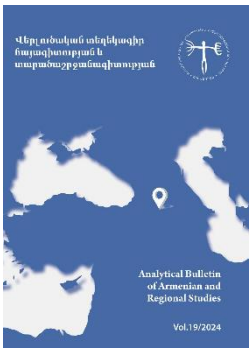

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RESEARCH NOTE
"ROAM SWEET HOME?" A MINOR FIELDWORK STUDY ON THE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS AMONG DIASPORA ARMENIANS IN SWEDEN[1]

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Abstract
The study aims to investigate how migrant identities, positionalities, and sense of belonging are informed in the situational interactions with multiple cultures and the local diaspora community in Sweden. Specifically, this study seeks to scrutinize how the identities of diaspora Armenians living in Sweden, with backgrounds in the Middle East, are constantly shaped and reshaped by interactions with different cultures. The aim of the study is best explained by our motivation to see how identities fluctuate and how identity oscillations can affect one's sense of place and belonging, as well as to understand how our participants narrate and explain the meaning of 'home.' Through the personal stories and experiences of the participants, the study aims to deconstruct primordial assumptions about the fixed nature of identities and belonging and analyze the representation of the meaning of diaspora itself in the eyes of the participants.

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[1] This study was originally conducted in 2021 during the Ethnographic Fieldwork course (SIMM25) provided by the Graduate School of Social Sciences at Lund University. The aim of the course is to explore the strengths of ethnographic in-depth fieldwork as a data collection method and the many techniques which it embraces such as observations, interviews, focus group conversations, etc. The content of this study is, therefore, structured in a way that it corresponds to the course objectives, including extensive discussion of fieldwork as an ethnographic method, as well as concepts widely used in ethnographic methods. The course lasts for 4 weeks and data collection is conducted during those 4 weeks.

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Introduction

The following study seeks to explore the self-described identities of first, second, and third-generation Armenian migrants in Sweden with particular regard to their ethnicities, as well as the role of local diaspora communities in shaping their respective identities. Through the personal stories and experiences of the participants, the study aims to deconstruct primordial assumptions about the fixed nature of identities and to analyze the representation of the meaning of diaspora itself in the eyes of the participants themselves.

Specifically, the study will focus on people with ties to not only one but multiple cultures, in an attempt to explore how positionalities are affected by situational interactions. The aim is to scrutinize how the identities of diaspora Armenians living in Sweden, with a background in the Middle East, are constantly shaped and reshaped by interactions with different cultures. The aim of the study is best explained by our motivation to see how identities fluctuate and how identity oscillations can affect one's sense of place and belonging, as well as to understand how our participants narrate and explain the meaning of "home. Studying diaspora Armenians from the Middle East therefore serves as not only a manifestation of the desire to delimit the scope of the study and simplify the sampling process but also the ambition to take into account the "chosen traumas" that many of the participants in the study might carry from being descendants of first-hand victims of the Armenian genocide who had to re-locate.

By emphasizing the assigned importance to a culture's chosen traumas and chosen glories, it can then be studied how certain historical events can influence feelings of belonging or non-belonging. For this purpose, we have adapted the broader term of "belonging," allowing participants to choose how they narrate their connections to 'place' and contextualize it with their own experiences.

The study will attempt to scrutinize the two following overarching research questions:

- What is the interplay between feelings of belonging, in-betweenness, and identity constructions among Armenians in Sweden?

● What are held to be the principal signifiers of Armenian identity among the diaspora, and how are they narrated in relation to each other?

The study also emphasizes the process of conducting fieldwork by reflecting upon central concepts such as "access," "rapport," "gatekeepers," "outsiders/insiders," "emotionality of participation," "reflexivity," "ethics," etc., and by drawing upon four semi-structured interviews, two focus group discussions and social observation that were conducted over four weeks. The text is divided into four sections: fieldwork as a method, preparations and encounters, interviews and experiences, and analysis of data.

Fieldwork as a method

To conduct ethnographic fieldwork is to find out what is often regarded as not being important, belonging to the implicit structures of people's lives.[4] Here, selecting a site in which pursued phenomena are particularly salient and examining various issues that concern the members at the chosen site is what lays the foundation for conducting fieldwork.[5] Gaining access to the worlds of other people, encountering their activities and concerns, 'being there' and witnessing the everyday life of people, gaining an "insider's" (emic) perspective, building rapport with participants, avoiding going "native" and keeping objective (etic) perspective are all part of this process.[6] As Malinowski argues, ethnography aims to understand a "native's vision of his world" and the way of life from the 'native' perspective.[7] Thus, fieldwork as a method helps scrutinize the world through the lens of people whose everyday life experiences, activities, thinking, and speaking differ from the "non-permanent place" of the researcher.[8]

Until the end of the 20th century, ethnographic studies mainly focused on non-Western cultures and societies while neglecting the researchers' own

[4] Jan Blommaert and Jie Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork: A Beginner's Guide* (Bristol ; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2010).
[5] David Wästerfors, "Observations," *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, 2018.
[6] Karen O'Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography*, Sage Key Concepts (Los Angeles (Calif.): Sage, 2009), 3; Wästerfors, "Observations," 315.
[7] James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc, 2016), 3.
[8] Spradley, 3.

societies. Western dominant knowledge has tended to exoticize "other" societies through functionalistic and holistic approaches.[9] However, as Spradley[10] argues it has become evident that there is no homogeneous culture and that people live in various cultural codes in their societies. Blommaert and Dong[11] have proposed the concept of "behavioral repertoire," through which they explain how different forms of behavior among individuals do not necessarily coincide with culture as a whole. Here, it is argued that researchers should avoid equating the behavior of individuals with the resources of culture or society.[12]

The problematic nature of holistic and functionalist approaches highlighted the necessity to find alternative approaches for examining the places where researchers are "outsiders". This resulted in the emergence of the "reflexive turn" in the 1980s and early 1990s, which emphasizes the importance of the researchers' role in influencing the fieldwork process.[13] The emergence of the postmodern school has criticized the "imperialistic and oppressive nature of fieldwork" and has demonstrated that by 'exoticizing' non-Western societies the ethnographers contribute to the reproduction of exploitative dynamics of colonialism.[14] In "Orientalism," Said argues that knowledge produced by the Western thinkers about the backwardness, and despotism of the East has created the image of uncivilized and barbaric "Other" and asserted both geographical and civilizational/cultural division between West and East.[15] Spivak has also focused on issues of representation and the meaning of the representation.[16] She has further developed the critique about how Western scholars inadvertently reproduce hegemonic structures and how they represent colonial societies in their studies.

[9] O'Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography, 100*.
[10] Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview, 12*.
[11] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork, 2*.
[12] Blommaert and Dong, 2.
[13] James Davies and Dimitrina Spencer, eds., *Emotions in the Field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010), 1.
[14] Davies and Spencer, 2.
[15] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London, Penguin Books, 1979).
[16] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "'Can the Subaltern Speak?,'" in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris, Reflections on the History of an Idea (Columbia University Press, 2010), 21–78.

