Student and Graduate Mobility in Armenia

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Chapter 1 Armenia in Context

The aim of this book is to provide insight into student and graduate mobility, focusing on the example of Armenians moving to different destinations, including Russia, the United States and the European Union. Underpinning this objective is a desire to provide new perspectives on geographical circulation among the highly qualified through conducting exploratory research in a national context that, unlike other parts of Eurasia, has not been extensively covered in prior studies; some of our questions may be familiar to readers well acquainted with the student and graduate mobility research field, including where and why people wish to go abroad, but the choice of location reflects a desire to expand the parameters of this field. Additionally, in engaging with Armenia at the present time, we have an opportunity to observe the potential impact of Armenia's Velvet Revolution on the life planning of 51 interviewees.

As a starting point for our discussion, we can therefore say that a major motivation for engaging with Armenia has been the need to place greater emphasis on student and graduate mobility outside familiar environments, in particular the EU, a region in which the topic has rapidly gone from being a niche interest, with few substantial works of note (see, e.g., Murphy-Lejeune, 2002), to forming an integral part of the study of human mobility and a serious political concern, especially within European level political institutions. From the point of view of the authors of this book, different aspects of spatial circulation have also proved to be valuable as research topics, including student exchanges and moving abroad for skilled employment (see, e.g., Cairns et al., 2017; Cairns et al., 2018). The present discussion can hence be considered an extension of a number of existing lines of inquiry, albeit centred on a somewhat different departure point in regard to research subjects.

Why study mobility?

In continuing this exploration, we also wish to help improve the quality of mobility research. Although the recent expansion of academic interest in highly qualified mobility is generally welcome, this does not mean we have a comprehensive or even accurate picture of the mobility practices of students and graduates or a coherent notion of how and why these people move. The assumption is that mobility is undertaken with a view to securing an improvement in economic circumstances, and at a greater stretch, internationalize an educational or career trajectory. It may also be the case that mobility represents an extension of pre-existing social ties and interests, reflecting a sense of adventure as well as a desire to renew geographical connections. However, for the most part, our perceptions of mobility are ground in the idea that moving abroad is a constructive activity that will ultimately contribute to the accumulation of capital, albeit with some recognition of the more enjoyable aspects of international travel (i.e. mobility as leisure).

At European Policy level, in tertiary education level institutions and among the agencies that host transnational exchange projects, particularly for young people with fewer opportunities, the view of mobility is much narrower, linked to overcoming various aspects of social exclusion. Universities meanwhile place emphasis on encouraging modes of circulation perceived to be economically valuable (student migrants). In emphasising these priorities, these parties risk ignoring more mundane but perhaps more prevalent forms of free circulation, especially mobility practiced by those who simply wish to go abroad to further their educational progress or enhance their career prospects using their own resources and initiative. Therefore, while we do not ignore the fact that some mobility takes place within institutional structures, the main emphasis will be upon mobility from the point of view of students and graduates rather than universities, civil society agencies or political institutions.

In this book, moving to the EU is of course not our only concern. Considering Armenia's gateway position in the South Caucasus, between East and West in a very literal sense, we will be exploring spatial trajectories for education and work other than intra-European circulation, including entry into the EU from Armenia as well as movement to the Russian Federation and the US. Given that we are starting our work from a position of knowing relatively little about how this mobility is managed by those who follow these pathways, we will take a relatively open approach to these destinations and not assume, for instance, that moving to Russia is 'easy' because people do not need visas or that the presence of an Armenian diaspora in the US and the EU makes settlement there unproblematic.

While student mobility has been extensively explored by researchers, the circulation of graduates is less well studied. Furthermore, moving abroad for work as a highly qualified individual tends to be ignored completely by policymakers and other stakeholders in the mobility field; it is in fact remarkable that barring the occasional moral panic over an alleged outbreak of 'brain drain,' graduate mobility is not taken more seriously as a research topic considering its potential social and economic significance. Taking into account this deficit, in this book we will attempt to learn more about those who elect to undertake post-graduation mobility, especially the challenges entailed in investing 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1984) in a foreign labour market. Such movement may in some respects more closely resemble the tacit norms of international migration than archetypical student exchanges; that is, involving relatively long duration stays abroad with the prospect of settlement and economic integration into the host country. Equally pertinent is the question of purpose: is such mobility is undertaken with a view to reaching a particular career goal, typically the idea of accessing opportunities unavailable at home or seen as a means of escaping from difficult circumstances in the Armenian labour market?

A student and graduate mobility research field?

In regard to locating our work with a pre-existing academic context, we can fit our topic into the general field of human mobility. However, there is no formal definition or set of parameters exclusively relating to student and graduate mobility. That is not to say that researchers and other interested parties have not tried to codify specific aspects of highly qualified circulation as research fields in their own right, only that no hegemonic paradigm has emerged to date. For example, a relatively recent attempt has been to demarcate a field of 'International Student Mobility,' albeit using existing terminology (see Rickett, 1991), but as the label suggests this is a descriptive category, and as such is vulnerable to being continually re-defined according to the vagaries of different researchers, policymakers and practitioners, including stakeholders involved in the management of student mobility programmes and projects. In consequence, work gathered together under this term, including our own prior studies (e.g. Cairns, 2014), tends to reflect the interests of the authors rather than follow a coherent and shared set of theoretical and empirical principles.[1]

As an ad hoc category, 'International Student Mobility' also risks privileging certain mobility modalities, and ignoring others. While policymakers, and arguably stakeholders working in civil society organizations, are duty bound to 'privilege' certain mobility, particularly where there are humanitarian considerations and a high level of media visibility (e.g. responding to the 2015 refugee crisis), academics work in universities that are profit driven and as such need to orientate their work around subjects that are likely to attract external funding or contribute to other processes, including internationalization strategies and ranking systems (see Bok, 2009). For a variety of different reasons, not least the availability of funding, researchers hence tend to study what is profitable, not to mention relatively convenient; books,

journal articles and PhD theses have a habit of examining the most readily observable forms of exchange, typically what takes place in one's own institution. Methodologically, this approach has consequences, with much work being grounded in national, regional or even municipal norms, especially where there are no funds available for more expansive fieldwork; at worst, this might involve nothing more taxing than distributing questionnaires to incoming students at a host university or conducting a websurvey. The continual taking of these shortcuts might however explain why so much work conducted on student mobility consists of studies of short-duration fixed-term exchanges between universities in different countries (often called 'credit mobility' due to the fact that an exchange student receives course accreditation for time spent abroad after their return to the sending institution) and work on students who have migrated for the entire duration of a degree course, creating the misleading impression that in regard to student mobility, credit mobility and undergraduate migration is all that is happening, something that is patently false. A student and graduate mobility research field clearly needs to recognize more diversity in terms of mobility practice, and something to which we seek to contribute, providing accounts of how mobility happens and is sustained in Armenia. More specifically, we recognize movement taking place outside institutional structures (i.e. other than 'credit mobility' exchanges or student migration) and consider moves abroad for work as well as study purposes.

Mobility in Armenia

These preceding remarks lead us towards a more detailed explanation of our choice of Armenia as a research site. Many reasons exist, both personal and professional. We can point towards the fact that Armenians are highly visible within the circuits of human mobility, but more pertinently, students and graduate in Armenia are able to meaningfully contribute to an

enhancement of the quality of our knowledge on a range of mobility issues, including what leads them to contemplate moving abroad and how they manage the process of being mobile. Initial research conducted in Yerevan during 2016 and 2018 also suggests that much movement taking place among the highly qualified is essentially laissez faire: self-motivated and self-financed as opposed to being directed by external agencies, satisfying the requirement to look at mobility outside institutional structures. Even where external support is used, this involves considerable effort on the part of the mover, in locating sufficient funds from a bewildering variety of agencies from across Europe and philanthropic organisations related to the Armenian diaspora, especially in the US (see Chapter 3). That opportunities have to be actively sought after introduces an element of creativity and perhaps more diversity into mobility planning, greatly influencing the scope of what we are able to study in regard to outward movement. Employment opportunities abroad meanwhile carry a great deal of risk and uncertainty, as well as the task of coping with institutional barriers including visa requirements. As we shall discover later in this book, different destinations bring different possibilities, and restrictions, that can influence success or failure in regard to working in foreign labour markets.

In regard to where highly qualified Armenians might be going, their outward mobility takes on a different complexion compared to what takes place in many Western societies, especially considering the significance of the Russian Federation as a destination. The relationship with the former Soviet ally has a major bearing on social and economic affairs in Armenia, and in the years prior to the recent Velvet Revolution relations between the two countries grew closer under President Serzh Sargsyan, including movement away from the EU and towards the Eurasian Economic Union (Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017; see also Chapter 5). We also need to take into account the extent to which people are actually free to circulate. Within the EU and neighbouring countries (e.g. Norway, Switzerland and Iceland), people have become habituated to the idea of moving between countries with relative ease, without the

inconvenience of visas and with a sense of familiarity related to shared membership of a political union, not to mention other more long-standing social, economic and political ties. Therefore, an EU citizen moving outside Europe for professional reasons might still be perceived as a major step but moving between, say, France and Germany or the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, is not.

The starting position of highly qualified mobility seekers in Armenia contrasts with the relative simplicity of the EU. They face a different situation, not being part of multi-national political union but still enjoying close connections with some of the former Soviet countries. Geographical position can also be problematic, especially considering the difficulties created by a lack of diplomatic relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan due to long-standing and more recent political tensions. The outward movement of students and graduates also takes on a character of its own, although this is no doubt true of all countries not participating in multi-national webs of relatively free movement. That student and graduate mobility in Armenia is distinct rather than generic however makes studying the mobility pathways of these individuals more not less worthwhile, as does the relative lack of empirical work on this topic.[2]

Methodological approach

Having outlined some reasons for undertaking the research in Armenia, including the originality of our geographical focus, what remains to be explained is our methodological approach. Since one author of this book, David Cairns, is neither fluent in the Armenian language nor an expert in Armenian political and economic affairs, the fieldwork was conducted entirely by Yerevan native Marine Sargsyan. This choice was made not only due to Marine's extensive linguistic capacities, fluent in Russian and English as well as Armenian, but also her familiarity with various forms of student and graduate mobility in Armenia. That

both authors had prior experience of working together on this topic in Armenia was a further advantage, particularly as this involved conducting research with students in the capital city of Yerevan who were in the process of becoming involved in mobility processes (see Cairns and Sargsyan, 2016).

In regard to the fieldwork, an important aspect of the research was recognizing students' and graduates' perspectives on their own mobility, necessitating an approach that could ask them directly about their aspirations and experiences. This explains why qualitative research was undertaken, with interviews conducted with 51 Armenians. Most of this work was undertaken in Yerevan between July and September 2018 (followed by some subsequent contact to clarify outstanding issues), with interviewees found through visits to workplaces, training institutions and NGOs, in addition to a large number of university faculties in the city. The interviews were conducted in English, Armenian and Russian according to the interviewees' preferences, and where necessary, transcribed and translated into English by Marine.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Table 1 presents an overview of the sample in the chronological order in which the fieldwork was conducted, with names changed where necessary to protect the identities of interviewees. Socio-demographic details are also included relating to age, gender, occupation and present location to illustrate that a diverse range of people were included in the sample. As the table shows, while more female than male interviewees were included, a relatively broad spectrum of people have been engaged, particularly in regard to age range and occupation. What is also interesting about the older cases is that a number of these people have actually engaged in mobility for work and study. As such, they are able to illustrate what happens after

education and work trajectories have been spatialized, as opposed to looking at mobility which is currently taking place or still in the planning stages.

Research questions

What remains to be outlined in this introductory chapter are the research questions that underpinned the discussion taking place within the interviews. Bearing in mind the considerations brought to light in the preceding discussion, the emphasis was more upon understanding mobility as it is happening now or in the recent past, and in the interviewees' own terms. Pre-existing categories and definitions are therefore side-lined in our discussion in favour of letting interviewees make their own interpretations.

In regard to the specific focus of the questions, we obviously wish to know where people are going. Chapter 3 focuses on outlining the main spatial pathways open to Armenian students and graduates, with specific relation to Russia, the US and the EU. Key reflections here relate to what attracts specific individuals towards these specific destinations and perceptions of their utility in terms of professional development. Some issues that impact upon decision-making are relatively self-evident, including the availability of financial support and pre-existing family ties. Other factors are more tacit, including the difficulty of making the transition from higher education to skilled employment, especially in foreign labour markets that are highly competitive. For interviewees with experience of living outside Armenia, we also explore the meaningfulness of their stays abroad in regard to personal growth, including managing family life and relationships. One additional issue concerns the experiences of those who have 'returned' to Armenian after having lived abroad, taking into account the importance of diaspora connections for these individuals.

Chapter 4 focuses on employment, looking at the experience of working inside and outside Armenia, with a view to gaining insight into challenges in the domestic labour market and the attractions of moving elsewhere for work purposes. Certain issues covered are fairly universal to the highly qualified, including the challenge of finding a job commensurate to education and skill level, and the difficulty of matching-up personal ambitions with what is available in terms of professional opportunities. But as will be introduced in Chapter 2, perhaps more specific to the Armenian research context are perceptions of corruption in the local labour market; an issue that may have some bearing on career choices, with certain pathways viewed as tainted or inaccessible.

More imaginative is acknowledgement of the significance of political change in thinking about the future. The closing chapter of the book looks at the importance of the Velvet Revolution of 2018, with more long-standing political relationships with Russia and the EU considered throughout our discussion. We ponder the prospects for a post-revolutionary enhancement of labour market chances at home, as well as obtaining a ground level view of what recent events mean from the perspective of the interviewees. While somewhat accidental, considering that the research was initiated long before the events happened, it is hoped that we can move towards an appreciate of what the Velvet Revolution might mean for the future aspirations of the highly qualified. While it is unlikely that major changes of direction will be observable only a few months after the Velvet Revolution, we can look for signs of hope which may ultimately prove to be instrumental in making plans for the future.

Notes

1. For a review of literature in the field of ‘International Student Mobility’ see Sussex Centre for Migration Research (2004).

