, an Assyrian Culture Union, MED (Midyat El‘Aziz Diyarbakır) was established in 1962. The name of MED was formed from the first letters of cities in Turkey: Elazig, Mardin and Diyarbakir that had a significant Assyrian population. The aim was to recreate the unity among the Assyrian people who had to migrate to Istanbul from these cities. The union organised events, such as balls, social nights, picnic outings and cultural activities.

During the same period, Assyrians, together with other labour migrants, moved to Western countries, including the Netherlands. Midyat Culture Association, which had become a central gathering place for youth, was closed because of increased migration. During this period, the Turkish state established the first institutions to collaborate with Turkish migrants by opening the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) in Europe in 1971 (Den Exter 1990, 46–56; Landman 1992, 101–105); its organisation in the

Netherlands, the Islamic Foundation “Diyanet” in the Netherlands (HDV), was established in 1982 (Mugge, 2012). As a Christian community, Assyrians did not want to cooperate with Diyanet. This was the first diaspora institution established by the Turkish state that did not reach out to Assyrians.

In the 1970s, the Kurdish question increased in its scale, and minority freedoms became more restricted. Living conditions were more difficult for Assyrians since the state had limited their freedom. All associations, clubs, societies, and civil society organisations of minority groups were closed after the military coup in the 1980s. The conflict continued until 2002 (Watts 2009). The Kurdish movement created diverse groupings within local communities, which increased the perception of threat and fear among many Christians and Kurds. For small communities, especially Suryoyo villages (including Assyrian villages) in Tur Abdin, this period was especially trying (Rabo, 2018). Many high-status individuals were kidnapped and threatened. Rabo (2018) states that villages with military posts became the target of the PKK and there has been fear of ethnic cleansing, especially among the Christian population. As a result of this period, Assyrians emigrated from Turkey at their highest rates. Since local authorities did not intervene, Assyrians - along with other Christians - felt defenceless in the face of the Turkish or Kurdish population. After the imprisonment of the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, and the permanent ceasefire declaration in 1999, relations between state and society in the southeast of Turkey began to change.

The minority situation has changed slightly with the possibility of Turkey’s EU accession. In 1994, the Turkish government launched the “Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project” (RVRP). The aim was to assist Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) that were forced to leave the region in the 1980s and 1990s (Ayata and Yukseker 2005, 15). The project aimed at reconstructing the southeast territory, as well as their modernisation and development. The EU imposed a massive reform agenda on Turkey to prepare it for future EU membership in 1999. Calls for normalisation of the situation in southeast Turkey through the return of displaced people, and full enjoyment of the rights for minority groups were the primary points on the EU agenda (Human Rights Watch 2000, Cetrez *et al.* 2012). As a result, Turkish minority politics have changed since 2002. This period also marked Turkey's active engagement with its citizens abroad and established a separate directorate responsible for emigrant affairs (Mugge 2012). Institutional changes, as well as the formation of a

directorates specifically concerned with diaspora affairs were introduced by the Justice and Development Party (hereafter the AKP). This included a new discourse about Turkey as a country of different ethnicities and cultures. This diaspora policy was aimed at attracting investors to the region. Rabo (2018) states that hometown associations were created for this project to bridge Assyrian/Syrian people living in different European countries and their investments with their hometowns. Using this opportunity, the Suryoyo (including Assyrian) diaspora invested in their homeland. Assyrian/Syriac people started to rebuild their houses in Turkey, as well as purchasing new ones. However, it was not permanent return; rather, these houses served as holiday houses or tourist destinations for the Syriac people. An exemplary village for these changes has been Elbegendy (Kafro) that was constructed by an Assyrian/Syriac migrant from Switzerland. The village was presented in the media as "dream village" or "little Switzerland" (Edis 2004). It is reported that seventeen Syriac families have returned from Europe to the village (Vertovec 2013). Additionally, Mardin, an ancient city in Turabdin, was rebranded as a city of cultural diversity. Syriac Christians that had long been hidden or ignored in Turkish society now appeared to be the attraction of this region. The multi-ethnic heritage of this region has become popular for various local and international players since it helped to secure the EU's support for EU candidacy. As Rabo (2018) states after her ethnographic trips to the Tur Abdin region, the Syriac monastery of Deyruzaferan near Mardin as exotic Christian monuments has become one of the main touristic attractions, with large cafeterias and café shops, greeting and attracting visitors that include Turkish Muslims. The diaspora has made restorative efforts, such as renovating highways from Diyarbakir to the west of Tur Abdin. As a result of her ethnographic visits to these areas, Rabo (2018) notes that hidden Syriac minority groups become an "exotic" minority community whose hand-made gifts were sold with explicit "Suryoyo coffee," "Suryoyo wine," or "Suryoyo sweets" signs. Encouraged by the changes, diaspora Assyrians/Suryoyo relinked with the homeland in ways unthinkable prior to the 2000s.

In 2001, Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit called upon diaspora Syriacs (including Assyrians) to return to Turkey. Caglar (2007) reported that during the years 2002 to 2004, 120,000 people returned to their towns and villages from abroad, with Assyrians among the returnees. However, not many migrants returned permanently; most of them returned for only a short period during the year, especially during the summer. The possibility

of EU membership has also caused the Suryoyo community's representation in parliament through the Kurdish Peace Democratic Party in 2011. Though research shows that this initiative was the only successful case of state-diaspora cooperation, Dutch-Assyrians underlined the lack of trust towards the state and the fear of continuous prosecution.

*"In 2013 we went back to Tur Abdin, because it is essential for me that my children know where they come from even though they were born here. We took them to see our village. We showed them Mor Gabriel monastery, the river Tigris. We want to go back, but we cannot do it now because it is not safe yet." (Martha, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*"During that period Assyrians invested, rebuilt their houses. My brother also reconstructed his house. However, he didn't consider returning permanently because you never know what the future can bring again to us." (Sargon, Turkish-Assyrian).*

*"I do not trust them. I was three years old when we came here. I do not remember anything, the stories that I know are from my parents. They told us they could not live with Muslims. They had their farm, and they were hard workers, they were not poor people. My parents used to say that they were afraid of Muslims, that they gave me a non-Christian name to avoid possible prosecution and for giving me a better future." (Samir, Turkish-Assyrian).*

A significant development in state-diaspora relations began in 2010 when the Presidency of Turks Abroad and Kin Communities was established in 2010 by the Turkish government. The institution functions as a reference point for emigrant-related affairs and establishes broader cooperation with different segments of the Turkish diaspora. Turkish diaspora policy has moved from a managed labour policy to a global nation-state one (Mencutek & Baser, 2018) by addressing almost all of the active variables of Ragazzi's (2014) taxonomy. As for cultural policies, the Turkish government organises cultural and language classes, as well as trips to Turkey for the Turkish diaspora. They also attract the entrepreneurial activities of Turks abroad and grant more rights to former citizens (including the rights of extraterritorial voting and social security rights). Regarding symbolic policies, Turkey organises conferences, exhibitions, and various kinds of cultural events. This policy prioritised Ottoman heritage, Muslim unity, and Turkish values (Mencutek and Baser, 2018). Different scholars and opponents view these programs as part of a state effort to strengthen ties with the Sunni Muslim Turkish population (Mencutek and Baser, 2018; Mugge, 2012). Thus, minority groups such as Alevis, Kurds, Assyrians, and Armenians have been overlooked.

Neither the Turkish state nor the Assyrian diaspora has any interest in working together on diaspora policies. One of the interviewees noted that there is an extensive alienation between the Turkish and Assyrian diasporas. Former Turkish citizens state that they do not have connections with state policies and have neither interest nor information on diaspora institutions functioning in the Netherlands. They have noted that “*the Turkish state will never finance any Assyrian institution. The state finances only the pro-governmental ones even among Turkish organisations.*” Although these initiatives can be interpreted as positive developments regarding Turkey's embrace of its broader population, a closer look at the experiences of minority groups reveals that ideologies of nationhood have created alienations between the state and former Turkish citizens that minorities.

#### **4.1.2 Assyrians and Iraq: Contradictory Relationship**

The situation of the Assyrians in Iraq has been marked with continuous persecutions and massacres. The first, and most mentioned massacre by the interviewees was the "Simmelle Massacre" conducted by the Iraqi military in 1933. According to Donabed and Makko (2009), the massacre resulted in the destruction of 90 Assyrian villages and the death of around 600 to 3,000 Assyrians. These massacres were a means of controlling and invoking a unified sense of nationalism in the highly pluralistic and heterogeneous Iraqi society.

This massacre was followed by the establishment of the Ba'ath party regime led by Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The party was meant to create a Pan-Arabic ideology and homogeneous state. Armenians, Assyrians, Alevis and other minorities were considered religious minorities. The state aimed at the Arabisation of minorities by naming them “Christian Arabs.” The rise of the Ba'ath party in Iraq was accompanied with demographic manipulation, cultural genocide (destruction of religious sites, cultural artefacts, and cultural appropriation), and forced assimilation through the prohibition of ethnic classification in the national census. For example, the Iraqi census in 1977 forced people to register as either ethnically Arab or Kurdish Christians in the national census. Those who declined to be categorized as Arabs were automatically marked as Kurds (Human Rights Watch, 1995).



The first Assyrian political party - the Assyrian Democratic Movement (Zowaa) - was created as a resistance to the Arabisation process and in response to the oppressive Ba'ath regime. The movement took up an armed struggle against the Iraqi regime and joined the Kurdistan Front (IKF) in the early 1990s. ADM participated in the 1992 Kurdistan election, and five seats were reserved for Assyrian representatives that held hopes of demanding autonomy for a region within Iraq. The party was one of the leading institutions that kept in contact with the diaspora and with the Assyrian Democratic Organisation in Syria, and played an essential role for the rise of nationalistic sentiment among the Assyrians living in Iraq.

Another dramatic period for Assyrians was the Anfal Campaign from 1987 to 1988 (Makiya, 1993). Aramaic or Syriac languages were banned at schools and social and cultural organisations and institutions were renamed with Arab names and titles. This was followed by the resettlement of Assyrians from concentrated areas to big cities throughout the country. As a result of this, Human Rights Without Frontiers (2003) reports that 220 Assyrian villages were destroyed. Donabed & Makko (2009) find that this resettlement had two main consequences on the Assyrian population: first, to detach Assyrians from their culture and identity, and second, to reinforce the position of Assyrians in Iraq's political, economic and social field.

The new period for the Assyrian population started after the fall of Saddam Hussain's dictatorship, which brought radical transformation to Iraq's social, economic and political standpoints. The new constitution of Iraq stated "*[we] ... should create our new Iraq... free from sectarianism, racism, locality complex, discrimination and exclusion*" (Washington Post, April 14, 2005). The new constitution was meant to unite highly fragmented parts of Iraqi society; however, in reality, it forced Assyrians into non-favourable conditions. They faced numerous obstacles in Kurdish-controlled territories for the ownership of lands they were displaced from (UNHCR, 2005).

The newest developments in Iraq have violently shocked Iraqi Assyrians due to the rise of ISIS. Iraqi-Assyrians refer to this period as the "threat of continuity" of the Assyrian presence in Iraq. One of the most important events in this period has been the fall of Mosul in 2014 and the demand from ISIS leaders for Iraqis to convert to Islam, pay tribute, or face execution. In addition to human loss, ISIS has also destroyed ancient Assyrian archaeological

sites (The Guardian, 2015).

Nowadays, Assyrians in Iraq have the right to five seats in parliament and are allowed to open their cultural centers as well as to practice their language and religion. The Nineveh Plains was of particular importance to the interviewed Assyrians since it is the only place where they have been able to preserve their language due to schools that teach the language to children. Assyrian groups in the diaspora provide support for constructing a semi-autonomous region in the Nineveh Plains, which according to them is the only chance to have a “safe zone” in their historical homeland:

*“In Iraq right now we have Assyrian schools, where everything they teach is in Assyrian. It is like in Armenia, in Nineveh Plains everything is in Assyrian. This gives me a hope that if we have 200,000 people that can read and write in Assyrian then this language will survive. In Nineveh Plains kids speak Assyrian; if you go to school you see everything is in Assyrian. We never had this level where starting from the first grade everything is in Assyrian, all the subjects. The books that we teach our kids in diaspora are created there in Nineveh Plains.” (Petros, Dutch-Assyrian).*

Despite existing bans on claiming the Assyrian national identity in Iraq, interviewees had contradictory feelings about Iraq, and alienation from the state was not as prevalent as in the case of Turkey. Many interviewed first-generation Dutch-Assyrians were in favour of Saddam's regime, claiming that, as Christians, they used to live in safe conditions in Iraq. The recent wave of violence was being perceived as a failure of the Iraqi authorities to protect them.

*“Saddam used to say if Iraq was a bouquet of flowers, Armenians and Assyrians would be the most beautiful flowers in it. He was very protective of minorities. It was a beautiful time for Assyrians.” Iraqi-Assyrian.*

Those with nationalistic orientation had somewhat negative feelings about Saddam's regime and about the position of Assyrians in Iraq since any nationalist agenda stemming from minority communities was strictly prosecuted by the state.

Nowadays, the community is continuing to shrink in size and is now a small fraction of what it was before 2003. Those who remain fear for their safety, especially in Baghdad, where bombings and abductions are frequent. In the Kurdistan region, although the security situation is better, Assyrians often report suppression of their political activities by the Kurdish authorities. There is pressure on Assyrians and other minorities to support the political aims of

the two dominant Kurdish parties, and instances of illegal Kurdish construction on Assyrian-owned lands occur frequently (Minority Rights, 2018).

Iraq can be considered a closed state according to Ragazzi's (2014) taxonomy. Out of the criteria mentioned by Ragazzi (2014), the Iraqi state fulfilled the citizenship right. Assyrians who are Iraqi citizens have an external voting right. The Electoral Knowledge Network states that anyone that has Iraqi nationality is deemed an Iraqi citizen; an Iraqi can have more than one citizenship; and no Iraqi can have his/her citizenship withdrawn (Country Information & Policy Unit Home Office 2004). This definition was very broad so that estimates of numbers of eligible expatriates included almost anyone who had left the country at any time for any reason. However, Iraqi-Assyrians in the Netherlands state that they have not seen a substantial interest on the part of Assyrians born in Iraq to participate in the elections. As one of the members of the organisations noted:

*"We can do a lot, but many people are lazy. We had an election and we asked all people to participate. I know that maybe they don't care, they live in the Netherlands but if we all go there, instead of 2 seats we can have 6 in the parliament and they can raise the problems that they and their relatives have in Iraq."* (Mariam, Dutch- Assyrian)

International organisations facilitate the major part of diaspora engagement attempts in Iraq. In 2017, the Iraqi government asked the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) to assess the needs of the Iraqi diaspora. In this instance, the Kurdish Regional Government was also considered one of the stakeholders. The assessment confirmed the assumption that state-led engagement practices should avoid a one size fits all approach and needs more sensitivity in consideration of Iraqi diversity (ICMPD, 2017). A similar program was initiated by international organisations, such as "SPARK" (Migrant Entrepreneurship (MEP)), which offered training and coaching packages to the diaspora in the Netherlands who wanted to start a business in their country of origin. However, according to Assyrian interviewees, these initiatives did not reach the Assyrian population.

#### **4.1.3 Assyrians and Syria: Contradictory Relationship**

The Assyrian population in Syria included both indigenous people and migrants that came

from Turkey following the Genocide. Atto (2011) states that a French mandate in Syria offered new economic opportunities for Assyrians and somewhat safe conditions beginning in 1923. The French mandate lasted until 1943, when two independent countries emerged, Syria and Lebanon. An Arabisation policy began after the establishment of an independent republic and was followed by the beginning of the Ba'ath regime in 1963. Similar to Iraq, minorities such as Armenians, Kurds, and Assyrians, were forced to identify as religious minorities. Assyrians have been recognised according to their sectarian divisions and not as a unified ethnic group. For example, if a person with Assyrian self-identification belongs to the Chaldean Catholic Church, then the person is considered Chaldean; if to the Syriac Orthodox Church, then Suryani, and if to Nestorian Church, then Ashouri.

As a way to protect their national/ethnic identification and to reduce the effects of the Arabisation movement, the Assyrian Democratic Organisation was founded in Ghamishli in 1957. During the years, there were few activities since majority of youth went to study at universities. The organisation achieved a kick-start in the mid-1960s when the students influenced by the founders reached their high schools and universities. These activities mainly focused on subjects related to national unity. Within a short period, this organisation spread and reached Assyrian students in Turkey. For this reason, contacts between Assyrians living in these countries became more restricted by state authorities. In consequence, ADO was not in touch with the Assyrians in Iraq. Contact was broken until the foundation of the Assyrian Democratic Movement. With the Ba'ath regime, all activities that concerned national values were banned.

*“There is a very famous song called Shamoma; literally translated the words of the song mean “when we get married, we can see each other”. The song was banned in Syria because even though it is a love song it has somewhat nationalistic nuances. So, this is an explicit example that in Syria we did not have rights to call ourselves Assyrians.” (David, Dutch-Assyrian).*

However, as the Assyrians from Syria are considered religious minorities, they were in safe conditions until the start of the Syrian Crisis in 2011. Since the start of the conflict, Christians, including Assyrians, have been exposed to violence in north-eastern regions that have been overrun by ISIS. 253 Assyrians were kidnapped by armed groups, including many women and children. This has caused an estimated 3,000 to flee the area and 11 destroyed churches (Minority Rights, 2018). Therefore, many Christians have left their hometowns, including

Aleppo, Homs, and Hassakeh, which were significant cities inhabited by Christians. Some fled to Europe, and others to Lebanon and Turkey. The extremist ideology of ISIS and some of the other groups fighting against the government has increased Christian fears about their future, and has driven some to support Assad regime. Nevertheless, many Christians are also critical of the regime. The rise of the opposition in 2012 destabilised the situation, and some Assyrians went on to join the opposition. There was no unified ideology about the stance that Assyrians should take; consequently, there are both anti-Assad and pro-Assad sentiments also in diaspora.

Despite the pressure on national movements, many Assyrian interviewees evaluated their status positively in Syria before the crisis. Assyrians in Syria have expressed fewer alienated sentiments towards Syria than Turkey (with the exception of people who had clear nationalistic ideology). The main reasoning behind this sentiment is that even though there was no democracy and freedom in Syria, Assad managed the coexistence of Muslims and Christians, and Christians had no fear of being persecuted because of their religion. Christians who could enter politics and government were educated and had stable occupations.

*"In Turkey, we did not have any rights, and we hate speaking Turkish. However, Assyrians from Iraq or Syria love to speak Arabic, they love to dance Arabic dances. For us Turkish songs are unbearable. I remember even there was a party, Turkish music was on, and one of our friends went and put the electricity off so that the song would not continue. Then nobody understood what was going on... But we did it on purpose... Come on! Why Turkish?" (Aram, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*"We have Assyrians from Syria that love Assad because he was protecting them and while in Turkey nobody protected them. Moreover, we have Catholic Assyrians who are all pro-Saddam, because he was protecting them. Somehow it may sound strange but you understand when you look at what is going on now. Because nobody is protecting them." (Esmar, Dutch-Assyrian).*

Diaspora engagement practices at a state level have been managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, which was established in Damascus in 2002. The Ministry has been encouraging the return of migrants and investments in Syria. The review of the official website shows that there have been diaspora-homeland conferences held in Syria. The first one was organised in 2004, with the name "With Expatriates towards Development" and the second organised in 2007 with the theme "Invest in the Home: Together We Build Future." Following Gamlen's (2008) typology, *Syria can be qualified as an engaging state*, which has policies both for diaspora engagement and diaspora integration. According to Ragazzi's (2012) symbolic

policies, citizenship policies and social and economic policies for diaspora engagement were in place. However, a qualitative look reveals that Syrian diaspora policy has been known not only for its positive sides but also for its repressive measures. Jorum (2015) points out several examples of the Syrian government repressing the diaspora in Sweden. For instance, several of the activists interviewed for this research have recounted their experiences of travelling to Syria before the uprising and being withheld at the airport or the border and confronted with files containing information on things they had said and done while in Sweden (Joren, 2015). Furthermore, he states that the goal of opening the Syrian Embassy in Sweden in 2001 was to monitor and report on activities, views and discussions held by Syrians in Sweden. After his defection to the Syrian opposition in 2011, a former Syrian ambassador to Sweden, Bassam Imad (2005–2008), confirmed that during his time at the embassy in Stockholm, his staff regularly monitored Syrians in Sweden (Svahn, 2012). During my research, I also interviewed Iraqi and Turkish Assyrians who expressed a dominant stereotype that Syrian-Assyrians still fear the government and would therefore not be open to talking about their political views, even with fellow Assyrian expatriates.

More active relations with the diaspora have been organised by international organisations and grassroots initiatives. In the case of Syrian diaspora engagement, a significant role was played by grassroots organisations and international actors, such as the United Nations, in facilitating better engagement of the diaspora into peace-building activities. These organisations find that the Syrian diaspora is endowed with the skills, expertise and resources that would allow them to play an essential role in leveraging the Syrian crisis. Numerous humanitarian organisations established by the Syrian diaspora provide humanitarian assistance to every Syrian province (Svoboda and Pantuliano, 2015). However, interviewed Assyrians do not mention cooperation with Syrian grassroots or international organisations for diaspora engagement projects.

Analyses of Iraqi, Syrian and Turkish state policies, as well as Assyrian perceptions of these states, reveal that none of these nations “count Assyrians as being their diaspora, nor Assyrians position and perceive themselves as a part of these states’ diasporas. These relations can be termed *“mutually alienated relations.”*”

## **4.2 ARMENIA AND DIASPORA ARMENIANS: SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS AT COOPERATION**

The role of the Republic of Armenia in constructing state-diaspora relations will be discussed through an analysis of the development of Armenian statehood. I will outline three periods of diaspora-state relations: 1) the Armenian Republic (1918-1920), 2) Armenia in the Soviet system (1921-1920) and 3) Armenia as an independent state (1991-2018) following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### **4.2.1 Formation of Statehood and Accumulating Experience with Cooperating with the Diaspora**

The first Republic of Armenia was created in severe political and socio-economic conditions for Armenians. In 1915, Armenians who had survived the Genocide in the Ottoman Empire had to leave their historic homeland and spread around the world by creating new Armenian communities or joining already existing ones. Some of the survivors of the Genocide found refuge in the territory of present-day Armenia. Armenian statehood became the most important formal institutional structure under which policies regarding Armenian immigration, protection of migrants' interests were developed. Activity under the First Armenian Republic lasted for a short period of two years, and was in a state of war and socio-economic hardship during the entirety of its existence

In that short period, the state succeeded in cultivating certain policies towards the diaspora. One of the state priorities during that period was the consolidation of diaspora resources to support Armenians worldwide. The state made the first steps in establishing direct contacts with organisations operating in Armenian-populated communities abroad. With the aim of organising these activities, some new institutional structures were set up in the Diaspora aimed at the organisation and strengthening of state-immigrant relations, consolidation of Armenians, and promoting repatriation. During this short period, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was established for solving the problems that Armenians could face abroad. The Minister opened consulates that undertook the task of gathering trustworthy information about

Armenians living abroad and establishing stable relations with them. Consulates were opened in Iran, Georgia, Abkhazia, Azerbaijan, and some Russian cities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs opened a specific department: "Department of Diaspora" (Meliksetyan, 1978). Its main aim was to study Armenian communities and establish ties between Armenia and the Diaspora in order to research its financial and human potential. The Ministry of Interior also contained the Department on Immigration and Reconstruction, and the Ministry of Relief was established to deal with Armenian refugees that had migrated to Armenia, as well as those who resided outside the country. Despite heavy social and economic difficulties, the government of the First Republic of Armenia made considerable efforts to organise the return of refugees of the Ottoman Empire to the Armenian Republic and to facilitate the immigration of Armenians living abroad to Armenia. In consideration of the fact that not all Armenians' birthplace was Armenia, the state announced the slogan "Armenia is the motherland of all Armenians" (Stepanyan, 2010). The accumulation of this experience was interrupted in November 1920, as Armenia's political system was transformed, and Armenia became a part of the Soviet Union.

#### **4.2.2 Soviet Era: Mutual Intolerance**

Diaspora-state relations changed in 1920 when Armenia became a part of the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Armenian Republic, national and political priorities, including diaspora relations, were governed and developed by the Soviet authorities. Consequently, the content of diaspora-state relations was planned and controlled by the Soviet central authorities. Many influential Armenian political organisations were banned and persecuted, and diaspora organisations and especially political parties were declared enemies of Soviet Armenia. This approach led to the formation of mutual intolerance and resulted in the alienation of the diaspora from Armenia. Following this, three of the major political parties (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Social Democrat Hunchakian Party, and Ramkavar Liberal Party) began to undertake their activities outside of their homeland. They created diaspora-based cultural, charitable, educational, and youth organisations (Yeghiazaryan *et al.* 2017). The Soviet government established the Armenian Relief Committee (ARC) in order to have its own channel to reach the Diaspora in 1921. The ARC had branches in almost all Soviet cities with a high number of Armenians, as



well as in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, France, England, Germany, America, Persia, Egypt, Algeria, and elsewhere. About two thousand members were involved in 200 ARC branches; these organisations were accountable to the Soviet regime.

The relations of the diaspora and the state became even more complicated when the Soviet Union decided to organise the repatriation of diaspora Armenians from 1921 to 1936 and 1946 to 1949. The ARC was actively engaged in organising Soviet propaganda and repatriation of Armenians (Melkonyan 1946). To bring back diaspora Armenians to the homeland, the ARC published journals, books and newspapers. Even though the organisation had a non-political orientation, party affiliation was frequently taken into account when facilitating repatriation. The state initiated extensive propaganda in diaspora communities to explain the importance and "opportunities" that the Armenians could have if they repatriated to Armenia. The real situation - that is, the difficult socio-economic conditions in Armenia - were not presented. Only people who were "sympathizers of Soviet orders" were allowed to repatriate to Armenia. The Soviet Armenian government did not create stable socio-economic and living conditions in Armenia before these repatriation waves. As a result, about 42,286 people returned to Armenia from 1921 to 1936, and 90,000 people returned from 1946 to 1949. They immigrated to Armenia from Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Greece, France, Bulgaria, Romania, and other countries where they migrated to as a result of the 1915 Genocide. This period is known for heightened tensions between diaspora returnees and the local Armenians (Repat Armenia 2014). The differences between them were manifested in their language, culture, religious beliefs, and socio-cultural norms. Returnees were dissatisfied with bad living conditions, a lack of jobs, compulsions and barriers and social injustice. In the 1948 Congress of the Communist Party of Armenia, the party announced that diaspora Armenians did not have "proper political upbringing" and brought with them "capitalist traumatic traits" (Meliksetyan 2017). In 1948 they began arresting people who were formerly members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, those who served in the French or English armies, or those who had relatives abroad. They were all accused of spying (Stepanyan 2010). Under the totalitarian ideology of the Soviet state and Stalinist repressions, these people were politically persecuted, and some were exiled to Siberia. This situation led to the loss of trust towards the homeland and, as a result, some of these emigrants later left Armenia.

In the mid-1960s, the Soviet government adopted a new policy aimed at the improvement

of relations with the Diaspora. In 1964, the Council of Ministers of the Armenian USSR set up a Committee on Cultural Relations with diaspora Armenians. It had the status of a non-governmental organisation, under the direct control and financial support of the state. The Committee consisted of Asian, African, European, and American sections of the Armenian community, as well as others. The goals of the Committee were to develop ties with diaspora communities, to facilitate patriotic propaganda, and to acquaint them with Armenian achievements, science and culture. Contacts were established with Armenian charity and cultural associations operating abroad, and a series of events were organised. During 1970-80s, the Diaspora Committee delivered literature, textbooks, and newspapers to the diaspora communities, offered diaspora teachers training in the homeland, organised exhibitions and mutual visits, invited professional groups, and published works by prominent diaspora writers. Through the Committee, admission space was allocated for diaspora Armenian students and scientists at Armenian universities. The Committee established relations with 1,010 organisations operating in 35 countries (Stepanyan 2010). The state also built bridges with highly qualified diaspora professionals such as foreign media editors, writers, journalists, and leaders of cultural associations. The state implemented a cultural policy of reaching diaspora Armenians by sending Soviet artists, writers, actors and other intellectuals to the Diaspora. However, even communication by artists with diaspora Armenians was restricted and controlled by the government.

An important factor in this phase of strengthening diaspora-state relations was the opening of Genocide Commemoration Memorial in Armenia on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Genocide on April 24, 1965. In many countries where Armenian survivors of the Genocide fled to, Armenians built memorials dedicated to the memory of the victims on April 24 each year. Meanwhile, in Soviet Armenia, the commemoration was rejected and considered an unacceptable nationalistic act that was incompatible with Soviet ideology. On April 24, 1965, Soviet Armenians rallied to demand the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, thus, breaking an era of silence that the Soviet regime had created regarding this issue. Following the example of this demonstration, diaspora Armenians also struggled and protested for the necessity to build a memorial in the homeland as a symbolic place of consolidation of all Armenians. After long negotiations, the USSR decided to build a monument to the victims of the Armenian Genocide in Yerevan.

The first wave of the Diaspora's recent involvement in Armenia started in 1988, after the devastating earthquake in Armenia. This disaster united the scattered Diaspora for the collective effort to recover the earthquake zone and provide relief to the displaced population. Melkonian (2011) argues:

*"The walls of separation started to come down in the late 80's and in the wake of the catastrophic earthquake of 1988, all the diaspora organisations and many individuals hastened to assist and to provide relief to the victims... After re-establishment of the independent Republic of Armenia, the Diaspora extended enormous assistance by re-building hospitals, schools, paving new roads, establishing joint ventures and restarting industrial enterprises."*

Organisation of the material and human resources took place at three levels:

- Armenian transnational organisations: (Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Church, political parties) mobilised their branches in different countries around the world and delivered humanitarian aid, such as money, food, clothes, and medical supplies to the earthquake zone.
- New charity organisations: The United Armenian Fund, SOS Armenia, Aznavour for Armenia and dozens of other new organisations were developed in response to the crisis. The United Armenian Fund (UAF) established in 1989, is a union of seven major Armenian organisations operating in the United States. With the help of the Diaspora, the fund has provided about \$350 million in humanitarian aid to Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The "Aznavour for Armenia" organisation was created by Charles Aznavour's efforts; he travelled to Armenia several times for donation-generation and charity concerts.
- Individual-level assistance: diaspora Armenians travelled to Armenia, bringing food, clothing and medicine. At the individual level, professional assistance to the disaster victims was organised. Doctors, psychologists, construction workers, and architects left the diaspora for Armenia and stayed for a long time, participating in rescue and rehabilitation activities.

Even though the Diaspora put significant efforts into assisting the homeland, there were many errors in Armenia's allocation of aid. There were suspicions that only a partial amount of the total aid was delivered to people in need. In fact, this was the first mobilisation attempt of diaspora Armenia and the first source of distrust towards state structures.

This first diaspora engagement in the homeland was followed by the Karabakh Movement, which began in 1988. This movement also built political contacts with the diaspora. Three national parties functioning in the diaspora supported the autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh for self-determination and the need to restore historical justice.

#### **4.2.3 Post-Independence Cooperation and Scepticism: "Your Country, Our Homeland"**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Republic of Armenia in 1991, the positioning of the diaspora has changed dramatically. After its independence, Armenia found itself in hard social and economic conditions, enduring a catastrophic earthquake, a war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and an economic blockade by Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The first state institution that announced new diaspora-state cooperation was the All Armenia Fund, established in 1992. One of its essential functions was to unite the financial capacities of the Armenian nation to contribute to the reconstruction of Armenia, its social-economic development, and provide assistance to Nagorno-Karabakh and deported Armenians from Azerbaijan. The funds are generated through annual pan-diasporic telethons, local yearly telethons, radio programs, donations, charity events, as well as individual donations. In his official statement, the President of Armenia has underlined that the Fund is a "national tribute" of diaspora Armenians to Armenia (Himnadram, 2018). The highest governing body of the Fund is the Board of Trustees, whose Chairman is the President of the Republic of Armenia. The board also includes the Catholicos <sup>2</sup> and representatives of the largest diaspora organisations. The Fund has 25 branches in the Armenian-populated countries of the world (Brazil, Argentina, Cyprus, Syria, Uruguay, Russia, Iran, Italy, Kuwait, United States, France, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Lebanon and Australia). The Foundation has some major permanent donors. These members make donations amounting from \$ 100,000 to \$ 1 million and have been granted an exclusive license by the President of Armenia (Himnadram, 2018). The collected sum mainly focuses on socio-

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<sup>2</sup> The Head of the Church

economic development programs in the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and Armenia.

Independence was also a motivating factor for the traditional political parties as well as diaspora organisations that had a long and successful history of functioning in the diaspora, such as the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) and the Armenian Relief Society (ARS), to open offices in Armenia (EV Consulting 2005). One of the Diaspora's first significant investments was the opening of the American University of Armenia (affiliated with the University of California at Los Angeles) to provide graduate degrees for Armenian students. Professors of this university were mainly diaspora Armenians from the United States (EV Consulting 2005).

The struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh had a significant impact on the Armenian diaspora's engagement in the homeland's politics, which manifested in three directions:

- Financial assistance for the establishment of an independent state of Nagorno-Karabakh. This was implemented through investments by diaspora organisations and individuals.
- Participation of diaspora Armenians in the war. During the Karabakh war, many diaspora Armenians joined the army and military operations for the liberation of their homeland.
- Lobbying activity for the international recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

Diaspora helped newly independent Armenia establish diplomatic relations with different countries, to open embassies in Armenia, and to buy buildings for Armenian embassies in countries where they were present. Diasporas also made their first sizeable investments in the country through ventures such as the establishment of the first diamond cutting company in 1993 (EV Consulting 2010). Diasporas' help was also valuable for the provision of humanitarian support to the Armenian population. The United Armenian Fund, All-Armenian Fund and individual philanthropists such as Kirk Kerkorian (Armenian-American businessman) provided humanitarian support and organised telethons to raise money for Armenia. These projects provided heating, power, water supplies, and fuel to hospitals, schools, telecommunication companies, and public transportation services so that these entities could maintain their daily performance (EV Consulting 2005, 6).

The independence of Armenia and investments from the diaspora has raised the need for

the establishment of stronger governmental ties. It was first carried out by the Department of Diaspora at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2008, it was replaced by the Ministry of Diaspora. The state has organised Armenia - Diaspora conferences to facilitate state-diaspora dialogue. According to Gamlen (2008), one of the main strategies that home countries use to engage diasporas with homeland projects is holding large conferences and conventions to bring homeland actors and diaspora members together. They aim to establish patronage relationships with diaspora members who perceive themselves as part of larger constituencies and keep the relationship between the home and the diaspora strong and intact. The primary goal of the conference has been the creation of national unity, development of fundamental ties for state-diaspora relations, and the production of the necessary organisational structures in Armenia and the diaspora.

For this reason, the commission included not only members of the Armenian government and church members, but also representatives of almost all diaspora Armenian communities, as well as organisation representatives and individuals. The conference is held once every three years. The first conference took place in 1999 and involved 1,200 people representing 50 states and was called the First Armenia-Diaspora Forum, followed by a second one in May 2002 and the third Pan-Armenian Forum held in September 2006. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised the first three forums, with Ministry of Diaspora carrying out the mission since 2011. Since the establishment of the Ministry of Diaspora, it has organised the Fourth Armenia-Diaspora Forum, held in 2011. It was attended by 550 delegates from 50 countries representing 151 diaspora organisations. The Ministry of Diaspora developed mechanisms for the involvement of diaspora Armenians in investment projects in Armenia, enlargement of pan-Armenian networks in the Diaspora, and the use of diaspora professional potential for the development of the Republic of Armenia's economy. The fifth Armenia-Diaspora Conference took place in 2014. 1,000 representatives from Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Diaspora participated in the event. The sixth Congress of Armenia and the Diaspora took place in 2017 with the slogan "Mutual Trust, Unity and Responsibility." During the Pan-Armenian Forum, issues related to the development of Armenia's economy, regional challenges, national security, foreign policy and elimination of the consequences of the Armenian Genocide, as well as matters related to the preservation of Armenian identity were all discussed.

According to the Ministry of Diaspora's official website (2018), the forums served as a

platform for discussing diaspora policy priorities which later on were summarized in a joint Armenia-Diaspora statement. Based on document analyses of these conferences, the following are considered priorities in diaspora policies: international lobbying for the recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Genocide Recognition, facilitation of economic investments for the development of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, identity preservation issues, such as implementation of cultural, religious and educational programs, and promotion of the repatriation process. Armenia and the Diaspora have been positively addressing almost all aspects outlined by Ragazzi's (2014) taxonomy.

- Religious/cultural policies have been addressed both by the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Ministry of Diaspora. The Armenian Apostolic Church is represented in almost all diasporic communities. Moreover, within the Ministry of Diaspora there is a special department of relations with church organisations. The Ministry of Diaspora coordinates the collaboration between the Armenian Apostolic Church of the Republic of Armenia and the religious organisations of the diaspora, as well as investigating and analysing religious events taking place in the diaspora (Ministry of Diaspora, 2018). In regards to cultural policies, Armenia has established the Armenian Genocide Research Centre and an online University of Armenian Studies. There are frequent cultural events such as concert and exhibitions that take place in the diaspora, and the government also provides assistance to the Organisation of Pan-Armenian Games as well.
- Symbolic policies (inclusion of diasporas in the national calendar of celebration). Armenia has so far organised six conferences that are an occasion for Armenians from all around the world to meet and discuss priority areas of collaboration. The conferences have been evaluated as an essential factor for boosting the tourism sector of Armenia.
- Social and economic policies (scientific networks, investment schemes for diasporas, welfare for the diaspora, welfare for refugees). The establishment of economic ties has been one of the priorities of Armenia-diaspora relations starting from the independence years. An example of financial investment programs was the third Armenia-diaspora Conference that set a task to develop the "Rural Poverty Reduction Program" further. It was decided to solve development problems in rural areas by allocating about \$30 million from the diaspora to this program. Armenia also has specific legislation for

foreign investments mainly intended for diaspora Armenians. Adopted in July 1994, the law grants some privileges and tax exemptions to foreign investors within a grace period in exchange for specific investment amounts a result of which has been the establishment of a high-quality medical centre. As for social policies, diaspora Armenians in collaboration with the Ministry of Diaspora have created the Pan-Armenian Youth Centre, the Armenian Development Agency, and training programs for diaspora Armenian teachers. There are also pan-Armenian networks of professionals and organised pan-Armenian professional conferences of architects, lawyers, journalists, and doctors. One of the main activities of the Ministry of Diaspora is the organisation of homecoming trips for diaspora Armenians.

- Citizenship policies (Access to citizenship through ethnic or religious belonging, acceptance of dual citizenship, external vote). A significant change in state-diaspora relations came through the permitting of dual citizenship in 2007. Under the law, individuals of Armenian descent aged 18 and higher, who have resided permanently in Armenia for three years, speak Armenian, and are familiar with the nation's Constitution, are eligible for Armenian citizenship. Ethnic Armenians qualify for citizenship if they prove their ethnic belonging via Church certificate or documents of their ancestors. According to the legislation, a dual citizen has all the rights as an Armenian citizen. However, out-of-country voting is not allowed by the Armenian legislation. Approximately 30,000 Armenians received dual citizenship. Following the crises in Syria, Armenia also facilitated a straightforward process of obtaining citizenship for Syrian-Armenians.
- State and bureaucratic control (lobbying is officially encouraged by the state). One of the critical points of Armenia-diaspora relationship is lobbying activity. Therefore, lobbying has been encouraged by the state through Armenia-diaspora conferences and granting special prizes for diaspora Armenians who have shown considerable support lobbying activities.

Despite the existence of conferences, research into official rhetoric reveals that many spheres of diaspora-homeland relations remain problematic and, throughout the years, have been accompanied with scepticism and sometimes even mutual disappointments. The political



elite in Armenia has seen the diaspora as a source of cash, rather than as a strategic partner (Cheterian, 2017). Over the past 25 years, there were success stories of state-diaspora cooperation, but there were also many failures. The popular image within the Dutch-Armenian diaspora was that many diaspora Armenians who attempted to invest in Armenia ended up losing money. According to many Dutch-Armenians interviewed, enthusiasm for investing in Armenia was strong in the early independence years. The first wave of investments was due to diasporic patriotism; however, as years went on, diaspora Armenians become more pragmatic. Consequently, diaspora–homeland ties depend on the reliability of Armenia for the Diaspora. During the diaspora-homeland conference in 2006, a French-Armenian representative noted (Tololyan 2014):

*"Despite all the efforts of the [French] Armenian Fund 18 and other organisations, only 12-20% of French Armenians have contributed so far, whereas 70% of French Jews have contributed to Israel. If we want more, then you, the leaders of Armenia, must give us an Armenia of which we can be proud. This is your country [yergir], but it's our homeland [hayrenik]."*

Similarly, the diaspora has received widespread criticism by not coming together as a united voice to subordinate the oligarchic regime in Armenia. As a result of this, Tololyan (2014) evaluates that organised links between the homeland and the diaspora are multiple and fragmented, and numerous individual or small-group collectives have developed reasonably successful connections between donors and local aid recipients, or have created cooperative ventures on a small scale (such as between educators and researchers) that are unknown or ignored by state policies.

Another major clash between the diaspora and Armenia has been due to disagreement regarding the Armenian-Turkish reconciliation process that was initiated from 2008 to 2010 by Turkish and Armenian authorities, the result of which was the signing of the Armenian-Turkish Reconciliation Protocols. Diaspora representatives were concerned about this document and did not like that Armenia was pursuing such a policy. The opinion of many diaspora representatives was that, if Armenia is also considered a homeland of diaspora Armenians, it must also advocate their interests through its policy. This document was not implemented and entered a deadlock and was abolished by Armenia in 2017.

The Dutch-Armenian community also raised concerns related to diaspora policy

implemented by the government. Dutch-Armenian participants of Diaspora-Armenia conferences disclosed its strengths and weaknesses:

*“As an idea it was useful to unite, to meet, to exchange ideas. But the question is what goals and results do we expect? Participants think that there are going to be serious decisions made at the end of the event. No, it didn’t happen. With 3,000 people, of course, you can’t make serious decisions. Nobody has authorised us to make arrangements for the whole Diaspora.” (Dutch Armenian, Armen)*

Interviewees believed that there were no ideas they took from this conference that they could use later in their activities. According to the interviewed participants, they felt a need to inform Armenians about their activities, because they do not have up to date information:

*“One person was giving a lecture that stated that the main issue for the Diaspora is the Genocide. No, it is not. Our primary concern is the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. I am not saying that the Genocide is not important, but Nagorno-Karabakh is an urgent issue for us. Everyone here knows about it, each Armenian and even each Dutch person that we know.” (Armen, Dutch-Assyrian).*

During the sixth conference, specific attention was also paid to repatriation issues. President Serzh Sargsyan stressed the importance of diaspora input in solving Armenia’s demographic problem, as well as investing in the Armenian economy. However, the respondents found that Armenia is not yet ready to receive diaspora Armenians. According to them, the massive influx of Iraqi and Syrian Armenians following the crises in Iraq and Syria revealed a country that has a significant unemployment problem; it is early to speak about repatriation. Only one part of the Syrian-Armenian and Iraqi-Armenian repatriates remained in Armenia; the majority of them found ways to migrate to the West, including Europe and North America.