Furthermore, the anthropological gaze has been turned to examine the role of the emotions, reactions, and experiences of researchers in the field. The emotions of the observers have become an indispensable part of the research process and an assisting tool for a better understanding of the lifeworld of the study subjects.[17] Radical empiricism – a position that emphasizes intersubjectivity, equal status between the observer and observant, and the role of the emotions in the field, has come to replace traditional empiricism, which has been designed based on objectivity, rationality, and the detachment of the researcher.[18] However, it can be argued that there is no explicit distinction between traditional and radical empiricism, and they should be seen as complementary. Diphoorn has further developed the idea of the role of the researcher's emotions in the whole process of conducting fieldwork and analyzing the data through her examination of violence in South Africa.[19] Having proposed her concept of "emotionality of participation," she explains the dialectic relation between emotions and participation, and how that relation plays a key role in providing insight into the world of the people who are being observed.[20] Diphoorn argues that, rather than considering the emotions of the fieldworkers as obstructive, one must recognize that they are crucial empirical data and are interrelated to other data that is being regarded as knowledge.[21] Furthermore, as has been demonstrated in the movie "Kitchen Stories,"[22] building rapport with the observant, and adopting an "insider" perspective, as well as the feelings and emotions of the observer are of key importance for understanding the world and lived experiences of the study subjects.

[17] Davies and Spencer, *Emotions in the Field, 2*.
[18] Davies and Spencer, 3.
[19] Tessa Diphoorn, "The Emotionality of Participation: Various Modes of Participation in Ethnographic Fieldwork on Private Policing in Durban, South Africa," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 42, no. 2 (April 2013): 201–202. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241612452140.
[20] Diphoorn, 203.
[21] Diphoorn, 203.
[22] *Kitchen Stories*, Comedy/Drama (Norway, Sweden, 2003).

Throughout history, different forms of fieldwork have been adopted, though mostly through inductive approaches.[23] Various methods of conducting fieldwork have led to adopting different epistemological perspectives. However, as argued by O'Reilly,[24] the positivist approach, especially empiricism, has received heavy criticism, and the feasibility of positivism in terms of applying it to ethnographic research has always been questioned. Thus, in the last two or three decades, most of the ethnographic studies have turned to constructivism or relativism.[25] Our study attempts to employ a social constructivist approach to challenge current conceptions of culture, place, and identities among diasporas and diasporic identities as being "closed, fixed, and unchanging."[26] In adopting this position, we also ensure epistemological consistency, given our view that knowledge of the social world can be generated through observation, participation, and experience. It also goes in line with our ontological position that people's interactions, behaviors, actions, and how they are interpreted and acted upon, are to be considered central.[27]

Still, it is important to take into consideration that due to the multifaceted character of fieldwork as a method, there is no clear instruction on how to conduct fieldwork in the best way. Since researchers can adopt different modes of participation while doing fieldwork, the role of the fieldworker in the research process also continues to be debated. Besides, it can be argued that even in the most idealistic forms of fieldwork, there is always a risk of encountering technical, legal, and ethical issues and challenges, which are a natural part of the fieldwork and can occur at any phase of the research process. Naturally, our project is not an exception to this, as it was also imbued with several challenges pertaining to, for example, technical, ethical, and practical issues, which will be addressed in more detail in the following sections.

[23] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 14.
[24] O'Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography*, 164.
[25] O'Reilly, 183.
[26] Shirlena Huang, Peggy Teo, and Brenda S.A Yeoh, "Diasporic Subjects and Identity Negotiations: Women in and from Asia," *Women's Studies International Forum* 23, no. 4 (2000): 391–392.
[27] Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, (Third edition, 2018), 85.

Preparations and encounters

Data collection is one of the most essential components of fieldwork as a method. However, fieldwork cannot entirely be reduced to simply being a way of collecting data. Conducting fieldwork can often cause frustration, disappointment, and high levels of emotions – thus it is widely accepted to characterize it as chaotic.[28] Moreover, while carrying out fieldwork, researchers always must revise their plans, since the process can cause certain encounters and challenges.[29] Given the time constraints and, not to mention, the Covid-19 pandemic, the fieldwork process being complicated and chaotic has been the case for us as well.

The first of several challenges we faced was choosing an appropriate topic that both of us could find interesting and feasible given the pre-determined, limited scope of the study. Based on our reflections, we decided to inquire about diasporic identities, identity fluctuations, belonging, and in-betweenness among Armenians living in Sweden with ties to the Middle East. During the initial stage of our reflections, we also discussed possible modifications of our research topic and formulated a back-up plan. This which would have enabled us to continue moving forward in the research process had certain challenges and scenarios inhibited the pursuit of this project.

As a result, when selecting our topic, we took both practical and theoretical arguments into account. In the case of the former, our choice was mainly guided by the limited timeframe at our disposal for conducting the study, having to adhere to the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as being aware of the ease of finding potential informants among the local Armenian diaspora-community. But more importantly, the gap in the literature about diasporic identities and feelings of (non-)belonging among Armenians in Sweden is what ultimately justified our choice of topic. While previous research on the topic of issues of belonging and in-betweenness among migrants in general is well-developed with a good number of academic works on the subject,[30] there are serious omissions about identity

[28] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 24.
[29] Blommaert and Dong, 24.
[30] Mark Graham and Shahram Khosravi, "Home Is Where You Make It: Repatriation and Diaspora Culture among Iranians in Sweden," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 10, no. 2 (1997): 115–33. Paolo Boccagni, "From the Multi-Sited to the in-between: Ethnography as a Way of

issues of Armenian migrants in Sweden in particular. In addition, our focal point being Armenians living in Sweden with ties to the Middle East created an opportunity to examine the identity re-shaping and reconstruction of our informants through the oscillations between *three* different countries – something that has seemingly not been taken into account before.

We as researchers should also interrogate our own "psychic interiors and personal histories" to be able to explain the roots of our curiosities, reactions, and responses in the field, seeing as our subjective experiences shape "every aspect of the research process from choice of project to the presentation of 'findings' whether consciously or unconsciously so:"[31] Indeed, subjectivity always plays a part in research, though it is not necessarily an easy task to reflect upon the unconscious drives that motivate our research. In this sense, our choice of topic was not only informed by practical and theoretical considerations but also by our emotions, feelings, and subjective experiences – perhaps as diaspora Armenians ourselves. However, while our emotions can provide a window into the soul itself, Crewe suggests not being too credulous of our field emotions as there is nothing more truthful about these emotions "because they come from within" compared to other forms of knowledge.[32] According to Hage, psychoanalysis has shown us that we are in many ways "strangers" to ourselves, and reflecting on our emotions is a reflection of the "strangeness" or otherness contained within us.[33] Not being aware of these risks makes "knowing the self" a substitute for knowing otherness and therefore requires critical reflexiveness on our part.[34] Therefore, we choose to not draw any conclusions with regard to our subjective, unconscious interests in inquiring about diaspora

Delving into Migrants' Transnational Relationships," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 19, no. 1 (2016): 1–16. Fatumo Osman et al., "Longing for a Sense of Belonging-Somali Immigrant Adolescents' Experiences of Their Acculturation Efforts in Sweden," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 15, no. 2 (2020): 1784532–1784532.