2. Relations between Turkey and Armenia have historically been strained due to the Armenian Genocide, with tensions with Azerbaijan related to disputes over the Karabakh region (Broers, 2014).

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Chapter 2 Reflexive Mobility

Readers familiar with prior studies of mobility among the highly qualified will be aware of a quite profound lack of theoretical engagement with the spatial dimension of education and work trajectories in much of this work. As suggested in the preceding chapter, the preference of most authors is to describe rather than explain mobility, using secondary statistics to chart recent trends and administrative data to assess the impact of stays abroad upon completion, with fieldwork involving conveniently located research subjects, such as incoming student migrants and exchange visitors. Although not entirely without merit, work that follows these familiar paths can lead to a rather superficial appreciation of mobility that fails to contribute to our understanding of what is actually taking place. In particular, there is little or no serious contemplation of the origins or the ontological meaning of mobility; it is just assumed that certain people like to travel and that their experiences abroad will, somehow, contribute to their career development, enhance feelings of well-being and heighten a sense of interculturality, all at the same time.

While there is value in learning about mobility exercises that have basically ended, especially for the institutions that host students and the agencies that fund exchanges, such research will unavoidably entail taking a retrospective as opposed to prospective view of mobility decision-making; what the experience means when it is finished as opposed to the original intentions and what was being sought. Significantly, we have a neglect of the question of what made people want to be mobile in the first instance, including the personal and societal circumstances that lead to contemplating a move abroad. It is of course possible to ask people at a later point in time about their original motivations, but this approach will inevitably prompt replies that are editorialized to gloss over potential mis-steps and disappointments. The

emphasis will also be on those who can be said to have enjoyed successful outcomes from their mobility rather than recounting a diversity of experiences, good and bad.

In our research we have tried to be balanced in our approach. This entails looking a diverse range of people in terms of their educational and professional backgrounds (see Table 1 in Chapter 1), and taking a more inclusive view of the mobility experience. We also believe that there is value in studying mobility as a process, with a beginning, middle and an end. As a starting point, this entails asking questions about the planning and the practice of different forms of mobility, appreciating that decision-making involves not only the choice to leave but also the task of finding suitable destinations, educational institutions, training agencies, and/or employers. Our approach also acknowledges that students and graduates proactively attempt to plan their lives, to a certain extent making their own decisions about their mobility, thus forging a link with popular concepts in youth sociology, especially the idea that young people, and the not so young, possess and use 'agency.' They have the capacity to act according to their own desires, with a view to reaching certain goals, albeit within pre-existing societal structures that contains many risks, limitations and inequalities.

Effective decision-making is however just the starting point of the mobilization process, with choices made through reflection on what the individual thinks best for their situation, with these choices adapting to changing circumstances and evolving needs. In regard to planning a career, this can mean looking beyond what provides an immediate improvement in monetary circumstances and identifying opportunities that hold the prospect of enhancing the likelihood of reaching economic and personal stability in the long term, also taking into account potential risks of failure along the way. All these considerations, and many others, need to be weighed up before initial mobility decisions are made. People do not simply show up at their local airport and take the first available flight. Nor will they necessarily continue to follow a pathway that is not meeting expectations. What takes place while a student or graduate is abroad

therefore also matters. During the mobility experience, perceptions of success and failure will feed into deliberations about how long to prolong a stay. On completion of a fixed duration stay, the level of satisfaction with what has been achieved while abroad will most likely influence future decisions regarding subsequent moves. These considerations underline the need to acknowledge difficulty and complexity in sustaining mobility, supporting the idea that a considerable amount of work needs to be put in by the mover to ensure the experience is a success.[1]

Mobility decision-making can also involve input from other parties. The choices that have been made are in a process of constant reformulation and re-evaluation at a personal level and in conjunction with peers, with a sounding board of sorts provided by friends, educators, trainers and colleagues in the workplace. Success is not simply a matter of self-evaluation but also involves social re-enforcement. Although feedback from friends, family members and looser acquaintances may be a positive influence and a source of reassurance about the validity of a particular path, negative experiences might also have a bearing on the efficacy of decisions taken. It is therefore recognized that mobility choices are idealistic yet pragmatic, bounded by positive endorsement and negative reinforcement, including the ability to cope with problem situations during working life, in education and at other points in the life course. This is not to mention the more straightforward matter of the availability of foreign work and study opportunities that will inevitably shape education and occupational trajectories.

Moving beyond the myth of the involuntary migrant

When it comes to understanding how mobility happens, the preceding remarks about the limitations of existing research helps explain why we lack a clear impression of the research topic. That much of this work emanates from people working in academic institutions or

commissioned by international agencies is slightly ironic, considering that transnational movement features prominently in their career trajectories, and they must know how difficult managing this mobility can be. Other sources of knowledge, including policy discourse and media reportage, are equally amiss at providing a realistic representation of mobility. As we might expect, certain 'catastrophic' forms of cross-national circulation dominate policy agendas and media headlines, not because of their broad relevance but rather due to the exceptionality of the events depicted; for example, the 2015 refugee crisis was heavily covered by journalists and policymakers across the world due to the fact that the entry of large numbers of refugees into Europe is something that does not generally happen. While important at a humanitarian level, studying exceptional events never provides insight into what happens within actual populations whereas the things that take place every day but fail to attract headlines because of their mundanity do. With such a lack of understanding a default position has emerged in explaining mobility, centred around the idea that people move abroad out of desperation related to social, political or economic marginalization; basically, ideas that feed into the myth of the involuntary migrant.

People with fewer opportunities are also thought to be moving towards the places where they can find 'riches.' Following this logic, we might expect to find many highly qualified Armenians moving abroad since they live in what many Westerners regard as a 'poor country,' with few highly paid jobs and little or no prospect of professional development (Mkrtichyan et al., 2016; see also Chapter 3). While there is no point in denying that many Armenians lack access to social and economic resources, such a perspective risks pandering to national stereotypes. It also fails to provide insight into why certain students and graduates seek mobility while others prefer to remain at home; what differentiates the leavers from the stayers? Clearly, even when facing challenging conditions not all highly qualified people in Armenia move abroad, raising questions about the factors that led to the decision to leave being made.

While we can highlight the significance of contextual factors, including the state of the local economy, might it also be the case that people wish to move abroad using their own ingenuity and resourcefulness, something for which they should be lauded not patronized. What we are hypothesizing in this chapter is that mobility choices are influenced by personal reflection and that there is active engagement with the process of planning an outward trajectory. We are, in short, taking a reflexive view of this process. This is not to say that all aspects of mobility can be explained through adopting reflexive paradigms, only that our understanding of how and why it happens in our research context needs to acknowledge a diverse range of factors, personal and societal, rather than being reduced to a simple question of wanting to earn more money. In looking at mobility from an individual rather than a societal perspective, it might also be that relatively low-key events rather than grand disasters have more of a bearing on how things happen, at least in regard to making people think moving abroad might be a good idea. This belief drives our study of student and graduate mobility towards micro level engagement with mobile protagonists, and the proposition that a reflexive decision-making process can be instrumental in arriving at certain choices and bringing plans to fruition.

Theoretical precedents in reflexivity

While a topic of long-standing interest across the social sciences, 'reflexivity' was popularized in the 1980s by Anglophone authors such as Anthony Giddens, as a tool for conceptualizing socially integrated self-realization processes in respect to individual identity, societal roles and lifestyle choices. Since this branch of reflexivity has been extensively covered in our previous publications (see, e.g. Cairns, 2014; Cairns et al., 2017), we do not want to repeat the same discussion other than to say that Giddens' work is an attempt to use reflexivity in a quite general

sense rather than being applied to a specific research context. It is hence of marginal relevance to the present research context, which is concerned with mobility and life planning among a specific cohort in Armenia.[3] Near contemporaneous with Giddens is work on reflexivity by another English author, Margaret Archer, published in a long series of books and articles that have proved to be highly influential (see, e.g., Archer, 2003; 2007; 2012). While diverse in terms of scope, she differs from Giddens and his co-authors in focusing on reflexivity less as an epoch defining feature of the late modern era and more as a tool for recognizing the role of human agency and individual capacities, particularly as applied to certain communities in the English midlands. What she seems to be saying is that the process of being reflexive about oneself can support or hinder personal evolution (although the emphasis in much of her work focuses upon the hinderances), including the idea that there is an 'internal conversation' taking place within people's minds that we shall come to discuss later in this chapter.

Suffice to say, there is much to be learnt from these theoretical studies, principally the idea that people are able to construct their own lives, to a certain extent, through the use of reflexive strategies. That people actively plan their lives and make use of their own agency is important to acknowledge (see also Archer, 2000), and has implications for the study of mobility among students and graduates in our Armenian research context. Furthermore, considering the point made earlier about the mundanity of mobility, Archer's work describes many of the basic difficulties people have in overcoming what look to be mundane but feel to them like quite significant barriers, especially coping with the demands of family life and overcoming different setbacks; for instance, difficulty in accessing job opportunities or coping with drug addiction. The process of reflexively overcoming personal limitations is of course different from being reflexive about mobility, especially making the choice to move to another place rather than maintain a position in an existing spatial position, but there is at least an acknowledgment that what people think and do matters.[4]

More recently, a small number of studies have emerged that apply reflexivity to various aspects of human circulation and the making of transitions to the labour market (see, e.g., Dyke et al., 2012; Moskal, 2018; Saar, 2018; Williams, 2018), and as noted previously, some of our own work has focused on understanding the mobility choices using a reflexive prism (see, e.g., Cairns et al., 2012). The basic premise can be summarized by saying that progression along education and work trajectories can be enabled or accelerated through becoming mobile, particularly where people inhabit regional contexts with a limited range of opportunities, a situation that can create a strong 'mobility requirement' (Morano-Foadi, 2005, p. 146). People wishing to pursue a career path not open to them at home might start to feel that they must move abroad, while others use mobility to reinforce an already strong socio-economic situation. Adopting a reflexive approach to human mobility recognizes that mobility is 'produced' through an active process, taking into account a diverse range of influences; material concerns are certainly important but are only one set of variables in the decision-making process and do not necessarily explain choices in relation to destinations and durations.[5]

Reflexive mobility as an internal and externalized conversation

In the discussion that follows, we will deviate somewhat from the concept of reflexivity as understood in prior academic work on this theme, and the idea of an 'internal conversation' within the process of life planning (Archer, 2007), moving towards a more extrovert view of how decisions about different future directions are made. There is no doubt that making decisions has a psychological dimension, that people make constant internal evaluations in regard to their state of well-being and sense of worth, but this is a beginning and not an end in

life planning processes. What we wish to acknowledge is that the 'conversation' can be taken outside, especially where it relates to mobility choices.

Putting this idea into more theoretical terms, in addition to the 'internal conversation,' we hypothesize that an externalized dialogue about mobility and the more general process of life planning is taking place in educational institutions and the workplace. This can take the form of a literal conversation between friends and among colleagues, or a more tacit feeling of inclusion and exclusion from a particular place or pathway. Furthermore, this dialogue can be constructive in respect to offering encouragement and validation, or become a negative aspect of decision-making where potential choices are invalidated. In regard to the latter experience, examples will be presented later in this book illustrating how some individuals were informed by colleagues in the workplace that they were not respected to the point of having to leave their positions and consider a change in direction (see Chapter 4). Good or bad, the important point to grasp is that life events, even if they seem trivial to some people, have the potential to influence choices, whether this is contemplation of making a move abroad for the first time (or the second or third time for that matter) or continuing along a career trajectory closer to home. This approach, we believe, takes much greater account of external circumstances in comprehending the life planning processes of the highly qualified, representing a means to advance understanding of how mobility is initiated and practiced.

The approach taken to reflexivity in this book is hence different from the sociological norm, which situates reflexive practices in the mental sphere; the previously cited work of Margaret Archer in particular. We also have a specific focus on mobility within work and study trajectories as opposed to emphasising the need some people appear to have to remain within their present place of residence. Archer's research subjects appear tied to sedentary life trajectories, residing in communities where transnational mobility might be viewed as a negative prospect. Their actions are bounded by this need to remain close to home, thereby

limiting their capacity to circumnavigate disadvantage. This is something she defines as 'working at staying put,' what amounts to a deliberate fostering of social immobility, related to a highly conservative mode of reflexive thinking (Archer, 2007, p. 158). In terms of mobility, this represents a valorisation of the antithesis of the European notion of free movement, particularly in regard to circulation between countries. If we are being less kind, we might conclude that Archer's interviewees are paying a high cost in regard to curtailed personal and professional development due to their preoccupation with maintaining an existing position even when faced with objectively difficult circumstances, something that becomes a preoccupation for their own internal conversations, which become fixated upon this insular dynamic.

Reflexive mobility in Armenia

Bearing in mind the opening remarks in this chapter about the under-theorization of mobility, through adopting, and adapting, certain ideas associated with reflexivity, we hope that it will be possible to go beyond simply describing mobility as it relates to education and work situations and create a better understanding of how and why it is happening. We also hope to illustrate that mobility decisions are imaginative and pragmatic, with choices bounded by a range of positive and negative influences. What we will be exploring in the rest of this book can therefore be considered purposeful action; moves abroad contemplated and undertaken with the intention to improve one's life situation and take an active role in this 'improvement' process. This is not to deny that there is a strong element of unpredictability, even luck, involved but among the interviewees there is relatively little movement that is unplanned, involuntary or totally left to chance, leading us to negate the idea that mobility decisions can ever be entirely devoid of agency.

That the current focus is on Armenia also enables us to study mobility outside Europe. While much of our own prior work on mobility themes has looked at intra-European circulation, especially in constructing education and work trajectories, 'Europe' is in many ways an exception due to the relatively high degree of free movement within the European Union and countries that form part of the Schengen Zone. We now have an opportunity to look at moves into Europe from Armenia, and mobility decision-making from an Armenian perspective, in addition to movement made towards other regions including Russia and the United States. This is, we hope, a new and exciting development in the study of student and graduate mobility, complementary to other new important lines of enquiry emerging from regions such as South East Asia and Australia (see, e.g., Collins, 2008; Robertson et al., 2018). Furthermore, rather than look at mobility issues through analysing secondary material, this study is totally grounded in original evidence consisting of first-hand accounts from Armenian students and graduates, providing fresh perspectives on the education and work experiences of these individuals.