This research also addressed the efficiency of the Ministry of Diaspora according to the Dutch-Armenian diaspora. In public debate, the activities of the Ministry are often described as “promising institution that ended up being a pure PR operation.” Only a few projects implemented by the Ministry of Diaspora have been evaluated as effective and positive. The interviewees were satisfied mainly with homecoming programs. Every year, thousands of diaspora Armenian youth have been implementing the "Come Home" program, and the "My Armenia" Pan-Armenian cultural festival. The interviews revealed that the members of the community are well-informed about the "Come Home" program implemented by the Ministry

of Diaspora. The program aims at introducing the homeland, history, culture, religion and traditions to diaspora Armenian teens and youth (13-17 years old). The program includes visits to major historical-cultural sites in Armenia, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, and plays, as well as instruction in Armenian language, literature, dance, history, and church traditions. The important component of the program is active contact between the youth of Armenia and the Diaspora, as well as meetings with prominent, state and public figures (Ministry of Diaspora, 2018). One of the participants of the focus group discussion expressed his satisfaction with the program:

*“My kids participated in the program probably twice and they were delighted. They got acquainted with Armenia's historical past, visited various historical and cultural memorials. I think that the program plays a vital role for the diaspora kids so that they know where they came from.” (Gor, Dutch-Armenian)*

The other program that respondents were aware of is a three-week training program of diaspora teachers taking place in Armenia. Teachers of Dutch-Armenian organisations dealing with educational issues have participated, and their feedback was quite positive. They said that the three-week program was informative, well-organised and motivational.

Educational programs by the Ministry have received some criticism. Most participants in the focus group discussions that were parents of children attending Sunday Armenian school complained that the textbooks sent by the Ministry do not match the needs of diaspora children and that they have to utilise their own finances to buy adequate books. One of the teachers explained:

*“We have received books from Armenia, these books are supposed to be for the diaspora schools. But they didn't consider the particularities of local kids, their level of Armenian. They used very complicated words. A child that grew up in a different place doesn't know these words. Kids are discouraged to learn the language after the first attempt. They spent a lot of money on these books that we never used, they remained on our shelves from the first day. What we certainly needed were dresses for dance groups, records of songs and other practical things. We asked those things from the Embassy, from the Ministry but we never got support. We buy these things with our finances. Even when you want to introduce kids to Armenian literature, you face difficulties because the literature is very complex. They should create simplified versions of Armenian literature for the kids who were born abroad like there are simplified books in English or Russian for the beginners.” (Silva, Dutch-Armenian).*

For this reason, in collaboration with the Ministry, language and history teachers from Armenia were invited to the Netherlands:

*“Two professionals from Armenia should come, I want them to come and to see what we need. They write textbooks that are complicated for our children. I'm convinced that when they come here and see how children perceive their textbooks and what they need, they will reconsider their methods.”*

A representative of a Dutch-Armenian organisation in the Netherlands evaluated the diaspora policies as not sufficiently useful. A different interviewee stated their organisation, which had been in operation since 1996, while the Ministry was established in 2008, had not felt any effects of the Ministry's diaspora policies: *“Only sending books to us is not enough.”* According to them, the activities of the Ministry are mainly limited to the implementation of some cultural and educational programs, and the relations between the Ministry and the Diaspora have fragmented character.

*“First of all, we need to understand why the ministry was founded. The aim was making Diaspora-Armenia ties closer so that there are collaborations at different levels. If you ask me whether these goals are accomplished, I would answer: no. It is not that they haven't done anything. No, they did some things, but they could have done more. For example, I appreciate the double citizenship law. Now I can have Armenian and Dutch citizenship and I dropped my Iraqi passport. But have they done anything to establish long-term cooperation? No! You know, in the Diaspora we are used to working on a volunteer basis. They give medals of appreciation to everyone for our efforts to maintain communities abroad. The Armenian government is not the entity to evaluate our efforts; the community should be the one to evaluate us. What we need from them are not medals, but a more effective policy to engage the Diaspora, its intellectual potential, financial potential.” (Hovig, Dutch-Armenian).*

In their opinion, the Ministry should develop a long-term strategic plan with the Diaspora, which should not neglect ideas or suggestions coming from the Diaspora. One of the leaders of a diaspora organisation was concerned that the Ministry does not put in enough effort to reach, become closer, or find new ways to engage the Diaspora with Armenia:

*“Here in the Netherlands we have a huge amount of people that are outstanding professionals in different fields. Why don't they reach them? Everything is ready for them to act and to establish ties. For example, there is a student union. Why they don't try to work with them? It's not understandable for me. The Ministry can have a huge role in this matter.” (Vahram, Dutch-Armenian).*

The Ministry of Diaspora cooperates with Armenian formal organisations operating in the Netherlands; as a result, non-formal organisational groups and individuals remain outside the circle. The Ministry mostly links up with traditional diaspora organisations and “recognised” leaders and does not put enough efforts into engaging with individuals who are not engaged with existing institutions. One of the leaders of a non-official organisation noted that they had not been extended any initiative to cooperate with the Ministry and see no need for cooperation because they do not trust the Armenian government. These organisations use their own channels, informal networks, and relatives to link with the homeland.

A lack of diaspora representation was also discussed as a weak point of the Armenia-diaspora conference. According to the participants, not all segments of the diaspora had the possibility to participate, since the meetings were held in Armenian. As a consequence, a large sector of the Armenian diaspora who does not know Armenian were left behind. Elaborating on the lack of diaspora representation, one of the respondents noted:

*“I am sure that the Ministry is aware of the problems that we have in the Diaspora and maybe even the Ministry has its share of fault in it. The Diaspora has many “gaps” in it, and it concerns the division between Armenians from Armenia and the rest of the Diaspora.” (Nvard. Dutch-Armenian)*

According to many interviewed Dutch-Armenians, one of the main tasks of the Ministry should be consolidating “different layers of the Armenian diaspora.” The diaspora is composed of “different layers of Armenians,” such as Iraqi-Armenians, Iranian-Armenians, Turkish-Armenians, Syrian-Armenians and Armenians from Armenia and the communication between these “layers” is very loose.

The last conference held in Yerevan in 2017 discussed the possibilities of creating a national assembly/council that will consist of senior officials from Armenia and representatives of its worldwide Diaspora. The participants were suspicious towards this initiative as well, as they took into account that besides official rhetoric, the Ministry does not put enough efforts in reaching all “layers” of the Diaspora.

*“I think they should study this initiative in detail to decide who will be in there from the Diaspora. Otherwise, it will create bigger problems.” (Armen, Dutch-Armenian).*

A new wave of diaspora-Armenia relationships can be foreseen with the Armenian Velvet Revolution that happened from April to May 2018. The new government also puts Diaspora-

homeland relations as one of the most essential strategic lines of the government. They promise that the “New Armenia” will reconsider diaspora-homeland cooperation and will contribute to the establishment of “horizontal/partnership” relations (Cheteryan, 2018). However, more time is needed to understand the strategic lines of the new government and its implication on state-diaspora relations.

### 4.3 CONCLUSION

The chapter captures state-diaspora relation of state-less and state-linked diasporas from a diaspora-cantered perspective. I use this approach since I examine the evolution of state-diaspora relations from a historical perspective, analysing opinions of diaspora members about existing policies, as well as using Mugges’ (2012) idea about examining nationhood ideologies to understand the experience of minority groups in diaspora. Ragazzi’s (2014) proposed taxonomy shows that the character and degree of involvement of diaspora in the homeland do not always coincide with official policies. Therefore, qualitative research enriches the typology and presents deeper dynamics of the diasporas’ experience.

*Table 9. State Policies and Diasporas Perspective*

	<b>State Policies</b>	<b>Diaspora perspective</b>
<b>Armenia</b>	Access to religious/cultural policies, social economic policies, citizenship policies, bureaucratic control policies, symbolic policies, institutional policies	Lack of trust Poor implementation of state policies State only focused on “easy to reach” segments or “elites” of diasporas
<b>Assyria /Turkey</b>	Access to religious/cultural policies, social economic policies, citizenship policies, bureaucratic control policies, symbolic policies, institutional policies	Alienation from the state Limited cooperation opportunities for minorities Repressive measures by the state

<b>Assyria/ Iraq</b>	Access to citizenship/voting policies	
<b>Assyria / Syria</b>	Access to symbolic policies, citizenship policies and social and economic policies	

Armenian diaspora policies can be considered a model that corresponds to Ragazzi's (2014) "global nation-state" typology. The state maintains strong institutional relationships with their diaspora communities despite their religion, linguistic belonging, and citizenship status. However, Armenia-diaspora relations also have several problematic points. The Ministry of Diaspora mainly functions as a way to symbolically value the diaspora as a strategic partner and makes Yerevan as the meeting point of diaspora Armenians through Diaspora-Armenia conferences. However, the main problem of diaspora-state cooperation is the lack of efficiency and reliability of the Armenian state and its institutions. There is also lack of state-driven, reliable, long-term initiatives and projects that address different layers of the Diaspora. Interviews with Dutch-Armenians reveal that the designed policies are not based on the needs of the Diaspora, as they lack trust towards the Armenian state. Lastly, the state has not succeeded in addressing the Diaspora's heterogeneity. Diaspora-state cooperation has been developed based on "easy to reach" communities, organisations and individuals. Privileging one part of the diaspora leaves behind various diasporic sub-communities and "silent" networks.

In the case of the state-less diaspora, in order to grasp the complexity of the state-diaspora relations, I examine the evolution of the relationship as well as the position of the minority group in domestic politics before migration. Assyrians as a minority group have been continuously persecuted in three countries of origin. State-minority relations have also been reflected in their experience as a diaspora. Many of the respondents have developed their ideas about sending state experience based on their personal experience or stories of their parents; therefore, as a diaspora, they feel insecure in cooperating with these states. As a result, the Assyrians in the Netherlands do not receive any support or state-driven collaboration initiatives from the countries that they consider a part of their historical homeland. Despite existing cooperation initiatives, alienation from the state is vivid, especially in the case of Turkey. These problematic relations with the states of reference are conditioned by a long history of

persecutions that are not easy to overcome.

This chapter shows that the access of stateless diasporas to state policies that represent their “historic homeland” is limited due to existing repressive measures towards minority groups. Therefore, their voices remain overlooked in official diaspora policies (Ragazzi 2014, Gamlen). However, even state-linkedness does not guarantee diaspora involvement in official policy implementation due to a lack of trust, conflicting ideas, and lack of addressing the heterogeneity of the diaspora



## **CHAPTER 5. ORGANISATIONAL LANDSCAPE: EXISTING AND FAILED ORGANISATIONS**

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The significant characteristic of diaspora, stated by Tololyan (1998) and Brubaker (2005), and which is at the core of this research, is the element of “doing” and “acting”. The examination of organisational structures through which diasporas “act” is vital for understanding agreements and disagreements around representing uncertain and immeasurable elements of diaspora populations such as their mobilisation priorities, homeland-state perceptions and articulations.

In the following chapter, I compare Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian communities’ organisational structures with a specific focus on historical evolvement and intra-group dynamics, as well as links with transnational communities and homelands. The chapter shows that the basis and settings of diaspora structures go beyond homeland-host nation connections. The organisational structures consist of and are generated based on multiple level of ties that range from informal to formal settings, and from local to transnational networks. They are affected by a number of settings: the experiences in home countries pre-migration, developments in the homeland, transnational diasporic networks’ priorities and agendas, as well as the specificities of the Dutch environment.

The chapter starts with an overview of existing organisational networks and management systems, as well as their commonalities and differences. It will be followed by a detailed analysis of each organisation’s mission statement, goals, tensions, and dynamics. As the chapter further shows, the national sentiments and sense of diasporism of Assyrians were developed with the first wave of migration to Western countries, including the Netherlands. Assyrian transnational, local organisations are managed by a restricted circle of people whilst the community’s “maintenance” mainly relies on kinship connections. Contrary to the Assyrian case, Dutch-Armenian transnational organisations have long histories and traditions of functioning within diaspora settings. Therefore, they provide more settings for ensuring maintenance of diaspora and addressing the needs of Dutch-Armenians.

I examine the ways in which the existence or absence of the state is reflected on the positionality of the homeland in the transnational management system of both diasporas. The Armenian case shows that influential pan-diasporic organisational centres are located in Armenia. However, diasporic communities retain their independence, since organisational networks are based on the principle of horizontal connections and free cooperation. Assyrian organisational networks are mainly concentrated outside the homeland at the international level, except for the Church and some political organisations. However, these organisations are not a centre that “governs” diasporas. Moreover, links with the homeland heavily rely on personal connections.

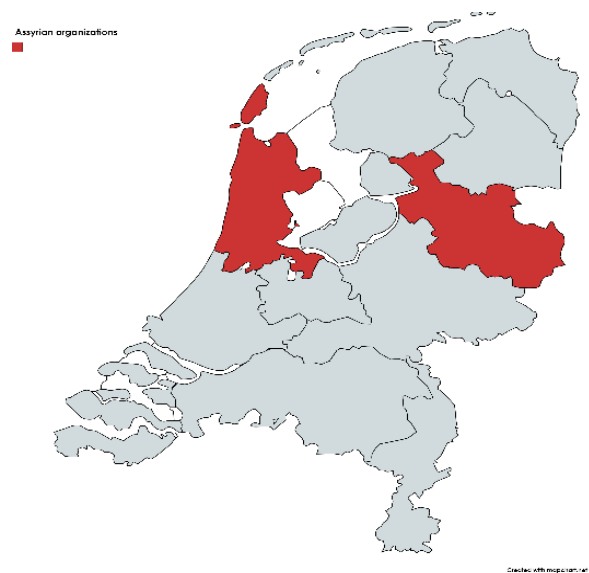
While discussing the organisational landscape of both communities, I present diaspora failures, conflicts and tensions alongside various ideologies, identities, and experiences of being part of a diaspora before migrating to the Netherlands. I also show that the decline of diaspora organisations is linked with the failure of meeting the special organisational needs of younger generations of Dutch-Armenians and Dutch-Assyrians that decreases their interest and willingness to cooperate. The research shows that the changes in Dutch immigration policies challenged the activities of diaspora organisations.

## **5.1 ORGANISATIONAL LANDSCAPE**

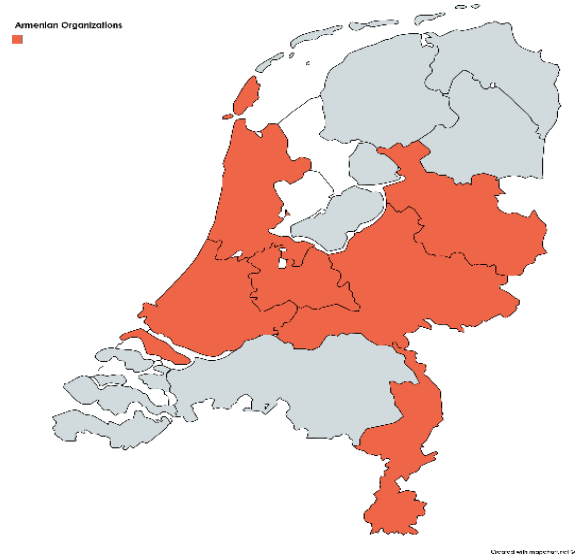
The Armenians (mostly from Turkey) and Assyrians came from mainly the same families or villages in their country of origin and inhabited the same district, town or village in the Netherlands. Therefore, in terms of geographic distributions, the organisations reflect the areas where there is a relatively high concentration of Assyrians and Armenians. Assyrian organisations are concentrated in Amsterdam (North Holland province), Enschede, Hengelo, and Oldenzaal (Overijssel province). Armenian organisations have a wider distribution: Amsterdam (North Holland province), The Hague (South Holland), Amersfoort, Utrecht (Utrecht province), Almelo (Overijssel province), Maastricht (Limburg province), and Nijmegen (Gelderland). The biggest Armenian community is in Almelo, which according to various estimates is composed of 5,000 Armenians. As for the Assyrian diaspora, Enschede (Overijssel province) is considered the “non-official” capital of Assyrians in the Netherlands,

where according to diaspora leaders almost 10,000 Syrians/Assyrians live. Two trends can be observed in regards to the demographic composition. First community organisations were initially established by men, and the boards predominantly consisted of male members. However, organisations that were established in the Netherlands in later years have more equal distribution of male and female members. This tendency reflects the pre-migration context, where women's access to the social and political life of Middle Eastern countries was limited. Organisations that have been established by youth also have a rather equal distribution of gender.

*Illustration 1: Assyrian Organisations Geographic Distribution*



*Illustration 2: Armenian Organisations Geographic Distribution*

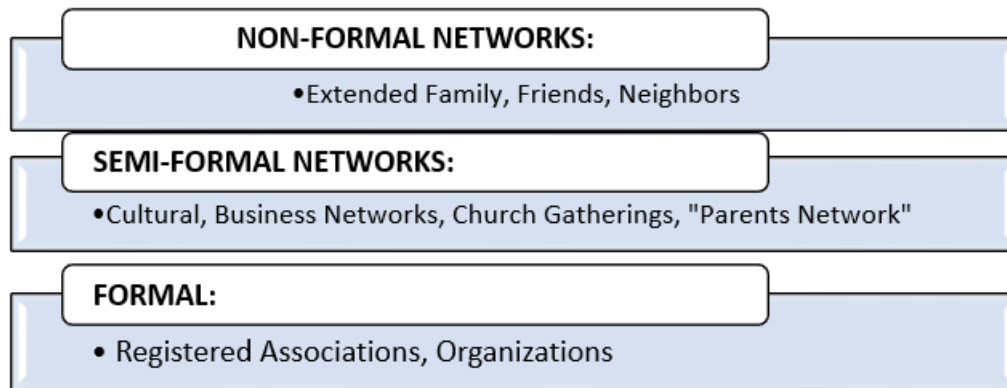


As outlined in the methodological chapter, organisations for both diasporas can be grouped as political, socio-cultural, faith-based, or humanitarian organisations. It should be noted that organisations do not have a strict focus but stretch their scope and activities across the categories mentioned above. The “confusion” between the fields of engagement can be observed whenever transformative events /conflicts trigger diaspora mobilisation.

Diaspora organisations consolidate diaspora resources and try to overcome internal divisions for representing the community. Despite this, only researching diaspora organisations does not grant a sufficient basis to speak on behalf of the entire diaspora, since there are other “non-formal” communities, as well as “in-between” categories. The examples of these

networks will be further discussed in the following parts of the chapter.

Figure 2: Organisational levels



Though the “non-official” and “semi-formal” of cooperation are an important basis for both the Assyrian and Armenian communities, it has a particular significance for the Assyrian diaspora, as it is a stateless group. As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, due to oppressive measures in their sending countries, Assyrians rely mainly on their kinship networks and did not have opportunities to develop organisational structures. Therefore, the Assyrian diaspora’s leadership relies on a small number of people. Since it is highly contested within the community whether these organisations represent the entire community, it is necessary to underline “non-formal” and “in-between” forms of community organisations as well.

The Dutch-Assyrian community is mainly based on family kinship relations and shows an interesting interplay between the family and ethnic-national identification. The family has been at the core unit of the community: *“someone’s family and a wider kin group were attached to a human being like a natural attribute”* (Atto, 2013). Kin-based unity and what Armbruster (2013) called *“linked biography”* explains how the community functions through family/friendship networks. The family networks extend from the borders of the Netherlands to Germany, Sweden, and the UK. Thus, someone’s wedding is seen as a community event rather than a family one. During my fieldwork, one of my interviewees interrupted the conversation, saying that she had to attend a funeral that was an important “community event”.

*“Family ties are very important for us. I have my uncle living in Sweden, my friend in Paris. Also, a few things that connect us are that we marry each other, we go to parties, we dance and have fun together, we share the grief. If, for example, a father-in-law of my sister dies, we all go. Moreover, it is not at all important whether the family is in Sweden or in Germany. That is why these borders in Europe do not exist for us. We mix, we come and go, very easy, very quick.” (Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian).*

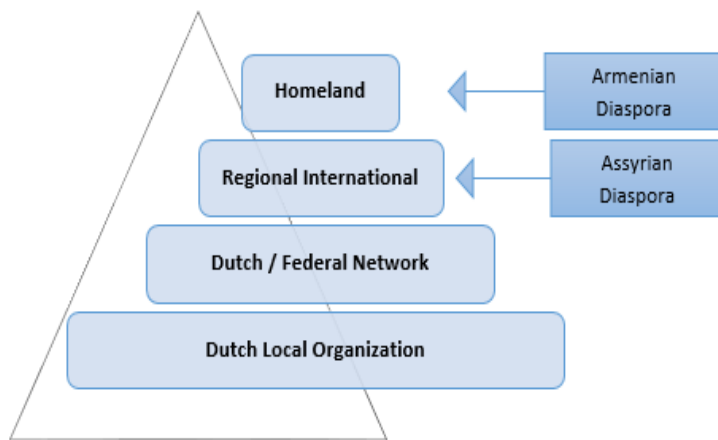
*“How I feel safe is when I go to an Assyrian party, when I hear Assyrian dances I feel happy, I feel comfortable. The generation of my kids maybe will not have this security fear in its genes. For this generation we need to establish outstanding organisations. As long as we teach our kids to marry Assyrian, and every mother says that to their kids. In the Dutch community, it is quite distant, we love to make noise, it is more fun, I think our youth will take the Dutch culture. If you marry and have kids, you stick to your roots.” (Nina, Dutch- Assyrian).*

At the formal level of organisation, Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian organisations can be divided into two main types: transnational and local:

- Transnational organisations are engaged in hierarchically organised institutional networks connecting Armenian/Assyrian diasporic institutions worldwide. Their main goals and management systems are the same in every country where a branch exists. Thus, transnational organisations bring coherent diaspora ideologies into the Dutch context as well as connect the Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian communities with wider diaspora networks.
- Local organisations mainly focus their activities on the city where their members have settled down, or the country level.

Within these two types, there are different levels of organisations:

*Figure 3: Organisational Levels*



### ***Local Organisations***

- **Dutch local organisations:** The first level is composed of institutional "cells", such as diaspora organisations representing communities in different cities or regions of the Netherlands. These organisations are usually named after the city or region that they claim to represent, an example being the Armenian community "Ani" of Maastricht, named after the ancient Armenian city of Ani located in present-day Turkey. They have a social, educational, and cultural profile aimed at preservation of diasporic "uniqueness". In the case of both the Armenian and Assyrian diasporas, their connections with the homeland do not have a systematic or obligatory character.
- **Federal/ Dutch Level:** The second level hosts federations of those communities at the federal or host-state levels. In this case, the institutional structures contain the name of their host country, examples being the Federation of Armenian Organisations in the Netherlands (FAON) or the Assyrian Federation in the Netherlands. The federations of local communities and institutions carry out their activity at the national level in the country. They are meant to unite the voice of Armenian or Assyrian organisations operating in the Netherlands. Their cooperation aims at addressing the government of the Netherlands and the national government

as well as international, and supra-national organisations such as the UN, or EU. The issues around which Assyrians and Armenians unite their voice is the recognition of Genocide in 1915, human rights violations in the homeland, independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, homeland security, lobbying, etc.

### **Transnational Organisations**

- **Regional/ International:** The third degree is the confederation of the Armenian/Assyrian communities at the regional level (such as the Forum of Armenian Associations in Europe, Assyrian Federation in Europe, or Assyrian Universal Alliance). This level represents the Armenian or Assyrian structures at the European, or in some cases, global level.
- **Homeland:** This is the level where the main difference between the two diaspora organisational structures is obvious. The hierarchical structure of main transnational Armenian organisations is centred in Armenia, while in the case of the Assyrian diaspora, it is located predominantly outside the homeland. The main exceptions are faith-based organisations, such as the Syriac Orthodox Church, since the headquarters is located in Damascus, Syria. However, the latter does not claim to represent the Assyrian people but the Syriac Orthodox people. In the case of Armenian transnational organisations, they generally have their centre in Armenia and oftentimes a hierarchical structure. Examples include the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, and the All-Armenian Fund. The organisations are included in the commissions and councils set up by the Armenian government and are awarded state awards for their work.

Thus, the Armenian and Assyrian community in the Netherlands are characterised by four levels of organisation that ensure a common representation whether outside or inside the homeland. For both communities, however, the hierarchical structures are not identified with a vertical model of cooperation, since the communities retain their independence and are based on the principle of free cooperation. The vertical model of cooperation between state and diaspora is at the core of state-centric approaches that pictures diasporas as peripheries connected to the centre that is the homeland. It can be argued that the vertical model of

cooperation is typical to relatively young diasporas. In the case of vertical management, the state creates diaspora organisations, sponsoring them (including financially), thus promoting the formation and development of the diaspora (foreign communities).

Traditional diasporas such as the Armenian and Jewish diasporas are older than states. The horizontal model operates in countries in which diasporas are old and well-established. In this case, the state does not create diaspora organisations as they already exist and have a history of that can go back decades and or even hundreds of years. In some cases, diaspora organisations are older than their native states. Therefore, if the state does not create diaspora organisations and networks, nor funds them, it becomes extremely difficult or impossible to instruct or guide their activities. In that case, cooperation is based on the principle of equal partnership, which lies at the core of the horizontal model. In the Armenian reality, for example, traditional political parties (ARF, SDHP, ADL) and social organisations like the AGBU (created in 1906), as well as other structures were formed before 1918, when the first Armenian Republic was established. Likewise, the most prestigious structure of the Jewish diaspora, the Jewish World Congress, which represents Jewish communities and organisations in hundreds of countries, was established in 1936 while the State of Israel established in 1948. Moreover, in the case of the Jewish Diaspora, not only is the diaspora not conducted from the homeland, but the state of Israel was created by the diaspora. Similarly in the case of Armenia, even if structures are centred in Armenia, it does not imply that they are directed by the Armenian state. Therefore, state-linkedness does not yet mean that the state “governs” the diaspora. Similarly, in the case of the stateless Assyrian diaspora, the organisational networks are not based on the vertical management system, and there is no “united centre” that guides them.

The following chapter will examine the main organisations involved at the local and transnational level more specifically, by reflecting on their historical specificities, current functions, existing disagreements, and tensions within the communities.



## **5.2 ASSYRIAN TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

The mobilisation and leadership of the community strongly rely on the efforts of a small minority: political or cultural entrepreneurs that present their voice as a diaspora (Brubaker 2005). Community “leaders” or elites are very well defined. I applied the snowball technique of discovering community leaders both within the Dutch-Assyrian community as well as with representatives of the wider diaspora (Swedish-Assyrian, Belgian-Assyrian, Armenian-Assyrian community representatives). As a result, the same community leaders were constantly suggested to me. Currently, there are a few organisations that ensure the formal representation of the community. Among the transnational organisations are the Assyrian Federation of the Netherlands, the Syriac Orthodox Church, a small community of the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Assyrian Democratic Organisation. As for local organisations, the main one is the Assyrian Mesopotamian Organisation, located in Enschede. There are also a few organisations that have few members are named as semi-formal networks.

### **5.2.1 Political Organisations and “National Awakening”**

Due to the oppressive policies of the sending states, as discussed in Chapter 3, the ethnic-national identity formation of the Assyrian people began in the diaspora. This does not apply exclusively to the Assyrian diaspora, as other state-less groups such as Kurdish or Tamil diasporas experienced the freedom of nationalistic awakening in diaspora as well (Demir 2017, Baser 2017, Wayland 2004). The Netherlands provided Assyrians with open opportunity structures that contributed to the development of distinctive ethnic identities and secessionist movements in the diaspora (Wayland 2004). I will start the chapter by discussing the process of redefining Suryoyo identity into an Assyrian one and the development of national consciousness among Assyrians in the diaspora with the help of organisations such as Assyrian Democratic Organisation (ADO).

Before migrating to the Netherlands, Assyrians in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria had a predominantly religious identity. The word Suryoyo underlined their Christian belonging in

opposition to Muslims since the latter was the major out-group population. While retrospectively reflecting on their experience in the Netherlands, the interviewees stated that the simple question “Where are you from?” turned out to require a difficult answer: “I am not Turkish, but I am from Turkey and I am Suryoyo,” a reference to being Christian. Extracts from interviews with Aram from Turkey and Daniel from Syria that are presented below underline the confusion that “Suryoyo” identifying people experienced in the Netherlands.

*“Back in Turkey we all said we are not Turkish; we are Suryoyo because we are followers of the Syriac Orthodox Church. It has been maybe 50 years that people use Assyrian/Aramean names. My parents have never told me that we have to be either one or another” (Samir, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*“My parents have not heard something like nationalism, political rights. They identified as Syriac, and they kept their culture, religion, language, but not political rights. I can remember that my father beat me when I spoke Arabic with my brother. I thought about the reasons ... why he did it, but then I understood that he knew there is something more than religion and we should keep it. I think that is the reason why when I arrived in the Netherlands and saw that there is a political movement I directly got involved. It was really because of my father that never knew what politics is but deep in his heart he was a revolutionary. He gave that feeling to us without knowing what he was doing. Thanks to him me, my brother and sisters are all interested in politics.” (Hano, Dutch-Assyrian).*

Migration to Western countries (including the Netherlands) generated an awakening of ethnic-national consciousness. Divisions and conflicts followed the efforts of creating the national label “Assyrian” that was intended to stand in place of “Suryoyo”. According to Makko (2008), the Aramean division started to evolve in opposition to the Assyrian one. Soon afterwards Arameans evolved as a separate ethnic-national group even though they refer to the same people, same homeland, culture and historical trajectories as the basis of national identity. Makko and Danabed (2008, 1) described this process as following: *“as the secular ethnic-national movement developed in an obvious direction in Diaspora, and even in the Middle East with the founding of the Assyrian Democratic Organisation by Jacobites in Syria in 1957, the Syrian Orthodox Church began to shift its official stance; thus, influencing denominational differences and much later, creating a counter movement [Aramean] to neutralise the impact of secular Assyrians.”*

The ethnic-national awakening of the Assyrian people has not been widely approved

by the Syriac Orthodox Church as well. The Church preferred to stay officially neutral and to maintain its unifying role for the Assyrian and Aramean divisions. However, many interviewees claim that the Church has participated in the promotion of Aramean identity. Assyrian respondents were convinced that the primary source of the weakened Assyrian movement is the informal alliance between the Aramean community and the Syriac Orthodox Church. This resulted in a more significant part of the Suryoyo community self-identifying as Aramean. My impression from the fieldwork confirmed that the Assyrian and Aramean division is a very sensitive topic. I was warned to be careful when using “Assyrian” or “Aramean” names and to use the “Suryoyo” generic label instead. For instance, a person who gave me a tour in the Syriac Orthodox Church monastery asked me to be careful with naming, otherwise, there could be people refusing to talk with me if they learnt that I talked to someone from the other group (Assyrian versus Aramean). There have been few attempts to overcome this division by creating “Assyrian-Aramean”, “Assyrian-Chaldean-Aramean”, and “Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean” unifying organisations. These attempts never worked. After short-term activities, the organisations either collapsed or failed to unite the “elites/core members” of the Assyrian and Aramean divisions.

These processes were not typical only within the Dutch context since the “national awakening” was compromised of the Suryoyo community in Europe at large including Sweden, Germany, France, Austria and more (Armbruster 2013). Freedom in diaspora gave them the opportunity to develop important national attributes, such as the flag, national holidays, and national hero celebration days. For example, the Assyrian flag was developed in 1974 by an American-Assyrian artist and was accepted by a transnational diaspora organisation (the AUA) in New York, United States. The sense of “diasporism” is also evident in the description of the flag:

*“In the centre the great Zab is in white portraying peace, and in the bottom, we see the mighty Tigris in a red colour representing the Assyrian national pride. These three stripes are also picturing the rays of the centre star and stand to symbolise the dispersion of the Assyrian people to the four corners of the world. The manner in which these stripes emerge from the star also symbolically portrays the eventual return of Assyrians to their ancestral homeland, which is represented by the centre of the star” (Ashurian 1999).*

*Illustration 3: Assyrian Flag*



In a stateless environment, Assyrian aspirations have been shaped by two political groups: the Assyrian Democratic Organisation (ADO) and the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) in Iraq. One of the first Assyrian nationalistic organisations started with the “Assyrian Democratic Organisation” in 1957 in Syria. Later, the ADO developed branches that reached from Turkey to Europe. Compared with the original homeland, in the diaspora they had the freedoms and rights to transform the ideas developed in the homeland into actions. According to Dutch-Assyrian leaders of community organisations, the national awakening was at its peak from the 1980s to the 2000s with the help of ADO members. Dutch-Assyrians refer to this period as being the most active time in the life of the diaspora. The secular division intended to transfer the central role of the Church in favour of an identity based on the history, culture, and language. For the first time they had the opportunity to shape their own culture and identity in Western countries.

*“We saw it as a liberation, as an opportunity to breathe freely, as an opportunity to be welcomed in a Christian land where for the first time we could maintain our culture and religion without any fear.” (Sarah, Dutch-Assyrian).*

The national awakening started with simple steps, such as giving lectures about culture, history, and teaching dances and songs. The interviewees that were active during this period retrospectively reveal that the folklore songs were mostly unknown to the Assyrians from Turkey and Syrian-Assyrians introduced them to the folklore culture. Through these organisations the Assyrians were introduced to Mesopotamia (Beth Nahrain) as being their homeland, and Assyrians being the inheritors of Assyria and Babylon.

*“ADO controlled all youth movements at that time. And in that way, we become part of a political party. In the beginning, we were doing only cultural activities; we did dance, some cultural activities, language classes. Moreover, very slowly we turned it into political activities. We invited many politicians to speak about our identity, our goals, our region: Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians. At that time, we did not have internet. Moreover, it was even challenging to phone anyone. People were interested because they wanted to hear something even though what we did was very basic.” (Sargon, Dutch-Assyrian).*

The leader of the organisation explained that during this period Assyrians who arrived from Syria brought with them nationalistic ideas.

*“When Assyrians from Syria came, they knew who we were, the language, dances, clothes, history. They knew that they wanted a piece of land and this land should be called Assyria, etc.” (Petros, Dutch-Assyrian).*

It was in the diaspora that people coming from different countries had the time to connect and to discuss openly what “Assyria” is and where their roots come from. Interviewed Assyrians that were involved in community activities from the 1990s to the 2000s proudly remembered the excitement and aspiration in the 2000s. The diaspora gave more space for Assyrians to think about their national belonging and their homeland. Some attributes from this period have remained within many organisations, such as the map of Assyria, watches with Assyrian symbolism, and an organisation of websites with the Assyrian calendar and time, thus making it possible to imagine the ideal homeland. They had the opportunity to connect with other Assyrians, to place Assyria on the map, to learn folk songs and dances. In this period, diaspora youth were very active in socialising and connecting with each other through youth camps, football tournaments and trips to different parts of Europe as well.

*“Since I was 16 years old, I have been a member of the Assyrian Mesopotamian Organisation. But before that my father was already a member. We had many activities. We would go to different countries for conventions, football tournaments, we would go to Berlin, Paris, London, to museums. We would see a lot; we would do language courses, folklore, cultural things, things that would bridge Assyrian and Dutch culture. Through these activities, we were trying to find a balance between Assyrian and Western cultures”. (David, Dutch- Assyrian).*

*“Many of my relatives are members of Assyrian organisations, those who feel Assyrian. Thanks to the organisations I think I was raised as an Assyrian with music, with stories and cultural aspects of Assyrian identity. If you are raised with this*

*influence, afterwards you can go on your own. You will search for these places". (Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian).*

The Assyrian Democratic Organisation currently has a weak standpoint in comparison to the past. Though ADO started as an underground political organisation in Syria and expanded its activities in Turkey, as an explicit transnational diaspora organisation it has been formed in diaspora. The freedom that members could have in the West allowed them to “*form a mobile, ambitious and idealistic network*” and to transfer ideas formed in the homeland into certain projects (Atto 2011). ADO does not have an explicit presence in the current diaspora. However, the elite or the main active part of the diaspora have been members of ADO during its active period. Retrospectively analysing the formation of the Assyrian diaspora in the Netherlands, many respondents agreed that ADO taught “who they were” and where they came from. The branches of these organisations exist in all countries where there is a relatively high concentration of the Assyrian population. This organisation was the one responsible for the national awakening of the Assyrian population in the diaspora. A new secular culture developed in the diaspora, exemplified through the celebration of national holidays like April 1<sup>st</sup> (Assyrian New Year), August 7<sup>th</sup> (Martyr’s Day), as well as educational activities. The organisation does not host as many activities currently in comparison with the past, and according to many members, it has become a club where people spend spare time.

*“We have about 45 active members; we used to have 100 in 1991 when it opened. Members are mostly from Syria. We have some from Turkey, Iraq, we have good contacts with ADM. The situation in Syria asks for more activities, connections, power, unity. However, people are not seriously involved. People are more concerned about their work than about nationalism and rights of people. The reason for the decline of participation the leaders have found is the detachment from the homeland among the current generation of Assyrians”. (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*“I am looking for the reasons of ups and downs, why people sometimes are more active than in the other cases. But I can’t find the reasons. When I am talking with my children about ADO, I see that they are not passionate enough because they have not lived in Syria. The national feeling has finished. The old generations only have the national feeling. Young people are interested in cultural rather than political activities”. (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian).*

### 5.2.2 Syriac Orthodox Church

In the pre-migration context, the Church used to substitute for the role of the state and played a critical role for both Armenian and Assyrian communities. Assyrians have also positioned the Church as a central community organisation. Both the Armenian and the Assyrian communities were formally governed by the spiritual-religious authorities (the Armenian Apostolic Community and the Syriac Orthodox Church) who had judicial and legal functions for community members. In Syria, the Ministry of Justice also affirmed these functions of both churches.

The current seat of the Patriarch is in Damascus, or in other words, the “headquarters” of the Syriac Orthodox Church is inside Syria. The Church has 30 archdioceses worldwide. Until the present day, the Church had considerable power among the Syriac people. According to the Syriac Orthodox Church’s estimates, there are about 6 million members worldwide. The Church is in favour of keeping the “Amo Suryoyo” (the emic term for Assyrian people) concept in a central position in public discourse. It opposes to nationalist movements and aims at keeping religious identity as the primary identification point.

*“I can remember that the patriarchy invited the Assyrian/Aramaic sections to come and to talk together, and let’s say that never after he tried that because it is not just working. Arameans would say: “So Assyrians are on the board then we aren’t in this organisation” and then Assyrians would say: “Arameans want this? Then we don’t want this.” (Aram, Dutch- Assyrian).*

The Syriac Orthodox Church began opening dioceses in Europe in the 1970s. Notably, the first diocese was opened in the Netherlands in 1970 and only later in Great Britain and Sweden. In due course, this was followed by the founding of church schools, as well as youth and women groups affiliated with the Church. Currently, the Netherlands has 11 parishes of the Syriac Orthodox Church (three of which are in Enschede, three in Hengelo, one in Rijssen, and three parishes in Amsterdam, as well as the monastery in Glane). In general, the Church has been successful in opening and operating network organisational structures in the diaspora, mostly with the donations of the community.

The monastery of the Syriac Orthodox Church is located in a small village named Glane, on the border between the Netherlands and Germany. The monastery was constructed

with the help of the first migrants that had settled in the Netherlands and Germany. The large wall that welcomes the visitor has a full list of all the people who donated to the Syriac Orthodox Church to purchase the land and construct the monastery (Illustration 4, Illustration 5). The monastery not only serves as a place for religious rituals but functions as a small, isolated island of “Suryani” people.

*The nun who welcomed us in the monastery asked my friend in Kurdish, who was also translating the conversation: “Where are you from?” My friend replied: “Maastricht.” “Maastricht? Never heard of it”. The young servant of the monastery laughed and said that for her only Amsterdam and Enschede exist where the majority of Syriacs/Assyrians reside, the rest of the Netherlands was unknown. The next question would be: “From which village in Tur Abdin are you from?” The two main places where Syriac people have a relatively high concentration). (Observation notes).*

The monastery also has its cemetery for “ordinary Syriacs” and a special room where the bodies of Patriarchs are buried. The cemetery not only serves the Dutch-Syriac population, but also receives the deceased for burial from Germany, Belgium, France. They also have a publishing house on the monastery grounds to keep their language alive. They publish biblical, historical, poetic, and linguistic books. Besides the faith, the Church is also responsible for maintaining the cultural and linguistic basis of the community.

Belonging to religious groups or self-identifying as Christians in both communities is only partly associated with faith. The other, more important element in the group is the sign of belonging to the community and being “a Suryoyo”. Being affiliated with and giving donations to the Church is a source of status, especially for men. These practices are especially common among those who came from the Tur Abdin region in Turkey. The pre-migration practices are also projected in the diaspora as a significant source of status and identity.

The church’s public placement of list of donations with names and surnames on it is a “soft power” to highlight someone’s importance in the community and success in general society. This is also a way to apply “soft power” for motivating others to donate.

*“We have 150 families in Amsterdam, but in Enschede it is much more, maybe 700 families. The youth also come and even if they don’t come, they call each other and ask why they don’t come, even if I don’t call”. (Priest, Dutch-Assyrian).*



*Illustration 5: List of Donations, Syriac Orthodox Monastery in Glane, the Netherlands*



Keeping in contact with the community does not necessarily take place through formal events. Funerals, weddings, and baptism ceremonies that take place in the Church have equal - if not more - importance for maintaining the community. Family events even sometimes involve larger amounts of people than regular church ceremonies. Not only do people from rural areas and cities attend, but pan-European extended families also gather in one place.

*“Church kept us together, Church is our home, if we lose Church we will lose everything, our culture, identity, everything. So, what we do first is establishing the Church. We call families to visit the Church and we stay together. If we see one day that some families don’t come, we call them and ask why they don’t come to the Church. Some people are even ashamed of other families, because they know if they don’t come, others will speak about it. Most of the Syriac people come to the Church. Ok, maybe not every Sunday, but most of the time they come”. (Martha, Dutch-Assyrian).*

The Syriac Orthodox Church also tries to meet the linguistic needs of the community. Since many people do not know another language and know Turkish or Arabic better, churches are divided based on which language the service is held in.