[31] Ben Crewe, "Not Looking Hard Enough: Masculinity, Emotion, and Prison Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (April 2014): 392–393, https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800413515829.

[32] Crewe, 393.

[33] Ghassan Hage, "Hating Israel in the Field on Ethnography and Political Emotions" in Davies, J. and Spencer, D. (eds), *Emotions in the Field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 133.

[34] Hage, 133.

identities, while recognizing the role of our subjective experiences and emotions as Armenians in shaping these interests to begin with.

Notwithstanding discussions about the grounds on which our choices as researchers are informed, it must be underlined that we cannot be considered a "natural part of the field." We have limited knowledge about the everyday life patterns of our subjects and, thus, always enter the field as "outsiders," despite arguably being "insiders" on a more general level in the sense that we are familiar with Armenian culture and customs.[35] Still, we transgress rules and ask silly questions, which can cause frustration and anger among the informants who accept us as "insiders" and who, in their eyes, should know better than to disturb power relations, established norms, and social codes.[36] This has been the case for us when we visited one of our participants at her place. Upon entry into the house, we tried to act in a way to not cause much disturbance or anger – not sit or stand in places where we were not supposed to, and not ask silly questions. When we enter the field as researchers, the site also undergoes changes, adjustments, and adaptations – a kind of "observer's effect" as argued by Blommaert and Dong.[37] As fieldworkers, we cannot observe a site without taking into consideration the effects of our presence, and its role in altering the actions of our subjects.

After deciding on the topic, we proceeded to consider how to find appropriate participants for the study. To begin with, we reflected on our pre-existing relations with people of Armenian background living in Sweden and contemplated whether they would make for good research subjects. However, most of the participants who expressed willingness to take part in our project were found on social media channels (mainly Facebook) and with the help of the so-called "snowball effect," which significantly simplified finding appropriate informants for both the interviews and focus group discussions. Here, our Armenian identities often came in handy as a "carte blanche," granting us consent on behalf of the participants and gain access to selected sites, in the shape of invitations to conduct interviews in the participants' own

[35] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 26.
[36] Blommaert and Dong, 27.
[37] Blommaert and Dong, 27.

homes. It is also worth mentioning that we have not met any people with an Armenian background who do not identify themselves as Armenians.

Let us here touch upon the concept of the "gatekeeper," which is an entangled part of the history of ethnography. The 'gatekeeper' is the person who grants access to the group and gives permission to researchers to enter the selected place.[38] As argued by Eklund[39], a "gatekeeper" as a concept is more than a person who provides access to minority groups or marginalized people of a certain society. It can be attributed to any person who facilitates the research process by helping the researchers to reach out to the "individuals, communities, households, key informants or documents that are not available to the public."[40] Considering this, it can be argued that we, as researchers, have played the role of "gatekeepers" or "key masters" during our fieldwork[41].

The finding of informants was followed by identifying the main themes for the research, planning and time scheduling interviews, focus group discussions, and social observation, as well as breaking down our research questions into several smaller, more "palatable" questions, which could give us answers on higher scale on the ladder of abstraction and address the initial inquiry, as proposed by Jennifer Mason.[42] The main themes included in the interviews were around participants' background, their experience with migration or family migration history, how participants identify themselves and what are the main factors that inform their identity, feeling of belonging, and home. During the interviews, simple questions such as "Who will you support in the upcoming friendly football match between Sweden and Armenia?" would ensue in a more relaxed conversation about the countries' national football teams while also informing us about the interviewees' different expressions of identity. Here, an interviewee's

[38] O'Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography,* 132.
[39] Lisa Eklund, "Cadres as Gatekeepers – The Art of Opening the Right Doors?," in *Research Realities in the Social Sciences: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas* (Armherst, New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 129–142.
[40] Eklund, 142.
[41] Lisa, M., Campbell, et al., "Gatekeepers and Keymasters: Dynamic Relationships of Access in Geographical Fieldwork," *Geographical Review* 96, no. 1 (2006): 97–99.
[42] Mason, *Qualitative Researching,* 69.

answer of supporting the team that "plays good football" shows his ambivalence towards who he'd rather win but also noted the Armenian national football team's recent unbeaten streak. He went on to say that he "feels" for Armenia when they win, stating that "when Armenia plays I get "yeeeaah!" (celebrating) because I feel that comes from the genocide survival thing, I feel it in the genes."[43]

In the initial stages of the research process, we decided to conduct in-person interviews and focus group discussions. However, due to the pandemic and time limitations, one interview and one focus group discussion had to be completed digitally. This created its delimitations, especially in the context of focus group discussions, resulting in a less lively and fluid conversation as participants had to take turns to speak. Nevertheless, this was not the case for the in-person interviews and second focus group discussion, where the conversations took place in a very interactive and dynamic atmosphere. Furthermore, during one interview in the participant's own home, we took advantage of the opportunity to engage in an unplanned discussion, or what O'Reilly identifies as an 'opportunistic discussion.' The discussion occurred naturally when our interviewee's husband joined in, granting us the possibility to see "how ideas are shared or generated, how thoughts are shaped in interaction, how norms are reproduced, and how power relations are managed."[44] We seized this opportunity to test our participants' responses as well as to bring the topic around to certain questions we had been puzzling over while conducting the project.[45] Apart from this, visiting our participants at their place also created the opportunity to conduct social observation and take notes, which is an indispensable part of ethnographic fieldwork.

In total, we conducted four individual interviews with two women and two men who identify themselves as Armenian or have an Armenian background. We also conducted two focus group discussions, each consisting of three people. In total, three women and three men participated in the focus group discussions. The participants were between 19-45 years

[43] Arthur, Interview, 2021.
[44] O'Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography,* 79.
[45] O'Reilly, 79.

old. All the participants were born in or have parents or grandparents who were born in Middle Eastern countries, particularly, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Specifically, two participants were born in Iraq, two were born in Sweden but have parents and grandparents born in Iraq and Iran, and two were born in Syria. Participants have different educational backgrounds, including specialists in IT, mathematics, engineering, law, and entrepreneurship. Two of the participants in the individual interviews also took part in the focus group discussions. The individual interviews lasted between 60-120 minutes, and the two focus group discussions were around 60 minutes.

Apart from taking notes, the main technique for collecting data was to record the encounters with participants. Making the recordings was important for us to later use as "evidence or examples" in our analysis.[46] It is also important to note that recording a conversation can be perceived as "threatening" for participants. Thus, as researchers, it is our responsibility to explain why we are doing the recordings and that they are not going to be used outside of an academic research context and ensure that the recordings will be deleted after having finished the research.[47] During the fieldwork, we did not experience any challenges where our informants refused to be recorded or demanded recordings be deleted after completing the study. However, even though none of our participants were against us recording them, the discussions after the recorder had been turned off were significantly more relaxed. This can also be ascribed to the fact that we often spoke Armenian after having completed the interviews, which will be discussed later. While making recordings, it is also extremely important to double-check that the recording device works properly to avoid ending up with any "raw material" from the fieldwork.[48] Unfortunately, this was the case for us during one instance. Due to unforeseen technical issues, we were unable to fully record one of our interviews. Luckily enough, the interviewee was later also part of a group discussion, during which we tried to compensate for the lost recording.