At this point, and having outlined a methodological approach in the previous chapter, more detail needs to be provided about what our interviewee's accounts might actually contain. Many of the questions we posed are relatively predictable, concerned with documenting experiences of moving through education systems and into employment, including the role of mobility in accessing opportunities and advancing along a chosen career path. Also ascertained is the current state of education systems and the workplace in Armenia, including allegations and experiences of corruption, and other obstacles to career progression. Looking at mobility is perhaps less straightforward, considering that much movement is incipient or unfinished. But there is a certain amount of clarity in regard to identifying potential destinations and outlining the purposes of stays abroad. What quickly becomes apparent is that we have three main pathways out of Armenia, all of which are explored in this book, relating to Russia, the

US and the EU respectively. Each of these destinations has its own distinct features, and as we shall discover in the next chapter, there are advantages and disadvantages associated with each place, and specific challenges to be addressed.

What then might the external conversations consist of among the Armenian interviewees? Providing something of a preview for what is to come in the following chapters, we will extract two cases to illustrate some of the ideas that have been introduced earlier in this chapter, using examples of mobility that is currently taking place. The intention is not to provide 'results' at this stage of our discussion but rather to demonstrate the nature of the externalized dialogues that are taking place relative to the spatial dimension of studying and working. While these accounts are not necessarily typical of the interviewees' accounts per se, they help bring the idea of reflexivity as an externalized conversation to life and hopefully aid understanding of this issue.

The first case we have chosen concerns *Sona*, a 28-year-old graduate of Duke University in the US, who is married with one son. She moved to the US from Armenia four years ago to study for an MA in International Development. In trying to explain why she made this choice, three main factors were highlighted during the course of the interview, firstly, that the decision to leave Armenia was influenced by family and friends, who provided a sounding board during the planning process. Rather than dissuade her from going, they provided help and encouragement. Secondly, her own previous experience of working and living in Armenia was important. In particular, *Sona* felt that she had relatively few opportunities for career development in Yerevan. The third factor concerned the availability of financial support: she decided to go to Duke because of the availability of an Armenian Scholarship at this university, one of many scholarship opportunities provided in the US by Armenian-American foundations. For this reason, *Sona* never considered moving to any other institution, although she has travelled to the EU and Russia for business and holidays. All these influences worked together

to send *Sona* to the US: a negative assessment of her prospects in Armenia, financial inducement to study for an MA at Duke and endorsement of her choices by those closest to her.

In keeping with the perspective introduced previously, all three of these factors entail entering into externalized dialogues; interactions with institutions and individuals rather than just thinking about particular options. Friends and funding agencies provided different forms of support for her move abroad, ranging from positive feedback to actual financial resources, with decisions made following a period of working in Armenia during which she realized that she could not make sufficient progress in regard to her career. We could of course take a more simplistic approach and say that *Sona* moved abroad just because she received a scholarship to study at a prestigious university, but this would negate recognition of the thought and effort that went into managing her mobility, including the task of sourcing this financial support.

Moving forward several years, to the point at which *Sona* now finds herself at the time of her interview, she has finished her degree course at Duke and is now looking for a job in the US. While she did find some short-term project work immediately after graduation, when the project's grant finished, she became jobless. In explaining why this happened, *Sona* attributes her lack of success in the US labour market to not having the right contacts or the necessary information about opportunities. As a foreigner, while her husband was supportive at a personal level, she had no one to talk to about how to find a job in the US labour market. She explains, 'the main challenge is the lack of contacts. You need to have a good network to find a job.' In trying to explain what is missing, it can be argued that there is an inability to externalize reflexivity at this point in her career, and that family support alone cannot compensate for the lack of a more expansive range of social contacts, or indeed instrumental support from external agencies, as was the case when she moved to Duke. At the time of her interview, *Sona* was in the process of expanded her search for work beyond the US, into other regions, including

Europe and Armenia, but was still without success. Fortunately, several months after this interview was conducted, *Sona* did manage to find a position in San Diego, although not in an academic institution as she might have hoped, meaning that she was eventually able to overcome her previous lack of network integration only with a change of intended career direction.

The second case we wish to bring to light concerns *Davit*, a 28-year-old computer scientist who lives in Brno in the Czech Republic with his girlfriend. He describes Brno, where he works and studies, as the Silicon Valley of Central Europe, implying that a considerable amount of prestige is attached to this destination within his professional field. In regard to his education, *Davit* is currently undertaking a PhD at Tomas Bata University in Zlin on Development Studies alongside working in the Information Technology sector. He is therefore combining work and study while abroad in a manner not generally observed among our interviewees.

In explaining how he has maintained a mobile career trajectory a number of factors were brought to light in the course of the interview. Firstly, his own personal aspirations have provided him with a very strong orientation point. *Davit* stated that doing a PhD was his childhood dream, underlying the importance of his imagination as a source of career impetus. The choice of Tomas Bata University meanwhile was conditioned by the presence of a strong social network, with his connections including friends and a very supportive professor. Added to these two influences has been the availability of financial support, beginning with two years of finance from the Vysegrad Fund. We can hence see some common ground with *Sona's* career planning, with an integration of social and institutional support enabling mobility to happen, ultimately driven by personal impetus and having a clear career goal in mind.

Two other considerations emerge from *Davit's* account of mobility planning. Firstly, the availability and accessibility of opportunities for highly skilled and specialist work clearly

matters; *Davit* states that it is not hard for foreigners to find a job in the Czech Republic since the country is in need of highly skilled migrants. There are also many international companies doing outsourcing, and even though he doesn't speak the Czech language, he had no problem in finding a job since these companies are demanding highly qualified English-speaking specialists, a language in which he is fluent. Prevailing labour market conditions and the requirements of employers therefore play an important role in determining the extent to which individual ambitions can be realized in a particular place. The second consideration worth mentioning concerns *Davit's* prior mobility experience. Another reason why he felt that it had been relatively easy for him to find a job in the Czech Republic was his experience of the same type of work in Hungary. This prior mobility practice outside of Armenia also enhanced his capacity to settle in Brno and he now sees himself as settled there, with a future oriented towards remaining abroad.

In these two accounts we have an impression of how mobility actually happens and the means through which stays abroad are sustained. Our understanding of circulation among the highly qualified from Armenia is heightened considerably by engaging directly with *Sona* and *Davit*, much more so than looking at statistical trends in regard to outgoing movement. Crucially, it is a combination of factors, internalized and externalized, that proves to be effective in managing mobility; not just thinking about what to do but finding situations in which plans can be worked out. What we have also been able to identify are a number of key moments at which choices have been made and some of the conditions that create an impetus for success. For example, *Sona* emphasizes the importance of making choices with the help of her family and friends while *Davit* is more individually-oriented, although he has benefitted from the support of a mentor professor. Both *Sona* and *Davit* also demonstrate the role played by external funding sources for highly qualified Armenians underlining the significance of material support, with the availability and accessibility of jobs also instrumental. For this

reason, and despite emphasizing the agency of *Sona* and *Davit*, we must remember that without adequate financial resources and opportunities, mobility cannot realistically happen or be sustained.

Conclusions

In this chapter, we have tried to bring to light some of the underpinnings of mobility decision-making, emphasising the purposeful and creative nature of these processes and the roles played by external parties in a support capacity. What is evident from the two cases discussed above is that the right conditions have to be in place, especially appropriate opportunities, alongside some sort of plan. To make mobility work, *Sona* and *Davit* actively think about what they want to do, take their plans outside the personal realm and discuss them with friends, family members and fellow professionals. They not only internally converse but externally relate to their objective circumstances through these intermediaries.

This is not the first time this proposition has emerged from conducting research with students and graduates. In reaching conclusions about the highly qualified within Europe in a previous publication, the impetus for intra-European circulation was ascribed to what was then termed 'the mobility dream,' the realization of which is enabled by social and political circumstances favouring free movement between countries (Cairns et al., 2017). What was implied by emphasising the dream of mobility was that reveries about a possible future provide an initial orientation point in becoming mobile: thinking about mobility and what could happen while abroad are basic pre-requisites to exiting, representing the opening-up of possibilities for personal and professional growth. However, as we have seen in the cases of *Sona* and *Davit*, dreams need to worked at and it is important to involve other parties to validate these plans and bring them to fruition, an idea expressed as externalized dialogue.

Although we acknowledge the speculative nature of reflexive life planning, taking this approach does allow us to hand over ownership of mobility to the actual protagonists and acknowledge the importance of their social networks, alongside material consideration. For this reason, we would regard the reflexive approach to mobility decision-making as an advance in our understanding of how mobility happens, and in allowing a place for agency we also have a welcome break from the somewhat staid view that moves abroad are purely economically motivated or driven by negative impulses. On the contrary, we would argue that practicing mobility involves originality and creativity, as well as practical skills and social competences, attributes which people can celebrate rather than decry.

Notes

1. An earlier example of denying the complexity of practicing mobility in our work concerns the impact of the 2008 economic crisis on mobility decisions. In contrast to popular media narratives at this time that stressed the use of mobility as a means of escaping economic hardship, it was found that moving abroad had become harder to contemplate due to factors such as a decline in social and economic resources and a lack of suitable opportunities abroad (see Cairns, 2017a).

2. As noted in a previous book (Cairns, 2014, pp. 27-28), the concept has had many different usages and definitions, being part of a long conceptual tradition within social theory, passing through the work of theorists including Merton, Popper, Bourdieu and Foucault. See, for instance, Giddens *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (1991) and, with Beck and Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (1994).

3. The experience of moving abroad for the highly qualified has its own unique dimensions, including the ability to generate new skills and competences which can then be put into practice on return or during other mobility exercises (see also Hu and Cairns, 2017). This latter study, conducted among graduates in China who had previously studied in Norway emphasized the value of learning new skills and values while spending time abroad, as well as the acquisition of tertiary education level qualifications.

4. Also studied in our previous work has been reflexive learning within internationalized learning environments, principally the European Commission supported Erasmus programme. However, while Erasmus can be discussed in regard to its reflexive functioning, this relates more to the educational experience than mobility decisions, which tend to be institutionally rather than individually mediated. For this reason, we cannot codify 'Erasmus' as an exemplar of reflexive mobility but it is useful to note the existence of reflexive practices in these learning zones. Through these socially interactive learning processes, which take place inside and outside the classroom, a form of internationalized employability is generated among participating students, alongside a more obvious form of intercultural understanding, attributes that can in theory be used as instrumental resources throughout a subsequent career, the most obvious example being enhancing foreign language fluency (Cairns, 2017b; Cairns et al., 2018).

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Chapter 3 Spatial Pathways to Work

In this chapter, we move from discussion of contextual and theoretical issues and towards consideration of how mobility is planned and practiced in our Armenian research context. Of particular interest are the possibilities open to students and graduates, including spatial pathways to Russia, the United States and the European Union respectively. Through the use of the interview material it is possible to discuss the attractions and the limitations of these destinations, including providing insight into what actually happens when people decide to move to one of these places. Among the issues discussed are bureaucratic barriers, the accessibility of foreign labour markets, family life and, bearing in mind the discussion in the previous chapter, the extent to which we can interpret mobility decision-making as a reflexive process.

Before we begin to discuss these topics, it is important to admit that we know relatively little about highly qualified mobility in Armenia. The existing knowledge base on student and graduate mobility is weak in terms of statistics, with empirical studies few in number, making it difficult to ground our exploration in prior precedents. In regard to what we do know, outward mobility among undergraduates may be limited in terms of scale. The UNESCO Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students dataset estimated that in 2016 the total number of Armenian students abroad was just under 8,000, with the Russian Federation by far the most popular destination (UNESCO, 2018). Prior studies have however suggested that there is a high level of interest in the idea of outward mobility among the youth population. For example, the Armenian equivalent to the German Shell study, focusing on the aspirations, values and lifestyles of 14 to 29-year-olds, found that 31 per cent of those surveyed wanted to leave Armenia; 50 per cent of the mobility favouring respondents to this survey indicated that they

wanted to go to the US, 45 per cent the EU and 45 per cent Russia (Mkrtichyan et al., 2016: pp. 96, 107).

These figures give us some idea as to where Armenian students and graduates might want to go, confirming the impression that Russia, the US and the EU are the most important destinations. Useful as this is to know, we do not really gain a sense of the challenges faced in becoming and remaining mobile. What affects their chances of successfully realizing a move abroad or preventing this from taking place? Fortunately, we are able to explore these questions using the interview material, with these accounts providing us with insight into mobility choices and some of the consequences arising from these choices. In some cases, motivations are quite apparent but often the factors that mediate the success of mobility are less obvious. Other issues of interest include the Soviet legacy in Armenia, which warrants discussion before proceeding further, as does an issue that has been alluded to but not elaborated upon, namely perceptions and experiences of corruption in the local labour market.

The Armenian labour market and Soviet legacy

As a preamble it is worth mentioning some of the more distinctive features of the Armenian labour market, including factors that can lead to a change of career path at home or abroad. While reacting to immediate circumstances is the aspect of life planning that is arguably the most pragmatic and self-evident, it is important to acknowledge that reflexive decisions are made in a context defined by objective circumstances as opposed to pure idealism. It is also stating the obvious to say that even when a coherent and realizable plan is in place, the desired outcomes will not necessarily come to pass; unfortunately, dreams do not always come true, especially in regard to mobility. Having a positive orientation towards the idea of moving abroad nevertheless matters a great deal, this being a somewhat under-recognized prerequisite

in the process of practicing mobility (see Cairns et al., 2017). At the other extreme, we need to acknowledge that for some people, entering the labour market can become a nightmare rather than a dream. However, in regard to the negative aspects of working in Armenia, and despite much talk of corruption in the local labour market among the interviewees, few of the people we encountered had direct experience of workplace marginalization; in fact, we had only two such cases in our sample.