*“For example, two parishes in Enschede are in Arabic language. Our Church in Amsterdam has services in Syriac and in Arabic. This is a way for them to keep contacts with the community. After a while they also learn the language, they mingle with the community and become part of the larger Syriac identity.” (Priest, Dutch-Assyrian).*

Language schools are attached to the Church as well. The Church dispenses linguistic and cultural knowledge, but these Church-affiliated schools do not touch upon nationalistic and historical senses of community development in order to stay neutral about the ethnic-national division:

*“We also teach them about culture, sometimes I take them to Turkey and show them our home. We teach them to love, tell how we are very poor, we don’t have anything, how Muslims used to kill us, so we must love each other, we teach them that it was not like in Europe where you could do everything. And parents also teach them about their roots” (Priest, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*“I do not talk too much about history because we have a problem within two groups. Because we call us Aramaic, some of them call themselves Assyrian. In this Church most of them call themselves Aramaic, in other places - the opposite. We teach them that we do not know where we come from. We cannot say where we are from. In Turkey we had Armenian people, Byzantian people, maybe I am from Armenia and maybe my grandfather comes from Syria. The history is not very important, what is essential is the Bible and love for each other. Our people fight for names, but it is not that important.” (Priest, Dutch-Assyrian).*

The youth division of the Church is one of the best-organised structures of Suryoyo life. According to the representative to the youth union of the Church, they try to become the bridge between the conservative first-generation priests and the new Dutch-Assyrians who

are not used to Middle Eastern traditions. According to a representative of the youth division, the Church must adapt to the needs and demands of the generation that grew up in the Netherlands. The once-unquestioned authority of the Church is often interrogated in the Netherlands now:

*“... Let’s say you are a priest from Tur Abdin, a village in the South East Turkey and you have never ever accounted with a young person why you have to make a cross. It is really difficult to explain to someone, who grow up in a different society, culture, different way of life, why to make the sign of the cross. If you ask the question: “Why?” to priests, mostly they get mad, so, we wanted to create a platform where these people could ask questions and we are there mostly for young people”. (George, Dutch-Assyrian).*

The monastery also hosts a summer school that is not only open to youth from the Netherlands, but from Europe and the US as well. These youth come to the Netherlands to study Syriac language, culture, literature and theology. The monastery also hosts scholars who research subjects related to the Church.

Another important concern within the community is that Church identity gradually erodes national identity and makes Christian identity a more powerful concept.

*“We are not just Christians; we are more than just Christians, we are a civilisation that has been alive for centuries and even more. Assyrians have been here many more years before Christianity. And it is a shame that we lose our national identity label. Many would disagree on that. But many would disagree with me.” (Sarah, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*“My parents say that it is very important to stand with the Church, I would say religion can be changed but my ethnicity can’t be changed. That’s blood, you can’t change it”. (Ninva, Dutch-Assyrian).*

### **5.2.3 Assyrian Church of the East**

A closer examination of the community’s open organisations that were opened and currently serve a few families or semi-formal networks. One of these communities is the Assyrian Church of the East in Oldenzaal. The community members migrated from Iraq and maintained their “way of the Assyrian identity” through opening the Assyrian Church of the East. There are around 15 families that are followers of the Church. It represents a branch of

the Assyrian Church of the East. However, they do not have many activities for stimulating or attracting more people into the family network. Moreover, their activities are restricted to this small town. Therefore, their activities can also be placed at the “kinship” and “semi-formal” level of community organisation.

According to community members, the “advantage” of the Assyrian Church of the East is that it does not separate ethnic and religious identities in contrast to the Syriac Orthodox Church. Notably, there is no interaction between these two communities.

*“Here my father-in-law started with the Church, he has the same nationalistic feelings. The number of Assyrians started to grow here and then they were going to Zeist, elderly people could not go, and they initiated once a month here and once a month there.” (Mariam, Dutch- Assyrian).*

*“You know, I did not know anything about why we are nationalistic. However, we say that we cannot separate our national identity from our religious identity. It is like my body and my soul. My body is Assyrian, and my soul is Christian. So, everyone who has separated from this Church has separated himself from the identity. Because of this, they distanced from their identity. I think that the name already says all, it is our identity, it’s our ethnic label we have. That is why we feel like we are the truest Assyrian that there are. I think this is our pride and also our downfall. This is a good thing but also makes us weak because others look at us and say: “You think you know all.” So, then they start to hate us, with this ideology we are not including but excluding people.” (David, Dutch-Assyrian).*

In addition to faith, political views are strongly linked with the pre-migration context as well. For instance, the members of this branch of the Assyrian Church of the East follow the activities of Assyrian/Christian leader Yonadam Yawsep Kanna, who is a member of the Iraqi National Assembly.

*“Every time I see him I see him as a leader, though I know he has done good and bad things. It is because I am Iraqi, if you are from Syria you wouldn’t know about him. Many of my friends don’t know about him and they are skeptical about him. It is because he wants to introduce a new label: which is Syrian-Chaldo-Assyrian. So, he was recognising the division, and people were mad. But I know that he wanted to unite people, so that people won’t be hurt, ok, you want to be called Chaldo, that’s fine, we call you Khaldu, Assuri, Syriani. He tries to talk with Arabs and Kurds.” (David, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*“Many people of the Assyrian Church of the East are pro-Yamada, in our mini-community, everyone is pro him. It is the way we are raised. But if you ask the Assyrian*

*Orthodox Church, they do not know him, but we group up following him, we know the songs of the ADM. So, it is a part of our identity. Because Zoha fights for Assyrian people. People from Syria don't have this feeling because it is a political party in Iraq and not in Syria.” (Mariam, Dutch-Assyrian).*

They invite the priest from the UK (where Assyrians already have their own church) occasionally to the community in Oldenzaal to give mass services. This community aims at maintaining the traditions of the Iraqi-Assyrian diaspora.

*“If you look at the history of the Assyrian Church of the East, it is where we all started from. But of course, people from Syria have their own Church. And then we had a group who separated and called themselves Chaldean, and then Evangelic and others. But originally, we are all from this Church. Basically, those who come from Iraq go to the Assyrian Church of the East.” (Mariam, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*“We try to have a Church mass once a month. Since the priest is from England, we can't ensure that he comes every Sunday. For example, when we had my son's baptism and then two more in Oldenzaal, the priest used to come almost every Sunday. We try as much as we can.” (Petros, Dutch-Assyrian).*

#### **5.2.4 Assyrian Federation in the Netherlands**

When diaspora leaders realised that traditional diaspora structures (such as the ADO and ADM) did not have influence on policymakers in the international arena, and as a stateless group they needed to have a united voice, they established Assyrian Federation in the Netherlands. The need for representation arose when the 2011 Syrian Uprising broke down, and minority groups such as Assyrians appeared to be in an increasingly vulnerable situation. AFN is an umbrella organisation for existing social, cultural and humanitarian organisations in the Netherlands and aims at channelling the efforts of local organisations into one collective narrative. It closely cooperates with the activities of Assyrian communities in Belgium, France, Sweden, and Germany. This organisation empowers a stateless nation to represent itself with collective leadership. The Assyrian Federation of Netherlands plays the leading role in representing Assyrian interests in the transnational arena by its membership in the Assyrian Confederation in Europe. This organisation is meant to unify the voice of the 500,000 Assyrians living in Europe by bringing together Assyrian national federations from several EU countries. The confederation carries out advocacy and

lobbying efforts, such as releasing human rights reports and press releases about the situation of the Assyrians living in areas controlled by the KRG in order to shed light on the condition of Middle Eastern Assyrians. The committee working on this issue is similar to a “government in exile” that looks for practical solutions for stateless communities in their homeland and Europe. The diaspora represents a territorial unit of a larger nation. As one of the leaders of politically oriented organisations stated, *“European borders do not play an important role for the Assyrian diaspora,”* since Assyrians have strong links with each other and implement humanitarian, political and social projects together that will be further discussed in the next chapters.

The establishment of a network profile of the community has not been without difficulties. Not all the organisations collaborate with each other due to ideological differences, and in some cases personal reasons. Five organisations are currently collaborating with the Assyrian Federation in the Netherlands. These organisations do not have many members or activities. An important organisation in local Assyrian life, the Mesopotamian Organisation in Enschede, does not have a membership yet even though several interviewees stated that board members separately collaborate with the AFN. The leaders of AFN state that their current goal is not a massive mobilisation of the diaspora, but a representation of the rights of the people left in the homeland with the efforts of small, but transnational and active diaspora elites:

*“We still don’t have many people, yet we have quality people. There are many things that we have accomplished in a short period.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian).*

### **5.2.5 Other transnational organisations**

There are several organisations that could be named “individual or family organisations” that do not have a wide support in the community. These are individual networks or organisations linked to the homeland, and other transnational diaspora organisations. Among them are the Dawronoyo, Assyrian Universal Alliance, Kurdistan Workers Party and more. During my fieldwork, I conducted interviews with ex-members of

Dawronoyo<sup>3</sup> and Assyrian Universal Alliance. None of them were members at the time of research due to ideological disagreements with the organisation collaborating with Kurds.

*“The first organisation that we as a family were active in was Dawronoye. Dawronoye is the term for revolutionary in Assyrian, it is an organisation that has its own militia, lobbying group, and it was very well known. It started in Europe and had its part in Northern Iraq and led guerrilla war. It was a very big organisation, but in 2010 we stopped being a member because the organisation had a connection with the PKK. In my opinion, if you want something for your own people don’t be connected to Kurdish separatist groups. They seek the same in our homeland. They claim Kurdistan to be the same territory that you are going to claim. How can you live with it? It is the reason why we left the organisation.” (Aram, Dutch-Assyrian).*

The Assyrian Universal Alliance was founded in 1978. The organisation was established in response to the mass migration of Assyrian refugees to the United States, with the intent to assist with the resettlement process. It has gradually become an international alliance made up of different chapters of Assyrian federations and organisations throughout the world. The Dutch–Assyrian representative was the only member in the Netherlands:

*“I represent AUA for Europe. We meet once or twice a year somewhere in the world unless there is an emergency meeting like what now has happened with Daesh in Iraq. We meet, we talk, we try to find out solutions.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian).*

According to leaders, they are the carriers of “frozen networks” that can be activated in case of an emergency.

*“We are always close to everything whenever something happens, when people are in the hospital, people in need, we sponsored a marathon in Amsterdam with the Assyrian flag three years ago. We sponsored this guy. We helped him, we sponsored him because he took an Assyrian flag. We don’t have a million dollars but if there is a real need we are there. Instead of becoming bigger, we come down. We are everywhere when something happens.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian).*

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<sup>3</sup> Dawronoyo is an Assyrian secular leftist nationalistic organisation

### 5.3 ASSYRIAN LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

The main local organisation that is responsible for the socio-cultural activities of the Assyrians in the Netherlands is the Assyrian Mesopotamian Club in Enschede, where most Assyrians reside. Other than the AMC, there are a few other organisations as well, such as the Assyrian Aid Society and Help Christians in the Middle East. These organisations mainly rely on family networks and have not attracted a large membership pool. The management of these organisations relies on a “*rotating membership*”: organisers of these clubs are also members of transnational organisations, and sometimes the name of the organisation might be different, but the membership pool is the same.

At the end of the 1980s when the number of Assyrians rose in the Netherlands, the community decided to establish a socio-cultural association to bring Dutch-Assyrians together. Since Enschede has traditionally been the city with the highest concentration of the Assyrian population, the Assyrian Mesopotamian Association (AMVE) was founded there in 1987. The AMVE promotes Assyrian culture, language, and traditions, as well as integration within Dutch society. Organisational membership was granted to the entire family unit rather than individuals. In recalling the most active period of the organisation, members and leaders organisation mentioned that almost every Assyrian family in the Overssijel region used to be a member.

At the time of research, the Mesopotamian Club was the main organisation promoting the socio-cultural life of Assyrians. However, interviewees and observations demonstrate that attendance at these events is low. Site visits to the main events that took place on Sundays and had the same people in attendance, playing games, drinking, and discussing different issues ranging from politics to daily updates about family life. The most active “diasporic days” in the club are the celebration of the Assyrian New Year, International Women’s Day, and dance classes. Special activities are hosting for children on Sunday, such as games and educational activities.

*“Now we have the ladies that are very active, on Friday, Saturday there are 50-70 people that come here. We organise some feasts. Now it is getting better. The finances come from membership and bar. We make barbeque here, it was very full here. We*



*make Ladies Day on March 8; more than hundred women attended”. (Organisation leader, Dutch- Assyrian).*

*“Every Sunday women organise dances, language classes, kids play some games. Each Sunday there is an activity for 6-10 years old kids. There are almost 15 children here.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian).*

During my most recent visits, it was apparent that within these clubs there are divisions along sub-ethnic lines. The club was mainly attended Syrian-Assyrians. Club funding was threatened because of membership decline and an end to state funding. As a result, community events would be organised from time to time to generate funding. Assyrian interviewees complained that the organisation had become like a pub and was no longer fulfilling its cultural role in diaspora.

*“The biggest organisation has become a tea house, where they drink tea and play cards. They have some activities, but it is not professional. Assyrian parties now are only about dances, there is nothing nationalistic or educational on what is our heritage, what we want to achieve. It is like people don’t care anymore.” (Aram, Dutch-Assyrian).*

Another local organisation, “Help Christians in the Middle East” was formed as a response to the humanitarian crisis in Syria and in support of the refugee camps in Turkey. The organisation was opened with a concern that Christians in the Middle East are missing from the attention of international actors as well as the local authorities. The organisation does not aim at attracting members, since its primary goal is to reach Dutch audiences for donations.

*“When the problem started in Syria the war, it was a couple of years ago, in 2014, with a couple of friends of mine we had an idea of establishing this organisation. We are six members all from Hengelo or Enschede. The priority was to have a humanitarian organisation to send money to our people. The money that is sent by the Dutch government or German government or other governments is being used for all communities, as well as Muslim communities. And a very little part or no money is being received by Christians.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian).*

The analyses of local organisations highlights that Assyrian diaspora relies less on formal organisations than the Armenian community, as it will be showed further in the chapter.

## **5.4 ARMENIAN TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS**

Armenian transnational organisations include the Armenian Apostolic Church, AGBU, and the ARF, along with attached unions such as the “Homenentmen” Armenian scout union and the “Garegin Njdeh” youth organisation. These transnational organisations have more than 100 years of experience, and a formal and stable management system of functioning in the diaspora. The purpose of these organisations was initially to help families and descendants of the Genocide, promote the preservation of Armenian identity throughout the world, and support the establishment of the Armenian state. These organisations established branches in Armenia after independence and closely cooperate with Armenian state structures. They have their input in the socio-economic, political, cultural and educational development of the state. There are certain links between these Armenian transnational organisations, but they are not yet sufficient to effectively coordinate their work. The state builds its political, economic and cultural activities with the diaspora at the elite level of these transnational organisations. The interactions of organisations at the state-transnational level have permanent character. Because of this cooperation, elite members of transnational organisations are also being granted awards from high government officials. They are registered as cultural unions but have educational and political functions as well.

### **5.4.1 Armenian Apostolic Church**

Armenian Apostolic Church exist in Amsterdam, Almelo and Maastricht. There are small communities as well in Arnhem, Assen and Dodrecht where priests visit for guest mass ceremonies. Throughout history, the Church has been one of the main markers of identity for Armenians. Religion has always served as a binding factor for the Armenian community, even when Armenia was under the atheist Soviet regime. The Church is furthermore one of the most important organisations that tries to engage with Armenian migrants in order to integrate into local diaspora life. According to the pastor of the Church in Amsterdam, the Church has a unique role in the preservation of “Armenianness” in all countries where migrants have settled down. The Church not only reinforces its religious ideology but also

works to preserve and reproduce national identity and culture. Additionally, it brings Armenians together in order to prevent the complete assimilation of the community into the host society. Attached to the church are various unions that target different groups of Armenians, such as women's unions, youth organisations, Sunday language schools, and dance schools. The Church also plays an important role for the "transnationalisation" of the Dutch-Armenian community, since the agendas and identity politics are coherent both with the central religious authority located in Armenia and the other branches of Armenian Apostolic Church worldwide. In the meantime, the Church serves the local needs of the community in close cooperation with local institutions. Thus, community life in places like Amsterdam, Almelo, and Maastricht is constructed mainly around the Church.

The Armenian Church in Almelo was established by Armenian migrants from Turkey in the 1960s. The goal was not only the preservation of their identity but also the demonstration of their ethnic identity to the host society:

*"Turkish-Armenians were called Christian Turks when they just arrived in Almelo. For a long time, they were trying to prove that they are Armenians and not Turks. For doing so, they rented a school building and used it as a church. They invited a pastor from Turkey and had masses in Kurdish language since they didn't know Armenian."* (Yervand, Dutch-Armenia).

Officially, the Armenian Church in Almelo was opened in 2003. It should be noted that this is the only church in the Netherlands built in the Armenian architectural style, making the existence of the community more visible in the host society. The Church is the main community institution in Almelo, which is considered the biggest Armenian community in the Netherlands.

The opening of the church in Maastricht is considered as the biggest achievement of the Armenians in Maastricht (2001). In 2013, the church was consecrated by the Archbishop of the Armenian Church in Paris. Every first Sunday of the month, the Church invites the Armenian pastor in Almelo or Amsterdam for a mass ceremony. The Armenian Church in Maastricht is working in close cooperation with the local organisation "Ani". They work towards the preservation of the Armenian culture and language in the community.

Although the Armenian Apostolic Church is the central institution, there are small

communities of other Christian churches (such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Evangelists) with Armenian members as well. Armenian Apostolic Church leaders consider these institutions as a danger to their ethnic identity. Most of the interviewees refer to these Armenians as “representatives of sects”.

*“We collaborate with all organisations, except the religious minorities. We can speak to them, explain everything, but we can’t work with them. There are some Armenians who joined those organisations; these people do not have any idea about Armenian history and culture, moreover, about the history and the values of the Church.” (Priest, Dutch-Armenian).*

Representatives of organisations that do not have a religious profile also consider the existence of religious minority organisations as danger for Armenian identity maintenance. The differences in religious orientation create obstacles for community unification since organisations are not open to collaborating with religious minorities. Moreover, any religious orientation other than the Armenian Apostolic Church is perceived as a potential “danger” to collective identity by the majority of organisational leaders.

#### **5.4.2 Armenian Revolutionary Federation**

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) is a major transnational diaspora institution. It has organisations in over thirty countries worldwide. As Tololyan (1996) states, the ARF has been a transnational organisation since its inception in 1890, in Tbilisi, Georgia. After Armenia’s incorporation into the Soviet Union, the members of the ARF regarded themselves as true guardians of Armenian national identity and as a government in exile (Tololyan, 1991). The ARF is represented in the parliaments of Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia, Cyprus, Lebanon, Iran and Syria. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation has established numerous Armenian schools, community centres, sports clubs, and youth groups.

The ARF is one of the most active Armenian organisations in existence and operates through its various branches across the world, striving to preserve Armenian heritage and foster political action in the homeland. Today, the branches of the ARF continue to strongly cooperate with each other and still play a central role in the preservation of Armenian culture,

as well as in the political mobilisation of the Armenian diaspora. The ARF branch in the Netherlands was opened by Armenians from Iraq, who were members of the ARF before migrating to the Netherlands:

*“Of course, in Iraq the party was different, since in every country we should adopt to the existing environment. For example, there are countries where the ARF is registered as a political organisation. Whereas in the Netherlands it is impossible, because you need to take part in local political life, and we tend to solve only our national problems here.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian).*

The activities of the Dutch branch of the ARF are based on a common ideology and agenda. Although the ARF is registered as a cultural union in the Netherlands, it follows the global ideology, which is based on the idea of return to the original homeland, claiming recognition of the Genocide, a reunion of dispersed Armenians, and maintaining connections with and providing support to the homeland.

*“Unfortunately, nowadays Armenia is only a part of the historical Armenia that we had<sup>4</sup>. Our aim is restoring Armenia at least partly. We work on recognition of the Genocide, as well as on Genocide compensation. In the meantime, our goal is the maintenance of Armenianness, so that Armenians should be united as a national entity even out of Armenia. Therefore, we should have all the means for the preservation of our language and culture. Our third goal is to strengthen Armenian statehood, as well as to support Nagorno-Karabakh.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian).*

The Armenian Cause, as a comprehensive program, was formed by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation after the Genocide in 1915. The party has formed the movement of the Armenian Cause that strives for achieving a united homeland for the entire Armenian people. Armenian National Committees were established in the United States and later in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, Russia, and in Yerevan in 1991.

While the Dutch branch of the ARF is registered in Almelo, it has members and operates

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<sup>4</sup> The reference is the lost territories due to the Genocide. These are the nowadays territories of Eastern Turkey that are considered the historical homeland of the generations of Genocide survivors. They call it Western Armenia and they refer to these territories as the lost homeland, since the generations of Genocide survivors are descended from these territories.

in other cities of the Netherlands as well. Its work in the Netherlands is carried out by a number of pan- Armenian organisations that address different groups of Armenian migrants as well:

- Armenian National Committee (ANC): The goal of the ANC is political lobbying for Genocide recognition and recently, for support for a resolution to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well. Paul (2000) referred to the ANC as a diaspora organisation that relies upon grassroots mobilisation as a lobbying tactic, focusing on the American branch of the ANC. In the Netherlands, the activities of the organisation are organised by a few people and do not rely on large mobilisation. Additionally, the Dutch ANC is not registered as a separate organisation, but as a committee attached to ARF. The leader of the Dutch ARF stated that along with their transnational branches of the ARF, they represent the main organisations responsible for Armenian lobbying.

*“People and offices that operate are very few, but their activities surprise even Turkey and Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan announces that their number one enemy in the Armenian diaspora is Armenian lobbying. The latter are ANC and ARF. They send millions of dollars, we do the same on voluntary basis and we do 100 times better than them” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian).*

- Armenian Scouts Union (Homenetmen): This organisation is devoted to sport and scouting for children, with the goal of promoting patriotism among a new generation. Homenetmen is a pan-Armenian diaspora organisation devoted to sport and scouting that was formed in 1918 in Constantinople or current-day Istanbul. It has branches in many countries, such as Russia, Greece, England, France, Austria, Hungary, Sweden, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Italy, Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait and the United States, as well as Canada and Australia. The founders were focused on providing help as well as offering scouting and sport to Armenian orphans after the Genocide. Homenetmen was opened in the Netherlands in 1996 by Iraqi-Armenians who were members of the same organisation in Iraq.

*“When ARF was opened in the Netherlands, it was decided that also the scout union should be opened, since the youth should have a sport club. In 1996 we opened the Armenian Scout Union. Since the very beginning I have been a member, in the beginning I was a sportsman and now member of the committee. Our group has almost 80 scouts in Almelo. There are 3 branches in the Netherlands: Arnhem,*

*Alkmaar and Almelo. The largest one is in Almelo, because the community here is the biggest.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian).*

The union has a volleyball and football team. According to the leader of the branch, the activities of “Homenentmen” stand on two pillars: scouting and sport. They also provide “national upbringing” for children, holding biweekly seminars about Armenian history and, culture. According to leaders, they also celebrate national holidays. They have three branches in the Netherlands: Almelo, Arnhem and Alkmaar. The largest membership group is in Almelo (80 people), the same city as the largest Armenian community in the Netherlands.

“Homenentmen” has three age groups (3-7, 7-12, and 12 and up). A representative of the organisations states that “they provide them necessary skills for *“living in the diaspora”* without assimilating, through organising history seminars”. Also, this serves as a basic education for them if they want to be politically active:

*“With the help of history classes, we try to teach them who they are, where they came from. The history teaches us that we still have problems to solve. We are not busy with providing them information about the internal problems in the state, we teach them where our homeland is, what meaning it has for us. Annually we participate in camps organised in Armenia. These are pan-diaspora gatherings, there are almost 800-900 people participating annually. The seminars give our comrades from ARF. They teach the youth to be demanding for the Armenian Cause and to know our national goals.” (Organisations\ leader, Dutch- Armenian).*

The “Garegin Njdeh” youth union and “Homenentmen” are complementary structures. The latter is an alternative for young people who do not want to take a political stand in the community.

- “Garegin Njdeh”<sup>5</sup> youth union of the ARF: This union has a political agenda within the Armenian diaspora. It was formed in 2008 with the same ideological priorities as the ARF. They organise various meetings, and seminars, as well assisting the ARF with organising their political agenda. Additionally, they

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<sup>5</sup> Garegin Njdeh was an Armenian statesman and military strategist, as well as the founder of Armenian nationalistic ideology.

organise entertainment events for socialising. Young Dutch-Armenians that have no affiliation with this union often consider it too radical and politicised.

### **5.4.3 Armenian General Benevolent Union**

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) was founded in 1906 by the initiative of prominent representatives of the Egyptian-Armenian community in order to promote the spiritual and cultural development of the Armenian people. Their main purpose was to create a union to support the Armenian people in every possible way, the survival of which was endangered by being a minority community in the Ottoman Empire. The AGBU's branches currently operate in 80 cities within 22 countries. Today, there are 120 branches, 27 cultural centres, and more than 22,000 AGBU members scattered throughout the world in the US, Europe, Middle East, South America, and Australia. The AGBU has about 20 schools with 6,600 pupils and more than 16 educational institutions, along with two libraries in Paris and New Jersey. In 1990, an AGBU office was opened in Yerevan, and in 2010 in the Netherlands by Iraqi-Armenians who had been members of the AGBU in Iraq before arriving in the Netherlands. The centre of AGBU Europe is in Brussels.

*“When I moved to the Netherlands in 1996 I asked for opening a branch of AGBU here, but it was opened in 2010 when the number of Armenians that moved from Syria and Iraq increased. Having 250 potential members we applied for opening a branch, and they agreed. Now there are almost 450 members”. (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian).*

Membership in the AGBU consists mostly of Iraqi-Armenians, with the second largest group being Syrian-Armenians and very few Turkish Armenians. Armenians from Armenia have almost no membership in the organisation.

AGBU is one of the traditional diaspora institutions that offers an innovative transnational networking opportunity for young Armenian professionals. Organisations of this nature differ from old diaspora institutions that are concerned about social, cultural and political engagement. Organisation representatives have noted that this profile is particularly attractive for those Armenians that do not identify themselves as being “diaspora,” and do not engage with traditional diaspora institutions. The examination of the Dutch-Armenian community has shown a new model of diaspora life aimed at promoting success for young



professionals without enforcing an interest in diaspora identity or community. AGBU Young Professionals represents a successful case of older diaspora organisations that attracts young Armenians. This organisation in the Netherlands was established in 2000 by a group of young professionals who wanted to meet others with the same background. One of the most important reasons for founding the organisation was their belief that as highly educated Armenians they shared a similar history, background, and position in Dutch society. Several of its members now hold prestigious positions in business, academia and politics. At the time of research, the organisation had 100 members. AGBU YP does not have rigorous requirements for membership, as they frequently invite non-members for drinks and socialising. Their goal is to help members develop professional networks within the Dutch-Armenian diaspora and beyond. The informal network also helps young professionals support each other in building upscale mobility. Informal events serve as a platform where young professionals can expand their networks and acquire labour market information. During interviews, organisation representatives mentioned that AGBU YP tries to help newly arrived Armenians, who are primarily international students, find employment. The organisation setting of AGBU YP is contemporary and attracts young people for whom sharing the same ethnic background is not enough for joining community life. The organisation offers innovation and creativity and attracts young professionals. They have organised events similar to TEDx talks, where successful young Armenians have the opportunity to meet each other. This targets groups of Armenians that are not easily mobilised by older diaspora or homeland institutions. The network organises meetings in different parts of the world with other AGBU Young Professional organisation members. Meetings are held in different parts of the world such as New York, Moscow, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Yerevan and more.

Slootman (2014) finds that ethnic and migration background in combination with education level leads to shared experiences and attitudes among second-generation migrants. These spaces allow young adults to safely explore what their ethnicity meant to them and develop their ethnic identities in accordance with their high education level (Slootman, 2014).

## 5.5 ARMENIAN LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

While transnational organisations have a rich history, are well-organised and make up a significant network among the Armenian diasporic community, there are also several local organisations that work towards supporting the local diasporic community in the preservation of their culture and as well as integrating into the host society. Among these organisations are the Dutch-Armenian Union in Amersfoort, Yerevan Cultural Centre in Almelo, Ararat Union in Amsterdam, Abovian Cultural Centre in The Hague, and the Gladzor Youth Union. The majority of these organisations were formed with few human and financial resources and are not included in any transnational network. In some cases, these organisations remind of the family model where the head of the organisation is the father of the family, the language teacher is the mother, and attendance is by the extended family. The support provided to the Dutch-based organisations by the homeland is limited and largely encompasses the educational and cultural spheres.

The Grigor Narekatsi Foundation in Amsterdam is in charge of the community life in Amsterdam. According to the leader of the organisation, they aim at creating an educational, cultural and scientific foundation that develops and promotes knowledge about Armenian language, culture, and history in the Armenian community of the Netherlands and abroad. The union organises permanent Armenian Sunday Schooling in collaboration with the Armenian Apostolic Church Surp Hoki in Amsterdam, gives guest lectures, seminars and conferences, carries out exchange projects, conducts scientific research, organises festivals, concerts, meetings, lectures, excursions and exhibitions; and collaborates with cultural, educational and scientific institutions and civil society organisations in Armenia and elsewhere where the Armenian community is located.

The innovative aspect of this organisation is that the foundation board consists of both successful Dutch-Armenians and Dutch people who have links with Armenia, an example being the Honorary Consul of the Netherlands in Armenia. The foundation's leader explained that they try to go beyond traditional transnational organising to create a union based on the leadership of successful Armenians. The organisation's leader is an Armenian from Armenia that aims at:

*“...organising more than just having parties. I was the only Armenian from Armenia that was a member of the board. In two years, I have organised the celebration of 200th anniversary of the Church in Amsterdam, where the Minister of Diaspora, parliament representatives of Armenia came, then I organised the 350th celebration of the first published Armenian Bible in collaboration with Amsterdam University.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian).*

According to the interview, the main, innovative concept of the organisation is close cooperation of Armenians, instead of creating “isolated islands of Syrian-Armenians, Turkish-Armenians or Iraqi-Armenians.” He believes that this strategy could help create a new diaspora model that will motivate young Armenians to mobilise.

**Ani Union in Maastricht:** “Ani” is the main organisation currently operating in Maastricht. According to the organisation head, organisation activities began in 1993. However, the organisation was not registered at this time since there were few Armenians involved. Further, there was migration from Armenia and nowadays from Syria. Beginning in 2001, the community became more active as a result of migration from Armenia and Syria, and a need developed to register the organisation so Armenians could meet, and preserve their culture, language and traditions. The leader of the organisation stated that the main goal is “to maintain Armenian culture, to preserve traditions, so that Dutch-Armenians do not forget their roots.” The community were loaned a church building where they conduct mass ceremonies on the second Sunday of the month. After Sunday masses, attendees gather to socialise and give children Armenian language, culture and dance classes, similar to other churches.

**“United Armenians in the Netherlands”:** Local young people initiated community life in Nijmegen. According to the organisation leader, young people previously didn’t have the opportunity to meet each other and didn’t even know where to look for each other. The organisation in its current format was formed in 2001:

*“We took off all age limits so that all interested people would have the opportunity to participate.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian).*

The ideological basis of this type of organisation is the maintenances of identity, culture, language, and history. There is also a Sunday language school and Armenian dance club attached to the organisation.

**“Abovian” Cultural Centre:** Based in The Hague, this centre is one of the first Armenian migrants unions in the Netherlands and was formed by Armenians arriving from different countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, Iran, Armenia, and Russia. Their goal was to establish an organisation that gives opportunities to preserve Armenian identity regardless of where members originate. Nowadays, the centre organises several events and classes about Armenian history, language, and country, as well as publishing materials about Armenia, the Armenian diaspora, culture and history.

*“We established Abovian Union in 1984. The primary goal for us was the maintenance of connections with the homeland. It was very risky, because it was the Soviet era, so every connection could have been judged as if we were communists. Thankfully, local Armenians joined us, and we could have established this organisation.” (Organisation leader, Dutch- Armenian).*

The organisation offers a Sunday Armenian language school not only for children but also for adults and actively organises cultural events, traditional festivals, and commemoration ceremonies.

Observations show that local organisations mostly function in order to provide educational-cultural services to children who attend Sunday language school. Therefore, semi-formal parent networks emerge that are at the core of “diaspora Sundays.” Class time for children functions as a socialising time for parents. For example, one of the parents noted that the main motivation for coming to language school is to have a place to meet other Armenians. Many members also mention that they are encouraged to come because they feel a family atmosphere. One parent stated that she brought her child to a language school because there is also a cultural union:

*“Before I used to live in a remote village where there were no Armenians. Almost for seven years I haven’t seen even a single Armenian. Now, when there is this opportunity, I bring my kid and I attend the event”. (Seda, Dutch-Armenian).*

Many interviewees have stated that that they come because they want their children to know Armenian and to be familiar with other Armenian kids.

*“I started to come mainly for my children, since it is very important for them to know their identity and never to avoid of being Armenian, and they don’t need to become a different person, to have the sense of inferiority. For them this would be a centre for*

*talking to Armenians and communicating with Armenians. Now many of us come to ourselves, in our daily live all of us are busy, we missed, and we get “vitamin A”, “A” stands for Armenia [laughing]. I have two daughters who were born in Armenia, but my son was born here. I am very glad that due to this organisation my son knows Armenian spoken and written.” (Anna, Dutch-Armenian).*

**Youth unions:** Armenian local organisations also include youth unions and professional networks. Notably, for youth organisations the use of the Dutch language is a means for achieving community cohesion. The representative of one of the youth groups explained that their organisation had several Turkish- Armenian members that did not speak any Armenian. Therefore, they had to communicate in Dutch to ensure that no organisation members are excluded from activities. Examples of these organisations are:

- “Gladzor” Student Union: An Armenian student organisation in the Netherlands that is officially registered in Utrecht, a central location that enables students to join the organisation’s activities despite their geographic location. This ideal can be considered a success for this organisation since members are from very different parts of the Netherlands. Their mission is to develop a network of Armenian students in the Netherlands, exchange information, maintain Armenian culture, and strengthen the Armenian community in the Netherlands.
- “AJO” Youth Union: This union is attached to the Armenian Church in Amsterdam. According to the organisation’s leader, before the establishment of this union, many people were interested in activities that young people, which led to its founding. They bring young Armenians together and give them a place to meet each other. AJO began in 2007 and has focused more on social activities and stimulating networks among young people.

Dutch-Armenian youth have also created several professional unions, the most active of them being the Union for Dutch-Armenian Lawyers and Doctors. During the fieldwork, I had an opportunity to be present at one of the meetings of this union, which gathers lawyers from all over the Netherlands in The Hague. The event’s main goal was to socialise, but members have also visited the International Criminal Court, an excursion that was organised by a Dutch-Armenian who was employed there.

## 5.6 SUBGROUPS OF DIASPORAS

The key objectives of both local and transnational organisations of the Armenian and Assyrian communities is identity preservation among its diasporic community. Several leaders of Armenian and Assyrian organisations defined their main objective as “the preservation of Armenianness” (Armenian word: Hayapahpanutyun) or “the preservation of the Assyrian identity”. Despite the frequent use of the term, none were able to provide a coherent definition on how to promote identity preservation. However, central concepts can be grouped in two categories: a) the maintenance of religion, language and culture, b) the maintenance of homeland connections and development of connections among Armenians/Assyrians in the Netherlands. Reflecting on theoretical discussions, these concepts are strongly in line with classical diaspora features, where a group is concerned about the maintenance of collective identity. While the traditional features of classical diaspora are incorporated into modern Armenian and Assyrian diasporic organisations, there are fragmentations between members and organisations.

In regards to organisation membership, all groups state that they aim at inclusive membership of Armenians and Assyrians with different backgrounds. However, the common trend for both groups is that organisations attract Armenians/Assyrians from predominantly one pre-migration country.

During discussions about organisational activities, Armenians divided the community into two main categories: “diaspora Armenians” and “new diaspora”. “Diaspora Armenians” are those that originate from countries that have well-established diaspora communities (such as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iran), mainly developed after the Genocide in 1915. The terms “newcomers”, “new diaspora” or *Hayastantsi*<sup>6</sup> referring to Armenians from Armenia who are not used to the “diaspora lifestyle.” According to the organisation leaders, “diaspora Armenians” are more active in community life participation compared to Armenians from Armenia.

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<sup>6</sup> Armenian translation: Armenian from Armenia

*“The new diaspora, unfortunately, is not conscious about the danger of assimilation. Hope that it will not take them long to realise, because it will be late already.” (Hovig, organisation leader).*

The leaders of transnational organisations find that diaspora values that exist in “traditional” communities should be the model that guides the “new diaspora”.

*“Love your nation, devote yourself to the nation: people coming from traditional diaspora know these. They always speak about “Us”; Hayastantsis speak only about “Me”. For them their individual interests and needs are more important than national ones. In Armenia they didn’t have the problem of nation preservation. But when they come here they should understand, that if they aren’t concerned about “us”, they will assimilate.” (Hovig, Dutch-Armenian).*

There have also been unions that have been formed as a result of clashes between sub-ethnic groups. For example, a union was formed due to disagreements that two groups had over diaspora lifestyle at the Armenian Sunday School attached to the Church. According to the representative of the Armenian community, Syrian-Armenian families left the schools because a disciplined diaspora school was not acceptable for them, as they were looking for a social club and not a place for their children to learn the language. Representatives of Syrian-Armenian families preferred not to talk about the details of the conflict. As a result, they have formed a small community that provides language classes for about 20 children and serves as a place for their parents to communicate. The organisation is mainly based on family networks.

Both local and transnational organisations representatives share the need to overcome sub-ethnic differences and identity:

*“I hope we will overcome these differences and we won’t be divided as Turkish, Iraqi, Iranians and Armenians, we will just be Armenians. It is very good that we mix, thus we make our culture richer.” (Armen, Dutch-Armenian).*

The division between “diaspora Armenians” and Armenians from Armenia does not mean that there are no divisions within “diaspora Armenians”. These disagreements are obvious both in the engagement spheres of sub-ethnic groups and in preferences on how to spend “diaspora time.” During the observations, Sunday diaspora activities organised by Iraqi-Armenians were also attended by newly arrived Syrian–Armenians. Iraqi-Armenians played different games, such as lotto, while having dinner. During informal talks that I had

with Syrian-Armenians, they revealed that those activities were strange for them because they never played similar games during their gatherings. Similarly, Iraqi- Armenians said that their way of spending time is different from those from Armenia itself.

Similar divisions based on the pre-migration context exist in the case of the Assyrian diaspora as well. In this regard, subethnic groups of Assyrians and Armenians illustrate very similar “diaspora behaviour”. For example, both Assyrians and Armenians from Iraq and Syria are considered as possessing a nationalistic and politically oriented character.

Another common point is the importance of preserving both the language and religion in both communities. However, disagreements prevail regarding the strategy for preservation. Religion has traditionally been one of the strongest binding factors of the Armenian community worldwide. However, religion has a different level of importance among Armenian and Assyrian sub-ethnic groups. Armenians who migrated from countries where there are well-established diasporic communities participate more actively in church activities than Armenians from Armenia. For Armenians from Muslim countries (i.e. Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria) religion played a major role in the unification and defence of the community, as Armenia is one of the few Christian countries in the region. Armenians from Armenia had to endure the atheist Soviet regime, where religious rituals and traditions were pushed to the background. In both communities, the most active groups that engage with the Church are Armenians and Assyrians from Turkey, as both groups did not have the opportunity to maintain their ethnic belonging through other institutions such as political parties, which were banned by the state. Consequently, the Church has been the central binding institution for their communities.

*“Armenians from Armenia are of course Christians. But being a Christian and loving the Church are different things. Armenians from the Middle East have that culture, while Armenians from Armenia have only recently become more “diasporic.” (Manuel, Dutch- Armenian).*

Similarly, according to the priest in Amsterdam, Assyrians from Turkey “are more generous when it comes to donating to monasteries.” Engagement fields are divided based on their pre-migration context. Those who migrated from Turkey are assumed to be more faith-oriented and engaged in Church-related activities. This is connected with their experience in Turkey, as people from the Tur Abdin region were mainly farmers and didn’t



have a high educational level. After coming to the Netherlands, they have been actively engaged in establishing churches in Europe and learning the language.

*“What we didn’t have in Turkey we have to create here, and we have to create something that we didn’t have in Turkey. If you go to churches in Europe and ask who has laid the first stones, they are all Assyrians from Turkey. And, Assyrians from Turkey want to learn the language, want to use it clearly, they don’t use a lot of Arabic or Turkish words.”(Nineveh, Dutch- Assyrian).*

Language is an important ground for collective identity since it not only enables communication with other Armenians and Assyrians across the world but is perceived as a link to their history as well. Interviews demonstrated that the language is being perceived as a marker of ethnic belonging and not knowing the language is marked as a “*step to assimilation*”. The issue of language is nonetheless a debatable issue within the community. According to the interviewees, one of the main challenges is that Armenians from Armenia are passive in their language preservation, unlike Armenian migrants from other countries. According to organisation leaders, this is a “threat to collective identity,” given that the future generation will not know Armenian:

*“Armenians from Armenia never had a problem of language preservation, and now they do not realise that if they are here they can lose their language, whereas diaspora Armenians are aware of it. Iranian-Armenians have been fighting to protect their identities. Armenians from Armenian do not have that experience, they think the language will automatically remain, but after two or three years they understand that their children do not understand the language. Why? Because they didn’t make efforts to teach Armenian.” (Shant, Dutch- Armenian).*

They state that Armenian migrants from Armenia put more efforts into teaching their children the Dutch language, rather than Armenian:

*“One of Armenians came and told me: “You know my child speaks perfect Dutch.” I told her: be happy if your child speaks perfect Armenian. If they have forgotten their language today, tomorrow they will forget even that they are Armenians.” (Gevorg, Dutch-Armenian)*

Moreover, it creates tensions within the community:

*“I have experienced that because I don’t speak Armenian they say: “Oh, so you are not a real Armenian”. And if you speak Turkish they say: “Why do you speak*

*Turkish?” Sometimes you have really opinionated and extreme people: you have to speak, otherwise you are not Armenian.” (Shant, Dutch-Armenian).*

Interviews reveal that within the community, there are strong opinions about different sub-ethnic groups based on the practices they borrow from the pre-migration country. Dutch-Assyrians continuously underlined that Assyrians from Iraq and Syria had interest in learning the language while in Syria and Iraq they felt comfortable speaking Arabic.

## **5.7 WHY DO DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS FAIL?**

Studying the development of the organisational landscape also sheds light on the absence and disappearance of diaspora organisations. This required a shift in attention from the pre-migration experience to the environment in the host society, as well as group dynamics. At the local level, interviews revealed the fall of many local organisations that were active until the 1990s. This period coincided with a change in Dutch immigration policy from the multiculturalism to assimilation. Multiculturalism granted groups the right to make claims for support as groups. Facilitation and financial support for ethnic group organisations for social and cultural activities were a part of the multiculturalism policies (Phillips 2003, Entzinger 2006). When the policy ended, state subsidies for these organisations were cut as well. Armenian and Assyrian community organisations state that after the cut in state subsidies for ethnic organisations, they began to have problems in maintaining these organisations. Currently, organisations in both communities rely on community donations and membership fees, but these measures are not always enough for maintaining these groups. When discussing the Assyrian community in Sweden, Dutch-Assyrians stated that one of the reasons why the Assyrian-Swedish community is better developed is because the state provides support that helps them sponsor the community activities. In the Dutch context, both Armenian and Assyrian organisation leaders stated that they had to develop community activities such as workshops on health issues or children’s issues so that they could receive financing from the municipality.

In the Assyrian community, there are many examples of once-active organisations that no longer exist and, as former members stated, *“only names are left”*. Among these

organisations are the Assyrian Society and the Assyrian Youth Organisation, for which only nostalgic feelings remain.

*“There is nothing for young people anymore. We were the last board members. We had been elected for four years, then we didn’t have a new board. Unfortunately, there was no one willing to be a board member. After that there was nothing to be honest. I went to some events in Germany and they are very active. I missed that. A lot of youngsters in those parties.” (Mariam, Dutch-Assyrian).*

The founder of the Dutch-Assyrian Society recounted that the started with 120 to 140 families in 1985. The organisation aimed to unite people who migrated from Iraq, Iran and Kuwait due to war. From 1985 to 2000, the organisation was very active. “I know also that around 20 people married each other because they meet there.” The indifference of the current generation is connected with a lack of “*national upbringing*” that fell dramatically after the 2000s.