[46] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 31.
[47] Blommaert and Dong, 34.
[48] Blommaert and Dong, 35.

Interviews and experiences

Our study relied heavily on informal, semi-structured interviews, motivated by our desire to gain insight into personal life stories. The choice of method is based on the ontological perspective that defines people as meaningful within the social world and an epistemological position that believes that people, especially through interactions, can provide important insights into the world around us.[49] O'Reilly argues that informal conversations grant the opportunity to have "interconnections of the views rather than a one-way flow of information," which in turn contributes to the reflexivity of both researcher and participant and leads to expressing contradictory views, fears, hopes, etc.[50]

In conducting the ethnographic fieldwork, we employed the so-called abductive reasoning. Rather than adhering to inductive and deductive models, employing abductive reasoning made it possible to move iteratively between theory and analysis, while constantly reinterpreting the acquired data. Instead of simply looking for evidence, it allowed us to play with possible explanations and inquire further about possible gaps in the literature by gathering evidence towards previously unnoticed patterns.[51]

This is not to say that interviewing the identities of diaspora Armenians is necessarily ethnographic, seeing as how there is nothing intrinsically ethnographic about conducting interviews.[52] O'Reilly refers to Barbara Sherman Heyl, who contends that ethnographic interviews, unlike other forms of interviewing, are conducted in the context of an "established relationship with a research partner" and through relaxing and enjoyable unstructured interviews with participants, with whom the researcher has built respectful, ethical, equal, and sensitive relationships.[53] Conducting interviews with Armenians significantly simplified the process of building relationships with the participants and yielded far greater results in terms of data than if we had not been insiders. Seeing as how one of us is an Armenian from Armenia, and the other is a Swedish-born ethnic Armenian, we were

[49] Mason, *Qualitative Researching,* 111.
[50] O'Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography,* 126.
[51] O'Reilly, 105-107.
[52] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 42.
[53] O'Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography,* 128.

able to better understand the differences in the identity constructions of our subjects. Being insiders, as diaspora Armenians, and considering how materially and historically grounded realities is inextricably tied to understandings of culture as "transient social constructions," helped us recognize the different strategies used by the interviewees to reaffirm elements of their Armenian cultural identities to "maintain links to their roots" while negotiating the "values and norms of their host societies in rewriting their identities."[54]

A prime example of the advantages to being an insider is how one of us researchers thought to bring a little gift bag of sweets for one of the interviews taking place at the interviewee's home, which is a custom among Armenians when visiting one another (especially for the first time). After having conducted the interview, we also followed the custom of politely declining the host's attempts at setting up a coffee table – only for them to insist on it and have their way. It is not necessarily that we did not want coffee or tea – rather on the contrary, it would (and did) give us the opportunity to have a lengthy talk about the themes of the interviews in a freer manner and without any barriers. Engaging in local customs of bringing a small gift bag or politely declining a cup of coffee before finally accepting, helped our subject feel more relaxed and think of it more as a friendly encounter rather than research. In this case, being an insider can therefore be argued to have been more of an advantage than a disadvantage – especially seeing as how the writing process itself forces the kind of emotional and mental distance that was jeopardized during the fieldwork process itself.[55]

While it must also be recognized that insider ethnography can sometimes be problematic and cause problems with reading the "unconscious grammar" of society due to the lack of detachment, our roles as key masters and insiders helped us gain rapport and express the "unconscious grammar" rather than describing them.[56] This can be said to have been a result of primary socialization, including reading non-verbal

[54] Huang, Teo, and Yeoh, "Diasporic Subjects and Identity Negotiations: Women in and from Asia," 395.
[55] O'Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography,* 116.
[56] O'Reilly, 111-114.

communication, which helped us in our endeavor to create relaxed, open, and truthful conversations.[57] By recognizing and having experienced the complexity of identity negotiations in diaspora, due to challenging stereotypes of both home/traditional cultures and host societies, we could not only adapt to the fact of our subjects' Armenian heritage but also relate to and be sensitive to their identity struggles. This awareness and sensitiveness as insiders also helped us successfully de-essentialize "diaspora," which is something that would be hard, if not impossible for an outsider to fully grasp.[58] An example of this type of identity negotiation was when one of the interviewees, when asked if he wants his future kids to identify as Armenian, started speaking about his values and what he wants his future wife to be like, stating that "it's not a problem for me to be the one to cook or clean or to change diapers. I think the father should change diapers too, you know… for me that doesn't make me less of a man."[59] Being someone who, like the interviewee, was born and raised in Sweden but with an Armenian ethnicity, I could very much relate to the interviewee's struggle of having to find my balance between my Swedish identity and values, while also taking into account my Armenian identity. The interviewee's answer to the question perfectly captured my struggle of wanting to find an Armenian wife with a progressive mindset in the future by stating that it is like being "at a civil war with your own values."[60]

However, using our own experiences to draw inferences about someone else's life can be problematic, according to Luhrmann, who contends that attempting to feel what the speaker is feeling through "empathy" is an impossible task, and only partially possible through our emotional response.[61] Our personal experiences can be an important guide to the emotional experiences of others, despite the risk of

[57] O'Reilly, 114.
[58] Huang, Teo, and Yeoh, "Diasporic Subjects and Identity Negotiations: Women in and from Asia," 396.
[59] Adam, Interview, 2021.
[60] Adam.
[61] Tanya Luhrmann, "9. What Counts as Data?," in *The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience*, ed. James Davies and Dimitrina Spencer (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2010), 220-221, https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/9780804774260-012.

"countertransference": "an emotional judgment that rises out of the listener's life circumstances, not out of anything the speaker has said."[62] Irrespective of using abductive reasoning, we must therefore be aware of how we use our own emotional experiences to interpret others.

Yet, fieldwork is also described as looking in a mirror and seeing not only others but also oneself, with the researcher being both a subject and an object.[63] By engaging with the interviewees in our roles as insiders, we can still reflect upon and conclude our own experiences when conducting fieldwork. This is not only limited to the conversations and interviews themselves but can also be related to our "sense of place" and emotional dimensions of topography that are spurred by particular landscapes.[64] During one interview at the interviewee's apartment, I felt very much like I was at home. Not because of furniture, or the mix of Swedish and Armenian books and souvenirs, but particularly because of two handmade picture frames shaped like letters from the Armenian alphabet, which I also have back at home. To my surprise, the interviewee had even shared the experience of having one of the wooden frames break due to its poor structural integrity and having to glue it back together! The particular sensations, created by the emplacement of people and co-produced settings, made me aware of the impossibility of trying to "separate the ethnography as written from the place as sensed."[65] Regardless of arguments for and against using one's own "raw moments" in ethnography, or interpreting someone else's emotions, it remains clear that including our perceptions as researchers is not only integral for the study but also unavoidable when conducting fieldwork. Being an insider not only helped me recognize the letter-shaped frame as an expression of Armenian culture but also helped me connect with the interviewee through our shared experiences.