The first concerns *Meri*, a 26-year-old project coordinator and PhD student at Yerevan State University of Economics, who explained to us that she experienced difficulties working in Yerevan for businesses that are part of major international corporations due to practices that are, to say the least, distasteful:

> Before starting my position at the university, I worked for a consulting company. […] From 50 candidates for one position they selected me. At that time there were three more offers and I was thinking for four days about which one to pick. Eventually I decided to reject this offer from [name of corporation] as auditing takes more time and energy. My classmates who have worked for the company said they sometimes stayed up to eleven o'clock at night. So, I rejected that offer and accepted an offer from a consulting company which was later bought and is currently owned by [name of another corporation]. I was overloaded with obligations and it was very difficult, yet I loved the job because I was learning a lot from it. I would even work during weekends, being of course paid for the extra work. However, I was given a hint from my German team leader, with a subtext, that nobody has progressed based on knowledge or hard work alone, and there should be a physical relationship if I wanted to succeed in the company.

Such expectations led *Meri* to leave this particular job, but thanks to her skills and abilities she found a position in a university where she has been able to pursue her career further. In this sense, while having endured an obviously unpleasant experience, *Meri* was at least able to change the course of her career through drawing on her own talents and depth experience. Although in this case a bad experience in the workplace did not lead to a move abroad, a major change in career direction did take place, with *Meri's* shift towards working in academia.

In regard to what might lead someone to want to leave the country, relationships within the workplace however matter a great deal, especially where feelings of inferiority or disadvantage have been generated by those in a position of power. Such perceptions were reported by the respondents to the previously cited 'Shell Study,' which emphasised the negative impact of patronage and nepotism in the process of finding a job in Armenia (Mkrtichyan et al., 2016). Other Armenian authors meanwhile stress the importance of contextual factors in defining life chances; for example, the collapse of Soviet Union, the Karabakh conflict and the earthquake of 1988, and the transition from an economic system grounded in state socialism to one based on neoliberalism, wherein vested interests often prevail (Vartikyan and Ghahriyan, 2017, p. 66).

From our evidence we also have the case of *Armine*, a 27-year-old Brussels-based trainee at the European Parliament who has previously studied in Armenia and Great Britain, at Cambridge University. As she explained to us, rather than financial gratification her motivation to move abroad was a combination of long-standing personal ambition and negative experiences in Armenia:

> It was my dream to study at Cambridge because of the name [I know that may sound funny] and because Cambridge was founded by the graduates of Oxford and is a more

> liberal university, which is closer to my personality. […] After my education in the UK, which was in Development Studies, I came back to Armenia hoping to put this knowledge and experience into practice, but couldn't find a job for three months. After finding a job I faced challenges and had a very negative experience, as my supervisor was an ignorant and absolutely arrogant person. I was also paid less in comparison to other staff who were not Armenian citizens; they only had BA Degree Diplomas but had US citizenship of Armenian descent. They didn't extend my contract but I was selected for a traineeship in Brussels at the European Parliament.

This account illustrates how personal reflection and determination influence career development as much as adversity, and how opportunities provided by the European institutions provide a potential means of escape. Negativity in the Armenian workplace acted as reflexive impetus, the outcoming being closer alignment with an outward career trajectory. This shift may also prove to be a lasting one. In the future, *Armine* sees herself continuing to work in international environments outside Armenia as she believes such workplaces promote personal growth and development, as well as broadening career horizons. Particularly important in this process is an ability she describes as being able to 'share an experience and learn from each other,' a position broadly consistent with European ideas on the significance of intercultural learning (see Cairns et al., 2018).

More widespread than the experience of actual adversity is the perception of dysfunctionality within the Armenian labour market. In accounting for this position, the most commonly held view among the interviewees is that such behaviour is part of the post-Soviet legacy. This is certainly the opinion of *Anahit*, a 20-year-old business student with plans to study at Charles University in Prague. Living in Europe, and in the EU in particular, is

perceived by *Anahit* as less problematic compared to the US or Russia, with the possibility of avoiding some of the negative aspects of the Armenian workplace:

> I had internships in local and international organizations in Armenia and my impression is that local institutions still have a Soviet approach, and that people get positions through their connections, mostly. International organizations are more competitive but well paid and entering there you develop your skills as a professional. The other difference is that local state institutions sometimes demand that you stay at work until eight pm, and you never get paid extra, while international organizations pay for each extra hour. Working for an international organization you can also travel abroad for experience and knowledge exchange, while in local-national institutions connections decide who will be sent for a business trip.

All these considerations were significant in regard to shaping *Anahit's* plans for the future, with wanting to avoid 'Soviet' situations having a major bearing on her decision to move to an EU country and ultimately seek to work in an international environment. Quality of life, and quality of working life, clearly matter.

Relating these reports back to the question of reflexive mobility, in cases where adversity is experienced to the point of a workplace in Armenia becoming tainted, the 'conversation' becomes externalized, with the feeling that one is not respected being made quite overt, followed by seeking a refuge of sorts being; for *Armine*, moving from international institutions to academia, while for *Anahit*, the answer was to seek employment in internationalized institutions. Career decision-making is thus played out in the workplace to a certain extent, wherein reflexive actions are a reaction to potential threats or feelings of inferiority. This does not however displace ambitions that are the result of long cherished

ideals; in the case of *Armine*, a childhood dream of studying at Cambridge, and *Anahit's* plan to move to the Czech Republic.

Pathways to Russia

Having considered some issues that might prompt thoughts of an exit, in the remainder of this chapter we will look at the main spatial pathways out of Armenia for the highly qualified, starting with Russia. Despite negative associations with the former Soviet Union, Armenia's relationship with today's Russian Federation remains strong in many respects, and the country can still be regarded as the most prominent destination for economic migrants; in fact, 10 of our interviewees had clear intentions to move there in order to enter the labour market. This is not only due to relatively close geographical proximity but also the fact that Armenian citizens are able to travel there without a visa and Russia is home to the world's largest Armenian diaspora (Zenian, 2002). We can therefore hypothesize that many highly qualified Armenians might be attracted to Russia because of historical and political ties, as well as the relative ease with which they can reside there.

Although practically all of our interviewees mentioned that cultural ties with Russia remain strong in Armenia, even several decades after independence in 1991, it was also pointed out that other links have been maintained in the post-Soviet era; for example, the presence of a large Russian military base at Gyumri. But despite this position, the prominence of Russia has declined in other respects; the most obvious example is the growing preference for English as a second language. Russia nevertheless remains popular as a destination for outward mobility, with the main attraction being its job market. It is however noticeable that Russia is less appealing to those who wish to continue their studies, with its universities regarded as less attractive compared to Western institutions. This may be one reason why we do not have any

examples of students planning to move to Russia in the immediate future to study for a Master's degree or a PhD, although several interviewees had studied at Russian universities as undergraduates in the past.

In regard to those who are planning to move to Russia for work, and to illustrate a relatively positive situation, we can discuss the experiences of *Gurgen*, a 27-year-old married Armenian living in Yerevan. He is currently self-employed but frustrated by the economic situation in Armenia and thinks that he would benefit from a move abroad. His reasons for choosing Russia relate to what he has learnt from friends with the experience of living in a variety of different countries; in effect, *Gurgen* is learning from others who have relevant knowledge. This feedback provided a vital sounding board for reflection on a range of mobility choices, as well as offering the prospect of practical assistance:

> I have friends abroad, in Russia, France and the US. They live and work there, and they say that it's financially secure. The most satisfied are those who work in Russia. In Russia I am ready to do any kind of job. I want to have a better life, and hope that I can live better there. Of course, my wish would be to have better living conditions in Armenia and stay here but I will go to Russia which is easier, although I would prefer the EU.

This position underlines the importance of first-hand knowledge in making mobility decisions as opposed to media accounts or vague impressions, although the relative ease of entry in regard to Russia also comes into play; the EU is perceived as culturally more appealing but less likely to provide access to its labour markets. Russia does however have its detractors as a place for work. Among our interviewees we also find *Anna*, a 28-year-old Law graduate

who is currently living in the US. Her objections to moving to Russia relate to its political reputation: she regards the country as 'totalitarian' and points out concerns related to the drop in the value of the Rouble, the annexation of Crimea, war in Georgia, selling weapons to Azerbaijan and the killing of an Armenian family in Gyumri. All these factors create a negative impression of Russia for Armenians. Furthermore, *Anna* is not impressed by the quality of life on offer:

> Moscow might be interesting for a short visit but it is certainly not a place to live and raise children. It's a good labour destination for workers but not a choice for academic and professional growth. [...] Although I have lived in the US for five years now, I think we have better conditions and opportunities in Armenia. I would stay there, as it is safe, climate is good, we don't think when we buy food whether it is organic or not, we have more friends and support.

All these reasons help explain why *Anna* moved to the US and would move back to Armenia before going to Russia. Such reflections remind us that the mobility decision-making process cannot always be reduced to a simple economic equation, and involves weighing-up political and humanitarian considerations. And while *Gurgen* prioritizes financial security, *Anna* takes into account issues such as childrearing alongside prospects for professional development.

Armenia and the United States

Russia might interest some of our interviewees, but others demonstrate a closer affinity with the US. There are many reasons for this preference but foremost is the strong influence of a diaspora second only in size to Russia, with émigrés and their progeny connected to Armenia via the church and cultural organizations, and substantial investments made by American-Armenian philanthropists, including educational scholarships for young Armenians. This is a long-standing connection, with outward migration to the US starting in earnest during the 1880s, when significant numbers of Armenians moved to America to escape the Young Turks massacres (Dadrian, 1995). The movement of Armenians from Turkey, the Middle East, Europe and Armenia to the US continued up until the late 1970s, the first major settlement being in Massachusetts, New England. The fiscal relationship between the two countries is also significant; for example, the contributions made by the bilateral economic assistance programme and the Foreign Assistance Act launched by the Clinton Administration, distributed via USAID. Armenia has in the past received the second highest (after Israel) level of US aid assistance per capita in the world (Cameron, 2002, p. 91). Another form of support to Armenia has been in the form of educational opportunities via State Department educational and exchange programmes launched in the 1990s, including Flex, Edmund Maski, the Professional Fellows Program (PFP), the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship and Fulbright. What these developments confirm is that Armenia is connected to the US not only by a history of migration but also by more recent growth in various fixed-duration forms of exchange.

Among the interviewees, the main attraction of the US relates to its capacity for delivering high quality tertiary level education; usually for short semester-long stays but in other cases entire degree courses, especially at Master's and PhD levels. However, we have relatively few accounts of actual moves having been made to the US (see the case of *Sona* in the previous chapter for an exception), and limited indications that this pathway appeals to a

large number of people, a situation that may be related to the competitive nature of securing funding as well as the relative exceptionality of postgraduate study.

For those who have followed this pathway, there are two stand-out reasons emerging from the interviewees' accounts: firstly, the global visibility of certain American universities (Harvard, Princeton, Yale, etc.), and secondly, the aforementioned existence of scholarships and international study programmes for Armenians that facilitate access to these institutions. Brand recognition therefore plays an important role in choosing an institution, as does the prospect of being funded for participating by philanthropic organizations. These are useful findings and while it is no doubt useful to know that highly qualified Armenians have such options, fixed duration study experiences do not necessarily lead to employment in the US. In fact, interviewees such as *Sona* show us that they struggle to find work there upon completion of their studies, even after spending time at a prestigious institution (see Chapter 2). Unlike European students who participate in programmes like Erasmus there does not seem to be the same acquisition of intercultural skills or heightening of employability within the US-based exchanges, explaining why people might exit their courses without an adequate grounding in foreign labour market norms or the making of vital connections, a point raised by the previously cited *Anna*.

Armenia and the European Union

The third largest Armenian diaspora after the Russian Federation and the US is to be found in Europe, specifically France.[1] As with the US, educational opportunities for Armenian citizens exist in the form of scholarships provided by, for example, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), NUFFIC in The Netherlands, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), SIDA in Sweden and the British Council. Such opportunities can be particularly

attractive for the highly qualified, offering the prospect of studying at globally visible universities.

The EU itself has many attractions for our interviewees. One alluring aspect relates to its familiarity, much of which is due to its popularity as a holiday destination and a high media profile. European culture and lifestyles are also associated with openness and diversity; Armenia is perceived to be conservative, whereas 'Europe' is assumed to be more relaxed. It is perhaps the idea of Europe, and the EU in particular, that seems to matter most, something that strongly relates to its perceived progressive ethos. This certainly appeared to be case for *Armine* and *Anahit*, both of whom we met previously in this chapter, who were either already living in Europe or had plans to move there in the near future.

Acknowledging this discourse about Europe brings into play another important dimension of reflexivity in the mobility decision-making process that is very much part of an internal rather than an external conversation, namely the significance of dreams and imagination. In this sense, moving to Europe may be less of a pragmatic choice, or at least a choice not based around purely material concerns. It is more a case of attempting to become a different kind of person, more attuned to tropes of Europeanism associated with social freedom and political openness (see also Cairns et al., 2017). This European ethos applies not only to education abroad but also within Armenia, with a number of universities in Yerevan having a distinctly European orientation. For example, *Mane* is 19-years-old and studies at the French University in Armenia, specializing in Marketing. While lower the tuition fees were an important consideration, she also mentions that the university had a good reputation among her friends and relatives:

> Of course, the financial part played its role, as the tuition fee was more affordable than at the [Armenian University]. I have travelled to Italy and Dubai for holidays but my dream is to study in London, because I have heard a lot about London and have a friend who took a course at Cambridge University, so the UK is my priority country for an MA but I am also considering France, as I have more chances to study in France because of my university. As I have an aunt in the United States, I was thinking about education in the US, but personally I prefer Europe.

For *Mane*, moving abroad has been deferred until postgraduate study, with the choice of a French university in Armenia having a bearing upon her current planning processes. We can also see that international universities have different attractions. For example, *Manvel* is an 18-year-old student, studying Management at the French University in Armenia. His choice of institution was influenced by what he describes as the 'international standards' of the university and its bilingual curricula, with the programme mostly taught in French. This is useful for him because in the future he intends, like *Mane*, to study for a Master's degree in Europe. Educational decisions are hence being made according to cultural considerations in these two cases, including language of instruction, providing another means through which reflexive planning can be bounded.