*“We try to do everything to engage new people, we even made a trip only for women, we rent a car, a bus, only ladies could go. We have picnics, but if you do that for 2-3 times and you don’t see any feeling, how long can you keep doing that. We organised trips to Belgium, 5th April (Mat Mariam day) with 3 buses, one from The Hague, the second from Amsterdam and the third from Rotterdam. The last 15 years you can’t find 10 people going. Why can’t we work together? We have a lot of selfish people; they don’t want to see when you are active. That happened with the Dutch-Assyrian society. Nobody comes now. When we had parties, we wouldn’t let young people sit, we would say: stand there, talk with people, old people they can sit. There was no place, 400-500 people. Till 2003-2004 it was very active.” (Shlimon, Dutch-Assyrian).*

According to the leader of the Dutch-Assyrian Society, there is currently a formal membership of 20 families, but they do not organise any events: “*It is a pity because we have this beautiful name “Dutch-Assyrian Society”, it is something to be proud of if you have a community.*”

Because of insufficient funding, only those who have keen interest in community life, as well as free time, can have the “privilege” of devoting their lives to diaspora. “*Not having enough time*” has been a central reason for both Armenians and Assyrians when explaining the decline of organisational activities. Both communities communicated that because of generational change, where Assyrians/Armenians are better integrated and most have jobs,

they do not have enough time for diaspora activities.

*“Those who have a lot of free time go there, while now I am a mother of three kids.” (Sarah, Dutch-Assyrian).*

Another important aspect in decreasing community participation is the mismatch between what diaspora institutions offer and what young Dutch-Assyrians and Dutch-Armenians demand. For example, there is a mismatch in what the new generation of Dutch-Assyrians want and what the Assyrian Church provides. The generation that grew up or was born in the Netherlands finds that the *“Church has to update itself”* by using new technologies and that priests need to learn Dutch in order to be able to communicate with the new generation. The Church is also blamed for being *“old-fashioned”*:

*“I think our Church needs to be changed. Our Church hasn’t changed since the day it started. We have a lot of Churches in a small religion and I can’t think of a single priest that speaks proper Dutch. We don’t have to change, it is perfectly beautiful, but it does not reach a lot of people. Their message is not reaching to many people. There is a gathering, there is a speech, but there is no communication with the Church. It is 2017, so maybe they use social media? These are small things, but these things need to be improved. Maybe there should be priests speaking Dutch.” (Aram, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*“Church is like a TV station, it is on it is off, there is no communication or dialogue. Every Sunday in the Church we read pieces from the Bible. So, it could be more related to the experience that we share nowadays. So, it starts with knowing Dutch culture, knowing what young people nowadays want.” David, (Dutch-Assyrian).*

The mismatch of the expectations articulates itself when discussing non-ethnic/non-diasporic topics, such as for blood donations or the LGBT community.

*“I support organ donation, but they don’t... They are too old to know what is happening out there in the world. There are only 2 people in the board that speak Dutch. How they can reach us or educate youngsters?” (Mona, Dutch-Assyrian).*

*“As an LGBT person, I try to avoid any community event, because I know how I may be labelled.” (Gor, Dutch-Armenian).*

There have also been cases when interviewees avoided the community because of the social pressure of obeying community rules. A young Dutch-Assyrian told her story of *“changing the community belonging”*:

*“I changed my Church because I thought that the Orthodox Church is very authoritarian and dictatorial. I didn’t like that. They control too much my life. And I said: No if God is like this, I must find another Church. And then in Zwolle I went to other group and I discovered that God is not like that”. (Helena, Dutch-Assyrian).*

## 5.8 CONCLUSION

Examining these organisations show that diaspora community involvement and articulation has multiple and multipolar links. Both communities’ organisations have multiple socio-cultural and historical links that go beyond their host land and homeland, and their embeddedness in these contexts shapes the current organisational basis of the communities. The chapter offers a systematic review of all the organisations functioning in the Netherlands. I highlighted two types of organisations: local and transnational. Within these types, I distinguished the distribution of organisational management: local organisations, host-country level networks, regional/ transnational networks or networks that reach the homeland. The examination of networks in both diasporas highlighted one of the main difference between state-linked and stateless diasporas: the main pan-diasporic organisations centres are located in Armenia, while in the case of the Assyrian diaspora they are located outside the homeland. While merely looking at organisational management may reveal that both have vertical connections with the homeland or transnational organisations, in-depth analysis shows that both communities have not achieved a united management system. Armenia as a centre of pan-diasporic networks has the “symbolic” articulation of state-linkedness. Both Assyrians and Armenians are instead connected with “collegial and horizontal” ties with the “homeland states” and have the independence to act. The unification of organisations in hierarchical structures is extremely difficult due to tensions and competitions within diasporas. Therefore, some organisations stay separate from diasporic networks and keep individual connections with the homeland and other transnational communities.

Different interpretations and fragmented narratives of the Armenian and Assyrian diasporas are reflected in the organisational networks of the communities. Assyrians are

greatly shaped by the pre-migration context and are products of the circulation of diaspora stances from one diaspora community to the other. Both groups consist of several sub-groups originating from different countries, and these sub-groups have brought different visions, practices and ideologies of diaspora community and lifestyle to the Netherlands. The first migrants transnationalised the communities from below by bringing transnational organisations that until now stand at the core of community structures. In the case of the Assyrian diaspora, a strong Christian identity has undergone a nationalism process by the members of the Assyrian Democratic Organisation and the Assyrian Democratic Movement. However, this process isn't final yet. In the Armenian community, the earlier waves of migration brought with them traditional transnational diaspora institutions, such as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and Armenian Apostolic Church. Parallel to this, there are several local organisations that currently operate as well.

Because of these fragmented visions about diaspora lifestyle, there are certain tensions between the sub-groups, as they have different opinions towards what they hope to gain from their membership in a diasporic organisation. In particular, throughout all of the discussions, there was a tension between “diaspora Armenians” (migrated from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey) and *Hayastantsi* or “new diaspora” i.e. those who now or more recently emigrated from Armenia to the Netherlands. The first group is perceived as “more diasporic” and the second group as less active in activity participation. Similar hybridity based on a pre-migration context also exists in the Assyrian diaspora, as Turkish-Assyrians are perceived as having closer cooperation with faith institutions, while Syrian- and Iraqi-Assyrians show more enthusiasm in participating in nation-building activities.

While the chapter had the aim of articulating formal organisational grounds, I have also highlighted the semi-formal and informal networks that are significant bases of both communities' experience at the “local level”. For the Assyrian case, the weak development of the organisational field resulted in stronger manifestation of “kinship ties” or semi-formal Saturday and Sunday gatherings in the church. The weak development of the community also developed “individual or family organisations” that do not have a large support in the community. In the case of the Armenian diaspora, social and cultural organisations resulted in the formation of a parent network of children that attend Sunday classes and the Church.

An examination of the organisational structure of both communities also provides the opportunity to understand the fall of organisations based on the reasons beyond ethnic identification. The first identified reason relates to the lack of host-state funding that makes the maintenance of diaspora organisations weaker and relies only on “devoted people who have enough time for it”. Another significant factor is unmatched needs between the younger generation and traditional diaspora institutions. Thus, it can be stated that both the Assyrian and Armenian communities have not yet developed enough organisational structures that can meet the needs of their heterogeneous populations.

## CHAPTER 6: IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE: FROM THE GENOCIDE TO PRESENT DAY HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

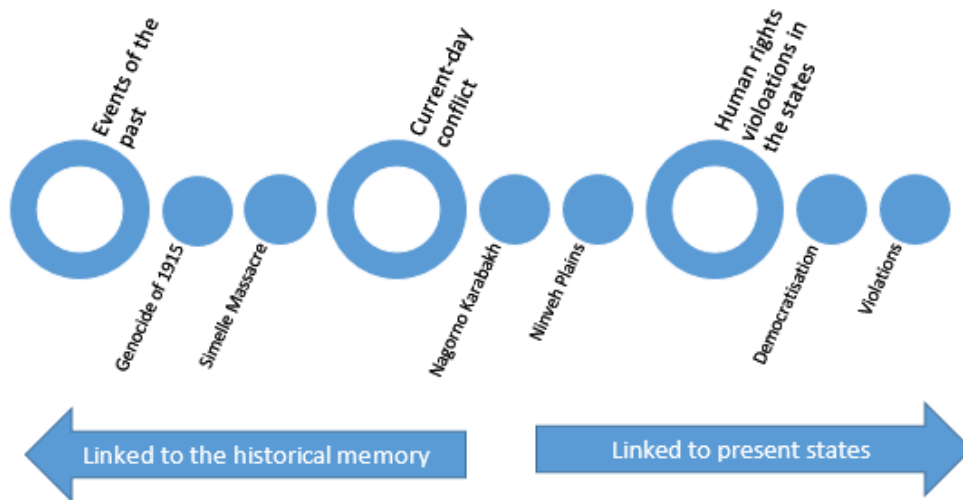
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In this chapter, I will analyse how different events affect diaspora mobilisation, as well as how different events relate to and are affected by the “stateness” dynamics of homelands. Koinova (2018) finds that little has been said to understand the impact of critical junctures and transformative events on state-diaspora relations. Other scholars have been interested in analysing how critical events, such as ongoing conflicts, violent events, homeland crises, regime change, and human rights violations shape and trigger diaspora mobilisation to support their homeland (Koinova 2011, Shain 2002, Adamson 2013, Hoeffler 2000). I propose to study how Assyrian and Armenian diasporas relate past traumatic memories and events to the present day:

1. **Events of the past:** I will discuss the recognition demands for the Genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire. This traumatic event is at the core of diasporic consciousness for both communities and is strongly linked to the memory of losing historical homelands rather than with the actual states that diasporas refer to as homelands.
2. **Current-day events:** I will discuss current-day conflicts and diaspora activities for the protection of the homeland. Here I will discuss the Armenian diaspora’s mobilisation for the protection of the de-facto state of Nagorno-Karabakh and Assyrian mobilisation for protecting the Nineveh Plains autonomous region in Iraq.
3. **Human rights violations within the states that diasporas refer to as homelands:** I will focus on democratisation demands of the Armenian diaspora and the 2018 Velvet Revolution in Armenia and human rights violation of Assyrians in Iraq, Syria and Turkey.



Figure 4: Mobilisation Events



Recently, diaspora mobilisation attempts are being studied from a “transitional justice” perspective, thus focusing on how diasporas “deal with past human rights abuses in societies in transition” (Bell 2008, 5) as well as how these discourses serve “as a mediator between different collective memories” (Brants and Kelp 2016, 3). In an earlier stage, scholars aimed at discovering whether diaspora engagement with the homeland escalates conflicts or contributes to peace processes (Adamson, 2006; Byman et al., 2001; Koinova, 2011; Shain, 2002). Without delving into the exact effects of diaspora engagement, I will rely on diaspora perspective and use the general term “justice-seeking” in regards to activities that reflect mobilisation attempts of Armenian and Assyrian diasporas in the Netherlands to right historical injustice, human right abuses, and conflicts in the homelands. In this chapter, I will discuss the main events I observed during fieldwork, such as Genocide commemoration events, demonstrations for Nagorno-Karabakh, the Assyrian European Convention in Brussels, and the European Armenian Convention in Brussels. The chapter will also focus on the internal heterogeneity of diasporas, connections, and disconnections with homelands and their linkages in transnational space, as well as cooperation-competition practices of the Armenian, Assyrian, and Turkish diasporas in the Netherlands.

As I will further show, diasporas do not have sustained commitment to mobilise, and their willingness for mobilisation varies for each event presented above in addition to being

internally contested and fragmented. The examination of the state-linked Armenian diaspora shows that the diaspora's formal organisations are more willing to relate to past events than causes relating to the current governments of their homeland. I will show that new developments, such as the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, gives birth to new actors that bring new visions of how diasporas should be relating to the "stateness of their homeland". In the case of state-less diasporas, an opposing trend is observed, since Dutch-Assyrian organisations put forward fewer efforts for Genocide recognition than for opposing the governments of the states that are referred to as their homeland.

The existence or absence of states affects the mobilisation activities of both groups. As the Armenian diaspora case will show, mobilisation practices have been developed in the absence of the homeland as a strategic centre. However, the existence of the Armenian state contributed to creating more coherent ideological stances that the diaspora takes on. The Assyrian case shows that statelessness creates a lack of coordination between various ideologies, stances, and actors.

## **6.1 THE GENOCIDE MEMORY: "REMEMBERING IN ORDER TO PREVENT FORGETTING"**

The Armenian and Assyrian diasporas have been known in the international scholarly literature as conflict-generated victim diasporas, and the memory of the Genocide has a central role in collective and diaspora identity formations (Bakalian 1993, Baronian 2010, Panossian 2002, Pattie 1999). Miller and Miller (1992, 36) refer to the Genocide memory as *the "axial point for a group and generational self- understanding ... through which group self- understanding evolves."* The sub-chapter focuses on the Genocide memory as a source for justice-seeking activities for the Armenian and Assyrian communities. Genocide memory dominates in the collective perception of the past and becomes an important means for social and political mobilisation of present.

### 6.1.1 Assyrians: “Don’t be Shy to Demand, You Are a Victim!”<sup>7</sup>

It has been stated that around 250,000 to 300,000 Assyrians, which constituted around half of the Assyrian population, were killed or died of starvation in the Ottoman Empire in the beginning of the 20th century (Travis 2017). Assyrians refer to these mass killings with the term Seyfo (the Sword). The international community hasn’t recognised the Assyrian Genocide until now. It has been indistinguishable from the Armenian Genocide and has so far fallen under the category of “forgotten genocides” (Travis 2017). Despite the lack of recognition, the stories and history of the Genocide are vividly remembered in the family histories of Dutch-Assyrians.

The respondents often mentioned that the memory of the Genocide plays a vital role for them since it dramatically changed the future of their nation in the Middle East.

*“We faced many difficulties in 1915. It is a heart-breaking thing for us, and we are the survivors. We got uprooted from our lands. What is now called South East Turkey is the place where my grandfather lived.” (Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian)*

*“My grandfather always talked about his cousins whom he lost. I know for us it seems to be a very old memory, but it is essential to know what has happened. It is what is happening with our countries in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey are precisely what happened in 1915. We should not let it happen again, that is the importance of memory.” (Sargon, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Research revealed that the memory of the Genocide is being transferred mainly through family stories from generation to generation. At an organisational level, Churches took on the main responsibility of remembrance. They avoid calling it an “Assyrian Genocide” and refer to it as a “Suryani Genocide”. During my interviews, the Syriac Orthodox Church revealed a plan to place a Genocide memorial near the Monastery in Glane, the Netherlands. The project has a transnational character since in many countries the Syriac Orthodox Church has installed the same monument.

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<sup>7</sup> The quote is from a speech by an international journalist during the European Assyrian Convention. He was encouraging Assyrians to be more active and demand recognition for genocides in the Middle East against Christian minorities.

*“We want to build a memorial of Genocide victims, here in Amsterdam we do not have yet, but there is a plan to build it in our monastery. There are monuments in Germany, in Sweden. It was the 100th anniversary, and our new patriarch said that it is essential to build symbols and all of the Churches must do.” (Priest, Amsterdam).*

Assyrians tend to hold commemoration events inside churches, which prevents the remembrance from being visible to the public. The placement of the monument will not engage with Dutch audiences as the monastery is far from public attention. The majority of interviewed Assyrians stated that they would like to see more visibility not just for their internal community, but for the external Dutch community as well:

*“I would like to see a monument of the Genocide but at the place where everyone could see. You know, I can place one here in my house, but what’s the point of it? We need to have a monument in a place where everyone can see and wonder who these people are.” (Aram, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Mobilisation for Genocide recognition is not absent from the Assyrian transnational diaspora’s discourse. These distant, yet ever-present memories of violence have been translated into political claims in more developed diaspora communities such as Australia, the US, Sweden, and Germany. One of the most successful projects has been the foundation of the International Seyfo Centre for Genocide Studies in Germany with the help of the transnational diasporic network. The Centre provides information and publishes articles about the Assyrian Genocide in 1915.

A lack of political claim-making was also visible when speaking with interviewees about commemoration events. Many of the respondents were hesitant as to whether these events were held on August 7<sup>th</sup><sup>8</sup> or April 24<sup>th</sup><sup>9</sup>. Few respondents remembered participating in any commemoration events. Some of them stated that they usually attend Church masses on these days, while others recalled lectures organised through a diaspora organisation in Enschede. There have been few attempts to commemorate April 7<sup>th</sup> as an “eventful” day, but there has not been much success despite calls from transnational diaspora organisations about its importance.

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<sup>8</sup> August 7<sup>th</sup> is Memorial Day for Assyrian Martyrs.

<sup>9</sup> Armenian Genocide Memorial Day

*“The development of the 7th of August into a Memorial Day for all Assyrian martyrs is essential and beneficial. Such a development will lead to greater unity within our nation. Each of our churches, villages, and tribes have memorials for their particular saints and martyrs. We must develop the 7th of August into a Memorial Day for all these martyrs so that we can bring the children of this nation together as a single entity to commemorate these people and events.” (Assyrian National Committee, ND)*

Organisation leaders stated that they use both days to commemorate victims. The Church has a primary role in translating memory during mass speeches, in Saturday schools, and through memorial installations. Cooperation between religious and secular components of this community has not been achieved yet because of the lack of unity within the community and existing splits between the Aramean and Assyrian groups. The political component of both group holds separate commemoration events for the Assyrian and the Aramean groups while referring to the same people that were killed in the Ottoman Empire.

The memory of Seyfo is not present equally at all levels of the community. The widespread opinion among Assyrians from Turkey and Syria was that the Genocide does not have similar emotional importance for Iraqi Assyrians because *“they were safe in Baghdad and did nothing.”* A group of Assyrians has traditionally been afraid of making Genocide ideology as a central identity claim. By stressing the emotional heaviness of the memory, they argued that continuous remembrance of the sufferings of the past may have a negative effect on the community since they wouldn’t be able to overcome the “victimhood”:

*“The memory of traumas should be remembered without making it a primary concern. Until now we feel the effects of the “victimhood”, our people are again in the same situation, and again we are the victims. It may have a very adverse effect on your mind. I always make sure that I have a place for positive things to remember who I am and what culture I am part of.” (Aram, Dutch-Assyrian).*

This perspective is similar to what Margalit (2002,3) described:

*“We, the remaining Jews, are people, not candles. It is a horrible prospect for anyone to live just for the sake of retaining the memory of the dead. That is what the Armenians opted to do. And they made a terrible mistake. We should avoid it at all costs. Better to create a community that thinks predominantly about the future and reacts to the present, not a community that is governed from mass graves.”*

Similarly, mainly young Assyrians find that the “grief of victimhood” should be changed to “demands for future.”

The absence or weak attempts of commemoration have not erased the memory of the Genocide. The weak presence of Genocide recognition demands is connected with oppressive policies towards Assyrians in their pre-migration countries. Their experience reflects what Assman (2003) calls the “dialogic forgetting” of dealing with traumas. Assman (2003, 33) described it as the following: *“silence that is imposed by the victors on the losers is the perennial strategy of repressive regimes to muffle the voices of resistors and victims”*. Oppressive policies enforced the transfer of memory through less formal institutions, such as family and church settings.

The chapter shows how “victimisation” in pre-migration countries turns into “victimhood” discourse in the Netherlands: *“while victimisation is more frequent in repressive states, where violence occurs with impunity, victimhood is more common in democracies that allow grievance-based identities to emerge”* (Jacoby 2015, 518).

### **6.1.2 Chain of Violence: Simele Massacre**

The specificity of the Assyrian memory of trauma and violence is focused on their experience of a chain of non-recognised and forgotten Genocides in the Middle East. Similarly, the word “Seyfo” is used not only to refer to past events but can also be employed to give a warning about a calamity that can still happen or is currently happening in the Middle East (Abdala 2017). The recent crises in Iraq and the demand of the Nineveh Plains region for autonomy rendered politically active part of the Assyrian diaspora in placing emphasis on the 1933 Simele Massacre carried out by the Iraqi government. August 7th is the commemorative day when the Assyrian diaspora releases a joint statement about the massacres and all fallen Assyrian victims. The Genocide of 1915 is one of the multiple events referred to in these statements. The joint petition of Assyrian Confederation (2018) stated:

*“Although Assyrian Martyrs Day is recognised each year on the anniversary of the Simele Massacre, the holiday was established to honour the victims of all genocides committed against the Assyrian people”*.

By using the phrase “all genocides,” the statement refers to the victims of Seyfo, the Simele Massacre, and *“the Assyrians who continue to suffer because of ISIS terrorism - both*

*those forced into external displacement struggling to survive as refugees far from home and those who have returned with the hopes of rebuilding their lives.” (Petition text, 2018)*

The petition (2018) stresses the consequences of the massacre on the current state of Assyrians in Iraq:

*“Despite conclusive evidence documenting this crime, the Iraqi Government has never recognised this state-sanctioned massacre. Historical injustices against the Assyrian people in Iraq have had lasting consequences that threaten their future. The Simele Massacre stands as an important reminder that crimes against humanity must not go without recognition, condemnation, and resolution.”*

This can be referred to as a “chosen trauma” (Volkan, 2001) in order to awaken group solidarity and to make their claims for the protection of Christian minorities in the Middle East stronger for the international community. The representative of the Dutch-Assyrian political organisation stated:

*“A few days ago, we started a petition about the Simele massacre. It is a forgotten genocide, Arabs and Kurds killed us in Iraq. In the place they killed thousands of Assyrians you see their bones still there. We want to respect those bodies and recognise that there were people killed there. We sent a letter to the government of Iraq, the signed petition.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian).*

These statements on commemoration are a means to remind the international community that the failure of protecting minorities in the past created the current Middle Eastern politics. As one of the politically active Dutch-Assyrians put it, *“We are not only traumatised because of the Turkish and Iraqi denial but also because these massacres resulted in ongoing violations of our rights that are happening in the Middle East right now.”* Assyrians recall victimhood identity, and place traumatic memory as a central discourse in order to gain more “credit” to struggle for current-day conflicts happening in the homeland.

### 6.1.3 Armenians: “We Remember, We Demand!”<sup>10</sup>

Armenians share the same belief regarding the need for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide of 1915 by the Ottoman Turks. Annually, on the 24th of April, Armenians across the globe commemorate those lost in the Genocide. On that day in 1915, 250 Armenian leaders and intellectuals were murdered, and over the next several years, over 1.5 million ethnic Armenians were killed in the region. To this day the government of Turkey continues to deny that the event ever took place. Since that time Armenians have actively fought to gain worldwide recognition for the Genocide. Their attempts to recognise the Armenian Genocide began immediately after the settlement of the first generation of refugees with awareness-raising campaigns about historical injustices and killings of Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire. The work was organised by collecting documents as well as survivors’ and witnesses’ interviews about their experience. These documents serve as valuable materials for genocide studies until today. As it was discussed in Chapter 3 on state-diaspora relations, the need to recognise the Genocide was initiated by diaspora leaders long before it officially became a part of the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia, which stands in contrast to scholarship that finds that states incorporate diasporas into their foreign policy agenda (Gamlen 2008, Ragazzi 2009, Csargo and Goldgeier 2004, Mylonas 2004). It was instead “insisted” by the diaspora to incorporate it in the foreign policy agenda of the state. This political issue is one of the leading binding factors of diaspora communities across the world and serves as the basis for community mobilisation.

The worldwide struggle for Genocide recognition by international society, and most importantly Turkey, also takes place in the Netherlands. Evaluating the activities of Dutch-Armenians, the ambassador of Armenia in the Netherlands noted: *“The activities of the Dutch-Armenian community we cannot compare with lobbying in the US and France, that have 100 years of history of struggling for the Genocide recognition.”* Even though Armenians do not “qualify” themselves as having a strong lobbying presence in the Netherlands, active members have the experience and willingness to organise Genocide

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<sup>10</sup> This was the motto of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Genocide.



recognition campaigns. The Dutch-Armenian community annually conducts mass letter-writing campaigns to the Dutch authorities, initiates informational campaigns, and leverages their formal and informal contacts with the Dutch authorities. The main initiators of Genocide recognition campaigns are Armenians that have experience for political mobilisation before migrating to the Netherlands. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation and April 24<sup>th</sup> Committee are at the forefront of the Genocide recognition campaign. The most active members in the Netherlands were members of similar organisations or part of branches of the same organisations in the diaspora, which were pioneers of the Genocide recognition agenda. This means that the Netherlands for them is not the first country where they have worked on mobilisation activities. The main success of the Dutch-Armenian community is Genocide recognition by the Dutch government in 2004 and its reaffirmation in 2018:

*“We started to demand the Dutch government to recognise the Genocide. First years we were being refused, they told that we don’t have facts, but we know that we have the right to claim till they will accept it. In 2004, the parliament accepted the Genocide recognition resolution.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

On December 2004, the Dutch Parliament unanimously adopted a resolution calling on the government of the Netherlands to consistently bring up the Armenian Genocide in future negotiations dealing with Turkey’s accession to the European Union. The move came following extensive efforts by the Federation of Armenian Organisations in the Netherlands (FAON) and the April 24<sup>th</sup> Committee, both of which worked for years with Members of Parliament and representatives of their government in support of Armenian Genocide recognition.

The Dutch parliament reaffirmed the recognition in 2018. This has been widely criticised by the Turkish community and Turkey condemned the vote, saying that it was not valid or legally binding. *“The politicisation of the events of 1915 by taking them out of historical context is unacceptable,”* a spokesman for the Turkish foreign ministry stated (UPI 2018, February 23). The motion included sending a cabinet-level representative to the Armenian capital, Yerevan, for a commemoration event in April 2018. The event took place due to organising by the Armenian Organisations in the Netherlands (FAON) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

There is a consensus at the organisational level about collaboration on Genocide commemoration events. The missions of these organisations does not affect their participation, as the organisations that are primarily focused on cultural preservation incorporate Genocide recognition into their activities. The leader of a cultural association confirms:

*“We are also occupied with lobbying activities. We worked on Genocide recognition by the Dutch parliament. Sometimes we have to involve in politics.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

The Armenian Church is particularly active in Genocide Recognition activities. They counted as a success story the recognition of the Genocide by Pope Francis in 2015. The memory of the Genocide is not only a source of political mobilisation, but ethnic-cultural mobilisation as well. The traumatic memory awakens what Armstrong (1976) called the “sacral myth” of common belonging and symbolises the collective Armenian identity. The commemoration of the Genocide gives a sense of historical continuity:

*“Of course, the Genocide recognition claim can be considered mostly a political subject. However, there is an injustice which should be solved; it is a sin that needs to be accepted. We have to keep the memory of victims alive. We need to remember that they became victims because of their religious and ethnic belonging. We should be united and claim the justice.” (Priest, Dutch-Armenian).*

Newly formed social, cultural, and educational organisations have a similar opinion on the importance of these events. The commemoration of the event also solves the “membership” issue of newly formed organisations into the wider “diasporic society.”

*“Unfortunately, we have only one ideology that unites us and it is the Genocide. On April 24th everyone, both rich and poor people, members of organisations and individuals who are not affiliated with any organisations, everyone thinks that they must commemorate. So, we unite with other organisations to commemorate.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

The activities of these organisations reached their most significant scale for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. An AGBU representative made an important point: *“Almost all organisations gathered, and we decide what we are going to organise. We organised concerts, demonstrations, letters to the parliament to demand justice.”* During interviews, many people were proudly recounted 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary events and showed videos

of the demonstrations. Many interviewed organisations members noted that there was unprecedented organisational unity in the Netherlands. The Armenian state played an important role by providing the symbolic resource for the commemoration of trauma and for linking up with the “imagined community” (Anderson 2006). The symbols and slogans of the organisations were in line with the policy designed in Armenia by the Minister of Diaspora. These symbols were also used for the commemoration of the Genocide in 2017. The symbols, ideology, and activities for the commemoration were also used for the 101<sup>st</sup>, 102<sup>nd</sup> and 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversaries of the Genocide in the Netherlands and other diaspora communities. Many organisations had photos and accessories of forget-me-not flowers, which was the symbol of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary campaign.

*Illustration 6: “We Remember and Demand”: Poster used for commemoration events for the 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversary.*



I was able to attend the 102<sup>nd</sup> Genocide Anniversary, organised by the Dutch-Armenian community. The activities for Genocide recognition take place annually in all cities in the Netherlands where Armenian organisations function. Before the events took place, organisation leaders gathered at the Armenian embassy to discuss and coordinate actions. April 24<sup>th</sup> is the only time during the year that organisations come together with a joint statement and program. The events began on April 18<sup>th</sup> with the submission of a petition to the Dutch Parliament and a rally at Plein Square in The Hague. Around 100 people attended the event,

with mainly Iraqi-, Syrian-, and Turkish-Armenians in attendance and very few Armenians from Armenia. Dutch-Armenians continued the event on April 22<sup>nd</sup> with a rally and demonstration in Amsterdam. This was followed by a march through the busiest streets of Amsterdam. The community provided special buses for people who wanted to join from other cities such as Almelo, Nijmegen, and Assen. The signs used at these two demonstrations were similar to the ones used in Armenia and elsewhere the Armenian diaspora is present: “Never again”, “Turkey is guilty”, “Turkey’s lies do not cover the truth.”

*Illustration 7: Demonstration in Amsterdam, April 2017*



During the rally, Nagorno-Karabakh flags could be seen, with posters stating “ISIS? Armenians experienced that years ago.” These were attempts to connect past events to the present, and call for international justice. These events were followed by lectures on the Armenian Genocide in Almelo.

Armenian youth gather to pay tribute to the memory of Armenian Genocide victims on April 23<sup>rd</sup> in Armenia Carrying the flags of Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and countries which have acknowledged the Armenian Genocide, the youth march to Tsitsernakaberd (the Memorial of the Armenian Genocide in Armenia). The same event happens in Almelo on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, where the youth march to the Armenian Apostolic Church. Commemoration

events continue on April 24<sup>th</sup> in Assen, where the Ambassador of Armenia in the Netherlands and other guests gave speeches about the Armenian Genocide and place flowers on the Genocide memorial. Armenian children also performed dances and songs recalling the events.

Dutch-Armenians have also released a documentary movie featuring members of their community, asking them to share their emotions when speaking about the Genocide. The movie aims to show that both the old and new generations are affected by the traumatic memory. They call it not only a country-specific trauma but a “*crime against humanity*.” The interviewees spoke of themselves as the heirs of the trauma: “*I feel sad, that is my reaction as a descendant of the survivor of the Armenian Genocide, it was a crime against humanity.*” (Anahit, Dutch-Armenian) These activities have shifted the attention from the stress on Armenia-Turkey relations to a more global human rights perspective. It has stressed the idea of prevention of genocides worldwide.

*Illustration 8: Poster for the Candle March in Almelo*



Diaspora organisations also do considerable work in transferring the Genocide memory to younger generations. Sunday schools that are attached to the Church are particularly noteworthy. They organise special classes and events to make pupils familiar with historical events. As one of the organisers stated: “*It is an important way to make children familiar with their nation and history.*” Organisations find that by sharing the story, they undertake an important step to link new generations with their ethnic belonging since they

should know *“why they become diaspora and against what injustice they should fight.”*

*“The Genocide issue is significant for us. Most of Iraqi-Armenians living here are the generations of the Genocide survivals. Even the little kids know about that. They learn it both at a Sunday school and in families. The pain is in everyone; therefore, we try to keep the memory alive among them. That is how the memory goes from generation to generation.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

During the observation period, events were organised for the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide at each Armenian Sunday School in the Netherlands. The Armenian Sunday School in Amsterdam organised a “human chain” across the canals of Amsterdam. Children and their parents were standing hand in hand with flags, posters for the Genocide recognition and with signs that stated: *“I am descendant of Armenian Genocide survivors.”* Children performed songs and poems dedicated to the victims of the Genocide, as well as the importance of keeping the *“Armenianness”* in the diaspora.

*Illustration 9: “Human chain,” Amsterdam, April 22, 2017*



At the end of the commemoration ceremony, attendees released balloons into the air with forget-me-not flower signs.

*“Every year with different events we try to inform the youth so that they can be involved in the pan-Armenian issue and at the same time be aware of it. We organise a human chain across the canals of Amsterdam. This is not a big event, of course, it does not have a big influence. This is rather for the young generations so that they*

*remember this and later maybe they would ask why it was organised.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

A representative of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation also underlined the importance of involving young people:

*“Our young scouts always participate, and we always explain to them why we take them there. They took the rights of Armenian people. If there wasn’t the Genocide today, we could have a different Armenia. There could have been more Armenians, and our economy could have been different. We try to explain to them that if you do not try to protect your rights, no one would come and take care of you. And you see that it has its effect because they become very patriotic and become members of patriotic unions in the Netherlands.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

Another means to reproduce this memory is the establishment of monuments and memorials. In the Netherlands, memorials of the Armenian Genocide exist in Assen, Maastricht, Amsterdam and Almelo. In 2015, the most prominent Genocide monument in Europe was opened in Almelo. The initiator of the project explained that the monument is not only devoted to 1.5 million victims of the Genocide but that it is also an essential way to remind people of the reasons to be involved in the diaspora:

*“We wanted to have this monument, which will remind our compatriots who are close to assimilation what happened 100 years ago and why they were spread all over the world.” (Founder of the monument, quote is taken from an interview on Armenian public television, April 24, 2018).*

In 2018, a “khachkar” or large stone with intricate designs of the Armenian Christian cross, was placed in Amsterdam on the wall of the Church. The community views these Armenian Genocide monuments in the Netherlands as essential symbols of identity preservation, justice restoration, community consolidation, and mobilisation.



*Illustration 10: Opening ceremony of the “khachkar” in Amsterdam*



A closer examination of the community shows that the memory of the Genocide has a different value for Armenians who migrated from diaspora communities and for those who migrated from Armenia. Due to the sub-ethnic difference, there are differences when it comes to approaches and willingness to mobilise. During the Soviet period, the memory of the Genocide was repressed by the Soviet regime; for example, it was only briefly mentioned in history books. For Armenians from Armenia attendance of commemoration events can be described as a “non-religious” ritual that is followed on April 24th annually. Attendance is not necessarily linked to the story of Genocide within their family histories. For “diasporic Armenians,” Genocide commemoration has been the central identity marker for generations, firstly because diaspora members are mainly the descendants of Genocide survivors and secondly, because the memory was actively reproduced through a diasporic education and organisation. The interviewees often told family stories of the Genocide, such as Hovig from Iraq who told me why he considered himself a “*survivor of the Genocide*”:

*“I am the third-generation survivor. Why do I say “survivor”? Because I have that trauma and sadness inside myself. I am the grand-grandson of Shushi and Vardges who escaped the Genocide in their own homeland and found shelter in Syria. I am the grand-grandson of people who went through violence, massacre and hunger. Whatever I do, wherever I go I feel the responsibility in front of their memory. I owe them for my hard-working, patriotic and, more importantly, humanist characteristics.” (Hovig, Dutch-Armenian)*

Many interviewees that migrated from Syria and Iraq, like Hovig, present themselves



as the “carriers of the memory”. Interviews and discussions with them reveal that there is a unity related to Genocide recognition demand among these groups more than any other group who migrated from Armenia in the 1990s. Representatives of diaspora organisations state that Armenians from Armenia have a passive stance when it comes to Genocide commemoration events. People that came from Armenia in the 1990s do not have the same level of emotional attachment to these historical narratives. Armenians from Armenia, such as Aram, find that it is more important to shift the attention from the past to the present issues in Armenia.

*“I have an impression that for “diaspora Armenians” the memory is very fresh, it seems the events happened yesterday. Of course, for me also it is an important issue, however, I think that we should concentrate the same efforts to build our country.”*  
(Ani, Dutch –Armenian)

Examining Genocide commemoration shows that Armenians adopted a “never forget” model of remembrance (Assman 2009). The memory not only connects with the loss of the ancestral homeland but is also at the core of the ideology of the diasporic transnation. The Armenian diaspora puts conscious efforts in reconstructing and reproducing Genocide memory through diaspora organisations.

#### **6.1.4 Armenians, Assyrians, Turkish and Azerbaijanis in the Netherlands: Clashes and Cooperation Attempts**

In April 2015, the Dutch Parliament passed a binding resolution recognising the Genocide of Assyrians, Greeks and Armenians by Ottoman Turks. The European Parliament and German Bundestag passed similar resolutions in 2016. Diaspora cooperation aims at presenting the events as common victimhood. Koinova (2019, 3) shows that diasporas build coalitions and sustain connections for universal human right claims: “diaspora groups seek[ing] to build awareness with other groups about human rights violations and genocides as a “never again” experience”.

Genocide commemoration events include statements about the closely-linked history of the Armenian and Assyrian communities and their common present struggle. During

commemoration events, Armenians usually invite representatives of the Assyrian and the Yazidi communities as well. By doing so, they are eager to present the unified voice of minority rights in the Middle East. They also try to present the Genocide of 1915 as a basis for the rest of the violence that would follow until the present day. During the commemoration events, there are always signs stating that ISIS violence is the continuation of the denial of Genocide in 1915.

Armenians and Assyrians also cooperate with Jewish communities. The Armenian and Jewish communities are often referred to by the Assyrians as demonstrating “the successful use of the Genocide memory” not only for claiming recognition but for creating a politicised diaspora as well. The Assyrian Confederation, for example, invited the representatives of the Armenian organisation responsible for lobbying in Brussels to present their experience.

*“Our people have strong ties, and we lived in an empire that never recognises our ties in our homeland. We Armenians support your campaigns for the recognition of Genocide and restoration of historical justice. Once it is not recognised, the Genocide is still ongoing. Only with a joint statement and voice we can reach the recognition and prevent repetition.” (Armenian representative at the Assyrian Convention, October 7, 2017)*

I also came across opinions when interviewing Assyrian and Armenian representatives that state that shared trauma not only makes diasporas cooperate with each other, but compete as well in the representation of trauma to the international audience. In several writings on the Assyrian diaspora (Travis 2017, Makko and Donabed 2013), and in many discussions that I had during fieldwork, Assyrians emphasised that the Armenian Genocide is more widely known than the Assyrian counterpart. They raised concerns related to the fact that since Armenians name it “the Armenian Genocide,” the world forgets that there were Assyrians and Greeks killed as well. One of my interviewees noted that: *“Maybe more Armenians died but if you look at the percentages, a larger part of the Assyrians living in the Ottoman Empire were killed” (Sargon, Dutch-Assyrian).*

Genocide Recognition claims have not been without difficulties and clashes with the Turkish and Azerbaijani communities. The Priest of the Armenian Church noted that they had faced Turkish and Azerbaijani resistance when installing the first Genocide memorial in Assen in 2001:

*“Turkish and Azerbaijani communities have a powerful presence in that region. We put the cross-stone with many difficulties. The Turks and the Azeris insisted us to change the name of the monument. Instead of putting the name as a cross-stone in memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide they tried to take out the name “genocide” and put it as in memory of our ancestors.” (Priest, Dutch-Armenian)*

*Illustration 11: Genocide Memorial, Assen, the Netherlands*



*Illustration 12: Genocide Memorial, Almelo, the Netherlands*



The Turkish community presented the same demand at the opening of the Genocide monument in Almelo, where about 5,000 Turks gathered to protest. They were demanding to take out the name “Monument for the Commemoration of the Genocide.” This event caused the largest clash between two communities. Ilham Askin, the Chairman of the Turkish-Azerbaijani Union in the Netherlands, was condemned by the representatives of the Armenian diaspora for making anti-Armenian remarks in a 2014 speech. A video of the 2014 demonstration shows Askin stating that “Karabakh will be the grave of the Armenians” several times, while a crowd repeated the slogan. The Armenian community, including the Federation of Armenian Organisations in the Netherlands (FAON) and the Dutch Armenian Committee for Justice and Democracy (Armenian National Committee of the Netherlands), had filed complaints to the local police regarding Askin’s comments. Later, Askin was sentenced by a

Dutch court for hate speech and inciting violence: he was ordered community service of 120 hours with a month of suspended jail time and two years of probation.

*“We welcome this conviction by the Dutch court to punish Ilham Askin of the Turkish-Azerbaijani Union. Calls like “Karabakh will be the grave of the Armenians” have no place in the Netherlands, in Europe. This is a clear message to those who call for violence and hatred, be it in Sweden, in the Netherlands or elsewhere. We will be very vigilant on this matter.” (President of the European Armenian Federation for Justice and Democracy (EAFJD)). (Armenian Weekly, 2014)*

There have been a few attempts of fostering dialogue between Turkish and Armenian communities, but, there have been no significant effects. One attempt was the documentary film “Blood Brothers,” which was streamed on Dutch public television. The film is about an Armenian and Turkish youth that try to discover their family roots and explore how they were involved in the Genocide, and undertake a road trip from Istanbul to Yerevan as well. The interviewees said that the movie had a different reception among the Turkish and the Armenian communities. The Turkish community criticised it since it spoke about Genocide recognition.

Thus, Genocide becomes a trauma that goes beyond homeland and diaspora links and to connect “common networks of actors from different countries with similar claims” (Tarrow 2005, 32) and even generate counter-coalitions that have different interpretation of the same trauma. Thus, the Genocide memory become the “battle ground” for competing interests of homelands, host states, diasporas and international politics. Diaspora representatives act as “transnational activists” that “shift their activities among levels, taking advantage of the expanded nodes of opportunity of a complex international society” (Tarrow 2005, 43).

## 6.2 CURRENT-DAY CONFLICTS

This subchapter aims at showing the extent to which the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a matter of concern for Dutch-Armenians, and whether the current rise of ISIS and demands of for an autonomous Nineveh Plains region mobilises the Assyrian diaspora. The chapter shows that both diasporas position themselves as “victim-witnesses”, groups who

experienced crimes against humanity (Brants and Klep 2013, 48). Current-day conflicts contain historic markers of a traumatic past that in both communities trigger active mobilisation. Assyrians connect the history of the Genocide to the events happening in Syria and Iraq, such as the persecution of Assyrians, Yezidis, and other minorities in the Middle East. In the case of the Armenian diaspora, even though few experienced the Karabakh conflict, the issue matters to many people in light of losing historic lands as well as lives in the Ottoman Empire. The Rise of ISIS and Demand for the Autonomous Region of Nineveh Plain.

### **6.2.1 The Rise of ISIS and Demand for the Autonomous Region of Nineveh Plain**

*“I have a perfect life here, I achieved many things, I can forget about everything, but it is my duty to do something for my people, for me it is the most important reason. Why are we politically active? If I were a Dutch person, I would give you another answer. Since I am Assyrian, I will give you another answer. If you do not have a country, you must be politically active. All the political activities are done to achieve a country.” (Apram, Dutch-Assyrian)*

*“Our political goal is to achieve the autonomous region. I grew up with the stories of my grandma. When you are a child, mostly at home you listen to the stories from your grandmother, mother. We lost many family members; every family is affected. You grow up with these stories and this is also why I try to give back to my people.” (Petros, Dutch- Assyrian)*

The current concerns of the Assyrian diaspora are primarily connected with the conflict in Iraq and Syria, and the situation of Assyrians in these countries. Post-genocide memories and the grief that the current generation and their parents experienced makes them more understanding and compassionate about the sufferings of the Assyrians currently living in their homeland. Despite the emotional sadness of losing their statehood and witnessing the violence in Syria and Iraq, there were few collective political actions taking place in the community. Emotional attachment to the homeland, individual concerns, and links with the

homeland have rendered only a small part of the diaspora politically active and engaged in a long-distance nationalism.