[62] Luhrmann, 220-221.
[63] O'Reilly, *Key Concepts in Ethnography,* 117.
[64] Kirsten Hastrup, "Emotional Topographies: The Sense of Place in the Far North"," in *Emotions in the Field the Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience Ed. James Davies and Dimitrina Spencer* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2010), 191.
[65] Hastrup, 193.

Analyzing findings

Having reflected on the central concepts and challenges that have imbued the fieldwork process, we can now turn to analyzing the collected data. This section attempts to detail our findings through the lens of contemporary theories about the broader concepts of "diaspora identities," "belonging," and "in-betweenness."

The balancing act between multiplex identities: belonging and in-betweenness among diaspora Armenians

After spending time with people of different ages, genders, social statuses, and various Armenian and Middle Eastern backgrounds —be it from Iraq, Iran, Syria, or Lebanon —it soon became clear to us that our research participants' diverse lifeworlds and wide-ranging experiences have produced unique identities that situate them in different cultures and mindsets in terms of belonging and feelings of in-betweenness. As argued by Narayan, the identities of our participants proved to be multiplex, containing many different strands of identification – complexities that are ascribed to not only their different geographical and ethnic backgrounds but also the numerous other factors, e.g., their social statuses and family situations.[66]

Yet, when asked to tell us about themselves, many of our interviewees chose to primarily highlight their Armenianness – perhaps as a result of their positionalities changing depending on situational interactions, perhaps not. It cannot be ruled out that our participants made an extra effort in presenting themselves as diasporans, knowing that both of us researchers deliberately positioned ourselves as Armenians to gain rapport and access. It must also be taken into consideration that what we as researchers perceive to be objective as our scientific results is the product of a subjective scientific process if read through Bourdieu's lens of "epistemic reflexivity."[67] However, what we deem to be the "truth" comes as a result of analyzing the participants' narratives, in the shape of stories and anecdotes which are told using particular rules of coherence and narrative patterning.[68] For example,

[66] Kirin Narayan, "How Native Is a 'Native' Anthropologist?," *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 3 (1993): 671–86.
[67] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork*, 66.
[68] Blommaert and Dong, 70-71.

one interviewee who was born and raised in Sweden to one Armenian and one Syrian-Armenian parent, described her feelings of in-betweenness as not feeling a "hundred percent Swedish" when socializing with Swedish people, nor a "hundred percent non-Swedish" when spending time with Armenians or other people.[69] Still, when questioned about her identity, she stated that she tells people she is "from" Armenia, despite her father jokingly telling her to tell people that she's Swedish "because they know you aren't."[70] Similarly, another respondent described himself as being "like a hybrid car," sometimes going electric and sometimes on gas – stating that he feels Armenian when he's at home, but also "adapts" to his surroundings, saying that "listening to rock music and being with my Swedish friends doesn't make me less Armenian."[71] Whether or not our interviewees chose to only highlight certain strands of the identities despite our open-ended question for them to introduce themselves, it remains clear that many of them could share nuanced stories of having to adjust their positionalities depending on situational interactions. This is very much in accordance with what Yeoh argues to be one of many strategies that diasporans use to "reaffirm elements from their cultural identities to maintain links with their roots while negotiating the values and norms of their host societies in rewriting their identities."[72] Thus, the different cultures of our interviewees should not be considered as fixed or unbounded, but rather as "transient social constructions" that affect identity constructions and, when related to migration, subject themselves to continual redefinition.[73]

Interestingly enough, none of our research subjects seemed to assign importance to their Middle Eastern background despite some of them being born in Middle Eastern countries and growing up there. To some extent, this seems to be explained by the prominence of Armenian communities in the Middle East, where Armenians have their churches, schools, and clubs and didn't 'mix' with the other communities. Several interviewees had attended

[69] Suzie, Zaman, Jenna, Focus Group 1, Interview, 2021.
[70] Suzie, Zaman, Jenna.
[71] Adam, Interview.
[72] Huang, Teo, and Yeoh, "Diasporic Subjects and Identity Negotiations: Women in and from Asia," 395.
[73] Huang, Teo, and Yeoh, 395.

exclusively Armenian schools where they had, for example, prioritized learning the Armenian language over Arabic.[74] For example, one interviewee details how her family engaged in Armenian tradition during her upbringing in Syria.[75] Another interviewee simply stated that she doesn't have "any emotional attachments to Syria (her birthplace) or the Middle East,"[76] while a third one simply stated that the only thing, he keeps from his Persian Armenian heritage is the food, holding that he thinks that "the Persian kitchen is the best in the world."[77]

Indeed, the stories and anecdotes showcased our participants' ambivalence towards the Middle East in terms of its significance and as an expression of their in-betweenness, leading us into an "experiential world" where their sense of belonging and 'home' can be said to have followed a pattern of being conceptualized in two entirely distinct ways.[78] On one hand, our participants' conceptualization of 'home' was seemingly located in the desire to attain ontological security, with many of them having fled the Middle East region due to war, conflict, and economic instability, among other reasons. One interviewee detailed his family's story of fleeing from Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq to Jordan under difficult circumstances due to economic reasons and war and moving from Jordan to Armenia before finally settling in Sweden. In addition, some of the interviewees who had lived in Armenia described the country as feeling somewhat foreign to them – especially due to variations in culture and differences in language which will be further discussed in the next section.[79] This indicates how many of our participants concurrently perceive and conceptualize 'home' as an orientation to an imagined homeland and regard it as being what Brubaker argues to be "an authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty."[80] In the eyes of our research subjects, this imagined homeland did not constitute the Armenia that exists today, but rather the lands in modern-day eastern Turkey

[74] Arthur, Ella, Andy, Focus Group 2, Interview, 2021.
[75] Anna, Interview, 2021.
[76] Suzie, Zaman, Jenna, Focus Group 1, Interview.
[77] Adam, Interview.
[78] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 83.
[79] Arthur, Ella, Andy, Focus Group 2, Interview.
[80] Rogers Brubaker, "The 'diaspora' Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005): 5.

(or Western Armenia as several interviewees preferred to call it) where millions of Armenians once lived before having to disperse due to the 1915 Genocide. In this sense, the inability to inhabit the lands where our respondents' ancestors had lived before being driven out makes for a continuous, hereditary burden that is carried by our respondents and can perhaps be ascribed to the prominence of their Armenian identities, despite being born or living in the Middle East and having to orient themselves in Sweden, which comprises a 'third' country.