Return to Armenia?

One additional consideration relates not to economic concerns or personal development but rather a more emotional side to mobility choices. People will make decisions and take actions

for what may appear outwardly illogical reasons which nevertheless make sense once we appreciate the strength of the attachment to home many people have. This is an issue that was particularly important among the older interviewees, including members of the Armenian diaspora, and in looking at this scenario it is important to acknowledge complexity in national identifications as well as mobility choices. It might, for instance, be the case that Armenia was a place of residence during childhood or someone has grown up in another country with one or more Armenian parents but never actually lived in Armenia.

One 'returnee' we interviewed was *Marine*, a 28-year-old lawyer born in Armenia but who spent much of her childhood with her Armenian family in Saratov and St. Petersburg. She recently returned with the help of the Yerevan-based Birthright programme, an NGO that helps connect diaspora members with Armenia:

> I have my country, it is Armenia, and I decided to live in my country. […] There are many problems in Armenia, but when you love the country you look at things differently, you accept them and you look for ways to change and develop.

Marine now intends to obtain Armenian citizenship and for at least the next five years, she plans to live in Armenia. She did however admit that she wanted to study in France but faced bureaucratic issues related to obtaining a visa. As she explained, with her Russian citizenship it is 'really hard to access the Western world.' We therefore need to acknowledge another set of bounds in mobility decision-making, namely bureaucratic barriers relating to Armenians with citizenship of countries such as Russia.

Another one of our older interviewees is *Hanin*, a 30-year-old volunteer in a primary school in Yerevan who is from Jordan, with a mixed Armenian and Syrian family background.

This is an example of someone with Armenian heritage but no prior history of residence in the country. *Hanin* in fact visited Armenia for the first time as a tourist and then decided to 'reconnect' through Birthright after being recommended by a friend. Her motivations for doing so are very clear:

> I want to be integrated into the life of the country and not discover it as a tourist. There are a lot of things that I like in Armenia; the job I volunteer at, the people, culture and food. There are cultural differences that are hard to get over, but it takes time of course. I feel that Armenia is the place to live and start a business.

Hanin would certainly consider living in Armenia permanently if she was able to find a good job or if her fiancé manages to start his own business, things she concedes are not easy to achieve. She also wants to be more fluent in the language as she knows only the basics of Armenian and is aware that good language skills are a necessity in the local job market.

These two accounts illustrate diversity in 'return' mobility although what both cases share is a very positive view of Armenia, as well as strong emotional ties; this is instrumental in making the decision to move (back), where this attachment over-rides other considerations, including material ones. There is however a noticeable degree of realism regarding future job prospects, with the ability to find suitable work the ultimate determinant of whether settlement can be attained, thus providing a limit to what can be realized using one's own agency and resources.

Conclusions

In moving towards some conclusions about mobility pathways, we can see that there are many superficial similarities with mobility as practiced by students and graduates in other regional contexts, especially Europe; for example, the popularity of fixed-duration educational exchanges. We have also drawn parallels with a process we explored in a previous publication on intra-European mobility, described then as 'the mobility dream,' with such reveries constituting an important source of motivation and an opportunity for reflection on how a move abroad can become reality (see Cairns et al., 2017). To better explain this process, we can again draw on the concept of reflexivity, this time acknowledging the importance of internal conversations as a starting point. The likelihood of 'dreams' being realized is another matter, whether abroad or in Armenia. In regard to the latter, we have several examples of difficulties in the workplace, as well as a reminder of the limitations of the local labour market. External factors may therefore put ambitions on hold, especially where there are major obstacles to confront.

In acknowledging the processes through which different mobility pathways are followed, we are however able to recognize the accomplishments of our interviewees, including their ability to cope with adversity and make effective decisions about where to go. We therefore wish to emphasize the importance of individual resources and agency in making mobility decisions, as well as access to finance and other forms of practical support, accepting that mobility options for Armenians are also mediated by bureaucratic impediments to circulation relating to visas and citizenship, not to mention practical considerations such as foreign language fluency.

Notes

1. Relations between France and Armenia have been relatively cordial for a considerable length of time. From the very first days of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire, Marseille became one of the main destinations for migrants and France was also active in supporting Armenia after the earthquake and the Karabakh war. On 14 October 2016, the French Senate also adopted a bill that made denial of the Armenian Genocide a crime.

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Chapter 4 Working Inside and Outside Armenia

Since independence in 1991, the highly qualified in Armenia have faced many challenges in regard to employment: low pay, a limited range of opportunities and perceptions of corruption in the labour market are just some of the reasons why graduates might feel socially and economically excluded from society (Mkrtichyan et al., 2016; Vartikyan and Ghahriyan, 2017; see also Chapter 3). In explaining why working in Armenia is difficult for the highly qualified, we can point towards recent historical experience and more recent factors. The country has had to cope with a major earthquake, the transition from communism to a free market economy and conflicts with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Such issues might be significant in relation to shaping life chances, with the potential to generate hardship, with mobility options also shaped by social and political circumstances including the fact that several neighbouring countries are not viable destinations for quite complex reasons.

Moving abroad to work also has its complications. That Armenia has long been a country of outward migration to Europe, the United States and Russia, especially in regard to seeking work in regard to the latter country (Zenian, 2002), however creates knowledge and understanding of how mobility works, including engagement with the practical aspects of moving abroad. This in itself has a potential bearing upon the popularity of outward work trajectories as aspirations and actual practices. Taking into account all these considerations, in this chapter we will argue that employment pathways for highly qualified youth in Armenia are characterized by a choice between what may be a limited range of appropriate opportunities at home and the many uncertainties of moving abroad, some of which were discussed in Chapter 3.

Transitions to work?

Entering this debate brings to mind the more general issue of understanding how people, including students and graduates, actually go about finding work and remaining within the labour market. Western youth sociologists have traditionally viewed moving out of full-time education and into a first job as part of the broader process of what they term the transition to adulthood, with entering the labour market happening alongside other developmental milestones, such as leaving the parental home and starting a life independent of one's family of origin. This transition is, as we might expect, a time in life fraught with stress and difficulty due to the many challenges entailed in moving between different stages in life relating education, work, housing and one's personal life. For the highly qualified, there are additional challenges, including finding a position commensurate to education and skill level; graduates have 'academic capital' that needs to be wisely invested, lest it dissipate through not being put to good use (see Bourdieu, 1984). Therefore, the transition for them is not simply a case of accepting the first job that comes along or looking for something that is convenient in the short-term: they must think ahead and consider what will enable them to develop professionally, and personally, over a much longer period.

At a conceptual level we are able to use some familiar terminology from youth sociology to help explain how this process happens. Most prominent is the idea of 'transition' itself: movement from education-to-work envisaged as an ontological journey taking place within the life course. Explanations of what this entails are varied but generally involve considering the bearing socio-demographic factors have upon life chances (especially gender, ethnicity and social class) alongside prevailing economic conditions, with the tension between micro and macro levels encapsulated in terms such as 'structured individualization' (see, e.g. Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Côté and Bynner, 2008). Looking at the 'individualization' part of

the equation, young people are imagined as seeing themselves in terms of their own skills and abilities, ideally utilizing their agency to enter and progress within their chosen occupational field. 'Structure' on the other hand takes into account a wide range of issues including the state of local and national labour markets; that is, the quantity and quality of opportunities on offer when the transition is taking place. What takes place is a negotiation of sorts taking place within the evolving personal biography: between what the individual wants and what they are willing or able to accept in regard to available opportunities.

While there is inevitable variation in regard to rhythm and tempo in the realization of transitions the general belief among youth scholars is that young people will, somehow, negotiate a path through whatever obstacles they encounter on the journey using their own initiative and resources, eventually finding an appropriate job and settling down into a relatively stable career. However, in practice, this transition process is not without its problems. Paraphrasing Furlong and Cartmel (2007, pp. 34-44), the process of finding a job became elongated, unpredictable and highly differentiated in late modern societies due to post-industrialization, flexible specialization and, more recently, generalized precariousness. These developments, it is believed, ultimately served to marginalize youth within national and regional labour markets as much as a lack of personal competence in the process of finding work (see also MacDonald and Marsh, 2005; Standing, 2011).[1]

Although the meaning attached to these transitions may differ among youth researchers, the popularity of the paradigm cannot be disputed; the archetype has in fact displayed a remarkable degree of resilience despite the lack of uniformity of experience noted above. There may however be greater divergence in regard to the from this 'journey' takes related to national or regional context; transitions in fact have an in-built geographical dimension that many authors conveniently ignore, which makes the structured individualization process three dimensional in regard to the bearing of place, time and personal characteristics. And the further

one is from the main metropolitan centres, the harder it can be to grasp hold of life chances since they are, literally, further away.

Being more circumspect, the idea of transitions being relatively static is in all likely a regional bias among youth sociologists, predominantly based in Anglophone countries were outward movement for work and study is relatively uncommon; a reflection of the fact that most work on this topic has taken place in societies where opportunities are, if not plentiful, sufficient. It is basically taken for granted that the transition to the labour market will take place within the same country (or in regions that have strong cultural and political links to one another), explaining the relative absence of 'space' from mainstream youth transitions texts (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). However, in more recent years youth sociology has finally begun to appreciate the need to 'spatialize' transitions since not all places are characterized by sufficient opportunities, meaning that people may need to move between urban and rural locales within a country or engage in transnational mobility in order to realize their transitions (see, e.g. Cairns, 2014; Farrugia et al., 2014).

Finding work in Armenia

Taking into account these considerations, and bearing in mind that Armenia is often characterized as a society with insufficient opportunities for the highly qualified, it is likely that a degree of mobility will become necessary for some students and graduates. An important contextual factor thus concerns the actual extent of employment opportunities in Armenia. To provide some indication of the health of the labour market, data from World Bank estimates, at time of writing (November 2018), the national unemployment rate at just over 18 per cent for the overall population. This contrasts with an equivalent figure of 1.9 per cent at the time of Armenia's declaration of independence in 1991; in other words, a market contrast with the

Soviet period.[2] The suggestion is that employment is relatively scarce, although such figures obviously provide no insight into how the highly qualified fare in the Armenian labour market compared to other demographic groups, or indeed, an indication of the quality of opportunities on offer in terms of working conditions. Given this situation, while taking a statistics-based approach to employment in Armenia might yield interesting results, our main focus in this chapter will not be on labour market trends but rather employment pathways for the highly qualified.

In regard to what we already know about potential labour market chances, on reviewing studies on this topic from Armenian authors, the impression created is that the employment situation for youth and young adults is somewhat bleak. For example, the Armenian 'Shell Study' looked at the aspirations, values and lifestyles of 14 to 29-year-olds in Armenia with emphasis on their relationship to the Soviet legacy and future development of Armenian society (Mkrtichyan et al., 2016). This includes coping with economic and political instability, extending to high unemployment rates. Among the findings of this study were that problems exist in sourcing the financial resources for acquiring what the authors term a 'good professional education.' The role of parents in securing labour market entry is also emphasised, as is difficulty in finding a job that corresponds to exact area of specialization: in fact, only 35.4 per cent of the sample of 1,200 respondents were found to be working in their chosen profession (Mkrtichyan et al., 2016, p. 22).[3]

This situation is attributed by these authors to the bearing of patronage and nepotism on finding a job in Armenia. Other authors stress contextual issues, including factors we cited in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter: the collapse of Soviet Union, the consequences of the Karabakh conflict, the earthquake of 1988 and the transition from an economic system grounded in state socialism to one based on neoliberalism, wherein vested interests often prevail (Vartikyan and Ghahriyan, 2017, p. 66). The outcome, they believe, is an exclusion of

youth from Armenian society – culturally, socially and economically – due to their lack of access to material resources, to the point of providing a potential impetus for outward migration.

Staying at home to work nevertheless still appeals to some of the interviewees, although an initial appraisal of our transcripts suggests that only 13 out of a total of 51 interviewees had definite plans to remain in Armenia. This number will almost certainly rise when difficulties are encountered in finding appropriate opportunities abroad; for example, the high level of expense entailed in moving or not being able to locate an appropriate position. There are many reasons why staying in Armenia is the preferred option, an outstanding justification being the strong attachment many have to their home country. This can be an emotional connection to Armenia itself or a more specific desire to remain close to family, friends and local neighbourhoods, that can mean staying even when unable to find work in a specialist field. One of our oldest interviewees, *Artak*, could be said to be in such a position; he informed us that even if he received a job offer from abroad, he would remain in Armenia. His desire to stay did however prompt a change of career pathway. A graduate in International Relations at Yerevan State University, he became an entrepreneur rather than pursue a career in this field, creating what he terms 'his own job' as he was not happy working for others and felt this would be badly paid.

Having a business is also an attractive option for *Ruzanna*, a 29-year-old specialist in Italian language and literature. Her plan is to do so in Armenia as she recognizes the difficulty of finding work with such a narrow specialization:

> It's not really hard to find a job in Armenia, the thing is what kind of job one wants to find. Certainly, well paid positions are very competitive, yet a qualified specialist will sooner or later find a good job in Armenia.

Therefore, and despite the pessimism present within the literature we cited early, there are highly skilled graduates who remain quite positive, if pragmatic, about their prospects at home, the main limitations being the limited range and limited quality of opportunities.

Other interviewees take a more balanced approach to entering the local job market in regard to managing expectations and career progression; for instance, *Haykaz* is a 27-year-old PhD student at the Armenian State University of Economics. He has already entered the local labour market, finding his first job in a bank during the first year of a preceding Masters programme. His approach has been to work his way up the occupational ladder within an organization:

> I applied for a vacancy, passed the exams, went through all the stages, and got the position. I work now at the same place, having achieved a lot in regard to my career in banking. […] At one stage of my career, I was considering and thinking about working or studying abroad, more specifically in the US, but I found myself staying in Armenia.