The “purposive” action of mobilisation was taken up by people in charge of Dutch-Assyrian membership in the Assyrian Confederation at the European level. The organisation aims at addressing influential international actors such as the EU and UN. This network enables them to present their voice collectively. However, there are several disagreements about the political activities and lack of a unified and strategic vision about the future of their homelands. Taking this situation into account, the chapter reflects the ideas and actions of a limited number of Assyrians that took charge of the political stances of the Assyrian people, and their perception of the way the Assyrian diaspora should be positioned in the Middle East. These beliefs are not shared by many organisation members, as well as Dutch-Assyrians that are not linked to any organisation.

The understanding of the conflicts in these countries requires going beyond nation states and analysing the complex links that Assyrians and other minority groups have with the Iraqi government and the Kurds. Research on the political mobilisation of the Dutch-Assyrian diaspora made me focus on the difficulties that diaspora communities face in mobilising in times of crises. Despite the accepted view that in times of crises a diaspora mobilises, the Assyrian diaspora shows a different experience. This is mainly connected with the lack of a politicised “elite” diaspora. The most salient goal that has generated the mobilisation of the Assyrian diaspora in Europe is the demand for recognition of the autonomous region in Nineveh Plains. This is an illustration of the Assyrian diaspora taking a political step to transform the ancient homeland of Nineveh into a demand of Nineveh as an autonomous region for Assyrians and other ethnic/ religious minorities of Iraq. Though this idea does not cause many disagreements within diaspora there are disagreements over the paths to take to establish safety in the region and to protect their presence in their lands. A part of the Assyrian diaspora is eager to have an active military engagement in the region by financing the families of the soldiers of Nineveh Plains, while another part is eager to cooperate with Kurdish forces. Another segment of the diaspora is organising advocacy and lobbying events directed at the EU and UN regarding autonomy for the region. For example, an international conference called “Towards a Comprehensive Solution for the Nineveh Plain” was hosted by the EU in 2017, where representatives of the Chaldean, Assyrian, and Syriac people in Iraq, NGOs, and

diaspora representatives gathered in Brussels to discuss legislative demands for the autonomous region. There is also a large group of Assyrians that try to avoid any political debate and clashes. One of the organisational leaders underlined the fact that they try to ensure a “politically neutral” environment. According to him, when the war in Syria started, pro-and anti-Assad organisation members “*turned to enemies*” and brought the conflict into the organisation. He found that the best way to handle that situation was to forbid and prevent any political discussions within the organisation.

The complicated relations between the Assyrians and the Kurds began with the Ottoman Empire and the 1915 Genocide. The Assyrians state that Kurdish irregular forces committed the Genocide in addition to Turkish troops. The Kurdish people claim the same territories as the Assyrians to be their homeland. Therefore, there is a long-lasting issue as to whether the Kurds are enemies or friends. The Kurdish Regional Government portrays their land as a safe haven for all minority groups. The Syriac, Chaldean, Yezidis, and Assyrians accuse Kurds of driving minorities out of their historical homeland. Christian groups are now asking for their own zone of autonomy, although their likelihood of gaining one seems very low. Some Assyrians are in favour of cooperating with the Kurds, while the rest find the Kurds to be their enemies:

*“I do understand it, when I was young, I had much empathy for PKK. We have the same enemy: fundamentalists in Turkey. Back in the day, the PKK was taking care of us. In one of his speeches Ocalan said: “I am asking all Kurds to go to your Assyrian, Armenian, Greek neighbours, whomever you know and apologise for what your parents have done to these people, they killed them, and these people were so good they never took the gun and killed them.” He was perfect for us and Armenians.”*  
(Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian)

Multiple and contradictory links that diaspora institutions and individuals have with the governments and political parties of the sending states significantly weaken the community. The Church avoids political engagement despite being an influential organisation in order to create collective mobilisation and act as a gatekeeper in order to reach the Assyrian people both in the homeland and diaspora.

*“Our patriarch, the one in Damascus, has to say YES to everything, Assad regime says nothing against Assad, so he is not free. We have one in Iraq, and he is not free either, if he says something against Iraq, they will kill him. We have a bishop in*

*Turkey who is a very important bishop, the one who is independent, and you would never hear him in the media because people that would interview him are afraid, they know that he would say something negative about Turkey. The one who is very friendly with Turkey he is on the TV every day.” (Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Yet, Assyrians believe that the community has the informal support of the Church in the Netherlands and the Church provides pathways to connect with the broader Dutch audience:

*“The Syriac Orthodox Church is in favour of the autonomous region of Nineveh Plains. They support with connections and with presenting our cause to the Dutch public.” (Samir, Dutch-Assyrian)*

*“When our bishop has local or international meetings, he always calls me and says: “Ok, I have this meeting with these people, what is our political message?” I say: whatever you talk with ministers or with the king, you should not forget to mention that Christianity is under the danger in the Middle East. Can you tell them that 1,000 years ago more than the half population in the Middle East were Christians, have you ever asked yourself what happened with these people? It was just 1,000 years ago. So, the Church will not survive if they won’t be politically active.” (Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian)*

The division and confusion related to mobilisation ways is also conditioned by lack of trustworthy information about the situation of Assyrians in the homeland. The pan-diasporic TVs provide information that doesn’t highlight the need for political unification and politically active people have very limited access to the Assyrian people:

*“We have international broadcast agency in Iraq: Ishtar TV. In Mosul Assyrians are being kidnapped, they are tortured, they are told to convert to Islam, but this TV puts only music. It is unbelievable, and why? Because they are in Iraq and they are not allowed to show any political thing on the television. Yet, this is one of our powerful televisions. We have another one in Sweden, it is in the hand of the tiny group Suroyo TV, it is linked to PKK, so they would never say a word what Kurds did to Assyrians. And they have another TV that is linked to the Church, so they would always show people praying. My mom goes to the Church on Sundays, then comes back home and watches this TV, so again church.” (Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian)*

The research shows that there is limited mobilisation of the Dutch-Assyrian diaspora. There are only a few activities, which are conducted by the personal, informal connections of a very few individuals. For example, the Dutch-Assyrians invited the Assyrian representatives of the Iraqi parliament to the Netherlands and organised meetings of Dutch and Assyrian political members. To make a claim and show stronger representation of the Assyrian diaspora



in Europe, the Confederation opened a representative office in Brussels. According to Confederation representatives, this makes them look more serious and consequently creates more trust among the diaspora and within European organisations.

*“Iraq and Iran are my business. Syria is another friend of mine that works in Sweden, Turkey is another person. We publish information; we send it to NGOs, media and European parliament. We had these contacts also before the crisis in the Middle East.” (Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian)*

The same diaspora group also works towards creating a new generation that has a more politicised and coherent ideology than previous generations. They do this through the Ashur Camp for Dutch-Assyrian children and teens, which was created in Summer 2017. Camp organisers state that the main goal is to introduce the younger generation to their history, roots, and current political problems. Teens are taught to send emails to parliament members as an essential lobbying tactic. This is seen as a preventive action by creating a generation that has the skills to take care of their people in the homeland in the case of need: *“There will be a time that something will happen in Syria, in Iraq that they will say: Oh, I know how to do that” (Mariam, Dutch-Assyrian).*

Many interviewees often referred themselves as “individual agents” in the struggle for justice. The leaders of the Confederation believe that Assyrians must feel a duty to carry out daily lobbying and become agents raising public awareness about their people. As an example, one of the interviewees discussed an example of a Kurdish taxi driver:

*“When I speak with my people I always use this of a Kurdish taxi driver, he said: “Oh, roj baş, oh, this is a Kurdish word for good morning... Also, then: “Oh, you know I just had a Kurdish bread the way we had in Kurdistan... It reminds me of these old days when we were dancing to old Kurdish songs...” I say, so how many times do you hear in this small conversation the word Kurds or Kurdistan? From a taxi driver! This is it! Why don’t we have that!?” (Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian)*

*“We have a lot of important people who do not have any political input. They would say how glad they are that their people live in Holland, that they are safe, and Holland is very nice to them, but they do not know how to ask and how to speak about their rights in Assyria, in our homeland. However, whatever you do, the impression left should be this: I met this very nice guy who told me that their people, their church have been destroyed in the Middle East.” (Sargon, Dutch-Assyrian)*

The most significant event in European-Assyrian political life is the Convention of the European Assyrian Confederation. I was invited to present my research findings, as well as to observe the event in 2017. The event gathered more than 50 participants from European countries such as France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, as well as scholars, journalists, representatives of international organisations, and artists that are concerned with the Assyrian issue.

*Illustration 13: Poster of the Assyrian European Convention, 2017.*



*Illustration 14: During the Assyrian European Convention, 2017.*



The event aims to discuss the priorities of diaspora engagement, generating consensus on the further steps and strategies. The Convention program revealed that the priorities of the Diaspora are primarily connected with the situation of the Assyrians in Iraq and in Syria. Many of them referred to it as *“the last call of keeping the pieces of the lost homeland.”* Otherwise, remaining Assyrians in the region will migrate and “continue their life in the diaspora,” a dangerous path for the community considering the danger of assimilation. The Confederation President opened the three-day event with the following statement:

*“Welcome to the convention of the Assyrian Confederation of Europe. It is very important to learn what we have to do, where we have to do, how we have to do. After Saddam has disappeared the Assyrians had the hope that they could live in peace because the dictator had left. Last few years that I have visited I saw that the situation has changed: Assyrians were afraid to speak; they were whispering ... They were whispering that the government in Baghdad doesn’t take care of them. However, now*

*they have new hope that if they want to live, they need to have their government, their own homes and we should help them with this hope. We should take those whispers on what Assyrians want in Assyria to the European Parliament, to the journalists.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

An important message was also made by a Dutch journalist who called on Assyrians to demand international organisations such as the UN and EU listen to the voices of minorities:

*“I visited Iraq many times, and I met a Christian priest, he said things are not going to get better. Arabic Spring turned into an Arabic Autumn. Assyrians in the Middle East are discriminated. I went to villages and I saw they were destroyed after ISIS left, the houses were burned. It is getting worse for Assyrians. First, you must unite, but they cannot get along with each other, Christians should unite, get together and work together. Don’t count on EU, count on Russians and America. You are too polite. If they do not help you, they contribute to genocide as they did during the Second World War.” (Dutch journalist)*

The meeting was followed by documentaries about the situation in the homeland, and the violence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The presentation of the communities’ internal problems (France, Belgium, the Netherlands) also meant to introduce the active component of the Assyrian diaspora to each other.

In contrast to Armenians, Assyrians place a strong emphasis on minority rights. They frame themselves for diaspora audiences as a “stateless nation,” and for the international audience they position themselves as Christian minorities in the Middle East. The Assyrian diaspora also acts as a non-state actor that has the privileged position to talk about the injustice happening in the homeland. Unlike the several studies that emphasise the role of the sending state in working with diasporas in order to mobilise them, the Assyrian diaspora is different. Here the diaspora plays a role of coaching and mentoring for capacity development and better representation. They help their co-ethnics who do not have much political influence in the homeland to formulate their requests to the European Parliament and other international institutions. Without the existence of any state-support mechanisms, the Assyrian diaspora not only intermediates but also initiates political activities and creates political messages.

*“We have a half million Assyrians in Europe and every day I ask myself what is this half million doing here, they should be in Nineveh Plains, their roots are there, they want to live in their own country. However, they do not live there. And do you know*

*why? Because they are afraid of Peshmerga, they are afraid of Kurds, and they are afraid of the Kurdish Region Parliament.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

*“I went to Syria many times. I visited Assyrian political parties in Syria and the Church. I bring the information to Europe, we publish it, we speak about it.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

*“Our job is to make clear what they want. I make always deals with the people that came from Iraq. For example, our parliamentarian came, and I said to him: “Speak whatever you want, I will say the truth that they may not like. Don’t worry. I live in Holland, they cannot come and kill me. There they are afraid if they would kill you nobody will ask: why? There is no police, there is no security, there is no law, there is nothing. In Europe, we will try to do things!” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Awareness raising campaigns, documentation, and communicating facts play a vital role in their campaign. The benefit and advantage of mobilising from diaspora is having the freedom of speech and becoming “the voice of voiceless people in the Middle East.”

*“In August we will have a program on the Dutch TV called from Nineveh to Nablus. Last year we had from Nineveh to Nazareth, I organised the whole program for them, and the whole trip they went but then the fights started, and they had to come back. However, now they will start the program and they will go to Nineveh Plains to look for Assyrians and to explain who Assyrians are, why they want those lands. They will speak to our fighters and politicians. Last week I sent journalists to Iran, I also organised their visit to the Armenian community.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

*“Every year that I go to Assyria, I take Dutch parliamentarians with me, Dutch NGOs, Dutch media, human rights organisations. Next week a group of journalists will go to Iraq, and then also students from the Hogeschool of Enschede will go and do research about Assyrians in Iraq. So, we send every month a Dutch journalist or someone to Iraq. Because if Dutch people go, their network is much better than ours and then they will spread what they have seen.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Although they are weak efforts, diaspora mobilisation tries to solve a power imbalance of an under-represented group, thus ensuring the safety of their people in the homeland. So far, the main successes of the Confederation have been the release of documents authored by the EU about financing the Nineveh Plains, as well as an initial agreement with the Trump administration to finance Assyrian forces.

*“We try to liaise with Trump administration so that they support the protection of Nineveh Plains. We have 5,000 people there, but the weapons are not new, we want to use the borders of Nineveh Plains and put everywhere our solders. What we reached is that USA will invest in this protection groups. We have reached a good point with the EU and US government.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

### **6.2.2 Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh: Consolidation of the Armenian diaspora**

Nagorno-Karabakh is a de facto state that largely relies on the support of the state of Armenia and the Armenian diaspora. Diaspora Armenians took a keen interest in the struggle for the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent state, condemnation of Azerbaijani policy at an international level, as well as support for Karabakh’s development and implementation of cultural, economic, and social programs. The establishment of the de facto state of Nagorno-Karabakh changed the image *“from victim nation to victorious nation.”* Nagorno-Karabakh symbolises the idea of protecting the homeland.

*“Karabakh is one of the most important issues. This is more important for us and more urgent than Genocide question. The majority of European countries do not know about the Karabakh. If we lose Karabakh, we will lose our homeland and will open the doors for our enemies. Therefore, we try to familiarise Dutch people and politicians with the issue. For example, we organised a seminar with the participation of Dutch academics three years ago. This was the first time that Dutch academics participated, and it had an adequate reaction.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

*“We also work on recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. We managed to organise the visit of the President of Nagorno-Karabakh with the representative of Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee.” (Organisation leader, Dutch Armenian)*

With the lead of transnational organisations (Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the AGBU) the diaspora in the Netherlands participates in various pan-diaspora activities, such as raising money (discussed in the next chapter), organising campaigns, and implementing awareness-raising activities. For example, during fieldwork, a petition was initiated by a transnational diaspora organisation with representation in Brussels (AGBU), in order to bring the attention of EU institutions to Nagorno-Karabakh. The petition (2017) stated:

*“Nagorno-Karabakh’s isolation is unique because the EU provides aid to 150 countries around the World. It also provides aid to people in many unrecognised territories such as Abkhazia, Transnistria, and Northern Cyprus regardless of their status. This policy is called “engagement without recognition... We call on the EU to engage with Nagorno-Karabakh and to support projects to improve the living conditions of its population because EU policies should contribute to the welfare, not hardship of populations in Europe and its periphery.”*

The petition was signed by several EU parliament members (including the Dutch MP), and was circulated by transnational diaspora websites and email campaigns. Dutch-Armenians also follow developments in the Azerbaijani community in the Netherlands and react in case of “*misinformation*” or “*anti-Armenian statements*”:

*“For example, there was a program which was done by Azerbaijani propaganda, when a reporter found some graves in Azerbaijan and said that it was a Genocide done by Armenians. There was no explanation of when or how. We immediately reacted and criticised them seriously. Moreover, we said that they need to show some facts before claiming that Armenians did something, and they did not show the Armenian viewpoint on that issue.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

Each year the Armenian Revolutionary Federation organises a demonstration in front of the Embassy of Azerbaijan in The Hague. The demand is to recognise the massacres of Armenians in the town of Sumgait, Azerbaijan, known as the “Sumgait Massacres” to Armenians in 1988. This massacre has merged the memory of the Genocide by the Ottoman Turks with the massacres in Azerbaijan. When discussing Azerbaijan and relations of Armenians with Azerbaijan, Armenians referred to Azeris as “Turks”. This makes it clear that the Sumgait massacre is perceived as a continuation of the Genocide. Moreover, the protection of Nagorno-Karabakh is seen as a way to recover historical justice. The annual protests do not have significant response in the community, with participation mainly by members of politically oriented organisations.

These scattered attempts of advocating for the Nagorno-Karabakh issue became widespread when conflict escalated along the entire length of the contact line of the Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijani border. A joint statement by organisations in the Netherlands was released with a call to stop aggression towards Nagorno-Karabakh. The Armenian community in the Netherlands held a protest “against the continued Azerbaijani aggression towards Nagorno-Karabakh” in Dam Square, Amsterdam, on April 8, 2016. The event was held under

the leadership of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and united the existing organisations in the Netherlands, as well as people who were not members of any diaspora organisation.

*Illustration 15: Poster of joint Armenian organisations for the protest in Dam Square, Amsterdam 2016*



*Illustration 16 : Protest in Dam Square, Amsterdam, 2016*



*“Unite Armenians, Unite Armenians... Artsakh is calling us, come to help us!”*

These posters, as well as other patriotic songs, flags and posters, were present in Dam Square during the protest. Event attendees claimed that they would go back to Armenia to protect their borders if the war did not stop. The event showed that the mobilisation and consolidation of the Armenian diaspora in the Netherlands is less fragmented when it comes to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Armenians from Armenia were especially active during the demonstration. It can be explained by the existence of direct ties with Armenia, meaning that the relatives and friends of those who recently migrated from Armenia are still there and that active connections are maintained. As for diaspora Armenians, they see the struggle for the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the context of restoring the once-powerful Armenian state. The mobilisation had an ad-hoc character because the war lasted only four days. However, it had a long-lasting effect on the community. Dutch-Armenians felt more alert about the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and came up with new initiatives of organising

and providing financial assistance to the homeland. This action will be discussed in the next chapter.

A significant event for the Armenian diaspora was the fourth diaspora-initiated conference in Brussels in 2017. The conference had two primary concerns: the Nagorno-Karabakh question and Genocide recognition. Speakers at the event discussed the diaspora-state relations that I term partnership relations. On Wednesday, October 18, 2017, the fourth Congress of the European-Armenians was held at the “Armenian House” in Brussels, and was attended by representatives from the diaspora, homeland, and international community, including the President of the Armenian National Committee of Europe, the President of the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Catholicos of All Armenians, the RA Minister of Diaspora, and the Chairman of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation’s Armenian Cause European Commission. Along with homeland and diaspora representatives, the event was also attended by members of the European Parliament.

One of the leaders emphasised that diaspora Armenians are organising Armenian lobbying without state support. He underlined that Turkish and Azeri lobbyists have state funding and that *“they are agents of Erdogan and Aliyev, and Armenians are citizens of their countries.”*

The President of Nagorno-Karabakh noted in his speech that events like this conference were an excellent platform to discuss national issues, outline solutions, and develop and implement various programs for the continuous development and strengthening of Armenian communities in the Diaspora, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh.

*“It is critical to build a constructive exchange of thoughts, to voice different opinions and to adopt mutually agreed decisions, first of all, to unite the different parts of our people on the implementation of national programs,”(Speech of the President, Nagorno-Karabakh).*

The President of Nagorno-Karabakh expressed his gratitude to all those who always support Nagorno- Karabakh. During the event, the President gave out the "Gratitude" medal to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation's Armenian Cause European Commission for the significant contribution to the recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.



The case of Nagorno-Karabakh illustrates a coherent struggle based on transnational diaspora practices, diaspora institutions, and the supporting role of the homeland. The dominant memory of the historical past and the loss of the ancestral homeland remains a central concept around which the heterogeneous Armenian diaspora mobilises for the protection of Nagorno-Karabakh.

## **6.1 ONGOING PROBLEMS WITHIN THE HOMELAND**

This sub-chapter will discuss diaspora actions in response to human rights violations and a lack of democracy in the homelands of the Assyrian and Armenian diasporas.

### **6.1.1 Assyrians: The Truth-Tellers about the Homeland**

Besides the two fundamental issues discussed above, the Assyrian diaspora is also concerned about injustice happening in their homelands on a daily basis. A recent incident occurred in the village of Alqush, in Iraqi Kurdistan territory, where the mayor of the village was beaten and jailed on August 30, 2017. As a leader of an organisation recounted, Dutch-Assyrians tried to create international pressure on the Kurdish government, and as a result of their efforts, he was released to report about this and other significant violations of human rights, the Assyrian confederation releases human rights reports, with the diaspora community using their regular contacts with friends and family as well as NGOs in the region as information sources. By doing so, they provide access to information necessary for the broader human rights community, such as international NGOs and UN and EU structures to engage in human rights advocacy and potentially influence the Kurdish and Iraqi governments. The report and interviews highlighted several cases of human rights abuses that are happening in the province, such as:

- Problems related to employment: Assyrians are discriminated against and not granted employment opportunities. Assyrians are employed only as low-skilled workers in locations where Muslims are not allowed to work (such as liquor shops). They are not

allowed to work in positions such as journalists, military officers, soldiers, police officers, etc.

- *Assyrians have land issues.* Land issues have existed since the Saddam Hussein government, with many mosques, churches and monuments destroyed during this regime. This continues in the present day and includes issues with private lands of people in the Kurdistan region, where Assyrians have lived for centuries. Today, mosques are placed in Assyrian villages so that Muslims can establish themselves there, and land is requisitioned for the government's large-scale projects. Interviewees were also concerned about this issue and donate to the local organisations that stand for the rights of the Assyrian people.
- *Assyrian heritage* has gone through an Arabisation period. People in Iraq are being taught that Mesopotamian civilisation is Arabic. The same situation is repeating itself in the Kurdistan region, where today local Assyrian history is seen as Kurdish history. Assyrians report that city names are changed to Kurdish names and Assyrian history is not recognised in textbooks, museums, and during memorial days.
- *Lack of safety.* Dutch-Assyrians report that Assyrians in Iraq are not protected and that the rule of the law is missing. Therefore, extremist groups continue to kidnap, kill, and send threatening letters to local Assyrians. As a consequence, many Assyrians flee abroad or to neighbouring countries. As a result, their presence in the region is under danger.
- *Women's rights:* The interviewees, as well as the human rights report, discussed the limited rights that Christian women have in the region. Recounting their childhood, one of the interviewed women stated:

*“Women have no life there. You could not have a proper education, play with boys, and later on your husband could beat you. Therefore, I was so shy when I came to the Netherlands. That is why I do not want to take my child to my homeland.”*

The report also points out that Assyrian women are forced by criminal organisations to work in prostitution. If they refuse, they are threatened with death.

According to the leader of the Assyrian Federation in Europe, the human rights report is a useful tool, since “30,000 people downloaded it in a few weeks”. It has been quoted by the

American and Dutch governments, as well as the Human Rights Watch organisation.

### 6.1.2 Armenians: Supporters of the Revolution

A very recent example of diaspora mobilisation in the Netherlands was due to the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, which took place from April to May 2018. The revolution forced the governing political party to peacefully pass the ruling mandate to the opposition. The peaceful demonstrations not only had a political aim but a strong emphasis on developing civil society in Armenia. This was the first time protests in Armenia had widespread support in the diaspora. Parallel to the protests in Armenia, diaspora Armenians organised protests in front of the Armenian embassies in several countries, including the location in The Hague. Pressure from diaspora Armenians was raised with every incident that occurred in Armenia. Around 200 people participated in a protest in front of the Armenian Embassy in The Hague in response to the arrest of the opposition leader in Armenia triggered. Support for the protests was far from being universal. Diaspora reaction was divided in two with an explicit division: most of “formal organisations stayed neutral, while Armenians from Armenia were active supporters of the revolution. The latter group usually does not attend traditional diaspora events such as the commemoration of Genocide and does not participate in any diaspora activism. The active involvement of the most passive segment of Armenia was observed in almost all diaspora communities in the US, France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, which has a population of Armenians that migrated from Armenia after the 1990s. Traditional diaspora representatives stated that the demonstrations might cause clashes and hatred among Armenians, and therefore they *“do not want a revolution, they want an evolution.”* One of their representatives explained: *“you can’t go against your state and it is even shameful to protest in front of your own country’s embassy in a foreign land.”* The most active component of the anti-government protests were Armenians from Armenia and Syrian-Armenians that had previously lived in Armenia before arriving in the Netherlands. This group migrated to the Netherlands because of inadequate socio-economic conditions during the 1990s. They believe that the governing regime at the time was responsible for the massive out-migration from Armenia. The fact that recent events did not affect most of the

“traditional diaspora” can be explained by a decline in transnational links with the homeland over generations.

The segment of diaspora that were officially linked to the Armenian government through organisations such as the Church, had a cautious attitude towards the revolution and didn’t give an immediate support to the protests. These institutions published press releases and called on both sides to avoid violence and sit down for dialogue. However, when the protests in Armenia took on a larger scale and Serzh Sargsyan resigned, the Prime Minister at the time, diaspora Armenians and “formal organisations” supported the revolution, as they hoped that the revolution would bring real democracy to Armenia.

An essential facet of these protests in the Netherlands was their organisation through social media. Before this event, social media only served as a means for information exchange, with minimal online discussions. The situation dramatically changed with the demonstrations in Armenia. Informal Facebook groups that before revolution usually served as an information-sharing platform on housing, Armenian products, and cultural events became a platform for posting news about the demonstration. As a result of these discussions, people in this group found it necessary to mobilise and organise the protests in front of the Armenian embassy in support of the people in Armenia.

This event received widespread publicity. The event actively created a civil society that protested economic and social injustice happening in Armenia after the independence years.

*“The protest was not led by a specific group. People understood that they could not do anything from a distance, decided to take some action. I personally know it from Facebook. In a Dutch-Armenian Facebook group that is about beauty products and does not have any political profile, I came across the post of the event” (Ani, Dutch-Armenian)*

The protests in Armenia were also streamed online, which made viewers “online participants” of the revolution through social media.

*“The social media played a significant role because for 24 hours I was following the protests and I was feeling 90% present in Armenia. It was first-hand information.” (Tigran, Dutch-Armenian)*

*Illustration 17: Facebook event flyer for a demonstration against the former Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan.*



New development in the homeland reconfigured diaspora settings, bringing the activism of the most “non-diasporic” part of Dutch-Armenians into the diasporic field. According to many demonstration organisers and attendees, this was one of the few times (which includes the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Genocide and demonstrations for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict) that they felt the need to participate in diaspora protests. They were hopeful that the restoration of social justice in the homeland and establishment of the rule of law would create opportunities for return. Their claim was: “We want a country to be proud of, we want a country where we can live.” The disappointment and distrust towards the government that Armenians experienced prior to migration became the critical point of diaspora mobilisation.

## 6.2 CONCLUSION

This chapter unpacks the limitations and opportunities of diaspora mobilisation over traumatic past and current-day conflicts. The in-depth analysis of intra-diaspora dynamics reveals the complex picture that diasporas have in succeeding or failing to raise their voice in support of their homeland in times of crises (Baser 2015, Mavroudi 2017).

The memory of the Genocide presents what Jacoby (2015) called “victimhood” or Macdonald (2012) called “past presencing”: the various ways in which the past is represented, experienced and performed in both communities. Strong "past presencing" results relatively strong mobilisation in the Armenian community, while in the Assyrian case it results in weak and insufficient mobilisation attempts. The Armenian community has a strong pre-migration experience of commemorating, demanding and struggling for Genocide recognition. These attempts are also supported by the Armenian state, which provides the symbolical source of commemoration ceremonies and brings organisations together with embassy assistance before commemoration events. Although, at the organisational level no disagreements are voiced, Armenians from Armenia are always referred to as the passive group within the community. In contrast, the Assyrian case clearly shows that while the memory of the Genocide is alive after the passing of over 100 years, and is renewed by current events, it does not turn into a source of mobilisation in the Netherlands. The few forms of commemoration activities are for an internal audience. This can be explained by divisions within the community, the absence of cooperation between the Church and the politicised group, weak leadership in the diaspora, and absence of state support. This chapter also highlighted new developments within the younger generation in both communities that resist “victim identification.”

Trauma makes the Armenian and the Assyrian communities cooperate and sometimes even compete over ownership of the trauma. The recognition of the Armenian Genocide not only becomes grounds for cooperation, ground but a battleground for relationships between receiving states and diaspora groups within it (Turkish, Azerbaijani, Assyrian and Armenian).

The current conflict over the de facto state of Nagorno-Karabakh awakens a more coherent form of mobilisation of the Armenian community since it touches on both Genocide

memory and the sense of needing to protect current-day Armenia. In the Assyrian case, the initial impression of a “unified goal” to demand an autonomous region in Iraq has changed with the unpacking of the internal composition of the diaspora. This issue resulted in limited mobilisation in the diaspora. Moreover, it created strong disagreements within the community due to the multiple contradictory links that diaspora groups have with the homeland. The Assyrian case shows that those in diaspora often find themselves confused and helpless in assisting the homeland in times of crises, despite having strong emotional links with it. However, a small group of Assyrians can develop transnational links and thus ensure the visibility of the group. They present themselves as the voices of a voiceless people, which have the privilege of freedom of expression in the diaspora. The examination of these two cases reveals the differences in diaspora-homeland relations: the Armenian case can be referred to as an example of partnership relations, while the Assyrian case can be referred to as mentoring relations, where the diaspora “teaches” the homeland how to present and frame a problem so that it is more receptive to the international community.

Besides these two “fundamental” issues, ongoing violations and the chance of restoring justice within the homeland triggers the Assyrian and Armenian communities to take actions. The revolution in Armenia transformed the diaspora from partners with the governing to strong opposition. Examination of the event illustrated that the leaders of formal organisations tend to focus on memory, past persecution, and suffering, and are less prepared to mobilise for current issues and in opposition of the government. The revolution revealed new actors that took on the leadership of diaspora activities and shifted power within the diaspora from the traditional group to the recent arrivals. Ongoing violations of human rights in Iraq also made the Assyrian diaspora become an advocate of human rights. Instead of “traditional protests,” they chose to investigate and report on human rights violations in Iraq, which includes women’s rights, safety and land issues, and more.

## CHAPTER 7: COLLECTIVE REMITTANCES: UNPACKING CHANNELS, BROKERS AND ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

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In this chapter, I will present the remittance practices of the Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian communities by aggregating them into three categories: *remittances initiated from above*, referring to remittances that have a state-driven character; *remittances organised by quasi-governmental organisations*, such as pan-diasporic networks, churches and transnational organisations; and *remittances from below*, organised by migrants and the local networks of diaspora members that can have both official and unofficial characteristics.

Collective remittances will be discussed in the framework of small temporary charity initiatives as well as regular participation in large-scale pan-diasporic initiatives: initiated both by elite members of diasporic organisations and ordinary non-elite members through networks of neighbours or acquaintances; directed both to territories referred to as homeland and co-ethnic communities in other states. I will focus on official and unofficial remitting practices, thus aiming to open a window for a structured classification of diasporic remittances that are often unrecorded. This chapter looks at layers of diasporas and their heterogeneity and existing inter-group tensions on how and how not to remit, instead of assuming they are collectives that are undoubtedly interested in supporting their homeland and people.

I will present the social aspect of remittances by putting it in the wider diaspora-homeland-state context instead of focusing on quantitative “fiscal” aspects of monetary transfers. I use Carling’s (2014) proposition to look at the social aspects of remittances. Remittances will thus be discussed as a phenomenon with material, emotional and relational elements. According to Carling (2014), migrant remittances reflect an individual’s commitments, priorities, and perceptions of needs and worthiness, define the relationships between the sender and the recipient, and elicit particular feelings surrounding the transactions. Carling (2014) introduces the concept of “script” and suggests that each script specifies, at a variable level of detail the transaction’s roles, actions and statuses, and the relation between elements. By doing so he aims to analyse the social aspects of remittances as mediators of relationships between



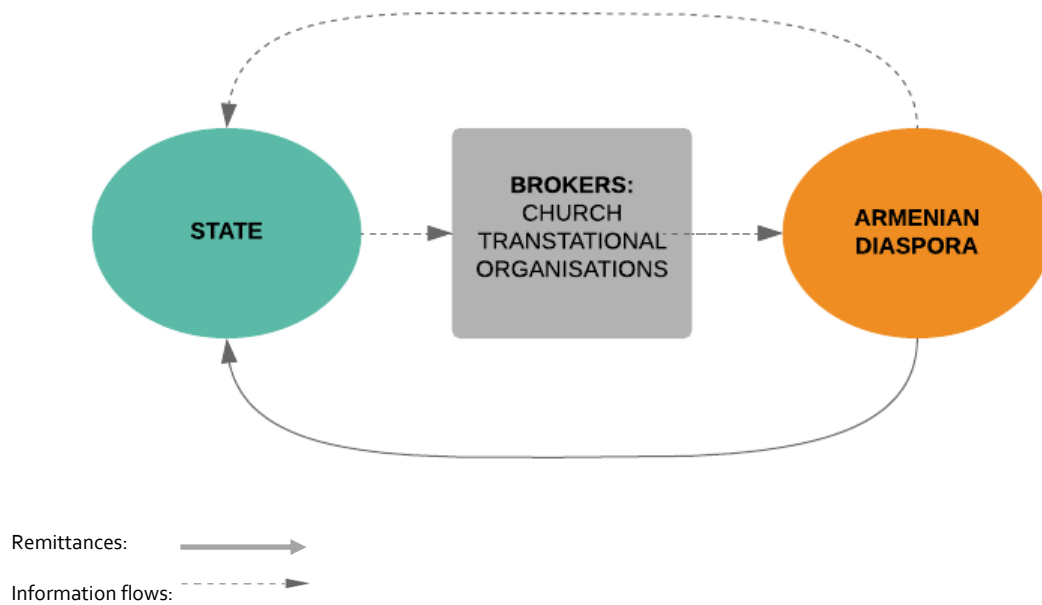
individuals. Though Carling's (2014) proposition of studying remittances is primarily concerned with individual remittances, his proposed concept could be also applied for studying collective remittances. Following his proposition, I look at collective remittances as a) signifiers of roles, actions, statuses, and relationships within the community; b) as a "mediator of relationships" and "vehicle of communication" between states and diasporas.

Before presenting the results of the study, I propose to clarify the terms "philanthropy" and "collective remittances." I propose to use the term collective remittances and refer to it as a subfield of philanthropy. Philanthropic activities represent a wider range of content, considering that it can be directed not only to co-ethnics, but a larger audience as well. Moreover, philanthropic activities can occur not only at the transnational level, but at the local level as well. The term "remittance" implies sending money abroad, and collective remittances imply support people who are connected to the "centre", such as people from the same church or network. Collective remittances are connected to the reciprocity of common belonging and are not always a pure act of philanthropy since they are accompanied with reverse remittances, usually in the form of symbolic remittances.

## **7.1 STATE-DRIVEN REMITTANCES OR REMITTANCES FROM ABOVE**

In this sub-chapter I will discuss the Armenian diaspora's experience to respond to state-calls to reemit, since the Armenian government considers remittance initiatives as a strategic resource for the country's development. The "vehicles of communication" of state-driven remittances is presented in Figure 5 and elaborated further in the chapter. Research has not identified any state-driven remittance initiatives of the Assyrian diaspora. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Assyrian diaspora does not rely on state structures or diaspora policies formed in Syria, Turkey or Iraq, since they have minority status in those states. Interviewees have states that "official doors of these countries are closed for them."

Figure 5: State-Driven Remittances



The collapse of the Soviet Union with its unified political and economic system established Armenia as an independent state. Independence was accompanied by a decline in Armenia's economy and an increase in unemployment and the poverty rate. The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh in the 1990s and the blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey have also had a negative impact on the development of Armenia's economy. Despite this, the establishment of the independent state has reawakened feelings of a homeland amongst various segments of the diaspora.

In 1992, after Armenia's independence, the All Armenia Fund was established, described as a *"worldwide collaborative effort fuelled by the Armenian Diaspora"* (All Armenia Fund 2018). Its main mission is to unite all Armenians and their supporters living in Armenia and abroad who are willing to make every effort to stabilise the economic situation in the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. The Fund operates in a government building in Armenia, has a hierarchical structure, a website, and various accounts open for remittances. The Fund's offices operate in 18 countries around the world. Fundraising is done through telethons and teleconferences annually. According to their official website, more than \$350 million has been invested by the Armenian Fund in assistance to Armenia since 1992. For example, in 2016 All-Armenian Fund's 19th annual International Telethon raised \$15,428,777 in donations and pledges. The telethon was conducted under the slogan "My

Artsakh,” and was focused on rebuilding war-ravaged communities in the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic through emergency and disaster preparedness for Armenia and Artsakh, as well as the construction of homes for Artsakh families with multiple children. In 2017, the telethon was again devoted to the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. It raised over \$12,505,456 for the “Fruitful Artsakh” project, aimed at boosting agriculture in Nagorno-Karabakh through two major projects: the drilling of deep-water wells and construction of irrigation networks, and the installation of solar power stations.

The main target group of mobilisation for these fundraising efforts are diaspora Armenians who do not have a direct link or personal connections with the homeland. These are second, third, and fourth generations of diaspora Armenians. Another big target of these donations are elite-diaspora philanthropists. For example, in the 2017 telethon, major donations included \$2.5 million by an anonymous philanthropist, as well as a \$2.25 million donation by a Russian-Armenian real estate developer. The official website does not provide statistics on a country basis to observe the activities of the Dutch-Armenian community. During interviews, members of the Dutch-Armenian diaspora and organisation representatives noted that trust in the Armenian Fund as a reputable institution has decreased over the past decades. Illegal allocation of donations and inappropriate practices relating to construction projects started to appear in the media beginning in the mid-1990s, damaging the Fund’s image. Almost none of the people interviewed reported donating to the Fund. Armenians that migrated from Armenia claim to have strong links with the homeland, and have become the ones who confirm or develop the distrust of state structures. The majority of Armenians that arrived from Armenia in the 1990s after the independence of the Republic of Armenia shared their impressions with co-ethnics living in the Netherlands that have arrived from different countries and do not have connections with Armenia. Since they are considered up-to-date on the situation in Armenia, they influence general impressions and trust towards the Fund, which often discourages donations. Gohar, a 45-year-old woman who moved to the Netherlands in the early 1990s, discussed her experience:

*“When Armenia got its independence, diasporic people who have never seen the country and had only photos of Ararat<sup>11</sup> on their walls thought that we finally have a*

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<sup>11</sup> Ararat is known as the “holy mountain” of the Armenian people.

*country and we can donate and construct the country we dreamed about. But in the 1990s when Armenians from Armenia migrated here they opened their eyes and said that you know what, with your money you construct villas of oligarchs, not the country. Since then, the amount of donations has declined. Now people want to find reliable ways to give their money”. (Gohar, Dutch-Armenian).*

Another major state-driven initiative came following the four-day war between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan in 2016. The state tried to coordinate provisions of material help from the diaspora. To encourage donations from a suspicious and discouraged diaspora, the Ministry of Defence of Nagorno-Karabakh published the official bank account of the republic in an effort to show transparency to those who wanted to make donations. Several individuals reported responded to the call for collecting money. The Church was one of the first diaspora organisations that responded to the call. It served as a centre where Dutch-Armenians gathered to collect money and discuss possible ways of supporting the homeland. However, the Church delivered only half of the collected money via bank accounts provided by the state. The other half of the collected money went through unofficial channels, i.e. trustworthy people in the homeland. Donations were transferred to the governing body of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and later to the state of Nagorno-Karabakh. The priest of the Church in Almelo explained that though it was not obligated to respond to the call via formal state-linked channels, there was a “*moral obligation*” to support the homeland in a time of crisis.

Calls to remit also come from the Ministry of Diaspora. In 2017, the Ministry initiated a call to support the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh under the slogan “What have you done for Artsakh?” Official diaspora media sources of the diaspora reported that the Dutch-Armenian community largely supported the initiative. Interviewees stated that the call was disseminated by the Embassy, and the news was spread via the Church and other organisations. However, the initiative did not reach large audiences due to the afore-mentioned reasons: distrust towards the state and the ministry. Narine, 29-year-old woman that moved to the Netherlands 5 years ago stated:

*“I don’t believe those big organisations. I trust a very narrow circle of people. I know the situation in Armenia, and we all know what happened to those funds that were*

*functioning in Armenia, say Kirk Kerkorian Foundation<sup>12</sup> Maybe some people will take some percentage of it, maybe not... I am not sure ... but what I know is that there's a risk. I prefer giving money to individuals I know". (Narine, Dutch-Armenian).*

Organisation leaders and people who are actively involved in remittance activities often find that the lack of trust serves as an excuse for not donating. As one organisation leaders stated:

*"You know people sometimes even say I don't trust so that they justify their inactive behaviour. You can never ensure and prove 100% proof that the money was given to families. Therefore, sometimes they should just choose the option that they trust". (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

Analysis shows that state-driven remittances address only the visible and active parts of the diaspora, leaving behind sub-communities and "silent" networks of diaspora. Several quasi-governmental, informal and semi-formal networks, resources, and their activities will be further discussed further in the chapter.