In a way, embracing one's ethnic Armenian identity implies furthering this kind of in-betweenness or even, in some cases, an emotional void akin to feeling a lack of "topophilia" or "affective bond between people and place or setting."[81] For example, during one opportunistic discussion, an Armenian couple described the hardships of there not being any Armenian apostolic churches where they live in Sweden, and their experience of having to wait for an Armenian priest to visit every three weeks. In addition, the sense of place is also inherently and co-constitutively tied to the formatting of social space, which explains having to negotiate one's values in attempting to balance and reaffirm cultural and ethnic roots with the values and norms in Swedish society.[82] This is seemingly a harder task than in the Middle East, given the lack of Armenian cultural elements in Swedish everyday life (illustrated in the case of the family's discontent with there not being an apostolic church), and the lack of other Armenians in general. Consequently, in Sweden, more emphasis is put on the Armenian identity being created in the home environment, as Swedish society does not necessarily offer any exclusively Armenian cultural elements that can serve as identity signifiers. During our interviews, all first-generation migrants made a point of highlighting Armenian as being their first language, while proficiency was not as common among second or third-generation immigrants who were born in Sweden. One interviewee who didn't know Armenian "in a good amount at all" noted that they speak Swedish at home but appreciated the hospitality of being accepted as Armenian when visiting the country,[83] while another

[81] Hastrup, "Emotional Topographies: The Sense of Place in the Far North," 195.
[82] Hastrup, 192.
[83] Suzie, Zaman, Jenna, Focus Group 1, Interview.

Swedish-born interviewee who also didn't know the language growing up, described a somewhat different experience of having to put up with others perceiving him as less Armenian due to him initially not knowing the language.[84]

In the article "The 'diaspora' diaspora," Brubaker underlines the frequent use of boundary-maintenance strategies among diasporas to preserve a distinct identity by deliberately resisting assimilation and maintaining traditions of self-segregation through for example endogamy.[85] Upon questioning our participants on issues about different aspects of life, such as raising children, dating, and marriage in connection to the normative question of preserving Armenian strands of identity, we received conflicting viewpoints. One interviewee noted the importance of wanting to marry an Armenian and for his kids to be able to speak Armenian in the future and "read and write [in Armenian] what I can't do."[86] During a focus group interview, another participant stressed the importance of not instilling one's values upon kids in favor of letting them find themselves in what is becoming a universal environment and a "spiritual way of people not identifying themselves by country" – maintaining freedom of choice for the child itself as integral despite the disappointment that might come with the child not being able to speak Armenian.[87] This was, however, challenged by the two other discussants who held the view that "by being assimilated or integrated, we lose our identity"[88] – emphasizing the importance of parenting future generations to be aware of their ancestral heritage while also noting the inevitable effects of globalization in making the world smaller and more connected and to contributing to a homogenization of culture. Despite there not being a consensus among our interviewees on the matter, it perfectly highlighted their inner conflicts in attempting to strike a balance between future generations being aware of their past, while also finding their place in an increasingly globalized and modern world. In the case of Adam, this also extended to the normative wish of not only being subjected to traditional

[84] Adam, Interview.
[85] Brubaker, "The 'diaspora' Diaspora," 6.
[86] Adam, Interview.
[87] Arthur, Ella, Andy, Focus Group 2, Interview.
[88] Arthur, Ella, Andy.

cultural elements of Armenian society but also influencing Armenian society to adapt to more progressive stances and creating a two-way street where he too, can influence what is considered "Armenian." In particular, he illustrated the cultural clash of being expected to ask a girl's father for approval before marrying her and him not wanting to give in to the tradition because of his progressive view that such actions would undercut the woman's agency and result in "selling out her independence."[89]

Notwithstanding debates on normative aspects of preserving ethnic strands of identity, it remains clear that both "chosen traumas" and other contemporary crises have acted as catalysts for identity oscillation among the Armenian diaspora in Sweden. Here, "chosen traumas" refers to the shared mental representation of massive trauma, experienced by the victimized ancestors of a certain group, as defined by Volkan Vamik[90], and is in this case represented by the 1915 Genocide which was committed against Armenians by the Ottoman Empire and is denied continuously by Turkey. Several interviewees noted how the genocide, as well as the Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) war that took place during the fall of 2020, brought the global Armenian diaspora closer together, and how the crisis "reactivated" the latent trauma of genocide to support peoples' Armenian identities in the face of existential threats.[91] Suzie described how she took matters into her own hands to connect with other Armenians in connection with the start of the war, after having been secluded from the Armenian diaspora,[92] while Adam made a point in saying that he wouldn't have gotten to know me, Edgar, had it not been for war breaking out in Armenia.[93] In addition, this was also echoed by Zaman, who concluded that the war "brought us together more."[94] Surprisingly, Anna would even go on to say that she was more moved by the war in Karabakh than the war that is ravaging Syria, from

[89] Adam, Interview.
[90] Vamik D. Volkan, "Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity," *Group Analysis* 34, no. 1 (2001): 79–87.
[91] Volkan.
[92] Suzie, Zaman, Jenna, Focus Group 1, Interview.
[93] Adam, Interview.
[94] Suzie, Zaman, Jenna, Focus Group 1, Interview.

where she also had to flee.[95] Others, such as Jenna, didn't want to comment on the war due to the feelings that it stirred up, which made us as researchers aware of the nature of the questions we asked through an ethical lens. With the Karabakh war still being fresh in the minds of many Armenians, including our own, we proceeded with caution when asking about matters that could be of a sensitive nature to our interviewees. In the case of Jenna, her silence on the matter is not to be considered as a lack of care but can be analyzed very much as a part of speech, effectively positioning herself as an Armenian.[96] In contrast, while her silence and hesitation when asked about her Middle Eastern identity also proved to be a production of meaning, it would rather indicate her lack of ties to the region besides "unfortunately" being born there. The two moments of silence and hesitation, despite being connected in the sense of accentuating her place of belonging as an Armenian, arguably showed how they could be interpreted as opposites in terms of meaning when placed in the context of her other statements made during the discussion.

Language, culture, religion: exploring the identity signifiers among diaspora Armenians

"My Armenian identity.... eating khash (Armenian dish), listening to Tatul (Armenian singer), and atami chop (toothpick)" – interview with Adam.[97]

Even as 'insiders,' we are torn about what Adam truly meant when reducing his Armenianness to simply saying "atami chop," or "toothpick" in Armenian,[98] going to show how we as researchers are not always drawn closer, but sometimes also thrust apart in the inverse process of renaming and reframing our pre-existing knowledge about identity and culture.[99] Perhaps Adam was jokingly making a point in how many Armenian men always ask for a toothpick after having finished a meal, or simply how many of them walk around the house with only the pointy edge of a toothpick

[95] Anna, Interview.
[96] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 45.
[97] Adam, Interview.
[98] Adam.
[99] Narayan, "How Native Is a 'Native' Anthropologist?," 678.

visible from the corner of their mouths? Perhaps it is something entirely different.

Whatever it may be, and despite the setback of never truly knowing what Adam was referring to, we shall still try to discuss the meaning of identity and the role of signifiers in the identity construction of our participants through the lenses of their stories and anecdotes.[100] We attempt here to explore cultural identity and representation. How do participants explain and narrate their own identities? What makes them Armenian in their own eyes? What do they deem to be appropriate identity signifiers?