Interestingly, *Haykaz* has travelled abroad during his studies but not with a view to settling in another country. His approach has been to take advantage of the many mobility programmes that are open to Armenian students, including an exchange visit to the US to study at Harvard University. However, he sees himself using his accumulated knowledge and skills from abroad in Armenia, remaining open to the idea of working in the US at some unspecified stage in the future.

Further reflections on entering the local labour market are provided by *Sonna*, a 22-year-old recent graduate of the American University of Armenia (AUA), having studied at the Department of English and Communications. For the past ten months she has been working at

the Armenian Volunteer Corps as a Programme Assistant. When asked how she found this position, she emphasised the significance of her own preparedness:

> I can't give you a concrete answer to the question of whether it is easy or difficult to find a job in Armenia as the country is in the middle of an interesting transition. Finding a job depends on different circumstances. It was easy for me as I was well prepared for it and had experience of working at the admission's office of my university.

This is an interesting perspective in the sense that *Sonna* used her past employment experience to find a job. While this is a useful approach, it is dependent upon already having access to such a position. Not everyone is able to find work in a university admissions office or equivalent setting. Another important path to work is undertaking an internship. As is the case in much of Europe and the US, this indeterminate form of working is popular in Armenia, providing an initial point of entry to the labour market. In the past, this was the case for *Lilit*, a 32-year-old dentist who undertook an internship during the final year of her university course:

> It was very easy for me as I was offered the chance to stay after the internship and continue working as a full-time doctor. But what I have heard from others, and friends, is that it is very difficult to find a job in Armenia because the market is small and we have many graduates.

Internship thus became an entry mechanism to full-time employment, but again we have an indication that the best positions are much sought after and not everyone can benefit in a competitive situation.

Looking at other negative aspects of the Armenian labour market, there is widespread believe among the interviewees that corruption plays a major part in constricting opportunities, with particular emphasis on the role played by bribery (see also Chapter 3). Two interviewees have directly witnessed such practices. *Nune* and *Seda* both work in the same Cosmetics Shop in Armenia, and are recent graduates of Yerevan State University; *Nune* studied Psychology and *Seda* Romano-German Languages. They found their jobs via an agency and both think that finding a job, in general, in Armenia is not a problem. The issue according to *Nune* is what kind of job the person is looking for and in which industry. As she explains:

> The system is corrupt. You should have connections and pay a bribe of about 3,000 US dollars for a job in a school. Prices for higher education are even worse. We hope that with this new government things will change. I even know several cases where people who got their positions through a bribe were fired after the revolution and its anti-corruption campaign.

Despite this situation, *Nune* is optimistic that recent political events in Armenia (see Chapter 5), specifically the change of government in spring 2018, will make a difference to the job market, although *Seda* is more pragmatic:

> I see no sense or point in paying 3,000 USD for a position in a school where the salary is about 140-150 USD and besides, I didn't study and pay fees for six years to then pay for an appointment. People get positions through connections, and they may not have good qualifications, but connections and the bribe come first. At least that was the reality before the revolution.

They are now both satisfied with their salary at the cosmetics shop and see themselves staying in Armenia. However, *Seda*, with her specialism in Linguistics, did once have a dream of studying at Cambridge but now thinks it would be very expensive and that this ambition cannot be fulfilled.

Progressing within the Armenian labour market

In looking for positive attributes that can help a qualified person find a job in Armenia, an issue that features heavily in interviewees' accounts is the importance of personal qualities, something that also applies to progression along a career trajectory, with much persistence and patience in evidence. This belief is illustrated by *Mariam*, a 24-year-old Political Science graduate who told us that it took her five months to find work in Armenia. Having graduated in May 2018, she found a job in October as a junior research fellow, then her appointment was extended with a new position within the same organization.

Mariam's wait for work, compared to some of her contemporaries, was relatively short. Not everyone has been so 'lucky' and we should acknowledge that a lack of progress in finding a position can lead to career stagnation; for example, the case of *Gayane*, a 28-year-old Medicine graduate. It took her a year to find a job after finishing her degree:

> I found a job after a year through an agency. I had left my CV and a cover letter, and after a month I had a phone call for a position. I had an interview and got the job, where I worked for a year as a nurse.

More tellingly for *Gayane*, finding a job in her field with a reasonable wage was an even more challenging issue:

> I found my second job while visiting a dentist and they needed an assistant in the clinic. After a friendly conversation I got the new job, but the salary was the same as it was six years ago, something that I was not happy about and something that forced me to leave this job to find a new position with a higher income.

Working conditions, including salary, obviously have a major bearing on perceptions of career progression after the initial point of labour market entry. Poor wages or static salary levels are obstacles, as is favouritism within a workplace. This has been an issue for *Narine*, a 29-year-old International Relations graduate, who has previously studied in The Netherlands and the United States. After graduation, she found a teaching post at an Armenian university, thanks to her good grades and the support of her previous PhD supervisor. However, the conditions under which she has to work are difficult:

> The academic job market in Armenia is very challenging. It is really competitive, yet very badly paid. It is not respectful as in the EU or the US. I have experience teaching in Estonia and was offered exchange tutoring in Moscow, but the position went to another candidate from my home university in Armenia, which was unfair and affected by external influence; the connection thing. It was very disappointing because the other person didn't have the qualifications or the knowledge and experience in the field. And the position was not well paid either.

Other challenges are faced by those from outside Yerevan. *Greta* and *Zaruhi* are medical students from the Noyemberyan and Gyumri regions respectively, both in their final year at university. They both pay annual fees of 800,000 Armenian Dram for their education

and rent an apartment for 80,000 AMD a month, in addition to having to pay for food, transport and other expenses related to their studies. *Greta* explains:

> We have to take care of ourselves. While it is very comfortable when after a class, tired and hungry, you come home and everything is prepared for your rest and you can enjoy your meal, for us it is very difficult. But we want to continue our education and would like to find a job in Yerevan, because in the regions, salaries are even lower despite there being high demands on doctors. Life is poor […]. Salaries are too low and the main income comes from extra payments or unregistered services that go directly into the doctor's pocket. For example, an Otorhinolaryngology doctor in Gyumri has an official salary of 65,000 AMD [per month] and of course it is not possible to live on that salary. And that's where the corruption and bribes start.

Doubts are also expressed about the quality of their training; both had internships in local hospitals but they were not happy with their experiences. However, they think that the theoretical dimension of medical education in Armenia is generally very good. There are also prospects for moving abroad, with many examples of Armenian medical students continuing their careers in Germany.

Outward trajectories

These remarks from *Greta* take us to the next part of our discussion, concerned with work trajectories involving outward mobility to the Europe, Russia and the US. In regard to the general popularity of outward movement, a report prepared by the European Training Foundation and Caucasus Research Resource Centre in Yerevan (2013), based on survey

evidence from 2011 and 2012, provides background information on this issue. Important findings emerge regarding the idea of moving abroad: 36 per cent of the 18 to 50-year-olds sampled were seriously considering leaving the country, with the likelihood strongest among highly educated respondents. Motivations for leaving included seeking employment, specifically a better quality of employment compared to what was on offer at home, with Russia the most popular destination (ETF/CRRC, 2013, pp. 4-5).[4]

Wanting to go abroad does not of course always translate into actual movement. Looking at our own evidence, we can see that making the move for work is challenging in many different ways, economically and emotionally, and not everyone seeking work abroad is able to find the job they are looking for. Among the relatively few success stories from the interviewees' accounts, meaning those who have left and established themselves in a foreign labour market, in the previous chapter we met *Armine*, a 27-year-old Brussels-based trainee at the European Parliament. Her account was interesting in a number of ways, not least the fact that her experiences underline the importance of parental support while studying abroad and the difficulties of using 'mobility capital' on return to the sending society, an issue that is by no means exclusive to Armenian 'migrants' (see Hu and Cairns, 2017).

Finding long-term employment abroad, as opposed to fixed-duration scholarships and work placements, is clearly very difficult. Some of the difficulties of moving to Russia are meanwhile demonstrated by *Hasmik*, an Accountancy graduate who started her degree at Moscow Economic University. *Hasmik* left and returned to Armenia as she was not optimistic about her job prospects in Russia, attributing this pessimistic outlook to her Armenian heritage:

> It is very difficult to enter the job market in Russia with an Armenian surname and I was even told to change the ending of my name by the faculty. I had excellent grades and they said that this will help me to move forward and build a career in Russia.

Hasmik refused to do so and instead finished her education back in Armenia. After graduation it was however hard to find work in Yerevan, leading her to accept a job outside her specialization at a major Armenian chemical plant, which then closed in 2015. At this point, she tried to find work through agencies but without success. The only offers she received were as cleaning lady or dishwasher. Now aged 31 and a single mother of one daughter, *Hasmik* is considering moving back to Russia despite her previously noted difficulties there.

Another example of moving to Russia is provided by *Sasun*, who studied Finance and Credit at the Yerevan branch of the Moscow Entrepreneurship International Academy. After graduating, he tried to find a job in Armenia but was unsuccessful in doing so. He then decided to move to Russia:

> I applied for positions at [names of several Armenia banks] and many other banks but being disappointed, I decided to try my luck in Russia. I moved to St. Petersburg where I started working in the restaurant business. For two years I lived in St. Petersburg, but then my family insisted that I come back to Armenia, have a family and stay in the homeland.

This case illustrates the fact that moving to Russia does not necessarily present an opportunity to use one's specialist skills; in this case, in the field of banking. Now back in Armenia, although he hasn't as yet married or started a family, *Sasun* is working as a sales manager at a major Armenian Brandy Company. From his personal experience, he thinks having connections and well-placed family members is more important than qualification and background when it comes to finding a job in Armenia.

While moving abroad is one option, *Sasun* also demonstrates another way of connecting with other countries, having studied at a branch of an international institution in Armenia. This situation is further illustrated by *Karen*, who is studying Business Administration at the American University of Armenia. Part of her motivation for doing so is the lower cost at these universities, although as she explains there were other considerations:

> We don't have a state scholarship and education at our university is very expensive, but they have some discounts related to academic achievements. We are also given the opportunity to have internships during summer. So, we are lucky when it comes to getting experience because in comparison to other universities there are more opportunities for working in international companies thanks to our language skills and practical knowledge.

These factors all make the choice of an international university more appealing. Therefore, although *Karen* wanted to study in the UK, he eventually decided on the American University in Armenia, although when he finishes, he plans to continue his education in the US, at Harvard Business School, should that be possible.

The positivity displayed by *Karen* is useful to note, as is the fact that international universities offer a viable alternative to moving abroad, although this may only be deferring making an exit. But in evaluating the accounts we have of moving abroad, particularly for work, it is notably that these interviewees tend to have endured negative experiences. This makes the optimism of those wishing to move, and the high level of mobility intentions registered in previously cited studies, somewhat curious. One explanation may be that a lack of exposure to the difficulties that accompany mobility, including the many problems encountered in entering a foreign labour market. These issues may not become apparent until

an outward trajectory has been initiated. Employers, and educational institutions for that matter, based abroad may also wish to downplay negative aspects of their countries that could repel new arrivals.

We should also mention the fact that for certain careers a move abroad is more or less mandatory due to almost complete lack of opportunities at home, making risks hard to avoid. This was certainly the case for *Alvard* and *Hayarpi*, two third year students at Yerevan State Conservatory, specializing in opera. They both see themselves working abroad in the future as they believe there are no prospects for opera singers in Armenia. *Alvard* wishes to study in Edinburgh, having previously sung in Moscow, Vienna and at the Mariinsky theatre in St. Petersburg. Both also acknowledge the importance of London as a centre for the arts in Europe, and they believe that their work would be appreciated there. But in order to be able to move abroad they must participate in entry competitions as that is how they will be noticed and invited to work. As *Hayarpi* states: 'It is all a matter of luck.'

Conclusions

In reaching conclusions about the experiences related by the interviewees, we can see students and graduates in Armenia face a difficult dilemma on entering the labour market; basically, to stay at home or move abroad. Some clearly intend to stay in Armenia, regardless of the consequences for their careers, while others wish to leave or have already moved abroad. These outcomes are perhaps to be expected. What is less predictable is the high level of difficulty experienced in entering and finding a position of stability within a foreign labour market, even one that is relatively accessible like Russia.

In explaining why finding an appropriate job is so difficult, and returning to the idea of reflexive mobility introduced in Chapter 2, we can deduce that there is a limited ability to enter

into meaningful ‘conversations’ about working in foreign labour markets. This is a marked contrast to what has been observed in Europe in some of our prior work within educational contexts such as Erasmus exchanges (see, e.g. Cairns, 2017). Such programmes seek to create spaces within which reflexive learning can take place among a cohort with shared aims; in the case of Erasmus, relating to employability and interculturality. This can be, in theory, a place in which knowledge and understanding about working in a foreign country is exchanged. Outside such artificially created environments, it may be harder to acquire this essential information; not only are there fewer means to integrate into a labour market, there is a risk of failure to enter due to not making the right connections or finding an appropriate place.

What this position suggests is that in studying the outward movement of the highly qualified from countries like Armenia we need to focus less upon how many are leaving (or simply wish to leave) and more upon the extent to which people are staying. While migration statistics attract headlines, particularly where there is an alleged ‘brain drain’ taking place, that some of those who do move fail to settle counteracts this ‘fear’. It may in fact be that there are large numbers of skilled ‘migrants’ who are occupying a liminal labour market position in a foreign country, or even returning home, a position that obviously warrant further investigation at an in-depth level.

Notes

1. Not only has the quantity of work thought to have declined in Western countries but finding and keeping a secure job has become more complicated compared to the assumed ease with which previous youth generations were thought to have entered the labour market, although in actuality this may be something of a ‘golden age’ perspective (see Goodwin and O’Connor, 2005).

2. In total, 55 per cent of respondents over the age of 23 in this study (i.e. those who have for the most part finished their studies) were not employed when surveyed, contrasting with the much lower figures we cited previously, with a significant gender/martial gap; 67.2 per cent of married males were in employment while 76.6 per cent of married women were not (Mkrtichyan et al., 2016, p. 39).