## 7.2 QUASI-GOVERNMENTAL REMITTANCES

Another level of analysis that can be applied to studying the Dutch-Armenian diaspora is **quasi-governmental organisations**. Transnational networks of these organisations connect several diaspora communities and aim at shaping diasporic agendas and policies. These institutions act as a "substitute to the state" or as Tololyan (1999) states, as "governments in exile" that propose their remitting priorities and ask the diaspora for support. The calls of quasi-governmental structures can come from the homeland or can be formed in the diaspora. Both Armenian and Assyrian communities present nodes and not the centre in these networks where

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<sup>12</sup> Kirk Kerkorian, 93, is Armenia's largest Diaspora benefactor. The Lincy Foundation has provided about \$1 billion USD to Armenia. It is widely circulated that the foundation was shut down in Armenia when Kerkorian found out that the Armenian authorities had pocketed a significant part of the last \$200 million donation (whilst, at least \$240 million has been donated by Kerkorian since the independence of Armenia).

agendas and policies are shaped. As it relates to quasi- governmental organisations, I propose to look at the following organisations:

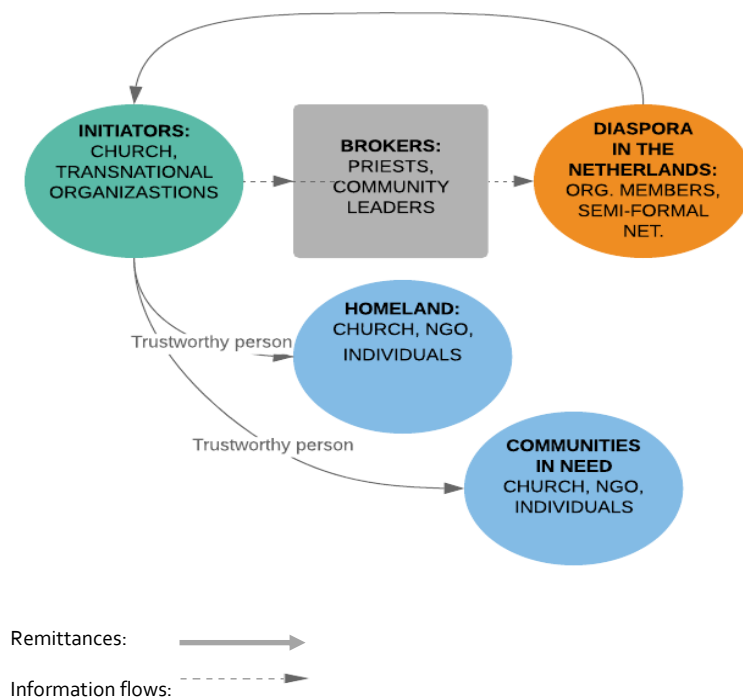
- Churches (Armenian Apostolic Church, Syriac Orthodox Church),
- Transnational political and socio-cultural diasporic organisations (Assyrian Confederation of Europe with the Assyrian Federation of the Netherlands branch), (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Assyrian Democratic Organisation, and NGOs).

Recently, there has been growing research on the role of quasi-governmental institutions, mainly religious organisations, in collecting remittances. Recent studies have focused on “sacred remittances” based on the experiences of Copts, the African Church, the Catholic Church, etc. (Brienkenhorff 2017, Adogame 2013, Fitzgerald 2018). Adogame (2013) finds that the moral economy produced by sacral remittances to the African Church creates transnational cohesion and purity in the community. Adogame (2013) demonstrates this with the example of African Churches where remittances given to the Church have a transnational impact in Europe and North America, and can promote urban development in Lagos, Nigeria. Research on significant contributions to the role of religious institutions as non-state agents is offered by Brienkerhorff (2017) with her research on the Coptic Church and their remitting potential. She offers the concept of the “multi-polar diaspora engagement” of the Coptic Church as an alternative to a state-centric approach. The activities of the Coptic Church are referred to as the de facto public service providers to Coptic communities in Egypt. An important advantage of religious institutions like the Coptic Church is that it has a decentralised character. For such organisations, the role of actors like religious authorities is more important than policies, which can significantly contribute to the decision of the diaspora to remit and for non-Church-based charities to work with the Church.

Both Armenian and Assyrian communities rely extensively on the transnational networks and organisational capacities of churches. Other quasi-governmental transnational institutions that function in the communities are political parties and transnational socio-cultural organisations. The targets of their diaspora activities are mainly their own organisational members, as well as semi-formal cultural, business, Church, and parent networks, as discussed in Chapter 5.

At the quasi-governmental level, shown in the figure below and discussed later in the chapter, both communities show similar “vehicles of communication” between diaspora and the homeland.

*Figure 6: Quasi-governmental remittances*



### ***Assyrian Community***

The Syriac Orthodox Church serves as a spokesman for Christian minorities in the Middle East (including Assyrian and Aramean identifying people) and has transnational connections both in the homeland and diasporic communities worldwide. Due to its large support among the Assyrian community, the Church serves not only as a religious institution and defender of the rights of the Syriac people in the homeland, but as one of the largest transnational organisations responsible for collective remittances as well.

Church activities are directed to Christian (Syriac Orthodox) populations and not only to Assyrian populated areas of Turkey, Iraq and Syria. The Church provides relief and humanitarian support to war-affected Christians, including food, medicine, clothes, and other necessities.

*“As a church, we are only concerned about those who are there. We collect money and send needy and poor either directly or through sister churches or government. We try to support philanthropically projects to the community but politically we don’t do that”. (Bishop, Syriac Orthodox Church)*

*“We are not pro or against Assad. We are concerned about those people who are affected by the conflict and we look for ways to help these people. For example, we have charitable organisations, we collect money, they spend it on food, protection, education. There are also certain projects to help people find jobs like having a bakery, having a mini ambulance for the medical purposes for the education of the schoolchildren, renovation of the houses”. (Bishop, Syriac Orthodox Church)*

Parallel to these short-term humanitarian activities, the Church participates in long-term rehabilitation programs of displaced people that are organised by global networks of the Syriac-Orthodox Churches:

*“Recently we decided to build a new monastery in Lebanon that will also have an orphanage for children affected by war. The patriarchy initiated this, so we send money from here.” (Priest, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Diaspora organisations face continuous barriers to deliver assistance in Iraq and Syria due to the ongoing conflict. According to interviews, the Church is the only institution that has access to Syria during the war. The Turkish part of "Assyria" plays the role of mediator for financial transfers since collected donations are transported by a trustworthy person to Turkey and then to Syria crossing the border. The Syriac Orthodox Church not only transfers collected money by the Church but also delivers donations from other organisations. As the representative of a charity organisation explained, there have been difficulties reaching Syria, and the Church had a crucial role in delivering the aid:

*“Transfer of money to Iraq and Turkey is not a problem. Syria is the problem. I know that the bishop had a huge problem to transfer money. Later on, he had the permission from the Dutch government, because it was a huge amount of money that they gave to people of Damascus. Another way to transfer money is to go to Turkey, so that someone from Syria can come to Turkey and take the money”. (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*



*“We have also donated money through Syriac Orthodox Church to Damascus and we have asked if they send it to the Qamishli<sup>13</sup>, Al Hasakah<sup>14</sup> so that our people can spend on their daily life without having any trouble”. (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

The activities of the Dutch Syriac Orthodox Church have a networked nature; they work in close cooperation with other dioceses and non-Church-related NGOs. One of these NGOs is “A Demand for Action,” a Swedish organisation that advocates for the protection of Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac Christians and other minorities in the Middle East. The project is reportedly supported by the Syriac Orthodox Church and helped open the Mor Afrem Health Care Centre in Beirut, Lebanon. The centre serves mainly Christian refugees and displaced persons.

Donations through the Church are mostly collected during Sunday masses, Church ceremonies, and through individual philanthropists. Observations show that the amount of money donated is often discussed among the community. As one of the interviewees proudly noted: *“when you come to our church you would never hear the noise of coins when collecting money because mostly people give bigger money.”* Interviews and observations demonstrate that mass ceremonies and face-to-face money collection in public places and within the community have a strong element of “positioning” and “keeping the pride” of a community member as a “good diasporic” person in front of other members of the community.

Just like in the case of state-initiated remittances, the legitimacy of the call to remit from quasi-governmental structures can also be a matter of conflicting opinion within the diaspora. Assyrians that are actively engaged in the political struggle and nation-building activities are more critical of the role of the Church and the donations that go through the Church to their homeland. The majority of interviewees have mentioned that the Church has “unconditional trust” among the older generation. Therefore, they are ready to donate immediately for any reason if the Church calls for it:

*“My mother donates for every reason. For example, once she said that she heard that you have to donate a euro for each of your bone. Next day she donated 270 euros, because she believed it will save her soul.” (Mariam, Dutch-Assyrian)*

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<sup>13</sup> Qamishli is a city in Syria.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Hasakah is a city in Syria.

A criticism of the Church is related to its avoidance of using the term “Assyrian” so that it does not cause conflict with other followers of the Syriac Church, namely the “Aramean”-identifying population. Consequently, the Church avoids taking any political positions or directing remittances for causes that can be viewed as unpopular by a portion of its followers. This is a matter of concern for the representatives of the political wing of the Assyrian community, since they are focused mostly on the protection of Assyrian people in Iraq and Syria through political lobbying and support for the soldiers of the Assyrian Army in Iraq (the Nineveh Plain Protection Units). The members of Assyrian transnational political organisations are engaged in donations that provide funding to the Nineveh Plain Protection Units (NPU). This initiative was formed in late 2014 in Iraq to defend the Nineveh Plain (a region where Assyrians in Iraq have traditionally been concentrated) from the Islamic State. The international platform for donations calls Assyrians worldwide to help fund the training, arming, and deployment of the NPU. Donations are directed to the families of soldiers fighting ISIS so that they can sustain themselves. The financial support comes mostly from Assyrians in the US and Europe. A few Assyrians interviewed also noted that they contribute to the donation efforts:

*“Now we are establishing a huge army. I send money to one soldier. I pay the amount that a soldier needs per month. My brother does the same, so we pay for two soldiers in Iraq. Someone else pays for a family of a general in Iraq.” (Nineveh, Dutch-Assyrian)*

*“We are not buying guns for our soldiers to fight. Our donations are for the families of soldiers, because from Iraqi State they earn only 100 dollars; how can a family live with this money?” (Somar, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Some of the interviewees raised concerns regarding the credibility of the funding initiatives directed towards the armed forces, stating that do not know where the money goes, who it serves, or what kind of impact it has on the community in the homeland. The lack of feedback or connection from the homeland also generates hesitation towards donating in the diaspora to remit because people do not know what kind of effect remittances have on conflict situations. They explained that in the diaspora they have the freedom to invest in a cause they find useful, but in the homeland those donations may cause additional troubles for Assyrians. Nahrin, an Assyrian woman, said that she stopped remitting for this reason because her recent trip to Iraq has changed her perception:

*“The first question that we should ask is what people in the homeland want ... I used to believe that yes we should fight for the autonomy in the homeland, we shouldn’t depend on Kurds, we should be independent. For that we need weapons. But then in 2013, I went to Iraq and people said to me “you speak so easy about this subject, who says we want to stay here. You are there, you are safe, and then because you are shouting there in Europe we are being eaten by Kurds and Arabs”. By shouting here let them have their own space, weapons, Nineveh Plain, we put them in danger. I don’t know how we should help them. If we send them money I don’t know where this money will go, if we go to Brussels and ask for weapons then you don’t know what will happen with people there”. (Mariam, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Another significant aspect of Assyrian transnational engagement is the establishment of humanitarian support to people in their homeland (Syria and Iraq). This initiative generates less hesitation among the Syriac/Assyrian population than remittances for political causes. An example of a project that won large diasporic support was “A Christmas Gift for Nineveh”. This project targeted Assyrian children in Northern Iraq, and the initiator of the project noted that:

*“Young and old have been traumatised because of the horrible events in the past years. The Christian Assyrians have been a continuous target of political groups and extremists. This has caused many families leave their homes to a safer place. I do hope that we, from Holland and the rest of the world, can offer these people a special Christmas greeting by sending them a gift!” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Other well-established Assyrian communities abroad, mostly in Sweden and the US, form the majority of the initiatives that Dutch-Assyrians contribute to. This is explained by the fact that there are only a few organisations in the Netherlands, and they are not interested in organising large-scale donations. Another reason for joining transnational initiatives is what is called the “well-networked” nature of the Assyrian diaspora. As one of the core members explained, the European diaspora represents just a territorial unit of the Assyrian nation and “European borders do not play much role for Assyrian diaspora”. This is explained not only by organisational links but by individual kinship and friendship links with the communities in Sweden, Belgium, Germany, the USA and elsewhere as well. An Assyrian interviewee explained that “there is no big secret how we are networked; a friend of mine from Sweden can send me a WhatsApp message saying that there is this cause, do you want to donate?”

Representatives of the Dutch Assyrian community cooperate with organisations in Sweden, Germany and the US. For example, some interviewed Dutch- Assyrians participate in

donations organised by the Swedish organisation “Assyrians without Borders,” which works to improve the lives of the Assyrian people in their countries of origin (Syria, Iraq, Turkey). It has a number of projects, varying from long-term development initiatives to emergency response. Projects provide support to Assyrians in emergency situations, and scholarships to Assyrian students who conduct research related to Assyrian history and identity.

Organisations are also connected to the NGOs functioning in Iraq and Syria to deliver help based on the demands of beneficiaries. One of the organisations reported to be connected to the Dutch Assyrian diaspora is Hammurabbi NGO. This organisation aims to defend the rights and basic human freedoms of religious and cultural minorities such as Assyrians, Yezidis, and Kurds. The activities of the organisation vary from supporting universities, providing relief and humanitarian support, housing services, and defending the rights of minorities.

*“So, if anyone needs money for a lawyer or someone is in prison because of being Assyrian, we provide them support. For example, they may blame a person for land issue. Kurds take lands and say that they are going to build a house there and an old lady says: “No but this is my land” and then they beat her. We are supporting those people.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Dutch-Assyrian charity activities are directed not only towards the homeland, but to communities worldwide. The “Assyrian Universal Alliance” organisation dominates as a transnational charity. The representative of the “Assyrian Universal Alliance” in the Netherlands explained that the organisation works as a global network of Assyrians whose aim is to preserve the Assyrian nation. The union also supports other Assyrian communities in need. Examples of their activities include constructing schools and providing transportation for schoolchildren in Assyrian-populated villages in Armenia and Georgia.

This examination of quasi-governmental organisations shows that the Assyrian diaspora is not limited to quasi-governmental organisations operating in their country of immediate residence, but works within a wider diasporic spectrum across state lines.

### ***Armenian Community***

Unlike the Assyrian Church, the Armenian Church works very closely with the Armenian state, and there are no disagreements about engagement strategies and the naming of the target group as “Armenian” vis-a-vis the followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The Church was one

of the first organisations that responded to the Four Day War that took place between Armenia / Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan in 2016<sup>15</sup>. The Church initiated collective fundraising activities among the Armenian community. The money collected was transferred to the governing body of the Armenian Apostolic Church and later on to the state of Nagorno-Karabakh. This was the main collective donation effort organised by the Dutch-Armenian community in collaboration with the state. The involvement of the Armenian Church in the protection of the homeland is explained the following way:

*“Of course, our primary mission is the salvation of the human soul, but we should not forget that we are Armenian Church. We will always stand for Armenia and for the protection of our homeland. Therefore, with the help of Dutch-Armenians we will support our homeland with whatever we can.” (Priest, Dutch-Armenian)*

The Church delivered collected donations via informal and formal channels. Half of the donations were transferred to bank accounts provided by the state, with the collected money first transferred to the governing body of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and later on to the state of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the other half of the collected money went directly through trustworthy people to target recipients. An alternative explanation of prioritising unofficial channels is that they are perceived as efficient and easier to manage.

*“Many people were eager to participate and send help to Armenia after the war in April. We knew that one of our people was going to Armenia, so we decided to send money with her... as much as we could gather at that moment. We haven’t collaborated with any organisation or fund. We had a certain person who knew certain people that have suffered during the war. So, we gave the gathered money to these people. They were mainly the families of fallen soldiers”. (Gohar, Dutch-Armenian)*

As in the case of the Assyrian quasi-governmental structures, the remittances go not only to the perceived homeland but to the “unknown communities” as well. This is mediated by the diasporic networks and transnational diasporic organisations. The heterogeneity of the Armenian community and “sub-ethnic” differences based on the countries Armenians migrated

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<sup>15</sup> The Four Day War or April War began along the Nagorno-Karabakh line of contact on 1 April 2016 with the Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army, backed by the Armenian Armed Forces, on one side and the Azerbaijani Armed Forces on the other. The clashes occurred in the unrecognised Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). The clashes have been defined as "the worst" since the 1994 ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

from is reflected in remittance mobilization practices as well. The Armenian diaspora in the Netherlands wasn't indifferent to the crisis in Syria, since a part of the Armenian community is comprised of Syrian-Armenians. Although Syrian-Armenians self-identify as Armenian, they refer to Syria as their "second homeland" and feel responsible for its future. Oftentimes during informal talks, participants noted that they should raise money not only for the motherland (Armenia) but the fatherland (Syria) as well. The Dutch-Armenian Church mediated charity activities in support of war-affected places and populations in Aleppo, Syria. For this purpose, the patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Syria visited Armenian Churches in Amsterdam, Maastricht and Almelo to inform the diaspora about the situation in Syria as well as to embark on a fundraising campaign. Organisation representatives have stated that this initiative was enthusiastically supported by Armenians that migrated from Syria.

*"A few months ago, a patriarch came from Aleppo, he was collecting money for reconstructing Armenian Churches. Aleppo has suffered a lot because of war. We organised a gathering in the Church and collected some money. I think within one day we collected almost 15000 EUR." (Hovig, Dutch-Armenian)*

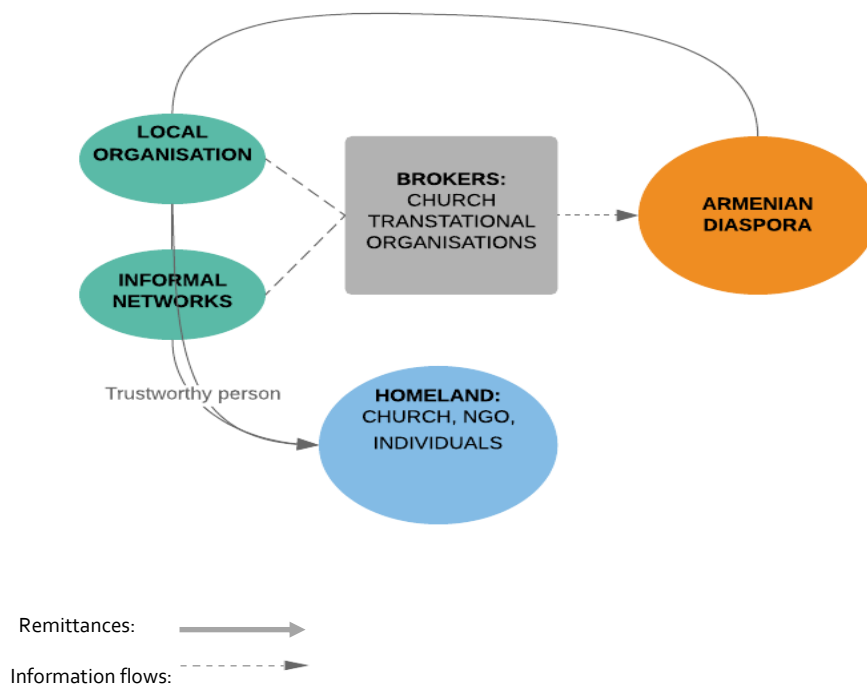
Another quasi-governmental socio-cultural organisation that was closely connected to Syria tried to spread the call to support the Syrian–Armenian community in Aleppo. However, as Armenian interviewees stated, the call has not been widely shared among the community and therefore many people were unaware of it.

### 7.3 REMITTANCES FROM BELOW

The following part of the chapter refers to remittances that are generated by migrants at the local community level; it encompasses formal local organisations and informal networks. Unlike quasi-governmental organisations, these organisations are not part of the networked diasporic organisations and do not have the goal of affecting diasporic agendas, nor are directly affected by them. Formal organisations refer to registered organisations that function at the local community level and shape the diasporic life of the community as registered charity or socio-cultural organisation. Informal organisations are non-registered charity organisations, as well as networks of relatives and neighbours that work together to help people in need in their homeland. Trust, connectedness, reputation, and social accountability are at the basis of non-

official philanthropic practices. Founders and participants of these networks include "non-elite" diaspora Armenians and Assyrians who are not affiliated with official diaspora institutions; therefore, their activities remain unnoticed.

Figure 7: Remittances from Bellow



## Assyrian Community

A comparison of Armenian and Assyrian organisational structures shows that Assyrians are less active in initiating activities at the local level. There are only two socio-cultural organisations in the Netherlands. These organisations are not active in initiating remittance activities. The main reason articulated is that the Assyrian diaspora does not have a coordinating body, and consequently, there is no agreement or ideology towards what they should invest in:

*“Ok, we have to build a militia; we have to have army. But, first, we have to think what our political goal is, and who our friends are. Who are the friends of Assyrians and other Christian minorities in the Middle East? Are they the Arabs, the Jews or maybe the Turks? It is not simple, the politics has changed a lot, so before building militia we*

*have to understand for what we fight, for what kind of future in Syria or in Turkey we are fighting for.” (Somar, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Another explanation for being inactive is that people already have families with them in the diaspora, or have links with families they want to give money to. Consequently, they are not keen on participating in or initiating activities at the collective level:

*“You never know where money goes if it is something you can’t see, and you can’t follow. I would rather do it by myself, I rather save some money and go to the people that are really in need.” (David, Dutch-Assyrian)*

The organisation “Help Christians in Syria” worked actively on fundraising in support of Christians in Syria. Given the continuous violations of human rights and combined with the minimal help provided by international organisations in Syria and Iraq to Christian minorities, the demand for humanitarian support has greatly increased. The organisation selected the Netherlands as a target for collecting donations and have organised events to raise awareness about the situation in the Middle East. They organised interviews with Assyrians in Syria on Dutch TV and radio, webinars, and used social media to establish contacts with the Protestant and Catholic Churches to reach people beyond their own ethnic networks. To grab wider public attention, the organisation did not use the term “Assyrians” but “Christians in the Middles East,” so that it was more recognisable for the Dutch general public.

*“We thought that if people in need are not followers of the Syriac Orthodox Church, they would not get any help. Therefore, we created humanitarian organisation that collects money for all Christians. And, basically, all Christians in the Middle East have Assyrian origins.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Fundraising was only organised once, and organisation activities are not continuous or ongoing, with the reasoning that collecting money from the Dutch people is time-consuming and requires long preparation. Additionally, these kinds of initiatives are very dependent on news cycles:

*“If for one day BBC doesn’t report about violation of human rights on media, you can’t ask people to donate. But if today all headlines say that ISIS has attacked Christian populated areas, people react more actively.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

### **Armenian community**

More activities focused on collecting remittances at the local level were identified in the Armenian community mainly due to conflict escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2016.



According to representatives of these organisations, as soon as they had information on conflict, they mobilised their members to discuss how they could support the homeland. They stated that “a considerable amount of money” was transferred to border communities and families of deployed and fallen soldiers. Notably, there was no cooperation between local organisations to deliver the gathered money. Each organisation found its own channels and trustworthy people to deliver the donations:

*“There was a person that was planning to travel to Armenia, so in one day we said, “Ok, we will collect money, everyone can contribute as much as they can.” We didn’t collaborate with any other organisation. We knew a person who was informed about those people that were affected during the war and were ignored by the state. We collected and delivered our donations to specific people.” (Gohar, Dutch-Armenian)*

Their intention was to provide the collected money to the communities that they deemed as being the neediest. For example, one organisation provided financial support to the village that had suffered the most due to the war, another donated funds to buy equipment to strengthen the line of defence for a village directly bordering Azerbaijan, and yet another organisation found it important to financially support the families of fallen soldiers.

Besides socio-cultural local organisations, there are also charity organisations at play. Interestingly, one of the most active organisations was founded after the escalation conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. After the conflict ended, the diaspora mobilised and extended the scope of its activities to opening official organisations and providing aid on a more regular basis. Those who migrated from Armenia and were first-generation migrants were those primarily interested in remitting collectively, and were mostly the migrants who never reacted to state-initiatives to remit. Many of them stated that everyone has family living in Armenia and they constantly provide help, but the will to collectively remit rose after the escalation of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The woman who initiated the activities explained the need for organising in the following way:

*“Before the April war I never thought of it but after the war I felt that I want to do something. I spoke with existing organisation here, we organised some events, collected money and bought warm clothes for soldiers. I personally took it to Armenia, spoke to the commander of a military unit. I liked the commander very much, he was a very good person. I personally climbed the mountains and met the soldiers in the trenches. When I returned, I thought I needed to continue as I saw what's happening there. For example, the commander gave me the address of a family. A woman’s father and brother died*

*during the first war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and now the husband died, too. She is staying in the house of one of her three children and can rely on no one's help. I thought I should continue this job and open a formal organisation for that.” (Heghine, Dutch-Armenian)*

It must be noted that similar to the Assyrian case, Heghine's organisation lacks the financial capacities to realise initiated projects. Therefore, the organisation tried to engage Dutch NGOs that provide support to developing countries, and members tried to engage Dutch people by using personal contacts such as friends and acquaintances. Members of this organisation participated in Protestant Church events by preparing and selling homemade sweets to gather additional funds that aren't covered with resources from their co-ethnics:

*“We collect amounts needed penny by penny. ... it is hard, but we must collect the needed money. We have a goal to reach: a 300-meter-long 5-story building in Tavush<sup>16</sup>, the roof of which must be renovated. There are 25 families there. We now keep these 12 families until we resolve this issue. I hope we can get this money through Dutch sources.” (Valia, Dutch-Armenian)*

The organisation avoids giving collected money directly to families in need and prefers investing in more small-scale development projects:

*“There is a family that says if I give this money, I will open a store. Another is a disabled woman, a freedom fighter, two legs cut off, her name is Shushan, and she cannot use the bathroom. She asked us to repair the bathroom. Another person that needed help was a 13-year-old child from Vanadzor<sup>17</sup> who is paralysed, cannot get out of the house. Different, different issues ... There was a family with husband killed, the wife applied for housing in Karabakh, she is waiting for their answer. We decided to collect money as soon as she gets home and buy things for their home. We send help, but giving money is not acceptable. I have to make sure that when people give money they know, and they see where the money is spent.” (Heghine, Dutch-Armenian)*

**Non-official collective remittance** practices that are made up of networks of neighbours, friends, acquaintances, and at times even transcend co-ethnics, are an essential part of diasporic remittance practices. This type of remittance has not been studied substantially as most studies are concerned with organisations and state-initiated remittance activities. Additionally, unofficial networks can be identified only in the case of close qualitative examinations of

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<sup>16</sup> Region in Armenia

<sup>17</sup> City in Armenia

community life. Though they provide small-scale support, these organisations are an important means of understanding how and why people establish or follow already-established informal networks and why they avoid formal organisations to reach their homeland and beyond. The founders and participants of these networks are referred to as the silent, non-elite or ordinary members of the diaspora: a larger pool of people who are generally uninvolved in diasporic affairs but who may mobilise in times of crises (Shain and Barth; 2003). A closer examination of the Armenian community in the Netherlands identified a non-official organisation that was initiated by three friends who decided to donate on a monthly basis to one family in need in Armenia. Later on, they widened the network since more people joined. The network is mainly composed of their acquaintances:

*“Last October when I went to Armenia I took with me all brand new clothes for three families from rural areas, they were very poor families, I took clothes and money for fourteen kids. My friend Valia took the clothes of her kids, someone else took the clothes of her grandchildren, all new clothes. My grandchild took his coat and told me: Grandma please take it to that kid. This is how everything started!” (Shushan, Dutch-Armenian)*

*“We have always thought of helping people somehow. The idea was to put a small amount of money but gather as many people as we can so that the collected money is considerable. We decided to help those people with whom we have no connections, they are not our relatives or acquaintances. We thought that if someone has a relative abroad then they will help somehow. In the beginning, there were three of us, now we are 33.” (Lucy, Dutch-Armenian)*

The activities of these unofficial networks occur regularly. Once a month, the women that form the network gather at someone's home, have dinner together, and use that occasion to decide the amount of money to be gathered and the beneficiaries. Observations show that the events are accompanied by long talks about news in Armenia, strong criticism of the government, and the need for the diaspora to help people in the homeland. *“How can we ignore these people, how they could live in these conditions, how come no one gives them support?”* These are common expressions that women use when considering cases of potential beneficiaries. The ties between organisers and beneficiaries evolve into friendships as they closely follow the lives of the beneficiaries. In those cases, the lines between private and collective remittances become more blurred.

*“Once we helped a girl and gave her 300 EUR, but then we thought what was next. She will buy a thing or two and the money will be gone. So, we decided better if we invest it in her education, then it will ensure income for their family. Also, people will know that what they do is going somewhere useful. We found a hairdressing course for her. Paid for everything even for the taxi. We are constantly in touch with her teacher to see if she is progressing. We are very happy the teacher said that everything is going well and finding a job won’t be a problem for her.” (Shushan, Dutch-Armenian)*

Remittance initiatives from below are a subject of criticism as well. A representative of the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia in the Netherlands stated that these initiatives do not evaluate the needs of the homeland and target groups based on their impressions from social media or untrustworthy news reports. She was concerned that these initiatives weaken the potential of the diaspora, since donations can have more positive outcomes if they are mobilised and coordinated:

*“I am warning everyone that they should be careful. Let me give you a specific example: an individual contacted the Embassy and said that some old computers of a state institution here in the Netherlands were out of use and he wanted to send them to Armenia.... I’m telling everyone that if you want to help, with the cost of transporting those computers all the way from the Netherlands to Armenia, it is better to buy computers in Armenia. By doing so, first, you would be sure that the technique is safely delivered and, second, you would help some local Armenian businessmen. That is to say, rather than trying to bring a waste to our country, they could do it in a more organised way, so that later on they wouldn’t think what to do with this outdated technology. I don’t know how else to explain this to people.” (Representative of the Armenian Embassy in the Netherlands)*

Another interviewee raised her concerns about the efficiency of the “unorganised” transfers:

*“Sometimes we witness a sudden enthusiasm to gather used clothes and send it to Armenia. We repeatedly tell them: instead of wasting money on shipping, buy it on the spot. First of all, there is a big psychological issue when you give someone’s used clothes to someone else. It is better to give less clothes but with quality. In such matters you should clearly understand what is right, what is wrong, and how to do not only to provide demonstrative support, but also to achieve your target goal without harming or offending anyone.” (Levon, Dutch- Armenian)*

Another form of unofficial organisation of collective remittances was observed in the Assyrian community: a network of friends or relatives select a family in need with whom they are connected with through family or neighbouring ties to provide financial support. This form

of organisation has an ad-hoc character and is less regulated than Armenian unofficial networks; this type of support is initiated and organised based on “talks over a cup of coffee.” This can be considered an in-between category of individual and collective remittances, since this form of support goes to people with whom the donors are connected personally. Nysra, a 50-year-old woman who fled Syria three years ago, told me about her neighbours who could not leave the country and were forced to live in inhumane conditions without water, gas, or electricity. Therefore, Nysra, along with her Assyrian neighbours in the Netherlands, collected and found a way to deliver money to her neighbours. Aram, a young man who was born in the Netherlands and still had some relatives in Syria, described this organisational form as a common practice:

*“If we hear that somebody is very sick in Syria or in need we try to fix it. For example, a relative of my neighbour was very sick, thus with the neighbours here we gathered money to help them. That’s something that everyone does.” (Aram, Dutch-Assyrian)*

They primarily provide primarily to families who live in disadvantaged conditions and do not have a family member abroad that can support them in their time of need.

#### **7.4 BROKERS/ INTERMEDIARIES OF THE REMITTANCES**

Research shows that trust and intervention of trustworthy people are important for both communities, and these can be a major deciding factor in deciding to donate. Social trust is critical when providing help through diaspora networks. Trust and informal channels are important elements for reaching and facilitating successful collaboration of diasporas with regions in conflict and fragile states (Brown et al. 2007; Emerson et al. 2012; Romzek et al. 2012). Trust can improve information-sharing, reduce transaction costs, improve cooperation, reduce uncertainty, and facilitate innovation and unofficial social accountability mechanisms (Klijn et al. 2010; Romzek et al. 2012, Abdel-Samad, Flamingan; 2018). The reputation of people working for diaspora organisations and the connections between people that are in charge of money transfers can have an important influence on the amount of remittances that flow as well as on the group of people that choose to remit. This is relevant for both unofficial and official philanthropic activities. When an Assyrian person makes a decision about donating

money or spreading information about existing initiatives for collective remittances, they make sure that they know a “trustworthy” person in Iraq who is in charge of charity activities and who is well aware of the situation on the ground. Moreover, community leaders sometimes organise trips to conflict areas in order to “check” the trustworthiness of people. Similarly, in the Armenian community, support for small-scale charities where people are known personally generates more support. Research reveals that trustworthy people can be grouped based on these categories:

- **Trust based on affiliation or “moral authorities”:**

People who are leaders of organisations, such as well-known religious leaders, become important mediators for collecting aid and are typically active in the community. The “trusted people” not only initiate but also mediate remittances by sharing information about existing remittance activities. The leaders of communities or diasporic organisations also reach out to their personal contacts and use their personal authority for asking them to join initiatives:

*“I personally contacted my friends and told them they have to help, not “Can you help?” This is the time when you have to show your will.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

This level of trust is based mostly on the organisation itself, and not individual sympathy. For example, while community priests may change, respect and belief towards the church remain. This situation can be observed at the end of Sunday mass. The necessity for the mobilization of the diaspora’s financial potential is communicated to the priest in advance of the mass, and at the end of the ceremony he announces that there is a cause that needs the diaspora’s support. The donations are then collected on the spot, or given to the Church at a later time.

- **Trust to “non-core” members based on their connectedness to the homeland:**

Under this category, I refer to people who are typically silent members of the diaspora and are not active in organising local diasporic life. However, they have the reputation of being “modest” or “intellectual” people. They have their own networks of people whom they mobilise to collect remittances. For example, diaspora language school teachers may organise meetings with parents to explain and convince them about the need for remittances. Trust in this case is mainly constructed around the individual teacher. Despite the existence of accountability

mechanisms, interviews from both communities revealed that the role of the person who is in charge of collecting money remains central.

*“The organisation should be trustworthy so that it won’t matter whether I am in the group or someone else. But for now, it is all based on personal trust, they trust me they give money. Whoever doesn’t know me, they won’t give money no matter what story I present.” (Organisation leade, Dutch-Armenian)*

These people connect diasporic remittances to the homeland since they are well aware of the situation and have personal contacts who can deliver help. Connectedness can also encompass not only direct connections, but chain connections as well: they know a person that knows a person that needs money. These networks are important both when delivering help to places difficult to reach, like in Syria or in Iraq, and in cases of finding beneficiaries.

*“Sometimes someone dies, and people say they want to support people in Iraq on behalf of him or her. And then we serve as a bridge between them and that way we receive money. Sometimes Dutch people, Christians collect money and they say ok we want to support people here and there, and we serve as a bridge between them.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

As proof of connectedness, they may organise trips to the homeland that serve as a means of gaining the trust of the community:

*“We went to the South East Turkey and we have seen a lot of people migrating to the South East of Turkey, from there to Istanbul and eventually to Europe. So we spoke to a lot of migrants from Syria and we asked how we could help them to understand how to direct our support efficiently.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

An alternative to “homecoming trips” can be using social media to identify beneficiaries. The mediator in these cases is usually an NGO or Facebook group that posts about families in need. However, personal connections serve as a tool for verifying provided information:

*“There is an NGO that helps families living near border areas. We know them from Facebook. So, they write posts about families in need on Facebook. We check and decide whom to help and how to help. We also give them money, we trust them. Maybe I wouldn’t give that money to my relative, but I would give it to them, we don’t give money to random people.” (Heghine, Dutch-Armenian)*

- **Trust to unknown people:**

Research shows that trustworthiness may not always require a background check when it comes to “sacral remittances” directed to the Church, or to people that remind of core identity grounds (for example, participants of war). An example of this was when a participant of an Armenian-Azerbaijani war visited the Netherlands, presented his veteran's certificates, awards, and pictures with prominent people, and collected money from European communities to support families of war participants:

*“A year ago, a man who fought for Nagorno-Karabakh, he showed us pictures of freedom fighters, their families, explained why he came... told us about the difficulties they encounter. We helped him with pleasure. That night we made small donations. When he went back to Armenia he sent us photos to show how they used the money...”*  
(Priest, Dutch-Armenian)

There were no formal mechanisms to check the affiliation of the person or whether he actually participated in the war; however, as the interviewed people claimed, *“they have proved their trustworthiness with their biography.”* Another example was a case of an Armenian priest from Syria who visited Armenian Churches in the Netherlands and other communities in Europe to collect money in support of war-affected places and populations in Aleppo.

This assumption was also observed during social events centred around raising money for soldiers. This further demonstrated that communities raising money are not demanding proof of credentials. The event raised money by selling handmade postcards for families of soldiers. Participant events would approach those selling postcards to ask why they were doing so. An interviewee who was volunteering for this event explained that the donation was organised for those who are in the army and their families. Reactions included statements such as *“Well, if it is for our soldiers, of course I will buy some.”* Additionally, it was observed that people purchased postcards to maintain their reputation in the community. For example, those who purchased cards would ask each other questions such as *“How many did you get? Oh, only two?”* These questions motivated people to buy more.

It should be acknowledged that the boundaries between these categories are fluid and permeable, considering that the distinctions between these groups are subject to change. Interviews highlight that the trust towards a community priest may be both “unconditionally” based on faith and can be based on a priest’s proven connection to the homeland who can safely deliver help to Armenia:



*“I know whom to give the collected money to by interacting with people, either in Yerevan or my village. Last year another priest joined us as well and shared information. He is also from Yerevan and moved to the Netherlands a few years ago. It means that his contacts back in the homeland are also fresh. In general, we try to help people that have health issues, have kids, or young people who need money for education. The help could be also in a form of clothes.” (Priest, Dutch-Armenian)*

These types of remittances are important for people who do not have any personal connections to the homeland. For example, Iraqi- or Iranian-Armenians that have no connections with Armenia and have developed a distrust of state structures are keener on giving money to a person they know.

## 7.5 ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS

The trustworthiness of an organisation or its brokers is confirmed by proving the “acceptable use of money”: controlling mechanisms used by organisations or networks to be accountable towards the diasporic people who remit. Research on accountability mechanisms typically has focused on more formal aspects of accountability (for example, financial audits and reports), while informal social accountability has largely been ignored (Romzek et al. 2012). Recently, Abdel-Sahmad & Flanigan (2018) researched social accountability mechanisms of the Syrian diaspora when providing aid to their homeland. Based on the literature reviewed, they argue that these practices have been missing from the attention of social scientists. They find that informal accountability (for example, trust, reputation, social ties, and informal meetings) in diasporic organisational networks is an important aspect of diasporic aid provisions in fragile or unstable countries.

The Armenian and Assyrian diaspora cases show that accountability mechanisms can vary from more formal mechanisms to informal or social accountability. However, even when having formal accountability mechanisms, the existence of personal ties is crucial for gaining the trust of the community:

*“If you look at the website of the Assyrian Aid Society, they are very clear about donations. We have here 20 volunteers in the Nineveh Plains, that know everybody. I*

*went to them and I told to show me or give me the list of Algush (it is just a village) to see how many people received food packages. And then they gave me the map of Alghush. From there you can see the list where it says that Nara from Algush has received 100 dollars for medical support of her grandmother and the date she received it and her signature on it.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Other, more informal ways of ensuring accountability is disseminating pictures of people who have been provided help, letters of appreciation, receipts, and thank-you messages in the form of short videos. These types of social accountability mechanisms can also be considered “reverse remittances” (Ambrosini, 2015): reverse flows of remittances that can take place in the form of gifts and symbolic objects, such as typical products of their land, photographs of their children, or religious images. This becomes tangible proof of an effective relationship and belonging to the group that does not deteriorate from the distance and length of separation (Ambrosini, 2015). These are mainly observed at the level of “remittances from below.” Observations revealed that the feeling of satisfaction and mutual encouragement plays an important role for continuing collective remittances.

*“For me donations are a way to have my duty done in front of my country. I am tired of drinking toasts for our motherland and say that whenever there is a war I will go to fight while you never know whether they will or no. If I can help a family to construct the roof with my 5-10 euros. Solving a basic household problem for 20-30 people and seeing their happy pictures is a bigger patriotism for me than singing an Assyrian song during some party.” (Somar, Dutch-Assyrian).*

At the level of remittances from below the organisation also provides payment receipts, such as signed documents stating that beneficiaries have received the money. This may not have any necessary legal value; however, it is a mechanism to prove the transparency and trustworthiness of the network.

## **7.6 EVEN POOR COMMUNITIES REMIT**

The current organisational capacity of both communities lacks visible donation capacity. Respondents from both communities find that they do not have huge economic potential, and cannot be considered rich communities that can provide substantial support to their homeland or to a diasporic community in need. The first Assyrians or Armenians that arrived in the

Netherlands were low-skill migrants and found that one or two generations are not enough to develop wealthy philanthropists and a philanthropic culture. Dutch-Armenians compare themselves to the French-Armenian and American-Armenian communities and believe those are examples of well-established communities with the reasoning that these communities have existed for almost a century and had more time to develop stable economic grounds. Dutch-Assyrians find that Swedish-Assyrian and American-Assyrian communities are well-established as well since they are bigger, more organised, and have more influence (politically and economically) on people among them. Both communities' representatives underlined that they have new migrants who have received refugee status recently and are still trying to settle in the Netherlands, and expecting philanthropic activities from them is a mistake:

*“Let me give you an example: if a person has just graduated from the university and has entered the field of his professional activity recently, then you can't expect him/her to have a great financial investment somewhere else. But someone else who already has a 15-20-year working experience can have a bigger investment. This community is still in the status of a graduate student or a recently-graduated student and, naturally, after 5-10 years, their involvement will increase in parallel with their professional abilities and financial capacities.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

*“We don't have very rich people, the most of them are the middle class, we have a small percentage that earn a lot of money. In Sweden the group is very big, they have a lot of money.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Representatives of both diasporas' organisations believed that there should be more efforts to mobilise and attract “promising” people so that they use their skills for the benefit of these two communities and the homeland. Organisation members state that they are currently trying to involve “simple” people and, as ask that they “contribute with whatever they can”:

*“We were always feeling that we need to help somehow our people. We do not have a lot of money. But we decided to put a small amount of money and convince also other people to help us. We thought that if we could help even one person that would be already something important.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

Most of the respondents find that their communities have human capital that has not been “used yet” since there are people with academic backgrounds in medicine, business, and politics in both communities who can use their expertise to further the causes of their people. Both communities' representatives believe that these may be future fields where diaspora communities can actively harness their members' potential. In this respect, Armenians find that

the state should initiate and try to motivate young people to use their academic backgrounds for the benefit of their homeland. The Assyrians find that the stabilisation of the situation in their homeland would make this type of engagement possible in the future.

## 7.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter unpacked the collective remittance practices of the Assyrian and Armenian diaspora in the Netherlands by aggregating them at three levels of analysis: state-driven initiatives, quasi-governmental initiatives, and initiatives from below. This analysis responds to the recent call in migration and diaspora scholarship to broaden the scope of diaspora analysis beyond sending states themselves and include other political actors and semi-governmental institutions (Gamlen, 2014, Kainova 2017). Remittances can reveal extensive information about intra-diasporic dynamics, diasporic networks, and diaspora-state cooperation channels. Closer examination of collective remittance practices highlights several novel findings, such as the central role of trust in collective remittances, reverse remittances applied to collective remittances, remittance practices that can be referred to as an *“in-between category” between individual and collective remittance*, and evidence that not only well-established, but poor communities of refugees as well try in some way to collect and send material support to their co-ethnics.

Research shows that despite the existence or absence of state-initiatives, a diaspora has its own preferences on how to engage and for which causes to remit. A state-driven level of analysis reveals that the existence of state structures doesn't necessarily lead to the mobilization of the diaspora. Armenians in Armenia have more direct links to the homeland than Armenians that migrated from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and other countries. The latter form their relationships with the homeland based on sources they believe to be reliable, such as media, transnational organisations, and interactions with Armenians from Armenia. These narratives have contributed significantly to the formation of distrust among other members of the diaspora. Hence, one of the main challenges today is the establishment of a reliable and accessible connection to all the layers of diaspora.