As argued by Stuart Hall, identity is not "as transparent or unproblematic as we think." Identity is never accomplished, or complete, it is always in the process of "production" and "reproduction" and "always constituted within, not outside, representation."[101] And, of course, based on the fact that we always speak from a particular place, time, and position as researchers, we should also puzzle over how we "enunciate" our participants within the context.[102] We as researchers should be aware of our impact on our study subjects, and "the way in which the observation events themselves are captured in a real historical context, from which they derive meaning and salience."[103]

Hall defines two different ways of explaining "cultural identity," the first being derived from the perspective of seeing "cultural identity" as a collective "one true self," which is being carried inside many other people who share history and ancestry in common.[104] This approach makes us think over the responses of our interviewees when being asked to describe themselves and identify themselves. Our participant Anna – a first-generation migrant from Syria, for example, identifies herself as Armenian and explains that by way of her ethnic roots and friendship with Armenians, her motivation is to keep and honor Armenian traditions such as preparing food that is common among Armenians, and speaking the Armenian

[100] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 70.
[101] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory* ed by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Routledge, 1994), 222-237.
[102] Williams and Chrisman, 222.
[103] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 66.
[104] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 223.

language at home, "Because for me even though now I am in Sweden, but I feel like my roots are Armenian, mostly I speak Armenian, I like Armenian food, and mostly traditions that we do in Armenia also. So even if we were back in Syria, we had our traditions, so we felt like we were Armenian at the end…"[105] Adam also identifies himself as an Armenian through his love for Armenian culture and music and traditional feasts with friends and family to eat the traditional dish "Khash."[106]

Now, let us return to the second approach of defining "cultural identity." As argued by Hall, this position emphasizes that, despite having significant similarities and sharing a common history and ancestry, there are also critical and deep differences among people which constitute "what we really are, or rather – since history has intervened – what we have become."[107] Thus, in this sense "cultural identity," is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being," with a strong connection to both the past and future. This approach explains identities as the names given "to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."[108] It is very interesting to again refer to the personal experiences of our participants, enabling us to see how the narratives of the past construct and reconstruct the diasporic identities. During the interviews, some of our participants described themselves as being descendants of the Armenian Genocide and having ancestors who had to flee the genocide and were subjected to forced relocations. Our participant Ella shared with us the story of her great-grandmother who told about the Armenian Genocide and how listening to her story influenced her perception of self and motivated her to discover her Armenian identity (fieldnotes taken during the interview with Ella). During the focus group discussion, Ella made a point of mentioning the effects of the genocide on her great-grandmother by emphasizing that she was always depressed and in an angry mood which often hovered like a cloud over the family but was not spoken of.[109]

[105] Anna, Interview.
[106] Adam, Interview.
[107] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 225.
[108] Hall, 225.
[109] Arthur, Ella, Andy, Focus Group 2, Interview.

Moreover, the interviews with our participants showed how the differences among people with shared history and ancestry constitute the way people perceive their identities and what they consider as signifiers of their identity. And what comes first to mind is again the question of language. As argued by Calhoun, throughout history language has been defined as a "key test of the existence of a nation."[110] Since language is deeply rooted in history and our contemporary society, it has often been understood as a continuation of the nation.[111] Regarding our study participants, we also noticed both their subtle and overt inclinations to emphasize the importance of language for keeping their Armenian identities. Our interviewee Anna, for example, underlined that they only used to speak Armenian both in Syria and now in Sweden. She also mentioned that it is her responsibility to teach the Armenian language to her children and future grandchildren, as it is the only way for them to preserve their identities as Armenians, stating that "We speak only Armenian at home... If we don't do that...it might go away with time."[112]

Moreover, this has also been the case for our other participants, such as Andy, who mentioned the importance of language for keeping his Armenian identity, emphasizing that "it's important for humans to know their background, where they came from - where they come from…. So, I definitely think it is important to keep the identity" (discussed in the context of language).[113]

Another essential aspect that came through our opportunistic discussion with Anna and her husband is the difference between Western and Eastern dialects of the Armenian language and their perception of the Western dialect (the dialect they speak) being more beautiful, pure, and ideal, whereas the Eastern dialect (which is spoken by Armenians in Armenia) was seen as 'rough' due to its influence from the intonations of words in the Russian language (fieldnotes). They also mentioned having problems understanding the eastern Armenian dialect when visiting Armenia or

[110] Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19, no. 1 (1993): 211–226.
[111] , 226.
[112] Anna, Interview.
[113] Arthur, Ella, Andy, Focus Group 2, Interview.

speaking to friends with that dialect. In another interview, Arthur – an Armenian from Iraq, also mentioned the difficulties of understanding Eastern Armenian by jokingly saying that it was "like someone speaking Chinese."[114] When factored in, the small differences in culture, such as the different dialects of Armenian, can have a proportionally big impact on people's feelings of belonging, as was discussed in the previous section.

Different perceptions about what makes someone Armenian can also bring about tensions, which occurred during a focus group discussion, when Zaman – a first-generation migrant from Iraq, referred to the Armenian language as the most important signifier of Armenian identity, stating that "it's like weird to speak another language to someone, to an Armenian. Even now, like I'm feeling weird to speak English among Armenians...." while another participant who considers herself Armenian despite not knowing the language, remained silent during this statement.[115] Indeed, while language is important for some, others do not consider it to be the main signifier of Armenianness. For instance, Suzie mentioned that not knowing the Armenian language does not make her feel less Armenian. Instead, she believed that what makes her Armenian is the culture, saying that "we celebrate the Armenian traditions and the food, and my mom still speaks like Armenian to me, my sisters sometimes and we understand it pretty well..."[116] Rather than strictly talking about language, she also considered Armenianness in terms of hospitality, which she explained using her personal experiences of visiting Armenia and always being welcomed despite not being able to communicate freely.[117] For one interviewee, Ella, being Armenian implied having a very "specific energy" in the family:

"But I would say something that is like, specifically Armenian, to me, is something that I remember when I was a child – it's like always this very specific energy, and you're with your family, that I don't find like anywhere else…And like this feeling of home....it's like a comfort."[118]

[114] Arthur, Interview.
[115] Suzie, Zaman, Jenna, Focus Group 1, Interview.
[116] Suzie, Zaman, Jenna.
[117] Suzie, Zaman, Jenna.
[118] Arthur, Ella, Andy, Focus Group 2, Interview.

Another participant underlined the importance of family and parents for keeping language and identity alive, saying that "it does not depend on me, my *parents* should speak it [Armenian] to me, it's not like I can go and *buy* it from the shop!"[119] Interestingly, Adam started speaking Armenian while addressing his point that language is taught from a young age and that it is not something that is simply purchased. By defying our agreement to conduct the interview in English in favor of speaking Armenian, Adam's choice to switch language can also be seen as a way for him to emphasize his point or, perhaps, even reinforce his feeling of being Armenian by speaking the language while addressing the fact of him previously being blamed for not knowing it. This is in line with Blommaert and Dong,[120] who argue that language and word choices are of key importance, given their power to enable us to not only understand the interconnection of language with emotions, attitudes, and feelings of the participants but also help us "enter to a wider package of social and cultural meanings."[121] Furthermore, Adam disclosed his experiences of being made fun of, not by Armenians from Armenia or Swedes, but rather by those who are supposed to be "his own" – Armenians from Iran, who would often question Adam's identity and ostracize him for not sharing their humor, as "Armenians from Iran have another sense of humor, instead of laughing together with you, they make fun of you."[122] Interestingly, here Adam once again switched to the Armenian language in what seems to be a pattern of him using Armenian to express his feelings in the face of recalling memories from having been wronged or as to emphasize the importance of his arguments.