3. For more details on employment trends in Armenia, including youth unemployment, see https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=AM&name_desc=false

4. The overall scale of outward migration from Armenia is also useful to note, with the number of Armenian migrants according to a World Bank survey stated as 870,200 in number or 28.3 per cent of the total population, with the top destination countries being Russia, the US, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Israel, Germany, France, Spain and Greece (World Bank, 2011).

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Chapter 5 Mobility in Transition

In this part of our discussion we will bring exploration of students and graduate's decision-making up-to-date through look at the impact of the impact of current political developments in Armenia. Considering the recency of the events that will discuss below, we cannot say it is possible to gain a realistic impression of what has changed in regard to the position of students and graduates through conducting fieldwork only a few months later. It is however still a timely moment at which to assess near immediate responses to these developments. As such, the preliminary nature of these accounts should be taken into account and all conclusions made will be somewhat tentative.

Background to the Velvet Revolution

In April and May 2018, Armenian politics briefly occupied a prominent position on the world stage, the country undergoing what came to be termed a Velvet Revolution. Mass street demonstrations were held, the focal point being Republic Square in the capital city of Yerevan. Thousands of people, young and old, men and women, children and students, protested together to demand the resignation of self-proclaimed Prime Minister of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan. Sargsyan had held power for previous ten years as president, putting the country squarely under Russian influence and generating a high level of dependency on the former Soviet partner, a position not to everyone's liking. The protests, led by member of parliament Nikol Pashinyan (head of the Civil Contract party), ultimately succeeded in their demands for change, albeit following much prevarication by Sargsyan, with Pashinyan elected Prime Minister of Armenia on 8 May 2018.

Many issues provided the impetus for this change, including the aforementioned pro-Russia politics of the former president and his administration (see Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017). Added to this are some factors that have already been discussed in this book: a perceived-to-be a corrupt political system, high unemployment rates, the lack of job opportunities for recent graduates, economic decline, poor social conditions and low salaries. These concerns united Armenian society, leading people to make a stand and claim their constitutional rights of democracy and rule of law, demanding an end to corruption and a commitment to equality and economic development. These demands also reached the large Armenian diaspora; that there are more Armenians living outside of Armenia than in Armenia itself is, ironically, partly attributable to dissatisfaction with the social, political and economic policies of the post-independence Republic of Armenia. But what was unique about this revolution was that what many Armenians had come to regard as a corrupt and autocratic government in a small former Soviet republic was overthrown in a peaceful manner, and without any apparent external interference from the East or the West.

Several months on and the meaning of the Velvet Revolution is still being discussed. In looking at reactions to these events, an interesting piece was written by French-Armenian lawyer Raffi Kalfayan for the Armenian-Mirror Spectator in August 2018. His article took the risk of being labelled ‘counter-revolutionary’ by his critics, but certain points are rational and sober; not influenced by the revolutionary euphoria of the post-revolutionary period and acknowledging the importance of people-to-people contact in Pashinyan’s ‘new’ approach. A key element of this critique was the idea that a state cannot make policy decisions based on what happens in the street or on Facebook (Kalfayan, 2018). People can realize their power and recognize the importance of a unified strive for justice and rights, but what is the next step? Pashinyan succeeded in enacting political change through what might be termed a populist movement and became a majority elected leader. He was able to unite and overthrow the single-

party system, led by Republicans, but is he now the person to lead the country? In other words, can the person for the revolution be an effective leader of the state? These are the main concerns for everyone in Armenia and its diaspora according to Kalfayan's article, and there is no doubt that the students and graduates we interviewed in the summer of 2018 are also pondering the country's fate.

Taking into account these considerations, we must accept that there is a degree of ambivalence in regard to the meaning of the Velvet Revolution, as did a number of the interviewees only a matter of weeks after the events had taken place. For example, 24-year-old Sales Assistant *Kristina* cites an example of what she regards as a non-competent appointment to the position of Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Investments, held by a graduate of the Romano-German Linguistic Department of Yerevan State University. This assessment of non-competence, we had better point out, is *Kristina's* rather than our own. The minister in question actually has a degree in Developmental Studies from Cambridge University in addition to a linguistics degree, and a substantial amount of experience working in politics; she is definitely not an unqualified non-specialist. Meanwhile, *Armine*, a graduate of Cambridge University in Development Studies whom we met previously in Chapter 3, contacted the newly formed government offering her skills and experience in shaping the new democratic order but failed to receive a reply; she left for Brussels and started working for the European Parliament instead. These interviewees were of the opinion that people from non-political academic and professional backgrounds were coming to power as part of the new government and in local municipalities. One example is the newly elected Mayor of Yerevan, Hayk Marutyan, an actor and showman, but also an ally of Pashinyan and a civil activist during the recent revolution and the previous demonstrations against public transportation fare increases in 2013 and the rise in electricity prices in 2015 (known colloquially as 'Electric Yerevan').

Political change in Armenia

Before looking at other interviewees' reactions to the events described above, it is important to state that this issue is of potential interest beyond Armenia. Understanding political change has been a long-standing concern of sociologists, with researchers in Europe and elsewhere focusing on formal and non-formal modes of engagement among the highly qualified and in other sections of the population (see, e.g., Verba and Norman, 1972). In practice this ranges from looking at how people join political parties to engaging in various forms of on-line activism (Dalton, 2008; Bakker and de Vreese, 2011; Castells, 2012; Fominaya, 2014). While important, we will not however be looking at these issues in this chapter. Our more specific focus is on what happens to life planning in the immediate aftermath of political change, including mobility decisions.

An initial look at the interview material suggests that there has been no knee-jerk reaction to the Velvet Revolution in regard to following different occupational pathways; no dramatic changes of direction after the change in government. Even the people who had some level of participation in the protests and demonstrations stated that the impact on their lives was more personal than professional. Probably the most active person we encountered was *Kristina*, a 24-year-old sales assistant. In her opinion, 'It was beautiful it was fantastic! We need historical justice, our people suffered way too much, it's time to live and have a strong country.' She did not however decide to change her career path. This does not preclude the possibility of the political changes ultimately leading to an improvement in prospects and then a change in career direction, for example, opening up occupational pathways that were previously sullied by corruption and patronage, but we have no clear signs that this has happened as yet in Armenia.

Engaging with this issue also provides a reminder that transitions to the labour market tend to be in a state of flux regardless of political events. In Chapter 4, some familiar ideas from youth sociology were introduced to help explain how certain Anglophone and European researchers view the passage from education to work; as a developmental journey, from one point on the life course to another. Some limitations were however pointed out relating to the applicability of established paradigms, including a long-standing reluctance to acknowledge the spatial dimension of career trajectories, a stubbornness that mirrors the broader sociological failing to effectively theorize mobility in transitions (see Chapter 2).

A reluctance to spatialize transitions is not the only problem. Success and failure in late modern societies is thought to relate to a combination of clever decision-making in respect to work and study options, and an ability to overcome the obstacles that block access to opportunities, with these obstacles related to prejudices arising from factors such as gender, social class and ethnicity (Roberts et al., 1994; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Côté and Bynner, 2008). While it is certainly true to say that socio-demographic background matters a great deal, so do geo-demographic circumstances, and in emphasising the salience of familiar traits transition paradigms are being grounded in an assumption of societal stability and a certain predictability of circumstances, even though these assumptions do not apply to many societies. There might be change, such as a switch in government at election time and small fluctuations in economic fortune, but nothing too disruptive. The rather dramatic change in Armenia presents a different scenario to the European or Anglophone norm, with the Velvet Revolution having the potential to disrupt or inspire the highly qualified, particularly in regard to deciding where to spend the future. Bearing in mind the discussion in Chapter 2, might it be that political change acts as an inspiration for a reflexive process of career re-orientation? Alternatively, it might make no difference at all or even retrench an existing position.

Another point worth making in regard to transitions to the labour market in difficult circumstances relates to the somewhat downbeat views on job prospects that prevail in youth sociology. The main thrust of much work in this field is, undeniably, negative, with the position of youth in society perceived as growing progressively more marginal with each passing generation. The quality of tertiary education and the efficacy of university degrees to ensure job market entry in particular are questioned, while the quantity and quality of job opportunities always seems to be dwindling for graduates (see Cairns et al. 2016). This perspective is in all likelihood a gross simplification of what happens in many countries, and hence perhaps somewhat unfair to criticize, but nevertheless, it captures the basic idea that highly qualified youth and young adults find themselves trapped in ever-worsening circumstances. And whether or not this view has relevance to countries like Armenia is another matter.

Transitions in a transition society

Armenia is different from the West for many reasons, including the fact that it is a society undergoing political transition following the Velvet Revolution, or more accurately, entering another phase within a longer transition trajectory. As a post-Soviet country, Armenia can like many like Central and Eastern European countries be described as a 'transition society' in the sense of making the shift from communism to free market capitalism (Veebel et al., 2014).[1] This is a long and still on-going process in many post-Soviet states, and while it is inappropriate to evaluate Armenia alongside Western societies using dubious terms such as 'development,' it is fair to say that capitalism has taken on distinct forms that differ from market economies elsewhere in the world. One issue concerns the egalitarianism of the transition in countries where the agent of change has been a bourgeois class of private owners. Putting this less politely, transition societies are vulnerable to domination by elites, with social and economic

policies (and appointments to positions of power and influence) reflecting the interests of a small minority of hyper-rich individuals and their families at the expense of everyone else. Institutional and cultural change is therefore slowed, as such elites presumably have no stake in encouraging social, economic and political inclusion. This may explain why some interviewees cited in the previous chapter perceived Armenia as having maintained labour market features associated with the Soviet era, including perceptions of institutional corruption and patronage. Being a transition society, it seems, involves participating in a transformation involving re-combinations of familiar arrangements rather than establishing an entirely new reality (see also Stark and Bruszt, 1998).

What then do these processes mean for students and graduates in Armenia? In Chapter 4 a number of graphic examples were cited of graduates actively shunning certain career routes due to the expectation of experiencing hostility; for example, *Nune* and *Seda* feeling that 'the system is corrupt.' This may be the impression of how things were but *Nune* also stated, people who owed their positions to bribery are now supposed to be losing their jobs. As a basic research question in this chapter, we want to look for signs of a shift in career orientation, even if only expressed in terms of growing optimism or declining pessimism.

Armenia after the Velvet Revolution

In April and May of 2018, Armenia may have featured prominently in global news reports but as is the way in such matters, the Velvet Revolution was quickly forgotten by most of the world once everything appeared to have been resolved without bloodshed or disruption to the geopolitical hegemony of the South Caucasus. The same cannot of course be said about the situation within Armenia, where debate has continued in public and private about the consequences of the political transition (see also Chapter 6), and among students and graduates

there is continued reflection about the bearing recent events have on their future job prospects. This includes deciding whether or not to leave Armenia, now or at a later point in life, given that there might just be a change in circumstances around the corner.

Acknowledging this uncertainty is important, as is the fact that optimism is likely to be tempered by realism. But a clear finding emerging from the interviews is that a, perhaps small, degree of hope has been generated, along with some expectations of change. *Albina*, a 35-year-old Economics graduate, had the following to say:

> I believe that recent political changes will have a positive impact, although it is too early to talk about it. The fact is that Armenia's politics cordially changed, and the country needed that. It is already a positive development, having a positive impact on the country's international reputation as well. I have positive hopes in this regard. For me, being active on those days in April and May, I think that the change was made because of internal strength and the unity of people.

28-year-old lawyer *Marine* meanwhile thinks that 'these recent events in Armenia bring hope to many and to me. I hope this new government will strengthen the country's sovereignty.' This positive outlook is however qualified by other interviewees, who are more circumspect about how they see the future. For example, *Anna*, a 28-year-old Law graduate had the following to say:

> Political moves in Armenia are a very big warning, I would say. It looks like everything and everyone was wrong before revolution to the point of being in a state of absurdity. Of course, it is very encouraging and good to be able to say 'let's hunt corruption and oligarchs' but the new appointments in the government do not look any better than

> those it had before. It's really a very dangerous atmosphere and the country needs experienced politicians, experts and advisers. I am afraid that it will get worse but I hope it will be good.

On the other hand, *Miriam*, a 24-year-old Political Science graduate sees the recent events as part of the broader process of societal change, drawing perhaps upon her academic expertise in regard to this matter:

> Society is in transformation and moving towards the Western orientation and lifestyle, but we have a lot in common with former Soviet countries, and it is still visible. Besides, Armenia as a nation has similarities with Middle Eastern culture, so we carry the mix of these three – European, post-Soviet and Middle Eastern. As to the recent political events, it is too early to say anything right now. I however hope for a positive change, yet it will take time, a few years, and during the first years we may even have regression and not progress, but that's understandable as we are having radical change in the system. In the long-term perspective, we will have positive developments.

As we might expect from a Political Scientist, this is a very coherent summation of the unfolding situation, and a reminder of not only the Soviet legacy but other influences; from the East, and the Middle East, as well as the West. For this reason, we must always remind ourselves of Armenia's gateway position in the world, geographical situated between two continents, and despite being closely connected with Europe in many different ways, its political culture has its own distinct norms and values that are influenced by Asia and further afield.[2]

Mobility in transition?

Returning to the mobility question, and as already discussed in Chapter 3, from the interviewees we had some interesting reflections on moving abroad and insight into the experience of living in another country. However, in regard to the impact of the Velvet Revolution, no one provided clear indications that a decision to leave was going to be reversed any time soon because of this. Positive views of recent developments were however found among those already living abroad, emphasising an optimistic view within the diaspora. For example, *Sona*, whom we met previously views the change of government as representing a positive development, although she states that it would not be having any immediate impact on her own life, particularly considering she lives abroad. *David* meanwhile is a 27-year-old project director at a consultancy company in Berlin. He moved to Germany having previously worked in Russia after finishing his studies in Armenia at the Russian-Armenian Slavonic University. He had the following to say on this matter:

> The positive side of this revolution is that now people realize their real power and if Nikol Pashinyan, the current Prime-Minister does not fulfil his promises, then he will have the same destiny as the overthrown government. The diaspora is very enthusiastic but at the same time sceptical about these changes, as we all understand that it will take time to see the results of the events in political, economic and social changes in the country.

Nevertheless, *David* thinks these changes are radical, especially considering that during 27 years of independence, many political mistakes were made in Armenia. However, like other fellow interviewees he also accepts that patience is required to see the real outcome of the

Velvet Revolution. Therefore, he can't say whether it will be positive or negative in the long run, but the fact that Armenian youth abroad are very enthusiastic raises the prospect of members of the diaspora engaging in return migration. On the other hand, Brussels-based *Armine* views the recent events in Armenia as necessary but believes the new government lacks a long-term strategy, reminding us that not everyone within the diaspora shares the same view.

For those seeking to enter the labour market or already in work, important questions remain regarding career progression at this time. We have already obtained some insight from those who are studying and a few people who are currently employed, the greatest post-revolution hope lying among those furthest way. Another scenario relates to people in Armenia not currently working. Can it be said that those who are out of work are feeling more optimistic about the future? One of the oldest interviewees, 35-year-old *Albina*, whom we met previously, is in such a position. She and her husband ran their own business for ten years but recently closed it due to difficulties. Since this time, she has not been able to find work, a situation she attributes to the Armenian job market being very limited in scope and employers preferring to have younger workers:

> It is very competitive, for a well-paid position, but the issue is that these positions involve multi-tasking and there is no life-work balance there. It is much easier to find a low paid job but I don't consider them because of my academic background and experience.

How the recent political changes will affect her situation is another matter. Like previously cited interviewees, *Albina* believes there will be a positive impact, but she expresses this more in terms of hope than certainty. It is not anticipated that anything will change substantially in the short-term when it comes to her labour market position, or indeed the

Armenian economy. In regard to when such change might happen, 31-year-old *Anush*, studying for a PhD in Psychology at Yerevan State University thinks that it might take a long time; 'it will take at least about ten years.' Significantly, *Anush* has already decided that once she finishes her degree programme, she will follow her intended route of moving to Germany, 'and this won't impact on my decision about moving abroad, where I hope to find a well-paid job and grow professionally.'

Conclusions

While the impact of the Velvet Revolution has yet to be felt in the lives of the interviewees, there are some signs that change is anticipated. It is however among those who wish to stay in Armenia and with members of the diaspora where we find most hope of an improvement in circumstances, not among students and graduates intending to leave the country. In regard to what the change means, the comments discussed in this chapter suggest that context, political context in particular, has some bearing on transitions to work, although not overwhelmingly so. What is more evident is a degree of optimism, even enthusiasm, about the future. This is not surprising, considering how exciting it can be to observe history in the making. *Kristina*, who we met earlier, perhaps being most enthused:

> I believe in the best outcome of this revolution. People in Russia were affected by it and they would start demonstrations asking Putin to resign, screaming 'Putin go away!! We want it like in Armenia!' Well, of course it didn't work out in Russia and all demonstrators were imprisoned. He is a Tsar, he will be there his lifetime and then mummified. He is there forever.

Bearing in mind the discussion in Chapter 2, we cannot really say that political change is acting as a spur for a reflexive process of career re-orientation. While this may be for many reasons, the lack of direct impact might explain why reflexive decision-making processes, and re-evaluation of mobility choices, are not happening in the lives of our interviewees. We cannot therefore say that the revolution has been a gamechanger to any meaningful extent in regard to life planning; not altogether surprising considering that, as we shall see in the next chapter, many important matters have yet to be resolved in the social, economic and political spheres in Armenia.

Notes

1. More specifically, this term refers to a society wherein the political structure changes from single-party rule to a parliamentary system, with administrative institutions undergoing reorganization and an economy of shortages replaced by consumerism (Allaste and Cairns, 2016, p. 3).

2. Armenia's geographical position inevitably brings with it geopolitical implications, placed between the sphere of European policy influence, including the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP), and Russia's macro-frameworks for regional integration and domestic sectoral reforms, creating a what might be termed a 'contested neighbourhood' of sorts (Ademmer et al., 2016; Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015; Friere and Simão, 2013; Loda, 2017; Vasilyan, 2017). Despite the existence of partnership policies, Armenia's trade interdependence with the EU has been generally weak, with low volumes of exports from Armenia to the EU, and even lower volumes of EU imports to Armenia according to European Commission figures cited by Delcour and Wolczuk (2016). These authors also emphasize the

significance of the trading relationship with Russia, and its role as what they term ‘a primary security guarantor’, not to mention a key supplier of energy to Armenia with a monopoly over gas distribution (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2016, p. 495).

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Chapter 6 Postscript

Bearing in mind the time that has passed between conducting our research in the late summer and early autumn of 2018 and the completion of this book, in February 2019, we thought it would be wise to add a postscript of sorts to bring our discussion to a more satisfactory end. Six months or so may not seem like a long time, but in regard to the political situation in Armenia, much has happened, or rather not happened. While not necessarily euphoric, a certain amount of optimism and hope was evident in the accounts of certain interviewees cited in Chapter 5. At this slightly later point in time, it is however hard to escape the feeling that much of this positivity has now dissipated and the lack of signs of improvement has become a problem in itself. From this point of view, it may be that the situation facing the highly qualified in Armenia is even worse than it was before since political change did not bring about societal change.

In explaining why there is disappointment, the new Prime Minister of Armenia has clearly not impressed many people. Somewhat presciently, this feeling was actually expressed by one of our interviewees, *Kristina*, who pointed out that in the immediate aftermath of the revolution what she termed 'incompetent appointments' were being made in government ministries, although as we pointed out in Chapter 5, this might have been a somewhat harsh judgement. Nevertheless, the inference is that patronage and cronyism have continued unabated, albeit with the associates of the new leader, Nikol Pashinyan, rather than the previous President/Prime Minister of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan. The promised foreign policy (re)orientation in regard to gaining distance from Russia is also considered to be an unrealistic proposition by many. Armenia's economic and political ties with Russia are simply too strong to enable a substantial decrease in dependence on Russian energy, exports and military

cooperation, including the acquisition of weapons, to happen. Meanwhile, in respect to Armenia's orientation towards the West, including relations with the European Union and the United States, there has been no notable change, except for a number of high-level visits between political leaders; for example, Nikol Pashinyan's visit to Brussels and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel's trip to the South Caucasus region. The EU has however promised to allocate more funds for the development of Armenia's economy, something else that has yet to take place.

The situation in Armenia, in fact, can be said to be somewhat fragile at the time of writing. The new government does not seem to have a concrete strategic plan in place but continues to promote a high-profile anti-corruption campaign and tax reduction policies that have yet to be affirmed. What happens next is of course unknown but we can say that expectations for an improvement in future prospects have notably diminished in the last six months and might need to be revised further downwards should there be no major developments soon.

Rethinking mobility and transitions among the highly qualified

One fringe benefit of writing this book for the authors has been the opportunity to rethink the issue of transitions to the labour market among the highly qualified due to a shift in perspective away from largely European or Anglophone considerations and towards the South Caucasus. In regard to the use of mobility within transition trajectories, it is fair to say that the main emphasis tends to be upon the education rather than the work phases of these journeys in existing studies, and in mobility research, a relatively narrow focus on 'credit mobility' and migration for the duration of an undergraduate degree course, leading to possible neglect in studying mobility in other transition phases, especially attempts to find work and job security

abroad. The importance of labour market entry for the highly qualified is however very prominent in our material, and finding work abroad seems to be much harder than sourcing educational opportunities.

A specific challenge for the highly qualified in making transitions is to apply what they have previously learnt in education to professional life, enabling skills to blossom rather than fall by the wayside due to disuse. It is also worth bearing mind that many people, including some of those we have interviewed, have made considerable investments (and sacrifices) to complete their education and obviously want to see a reasonable return. This situation can be expressed sociologically by acknowledging the difficulty of making use of accumulated 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1984), one reason why this task is so difficult being the lack of guidance in making what may be complex transitions. What has emerged from the accounts of those who have attempted to find work commensurate to education and skill level abroad, for example, *Sona* whom we met in Chapter 2, are challenges linked to the lack of sufficient grounding in the norms a foreign labour market, expressed in terms of missing social network integration. Skills and qualifications are not quite enough to ensure success as having the right connections also matters; a somewhat ironic position, considering the criticism of patronage networks within Armenia, before and after the Velvet Revolution, in this book (for instance, see the views of *Kristina* cited previously). As an addendum to debates on the question of highly qualified transitions to the labour market we would therefore seek to reaffirm the need to support people in finding skill level appropriate jobs in addition to providing them with the necessary funding for educational courses.

Addressing theoretical underdevelopment

A theme that has been re-iterated in this book, especially in Chapter 2, is that geographical mobility among the highly qualified is chronically undertheorized. Specifically lacking is engagement with questions of how and why mobility happens to accompany the many, many accounts of how much circulation might be taking place. Equally pressing is the need to re-balance discussion away from what mobility means for institutions, especially in terms of profitability, and towards learning what practicing mobility means for the actual movers. To address this obvious failing we have looked back at our previous work on this theme (starting with Cairns et al., 2012 and Cairns 2014, and continuing into Cairns et al., 2018), and taken a reflexive approach to understanding how mobility happens. The basic premise is that mobility decisions are through reflection, bearing in mind what the protagonist wishes to achieve (i.e. continuing an educational trajectory or entering the labour market, and no doubt remaining in work) and what is realistically possible in terms of personal capacities and available opportunities. When it comes to thinking about mobility, rather than fall back on assumptions that emphasise financial considerations, a wide range of factors can be taken into account, including the influence of family, peers and looser acquaintances, all of whom provide potential validation for choices. Therefore, while prior exploration of reflexive life planning has, quite rightly, emphasised the importance of internal conversations (Archer, 2003; 2007), we also note the importance of externalized dialogues that extend to experiences in the workplace that are capable of prompting a change of career direction.

In putting these ideas into practice, the interviewees' accounts in Chapters 3 and 4 illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of interpreting mobility decision as reflexive practices: on the one hand, we are indeed able to acknowledge the bearing of a wide range of influences and move beyond simplistic econometric imaginings of how and why mobility happens; on the other, mobility choices obviously remain bounded by a range of limitations, from visa requirements to the availability of life chances. In consequence we have few, if any,

examples of outstanding success in 'using' mobility due to factors such as the absence of appropriate orientation points for reflexive thought and action, and the difficulty of accessing opportunities without adequate information or connections. We therefore have to state at this point that we are theorizing 'failure' more than demonstrating a range of successful outcomes, but we can at least see why people are unable to realize their ambitions abroad.

Following different pathways to work

One interesting finding of Chapter 3 was that students and graduates, or at least the ones we interviewed, follow different spatial pathways in regard to entering and moving within the labour market. There is no homogenous experience of working in Armenia nor is there a homogenous way to move abroad in search of a dream career. Choices about career pathways relate to both objective circumstances, including positive and negative experiences in the workplace, and personal desires; a position that in some respects echoes the familiar 'structured individualization' motif popular in youth sociology (see, e.g. Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). We can thus deduce the importance of acknowledging agency in life planning alongside contextual factors in defining future directions.

In regard to the following of different spatial pathways, a number of tentative conclusions emerge. Firstly, we have an affirmation of the importance of the idea of being mobile to finding work; although not for everyone, enough people wish to move abroad to work or have already moved for us to take notice, even taking into account the fact that in recruiting interviewees we actively sought out those with mobility experience. Secondly, there is a degree of predictability in regard to destinations; the significance of the Russian Federation is impossible to ignore, while the US and the EU also feature prominently due to the links these regions have with Armenia. Thirdly, but perhaps less well anticipated, are the many difficulties

that people face in practicing outward movement. In some ways, they are required to operate in a mobility sphere that is not attuned to providing settlement or stability; what they encounter may be no better or even worse that the situation they have left behind.

Outward mobility from Armenia hence has its complications. Despite all the media hype and policy hysteria about 'migration' it would seem to be that moving abroad in the twenty first century with a view to settlement can be a rather frustrating experience due to labour market conditions. Outward trajectories, while conforming to preconceived ideas in regard to destinations, thus tend to become fragmented in time and space. Rather than being a permanently dislocative experience, there is movement back and forward between what would once have been described as the 'sending' and 'receiving' societies, with 'migration' being created by an accumulation of mobility experiences rather than proceeding from one specific departure point. The foundations for more substantial moves are thus made through practicing (in more ways than one) mobility in what may appear at the time as being relatively ephemeral exercises, the case of *Davit* in Brno being a case in point (see Chapter 2), which become the foundation for subsequent movement.

Mobility as a resource

One last consideration relates to our understanding of 'mobility' itself as practiced by students and graduates. For reasons that are not entirely clear, much mobility research is still rooted to notions of spatial circulation that are quite old fashioned; that is to say, mobility as migration, and migration as a profoundly negative life experience. While traditional forms of migration still happen, this is not really how most human mobility functions in the twenty first century; it is contingent not absolute, voluntary not involuntary, often very expensive and rarely

profitable. It takes diligence and dedication to practice mobility, qualities that should be recognized as strengths not human weaknesses.

Learning how to be mobile nevertheless has value, perhaps best explained as a capacity that can become a resource akin to academic capital. It takes time and effort to acquire but the effects can last a lifetime, becoming an indispensable recourse for the highly qualified. Our material provides an illustration of various scenarios in which attempts have been made to access and make use of mobility, albeit for the most part, without a great deal of unqualified success. Therefore, unlike one previous study, in which it was possible to demonstrate how students and graduates acquired and then used 'mobility capital' in their subsequent careers, in this case Chinese postgraduates in Norway (Hu and Cairns, 2017), it is much harder to demonstrate value generated via mobility among the Armenian interviewees.

We also acknowledge the fact that the meaning of mobility is open to change, as are other aspects of educational trajectories and professional careers. Political developments can change politicians, but as we observed in Chapter 5 and in the opening preamble to this chapter, politicians do not necessarily change society. This reflection extends to mobility decision-making, with little or no impact being observed among the interviewees during the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution. However, given the short amount of time that has passed since this time, we do need to be patient, and perhaps in another ten or twenty years, take another look at this situation.

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