Non-official remitting practices that are made up of neighbors, friends, acquaintances, and at times even transcend ethnic networks are an essential part of current Armenian and Assyrian diasporas. The role of brokers is crucial for both communities: people that are able to create and maintain trust relations between donors and beneficiaries, and are trusted to be reliable transfer agents. This is more evident at the level of quasi-governmental initiatives and initiatives from below. Trust and reputation largely rely on social accountability mechanisms. Social accountability mechanisms can include photos of beneficiaries, letters of appreciation, “thank you” messages, receipts of payments, and short videos about the impact of the provided aid.

Analysis at the level of quasi-governmental initiatives reveals that the absence of the state and limited opportunities in the community have led to better functioning Assyrian networks between diasporic communities. The stateless Assyrian diaspora uses the “resources” of other European and US-based Assyrian communities as a donation channel. Networks of diasporic organisations are directly involved in “state-building” activities, such as financing the families of soldiers that are protecting their historic homeland. Lack of organisational capacities and a common vision about their homeland is a constraint for the mobilization of stateless diasporas. These initiatives are supported only by those who are highly politicised and committed to the cause. Less active members of the diaspora hesitate to support, reasoning that the diaspora expressing its opinions is problematic because rigid ideological positions can cause additional trouble and unwanted consequences for their co-ethnics in the homeland in times of crises.

The research reveals that the existence or absence of the state has a role in “positioning” Churches in the two communities. The Armenian Apostolic Church closely cooperates with the state for homeland protection and mediates charity contributions from the Dutch-Armenian community. The Syriac-Orthodox Church stays neutral when it comes to Assyrian protection initiatives for the homeland. Rather, the Syriac-Orthodox Church directs financial resources to humanitarian help. The Syriac-Orthodox Church tries to overcome the fragmentation of the community based on Assyrian/Aramean self-identification, which has caused ideological disagreements on whom to remit to. The Church became the centre of the Syriac (Assyrian/Aramean) community that captures diaspora remittances and encourages diaspora participation in assisting Syriac communities in Syria, Iraq, and Turkey.

In the case of Armenians, the Armenian Apostolic Church plays an important role in the “transnationalisation” of the community, which creates sustained connections between diasporic communities as well as the diaspora and state. The direction of collective financial transfers shows that both communities are far from being homogeneous. Internal diversity in the Armenian community has affected the engagement directions as well. Armenians that have migrated from Syria are interested in provisions of support to “known communities”: Armenian-populated areas of Syria. Assyrian communities also participate in philanthropic activities for their communities worldwide; however, motivation is not based on individual connections or the migration history, but rather for supporting “the unknown community” of their co-ethnics.

At the level of remittances from below, Assyrians rely on a narrow circle of neighbours that I call an *“in-between category” of individual and collective remittance*. The research shows that diaspora engagement practices have the tendency of going beyond ethnic networks. Both the Assyrian and Armenian diaspora try to engage Dutch society in order to overcome the lack of financial resources available within their own community. This goes hand in hand with the thesis of Mavroudi (2017), arguing that despite their strong emotional attachment to the homeland, diasporas can have difficulty in mobilising even in times of crisis. The Armenian diaspora’s experience shows that the diaspora prefers informal and person-to-person transfers of money and goods, even though the Armenian government has initiated pan-diasporic fundraising activities. Unofficial networks are gaining popularity among the Dutch-Armenian community, since these donations seem more trustworthy and efficient.

The existence of unofficial networks that have a self-initiated character and are increasing in popularity in both diasporas counterbalance the state-centric approach that diasporas need to be governed in order to come into existence. Diasporas engage using their own networks, based on the idea of co-responsibility towards their homeland and co-ethnics. This argument shows that diasporas are not only a “practice of power” (Ragazzi, 2009) but a lived experience as well

## CHAPTER 8: OLD AND NEW DIASPORAS: ACTS OF COLLECTIVE CARING

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Syrian nationals are accounting as for one of the largest number of asylum applications (10,296) in the Netherlands (IND, 2017). Syria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, which is reflected among Syrian migrants in the Netherlands. Religious and ethnic minority groups such as Assyrians and Armenians, along with Yezidis, Chaldeans, Maronites, and other groups are included in the larger Syrian migrant group. Dutch-Assyrians and Dutch-Armenians have “received” ethnic Armenians and Assyrians from Syria. This chapter looks at the “established” part of these diasporas and how newly arrived migrants position themselves in regards to their “stateness” when struggling or helping co-ethnics settle in the Netherlands and obtain refugee status. I analyse support and aid that newly arrived Syrian-Armenians and Syrian-Assyrians receive from diasporic organisations and their ethnic networks. I also discuss the main “collective” problems that these two groups have faced: Syrian-Armenians faced deportation as the Armenian government had granted them citizenship based on their ethnicity, while Syrian-Assyrians claimed facing discrimination by Muslim asylum seekers in refugee camps. In the last section, I will discuss whether migrating to the Netherlands is a temporary or a permanent solution for newly-arrived Assyrian and Armenian migrants, as well as the reasoning behind it.

As already discussed in Chapter 1, a considerable body of recent studies have focused on the role of diaspora institutions as non-state actors in justice-seeking activities (Brinkerhorf 2017, Delano, Alonso, and Mylonas 2017). Diasporas are among the actors who can shape, reformulate or even drive these activities, since diaspora members are not only activists, but in some cases victims, witnesses and even perpetrators of mass atrocities as well (Orjuela 2017). However, the role of diaspora institutions in justice and truth-seeking activities was mainly discussed in regard to their homeland and not towards compatriots settling in a new country. Additionally, a different body of migration literature agrees that diaspora institutions and ethnic networks may turn into increasingly visible actors that ease entrance and stay of migrants in a new country (Ambrosini 2017, Wessendorf 2017, Brah 1996, Fortier 2000, Sigona et al. 2015, Wessendorf 2018). Ambrosini (2017) suggested that having a reliable contact in the receiving

society pays more than a high school diploma in irregular migrants' ventures. The role of diasporic institutions is more relevant when discussing the role of supporters and alternative help providers (Ambrosini 2017). Their activities include standardising legal status, provision of services (e.g. health services, language classes), legal advocacy, and moral support (mainly by religious institutions and faith groups). Ambrosini (2017) finds that it is important to mention the political and cultural activity of ethnic networks/organisations juxtaposed the criminalisation of irregular immigrants and in defence of asylum seekers. By adopting a frame mainly focused on victimisation in regards to irregular immigrants, civil society actors often play a role in the cultural struggle on immigration (Ambrosini 2017).

The chapter bridges these pieces of literature and illustrates that shared traumas become important grounds for already established diaspora organisations to be able to cooperate with newly arrived migrants. Using the common narrative of a traumatic past, diasporas position themselves as non-state actors and transnational communities. They emphasise their minority status and bypass their state-connections in order to assist migrants as well as influence home governments to accept or improve the reception conditions of newly arrived migrants.

## **8.1 NEW BUT CONNECTED**

After the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, most of the Syrian-Assyrian and Syrian-Armenian population fled the country and found shelter in Europe, including the Netherlands. Most Armenians and Assyrians in Syria were descendants of the victims of Genocide in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 who found shelter in Syria. The Syrian-Armenian community can be considered an example of the "classical diaspora" that Cohen (2008), Armstrong (1976) referred to when naming Armenians as an "archetypical" case of diaspora. A substantial part of the Armenian diasporic community has maintained its distinct identity over a century by developing several cultural, social, religious, and political institutions. Although the Assyrian case has not been widely discussed in the literature, this community has passed through similar migration paths as the Armenians, which includes fleeing the Genocide in the Ottoman Empire and massacres in Iraq, and finding shelter in Syria. There are also Assyrians that claim to



represent the indigenous population of Mesopotamia (a part of which is considered to be part of current-day Syria), which has been persecuted for centuries.

*“For the Assyrians emigration is not a new phenomenon. In the Middle East Assyrians have been subject to frequent massacres for centuries. For this reason, the Assyrian people have been in constant trouble for the last two thousand years, waiting for the very first opportunity of having their passports in their pockets. They already know well that a living space will not be given them in this unstable and disturbing region.”* (Basma, Syrian-Assyrian)

As Christians in the Middle East, Assyrians and Armenians regard themselves as being ethnically and linguistically distinct from the Arab population with whom they share a long historical and geographic affinity. They have their own schools, as well as social, cultural, and religious organisations in Syria that functioned strictly at the civic society level. It is estimated that almost 100,000 Armenians lived in Syria before the war. All Armenian unions and dioceses used to have their own infrastructure or branches in all regions of Syria where there were Armenians: Aleppo, Damascus, Kessab, Kamishli, Latakia, and Homs. The Assyrian people were mainly located in the northeast of Syria. Close to 30,000 Assyrians used to live in Syria. Assyrians had schools, cultural and social organisations, and churches in Syria, of which most are now destroyed. All newly arrived Assyrians and Armenians stated that they were members of social, cultural, or religious organisations. Affiliation to diaspora organisations often was not by choice, but was rather granted at birth, as their parents and family members were organisation members. They state that in a Muslim environment, membership in an organisation was essential for keeping distinct communities. According to interviewees and participants of focus group discussions, almost every Armenian was closely involved in an organisation branch.

*“In 2010 no one could expect that there could be any internal political problem in Syria or terrorists may appear, I must admit that President Assad’s attitude towards Armenians was exceptionally positive. We had our church, national unions, representatives in the Syrian parliament, social and cultural clubs.”* (Lusin, Syrian-Armenian)

*“People in the diaspora often do not become but are born as a member of ARF because their parents and grandparents were in the ARF. The lives of many people start in the ARF structures”. (Alen, Syrian -Armenian)*

*“You don’t choose whether you go or not. It is from your childhood that you know that if you are Assyrian you need to go to an Assyrian school.” (Saro, Syrian-Armenian)*

Similarly, Migliorino (2006, 35) described Armenian clubs of Syria as a “true islands of Armenianness”. Based on the interviews with Assyrians, it can be stated that the same description is applicable to the Assyrian community in Syria as well:

*“Attendance of the club [diaspora organisation] of respective “family affiliation” (Hamazkayin-Dashnak, Nor Serount-Hunchak, Tekeyan-Ramkavar) is a common way of spending spare time and weekends. The clubs – for example the large Spitak centre in Aleppo - are true islands of Armenianness, and attraction poles for the youth, who finds spaces of socialisation and entertainment. Clubs are also important connections of the community with the wider Armenian cultural world, and place Aleppo on the map of the inter-Armenian cultural exchanges.” Migliorino (2006,35)*

The main connections that newly arrived migrants had in the Netherlands were the Church and transnational political organisations (ARF for Armenians, ADO for Assyrians), which are registered as cultural unions in Syria, along with individual ethnic networks.

It is hard to define who initiated the first contact with newly arrived migrants. Many organisation representatives stated that knowing that there were co-ethnics in nearby asylum camps, they initiated visits to introduce the local diaspora community to the newly arrived migrants and to understand what assistance they might need. Syrian-Armenians and Syrian-Assyrians stated that after coming to the Netherlands, they began to look for existing transnational organisations that existed in their pre-migration country as well. The main institution mentioned was the Church (Armenian Apostolic Church in the case of the Armenian migrants and Syriac Orthodox Church for Assyrian migrants). A representative of a cultural organisation in the Netherlands also states that he tried to find Assyrians in nearby camps, but access and information on whether there were Syrian-Christians was restricted. The Syriac Orthodox Church as a faith institution had the largest degree of access to the asylum camps. A Syriac Orthodox priest stated that he visited several asylum camps during the course of a few months to find followers of the church and offer mass and prayers for them. The Syriac Orthodox Church invited refugees to have a breakfast for the Christmas season and to discuss their situation and the difficulties that they face. The priest explained that he felt compassionate for newly arrived migrants not only as a member of the Church but as a former migrant that fled persecution:

*“I myself fled from Turkey with my family because of my faith thirty years ago. I know how valuable it is to meet a familiar people in a new country. It gives them hope and feeling that they are not alone. They have their community here.” (Syriac Orthodox Church, priest)*

By being registered as religious minority groups in Syria, these communities were formally governed by the spiritual-religious authorities (Armenian Apostolic Community and Syriac Orthodox Church). These religious institutions also had judicial and legal functions for community members. These functions were also affirmed by the Syrian Ministry of Justice. Therefore, in the pre-migration context the Church would substitute for the role of the state and played a key role for both communities as well.

According to a priest of the Armenian Apostolic Church, newly arrived Syrian-Armenians are already cooperating with the Church and actively participating in community life.

*“Newly arrived migrants are not “new-born” Armenians, it is the country that is new for them, but the Church is not new. Especially, those Armenians that arrived from Syria already have an experience of cooperating with diasporic communities prior to migration to the Netherlands. When arriving to a new country, they already know that the first step in the new country is finding the Church.” (Priest, Dutch-Armenian)*

As Christian minorities, both communities had closely cooperated in Syria and considered the other as an acceptable community for business as well as marriage. The search for familiar institutions sometimes led to the discovery of the other “acceptable community.” During the interview process, Armenian interviewees revealed that when they came to the Netherlands they also searched for Armenian organisations and churches. However, the first one they found that was familiar to them was the Syriac Orthodox Church, where they have started attending the community events.

*“We know some Aramaic language, people were familiar to us. Then they told that there is also an Armenian community, Armenian Church. This is how we have found the Church”. (Saro, Syrian-Armenian)*

The Church does not have a duty to provide formal support to newcomers. However, they use their informal networks to provide legal assistance and accommodation support:

*“We also live in a foreign country and we are also foreigners for this country. However, we find ways to be useful for them (migrants). For example, if they experience problems with their legal status we connect them with Armenian lawyers. We provide them*

*contacts if they, for instance, have accommodation issues. Church doesn't have such mission, but we mobilise our personal networks.” (Priest, Dutch-Armenian)*

Another important transnational institution is the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), which has organisations in over thirty countries worldwide. Syrian-Armenians that were members of the ARF in the Netherlands actively participate in community events as well.

*“You can't find any Syrian-Armenian in the Netherlands that doesn't know that we are here, that the organisation exists. We don't put any efforts, they lived in diasporic environment all they life. They come and find the organisation and become members as they used to be in Syria or Iraq.” (Mane, Syrian-Armenian)*

*“If we even end up in a desert, we will look for an Armenian community and ARF because we have grown up in that way. And when you do not find it, you feel a specific kind of ‘hunger’.” (Saro, Syrian-Armenian)*

Similar to Armenians, Assyrian migrants also have not had a hard time finding the Syriac/Assyrian community functioning in the Netherlands. In the case of the Assyrian diaspora, ethnic networks (relatives, friends) and the Church were highlighted by respondents as primary bridges to the community and support providers. Newly arrived migrants from Syria have a tendency to concentrate in the Twente region that already has a relatively high concentration of Assyrians. . Newly arrived refugees are distributed throughout the Netherlands by the government. An Assyrian woman that recently arrived in the Netherlands fleeing the Syrian conflict revealed her path from Syria to the Assyrian community in the Netherlands. She first went to an asylum seekers centre, and was allowed to stay in the Netherlands and assigned a house in Utrecht. Afterwards, she moved to a place of her preference, closer to the Assyrian community in Twente. Similar to this example, many Assyrians fleeing the conflict in Syria ended up in a “familiar place” in the east of the Netherlands:

*“I came immediately to Enschede because I already had a family here. You know if you are here in this city you don't have to look for something Assyrian such as events or news because if it they exist you will know about them. If you look at the Netherlands Hengelo, Enschede and Oldezaal are the best places to live as an Assyrian.” (Basma, Syrian-Assyrian)*

With the help of the Church or ethnic networks, newly arrived migrants connect with the local organisations as well. In order to understand what role organisations play for newcomers, local organisation leaders suggested participating in an event organised for women called “Coffee Drinking”. This is an informal gathering of women who fled Syria during the recent

war as well as those who have been in the Netherlands since the 1960s and 70s. “Coffee Drinking” usually takes place once a week and lasts 3 to 4 hours. The event gathers around thirty women that mainly came from the same city in Syria (Khamisli). Among old and new arrivals are former neighbours and relatives’ acquaintances from Syria whom the organisation helped to reconnect. The events usually have an informal character, with women simply gathering to socialising. Discussion topics may vary from the situation in Syria to family issues. They sometimes organise more formal events as well, such as inviting doctors to discuss health issues. When asked about the role and the importance of these events and organisations, interviewees have underlined that this is a way to keep in contact with the community and overcome the feeling of being a stranger in the Netherlands.

Most recent arrivals stated that they already had family members and relatives in the Netherlands that made it easier to settle in and connect with the community. Many respondents explicitly stated that they chose the city because of the Assyrian community. They justify the need to be with their co-ethnics by the lack of state support:

*“We have never had anything except of our church and our people. The only place we feel secure, we feel love and hope is family and church. That’s in our genes since we haven’t felt safe for 2,000 years.” (Shamiram, Syrian- Assyrian)*

*“We don’t have legitimate organisations for Assyrians who can represent Assyrians. The Church also doesn’t have a legitimacy, but it is the only one that can take the legitimacy. For example, if you want to get married you can’t go to Assyria and get married by the government. No, if you want to get married you should go to the Church, and you should see the priest.” (Tigris, Syrian-Assyrian)*

The priest of the Syriac Orthodox Church told that they mobilise the community to help their co-ethnics in the local asylum camps:

*“We have people who visit them in camps and ask what they need. For example, in the monastery occasionally we say “Ok, people, we are gathering money for refugees, can you give us clothes for children? “And in a few days the monastery looks like a big store. And then we send it to the camps and then we always say to them: better too much than few.” (Priest, Syriac Orthodox Church)*

Representatives of both Armenian and Assyrian communities state that their aim is to encourage integration by aiding the newly arrived migrants. As an example, Armenian organisations state that they provide Dutch-language classes to the new migrants. They find

that the more integrated the newly arrived migrants are, the better the chance to help the development of their homeland. On many occasions, they proudly underlined that they do not encourage isolation of Armenians from the Dutch society.

*“First step of integrating into the Dutch society is learning the language, that’s why we organise Dutch classes.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

*“New migrants don’t even know Dutch language to communicate properly. We help them to solve documentation problems, we show paths to overcome refugee problems smoothly. There are also Armenians, so we should help each other.” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian).*

*“Yes, I am Assyrian, and yes I am a Dutch citizen. I have done everything to be an equal successful Dutch citizen, and I think that we should help Assyrians to do the same. We have a homeland full of problems, for solving these problems we need to help new migrants to become good Dutch citizens.” (Sargon, Dutch-Assyrian)*

Support for newly arrived migrants is not a core function of these organisations but is rather a complementary action and an illustration of diasporic solidarity. Not only do they contribute to the diasporisation of migrants by providing cultural, linguistic, historical, emotional and religious links with the homeland, but also support them to integrate smoothly. Diaspora actors assisting newly arrived migrants complements the activities of civic society organisations and other non-diasporic “formal organisations.” These actors believe that they can provide more direct and effective assistance, mainly because they went through the same situation and issues as these asylum seekers. Diaspora actors are convinced that the same paths of suffering make them more aware of the problems that newly arrived migrants face. They provide not only practical support, but a “familiar space,” and “feeling of being at home.” One of the main weaknesses of diaspora actors’ activities is that they are unaware of what other actors do, and do not coordinate their activities. Likewise, the “trustworthiness” of informal advice can also be insufficient or unsatisfying for newly arrived migrants.

Existing organisational and ethnic networks make conscious and organised efforts in helping migrants stay in the Netherlands. An organisation leader found that newly arrived migrants bring a “new spirit” into community life and guarantee the continuation of diaspora life in the Netherlands. In the Armenian community, Syrian-Armenians are considered “*exemplary diaspora members.*” They find that Syrian-Armenians are an asset to the community and will guarantee that “traditional” characteristics of the diaspora will not disappear, since they bring with them a set of values, practices, and traditions of “proper

diaspora value.” It is more likely that they will take on new forms, and localised practices that reflect the particularities of the Dutch context.

Arrival of newly arrived migrants from Syria is not the first time these communities have assisted co-ethnics escaping conflict. Armenians arrived in the Netherlands in an earlier migration wave due to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenians that came in 1990s from Armenia state that it was easier to obtain refugee status then, and that the state provided them accommodation. However, Armenians from Armenia were not members of transnational organisations, their link with the Church was weak, and they did not have experience collaborating with diaspora organisations. As a result, these migrants did not link immediately with diaspora organisations when they migrated to the Netherlands.

The picture was different in the case of the Assyrian diaspora, since all sub-groups of the diaspora used to be affiliated to organisations in their pre-migration countries, the Church being the most important. Reflecting on the 1990s, representatives of Assyrian organisations stated that interest in joining organisations was higher. In the 1990s, ethnic networks were the main means of gaining information on housing and employment as there were limited sources of information. Ethnic networks have been used for informal information exchanges on housing, law, employment, etc. Organisation representatives stated that they turned to community support if they did not have any relatives or people whom they knew before in the area. *“They needed to know more people to feel at home”*.

## **8.2 COLLECTIVE PROBLEMS AND THE RESPONSE OF DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS**

Two collective challenges that were identified during research were the risk of deportation for Syrian-Armenians and claims among Syrian-Assyrians of discrimination on the basis of their religious identity as Christians in the asylum camps. The communities’ response to these issues opens a prospect for understanding how community leaders and diaspora organisations position themselves as a diasporic group in respect to their homelands when protecting newly arrived asylum seekers.

### 8.2.1 Armenians: Deportation Risk

Syrian–Armenians that have arrived in the Netherlands have faced major legal issues, as the Dutch authorities claim that they received Armenian citizenship prior to their arrival in the Netherlands. More than 22,000 Syrian-Armenians have arrived in Armenia since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011. Their ancestors were driven out of their land over a century ago during the 1915 Armenian Genocide. As a response to Syrian crisis, the Armenian government facilitated a straightforward citizenship process for Syrian refugees. The Armenian government did not treat them as refugees, but as ethnic Armenian returnees from Syria to the homeland. Syrian citizens of Armenian origin were able to receive Armenian citizenship at diplomatic representations and consular posts of the Republic of Armenia. Hakobyan (2016, 22) described the choice of migration to Armenia as following: “*ethnic identity together with the idea of motherland play the important role in selecting a survival strategy.*” Moreover, this was the easiest way for Syrian-Armenians to leave the country. Although they would not face security challenges in Armenia, approximately half of them migrated from Armenia to Europe, the US, and Canada. The Netherlands was one of the countries Syrian-Armenians migrated to and claimed refugee status by neglecting their Armenian citizenship. At the time of the fieldwork, they have been facing the danger of deportation after the Dutch government found out that some already have Armenian citizenship.

For Syrian-Armenians and the “internal audience,” the influx of Syrian-Armenians to Armenia is considered as “homecoming” or “repatriation”. For the external audience, however, this migration wave was named a “reception of refugees”. For example, in September 2015, during the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the president of Armenia mentioned in his speech that Armenia received more than 16,000 Syrian refugees from Syria, which makes the country one of the most important refugee recipients in Europe. Similarly, UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon thanked Armenia for its efforts in providing for refugees from northern Iraq and Syria. Whether this migration wave was repatriation or a continuation of forced migration was contentious within the Syrian-Armenian community. Syrian-Armenians mostly described this process as displacement and not voluntary migration or repatriation. Moreover, they expressed a shared attachment to Syria, and made a clear distinction between the state and homeland. Syrian-Armenians used a common expression: “*Armenia is our motherland, but Syria is our fatherland.*” A participant stated:



*"We used to live in very good conditions in Syria; we had equal rights as Syrians, we were respected, we had our own businesses, schools, associations and churches. Now we are witnessing a second Genocide, they forced us to leave our homes." (Saro, Syrian-Armenian)*

Syrian-Armenians interviewees explained that they found it hard to stay in Armenia since they were not provided with enough social and economic support:

*"It is not necessary to live in Armenia. You can be helpful to your country also living in diaspora. Of course, we would have liked to be in our country if there were enough conditions. But we will be useful for our nation being successful here in abroad". (Mane, Syrian-Armenian)*

Factors such as limited job opportunities and unsatisfactory work conditions conflicted with ethnic interests of staying in Armenia. Some Syrian-Armenians also highlighted cultural and social differences between Armenians in the Republic and Syrian-Armenians, as well as the difficulties of the Armenian bureaucracy, termed the *"Soviet mentality that is present in Armenia."* The combination of these factors made Syrian-Armenians consider the alternative survival strategy of migrating to Western countries, including the Netherlands.

Diasporic organisations, notably those formed by Armenians from the Middle East, took the lead of supporting the newcomers. Representatives of these organisations stated that there were cases when families came directly to the Netherlands, but were also at risk of being deported. As soon as Syrian-Armenians received notices about possible deportations in 2016, Armenian organisations addressed a joint statement to the House of Representatives in the Netherlands about their concerns. This issue was still pending during fieldwork. A community leader stated that they had arranged meetings with the necessary authorities. During a visit to an Armenian organisation, a leader had gathered Syrian-Armenian representatives to discuss with problems that they faced and possible ways to overcome them.

They link the legacy of the Genocide to this group of migrants in order to create positive grounds for them to remain in the Netherlands. As one of the leaders stated:

*"They have no one here in the Netherlands. And if not us who else would help them? If the Dutch government may provide support to Syrians, why not to Armenians? These people have faced double genocide and deportation. First one was in 1915 when they were forced to flee their homeland and take a refuge in Syria and now this." (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

Organisation leaders stated that they were trying to use their contacts to explain their situation to the authorities. Interestingly, representatives of Assyrian political organisations stated that they had helped Armenians organise meetings with Dutch political parties, such as “Christen Unie”. In doing so, they circulated the notion of “*victim diaspora*,” connecting the memory of the Genocide with the violence generated by ISIS. The discourse is based on the idea of being “one of the Christian minorities in the Middle East that has already suffered from persecution,” referring to the Genocide in 1915:

*"If the Dutch government accepts those fleeing the conflict, the Christian minority should also have its place in the Netherlands." (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

In order to make the claim more viable, they mobilised lawyers (including those with Armenian origins) to work on this case:

*"Who else would understand them? For other people it may seem that, yes, why not, they should return. But they need to know that these people have the right to choose where to stay, they have been displaced twice." (Organisation leader, Dutch-Armenian)*

For this reason, the community leaders invest in financial resources as well. According to organisation leaders they hired “the best lawyers in Amsterdam” to help Syrian-Armenians. Although the issue is ongoing, this case makes salient the victimisation frame used by the organisations and questions the diasporas’ state-linked and state-centred character.

### **8.2.2 Assyrians: Christian Asylum Seekers Feel Unsafe**

The settlement of Syrian-Assyrians in the Netherlands has been rather smooth, as they have not faced “collective” legal issues. The necessary support has been provided to them by their relatives who were the first to arrive to the Netherlands in 1950 and 60s. The Church took on the stance of protecting the rights of the Syriac/Assyrian community when they received complaints about “unfair treatment” at the refugee camps.

*"We are always alert to discrimination and threats at AZCs and other reception locations." (Priest, Syriac Orthodox Church)*

According to them, there is a high chance of conflict between Christians and Muslims in the refugee camps, referring to Christians that live with large groups of Muslims. Moreover, they claim that their “cultural and religious specificities are not being respected”:

*“During Ramadan, the kitchen was open all night so that Muslim asylum seekers eat after sunset, as is mandatory in their religion. And I think it is right that they respect their religion in the Netherlands. But why do they wake up Christians to wake up early in the morning for the first prayer?” (Organisation leader, Dutch-Assyrian)*

*“We have received complaints that Christians should not eat during the Ramadan. Also, Christians were not allowed to go to the kitchen because Christians are dirty according to them. And this in our camps in the Netherlands. They are Dutch they don't understand, they are multi-cultural.” (Priest, Syriac Orthodox Church)*

There have also been publications on this topic, such as a report by RTV Oost (2018, September 11) based on an interview with a priest of Syriac Orthodox Church:

*“In Nijmegen there are two hundred Christians on three thousand Muslims...Fleeing for the sake of their lives, for the sake of freedom of religion and expression, Christian asylum seekers in the camp are intimidated and threatened. Their churches in Syria have been burnt down, all their belongings have been taken away. And here in the Netherlands they still feel unsafe, while this is the safest country in Europe. People do not even dare to cross in the reception camps.”*

The Christian groups claim to be threatened and intimidated, the priest stated:

*“Our people say that sometimes in Syria they felt safer than in refugee camps. Syrian Orthodox Christians have fled from the Islamic world, because our faith was undesirable there. Shall we also feel oppressed in the most equal country in the world?” (Priest, Syriac Orthodox Church)*

Representatives feared that within groups that fled the war, there were extremists that had persecuted Christians back in Syria. The main message they want to deliver to the Dutch authorities is that as minorities they are overlooked and their rights and concerns are undermined. Assyrian refugees need assistance and protection, while their needs are not being taken into consideration. One of the interviewees noted that *“Why do they consider refugees' needs and experiences in relation to their age, disability, while religious or ethnic identity is being ignored”*. They see the role of diaspora institutions as raising awareness about the diversity of the populations migrating from Syria. They find it disturbing that *“Dutch residents just see them as Arab people that fled Syria.”*

The Church tried to liaise with the government so that they separate Muslims from Christians within camps and advocate for a separate reception of Christian asylum seekers. In discussing the settlement of Assyrian Christians in the Netherlands, a Syriac Orthodox priest stated that *"A good location could be here in Twente, where there is already a very large Syriac Orthodox community."* When their suggestion to settle Christian refugees in Twente was rejected by the Dutch authorities, community leaders tried to suggest an alternative solution: *"to bring refugees to the Church or our homes."* The proposal was not accepted by responsible authorities, as it would encourage segregation and negatively affect integration. While the issue has yet be resolved, organisation leaders stated that they follow updates and try to voice their needs.

*"We have to care about our people. Why we have this behaviour? Our enemies killed us every 40 years. There is a research done on Genocide of Assyrians and they have proved that every 40 years there was a genocide for 2000 years." (Organisation leader, Dutch- Assyrian)*

### 8.3 A NEW HOME OR A TEMPORARY SOLUTION?

To have a complete picture about the positionality towards Syria, Armenia, and the Netherlands, I asked interviewees if they are planning to return to their homeland. As it has been widely discussed in the diasporic literature (Armstrong 1956, Cohen 2008), diasporas tend to develop nostalgic, idealised feelings towards their homeland. I re-examined these feelings are interesting to re-examine through the lenses of minority groups. What happens with the desire of return when the group experienced not only brutal war and displacement in their homeland but also prosecution by the authoritarian regime and limited freedom throughout their life in Syria? Do Assyrians yearn for an idealised homeland, when they experience injustice and oppression in the homeland? And where is the homeland is Syria or "mythical Assyria"?

Unlike Assyrians, Armenians have never had internal secessionist claims in Syria. Similar to the Syriac Orthodox Church, they has been loyal to the Syrian government and the Assad regime. To which homeland do they want to return, do they develop more "state-linkedness" to Syria after being uprooted from there.

Interestingly, observation of social events among Armenians showed that they are highlighting their “Syrianness” in diaspora. The observation showed that nostalgia is cultivated by playing Arabic music and encouraging Arabic dances during Armenian parties. The tendency of idealising Syria have also been observable during the interviews:

*“Two years ago, a friend of mine returned from Syria where I had a vineyard. I was very happy and immediately planted it in our home garden. We dug, gave fertilisers and did everything to protect it from the cold. However, despite our efforts, the grape vines dried day by day. It is the same for people: if you uproot them, later, you cannot expect them to be the same.” (Saro, Syrian-Armenian)*

Syrian-Armenians mostly discuss the burden of economic conditions as impacting their desire to return to Armenia. Syrian-Armenians interviewees stated that they felt lost and without any prospects in Armenia:

*“Right after the war started I left for Armenia. To be honest I grew up with dream ideas about my homeland. However, when I went there I couldn’t find a job. Therefore, I asked refugee status from the Dutch government.” (Mane, Syrian-Armenia)*

*“The idea of returning to Armenia is there. Our little kid always asks me why we are here, why we don’t we go back to Armenia. It is a bit difficult to explain why we are here and why we left Armenia. For our kid of course it’s a lovely place, he hasn’t seen any difficulties, everybody there loves him, does everything for him. I and my husband also want to go back. But if we rationally think, we don’t have anything to do in Armenia for now. Here we are used to the rules, here we feel protected, while in Armenia there is no law, so we need to adopt to it.” (Lusin, Syrian-Armenian)*

One of the interviewees explained that if they returned to Armenia “with money or in a stable situation, as their house and business was in Aleppo,” then they would have stayed. Therefore, they have headed for a better life in the Netherlands.

Among Assyrians also, the enforced exodus has strengthened attachment and developed nostalgic feelings towards Syria, as is expected in conflict-related diasporas in general. In discussions about Syria, many Armenian and Assyrian interviewees referred to it as a “prosperous state,” where they would return if the situation is normalised. Interviewees who wanted to go back to Syria stated that they would go back “when Syria is a safe country again.” When asked for their reasons for return specifically to Syria, many answered: “because I was born there, and it is my country.” One interviewee explained “because in Aleppo we had a good life.”

However, majority have underlined that they never thought actively about returning back to Syria or Armenia. Interviewees mentioned that the violence committed against the Christian population in Syria emptied their villages and towns. They were concerned about unsafe conditions and religious and noted that the Middle East will never be a safe place for Christians, since even before the conflict they lived as being in exile. For Assyrians who migrated due to political conditions and authoritarian regime of Assad, Syria was pictured as a place of suffering and prosecution. Their nostalgic feelings was mainly attached to their home or village, and detached from Syria as a nation-state:

*“I have brought a small stone from my house to the Netherlands. I put it in my office room, on the edge of my window. Looking at it, I remember where I came from, what happened, my past, my history, I feel stronger. But the same stone with each passing day increases my longing. Therefore, the issue of return is the common dream of the Assyrian diaspora. But that's just a dream. Each of the Assyrians who witnessed the Middle East harshness is asking, "How can you imagine the return to these places?" When you hear the tragic stories of Assyrians fled here from Iraq or Syria, these ideas will undoubtedly evaporate and disappear.” (Tigris, Syrian-Assyrian)*

Interviewees also discussed the possibility of having a diaspora life as a reason to stay in the Netherlands. Both communities noted that religious and cultural associations in Syria do not function anymore, which makes community life impossible.

*“I don't think we will go back to Syria, we have all relatives here, our town and villages are ruined, the world I know has changed. There is no reason for me to go back.” (Shamiram, Syrian Assyrian)*

An important factor in considering staying in the Netherlands permanently is the existence of functioning Assyrian and Armenian communities. These organisations ensure that reproducing cultural, social, and national values in the Netherlands is possible, and they attract migrants familiar with diasporic practices.

*“Now I am here in the Netherlands. I have solved my financial issues and started to look for the social and cultural clubs that we had in Syria.” (Shant, Syrian-Armenian).*

The question of return opened one of many different ways in which people experience their home-state and homeland belonging. Armenians felt more strongly the “Syrian” part of their “Syrian-Armenian” belonging. Assyrians either experienced sudden “Syrianness” or felt the possibility to uncover and cherish “Assyrianness” in freedom. Nevertheless, the return has been mainly discussed as an abstract category for most of the interviewees. Similar to Jews

expression “*Next year in Jerusalem*,” the discussion about return have expressed mainly a non-realistic wish, rather than a future plan.

#### 8.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter analyses the role of ethnic/ diasporic networks in voicing the injustice occurring in the hostland and easing the stay of co-ethnics’ in the host society, based on Armenian and Assyrian migrants that fled Syria after the conflict began in 2011. It also analyses how existing diaspora institutions connect with new migrants, and what role diaspora institutions play when trying to aid newly arrived migrants in conditions of either absence or existence of homeland support. The role of ethnic networks has been discussed not only in regards to entering the labour market and finding accommodation, but also in regards to advocacy that can fall under “justice-seeking activities”.

The research shows that familiar “transnational” diaspora organisations serve as a resource for newly arrived migrants in meeting their primary needs such as accommodation and legal issues, as well as linking them with the existing community. Newly arrived migrants who have been members of transnational diaspora institutions have the advantage of relying on these networks in a new country of settlement. This research confirms several studies on the role of well-established networks as providers of emotional and cultural support as well as practical advice on accommodations, information, and assistance in accessing the labour market to newcomers (Hagan 1998, Ambrosini 2017). The study shows that the difference between diaspora organisations and individual ethnic networks or other civic society organisations is that they help with integration not only within the host-society, but within local diaspora affairs as well. The organisations, in turn, have a vision of establishing a long-term cooperation model with newcomers. They see newly arrived migrants as an asset to diaspora communities and a guarantee of the continuity of diaspora life.

Research on post-conflict diasporas mainly concentrates on the impact they may have in relation to their homeland (Baser and Swain 2009, Hall and Swain 2007). Advocacy and protection of the rights of co-ethnics are usually discussed in relation to transnational activities.

The “collective problems” of Assyrians and Armenians in the Netherlands offer a new insight on diaspora’s pro-active involvement in the protection of newly arrived migrants that have fled conflict in a new country. Diasporas have the advantage of providing support to newcomers based on their emotional commitment in prioritising areas of help that could be overlooked by other non-diaspora actors. Diaspora networks help to position newly arrived migrants in favourable conditions and act as intermediaries to gain the trust of the Dutch authorities in order to overcome the obstacles that as newcomers they themselves faced. The organisations make a clear distinction between a homeland as a place of common belonging and the state that their homeland falls under. Moreover, diaspora organisations become non-state actors that prioritise their common “traumatic past” as a legacy that justifies helping newly arrived migrants settle in the Netherlands. The Assyrian case shows that the Syriac Orthodox Church takes on the responsibility of highlighting problems that their fellow members have in the asylum camps and educating Dutch society about the religious and ethnic diversity of Syrian migrants. For Assyrians, statelessness is framed as something “extra” that is added to common diaspora feelings (i.e. sharing cultural affinities or native origins). The case of Armenian migrants shows that when national structures were neglected, a position as a "minority group from Syria" group was chosen.

The Assyrian and Armenian communities show common patterns rather than differences when it comes to cooperation between the new and old diasporas. The finding confirms Tint’s (2014, 4) statement about mutual help between diaspora community members: *“Their shared experience of loss, transition, adjustment challenges, and new minority status shifts the relational dynamics. Smaller communities may more feel the need to join for a greater sense of unity, connection and security.”* Diaspora organisations act as non-state actors trying to overcome shortcomings of more powerful formalised institutions that deal with forcibly displaced minority populations. The chapter highlights the important role that diasporas can play as substitutes of state functions in times of crises. When the state lacks the capacity and/or political will at the local level to effectively implement them, diasporas deliver key components for individual strategies of survival (Brienkoff 2017). Though both groups receive support from the receiving states as refugees, newly arrived migrants find advocacy support from diaspora organisations that claim more rights for them. Diaspora organisations have been one of the main service providers to Syrian-Armenians and Syrian-Assyrians for their specific needs that



otherwise may have been neglected by non-diaspora actors such as international organisations, host societies, sending country, or country of origin.

Findings also suggest that diaspora organisations experience duality when it comes to notions of returning to the “homeland” and “state”. These concepts are more complex than simply a link to a certain territory. Both communities mainly prefer to maintain solely nostalgic identification with their homeland. For both communities, the existence of ethnic networks and diaspora institutions are considered contributing factors of choosing the Netherlands as a permanent place to stay, as well as a chance for reproducing life in diaspora. Armenian interviewees from Syria named their return to Armenia not as “repatriation” but a “back up” plan for fleeing Syria, as they returned to Armenia as displaced people. The existence of a historical homeland has been one of the core obstacles in their attempt to settle in the Netherlands. Diaspora organisations take responsibility for their newly arrived co-ethnics and invest human and material resources into solving their problems. For both Assyrian and Armenian communities, victimhood and elements of the past are used when dealing with current issues. The legacy of the Genocide as a victimisation frame is passed on to second as well as later generations with the aim at shaping their migration movements.

## CONCLUSION

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Representation of diaspora and nation-state links as a norm is a relatively recent development in migration studies. Homelands are pictured as countries who actively try to “govern their diasporas” by opening ministries and institutional structures (Croucher 2012, Gamlen 2013, Miriliovic 2016, Lerner 2007, Kunz 2012). This tendency is under-theorising the heterogeneity and complexity of state-linked diasporas, as well as the experience of stateless diasporas. This research aims at counterbalancing this tendency and re-examining state-homeland-diaspora categories by unpacking the complexities of their relations. Considering the lack of studies reflecting on the commonalities and differences between state-linked and stateless diasporas, I have examined the case studies of the Assyrian (stateless) and the Armenian (state-linked) diasporas in the Netherlands. I formulated the following research questions:

*How do diasporas relate to their homelands and to the statehoods of their homeland?  
How do the absence or presence of statehoods shape diasporas' engagement practices?*

I reflected on the experience of diasporas with specific reference to classical and (Armstrong 1976, Smith 1986, Vertovec 1997, Safran), modern diaspora conceptualisation (Reis 2004, Brubaker 2005, Tololyan 1996, Wahlbeck 2001), as well as transnationalism (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004, Faist 2010, Khoser 2003). I applied “modern” approaches of conceptualizing diasporas: I discussed diasporas as the product of specific processes of mobilisation that are ongoing but remain incomplete. While recent studies on diasporas and transnational communities question state characteristics, they rarely de-essentialise the role of states (Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003, Chaander 2006, Gamlen 2006, Ragazzi (2014). Therefore, I also pointed out some conceptual aspects that are well documented in classical literature and are almost forgotten in contemporary diaspora studies: the historical depth of diasporas as well as the acknowledgement that homeland and states are not necessarily conjoined categories.

For answering the proposed research questions, I suggested applying a diaspora-focused approach that takes the diaspora community as the main unit of analysis (Koinova 2018, Alonos 2018, Craven 2018). This approach provided a nuanced analysis of all state and non-state actors involved in the diaspora engagement process, as well as the relationships between diasporas and these actors. Such positionality does not neglect either diasporas or structural factors, such

as homeland and host-land policies. The application of qualitative methodology through in-depth interviews with elite and non-elite members of diaspora, participative observation of community events, and focus group discussions enabled me to closely examine the two communities' engagement practices in a comparative manner.

I have related the examination of homeland-diaspora-state relations to pro-active diaspora engagement practices: *transnational justice-seeking activities for conflict settings, post-conflict settings, and human rights violations; collective remittances; and diasporas' role in supporting newly arrived migrants*. The aim has been to capture as many instances of homeland-state-diaspora links as possible over the studied period of time.

Each chapter elaborated and highlighted that state-diaspora links are not precise and a given, but are instead complex and contested. Each chapter also offered a closer look at the plurality of actors in shaping both institutionalised and unofficial, non-institutionalised diaspora engagement practices. The study showed that despite being neglected and dismembered from the “official” diaspora discourse, stateless diasporas find alternative links with the state through their trusted networks and transnational institutions. Similarly, the existence of a state is not a required condition for state-linked diaspora existence and collaboration with state initiatives. The chapters highlight the various forms in which “diaspora” or some layers of diasporas may relate more closely to the stateness of their homeland, while in other cases neglect it. The examination of both groups showed that diasporas are flexible in making decisions on how to position themselves towards their homeland, whether a corresponding nation-state exists or not.

The reflection on classical and modern conceptualisations of diasporas provided theoretical flexibility to examine the Armenian and Assyrian diasporas. Armenians and Assyrians position the same event, the Genocide in 1915 in the Ottoman Empire, as the main reason for diaspora development (Khosroeva 2015, Panossian 1998, Balakian 2003, Hovannisian 2007). The Genocide is presented in academic literature as a central identity marker for these groups; therefore, these groups can be classified as a “victim diaspora” following Cohen's (2008) typology. The Dutch-Armenian and Dutch-Assyrian diasporas have similar migration patterns even though they migrated from different countries (Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Russia, Armenia) beginning in the 1950s. They ultimately migrated to the Netherlands for a number of reasons,

including labour migration, decolonisation, civil wars, political and economic upheavals, and religious repression.

I began the examination of homeland-diaspora relations with a reflection on the structural factors that may effect diasporas, such as the historical and policy context of their homelands (Chapter 3, 4). I discussed the role of states in reference to diaspora construction by bringing together three aspects of the state-diaspora-homeland nexus: the position of the stateless Assyrians as a minority group in the homeland encompassing Iraq, Turkey and Syria, the positionality of the Armenian and Assyrian diasporas in the states of reference, as well as the perceptions of Dutch-Armenians and Dutch-Assyrians regarding these policies (Chapter 4). These are three intertwined aspects that are important for understanding the role of the state and state policies for diaspora positionality. Diaspora politics attached to any state is an arena for competing interests, identities, and visions about the “homeland,” and as a result diaspora engagement strategies are not merely directed by a set of policies. Using Ragazzi’s (2014) proposed taxonomy, I showed that the character and degree of involvement of diaspora in the homeland do not always coincide with official policies. Therefore, qualitative research enriches the typology and presents deeper dynamics of the diasporas’ experience.

The research showed that the presence of the state is not manifested in all layers of diasporas, and not all directions of state policies are acceptable for diasporas. The existence of the Ministry of Diaspora in Armenia and the positionality of the diaspora as a “strategic partner” does not make the Dutch-Armenian diaspora a state-led entity. The Armenian diaspora had a long functioning history in a stateless environment and developed its institutional structures before the homeland reached statehood. Another aspect that has a significant impact on state-diaspora relations is that Dutch-Armenians lack trust towards state institutions.

The thesis highlighted that states can also be selective in engaging former citizens who are being perceived as threats or peripheral citizens. The states of origin, particularly for minority groups, can hinder diaspora engagement opportunities. The Assyrians had a religious identity in Syria, Turkey, and Iraq but have been denied the ability to claim their ethnic-national identity. They have been referred to as “Christian Turks” or “Christian Arabs” by majority groups. Consequently, they have been subordinated and persecuted in the homeland. As a result, many of the interviewed Dutch-Assyrians that arrived in the Netherlands as labour migrants have a strong “victim identification” (Chapter 2). The examination of diaspora

policies shows that Assyrians were “neglected” and “dismembered” from the states’ diaspora groups. In Turkey, policies are focused on the Sunni Muslim Turkish population, and minorities such as Assyrian migrants are not included in “Turkish diasporas.” In Syria and Iraq, grassroots organisations and international actors play an important role in facilitating engagement of diaspora in peace-building activities but these initiatives don’t reach and target the Assyrian community.

An examination of organisations shows that in the case of state presence, certain relations exist between homeland and diaspora organisations. In the case of state absence, not only policies, but relations with diasporas at the formal level are absent as well. Therefore, stateless diasporas are more prone to transnational mobilisation that is horizontally multicenter and networked through transnational organisations. Based on this, the Armenian diaspora as well contains organisational elements inherited from their stateless past. The pre-migration historical context had an important impact on the diaspora practices of Dutch-Armenians and Dutch-Assyrians. The first institutions opened by Assyrians and Armenians from Turkey were the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church, followed by the establishment of branches of other transnational organisations (ADO, ARF, AGBU), as well as new local organisations.

I have grouped Armenian and Assyrian organisations in two main categories: transnational and local organisations (Chapter 4). Transnational organisations are engaged in hierarchically organised institutional networks connecting Armenian and Assyrian diaspora institutions worldwide. Local organisations mainly focus their activities on the city they have settled down in or on nearby communities. Transnational organisations connect Armenians with the homeland as well, since the branches or headquarters of these organisations are located in Armenia as well. The local Armenian Embassy is also a source of information and connection with the homeland. In the case of the Assyrian diaspora, transnational organisations represent a coalition of diaspora institutions that have informal/individual connections with homeland actors (e.g. Assyrian representative in Iraq parliament, Assyrian community leader in Syria etc.), except for the Syriac Orthodox Church. Another important difference that can be observed between both communities is that Dutch-Armenian transnational organisations have long histories and traditions of functioning within diaspora settings. Therefore, they provide more opportunities to ensure the maintenance of the diaspora and address the needs of Dutch-

Armenians. In the case of the Assyrians, national sentiments and the sense of diaspora developed with the first wave of migration to the Netherlands and other Western countries. The main guardians of the Assyrian identity are the Church and local communities that settled in specific Dutch cities that made it possible to remain closely connected at both the familial and collective level.

The research highlights the powerful role of faith institutions in both diasporas. The Armenian Apostolic Church and Syriac Orthodox Church contain elements of a “state” that “governs” diasporas (Kalliney 2010, Brinkerhoff 2011, Brinkerhoff 2017). Faith institutions are important not only because they provide various services, but because they create communities and feelings of belonging. The research shows that the existence or absence of the state has a role in “positioning” the churches in the two communities. The Armenian Apostolic Church closely cooperates with the state for the protection of the homeland and mediates political mobilisation (Chapter 6, Chapter 8). In the absence of the state, the role of the church is as one of the main guardians for the communities’ existence. However, the Syriac Orthodox Church stays politically neutral when it comes to homeland protection initiatives. The Syriac Orthodox Church is keen on humanitarian responses and tries to avoid ethnic-national identity struggles between “Assyrian” and “Aramean” communities and mainly focuses on the maintenance of religious identity.

The role of pre-migration countries and the heterogeneity of diasporas have also been reflected in sub-group divisions. Dutch-Armenians are grouped into two main categories: “diaspora Armenians” and “new diaspora.” “Diaspora Armenians” are the third or fourth generation of Armenians that migrated from countries that have well-established Armenian diasporic communities. The term “new diaspora” or “*Hayastantsi*” refers to Armenians that migrated from Armenia after the collapse of the Soviet Union and are not used to the “diaspora lifestyle.” Similarly, the research identified that Iraqi-Assyrians, Syrian-Assyrians and Turkish-Assyrians have their own perceptions about “diaspora lifestyle.” Therefore, for both communities, diaspora also became a place for competing visions, ideologies, and practices of what it means to be diasporic.

A closer examination of organisations highlighted the importance of the host society in shaping diasporas as well. Migration to the Netherlands and other Western countries gave Assyrians an opportunity to construct and express an ethnic-national identification. While

diasporas have autonomy to decide, their identity is also greatly shaped by the host countries as well as the homeland's opportunity structures. Freedom of speech, multicultural policies and state subsidies contributed to the emergence of Armenian and Assyrian diaspora communities in the Netherlands. The decline of multicultural policies and state funding for ethnic minority groups has challenged diaspora organisations, and they currently struggle to survive and find capacity for organising events, initiatives, and conferences. Diaspora organisations still operate, but their mobilisation is not as powerful as in the communities where the host country officially assists diaspora groups.

The first form of diasporas' pro-active engagement discussed in the thesis is diasporas' justice-seeking activities. I studied how diasporas refer to different events that are related to the statehood dynamics of their homeland, such as current-day homeland conflicts (Nagorno-Karabakh for the Armenian diaspora, the rise of Islamic State as well as demands for an autonomous region for the Nineveh Plains in Iraq for the Assyrian diaspora) and equal rights and democratisation demands in the homeland (human rights violations of Assyrians in Iraq and Syria, demands for democratic government in Armenia). I also studied events related to historical memory, such as the memory of the Genocide (Chapter 6). The thesis, as outlined in Chapter 6, observes two trends: firstly, traditional diasporas tend to focus on past persecution and suffering, and are less ready to mobilise for contemporary issues; secondly, traumatic parts of diaspora identity closely connected with present-day homeland conflict and injustice have the highest potential of consolidating diasporas.

The legacy of the Genocide is a victimisation frame inscribed to second and later generations in order to make claims when mobilising justice-seeking activities at the transnational and local levels. The research shows that the memory of Genocide has a stronger emotional presence among the descendants of the Armenian Genocide that migrated from Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Greece than Armenians from Armenia who did not experience the Genocide. While for the Assyrian diaspora the victim identity discourse is strongly present in the community, without proper mobilisation and engagement attempts "victim memory" remains known mainly to co-ethnics.

The examination showed that the Dutch-Armenian diaspora is empowered and more mobilised due to cooperation with the Armenian state, as well as past experience of transnational diaspora organisations demanding Genocide recognition and protection of

Nagorno-Karabakh in international settings. This tendency is in opposite to the Assyrian diaspora, which reveals insecurities and fragmentation of stateless diasporas that diminish prospects for large-scale diaspora mobilisation. The research shows that victimhood and elements of the past are used both in the Assyrian and Armenian communities when dealing with current issues.

The experience of the diaspora in commemorating, demanding, and struggling for Genocide recognition, combined with the support of the Armenian state, provides the grounds on which the loyalty of state-diaspora is constructed. Personal, institutional, and political links with the state make diaspora leadership less willing to mobilise for protests against the government. Formal and informal links with the homeland, such as participation in pan-diaspora conferences and official meetings with state representatives tend to establish loyalty links with the diaspora. The Genocide and conflict over the de facto state of Nagorno-Karabakh are “less contested” events to mobilise over compared to present political struggles, such as the Velvet Revolution in Armenia in April 2018. The Velvet Revolution mobilised new actors that were unknown to the community and indifferent to collective mobilisation calls, as these people were mainly Armenians from Armenia who had personal links with the homeland.

In the Assyrian case, the diaspora has neither a unified scope of the nationalist movement nor the political leadership to pursue territorial autonomy for the Nineveh Plains. Despite the emotional sadness of losing their statehood and witnessing the violence in Syria and Iraq, there were few collective political actions taking place in the community. The emotional attachment to the homeland and concerns about its future mobilised only a small group of Assyrians to develop transnational links and ensure the visibility of the group. They present themselves as the voices of voiceless people that have the privilege of freedom of expression in the diaspora. Conflicts rendered them helpless because of the absence of any shared vision. The on-going violation of human rights in Iraq rendered an even smaller part of the Assyrian diaspora to become advocates of human rights. Assyrians chose the path of investigating and reporting human rights violations in Iraq to supranational European and global institutions. It should be highlighted that it is the absence of a state that pushes diasporas towards supranational structures such as the UN and EU when seeking protection and influence.

Advocacy and protection of the rights of co-ethnics are usually discussed in relation to transnational activities in the literature, while the role of existing diasporas in supporting newly



arrived asylum seekers has been overlooked (Chapter 8). The “collective problems” of newly arrived Assyrians and Armenians in the Netherlands offered new insight on diaspora’s engagement at the local/host-society level. The positionality of diasporas has a fluid character, dependent on diaspora characteristics such as state-linked, stateless, or religious minority. As Chapter 8 further developed, the diaspora networks position newly arrived migrants in favourable conditions in the host-society and act as intermediaries to gain the trust of the Dutch authorities. Existing diasporas help Syrian-Armenians and Syrian-Assyrians overcome obstacles that they as former migrants have faced. The existence of a historical homeland as a nation-state has been one of the core obstacles for newly arrived Syrian-Armenians as they attempt to settle in the Netherlands.

Newly arrived Syrian-Armenians face a deportation risk. Armenian diaspora organisations make a clear distinction between a homeland as a place of common belonging and a homeland as a national state. Diaspora organisations “bypassed” the state and positioned themselves as non-state actors that prioritise their common “traumatic past” as a legacy to help newly arrived migrants settle down in the Netherlands. Diaspora organisations take responsibility for their newly arrived co-ethnics and invest human and material resources into assistance and liaise with Dutch authorities for solving their problems. The Assyrian case shows that the Syriac Orthodox Church takes the responsibility of publicising problems that their fellow members have in asylum camps and educating Dutch society about the religious and ethnic diversity of migrants coming from Syria. Statelessness is framed as something “extra” that is added to shared diaspora sentiments (i.e. cultural affinities or native origins). Both communities show that the memory of the Genocide represents a link between the past of existing communities and the present struggles of newly arrived migrants. Existing diaspora organisations helped to position newly arrived Armenians and Assyrians as “victimised,Christian” refugees in consideration of the growing hostile attitude towards mass migration from the Middle East. In conditions of state absence or the existence of a state that “substitutes” for the historic homeland, country of origin does not become a place of collective return for diasporas.

Another form of diaspora engagement practices examined in this study is the collective remittance practices of the Assyrian and Armenian diasporas in the Netherlands. I have aggregated collective remittances at three levels of analysis: state-driven initiatives, quasi-governmental initiatives, and initiatives from below (Chapter 7). The study illustrated that

despite the existence of official state channels that encourage the Armenian diaspora to remit, non-official and semi-official networks (Chapter 5) have gained popularity since these types of donations seem more trustworthy and efficient. Notably, those Armenians who have direct links with Armenia have shaped distrust towards major state-led funds among members of diaspora who don't have direct links with the homeland.

The examination of the “social aspects” (Carling, 2014) of collective remittances revealed the central role of trust in transnational diaspora networks. In communities where there aren't any other means to learn about the situation on the ground in the homeland, social trust and brokers become more important than state-offered opportunities. Both communities tend to trust more quasi-governmental initiatives and remittances from below more. It is important to underline that brokers are not only individuals but institutions as well, an example being that the Syrian Orthodox Church is the only institution that has access to Syria during the war. The Church not only transfers donations collected by church members, but delivers the donations of other diaspora organisations as well.

This examination also discovered a novelty in the diaspora literature. I argue that distinguishing only individual and collective remittances is not enough, as there is an “in-between” category. An example of it, are the networks of relatives that remit for families in need. Both Armenian and Assyrian communities are sensitive about the suffering of co-ethnics in more difficult circumstances. Another interesting aspect that emerged was the identification of “reverse remittances” sent from the other side of migration in the forms of letters of appreciation, receipts, “thank-you” messages, and short videos. “Reverse remittances” ensure social accountability when the transactions have an unofficial character.

The research shows that diaspora engagement practices have the tendency of going beyond ethnic networks. Both the Assyrian and the Armenian diasporas try to engage Dutch society to overcome the lack of financial resources available within their community, as well as to gain more support for their claims and political demands (i.e. acknowledging human rights violations in Iraq). The Armenian diaspora's experience shows that diasporas prefer informal and person-to-person transfers of money and goods, even though the Armenian government has initiated pan-diasporic fundraising activities.

The directions of collective financial transfers illustrated the multi-linked nature of diaspora communities. Armenians that have migrated from Syria are interested in the provision of

support to “known communities”: Armenian-populated areas of Syria. The Assyrian community also participates in philanthropic activities to their communities worldwide, but the motivation is not based on individual connections through migration history but, supporting “the unknown community” of their co-ethnics.

The findings of this research contribute to the field of diaspora studies by expanding understanding of the importance of homelands for diasporas and the complex relation of diasporas with the statehood dynamics of their homeland. The research also contributes to studies of stateless diasporas that are generally excluded from academic and policy perspectives. I suggest that diaspora studies need to consider also the types of diasporic communities that constitute “exceptions” in the world of nation-states. The study reveals that diaspora communities’ have multiple, multi-linked and multipolar characteristics: they are constructed not only by the sending states and the migrants themselves, but also by the homeland, host society, intermediaries, organisations, brokers, and transnational diaspora agendas.

In support of criticism regarding state-centric theories and in favour of scholarship that pictures diasporas as non-state actors (Brinkerhorf 2017, Delano Alonso and Mylonas 2017), I underlined that diasporic continuity is not guaranteed, as their engagement and interest in the homeland is insured not just by state policies. I suggest that structural factors, such as state capacities, the existence or absence of state support, and the historical patterns may “force” diasporas to reshape their relation with the homeland and take on affordable new practices. An illustration of this was when Syrian-Armenians were at risk of deportation to Armenia by the Netherlands, and existing diaspora organisations helped newly arrived migrants position themselves as a “minority group that migrated from Syria.” Similarly, Assyrians can refer to the non-existing “Assyria” as a “lost state” for framing their political agendas addressed to supranational institutions in order to receive autonomy of the Nineveh Plains region in Iraq.

In addition to problematizing the term “diaspora” and deconstructing their complexities and divided characteristics, the study also suggests an answer to an everlasting question in diaspora studies: “*Do diasporas exist?*” or as Dufoix (2008) stated: “*Is diaspora a useful word?*” My proposed answer to this question is that yes, they do exist and yes, it is a useful term. Diaspora is not just a constructed concept by policymakers, and states but gives meaning to collective realities. It is useful not just for describing political projects, but is able to exist in

practice and lived experiences of people. One illustration of this is that even poor and newly established communities remit without requiring formal leadership. Even though the diaspora literature mainly revolves around diaspora elites, the “non-official” networks that mobilise without asking for diaspora leadership is a ground on which to insist on the existence and commitment of diasporas. This example demonstrates that diasporas should have the “substance” upon which the diasporic projects are actively constructed.

The findings of the thesis may open a window for new research opportunities. One of the main limitations of this study was the lack of a digital presence of the two communities (Chapter 3). However, digital ethnography might offer an interesting insight in cases of examining other diaspora communities. Comparisons of diasporic groups settled in different countries would also allow to study the role of receiving countries. Another important field of analysis is the production of survey-based statistical results, which could be particularly relevant among the heterogenic and minority communities that are difficult to capture through official statistics. Further research can unpack two shores of migration and connect both sending and receiving countries. This approach might enable an understanding of the impact of diasporic actions and the social effects of remittances on homeland populations.

## 9.1 COMPARISON OF ARMENIAN AND ASSYRIAN DIASPORAS IN THE NETHERLANDS

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS		
	<i>Assyrian</i>	<i>Armenian</i>
<i>Type of diaspora</i>	Stateless	State-linked
<i>Territories that diasporas refer as homelands</i>	Assyria (Northern Iraq, northwest Iran, north-eastern Syria, and south-eastern Turkey)	Armenia
<i>State-less since</i>	612BC	
<i>State-linked since</i>		1991
<i>State support</i>	None	Ministry embassy Of Diaspora, local Armenian embassy
<i>Worldwide diaspora population</i>	3.3 million	7 million
<i>Population in the Netherlands</i>	25.000	20.000
<i>Main migration reasons Dates</i>	since 1960s- ongoing	since 1950s- ongoing
<i>Migration reasons Netherlands</i>	Labour migration, war, political and religious repression	Labour migration, war
<i>Main sending countries</i>	Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon	Turkey, Armenia Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Russia, Greece, Syria, Indonesia

STATE-DIASPORA RELATIONS		
	<i>Assyrian</i>	<i>Armenian</i>
<i>Position as Diaspora (s)</i>	“Dismembered” and “neglected” diaspora	States’ strategic Partners
<i>Challenges of cooperation with State (s)</i>	Alienated from the States Continues prosecution throughout the history	Suspicious about State institutions’ trustworthiness Lack of trust

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS		
	<i>Assyrian</i>	<i>Armenian</i>
<i>Community Organisation</i>	Local and transnational organisations	
	Relies on kinship network	Relies on pre-migration organisational capacities
	Individual, Elite-level links,, Church	Embassy, transnation

		al organisation, Elite-level Personal

#### JUSTICE -SEEKING ACTIVITIES

	<i>Assyrian</i>	<i>Armenian</i>
<i>Genocide memory</i>	Limited mobilization acts, Mainly in cooperation with Armenian diasporas	Unified mobilization at formal organisation level
	Transnational mobilization attempts	Unified mobilization at formal organisation level
<i>Violation of human rights</i>	Elit-level mobilization Transnational mobilization attempts	Strong mobilization among Armenians from Armenia, grassroots
<i>Absence/presence of state</i>	Fragmented visions Lack of political leadership	State-diaspora loyalty Unified ideology with the state and transnational communities
<i>Diaspora actors</i>	Political elites in transnational diaspora coalitions, Churches	Political, social-cultural organisations, Churches, non-formal networks, Embassy
<i>Positionality of diaspora</i>	Stateless nation, minority group's voice	Diaspora of the State, part of global diaspora network
<i>Mobilization channels</i>	Human rights reports, Press releases, meetings with Dutch and supra-national authorities, Conferences	Demonstrations, Conferences, Meetings with Dutch and Supra-national authorities, Opening of Memorials

#### SUPPORT TO NEWCOMERS

	<b>Assyrian</b>	<b>Armenian</b>
<i>Diaspora-Newly arrived</i> <i>Connecti on Source</i>	Pre-migration community connections Transnational Organisations (Church) Individual ethnic connection	
<i>How to connect?</i>	Visits to asylum camps Migrants' visits to organisations	
<i>Assistance to newly arrived</i>	Practical advices: housing, accommodation, job, etc. Integration into local diaspora affairs	
<i>Diaspora institutions' interests</i>	Communities reinforcement with experienced and reliable diaspora members	
<i>Advantages of diaspora actors</i>	Emotional connections of sharing the same history Having access to "insider information" that non-diaspora actors might not have or might not be interested	

<i>Diaspora positionality</i>	Underlying their minority status	Underlying their minority status in the sending country “Bypassing” the homeland as a state Prioritizing traumatic past
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<b>COLLECTIVE REMITTANCES</b>					
	<b>From below</b>		<b>Quasi-governmental</b>		<b>State-driven</b>
	<b>Assyrian</b>	<b>Armenian</b>	<b>Assyrian</b>	<b>Armenian</b>	<b>Armenian</b>
<i>Actors</i>	Local community Semi formal networks Non-formal networks		Transnational diaspora institutions, Church		The state through formal organisations and Ministry of Diaspora
<i>Brokers</i>	Non-core members in diaspora (intellectuals) , Ordinary members, Priests, Community leaders		Non-core members in diaspora (teachers, intellectuals etc.) Priests, Community leaders		Priests, Community leaders, Embassy
<i>Reasons to remit</i>	Assistance to Selected Individuals, families in need		Solving situational, conflict-generated problems for homeland		Development of social-economic conditions
<i>Directed to</i>	Turkey, Iraq, Syria	Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh	Syria,Iraq, Turkey, Diaspora communities in need	Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Diaspora communities in need	Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh
<i>Who Remits?</i>	Dutch-Assyrians, General Dutch Society	Dutch Armenians, Dutch Acquaintances	Assyrians in diaspora Followers of the Syriac Orthodox Church	Diaspora Armenians; Dutch - Armenians	Armenians worldwide (including in Armenia)
<i>Channels</i>	Unofficial (through trustworthy people)		Official (through bank transfers); Unofficial (through trustworthy people)		Official (through bank transfers)
<i>Accountability</i>			Formal records, No accountability Needed		Official Reports

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# ANNEX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDES

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## INTERVIEW GUIDE: FOR ARMENIANS AND ASSYRIANS

<b>Identification</b>	
<b>Name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Location</b>	
<b>Contact details</b>	

### 1. Personal Questions

- 1.1 Could you please describe your immigration history, reasons for migration, and your family background?
- 1.2 Why did you choose the Netherlands? Did you have connections in the Netherlands that helped you settle here?
- 1.3 What was your occupation after migrating to the Netherlands? What is your occupation now?
- 1.4 Do you collaborate with any Armenian/Assyrian organisations in the Netherlands? Why yes/no? If yes, is the Netherlands the first country where you are engaged in community activities? If yes, what has motivated you? What have you obtained by joining the organisation?
- 1.5 Which language do you speak at home? On what occasions do you use your mother language? Do your children learn your mother language and how?
- 1.6 Who are your main friends (natives, compatriots, immigrants of different origin)?

### 2. About the Dutch-Armenian/Assyrian Diaspora

- 2.1 According to you, is it necessary to keep in touch with compatriots in the Netherlands? Why yes/no?
- 2.2 According to you, is it necessary to keep in touch with the Armenian/Assyrian organisations in the Netherlands? Why yes/no? Could you please describe what can an Assyrian/Armenian obtain by becoming a member of Armenian/Assyrian organisations?
- 2.3 How frequently do you attend community meetings, initiatives or events? Which events do you mainly attend and why? How do you support diaspora activities?
- 2.4 According to you what are the issues that diaspora organisations should help migrants to solve (consulting on rights, identity preservation issues, financial support, job support, support to the homeland, or any other)? Please explain why.
- 2.5 How satisfied are you with the community life in the Netherlands and with organisational activities? Please explain why? How it can be improved?
- 2.6 According to you, which sectors need to be developed in the local diaspora community? Who should initiate these activities? In which measure and how you are ready to support development (intellectual, financial)? Are you ready to provide resources for the development of the Armenian/Assyrian diaspora (intellectual or financial support)?
- 2.7 Whom do you consider a community leader? What do you think about your community leaders and the activities they initiate? Do they need to be improved? If yes, then how?
- 2.8 How do you get information about community events and projects? Are the means of the communication effective enough?
- 2.9 What are the main obstacles to engage Armenians/Assyrians in the diaspora activities? What suggestions do you have for overcoming these obstacles?

### **3. Transnational Activities**

- 3.1 Are you informed about Armenian/Assyrian communities in other countries? Do you keep any connections with them on the organisational or individual level?

- 3.2 Are you informed on who the most vulnerable Armenian/Assyrian communities abroad are?  
Do you think other Assyrian/Armenian communities should support them? In which measure and how are you ready to support development (intellectual, financial)? What are the resources that you are ready to provide (intellectual/financial)?
- 3.3 According to you, what are the common goals/interests of Assyrians/Armenians worldwide?  
Are there any transnational activities to meet these goals? Have you ever participated in these activities? If yes, please provide examples.

#### **4. Links with the Homeland**

- 4.1 According to you, should Armenians/Assyrians implement projects for supporting the homeland? Why? Do you know any projects that were implemented in the Netherlands? Have you participated? Were they successful or no? Why?
- 4.2 According to you, does your homeland need the diaspora's support? What can the Dutch-Armenian/Assyrian community do for the homeland? What can you do? What are the situations/sectors that diaspora needs to be involved in?
- 4.3 Currently your homeland is in a conflict situation (Iraq, Syria, Nagorno-Karabakh). Has the Dutch-Armenian/Assyrian community provided help? If yes, who organised it? Have you participated in it?
- 4.4 Do you know if your homelands' government has any projects addressing Armenians/Assyrians living abroad? If yes, what are the projects about and have you ever participated in these projects?
- 4.5 Armenians have their state: what influence does it have on the activities and development prospects of the Armenian diaspora?
- 4.6 What influence does the absence of statehood have for the Assyrian diaspora?

#### **5. Future Plans**



- 5.1 According to you, what should be priority areas of Dutch-Armenian/Assyrian diasporas' future development?
- 5.2 In the condition of absence of statehood, what further developments do you see for the Assyrian diaspora?
- 5.3 Is there any sphere that you think diaspora has a potential to be engaged in? What are the obstacles?
- 5.4 How can the role that diaspora plays for the home-country and other diasporic communities be stimulated and strengthened?
- 5.5 Where do you see the future of your family (in the Netherlands/homeland/somewhere else)? Please explain why.

## INTERVIEW GUIDE: FOR THE REPRESENTATIVES OF DIASPORA ORGANISATIONS

Identification	
Name	
Date	
Location	
Contact details	

### 1. Personal Questions

- 1.1 When did you migrate to the Netherlands? What were the reasons for migration?
- 1.2 What were the reasons for joining/establishing the organisation?
- 1.3 Have you been a member of any diaspora-oriented organisations before migrating to the Netherlands? If yes, could you tell about the profile of the organisation?

### 2. About the Armenian/Assyrian Diaspora

- 2.1 How has the current Armenian/Assyrian community developed in the Netherlands? From which countries have they mainly migrated from? What were the reasons for migration? Can you identify the main migration phases?
- 2.2 Do you have any data on the approximate number of Armenians/Assyrians living in the Netherlands?
- 2.3 To what extent are Armenians/Assyrians eager to collaborate with diaspora organisations? What are the main obstacles?
- 2.4 According to you, what do they gain by collaborating with diaspora organisations?

- 2.5 Do Armenians/Assyrians tend to maintain their national/ethnic identity? If yes, how? What are the values and practices that they tend to maintain or reproduce (language, religious practices, internal/external marriages)? If no, why? Are there generational differences?
- 2.6 Are Armenians/Assyrians united in the Netherlands? Are there any social, cultural, religious, and/or political divisions within the community?
- 2.7 Have there been any particular developments or trends that you observed in the community since the time you live in the Netherlands/joined the organisation?

### **3. About the Organisations**

- 3.1 When was the organisation established? By whom and why?
- 3.2 What is the profile and activities of the organisation? What needs of Armenians/Assyrians does the organisation meet? Have the profile and activities changed since the establishment of the organisations?
- 3.3 What is the role of your organisation in developing the Armenian/Assyrian community in the Netherlands?
- 3.4 Is the organisation registered? If no, why?
- 3.5 What are the main identity/cultural values that you aim to keep/transfer to the Armenians/Assyrians living in the Netherlands?
- 3.6 Do you have any specific target group? What are the main characteristics of members: how long have they lived here; are they mainly first/second/third generation migrants; what is their age range and education profiles?
- 3.7 What are their main motives of Armenians/Assyrians to join the organisation?
- 3.8 How many members does the organisation have (active and inactive)? Do you collect data on Armenians/Assyrians living in the Netherlands (or in the region where the organisation is

based)? What kind of data do you collect (size location, skill level, frequency of data collection)?

3.9 How do you involve Armenian/Assyrian newcomers? How do they obtain information about the organisations?

3.10 How do you keep in touch with local Armenians/Assyrians? Do you use digital means to reach them?

3.11 How is the organisation financed? Do you get financial support from any governmental sources or non-governmental organisations?

3.12 Does your organisation have branches outside or within the Netherlands?

3.13 How do you plan to develop the organisation? What are the main challenges and obstacles?

#### **4. About Local Context and Networks**

4.1 How would you evaluate the Dutch context for diaspora development: does it assist or create obstacles for diasporas? Why and how?

4.2 Do you collaborate with the Dutch government or any organisation? How? If no, then why?

4.3 Do you collaborate with other Assyrian/Armenian diaspora organisations in the Netherlands? Why yes or no? If yes, how frequently and on which occasions?

4.4 Do you collaborate with the Armenian/Assyrian embassy or governmental institutions?

4.5 Do you undertake lobbying or advocacy activities in collaboration with other organisations? Why yes or no? On which occasions?

4.6 Do you circulate social resources, cultural resources, or organisational skills among organisations? Why yes or why no? If yes, does it have a systematic character or no?

4.7 Do you organise social/cultural events together? What were the most important events organised jointly with local organisations?

- 4.8 Do you organise charity/ philanthropy activities? If yes, whom are they directed to? Does it have a systematic character or not? On which occasions have you organised? What were the most important ones organised jointly with local organisations?
- 4.9 Do you have joint projects to facilitate Armenians'/ Assyrians' better engagement in diaspora activities in the Netherlands?
- 4.10 Do you consult with other local organisations (either formally or informally) when deciding priority areas of diaspora activities?
- 4.11 Are there organisations that you don't collaborate with? If yes, why?

## **5. Transnational Activities**

- 5.1 What are common interests and differences of Armenian/Assyrian communities here and in other countries?
- 5.2 What are the most important issues that the Assyrian/Armenian transnational networks try to solve? How do you try to contribute?
- 5.3 Do you have any links with other diasporic communities abroad? Where are these organisations located?
- 5.4 Is the organisation a part of any larger network of organisations, umbrella organisation, or transnational platform? Why or why not?
- 5.5 How do you choose organisations you are collaborating with?
- 5.6 Do you participate in international diaspora initiatives? If yes, can you provide examples? How do you obtain information about these initiatives?
- 5.7 Do you undertake lobbying or advocacy activities in collaboration with other organisations? Why or why not? Does it have a systematic character or not?

- 5.8 Do you circulate social resources, cultural resources, or organisational skills? Why or why not? Does it have a systematic character?
- 5.9 Do you organise social/cultural events together? What were the most important events organised jointly with local organisations?
- 5.10 Do you organise charity/philanthropy activities/collective remittances? If yes, whom are they directed to? Does it have a systematic character? What were the most important remittance collections that you initiated?
- 5.11 What are the most vulnerable diasporic communities? Do you assist them? Why yes or no and how?
- 5.12 Do you think that transnational Assyrian/Armenian collaboration needs to be improved? With which countries and why/which directions? If no, why?

## **6. Links with the Homeland**

- 6.1 What are the territories you consider as your homeland? Why?
- 6.2 Do Armenians/Assyrians tend to visit their homeland? Do you organise visits to the homeland? Why? How frequently?
- 6.3 Armenians have their state: what influence does it have on the activities and development prospects of the Armenian diaspora?
- 6.4 Questions intended primarily for Assyrian interviewees: What influence does the absence of a state have for the Assyrian diaspora?
- 6.5 Do you follow developments in your homeland? Does your organisation react to them? How? Examples?
- 6.6 Is there any organisation, institution you keep in touch with that is based in the homeland? How? Do you consult with them, exchange ideas?

- 6.7 Does the home-government assist/create obstacles/play a neutral role for developing/maintaining diasporas abroad? How?
- 6.8 Do you undertake lobbying or advocacy activities addressed to the home- government? Why or why not? Does it have a systematic character or not?
- 6.9 Have you ever provided humanitarian assistance to the homeland? How did you organise it (institutional network, individual connection)? Whom was it targeted to, who benefited from it, and what kind of help was it (healthcare, protection/security, business support, financial support, etc.)? How often do you send humanitarian help/material contribution to the country of origin (for instance, during the last year)?
- 6.10 Do you receive any assistance from the homeland (cultural, social, organisational, financial resources)? Why yes or no? Does it have a systematic character or not, on which occasions?
- 6.11 Are there any situations when the organisation would certainly provide support to the homeland?
- 6.12 Has the organisation provided support to the homeland in case of emergency situations (war, crisis, etc.)?
- 6.13 Do you think that diasporas engagement in the homeland needs to be improved? If yes, how? If no, why?

## **7. Future Plans**

- 7.1 Do you have future development plans for the Armenian/Assyrian diaspora in the Netherlands?
- 7.2 Questions intended primarily for Assyrian interviewees : In the condition of the absence of statehood what further developments do you see for the Assyrian diaspora?
- 7.3 Is there any sphere that you think diaspora has a potential to be engaged in? What are the obstacles?
- 7.4 How can the partnership capacity of diaspora organisations be improved?

7.5 How can the role that diaspora organisations play for the home-country and other diasporic communities be stimulated and strengthened?

Identification	
Name	
Date	
Location	
Contact details	

#### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR “ELITE”/ CORE MEMBERS OF DIASPORA

### 1. Personal questions

- 1.1 Could you please describe your immigration history, reasons for migration, and your family background?
- 1.2 Why did you choose the Netherlands? Did you have connections in the Netherlands that helped you settle here?
- 1.3 Can you describe your current occupation?
- 1.4 When did you start to be actively engaged in diaspora activities and why? Was the Netherlands the first country where you were actively engaged in diaspora activities?

### 2. About the Armenian/Assyrian Diaspora

- 2.1 Since you live in the Netherlands/joined diasporic activities, have there been any particular developments, trends that you observed?
- 2.2 What are the common interests and differences of Armenian/Assyrian communities here and in other countries?



- 2.3 How many people of Armenian/Assyrian origin take part in diaspora activities?
- 2.4 In which measure people feel a belonging to the Armenian/Assyrian community? On which occasions?
- 2.5 Do Armenians/Assyrians tend to maintain their national/ethnic identity? If yes, how, what are the values and practices that they tend to maintain or reproduce (language, religious practices, internal/external marriages)? If no, why? Are there generational differences?
- 2.6 Are Armenians/Assyrians united in the Netherlands (social, cultural, religious, political divisions within the community)? If no, what are the main obstacles?

### **3. Local Activities**

- 3.1 What are the activities that you initiate/are involved in for the Armenian/Assyrian community? Does it have a social, economic, and/or political profile?
- 3.2 What are the main needs of the Armenian/Assyrian migrants in the Netherlands? Do you have any projects to address them?
- 3.3 Do you have any initiatives to engage migrants in the community/organisational life (especially newcomers)? What do they gain by joining community life/organisations?
- 3.4 Do you collaborate with Dutch government or officials for meeting the needs of the community? How?
- 3.5 Do you collaborate with the Armenian/Assyrian embassy or governmental institutions? If yes, could you give examples of your collaboration?
- 3.6 Do you collaborate with other Assyrians/Armenians in the Netherlands in order to realise your projects? Why or why not? How frequently? On which occasions? Could you provide some examples?

### **4. Transnational Activities**

- 4.1 What are the most important issues that Assyrian/Armenian transnational networks try to solve? How do you try to contribute?
- 4.2 Have you initiated any projects in collaboration with Assyrians/Armenians in other countries? What are the profiles of these projects (charity, collective financial transfers, intellectual, professional assistance to the homeland)? How frequently do you collaborate?

- 4.3 Have you participated in international diaspora initiatives? How do you become informed about these initiatives? What was the profile of the project (charity, collective financial transfers, intellectual, professional assistance to the homeland)? Could you provide examples?
- 4.4 What are the most vulnerable diasporic communities? Do you assist them? Why yes or no? If yes, how?
- 4.5 What are the most well developed Armenian /Assyrian diasporic communities? Do you collaborate with them?
- 4.6 Do you think that transnational collaboration among diaspora communities needs to be improved? With which countries and why/ in which directions? If no, why?

## **5. Links with the Homeland**

- 5.1 : Which territory do you consider your homeland? Why?
- 5.2 What are the primary needs of your homeland<sup>s</sup>?
- 5.3 Do you follow developments in your homeland? Do you react to them? How? Examples?
- 5.4 Have you implemented any project addressed to the homeland? What was the profile of the project (charity, collective financial transfers, intellectual, professional assistance to the homeland)?
- 5.5 Armenians have their state: what influence does it have on the activities and development prospects of the Armenian diaspora?
- 5.6 Questions intended primarily for Assyrian interviewees: What influence does the absence of statehood have on the current state and development of the Assyrian diaspora?

## **6. Future Plans**

- 6.1 Do you have future development plans for the Armenian/Assyrian diaspora in the Netherlands?
- 6.2 In the condition of the absence of statehood what further developments do you see for the Assyrian diaspora?

6.3 Is there a sphere that you think diaspora has a potential to be engaged in? What are the obstacles?

6.4 How can the role that diaspora plays for the home-country and other diasporic communities be stimulated and strengthened?

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Questionnaire number	
Group	
Date	
Location	

### 6. Personal Questions

6.1 Could you please describe your immigration history, reasons for migration, and your family background?

6.2 Why did you choose the Netherlands? Did you have connections in the Netherlands that helped you settle here?

### 7. About the Dutch-Armenian/Assyrian Diaspora

7.1 Why did you want to keep in touch with compatriots in the Netherlands? Why yes/no?

7.2 Were there any issues that diaspora organisations helped you solve (consulting on rights, identity preservation issues, financial support, job support, support to the homeland, or other)? Please explain why.

- 7.3 According to you, is it necessary to keep in touch with the Armenian/Assyrian organisations in the Netherlands? Why yes/no? Could you please describe what an Assyrian/Armenian can obtain by becoming a member of Armenian/Assyrian organisations?
- 7.4 How frequently do you attend community meetings, initiatives or events? Which events do you mainly attend and why? How do you support diaspora activities?
- 7.5 How satisfied are you with the community life in the Netherlands compared with the community in Iraq / Syria?
- 7.6 How do you become informed about community events and projects? Are the means of the communication effective enough?
- 7.7 What are the main obstacles to engage Armenians/Assyrians in diaspora activities? What suggestions do you have for overcoming these obstacles?

## **8. Transnational Activities**

- 8.1 Are you informed about Armenian/Assyrian communities in other countries? Do you keep any connections with them on the organisational or individual level?
- 8.2 Are you informed who the most vulnerable Armenian/Assyrian communities abroad are? Do you think other Assyrian/Armenian communities should support them?
- 8.3 According to you, what are the common goals/interests of Assyrians/Armenians worldwide?

## **9. Links with the Homeland**

- 9.1 Currently your homeland is in a conflict situation (Iraq, Syria, Nagorno-Karabakh). Has the Dutch-Armenian/Assyrian community provided help? If yes, who organised it? Have you participated in it?
- 9.2 According to you, should Armenians/Assyrians implement projects for supporting the homeland? Why? Do you know any projects that were implemented in the Netherlands? Have you participated? Were they successful or not? Why?
- 9.3 According to you, does your homeland need the diaspora's support? What can the Dutch-Armenian/Assyrian community do for the homeland? What can you do?

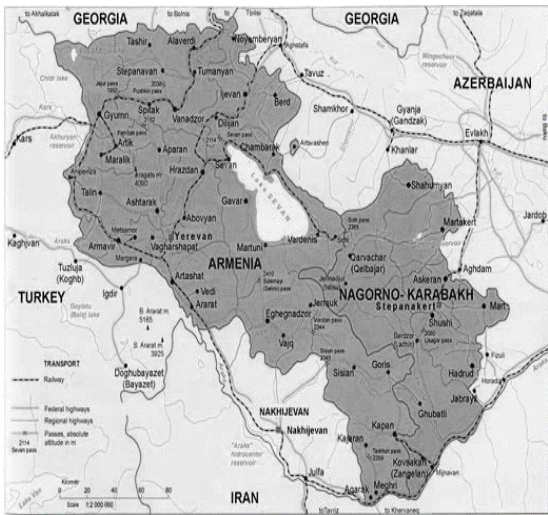
- 9.4 Do you know if your homelands' government has any projects addressing Armenians/Assyrians living abroad? If yes, what are the projects about and have you ever participated in these projects?
- 9.5 Armenians have their state: what influence does it have on the activities and development prospects of the Armenian diaspora?
- 9.6 What influence does the absence of statehood have for the Assyrian diaspora?

## **10. Future Plans**

- 10.1 Where do you see the future of your family (in the Netherlands/homeland/ or somewhere else)? Please explain why.

## ANNEX 2: MAPS

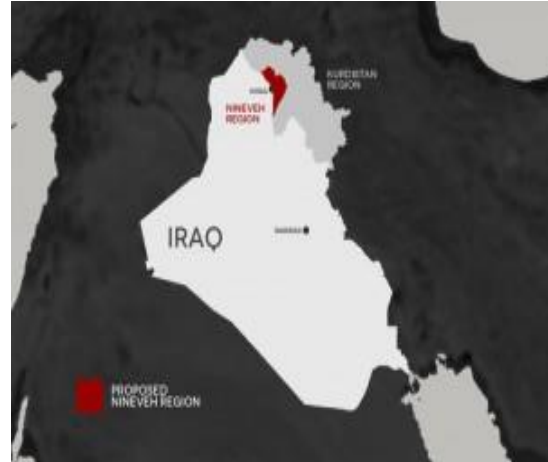
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**Map 1: Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh**



**Map 2: Territories referred to as “Assyria”**



**Map 3: Nineveh Plain Region**