Moreover, the role of religions also has been mentioned briefly as an important aspect for keeping the Armenian identity. However, contrary to what we initially thought, few of the participants mentioned Christianity and holding certain religious beliefs as a signifier for the Armenian identity. For instance, Ella stated, "Like, I am not

[119] Adam, Interview.
[120] Blommaert and Dong, *Ethnographic Fieldwork,* 70.
[121] Blommaert and Dong, 72.
[122] Adam, Interview.

Christian....So that was kind of also maybe for some people thought it was harder to connect with me, maybe, because I'm not Christian," while another noted that 'we' were Armenians before we were Christians, despite him being religious, as opposed to Ella.[123]

Conclusion

In conclusion, this limited, yet deeply personal and emotionally rewarding project has helped us greatly in improving our understanding of the central concepts that underpin fieldwork as a method and has provided much-needed experience when employing the method in future research. In the course of this project, which mainly concerned itself with the identity constructions of diaspora Armenians in Sweden with a background in the Middle East, we have continuously highlighted the importance of reflexivity on behalf of us researchers, as well as other concepts in fieldwork and ethnography pertaining to insiders/outsiders, going "native," rapport, gatekeepers, ethics, access, etc. These concepts which also proved to be very useful as tools in analyzing the collected data from having conducted multiple interviews, focus group discussions, opportunistic discussions, and social observation.

What we thought would be an easy task of analyzing the familiar setting of the Armenian diaspora in Sweden proved to be deeply imbued with challenges – be it related to technical issues, finding the true meaning of why an interviewee described his Armenianness with the word "toothpick," or unraveling the truly unique identities of our participants, whose different life-worlds and experiences have contributed to their multiplex identities and social differentiation. Yet, we often also managed to strike a chord with our participants, which allowed us to tap into their mixed feelings of belonging, in-betweenness, and trauma, as well as their identity signifiers in what is seemingly an uncertain future for many aspects of Armenian culture and traditions in the fragile diaspora and amidst our increasingly globalized world. Many of our participants found themselves split between two different conceptualizations of 'home', with one constituting the real and the present, while the other represented the imagined Armenian homeland, the unattainable ideal which is thought to heal, bring closure, and ontological

[123] Arthur, Ella, Andy, Focus Group 2, Interview.

security. Our interviewee's carrying this ideal despite being born in the Middle East or Sweden indicated how the chosen trauma, the genocide, can be thought of as a hereditary burden of sorts. Yet, it was also indicated that being 'liberated' of this burden and not growing up with identity signifiers held to be exclusively Armenian might not be liberating after all, seeing as how many of our interviewees who did not master the Armenian language or partake in Armenian culture showed signs of having their Armenian identity evoked in the face of contemporary struggles, conflicts, and wars. Irrespective of the results of our analysis, this exercise remains not only important for our future ethnographic endeavors as researchers but also for our own conceptualizations as Armenians.

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Appendix

Group log

Throughout the research process, an equal amount of time and effort has been devoted by both Edgar and Sona in conducting the fieldwork. All interviews, focus group discussions, and social observation have been carried out jointly, enabling us to discuss in detail our main takeaways, thoughts, and perspectives about each of our participants' way of acting, expressing their feelings, speaking, and narrating their stories and experiences.

In terms of the writing process, Sona focused on the fieldwork as a method, while Edgar took the responsibility of writing up the section on interviews and experiences, whereas the section about preparation and

encounters was authored by both. Also, we would like to underline that we read each other's texts, shared our concerns and comments, and spent *a lot* of time editing them to ensure textual coherence, as well as reader-friendliness.

The analysis was separated into two main parts and each of us undertook the responsibility of writing one section. Before writing, we thought about the main points and arguments that we aimed to convey. Sona worked on producing the part entitled *"Language, culture, religion: exploring the identity signifiers of the Armenian diaspora,"* while Edgar's task was to develop the part about *"The balancing act between multiple identities: belonging and in-betweenness among diaspora Armenians."* Soon after completing the writing of our separated parts, we read and edited each other's texts and came up with suggestions for improving the analysis and the quality of the text.

Lastly, it can also be mentioned that the introduction and conclusion were produced through a joint effort.

Another aspect to consider is that as the article is composed together, we mainly use the plural pronoun to refer to ourselves, however, on pp. 9-10 the singular "I" and "my" are used due to the fact that the feelings described were only experienced by only one of the researchers.

ՏՈՒՆԸ ՈՐՏԵ՞Ղ Է. ՇՎԵԴԻԱՅՈՒՄ ՍՓՅՈՒՌՔԱՀԱՅԵՐԻ ԻՆՔՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՁԵՎԱՎՈՐՄԱՆ ՎԵՐԱԲԵՐՅԱԼ ԱԶԳԱԳՐԱԿԱՆ ԴԱՇՏԱՅԻՆ ՀԱՄԱՌՈՏ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ

Սոնա Սուքիասյան
Սոցիոլոգիայի և աշխատանքի գիտության ինստիտուտ,
Գոթենբուրգի համալսարան

Էդգար Դարբինյան
Լունդի համալսարան

Բանալի բառեր *՝ սփյուռք, ինքնություն, պատկանելության զգացում, սփյուռքի հայեր, Շվեդիա*

Այս հետազոտության նպատակն է ուսումնասիրել, թե ինչպես են միգրանտների ինքնությունը, և պատկանելության զգացումը ձևավորվում և կերպափոխվում տարբեր մշակույթների և Շվեդիայի տեղական սփյուռքի հետ փոխազդեցությունների ընթացքում: Մասնավորապես, այս աշխատանքը ուսումնասիրում է, թե ինչպես են Մերձավոր Արևելքից Շվեդիա տեղափոխված հայ միգրանտների կամ միգրանտների զավակների ինքնությունները, մշտապես ձևավորվում և վերափոխվում տարբեր մշակույթների հետ փոխազդեցությունների արդյունքում: Աշխատանքի նպատակն է նաև հետազոտել, թե ինչպես են ինքնության փոխակերպումները ազդում միգրանտների տեղի ու պատկանելության ընկալման վրա: Մասնակիցների անձնական պատմությունների և փորձառությունների միջոցով ուսումնասիրությունը նպատակ ունի վերաքննել ինքնությունների և պատկանելության զգացումի անփոփոխ լինելու վերաբերյալ պրիմորդիալ ենթադրությունները և մասնակիցների տեսանկյունից սփյուռքում ինքնությունների ձևավորման ընթացքը վերլուծել: