

Spaces of Diasporas

Kurdish identities, experiences of otherness
and politics of belonging

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Minoo Alinia

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Abstract

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Author: Minoo Alinia

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Department of Sociology, Göteborg University

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This thesis concerns sociological analysis of deterritoriality and displacement, and is guided by the overall issue of how displaced populations, especially migrants, refugees and diasporas, deal with questions of origin, homeland and national belonging. These questions are studied within a context of increasing population movements and of a global hierarchy of power, where these groups have become political categories with growing impact on identities and social relations.

The thesis explores the Kurdish diasporic identity and movement on the basis of experiences of people involved in these processes. Twenty-two Kurdish women and men settled in Gothenburg have been interviewed. They all belong to the “first generation” of Kurdish refugees in Sweden and are involved in diverse political and cultural activities. The primary aim of the thesis is to study their relationships to Sweden, countries of origin and Kurdish diasporic institutions and movement. The second purpose is to contribute to theoretical improvement and clarification of the concept of diaspora, focusing on its main features – homing desire and collective identity formation. Further, by integrating aspects of the theory of social movements with the theory of diaspora, the thesis examines how individual needs and actions interact with social processes and structures in the formation of diasporic identities and communities.

The respondents’ experiences of Sweden are associated on the one hand with democracy and political freedom, which give them social opportunities to pursue their activities, and on the other hand with everyday racism and exclusion. Their memories, lived experiences, identities and histories are mobilised as resources in their struggles to create alternative spaces and homes. In this process, homeland and homing desire become central, but their relation to and conceptions of homeland cannot be defined only in territorial terms, but also as a response to exclusion, marginalisation and “homelessness”. Their notions of homeland consist mainly of subjective constructions based on individual experiences of localities and the way these are articulated in political discourses. In the narratives I have not found any given homeland to which they all relate and with which they all identify. The study shows that the diasporic movement and space, collective identity and community formed around the politics of location have become a “home” for such people.

The thesis has also highlighted the internal boundaries and contradictions that divide the Kurdish diasporic community. The issue of gender is discussed specifically by comparing experiences of women and men and their ways of identifying themselves and relating to Sweden, to countries of origin, and to the Kurdish diasporic community and movement. The analysis shows that both women and men feel excluded and alienated from Swedish society whereas they find a home in the Kurdish community. At the same time women display more ambivalence than men in their relation to the Kurdish diasporic community and are more positive towards Swedish society.

The study confirms that Kurdish nationalism and identity have been strengthened and spread through the Kurdish diaspora and that its activities also influence this process. It has recurrently challenged the boundaries of identities and of politics pursued by the states ruling over the Kurds. Moreover, the thesis argues that Kurdish diasporic identity and Kurdish nationalism in regard to Sweden primarily constitute a politics of position, mobilised as a resource to resist the imposed immigrant identity and survive the exclusion and otherness that it implies.

Keywords: Kurdish diaspora, exile, homeland, diasporic community, Kurdish identity, movements for location, Kurdish nationalism, Sweden, forced migration.

For my parents

Akhtar-al-molouk Najafian &
Ali-Akbar Alinia

Contents

PART I: THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL FRAMES	17
1. Introduction	19
Reflections on a childhood memory	21
What is the problem?	22
How this project came about and what its aims are?	23
Diaspora as analytical concept	26
The Kurdish diasporic experience	29
<i>Geography of Kurdish dispersal</i>	29
<i>Some previous research on the Kurdish diaspora</i>	31
<i>Kurdish diasporic communities</i>	32
<i>Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish nationalism</i>	32
<i>Kurdish diaspora, media and publications</i>	33
Disposition of the work	34
Further considerations	37
2. The Kurdish Identity: a Historical Overview	39
Introduction	41
<i>Geography, population and language</i>	41
Kurdish nationalism and the history of denial and resistance	44
<i>The position of Kurds within the Persian and Ottoman Empires</i>	46
<i>The end of the Ottoman Empire and the Kurdish question</i>	47
The establishment of the nation-states, excluded identities, and Kurdish responses	49
<i>Turkish nationalism: the politics of total denial and forced assimilation</i>	49
<i>Iraq: between cultural autonomy and genocide</i>	52
<i>Iran: neither denial nor recognition</i>	57
<i>Syria: systematic transfer, dispersion, and Arabisation</i>	60
Kurdish identities, continuities and changes	62
Summary	65
3. Global Migration, Citizenship and Politics of Belonging	67
Introduction	69

Citizenship and the challenge of global migration	69
<i>Nation – states and the paradoxes of global migration</i>	72
Contemporary migration: historical roots and geopolitics	75
<i>The migrant ‘other’ and hierarchies of mobile subjects</i>	78
<i>Forced migration and the state of exile</i>	80
South–North migration and the discursive exclusion of immigrant	
Other	83
Migration, aliens and Swedish society	86
Summary	91
PART II: THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMES	93
4. Diasporas	95
Introduction	97
The concept of diaspora: etymologies and definitions	97
<i>The metaphysics of return: (re)territorial notion of diaspora</i>	98
<i>“Location-in-movement”: de-territorial notion of diaspora</i>	103
Essence-claim: essence or politics of position	109
Diasporic mobilisations as social movements: towards an analytical framework	113
<i>Diasporic consciousness, collective identities and collective action</i>	114
Dialectics of diasporic identification	117
<i>Homing desire: “homelessness” and the politics of home</i>	117
<i>Politics of location and meanings of homecomings</i>	121
Summary	123
5. A Journey Through a Research Project: Reflections on Data, Theory and Methodology	125
Introduction	127
Methodological considerations	127
<i>Theory-data and macro-micro in mutual interaction</i>	127
<i>Experiences, articulations, and discourses</i>	130
<i>Analysis: individual experiences and social processes</i>	134

<i>Validity of validation criteria in qualitative interviews</i>	136
Demarcation/selection and procedure	139
Micro-politics of research: ethics, roles and power relation	143
<i>Objects of study or co-creators: a discussion of ethics</i>	143
<i>The researcher's double role - the dilemma of research</i>	147
<i>Where do I stand?</i>	149
Summary	151
PART III: "HOMELESSNESS", HOMING DESIRE AND POLITICS OF LOCATION	153
6. Being a Citizen, Kurds and Immigrant Other in Sweden	155
Introduction	157
Experiences of displacement, exile and otherness	157
Meeting the two faces of Sweden: (I) democracy and "cultural freedom of choice"	162
<i>Paradoxes of multiculturalism</i>	164
<i>"In this society there is really freedom"</i>	165
<i>"It has been a very nice environment for me"</i>	167
Meeting the two faces of Sweden: (II) structural discrimination and everyday racism	169
<i>Experiencing otherness as invandrare (immigrants)</i>	172
<i>"I have seen many things like that but I have tried to ignore them"</i>	174
<i>"When you go to a shop you see that the assistants look at you suspiciously"</i>	176
<i>"A coloured man is less respected than a coloured woman"</i>	176
<i>"I am Master of Engineering and get a job as a cleaner"</i>	178
<i>Experiences of otherness as Kurds</i>	179
<i>"As if killing women is our culture"</i>	182
<i>"Did your father force you to marry?"</i>	185
<i>"It does not matter who I am. There is already a conception of me"</i>	187
Summary	188
7. Tracing the Home(land)	191
Introduction	193

Diasporic spaces of agency	193
<i>Kurdish migration: dispersal from the territory and gathering in the movement</i>	195
<i>“It was first during my escape that I met other Kurds”</i>	196
<i>Kurdish media and practices of stateless agents</i>	197
<i>Cultural associations and local radio stations in Gothenburg</i>	201
Kurdish cultural associations and Swedish multiculturalism	203
<i>Kurdish cultural associations: culture reservoirs or platforms</i>	203
<i>“We teach Kurdish culture”</i>	203
<i>“It is good to have a platform”</i>	205
Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish nationalism	207
<i>Exile, homesickness and nationalism</i>	208
Where/What is the homeland?	211
<i>A diasporised home: in no-man’s-land of diaspora spaces</i>	211
<i>The nationalist discourse</i>	212
<i>“Kurdistan is my mother”</i>	212
<i>The counter-discourse of the left</i>	215
<i>“Kurdistan is not holy for me”</i>	215
<i>Lived experiences, political discourses and geo-political realities: positions in between</i>	216
<i>Hesitations, ambivalences and the uncertain homeland</i>	219
<i>A home(land) in Sweden?</i>	223
<i>“I don’t want to belong anywhere / I am a citizen of the world”</i>	223
<i>“My children are Swedish. I cannot see myself as a guest here”</i>	226
<i>A “home” in diaspora community</i>	228
<i>“You are somebody in your own society”</i>	228
Summary	232
8. To Be(come) Kurd in Sweden: Strategies of Resistance and Survival and Politics of Identity	235
Introduction	237
Interactions, identities and power relations	237
<i>To be(come) a Kurd: some pre-migratory experiences of oppression and resistance</i>	240

To be(come) a Kurd in Sweden: individual identity projects and political discourses	246
<i>Resisting imposed identities</i>	249
<i>“I am not a Swede, nor an immigrant. I am a Kurd”</i>	249
<i>Paradoxes of resistance</i>	255
<i>“Stone is heavier in its own place”</i>	255
<i>Internalising inferiority</i>	260
<i>“It depends on yourself and your social competence”</i>	260
<i>Kurdish identity and counter-discourse of the Kurdish left</i>	264
<i>“The national question cannot define my identity”</i>	264
Summary	267
9. Gender Strategies, Identities and Community Belonging	269
Introduction	271
The contexts and dimensions of diasporic Kurdish women’s identity	271
<i>Third World woman, struggles and stereotypes</i>	272
<i>National liberation movements and gender question</i>	275
<i>Women and migration</i>	279
Gender strategies, identity and community belonging:	
(I) In relation to Sweden	284
<i>“Men are living in the past ... we think about the future”</i>	284
<i>“I have been good at adapting to Swedish society”</i>	288
<i>Obstacles, problems and the double pressure on women</i>	291
Gender strategies, identity and community belonging:	
(II) In relation to the Kurdish community	295
<i>“Politics with a big moustache”</i>	296
<i>“Maybe 70 percent of men don’t want to have women in associations”</i>	299
<i>Women do social life and politics differently</i>	302
Explaining gender inequality	305
I. <i>National oppression</i>	305
<i>“In a Kurdish state, as a Kurdish woman I will be heard much better”</i>	305
II. <i>Women should blame themselves</i>	307
<i>“Men are not responsible. We are all children of our mothers”</i>	307
III. <i>Male dominance and patriarchal structures</i>	310

“Kurdistan will not be free, as long as its women are not free”	310
Summary	312
PART IV: CONCLUDING REMARKS	315
10. Diasporic Movement for Location: the Kurdish Experience	317
Introduction	319
<i>Central features of diaspora: homing desire, collective identity and movement</i>	320
Integrating the theory of diaspora and the theory of social movements	322
<i>Interactions in focus</i>	322
<i>Considering the political and the individual</i>	322
Kurdish diasporic experience and politics of location	324
<i>Considering power structures</i>	324
<i>Movement for location</i>	326
<i>Location in movement</i>	328
<i>Kurdish diaspora and gender relations</i>	330
Final remarks: “new ethnicities”, new generations	331
Appendix 1	337
Appendix 2	338
Bibliography	339

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PART I

THE HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL FRAMES

1 Introduction

Reflections on a childhood memory

While I was working on this project a memory from my childhood emerged time after time. I recurrently remembered my grandfather sitting in his small garden, next to the little basin with a fountain, smoking his water pipe and listening with nostalgic joy to the radio. It seemed that he disappeared into the sounds of the music, and flew far away to distant places. The music took him away, enclosed him like a cocoon and excluded the world outside. I was very young and it did not mean anything to me apart from a pleasant sight and a nice observation. My grandfather was originally from Baku in Azerbaijan. As a young man he immigrated in the early twentieth century to Iran and settled down in Iranian Kurdistan, where he later married my grandmother. I do not know why he emigrated. He had no relatives in Iran, and with his relatives in Azerbaijan he had no contacts. Now when I remember those moments I assume that he missed his family, people and places that meant something to him. Radio broadcasts and especially the music were his only contact with his past. There was no community of exiles or migrants, either, to which he could relate and where he could articulate his experiences.

These memories made me realise something that I had never before reflected on, namely that my grandfather was an immigrant. He was also living in exile as I do. However, he was not regarded as an immigrant, either by people around him or by himself. The word just did not exist in our consciousness. We were like everybody else. If I said to my father that he is a “second-generation” immigrant or to my brothers, sisters and cousins that we are “third-generation” immigrants, they would not understand me at all. They are no more immigrants than my grandfather was. He was, as far as I remember, never treated in a special way because of his “ethnic” origin. There were no questions about it. It was not a problem. Neither did he define himself in those terms. The question of origin did not have any impact on his practical and social everyday life in the same way that it does in my life. His origin and his “homeland” were for him probably issues on an existential level but absolutely not social and political.

Never before have I been facing questions about my origin, my “ethnic” belonging and my “roots” as much as I have done during these

years in exile. Never before has my origin affected my life so much as it has done during these years. It seems that there is a need to put people in exactly demarcated and defined national and ethnic categories to which there already exist certain kinds of relations based on their position in the global hierarchy of power and dominance. Thus, I can say that the most significant thing in common in my grandfather's and my experiences of exile is our lived experience of localities that are connected with memories of families, friends, relatives, smells, colours, sounds, and so on. The historical and socio-political contexts that condition our exile as well as our relation to it are different. My grandfather's and my experiences of migration and exile should be understood within two different personal histories, two different local histories, two different times and two different spaces.

What is the problem?

According to both my personal and professional experiences as an exile/migrant in the early twenty-first century in Sweden, you become sooner or later confronted with the questions of who you are and where you belong. They work like an imperative that creates moral obligations and norms for you to define your "roots" in order to determine your identity and negotiate your relation to the society. Why do these questions become more urgent and significant in some situations than in others? Why do the lack of identity, questions of origin and national belongingness appear strongly in some situations but not in others? How do displaced populations relate to questions of origin, homeland and national belonging? How can social relations between receiving societies and migrants/refugees be affected in a situation where, on the one hand, these questions have an increasing impact on social relations, and on the other hand, nations and nationalities are hierarchically positioned in a global power structure?

In other words, origins and "roots" are not entirely individual issues but also have become increasingly social and political, exploited by exclusionist, nationalist and racist ideologies and politics. At the same time, "the spatial and social displacement of people has been accelerating around the

world at a fast pace.”¹ How is the category of mobile and displaced populations, migrants and refugees affected – and how do they react in what Malkki calls the “national order of things”, according to which “the rooting of people is not only normal; it is also perceived as a moral and spiritual need”?² The category of displaced people implies a world of different groups including migrants, refugees, exiles and diasporas. These are very striking examples of displacement where origin, home(land) and belonging become significant for people’s everyday life.

However, diaspora, unlike exile, implies not only experiences of migration and exclusion but also collective identity and community formations. Diaspora differ from other kinds of de-territoriality, and displacement also implies a movement for location. Hence, this thesis concerns not only experiences of migration, exile and otherness but also movement conditioned by such experiences. The present study can be seen as a step towards what Malkki calls the “sociology of displacement”³ since it puts population movements, migration, de-territoriality and boundaries in the centre of analysis, and investigates the questions that arise from these conditions.

How this project came about and what its aims are

In the spring of 1999, the world was witnessing the simultaneous mobilisations of the exiled Kurds in many countries in response to the kidnapping of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of Kurdistan’s Worker’s Party (PKK). Most of the mass demonstrations and other actions were taking place in Western Europe, where a large number of Kurdish refugees/migrants are settled. This was the second time, since the Kurdish uprising and the following refugee catastrophe in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991, that Kurds and their situation had attracted so much global attention. However, the difference compared to 1991 was that, firstly, this time the Kurdish diasporic communities in Western countries were mobilised on such a large scale that

¹ Malkki 1995:495.

² Malkki 1992:30.

³ Malkki 1992:37-38.

they were impossible to ignore. Secondly, while in 1991 the attention was related to the Gulf War and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, in 1999 the focus of attention was solely on the Kurdish issue and the Turkish state's policy towards the Kurdish minority in the country. Thirdly, the Kurds now had their own media, which sent out news and information and mobilised people. Finally, in 1999, unlike 1991, Kurds showed a high degree of organisation and collective identification. The Kurdish mobilisations demonstrated the new conditions for the Kurdish movement and Kurdish identity as well as the new global conditions regarding mass migration, mass media, and communication technologies and their joint effect in the creation of transnational social spaces within which people communicate and act across national boundaries. They also demonstrated a transnational process of identification, community maintenance, and political activism.

In the spring of 1999, when these events took place, I had recently started my Ph.D. studies. It was a coincidence which made my choice of topic for a dissertation quite easy. To study such a process would include my interest in migration studies, within which I wrote both my candidate and master theses; my concern with topics of globalisation, global stratifications and movements; and my general interest in social and political processes especially regarding the Middle East and including the Kurdish movement. I am present in this study not only as a researcher but also as an individual with my background, my contemporary life, and my position within categories of gender, class, age and profession.

As I started working on this project, and especially when I began to interview people, I became more and more interested in individual experiences of and responses to these processes and realised the importance of highlighting them. It meant studying these processes from below, via people's experiences and their relationship with the larger social and political processes. The collective actions that took place in 1999 were the manifest aspects of a more basic but latent social process. It was this underlying social process that I later became more and more interested in and which is emphasised in this study.

The overall purpose of the dissertation is to investigate displacement and de-territoriality in "the national order of things" by focusing on the

Kurdish diaspora. The primary aim of the thesis is to study the Kurdish diasporic experiences, identities and movement from the perspective of people who are involved in them. Through deep analysis, the complex process by which the Kurdish diasporic identities and communities are constructed will be studied. The study also aims to investigate how in this process individual experiences and social processes and structures condition each other and how respondents relate to questions of homeland, Kurdish identity and national belonging. Diaspora, as a transnational movement and community is characterised by a triadic relationship between countries of settlement, countries of origin, and the transnational diasporic institutions. Hence, the Kurdish diasporic community in Gothenburg, seen as a part of the transnational Kurdish community, will be studied in relation to these three contexts.

The dissertation also has a second purpose. It has the ambition of contributing to the theory of diaspora. The study distinguishes diaspora from other kinds of de-territoriality and mobility in order to contribute to the analytical clarity and usefulness of the concept. This will be done by highlighting the central features that characterise diaspora and by bringing them into the centre of analysis. In addition, I will attempt to integrate some aspects of the theory of social movements in the diaspora concept. Thereby it provides an analytical tool to expose the interactions between individual motives and actions and the social processes in the formation of collective identities, movements and communities. Thus, the study argues that diaspora in that sense can be seen as a kind of social movement.

The following questions have guided my analysis:

- 1) What are the respondents' experiences of living in Sweden both as migrants and as Kurds?
- 2) How do they relate to Sweden, to their countries of origin and to the Kurdish diasporic community?
- 3) What does homeland mean to the respondents and how do they articulate this? How do their narratives about homeland differ and why?
- 4) How do they identify? What does Kurdish identity mean to them in

- this process? How do they differ and why do they differ?
5) Does gender make any difference in this process? How?

This is a qualitative interview study, but a very great amount of previous research and other literature has also been used. The semi-structured interview method is used for collecting individual experiences of diaspora. Twenty-two Kurdish women and men involved in different Kurdish organisations and institutions in Gothenburg have been interviewed. The respondents' experiences, knowledge and analyses have been challenging and enriching in many ways. The study is not only about respondents' experiences of exile, otherness, exclusion and homing desire, but also about their reactions and responses as acting subjects in order to overcome problems and to keep alive the sense of self-respect. These processes are going on around the formation and maintenance of communities and networks of social relations and activities, which exceed several national boundaries and in which people find a sense of identity and solidarity and a "home".

In the following I will introduce very briefly the concept of diaspora and my points of departure concerning the concept. A short overview of the study of the Kurdish diaspora will be presented. Finally the disposition of the book and some considerations will follow.

Diaspora as analytical concept

The general theoretical framework of the thesis is the theory of diaspora, which is thoroughly discussed in Chapter 4. Current debates on the configuration of ethnic and racial boundaries in the era of transformations have refocused academic attention on the concept of diaspora. However, diaspora is a complex concept and can sometimes be problematic. A central problem, as Clifford asserts, is that it is not easy to avoid the slippage between diaspora as a theoretical concept, diasporic discourses and distinct historical experiences of diaspora.⁴ Another problem is that

⁴ Clifford 1997:244-5.

diaspora is an “overused but under-theorised”⁵ and sometimes even a misused term. The concept is sometimes understood as a synonym for ethnicity and nationalism. This assumption is based on the ethnic, nationalist and religious conceptions of ethnic particularity that, as Gilroy points out, have co-existed with the term.⁶ It is also often used as synonymous with transnational, and also in some texts as a substitute for the terms migrant, ethnic minority, etc. Thus, the term can sometimes be very general and the disadvantage of such a general and all-embracing term is that it risks losing its analytical sharpness and usefulness.⁷ The word diaspora originates from the Greek *dia*, ‘through’, and *speirein*, ‘to scatter’.⁸ This etymological association with the Greek origin of the word ‘sperm’ has given rise to problematic descriptions/identifications when diaspora is defined as gender-specific and masculine.⁹ Others equating diaspora with ethnicity assert that diaspora is a masculine-specific concept.¹⁰

Moreover, the concept is often connected with and defined on the basis of specific experiences, and consequently it can give rise to the problem that Clifford warns about, namely the slippage between diaspora as theoretical concept and diaspora discourses. Hence, in order to avoid such a problem, as Brah points out, there is a need for a historicity of diaspora experiences, that is, “each empirical diaspora must be analysed in its historical specificity.”¹¹ The concept is, at least in the Western context, particularly associated with the dispersion of the Jews after their Babylonian exile.¹² This may be, as Brah also notes, because the Jewish diaspora occupies a “particular space in the European psyche” – on the one hand because of the history of anti-Semitism and holocaust of Jews in Europe, and on the other hand because the idea of return and “re-establishment” of Jews in their “original home-

⁵ Anthias 1998:557.

⁶ Gilroy 1997:332.

⁷ Wahlbeck 1999.

⁸ Brah 1996:181.

⁹ For discussion and critical considerations see also Gilroy 1997.

¹⁰ Anthias 1998.

¹¹ Brah 1996:179, 183.

¹² Brah 1996:181.

land” has been based on nineteenth-century European colonial thinking.¹³ Thus, the Jewish diaspora is radically different from the late twentieth-century and postcolonial diasporas’ experiences. In recent years, too, a huge body of scholarly works on the African diasporas’ experiences has been published that gives a different notion of diaspora and diasporic yearnings. Hence, it can be said that the two current main categories of definitions are based on Jewish and African experiences. Since the term is related to specific experiences, it should be taken as a point of departure rather than necessarily constituting “ideal types”¹⁴ or “normative models.”¹⁵

Diaspora in this study is defined as a social process and social movement. This view is inspired primarily by the work of Paul Gilroy on the African diaspora but also by James Clifford, Stuart Hall and Avtar Brah. I will try to give a clear definition of diaspora since there is a confusion surrounding the concept. As a first step I consider that there is a need to distinguish diaspora from other similar concepts through highlighting its central features and characteristics, which are the centrality of homeland, collective identity and community formation. Another significant aspect that needs to be taken into consideration in diaspora studies is the relation to the structures of power. Hence, I share Wahlbeck’s concern that:

There is a danger that the concept ‘diaspora’ with its preoccupation with “migrant communities” and their relationship to the country of origin, may disregard the host-society and the power structures involved in majority-minority relations. If this happens the introduction of the concept leads back to culturalist and other social and psychological theories in which immigrants are largely seen as choosing to integrate or not, and exclusionary structures and ideologies, like racism, are not seen to play any significant role.¹⁶

¹³ Said 1990; Cohen 1997. Said refers to the discrimination against and exclusion of natives, something that was thought to be normal and ‘scientifically’ legitimate. He writes: “For whatever it may have done for Jews, Zionism essentially saw Palestine as the European imperialist did, as an empty territory paradoxically ‘filled’ with ignoble or perhaps even dispensable natives...” (p. 221). Critical for almost the same reasons is Cohen 1997:115-118.

¹⁴ Brah 1996:181.

¹⁵ Clifford referred to in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994:340.

¹⁶ Wahlbeck 1999:36.

The Kurdish diasporic experience

Experience is one of the central analytical concepts in this thesis. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, I do not have access to respondents' lived experiences but to their articulations. Hence, in this respect experience has a discursive dimension, which is taken into consideration in the analyses. The thesis has highlighted the gender dimension in the experiences and has made a comparison between women's and men's experiences of and relations to Sweden and to the Kurdish diasporic community.

A question that I was facing when I started this project was how to define Kurds and Kurdishness. Which criterion should I have in my selection of respondents? In order not to contribute to an essentialisation of the Kurdish identity, I chose to interview people who identify themselves as Kurds, although being a Kurd does not mean the same thing to all of them. This dissertation considers national and ethnic identities, including Kurdish identity, as constructed collective and political identities. This position is also evident in the main literature that I have used in defining and analysing Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish identity. However, for pragmatic reasons I have used statistics, for example about the number of Kurds, that accept a definition of Kurds based on language.

Geography of Kurdish dispersal

Deportation, involuntary migration and forced resettlements of Kurds can be traced back many centuries. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many Kurds of Yezidi faith were persecuted by the Ottoman and Persian authorities or by their Muslim fellows (Kurds included). They found refuge in Czarist Russia, in the territories beyond the Caucasus. In the late eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman and Persian authorities organised a number of deportation campaigns as well as internal forced resettlements (exile) in response to rebellions or as a measure of punishment against certain local princes or tribal and religious leaders. Many political, religious or tribal leaders were repeatedly sent into exile as a response to various uprisings. The leaders were exiled either to the metropolises of the Ottoman and Persian empires or to their dominions, such as the Hijaz

(Saudi Arabia), Lebanon, Libya, Syria, Egypt and Sudan.¹⁷

In the mid-twentieth century a gradual change in the Kurdish migration and exile took place. A greater number of Kurdish labourers and students migrated to Europe, in contrast to the earlier Kurdish exiles who migrated and/or were deported to the non-Kurdish regions in their home countries or to neighbouring countries. It was in the 1960s that a radical change in the character of Kurdish migration occurred. The Kurdish migration to Europe started during the 1960s as an outcome of European industry's need for labour. Turkey was one of the countries from which labour migrants, among them many Kurds, came to Europe and mostly to Germany. Besides a quite large number of students and workers, with the start of the armed resistance movement in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1961 many Kurds became refugees in neighbouring countries.¹⁸

Kurdish refugee migration to the West began mainly during the 1980s as a consequence of a change in the political situation in Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Because of the new political situation in these countries since the 1980s, Kurdish movements, as well as the general popular movements in these countries, became revitalised and were thereby followed by more state violence. This trend gave rise to the Kurdish refugee migration, part of which came to Europe, although the great majority of Kurdish refugees in the 1990s were living in neighbouring countries. Violent conflicts, political persecutions and deportations have been the main causes of Kurdish migration, and thereby it can be classified as an involuntary and forced migration.

The social composition of the Kurdish exile varies in different periods. For example, exiled Kurds from the periods 1960-1975 and after 1975 originate, according to Sheikhmous, from different social backgrounds. Before 1975, the majority were young and single men. One category of them was from the urban middle or upper middle class and from the aristocracy, and highly educated. They had a high degree of political activity and low religious commitment. Another category was from rural areas with a low level of

¹⁷ Sheikhmous 1990:88-91.

¹⁸ Sheikhmous 1990:95.

education and some were even illiterate. They had a low level of political activity and a high level of religious commitment.¹⁹ The Kurdish exiles and refugees after 1975 are a more mixed category due to the larger number of refugees and their diverse motives for migration. The start of the Kurdish armed resistance in Turkey and Iran and the continuation and escalation of the movement in Iraq during the 1980s gave rise to a great number of Kurdish refugees. Contrary to the first period, there are now more families, various age groups, very mixed social backgrounds, different levels of education and different political and religious involvements.

Although it is difficult to draw a clear line between voluntary and involuntary migration, forced migration is of a different character.²⁰ The situation of refugees is, according to Abu-Lughod, “particularly poignant, since the severance is always abrupt and forced.”²¹ No official figures exist about the number of European Kurds, because they are registered as Iranian, Iraqi, Turkish and Syrian citizens. According to an estimate, there is a total of 28,216,000 Kurds of which 746,000 are settled in Europe, USA, Canada and Australia. There are estimates of 400,000 Kurds in Germany, 60,000 in France, 30,000-50,000 in Netherlands, 20,000-40,000 in Austria, 20,000-30,000 in Britain, 15,000-30,000 in Switzerland, and 16,000-20,000 in Sweden. Furthermore there are 500,000 Kurds settled in the former USSR countries and about 300,000 in the Middle Eastern countries.²² In sum, the implication is that 7–8% of all Kurds live outside their region of origin.

Some previous research on the Kurdish diaspora

Something that the existing research on the Kurdish diaspora considers is the centrality of politics in the Kurdish diasporic community and the spread of the ideology of nationalism. Several researchers find that Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish national identity have become stronger in exile.

¹⁹ Sheikmous 1990:97-98.

²⁰ Said 2000:181; Abu-Lughod 1988:61; Richmond 1988; Malkki 1992, 1995.

²¹ Abu-Lughod 1988:61.

²² van Bruinessen 1999; Wahlbeck 1999; Sheikmous 1998.

In this process, the Kurdish diasporic community has according to them played a central role.²³

Kurdish diasporic communities

The sociologist Wahlbeck has made a comparative study of the Kurdish diasporic communities in Britain and Finland. He describes the relation between the Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish nationalism as follows: “The label ‘diaspora’ is, perhaps, especially appropriate in the case of the Kurdish refugees because of the influence of Kurdish nationalism, which commits many Kurdish refugees to the restoration of their homeland.”²⁴ The development of the Kurdish diaspora, in his view, is due to the political situation in the countries of origin as well as to structures and politics in the countries of settlement. Despite great differences between Britain and Finland, he finds many common aspects in Kurdish communities in these two countries such as experiences of exclusion and racism, the wish to return, feelings of displacement, and transnational networking that includes contact with Kurds in Kurdistan and in other countries. He emphasises, though, that there are also significant differences between refugees depending on their countries of origin, countries of settlement and their relation to them. Further, he claims that both countries of origin and countries of settlement are independent variables that affect refugees’ social relations in different ways. Kurdish associations in Finland and Britain are, according to him, highly politicised and the same pattern of co-operation and conflicts as in Kurdistan is found in Kurdish diasporic communities. He argues moreover that neither religion nor kinship is a determining force or mobilising factor, and that the only important factor is politics.²⁵

Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish nationalism

The anthropologist van Bruinessen considers that, alongside a number of other factors, the Kurdish diaspora has played a significant role for the deve-

²³ Van Bruinessen 1999; Hassanpour, A. 1995, 1998, Wahlbeck 1999; Ahmadzadeh 2003.

²⁴ Wahlbeck 1999.

²⁵ Ibid.

lopment of Kurdish nationalism in recent decades. He emphasises the significant role of Kurdish intellectuals in exile who, in an active and conscious way, have worked among the Kurdish labour migrants and have contributed to the spread of Kurdish nationalism among them. Many people have, according to him, started to identify themselves as Kurds in the countries of settlement affected by the Kurdish diaspora's activities. Even the so-called second generation of Kurdish migrants – children of the labour migrants – who are born and/or grown up in Europe show interest in Kurdish identity and politics more than their parents do. The reason, in his view, is that it offers them a sense of self-respect and identification in a context of exclusion and marginalisation. Kurdish political parties have also realised the importance of the Kurdish diaspora and pay more attention to it.

Kurdish diaspora, media and publications

The media and communication researcher A. Hassanpour considers that the Kurdish media, and especially satellite TV channels, have played an important role in creation of Kurdish national identity. He thinks that they have created the idea of a Kurdish imagined community and an established relationship with the audience not only as members of an audience but also as members of a Kurdish state.²⁶ He argues that the Kurdish diaspora's activities and especially Kurdish satellite TV channels challenge the boundaries and politics of the sovereign states governing the Kurds. Kurdish diasporic activities have been subject to recurrent diplomatic negotiations between, for example, Turkey and England.²⁷ Kurdish TV and media activities have also contributed to the development of Kurdish language, literature and culture, which according to van Bruinessen has been possible in a favourable European environment. This has been of crucial importance for Kurds, and especially for Kurds from Turkey where the Kurdish language until recently was prohibited by law.

Concerning the Kurdish publications in Europe, Rigoni finds that 77 Kurdish newspapers and magazines have been published in Europe betwe-

²⁶ Hannanpour, A. 1998.

²⁷ Hassanpour, A. 1995.

en 1975 and 2003, by Kurds from Turkey alone.²⁸ In Sweden, according to Tayfun, Kurdish publishing firms and Kurdish authors have received economic support from *Statens Kulturråd* (the National Council for Cultural Affairs), which emphasises the importance of supporting migrant and minority languages in the country.²⁹ According to this policy the Council for Cultural Affairs since 1977/78 has supported publications of literature for migrants and minorities and a number of Kurdish authors and publishers have received significant economic grants.³⁰ The Kurdish library in Stockholm was opened in 1997, financed by *Stiftelsen Framtidens Kultur* (Foundation for the Culture of the Future) and with support from the City of Stockholm and some other institutions.³¹ The library collects books, magazines, newspapers, articles and research on Kurds and/or by Kurds that are published in different countries around the world. They also conduct other kinds of activities like lectures, seminars, and exhibitions. The library started in 1997 with 3,000 titles but the number has grown significantly since then.³²

Disposition of the work

Part One of the thesis, consisting of Chapters 1–3, is an introductory part. Chapters 2 and 3 include the historical and socio-political frameworks of the study. These two chapters are important since they give the context and background for analysing the respondents' experiences. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the history of the Kurdish identity, since two of the central concepts in the study are the Kurdish identity and Kurdish nationalism. Historicizing migration studies and diaspora studies are in my view important also for other reasons. Each diaspora and each migrant or refugee group has its own unique history that affects its members' con-

²⁸ Rigoni 2003.

²⁹ Tayfun 1998.

³⁰ Tayfun 1998:10-33.

³¹ Tayfun 1998:52-55.

³² Tayfun 1998. For more information see the library's website: <http://www.kurdishlibrary.org>.

temporary life and their relation to the new socio-political environment. Their history is like a store of resources from where they bring elements in order to deal with their contemporary situation. Additionally, a way to avoid contributing to the construction of a collective immigrant 'other' is to historicize each group we are looking at. This chapter surveys the literature and previous research on Kurdish nationalism, Kurdish identity, and Kurdish history. These existing works are mainly written by political scientists, anthropologists, linguists, and media and communication researchers. The sociological studies of such issues are very rare, and I hope that this dissertation will partially fill the vacuum.

Chapter 3 positions the Kurdish refugees as involuntary migrants and exiles from the Third World. It is also a survey of the literature on global/postcolonial migration and ethnic relations within the global hierarchy of power and dominance as well as the politics of citizenship and national belongingness. This chapter also discusses the postcolonial migration, its roots and geopolitics in order to distinguish the postcolonial migration from other kinds of mobility. The chapter is not a history of the global migration or of the migration to Sweden. It is rather intended to highlight the construction and position of the immigrant 'other' and the discourses on that image in the West, including Sweden. Additionally it discusses the challenges of the global migration that the nation-states in the West face concerning, for example, citizenship and national identity and their response to these. Moreover, this chapter distinguishes forced migration and exile from voluntary migration in order to expose the psychological dimensions of forced migration, which have often been neglected.

Part Two, comprising Chapters 4 and 5, presents the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study. Chapter 4 includes a theoretical discussion on the concept of diaspora. In this chapter, different definitions and theories of diaspora are examined and an alternative analytical framework for diaspora studies is suggested and discussed. Chapter 5 describes the methodological considerations and points of departure in the study, as well as my role in the research process, ethical considerations and the procedure followed.

In Part Three, which embraces Chapters 6–9, the respondents' experi-

ences are discussed and analysed. The research questions that I mentioned earlier will be taken up in these chapters, while making continual references to previous chapters. Chapter 6 deals with the respondents' experiences of living in Sweden as Kurds and as refugees/exiles. This chapter serves as an entrance to the following three chapters. It gives a background for the respondents' responses, their identity projects, and their articulations of Sweden and of their pre-migratory experiences from countries of origin. Chapter 7 takes up the issue of homeland and respondents' notion of homeland and belonging. This is discussed in regard to the respondents' experiences and relationship to their countries of origin, to Sweden and to the Kurdish diasporic community and the Kurdish movement. Chapter 8 focuses on respondents' identification, identity projects and notions of themselves. The Kurdish identity and its meaning for the respondents are discussed in this chapter. It is related to their experiences of and their ways of connecting to Sweden, to their homelands and to the Kurdish diasporic community, as well as to the Kurdish movement.

Chapter 9 discusses the attitudes toward gender within the Kurdish diaspora. The Kurdish community, like all other communities, is divided along lines of class, gender, generation, sexuality, religion, language, culture, origin, etc. I take up the issue of gender because of its importance for the respondents and also because of its social and political significance for the exiled Kurds. Additionally, the gender dimension and especially women's experiences have often been neglected in migration studies and also in diaspora studies. A separate chapter is devoted to this topic because it accentuates the issue more specifically and, at the same time, neither dominates the other issues nor becomes obscured by them. It can be said that Chapters 6–8 deal with the external boundaries of the Kurdish diaspora while Chapter 9 highlights its internal boundaries regarding gender.

Part Four, ending the thesis, consists of Chapter 10 which presents a final discussion and conclusions. Since each chapter has its own summary section, the focus of this last chapter will be on overall comments. Chapter 10 draws together the range of conclusions, points and findings in order to give a general perspective on the research.

Further considerations

The Kurdish issue has never been so widely debated and it has never attracted so much global attention as during the 1990s and later. The reason lies in the various political events that have taken place during this period in the region as well as the Kurdish diaspora's transnational activities and mobilisations. Since 1999, when I started this project, much has happened and the political situation has changed in different ways in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Conditions in Turkey have shifted during the last few years in some respects but still not fundamentally. In Iran and Syria, less has been done about the Kurdish issue. In Iraq, matters were radically transformed by the US–British invasion in March 2003. Thus I have constantly been faced with the question of how to relate to such changes. However, my purpose is to remain aware of the development of the socio-political situation in these countries and, so far, the changes have not significantly affected the position of Kurdish exiles concerning, for example, their return. As far as I know, no movement back to Iraqi Kurdistan has taken place.

Another point to be made is that, since one of my criteria for selecting people for interviews is that they have at least seven years of settlement in Sweden, the respondents' direct experiences from the countries of origin are at least about seven years old. In many cases, respondents have been living in Sweden for even more than seven years and/or have been away from their countries of origin for much more than seven years. The situation in these countries, not least for the Kurdish people, has gone through considerable changes in the last two decades. However, this should not affect the trustworthiness of the study since it is not meant to discuss the socio-political situation in the countries of origin, but is about the respondents' subjective experiences.

The Kurdish Identity: a Historical Overview

Introduction

This chapter is an overview of Kurdish history based on various studies of Kurdish history and politics. It provides a background for the Kurds' situation in the countries of origin, focusing on the Kurdish identity and its conditions in general and in each country respectively. The aim of the chapter is to highlight the historical conditions within which the Kurdish national identity and Kurdish nationalism were constructed. This is an important prerequisite for understanding the process of identity in the Kurdish diaspora, its development and its characteristics.

Geography, population and language

Kurdistan is a strategically located region comprising important parts of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. There has never existed a state with that name. The heart of this area consists of the extremely rugged mountains of the Zagros range. Since the early thirteenth century a large part of this region has been called Kurdistan. However, it was not until the sixteenth century that the term Kurdistan came into common use. There have also been various non-Kurdish-speaking minorities living in Kurdistan who have been tied to the Kurds by networks of social and economic relations. The Kurds are the fourth largest population group in the Middle East after the Arabs, Turks and Persians. They are primarily concentrated in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, but Kurdish communities are also found in the former Soviet Union.¹ The size of the Kurdish population varies highly depending on different sources. Usually the Kurdish nationalists give a higher number while the governments in the above-mentioned countries give lower figures. Estimates of the number of Kurds in the Middle East and in the former USSR (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkmenistan) in the 1990s vary between 20 and 35 million.² The Kurdish population of Europe is estimated to be between 500 and 700 thousand.³

¹ van Bruinessen 1999:1; Ciment 1996.

² Wahlbeck 1999:39; van Bruinessen 1999; McDowall 1992a; Entessar 1992; Ciment 1996; Vali 1998, Izady 1992:119.

³ McDowall 1992a.

Estimates of the number of Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria vary strongly since there exist no official sources. I have used statistics from diverse sources in literature that often refer to each other and/or to different Kurdish institutions. Figures sometimes vary widely and it can only be said that the most reliable numbers are somewhere in between.

Very little is known about the history of Kurds before the advent of Islam in the seventh century. It was only in the beginning of the Islamic period that the term 'Kurd' was used in Arabic historical accounts. The term referred to Iranian tribes and nomads of Western Persia. The question of the origin of Kurds is very controversial. Kurdish nationalists and even a number of researchers trace the Kurds' origin back to the Medes, a tribal group from Central Asia that moved into the Iranian plateau.⁴ According to some sources they came in the second millennium B.C. and established the Median Empire between 612-550 B.C.⁵ This claim, J. Hassanpour argues, cannot be substantiated because there is too little evidence. For example, the evidence of the Median language is, according to him, limited to only a few words.⁶ The question of common origin is essential to all nationalist narratives and their discursive representations of history. They are, according to Vali, strategic debates about the identity of the nation for legitimising its claims.⁷

The vast majority of Kurds are Muslims. However, religion is not a major uniting factor among Kurds.⁸ The Kurdish language belongs to the Indo-European languages and is a part of the family of the new Iranian languages. There is a large number of different Kurdish dialects and sub-dialects that may be classified into a number of more or less distinct groups which are not, or are only very partially, mutually understandable. According to A. Hassanpour, Kurdish sources agree on distinguishing four dialect groups: Kurmanji, Sorani, Avrami or Gorani, and a more heterogeneous group called

⁴ Hassanpour, A. 1992; Yasin 1995; Hassanpour, J. 1999.

⁵ Yasin 1995; Hassanpour, J. 1999.

⁶ Hassanpour, J. 1999:36.

⁷ Vali 2003.

⁸ McDowall 1992a; van Bruinessen 1992b.

Kirmashani. However, it was Sorani and Kurmanji which played a role in the standardisation of the language and they are therefore more significant.⁹ Kurmanji, which is also called the northern dialect, is spoken in northern Kurdistan, mainly by Kurds in Turkey but also in northern Iraqi Kurdistan and Iranian Kurdistan and by Kurds from the former USSR. Sorani, also called the southern dialect, is spoken by Kurds in the south, that is to say, in Iranian Kurdistan and Iraqi Kurdistan.¹⁰ These two Kurdish dialects were used as literary languages for the first time in the sixteenth century (Kurmanji) and the nineteenth century (Sorani), although A. Hassanpour traces the first literary use of the Kurdish language as it is spoken now to the fifteenth century.¹¹ The modern Kurdish standard dialects were created by Kurdish nationalists during the twentieth century.¹² The Kurdish language has been the official language in Iraqi Kurdistan, while it has been totally forbidden in Turkey. In Iran it has been mainly allowed for private usage and for cultural activities.

Traditionally the Kurds were largely organized into a rough hierarchy of tribes, sub-tribes, and tribal confederations with strong primordial loyalties. In the mid-fifteenth century Kurdish emirates were established within the territory now known as Kurdistan.¹³ Power in the Emirates was in the hand of the Emir, Pasha, and Khan. They had their own territories, and their own armies recruited from tribes. The most powerful principalities were independent and struck their own coins.¹⁴

Kurdish society has always been a heterogeneous and highly stratified and complex society with many internal conflicts and rivalries, which have usually affected the social and political life. These loyalties and local power relations, often because of the geopolitical location of Kurdistan, have become linked with those on the state and interstate level and have operated within the context of world politics.¹⁵

⁹ Hassanpour, A. 1992:19.

¹⁰ McDowall 1992a; van Bruinessen 1992a; Entessar 1992.

¹¹ Hassanpour, A. 1992:49.

¹² Hassanpour, J. 1999:36.

¹³ Hassanpour, J. 1999:34.

¹⁴ Hassanpour, A. 1992:51-52.

¹⁵ Entessar 1992; van Bruinessen 1992a:34; McDowall 1992b:12.

Kurdish nationalism and the history of denial and resistance

Kurdish nationalism is a quite new phenomenon, closely associated with the construction of nation-states and national identity in the Middle East in the period between the First and Second World Wars.¹⁶ However, the conditions of these processes and the way that nation-states were built have been different in each country, and these differences have marked Kurdish identity and politics. The contemporary state system in the Middle East has its origin in boundary definitions and divisions made by European colonial powers during and after World War I. The “European-designed nation-state system” followed a period of either European colonization or indirect domination. The power, interests and strategic ambitions of the European states involved, primarily Britain and France, mainly determined the content of the large structural changes that took place during this period. The imposed boundaries, in most cases, had been drawn without regard to the distribution of people and the state machinery, and the structured political system emerging in these countries tended to benefit the dominant ethnic groups and ignore others. As a result a number of minorities, among them Kurds, started to challenge the hegemony of the dominant groups in the society. As McDowall says, Kurdish national feeling was expressed in “a negative form: opposition to political control by outsiders.”¹⁷ Based on primordial and ethnic conceptions of identity and origin, this process of resistance has implied a “historically and culturally defined zone of inclusion and exclusion which persistently affirms the uniform identity of the Kurdish community by contrasting its ethnic origin to those of the surrounding Arab, Persian and Turkish communities.”¹⁸ The conception of a unified and distinct Kurdish identity and a common origin, despite the many traits that divide the Kurds such as language, religion and the highly stratified society dominated by tribal elites, has been an important prerequisite for the continuity and survival of a Kurdish identity. The opposition to the outsiders’

¹⁶ Ciment 1996; Chaliand 1994; van Bruinessen 1999, 1992a, 1992b; Entessar 1992; Vali 1998, 2003.

¹⁷ McDowall 1992a:82.

¹⁸ Vali 2003:61.

control was strongly organised within the tribes and principalities, and this was an important factor that contributed to the maintenance of a Kurdish identity and later to the development of Kurdish nationalism. This situation has successively strengthened the idea of being a distinct people.

Moreover, their geopolitical position between two powerful empires early drew Kurds into recurrent wars which, in turn, contributed to an awareness of their position, their political significance, and their claims on or demands for political power. Both Persians and especially Ottomans tried to win the Kurdish principalities' support in wartime with promises to respect the autonomy of the principalities.¹⁹ Paradoxically, these policies strengthened not only the Kurds' idea of being a distinct people, but also their rivalries and internal conflicts as they allied themselves with different parts in war. Kurdish nationalism is strongly influenced by the culture and system of loyalties which characterise a tribal system. This is most obvious in those regions where the tribal system and the corresponding organisation survived. In Kurdistan, nationalism as a modern political ideology has been developed in symbiosis with the system of tribes. Accordingly, the relationship between Kurdish national identity and primordial loyalties and local identities has always been ambivalent.

The process of nation-state building in the Middle East largely started with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. In this process the Kurds became divided between several nation-states in the Middle East. The denial of Kurdish and other minority identities was a necessary condition for the construction of national identity in these states. The political form and character of Kurdish nationalism, according to Vali, can therefore be defined by the dialectics of denial and resistance. However, these nation-states and their official nationalist discourses, constructed to legitimise their authoritarian rule and hegemonic political culture, varied in form and character. Therefore the Kurdish national identity has been highly fragmented since its inception because it is marked by the political and cultural diversity of the distinct societies.²⁰

¹⁹ Hassanpour, A. 1992:53.

²⁰ Vali 1998.

The position of Kurds within the Persian and Ottoman Empires

During the seventh century, as an outcome of the Arab invasions of Persia and Anatolia, the Kurds became Islamised and they were integrated both religiously and politically in the Islamic Empire with its centre in Baghdad.²¹ This period is called the Kurdish “golden age”.²² As Kurds gradually converted to Islam the Muslim caliphate in Baghdad opened to them. Many of them became generals in Islamic armies; others acceded to power in subsidiary kingdoms. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Seldjuk Turks from central Asia invaded Persia and Anatolia and laid the ground for what later became the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the seventeenth century, forty large and small Kurdish principalities (emirates) were established. Kurdish society went through a complex stage of differentiation. A process of limited urbanisation started in all Kurdish areas, within both the Persian and Ottoman Empires. But this process of socio-economic and cultural development was inhibited when Kurdistan as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan became the scene of a war between the two empires – a war that lasted until the mid-nineteenth century.²³ The boundaries between the Persian and Ottoman Empires were finally drawn through the Kurdish region and composed of the contemporary borders between Iran, Turkey and Iraq. In 1639 one part of Kurdistan became incorporated in the Ottoman Empire and the other part in the Persian Empire. This was the first division of the Kurds and Kurdish region along political and national borders.²⁴ A. Hassanpour argues that war and the division of Kurdistan had two contradictory effects on the national development of the Kurds:

On the one hand, they retarded the growth of the Kurds as a unified nation and inhibited the formation of a united Kurdish state. On the other hand,

²¹ Previously tree and solar cults, Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity had competed in the region. (McDowall 1992a:13).

²² Ciment 1996:37.

²³ Hassanpour, A. 1992:50-53.

²⁴ Ciment 1996:38; Vali 1995; Entessar 1992.

the enormous destruction and suffering caused by foreign domination resulted in the genesis of national awakening in a feudally organized society where loyalties were primarily to family, tribe and birthplace.²⁵

During the Ottoman Empire there was a dual administration in Kurdistan. Some areas were administrated directly through local ruling families in which rulers were chosen internally. In other areas Kurdish princely houses governed, but the sultan decided which member of the family would rule. The relationship between the Kurdish emirates and the sultan's empire was a complex and occasionally volatile mixture of independence and deference.²⁶ The Kurdish attitude towards the sultanate had always been ambivalent, but the sultan represented an ideal of empire in which loyalty to the sultan transcended all nationalism. The Persian states, on the contrary, started a policy of centralisation and a rapid destruction of the remaining Kurdish principalities. The Safavids followed this with massacres and deportation to the eastern borders of Iran.²⁷ By doing so, they were initiating or enforcing stricter control of the Kurds and preventing the establishment and formation of large and powerful tribal confederations in Iranian Kurdistan.²⁸

The end of the Ottoman Empire and the Kurdish question

The Ottoman military defeat by the British and French during the First World War produced a radical change throughout the whole Middle East. Different provinces of the empire were carved up into a number of successor states, each of them under the control of one or other of the victorious powers. The new order was not accepted by many of the inhabitants in the Middle East although some minorities welcomed it. Furthermore, as a consequence of the new situation, the socio-economic conditions for all

²⁵ Hassanpour, A. 1992:55.

²⁶ Ciment 1996:38.

²⁷ Hassanpour, A. 1992:53.

²⁸ Vali 1995:10.

inhabitants of the region became very problematic. The colonial states were neither able nor willing to do anything about it. This gave rise to a number of oppositional movements and resistance. Nevertheless, in spite of all local resistance, as Owen states, by the mid-1920s the British and the French were “the masters of the Middle East.”²⁹ Even the Kurds’ situation became more complex with the disintegration of the empire. However, what distinguished the Kurds from other groups who also became suppressed was that they were already strongly organised and had a quite independent position. The power vacuum created by the disintegration of the Empire allowed Kurdish tribes once again to challenge the Iranian and Turkish control of Kurdistan, and encouraged Kurdish aspirations to self-determination.

In 1916, the British and French governments signed the secret Sykes-Picot treaty, dividing Ottoman domains in the Middle East amongst themselves. Sykes-Picot became the basis for the openly declared Treaty of Sévres in 1920, which included among its provisions a possibility for a Kurdish state as well as Armenia, Arab states of the Hijaz, Iraq, and Syria. Britain’s support for a Kurdish state was based on her wish to control the oil-rich Kurdish province of Mosul.³⁰ Yet the treaty of Sévres was abandoned in 1923 when the allies and the newly founded, pro-Western republic of Turkey signed the final Treaty of Lausanne. The outcome of the new treaty was instead a second division of Kurdistan. The Kurdish regions were divided between the new states of Turkey, British Iraq, and French Syria.³¹

Kurdish history since then has been a tale of tragedies and oppression, but also continual resistance. Although the specific causes of the Kurdish resistance and Kurdish identity have been different in each country, an “unequal center-periphery relation” has long characterised the Kurdish situation in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.³² This center-periphery relation is described in terms of socio-economic marginalisation. Entessar writes:

²⁹ Owen 1992:10-11.

³⁰ Ciment 1996:44; Saleh 1991; Chaliand 1992; Ciment 1996; Entessar 1992; McDowall 1992a.

³¹ Ciment 1996:44; Saleh 1991; Chaliand 1994.

³² Entessar 1992:6.

Cultural and socio-political discrimination against an ethnic group by the larger society is what Joan Nagel has called ‘unequal center-periphery relations’. This discrimination has contributed to the enduring quality of Kurdish ethnic consciousness. The relatively greater development of the centre vis-à-vis periphery, Kurdish regions and the subsequent socio-political and economic inequality experienced by the Kurds, have given rise to a condition akin to internal colonialism and to what Frank Young has termed ‘reactive subsystems’.³³

“Reactive movements” are, according to Entessar, those organised by the periphery in reaction to its exclusion from a state controlled by the dominant “ethnic groups”. These resistance movements emerged largely in the form of what Vali calls “autonomist movements”.³⁴ They have traditionally been organised within the system of tribes, based on primordial loyalties and local power. Autonomist movements dominated the Kurdish political scene until the mid-twentieth century and the occurrence of modern political ideologies, such as nationalism and Marxism in Kurdistan. In the following, I will give a brief history of the establishment of nation-states and the Kurdish movement in each country.

The establishment of the nation-states, excluded identities, and Kurdish responses

Turkish nationalism: the politics of total denial and forced assimilation

The abolition of the Caliphate in 1924 undermined the old Ottoman concept of a Muslim community, *Umma*, and allowed the Kemalist notion of a secular Turkish nation to emerge. The Kemalist programme of Turkish national liberation, secularism and modernisation was not easy to implement in the highly diversified and multi-cultural environment of Anatolia. In 1924 the government prohibited all Kurdish schools, organisations,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Vali 1998.

publications and religious fraternities. The victory of Atatürk's agenda made things extremely uncomfortable for the Kurdish nationalists in the capital. Many went into exile and others returned to the Kurdish regions. The domination of Turkish nationalism was a blow to Kurdish ideas of an egalitarian union with the Turks. The Kemalist threat to Kurdish identity and socio-political structures brought many Kurds, irrespective of internal conflicts, together in a common struggle. Several Kurdish rebellions followed, which were violently suppressed by the Turkish state. The reprisals were extremely brutal. The last major uprising before the 1980s was that between 1936 and 1938 in Dersim. In this uprising 40,000 Kurds were killed and 3,000 Kurdish families were deported. Many villages were depopulated or massacred.³⁵

The existence of a Kurdish minority was in conflict with the Turkish nationalism and Kemalist ideology on which modern Turkey is founded. From the foundation of the Turkish state until recently, the Turkish government denied the existence of Kurds, and the minority has been subject to forced assimilation. The Kurds have been called "mountain Turks" and the Kurdish identity has been oppressed through legislation. Anything Kurdish or even any mention of the fact that Kurds exist has been banned as separatism. The Turkish government has always reacted very violently against any manifestation or promotion of Kurdish rights. To defend Kurds' rights in writing or speech has been punished by long imprisonment and/or execution. Another means of suppressing Kurdish identity has been large-scale deportation of people from their ancestral villages by support of the law. Human-rights organisations, such as Helsinki Watch and Amnesty International, have documented the violation of human rights against Kurdish people.³⁶

The Kurds in Turkey have experienced a new era of the Kurdish movement in the last decades of the twentieth century. This movement, contrary to the century-old previous movement, was led by neither traditional *aghas*

³⁵ Wahlbeck 1999:44; see also van Bruinessen 1994; Chaliand 1994; Ciment 1996:47; Entessar 1992:83-86.

³⁶ Entessar 1992:104-107.

(tribe chiefs) nor *sheikhs* (religious leaders), but by organisations and leaderships presenting themselves as vanguard revolutionary parties. A number of factors contributed to this process of change of the Kurdish movement in both form and character. The relative political freedom in Turkey during the 1960s and 1970s allowed various left-wing groups to emerge amongst the Turkish and Kurdish intelligentsia. Another significant factor was Kurdish urbanisation, caused by both forced and voluntary migration from villages to the cities. Kurdistan's Worker's Party (PKK), which was founded in 1974, started a guerrilla war in the mid-1980s when the party, as well as all other parties in opposition to the Turkish state's politics, was declared illegal and forbidden after the coup of 1980.³⁷ PKK was originally a political party with an explicit Marxist-Leninist ideology, and also with a "strong dose of Kurdish nationalism",³⁸ although during the mid-1990s the party distanced itself from Marxism-Leninism. There are and have been several other Kurdish parties and organisations, nearly all of which have been declared illegal in Turkey. The National Liberation Front of Kurdistan (ERNK), working closely with the PKK, was founded in 1985. There are also other left-wing parties, for example the Socialist Party of Kurdistan (PSK), which has advocated a peaceful solution of the Kurdish question but which is nevertheless forbidden. However, during the 1990s the polarisation of the conflict in Turkey led to a situation where the PKK and ERNK became the most important Kurdish political organisations. The response of the Turkish government to the Kurdish nationalist movement and the guerrilla war was not only one of armed force, but in practice also involved an increase in the persecution of all Kurds in eastern Turkey.³⁹

Since applying for membership of the European Union, Turkey has been forced to implement democratic reforms in the country. In August 2002, as a step toward EU membership, the Turkish parliament voted to allow TV and radio stations to broadcast in regional languages such as Kurdish. In November 2002, Turkey's broadcasting authority authorized

³⁷ Ciment 1996:49-50; Entessar 1992:89-96.

³⁸ Entessar 1992:89-97.

³⁹ Entessar 1992:89-97; Wahlbeck 1998:45-46.

state radio and television to hold a limited amount of programs in the Kurdish language. Radio broadcasts in Kurdish or other regional languages could not exceed 45 minutes per day and a total of four hours per week. Television broadcasts cannot exceed 30 minutes per day and a total of two hours per week. The issue of broadcasting or teaching Kurdish is extremely controversial in Turkey. However, the EU has demanded that Turkey grant increased minority rights, and has specifically pointed to limitations on the Kurdish language.⁴⁰

There are no official figures about the number of Kurds in Turkey, only estimates.⁴¹ Different estimates by the mid-1990s state different numbers: 7.046 million or 12.6 percent of the population in 1990,⁴² 12 million⁴³ and 14 million,⁴⁴ and 10,800,000 or 19% of the total population in 1991,⁴⁵ 13.7 million or 24.1% of the total population in 1990.⁴⁶

Iraq: between cultural autonomy and genocide

Iraq was established by Britain in 1918, comprising the three ancient Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad and, later on, the oil-rich Mosul with its major Kurdish population. The Kurdish-inhabited cities were occupied by British forces under the British mandate during 1918-1930. British policy favoured the appointment of Kurdish local leaders to administer under the supervision of the British advisers. The relationship between Kurds on the one side and the British and their client government in Baghdad on the other side did not work. The Kurdish dissatisfaction and resistance against the Iraqi-British rule increased strongly. Finally Kurds became, against their will, subjects in the state of Iraq under British imperial interests when in 1922, as an outcome of the Treaty of Lausanne, Mosul was declared a part of

⁴⁰ <http://www.kurdishnews.com>.

⁴¹ van Bruinessen 1992a.

⁴² Mutlu 1996.

⁴³ Chaliand 1994.

⁴⁴ Sheikhmous referred in Wahlbeck1999.

⁴⁵ McDowall 1992a.

⁴⁶ zady 1992.

Iraq.⁴⁷ The Kurdish demand for self-determination was rejected by the Arab nationalists in the Iraqi government. Since then, periods of negotiations and war have followed. The Kurds have recurrently been involved in guerrilla war against the government and the guerrillas have periodically controlled large parts of northern Iraq.

The Kurds in Iraq have experienced dramatic changes in the state's attitude towards the Kurdish issue. The fact is that Iraq has gone through dramatic changes with recurrent military coups and alteration of the political system. This situation has also affected the Kurdish movement in Iraq. The Kurdish regions have occasionally been granted limited autonomy by the governments, but usually the state's wish for political hegemony and the Kurds' wish for political autonomy have led to conflicts between the Kurdish minority and the government.⁴⁸ One important period covers the early years of the republic of Iraq. By the mid-1950s the pro-British Hashemite monarchy in Iraq came to an end, through a military coup led by General Abdul Karim Ghasem. The new government's attitude towards the Kurds has been described as friendly. A provisional constitution in 1958 recognised, for the first time, that the Arabs and Kurds were associates in Iraq. However, the constitution reaffirmed the country's place as an integral part of the Arab nation while stating that Arabs and Kurds were considered partners in this nation. During the early years, Ghasem's regime did allow Kurdish cultural activities and legalised the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), but rejected the demand for total political autonomy for Kurdistan.⁴⁹

Kurds in Iraq have enjoyed greater cultural rights than Kurds in Iran and Turkey, but they have also experienced almost a century of wars and armed conflicts, genocide, deportations, chemical warfare, mass executions and human-rights violations on an enormous scale.⁵⁰ When the war between Iran and Iraq ended in 1988, Saddam Hussein introduced the *anfal* campaign, a new extensive programme of Arabisation and genocide of the

⁴⁷ Entessar 1992; Ciment 1996; Wahlbeck 1999; Chaliand 1994.

⁴⁸ Chaliand 1994; Entessar 1992.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ <http://www.unhcr.org>.

Kurdish population. During this campaign, between fifty and one hundred thousand Kurds were killed, according to Human Rights Watch.⁵¹ The number of victims was, by other sources, estimated to be between one hundred and fifty and two hundred thousand.⁵² More than half of the Kurdish villages in Iraq were destroyed in the campaign.⁵³ In many cases Kurdish villagers were transported to concentration camps where the men were executed and the women and children were deported from the Kurdish areas to camps in other parts of Iraq.⁵⁴ Chemical bombing also occurred repeatedly, of which the bombing of the town of Halabджа where five thousand people died was the most notorious example. As a consequence of the *anfāl* campaign, the Kurdish rebellion collapsed and a large number of people fled to Iran and Turkey. The total number of refugees varies in different estimations. Some sources estimate it to be 250,000⁵⁵ and others 400,000 (of whom 370,000 fled to Iran).⁵⁶ The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 created a new situation for the Kurds in Iraq. In March 1991 a spontaneous uprising in Kurdistan brought the whole northern part of Iraq under control by the Kurds. After it emerged that Saddam Hussein, after all, was not defeated and that the uprising would not get support from the allies, it soon became clear that this rebellion too would end in disaster. The population fled *en masse* towards the neighbouring countries.⁵⁷ According to UNHCR there were 1.4 million Kurdish refugees from Iraq in Iran and 450,000 on the Turkish border by mid-April 1991.⁵⁸

In a way that had never happened before in the case of the Kurds, the Western media followed this refugee catastrophe very intensively. The reason was that the catastrophe coincided with the Gulf War and Saddam Hussein's relations with the United States and allies. Only two years earli-

⁵¹ Wahlbeck 1999:52.

⁵² Ibid.; <http://www.unhcr.org>.

⁵³ van Bruinessen 1992a; Wahlbeck 1999:52.

⁵⁴ Sherzad 1992.

⁵⁵ McDowall 1996, referred by Wahlbeck 1999:52.

⁵⁶ Chaliand 1994.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Wahlbeck 1999.

er, in 1988 the chemical bombing of the city of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan, performed by the Iraqi regime, passed without much attention. In order to prevent the mass flight and alleviate this disaster, in the early 1990s the UN Security Council declared its Resolution 688, which led to the establishment of a no-fly zone, a “safe haven”, in northern Iraq at the end of the war to protect the Kurds against the Iraqi regime. The Kurdish parties organised an election for a national assembly and established control over northern Iraq. The assembly declared autonomy for the Kurdish region.⁵⁹ With the US-British invasion of Iraq in 2003 the situation of Iraqi Kurdistan came once again onto the international political agenda. The two main Kurdish parties supported the invasion of Iraq by the USA and Britain and cooperated in their war against the Iraqi regime. However, a condition for the cooperation has been an agreement about the sovereignty of Iraq. The Kurds’ cooperation with the US-British invasion has intensified the debate among Kurds about how the Kurdish parties in Iraq would act in order to avoid becoming a pawn in the game once more.

The family of the sheiks of Barzan has played a central role in the Kurdish nationalist movement in Iraq since the 1930s. Until 1975 the Kurdish scene had been dominated totally by the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) and the personality of Mustafa Barzani.⁶⁰ During the Iran-Iraq war in 1974 the Kurds received considerable support from Iran and were able to fight the government troops, until Iran in 1975 stopped supporting the Kurdish rebellions when the war was over. The uprising was put down, many civilians and guerrillas fled to Iran and many families were deported to Iran. This defeat generated a heated debate among the Kurds about the direction of the Kurdish struggle in Iraq. The KDP began to split into several groups. Barzani’s sons regrouped the loyal supporters again in the KDP, while a group of radical members accused their leadership of betraying the Kurdish cause by striking a Faustian bargain with the United States, Israel and the Shah of Iran, causing the collapse of the Kurdish resistance. These people, under the leadership of Jalal Talabani,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Chaliand 1994.

formed the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in 1976. PUK represented three different movements: the “Green Line”, consisting mainly of Talabani’s personal followers, the Marxist-Leninist Komala, and the Socialist Movement of Kurdistan.

PUK and KDP have been the dominant political organisations in Iraqi Kurdistan since then. The relationship between Talabani and Barzani has frequently been very bad and the two parties ended up in armed conflict with each other in the late 1990s.⁶¹ However, there are no fundamental political differences between the two parties.⁶² They have become close to each other and even started to cooperate as a result of the new political situation in Iraq since 2003 and their cooperation with the invasion forces of the USA and Britain. Unlike Iranian and Turkish Kurdistan, a radical break with the “traditional” Kurdish movement and leadership in Iraqi Kurdistan seems not to have taken place. This can be explained largely by the history of Iraq and the Kurdish region’s situation in the country. The Kurdish left in Iraqi Kurdistan have been partly organised within the Iraqi Communist Party. Another leftist political party in Iraqi Kurdistan is the Communist Workers’ Party of Iraq, founded in the 1990s. The party constitutes a small minority and defines itself as an all-Iraqi organisation. It is mainly formed by the Kurdish Marxist-Leninist intellectuals inspired by the Iranian Communist Workers’ Party. It strongly opposes Kurdish nationalism and is very critical towards the two dominant Kurdish parties in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The Kurds are by some sources estimated to be 4.5 million, or 23 percent of the population of Iraq in the mid-1990s,⁶³ and by others, 3.1 million in the early-1990s,⁶⁴ or 4.4 millions, that is 23.5% of total population.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Entessar 1992:75-80; Chaliand 1994.

⁶² Wahlbeck 1999.

⁶³ McDowall 1992a.

⁶⁴ van Bruinessen 1992a.

⁶⁵ Izady 1992:119.

Iran: neither denial nor recognition

Iranian Kurdistan consists of the same areas that were incorporated into the Persian Empire in 1514 under the rule of the Safavid dynasty. The relationship between the Kurds and the Persians seems to have been more ambivalent than in other countries. Although the Persians have retained political power, the Kurds usually have had a sense of closer affinity with the Persian language and culture than with the Turkish or Arabic. The Kurds and Persians shared the same religion and traditions before Islam.⁶⁶

As discussed in the previous pages, the Persian state's policy towards Kurds, especially since 1514, has been that of 'divide and rule'. The Kurdish principalities and the political organisation of the tribes were destroyed. Tribal leaders filled the power vacuum that was created. They were appointed as local governors and Kurdish towns became the seats of tribal power. To contain the Kurdish rebellions, Iranian monarchs took advantage of tribal hostilities among the Kurds. The policy of carrot-and-stick and a selective system of rewards and punishment were effective complements. This practice continued until the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁷

In the nineteenth century, the growing dominance of European empires, especially neighbouring Russia, had several important effects on the history of Iran. The nationalist ideas of nineteenth-century Europe reached Iran and the Iranian leaders. The application of new technologies and bureaucratic ideas inspired Persian leaders to extend more control over their Kurdish subjects. The revolution of 1905-6, which replaced autocratic rule by a constitutional monarchy, also marked the birth of Iranian nationalism. The uniqueness of Iran, compared to Turkey and Iraq, is that the country has a longer history as a nation-state. Additionally, it consists of several minorities such as Azeris, Arabs, Beluchs, Persians, Turkmen, and Kurds. This fact has had an important impact on the identity politics practised by the Iranian state(s). The constitution of 1906, unlike that in Turkey, did not contain an ethnic definition of the conditions of citizenship, and the Iranian national identity was the identity of the citizens and the basis of their civil

⁶⁶ Wahlbeck 1999; Entessar 1992.

⁶⁷ Vali 1995:10.

and political rights and obligations. However, Persian was specified as the official language of the nation and the other languages, Kurdish included, were neither recognised nor denied. They came to be called “provincial languages” and were subordinated to Persian.

Although the nationalist ideas also influenced the Kurdish intellectuals and leaders during this period of construction of Iranian nationalism, there did not exist any political or literary discourses on Kurdish nationalism. The reason was that Kurdish society was predominantly pre-capitalist, agrarian, and dominated by primordial relations and loyalties.⁶⁸ Additionally, recurrent Persian leaders had already broken Kurdish society into a more disjointed and tribal structure and made it far less able to respond to the nationalist ideas and forces sweeping the Arab and Persian worlds in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Kurdish responses to the politics of territorial centralism and the cultural process of the construction of a uniform Iranian national identity defined the conditions of formation of the Kurdish nationalist movement.

The first major rebellion in Iranian Kurdistan, known as *Simko's revolt*, took place between 1920 and 1924.⁶⁹ Kurdish nationalism in Iran was, according to many scholars, born in the mid-twentieth century with the establishment of the Kurdish republic of *Mahabad*. The rise and fall of the republic of Mahabad must, according to Ciment, be analysed within the context of Soviet expansionist policy.⁷⁰ World War II came to Iran when the Soviet Union and Britain occupied the country from 1941 until 1945. The *Mahabad* region in Iranian Kurdistan acted as a buffer zone between the territories occupied by the two allied powers. The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), which was founded mainly by the urban petit bourgeoisie and left-wing intellectuals, established the republic of Mahabad in December 1945 supported by the Soviet Union. In December 1946, when the wartime alliance between the Soviet Union, Britain and the United States was over, the Soviet Union abandoned its support for the pro-Soviet

⁶⁸ Vali 1998; Ciment 1996.

⁶⁹ Ciment 1996:63-64; Vali 1995.

⁷⁰ Ciment 1996.

republics in Iranian Kurdistan and Azerbaijan. In the spring of 1947 the leaders of the republic were hanged and the movement was put down.

Sporadic rebellions continued to occur throughout Kurdistan. However, they were no longer able to resist the vastly superior Iranian army. In addition, the *Shah* attempted to pacify Kurdistan by co-opting tribal leaders into the monarchical system through a policy of financial and political rewards. When he implemented his land reform program, he left the large landholdings of some significant tribal leaders untouched. Even though the Shah's carrot-and-stick policy rewarded some Kurds, life for the majority of Kurds remained unchanged during the Pahlavi regime.⁷¹

During the Iranian revolution in 1979, Kurds also participated actively in the belief that it would lead to a better situation for them. However, the Kurds' relation to the government deteriorated badly after the revolution. The breakdown of the Shah's government created a power vacuum, and Kurds acquired a *de facto* autonomy over the Kurdish part of the country. A war between the army and the organised Kurdish people started, and finally the army took over the cities. Executions, imprisonment, deportations and "ideological cleansing" within schools, universities and authorities were some of the reprisals. Until 1983 the Kurdish parties controlled villages around all Kurdish cities and had created a free zone where all Iranian opposition also found a refuge. However, since 1983 the Kurdish opposition has largely operated from inside Iraqi Kurdistan.⁷² The Iranian government's violation of human rights against Kurds and other Iranian citizens, according to Amnesty International, has continued until recent years, including political arrests, unfair trials and executions.⁷³

There have been two political parties of importance in Iranian Kurdistan. The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI) was founded in the 1950s and is a liberal nationalist party. The other party was the radical Marxist party called the Revolutionary Organisation of Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan, known as *Komala*, which was founded by Marxist-

⁷¹ Entessar 1992.

⁷² Chaliand 1994; Wahlbeck 1999; Entessar 1992.

⁷³ Wahlbeck 1999.

Leninist urban intellectuals and university students in the late 1970s. During the early 1980s, Komala together with several other radical Marxist organisations in Iran established the Iranian Communist Party, in which Komala constituted the Kurdish section, although demanding autonomy for Iranian Kurdistan.⁷⁴ Political and ideological disagreements and contradictions led to violent clashes between Komala and KDPI in the mid-1980s. Furthermore, there have been divisions inside both KDPI and Komala which have brought about new parties, new cooperations and conflicts within the movement.

The Kurds constitute between 10 percent⁷⁵ and 15 percent⁷⁶ of the Iranian population, that is to say, between 5.5 million and 8 million in the mid-1990s, 6.6 million or 12.4% of the total population in 1990.⁷⁷

Syria: Systematic transfer, dispersion, and Arabisation

In 1921 three Kurdish enclaves were turned over to Syria, which at that time was under French mandate. The three regions in question are separated from each other by Arab population areas. Hence, Syrian Kurdistan has become a fragmented territory and could be considered as “Kurdish regions in Syria”.⁷⁸ The policy of the Syrian state has been to isolate Kurdish areas and turn them into small islands surrounded by the Arab populations. During the long period of Ottoman domination, relations between the Arab and Kurdish peoples were friendly, in the context of the Muslim community, *Umma*. When the French and British troops pulled out in 1946 and the country became independent, Arab-Kurdish relations were still fairly good. However, the independent Syria, which soon adopted a pan-Arabist ideology, refused to recognise the existence of Kurds and other non-Arab populations in the country. Still, the Kurds were not tar-

⁷⁴ Wahlbeck 1999:57, Entessar 1992.

⁷⁵ McDowall 1992; van Bruinessen 1992a.

⁷⁶ Chaliand 1994.

⁷⁷ Wahlbeck 1999:57; Entessar 1992.

⁷⁸ Nazdar 1993:196.

gets of directly repressive measures. From 1946 until 1962 Kurdish school-books were circulated freely, though the state education was only in Arabic. In 1957 the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria was founded on the model of the Iraqi KDP. Its programme was to obtain recognition for Kurds as an “ethnic group” entitled to their own culture. Also, together with other organisations, it was involved in the struggle for agrarian reform and democracy, which led to the imprisonment of several leaders of the KDP of Syria.⁷⁹

In 1961 the new government started to oppress Kurds in a systematic way with strategic plans of Arabisation. Nazdar considers that many Kurds from one of the Kurdish regions called Jezireh were discounted as foreigners and stripped of their rights as Syrian nationals, after a special population census in the region. They were suspected of having relations and planning activities together with the Iraqi Kurds. Furthermore, in 1962, to combat the “Kurdish threat” and “save Arabism” in the region, the government inaugurated the so-called “Arab Cordon Plan”, which envisaged the expulsion of the entire Kurdish population living along the border with Turkey. They were to be gradually replaced by Arabs and would be resettled and preferably dispersed in the south of the country. According to Nazdar, the Kurds’ position worsened when the Baath party came to power in 1963. A twelve-point plan was proposed to be put into operation against the Kurdish population.⁸⁰ It was an Arabisation plan which included points such as transfer and dispersion, depriving Kurds of education and employment possibilities, setting Kurds against Kurds (divide and rule), continuation of the cordon policy, implantation of “pure and nationalist Arabs” in the Kurdish regions, anti-Kurdish campaigns among the Arab population, etc.

Many of the points were, according to Nazdar, put into practice; 120,000 Kurds were classified as non-Syrian and were deprived of any other form of legitimate status. In 1975 the state built 40 “model villages” in the Cordon zone where seven thousand Arab peasant families were armed and implanted. The Kurds were subjected to regular administrative

⁷⁹ Nazdar 1993:198.

⁸⁰ Nazdar 1993:199-200.

harassment, police raids, firings and confiscation orders. In all the official publications of Syria, the Kurds and other non-Arab groups are never mentioned. All Syrian citizens are regarded as Arabs. However, since 1976 the pressure on Kurds has decreased, after President Assad officially renounced any further implementation of the plan.⁸¹

There are no official statistics on the number of Kurds in Syria. There are different estimates from various sources. According to some of them the number of Kurds by 1991 was 1,000,000 or 8% of the total population of the country.⁸² Some others estimate the number of Kurds to be 1.3 million or 9.2% of the total population in 1990.⁸³

Kurdish identities: continuities and changes

The development of a Kurdish national identity and Kurdish movements has been determined by several factors. Firstly, Kurdish national identity emerged primarily in relation to the construction of the nation-states and the centralisation of political power in the region, in which exclusion of Kurds as well as other minorities and denial of their cultural identity was a necessary condition. The project of nation-state building in the Middle East has to be analysed within the framework of European colonialism. These nation-states, in most cases, either were colonised or were under colonial powers in different ways. Hence, in spite of historical, political and cultural differences, common to all of them is their authoritarian and anti-democratic character. Kurdish identity and politics have developed differently in different socio-political and cultural contexts of four sovereign states and are therefore strongly marked by these differences. As discussed before, the policy of exclusion and control has been different in these states. Consequently, they have led to different reactions from the Kurds and have influenced the formation of the Kurdish identity in diverse ways.

Secondly, the Kurdish movements that originally rose to resist this

⁸¹ Nazdar 1993:201.

⁸² McDowall 1992a.

⁸³ Izady 1992:119.

process consisted of “autonomist movements” based on the organisation of tribes and under the authority of tribal or religious leaders. They were characterised by primordial loyalties and local power, obtained by any means, including cooperation with states (their own and other states), even if it would be against other Kurds or other oppressed minorities. As van Bruinessen argues, Kurdish nationalism and the tribal and regional loyalties stand in an ambivalent relation to each other. The reason is that, on the one hand, the Kurdish movement acquired its mass character thanks to the fact that the first Kurdish nationalists were tribal leaders who could mobilise the primordial loyalties. On the other hand, the conflicts and rivalries between these “traditional” leaders have prevented the Kurds from unifying politically.⁸⁴ This kind of movement and leadership has its roots in the chronic weakness of the civil society in Kurdistan, which partly has been an outcome of the socio-economic and political strategy in Kurdistan practised by the ruling states. It has also partly been a consequence of the long period of armed conflict and war in Kurdish regions, especially in Iraq and Turkey.⁸⁵ Modern political ideologies, such as Marxism and nationalism, are quite new phenomena in Kurdish society. It was first during the second part of the twentieth century that these political ideologies entered Kurdish political life.

Thirdly, the important geopolitical location of Kurdistan in the politically and economically important region of the Middle East, and subsequently the involvement of the regional and international powers in the Kurdish question, have made the Kurdish issue very complicated. Four states in the Middle East – Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria – are directly involved in the Kurdish question. The Kurdish issue has always been a cause of conflict and cooperation between these states. They try by all means to prevent the Kurds’ political unity and the establishment of a Kurdish state. James Ciment describes this situation very well when he writes:

⁸⁴ van Bruinessen 1992a:6-8.

⁸⁵ Vali 1998.

Through their modern history, the Kurds have faced one incontrovertible fact of *realpolitik*: they have no predictable or permanent allies in the region. Because of this fact, they have often sought alliances with international powers. ... While Kurdish leaders and their followers have sought regional and international allies for pragmatic reasons, these alliances have more often than not proved disastrous for the Kurds in the long run. Frequently, these alliances have come undone when the friendly power decided it was in its interest to drop the Kurds in favour of the regime they were opposing.⁸⁶

Consequently, the Kurds have recurrently become a pawn in the regional and international political game. Establishment of a Kurdish state would not get any support anywhere within the contemporary geopolitics of the Middle East. This may be one of the reasons why none of the significant Kurdish political organisations demand the establishment of a Kurdish state.

The Kurdish political parties define their activities and goals within the nation-states and in relation to them. Hence, there is a contradiction between the locally organised politics and identities and the idea of a Kurdish nation and a Kurdish national identity. However, during the years the Kurdish movements in different parts of Kurdistan have inspired each other and periodically also some limited degree of cooperation between political parties has occurred. Despite their transnational condition, contacts between the Kurdish populations across the boundaries of these four nation-states have been very limited until recently. Transnational contacts among the Kurds have increased during the last two decades, partly because of the mass media's expansion and partly because of the vitalisation of the Kurdish movements. The large number of Kurdish refugees migrating to the West, as a consequence of oppression and terror caused by their states, has been an important factor for the creation of a transnational network and the idea of a unitary Kurdish identity. This process is going on outside of the established political parties and parallel to them. The Kurdish nationalist intellectuals living in exile have in different ways tried to establish a unitary nationalist

⁸⁶ Ciment 1996:25-26.

Kurdish identity that exceeds the national boundaries.

Characteristic of Kurdish identity, politics and society are their fragmentation and internal contradictions in a blend of old and new, “traditional” and “modern”, local and global. This feature is quite well demonstrated in the interviews in Chapters 6–9. One important new phenomenon in the Kurdish movements during the last two decades has been women’s involvement, with participation in both political and military activities. Unfortunately, almost all of the literature used in the present chapter has ignored this issue. Women have always played an important role among the Kurds, but they have not directly been involved in the political and military activities before, at least not to this extent. During the last two decades, especially in the Komala (from the Iranian part) and the PKK (from the Turkish part), women have been largely involved in both guerrilla war and organised clandestine political activities. These two parties developed from the radical left-wing mass movements emerging during the relative political freedom in Iran during the 1970s, and in Turkey during the 1960s and 1970s.

The primary aim of this study, however, is not to investigate the historical development of Kurdish nationalism, although the issue is very closely related to this study and will be discussed. The study will rather focus on individuals and their experiences as Kurds and as immigrants/exiles within a transnational community, and follow the formation of Kurdish identity through their narratives. Hence, the respondents’ experiences and narratives should be analysed within their context which is related to countries of origin, Sweden and the Kurdish diaspora.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed part of the contextual framework within which the Kurdish diasporic identity is evolving, that is, the historical background of Kurdish national identity. Kurdish national identity goes back to the first part of the twentieth century and is connected with the building of the nation-states in the region, from which the Kurdish and other minority identities were excluded. In this process, the Kurds became divided between

several countries with different historical, social and political situations. Thus, Kurdish identity developed differently in these four countries and has been fragmented since its inception. Moreover, the Kurdish societies were structured around the organisation of tribes based on primordial loyalties and local power. These tribes have been the popular bases for the resistance movement against the national states' exclusionist policy. Kurdish identity has been shaped on the one hand by the dispersal of Kurds between four countries and, on the other hand, by tribal structure and primordial and local loyalties. The twentieth century is seen by many researchers as the period of the birth of Kurdish nationalism and national identity, though still affected by the older and more rooted loyalties.

3 Global Migration, Citizenship and Politics of Belonging

Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion of exile and migration in the Western context. It is intended to give an overview of the postcolonial migration and the Western societies' response. Postcolonial migration challenges, on the one hand, democracy and human rights in these states and, thereby, demands for change in the institution of citizenship in order to adapt to the new conditions. On the other hand, it challenges the basis of the nation-state by calling into question the "natural" fusion between membership in the imagined national community and the membership in the state. The chapter aims to provide a socio-political background for Chapters 6–8 where I discuss respondents' experiences of Sweden. The first section will discuss the relationship between global migration, citizenship and the politics of belonging in Western democracies. The second section will highlight global migration with a focus on postcolonial conditions as well as global distribution of power and dominance and their impact on the relationship between the majority of society and immigrant minorities. The third section examines everyday racism and exclusion of immigrants. The last section comprises a very brief overview of migration to Sweden. An additional focus of this chapter is upon involuntary migration and the state of exile. The chapter does not offer a historical overview of migration to Sweden, but a more selective survey of relevant literature for the purpose of the thesis.

Citizenship and the challenges of global migration

Turner defines citizenship as an institution that embodies and expresses the formal rights and obligations that members have towards a political unity, a state. Citizenship, according to Turner's sociological perspective, is related to identity, society, and political, economic and cultural resources.¹ In the post-1945 period, T. H. Marshall's sociological theory of citizenship has been highly influential in the USA and Britain. It has also influenced the welfare sta-

¹ Turner 1997:6.

tes in Scandinavia, where it complements other social-democratic theories of the welfare state.² Criticising the contradiction between formal political equality and the persistence of economic and social inequality in capitalist society, Marshall distinguishes three types of citizenship rights: civil rights, political rights and social rights. A key aspect of Marshall's theory is the idea of the interdependence of these different types of rights.³ Citizenship is one of the components of the nation-state, and citizenship rights and obligations are accordingly defined within the framework of the nation-state. These definitions focus on the "administrative" aspects of citizenship, relating to individuals' association with a specific state.

However, the concept of citizenship becomes more complicated when we go beyond the merely administrative definition and look at the principles on which it is constructed, namely, principles of descent, *jus sanguinis*, or of territoriality, *jus solis*.⁴ These principles, which form the basis for different countries' citizenship legislations, are connected with different notions of nationality.⁵ According to the principle of *jus sanguinis*, modern citizenship is regarded as a formal principle which includes certain rights and duties and does not mean membership in the nation, because the foundation of national belonging and national identity is "the holy trilogy of blood, language and tradition (which usually is called 'culture' and often also includes religion)".⁶ The principle of *jus solis*, on the contrary, links a person's right to citizenship with her/his place of birth.⁷ These two principles of nationality are also called ethnic and civic, and in the European context they are associated with French (civic) and German (ethnic) principles of nationality and citizenship.⁸ But these principles need to be nuanced, and differences between them should not be essentialised because all modern national projects include

² Castles & Davidson 2000:105.

³ Castles & Davidson 2000:104-5.

⁴ Hammar 1990; Peralta 1995.

⁵ Peralta 1995; Thörn 2002.

⁶ Peralta 1995:54.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Thörn 2002:94.

exclusionistic politics based on a notion of ethnic/national identity.⁹ Peralta points out the vague boundary between these two principles by highlighting the exclusion of Indians, who are aboriginals of America, from the national community in Argentina, where citizenship and national belonging are based on the principle of *jus solis*.¹⁰

It can be concluded that, despite different principles, national identity is, as Hall maintains, often built up as a result of a fusion of both membership in a political nation-state and identification with a national culture in order to make the culture and the politics congruent.¹¹ This fusion proceeds from an idea of nation-states as homogeneous entities. While culturally homogeneous communities have always been an exception rather than a norm in human history, with globalisation and the rapidly increased mobility of people across national borders and the emergence of new forms of communication, the myth of nations' homogeneity has become more and more unsustainable. The European post-war period, especially since 1980, has been marked by large-scale migrations, which have led to new settlement in nearly all European countries.¹² European societies have become more and more multicultural, and cultural diversity has become a central aspect of almost all Western societies. Membership in a political nation-state is more and more separate from membership in a nation, and therefore it undermines/weakens the basis of the ethnic principle of citizenship and national belonging. This process has resulted in the appearance of new modes of membership in nation-states, which are multidimensional. Dual citizenship, which is accepted in a number of states, is an indication of that. Migrants bridge local, regional and global identities, creating complex patterns of rights, obligations and loyalties.¹³

There is consequently an unavoidable conflict and tension between the national state system and migration, because migration challenges the

⁹ Peralta 1995; Thörn 2002; Hylland Eriksen 1993; Anthias and Yval-Davis 1992.

¹⁰ Peralta 1995.

¹¹ Hall 1992a:296.

¹² Castles & Davidson 2000:8; Castles 2000.

¹³ Soysal 1994:166.

“natural” bond between national identity and cultural identity. In other words, membership in a state no longer necessarily implies a shared culture and history.¹⁴ Hence, a response to globalisation and the increase of cultural heterogeneity and hybridity has been that national and other local and specific identities have become stronger.¹⁵ This is demonstrated by both discourses and policies which exclude immigrants from the national community. Concepts such as ‘assimilation’, ‘integration’ and even ‘multiculturalism’ are all based on a definition according to which immigrants’ relationship to the society is regarded as problematic.¹⁶ However, this new situation has also raised issues of democracy, human rights and citizenship, and calls for adaptation of these issues to the new transnational conditions.

Nation-states and the paradoxes of global migration

Nation-states are facing a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, global migration is a social and historical process of our time and also one of the prerequisites for the global economy, an irreversible historical process which is also a component of the contemporary global world system.¹⁷ On the other hand, migration flows have their own dynamics, which do not always follow the dynamic of labour markets and their need for cheap labour forces. Moreover, global migration is challenging democracy¹⁸ and human rights with its demands for adaptation to the new global/transnational conditions.¹⁹ That is why global migration has become an issue of security in, for example, the European Union,²⁰ followed by tightening of the policy of refugee migration in the form of border control, common intelligence services, diverse agreements, etc.²¹ Even though current inter-

¹⁴ Hall 1992b.

¹⁵ Ibid. 300.

¹⁶ Thörn 2002:97.

¹⁷ Appadurai 1996; Sassen 1996.

¹⁸ Hammar 1990.

¹⁹ Sassen 1996.

²⁰ Abiri 2000; Tesfahuney 1998; Hansen 2000.

²¹ Tesfahuney 1998; Sassen 1996; Abiri 2000; Hansen 2000.

national laws impose important limitations on the state's control and sovereignty, there is strong agreement about the state's authority on the issue of migration.²² The question of migration has become highly politically challenging and the politics of Western national states are changing in order to encompass this shift. The goal of the nation-state's immigration and integration policy is, on the one hand, to "save" the national identity of the majority, via different forms of migration and cultural policies – and on the other hand, to respond to the new challenges of global migration.

Thus, immigration discourses and policies are influenced by security thinking and economic considerations as well as by human-rights discourses. The balance between these two aspects varies in different countries. Hence a number of European states have made significant reforms that render access to citizenship for the foreign residents possible. Consequently, besides the citizens, other categories have also emerged such as *denizens* or *quasi-citizens*, which is a new legal status – higher than that of a foreigner and lower than that of a citizen.²³ For example, foreign citizens who are permanently settled in Sweden have a right to vote in the local elections. The construction of such intermediate categories is, according to Castles and Davidson, a reflection of the real ambiguity of citizenship status, because of the discontinuities and fluidity of its different aspects.²⁴ They point out that these ambiguities apply even more strongly to immigrants and other minorities, as a result of their exclusion from certain rights or their precarious legal status.²⁵

Immigration policy differs widely between highly developed countries, and most sharply in the criteria for naturalisation. Sassen argues:

Some countries—for instance, Germany—have naturalization policies based on *jus sanguinis*, or descent, while others—France, for one—base theirs on *jus*

²² Sassen 1996:66.

²³ Castles & Davidson 2000:94; Hammar 1990:15. Hammar has suggested the term 'denizen' for the groups of people who are foreign citizens with a legal and permanent resident status.

²⁴ Castles & Davidson 2000:103.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

solis, or place of birth. Some countries, among them the United States and Sweden, facilitate citizenship acquisition; others, such as Switzerland and Japan, do not. Some, like Germany and France, have instituted explicit return migration policies, including monetary incentives, while other countries, notably the United States, hardly register the fact of return migration. Some countries – Canada and the United States, for example – possess political cultures and identity formation processes that incorporate the fact of immigration, while in others, particularly Germany and Japan, this is not the case whatsoever.²⁶

Sweden was the first state which, in 1975, granted voting rights in local elections to foreign residents.²⁷ Ethnic and cultural diversity has been explicitly accepted in Sweden since the mid-1970s and the establishment of the policy on immigrants and integration (cf. Government Bills 1975:26, 1997/8:16).²⁸ According to this policy, based on “cultural freedom of choice”²⁹ regarding cultural identity and assimilation, all Swedish citizens, regardless of ethnic/cultural background, should have equal rights as well as equal obligations. Swedish citizenship is also available for immigrants from outside of Northern Europe after five years of residence, and for immigrants from the North of Europe after two years of residence. However, the Swedish adaptation of the principle of *jus solis* is, as Peralta also notes, limited to the juridical aspect, while the old principle of *jus sanguinis* continues to dominate people’s notion of social relations.³⁰ It means that membership in the national community, that is, Swedishness, is a property that lies outside of the politico-juridical status of citizenship and therefore is unavailable.

To sum up, *access* to formal citizenship, which is neither taken for granted nor fully achieved, especially in the countries where immigrants cannot become citizens, is still one aspect.³¹ Equally important is the

²⁶ Sassen 1996:64.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Gustafsson 2002:Paper V, s.6.

²⁹ Sojininen 1999:690.

³⁰ Peralta 1995:54.

³¹ Castles & Davidson 2000:84.

extent to which people belonging to distinct groups of population actually achieve “*substantial citizenship*”.³² This means equal chances to participate in various areas of society, such as politics, work, welfare systems and cultural relations.³³ Kurds, as well as other groups of immigrants/refugees in Sweden, have access to formal citizenship and enjoy in different degrees general human rights and certain civil and social rights in the position of Swedish citizens or quasi-citizens. However, as immigrants they are systematically excluded and subject to the discourses and practices of everyday racism.³⁴ This aspect will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Contemporary migration: historical roots and geopolitics

Migration is not a new phenomenon. One could “reasonably claim that mankind’s history has been a history of migration.”³⁵ As a “constant, not an aberration, in human history”³⁶ international migration is now more than ever before a “part of a transnational revolution that is reshaping societies and politics around the globe.”³⁷ During the last five centuries migration has played a key role for colonialism, industrialisation, and for the development of the capitalistic world market.³⁸ The new migratory movements are a continuation of historical processes that began in the fifteenth century with the European colonial expansion. It is estimated that during the colonial period fifty million people emigrated from Europe.³⁹ Hence, in the modern epoch, global migration has often been closely related to colonialism and its outcomes/consequences, among them the contemporary postcolonial migration flows between South and North, East and West.⁴⁰ Migration, displacement

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Pred 2000; de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002.

³⁵ Rystad, cited in Tesfahuney 1998:27.

³⁶ Castles & Miller 1998:283.

³⁷ Castles & Miller 1998:5.

³⁸ Castles & Miller 1998:283.

³⁹ Tesfahuney 1998:28.

⁴⁰ Thörn 2002:132-133.

and exile have also been major features of the post-World War II period, to such an extent that the contemporary period of human history is seen as “the age of migration”.⁴¹ Castles and Miller stress the common roots and the interrelatedness of all migratory movements and argue: “Western penetration triggered off profound changes in other societies, first through colonisation, then through military involvement, political links, the Cold War, trade and investment.”⁴² The upsurge in migration is, according to the authors, due to rapid processes which arise from decolonisation, modernisation and uneven development. It can be said that the postcolonial migration in many respects demonstrates the consequences of colonialism.⁴³ It also confirms the geopolitics of migration, which is illustrated in some of the immigration patterns in Europe.⁴⁴ For example, Sassen notes:

Sixty percent of foreign residents in the United Kingdom are from Asian or African countries that were former dominions or colonies. ... Almost all Algerians in Europe reside in France, as do 86 percent of Tunisians and 61 percent of Moroccans. ... The Netherlands and Belgium both hosted significant number of immigrants from their former colonial empires.⁴⁵

Additionally, international migration and mobility are regarded as a major consequence of the transnational world economy, and are expected to increase with the further growth of that economy and its need of cheap and mobile labour forces.⁴⁶ During the 1980s and 1990s the largest amount of international migration consisted of refugee migration, over 90 percent of which has taken place outside Europe and the West, while Europe and the United States receive only a fraction of the global migration flows.⁴⁷ In 2002,

⁴¹ Castles & Miller 1998; Said 2000.

⁴² Castles & Miller 1998:139.

⁴³ Thörn 2002:133.

⁴⁴ Sassen 1996.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 80-85.

⁴⁶ Tesfahuney 1998:25; Sassen 1996; Thörn 2002.

⁴⁷ Tesfahuney 1998:28-29, 2001:192.

of the total of 20,556,700 refugees in the world, about 16 million were located in the Third World. Only about 5.5 million people were located in Western Europe and North America.⁴⁸ Moreover, statistics from UNHCR and the World Bank illustrate that, of the top nine host countries of refugees between 1999 and 2001, only three are located in the West, while six others are located in the Third World.⁴⁹ Furthermore, a comparison between the number of refugees per inhabitants and GNP per capita in these nine countries confirms the fact that poorer countries in the Third World receive many more refugees than rich countries in the West.⁵⁰

With globalisation, mobility of people has become a major aspect of the present world. The movement of capital, goods and people in positions of elites, students, professionals, tourists, activists, migrants and refugees has assumed global proportions. The revolutionary improvement of transport and media communication has created prerequisites for contemporary, historically unique movement and communication across the globe.⁵¹ But far from all the global travellers enjoy the same freedom of movement and access to places. With globalisation and increased mobility, also social inequalities and stratifications have become globalised and operate on a global scale. That is why it is important to see *who* moves, *when, how, where and under which circumstances*.⁵²

⁴⁸ www.unhcr.org.

⁴⁹ <http://www.ecre.org/factfile/realfacts.shtml>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Appadurai 1996; Thörn 2002.

⁵² Brah 1996:182; Tesfahuney 1998:25.

The migrant 'other' and hierarchies of mobile subjects

While the agency and creativity of such dislocated people should be in no way minimized, ... one of the ways ... to critique celebratory notions of modernity and to re-insert the actuality of inequality, dislocation and suffering is through a global mapping of shifts in borders and the accompanying reinscription of boundaries... as well as through the physical trajectories of mobile people rather than only their cultural itineraries.⁵³

In order to differentiate one group from another, the question of “relational positioning”⁵⁴ is of crucial importance. It enables us, according to Brah, to highlight the regime of power which operates within this process.⁵⁵ Taking this view, one can argue that it is not only mobility in itself, but also its location within the regime of power and stratification in a global context, which should be in focus. The international circulation of people is hierarchically structured. With regard to international migration, one can speak of different hierarchically settled mobility positions in terms of “spatial access, closure, and reach of spaces of circulation and barriers to mobility”.⁵⁶

The second class of mobile people, unlike the first class, are subjects of suspicion, control and security measures.⁵⁷ They are, according to Tesfahuney, mobile subjects from the South, nationals of a Third World country, who “are citizens of states listed as ‘undesirables’ by transnational regimes of migration control in Europe”.⁵⁸ Further, geopolicing systems have an impact on immigrants in very intimate ways since there is an impact on their everyday life.⁵⁹ Bauman describes the hierarchy of mobilities with the metaphors “tourist” and “vagabond”.⁶⁰ “Tourists” are those who not only can

⁵³ Shami 1996:8.

⁵⁴ Brah 1996:182.

⁵⁵ Brah 1996.

⁵⁶ Tesfahuney 1998:125.

⁵⁷ Abiri 2000; Tesfahuney 1998; Brah 1996.

⁵⁸ Tesfahuney 1998:126.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Bauman 1998.

choose to move but also can choose to stay. “Vagabonds”, on the contrary, seldom can choose where they can stay or when they can move. He states: “The Tourists move because they find the world within their (global) reach irresistibly *attractive* – the vagabonds move because they find the world within their (local) reach unbearably *inhospitable*. The tourists travel because *they want to*; the vagabonds because *they have no other bearable choice*.”⁶¹ Freedom of movement and freedom of choice about one’s own mobility, to which these metaphors refer, “is about the ability to move and the ability to access desired spaces and places. . . . Freedom of movement implies access to places and the freedom to choose where to go, where to stay, and where to develop emotional ties to place.”⁶²

In studies of global migration it is important to make a distinction between involuntary and voluntary migration. Involuntary migration, according to several researchers, has been neglected in sociological theories.⁶³ In the present study, this distinction is highly relevant because of the character of the Kurdish migration, which mainly consists of forced and involuntary migration in the form of political and partly war refugees. This distinction is important in respect to the individual’s feelings and the existential trauma created by living in exile. Working on this study and especially my respondents’ narratives made me more and more aware of the importance of the distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration, because of the traumatic experiences that are connected with exile. This issue will be discussed and illustrated further, especially in Chapters 6–8. Next I will discuss the position of exiles within the category of migrants in order to highlight the micro-sociological aspects of involuntary migration.

⁶¹ Ibid. 92-93.

⁶² Gustafson 2002:30.

⁶³ Cohen 1996; Richmond 1988; Abu-Lughod 1998.

Forced migration and the state of exile

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. [...] In other ages, exiles had similar cross-cultural and transnational visions, suffering the same frustrations and miseries, performed the same elucidating and critical tasks. ... But the difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age ... is indeed the age of refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration.⁶⁴

Studies on transnational migration have until recently paid little attention to the category of refugees.⁶⁵ Transnational migration has been discussed mainly within the framework of “voluntary” migration. The Kurdish migration is basically involuntary, and Kurdish communities mainly consist of war refugees and political refugees (of course disregarding the labour migration of the 1960s). Seen from the perspective of the receiving societies, these differences may not matter so much because all cross-border migrants, irrespective of their backgrounds, are seen as immigrants, as those who do not belong to the national community. However, seen from the perspective of the people themselves, these differences do matter and are important to highlight because they have a great impact on the migrants’ everyday life at all levels and on their relationship to the new country.

If the difference between categories of mobile people is the freedom of choice concerning mobility, the difference between voluntary and involuntary migrants is also about the freedom of choice concerning access to the localities from where they have lived experiences. Involuntary migrants are excluded from their “native place” irrespective of whether they find it inhospitable or not. Hence, the involuntary migrants and exiles have no right or possibility to return and/or there does not exist any “native country” to return to. Said stresses the possibility of choice and the possibility of return, and considers that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile.⁶⁶ Hence, he divides immigrants into different categories.

⁶⁴ Said 2000:173, 174.

⁶⁵ Abu-Lughod 1998; Richmond 1988; Cohen 1996; Malkki 1992, 1995.

⁶⁶ Said 2000:181.

Expatriates are, according to him, those who voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons – and an émigré is “technically” anyone who emigrates to a new country. Said states:

Choice in the matter is certainly a possibility. Colonial officials, missionaries, technical experts, mercenaries, and military advisers on loan may in a sense live in exile, but they have not been banished. White settlers in Africa, parts of Asia and Australia may once have been exiles, but as pioneers and nation-builders, they lost the label ‘exile’.⁶⁷

The question of return here is first of all about the possibility to keep alive the bond between past and present and the continuity of the self, rather than about root romanticism and return to one’s “roots”. The “native place” is important since it is connected with individual memories, histories, emotions, social relations rather than soil. One can also be an exile while living in one’s “native place”. That is why Said characterises exile as a ‘condition of terminal loss’, caused by a ‘discontinuous state of being’.⁶⁸ Exile has a very wide meaning for Said and this is visible in his text. He regards it as a state of mind but also as a more specific situation of displacement. Yet sometimes it seems that he essentialises exiles’ attachment to the soil and to the native place, for instance when he describes exile as “the unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, *between the self and its true home* (my emphasis): its essential sadness can never be surmounted.”⁶⁹ However, this kind of essentialisation is not representative for the whole text or for Said. It is about a specific experience that, as he says, only those who experience it can understand. Not least, it illustrates the emotional and existential trauma that forced migration gives rise to in the lives of exiles, including Said himself.

However, to distinguish the categories of migrant, refugee and exile in contemporary global migration is not without problems because there are

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Said 2000:173,177.

⁶⁹ Said 2000:173.

many intermediate categories and overlaps. Moreover, neither presence nor absence of choice in voluntary and involuntary migration is absolute. Voluntary migrations are voluntary to an extent because the individual's decisions are framed within the socio-economic structures and the possibilities that they give. Voluntary migrants are at least partially forced, in the sense that they are "need-driven".⁷⁰ However, Abu-Lughod, inspired by Said, stresses that there is a real break between a "voluntary need-pushed migration" and a "sudden involuntary severance from one's 'native place'".⁷¹ Furthermore, Eastmond, studying Chilean exiles, points out the impact of exile on an existential level:

Exile represents a social disruption at structural levels which leaves no domain of social experiences untouched, with profound and existential consequences. ... The condition affects the lives of refugees in all their vital dimensions – social, cultural, emotional and even physical – as it ruptures the basis of the social world of those affected and attacks their ontological security.⁷²

It is therefore very important to highlight these aspects in order to understand people's feelings, desires and sense of belonging, as well as their attachment to place and meanings of home. Abu-Lughod describes the state of exiles' life as living in a "limbo" unable and unwilling to become a part of life in exile.⁷³ A collective response can be organised opposition⁷⁴ and "however, unrealistic, some may cling to the 'myth of return' or work politically for the 'liberation' of the homeland."⁷⁵ These reactions are regarded by Said as a way "to lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity – to deny an identity to people. ...efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement."⁷⁶

⁷⁰ Abu-Lughod 1988:61.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Eastmond 1989:7; See also Lundberg 1989.

⁷³ Abu-Lughod 1988:62.

⁷⁴ Eastmond 1989.

⁷⁵ Richmond 1988:14.

⁷⁶ Said 2000:175, 173.

Irrespective of different migratory experiences and histories, the socio-political and ideological conditions of the receiving societies determine how “the immigrant” is regarded and treated. As discussed earlier, it is rather the geopolitics of migration that has an impact on how different groups are treated. Hence, from the viewpoint of this study it is highly relevant to ask what happens when the immigrant Other becomes part of these societies.⁷⁷ A key notion in postcolonial theory is the concept of *the Other*. The idea of the Other and the way it structures the meaning of one’s location in the world, and in defining what is normal and what is not, is central within postcolonial theories. “Postcolonial thinkers often use the term Other, in order to depict how colonial and racist belief systems construct colonised peoples as the generalised Other of colonial powers.”⁷⁸

South-North migration and the discursive exclusion of the immigrant Other

Hierarchy of origins and the geopoliticising of mobility and migration are among the important aspects of the stratification in contemporary global society. These conditions influence the everyday life of migrants. The conditions of mobility, origins and destinations within the framework of the social stratification and power relations in a global context are among the most important factors which affect the social relations that mobile people and the majority of society develop. Circumstances of leaving and those of arrival and settling down are closely related to each other. As Brah points out:

The manner in which a group comes to be ‘situated’ in and through a wide variety of discourses, economic processes, states policies and institutional practices is critical to its future. This ‘situatedness’ is central to how different groups come to be relationally positioned in a given context.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Castles & Davidson 2000:9.

⁷⁸ Mattsson 2001:191.

⁷⁹ Brah 1996:182.

The European migration to other continents during the last five centuries is usually described in terms of great events, surrounded by adventure and romance.⁸⁰ The contemporary migration from South to the North is, on the contrary, usually described by the media, experts, and nationalistic political parties in terms of threats, danger and invasion.⁸¹ Furthermore, the South-North migration is increasingly discussed and treated as a security issue, and a potential threat to national as well as international security.⁸² Accordingly, immigrants are discursively excluded from the society and become its Other, something that gives way to racial discrimination in everyday life. Analysing the white elites' role in the reproduction of ethnic and racial inequalities in Europe and North America, van Dijk finds that elites in all sections of society, and especially mass media, in their texts and speeches often formulate stereotypes and prejudices about minorities, define ethnic relations and legitimise ethnic discrimination. He stresses the important role of mass media in the maintenance and legitimising of the white groups' dominance in Western societies by production of "everyday racism".⁸³ This process goes on in a subtle, indirect and strategic manner by expressing ideals of generosity, understanding, tolerance, and a strong rejection of racism, combined with more or less open restrictions, marginalisation and problematisation of immigrants, refugees and other minorities.⁸⁴ van Dijk argues that it has only softened the dominance of white Western nations. Deeply rooted economic, social and cultural remnants of colonial oppression and inequality are, according to him, far from abolished.⁸⁵ Everyday racism is also defined by Essed as:

A process in which (a) socialised racist notions are integrated into meanings that make practices immediately definable and manageable, (b) practices

⁸⁰ Tesfahuney 1998:28.

⁸¹ Tesfahuney 1998; Nemati 1998; Brune 1990, 1996, 1998; van Dijk 1993; Castles & Miller 1998; Castles 2000.

⁸² Tesfahuney 1998; Abiri 2000; Castles & Miller 1998:291.

⁸³ van Dijk 1993.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 7.

with racist implications become in themselves familiar and repetitive, and (c) underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualised and reinforced through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations.⁸⁶

Essed's concept of everyday racism links micro-experiences to the structural and ideological context in which they are shaped. This means that it crosses the boundaries between structural and interactional approaches to racism.⁸⁷ Castles considers that racism remains embedded in our culture and tradition with its "taken-for-granted" and simplifying assumptions about the complex social world around us.⁸⁸ The notion of everyday racism does not necessarily mean that people have conscious racist beliefs, but rather that they act in a way which reinforces racist structures and ideologies.⁸⁹ Today no mainstream politician speaks openly of white racial superiority. Many countries now have anti-discrimination laws and equal opportunity measures. "Yet racism persists."⁹⁰ Studying the German state's response to racism, Castles maintains that a political explanation for racism "frequently put forward by politicians – was that it was an understandable reaction to mass immigration".⁹¹ Such a discourse also exists in Sweden.⁹² The problem with such notions is, according to Rätzzel, that they seem to convince many people.⁹³ What lies behind it is the image of home as harmonious, something that tends to be associated with perceiving immigrants as a source of social conflict. Criticising all kinds of reductionistic explanations of racism, Castles applies rather a historical perspective. He points out:

Germany is not unique: racism in its various guises (anti-Semitism, repression of gypsies and other ethnic minorities, oppression of colonized peo-

⁸⁶ Essed 1991:52.

⁸⁷ Essed 1991:100.

⁸⁸ Castles 2000:173.

⁸⁹ Castles 2000; van Dijk 1993; Essed 1991.

⁹⁰ Castles 2000:164.

⁹¹ Castles 2000:156.

⁹² Brune 1990, 1996; Nematı 1998.

⁹³ Rätzzel 1994:81.

ples, discrimination against migrant workers) is part of the European history and culture. Racism is closely linked to the struggles surrounding the building of nation-states and their colonial expansion.⁹⁴

The discursive construction of immigrants/refugees as a problem, states' policy-making, and public opinion are often closely interrelated. Discourse on immigration and "foreign cultures" as threats and dangers has, according to several studies, become the core of the security policy within the European Union, as well as the individual states in the West.⁹⁵ Migration policy and the problematisation of immigrants are among the highly political issues in many European countries. Especially at times of general elections these issues become very central as social and political problems. Parliamentary and local elections in Sweden and in a number of other European countries in recent years illustrate this condition.⁹⁶

Migration, aliens, and Swedish society

Sweden has been multiethnic, multireligious and culturally compound for a very long time, embracing Lapps, Gypsies, Finns, *tattare* or *resande* (travellers) and also people originating from Germany, Denmark, Norway and the Baltic states.⁹⁷ It was mainly a country of emigrants from the middle of the 1800s until 1930. Over two million people emigrated from Sweden – most of them to North America. In the twentieth century, after World War II, Swedish industry had an urgent need of workers, and the need for a more open labour-immigration policy became clear. Immigration and migration politics soon became steered by fluctuations in the economy. Migration thereby became a part of Swedish labour-market politics until the mid-1970s.⁹⁸ Until the 1970s, those who immigrated to Sweden were predominantly Nordic citizens, who

⁹⁴ Castles 2000:157.

⁹⁵ Tesfahuney 1998; 2001, Abiri 2000.

⁹⁶ Nemati 1998; Westlind 1996; Fryklund and Petersson 1989; Abiri 2000; Kalla fakta TV4, 24 October 2002.

⁹⁷ von Brömssen 2003:90.

⁹⁸ Svanberg and Tydén 1992.

in 1969 made up 70 percent of the total immigration. In the 1960s the Swedish Labour Board started to recruit Turkish workers directly in Turkey. Labour immigration increased during the last part of the 1960s, and came to a peak in the beginning of the 1970s. During those years there also came large numbers of Kurds (from Turkey) as labourers to Europe, including Sweden, but most of the Kurds settled in Germany. When the need for labour decreased in the 1970s, the Swedish labour union *LO* demanded a regulation of the immigration. It became more difficult to move to Sweden, and after 1972 most of the immigration of non-Europeans was stopped. It was during this decade that the earlier labour migration was replaced by refugee migration from countries outside Europe, which increased since the 1980s.⁹⁹

According to Svanberg and Tydén, the refugee and labour-immigration policies of Sweden, like those of other European countries, have often been guided as much by a need for cheap labour as by “ideology and thinking patterns.”¹⁰⁰ Since 1989, there has been a steady demand to reinstate labour immigration, particularly by the conservative parties which also demand that the laws regulating asylum and refugee immigration should be even more stringent,¹⁰¹ and that the labour immigrants should not have the same rights as the Swedes.¹⁰² During the election campaign of 2002 this discussion was once again taken up.¹⁰³

It was mainly during the 1980s that refugee migration from the Third World came to replace labour migration. Although Sweden was never a homogeneous society, it has become religiously and culturally much more diverse during recent decades, since people from more distant places outside Europe have immigrated to Sweden. As von Brömssen argues, Sweden has always been a multicultural society but not until recently did multiculturalism become subject to political debates.¹⁰⁴ According to Ericsson et al., in

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Svanberg and Tydén 1992:401.

¹⁰¹ Nemati 1998.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ ”*Ett parti som vågar utmana: Folkpartiet liberalernas valmanifest inför valet 2002*” (A party that dares to challenge: the Liberal Party’s manifesto for the 2002 election).

¹⁰⁴ von Brömssen 2003:91.

Sweden as well as in a number of other countries, two partially linked processes of change are occurring in parallel, characterized on the one hand by the growth of the multicultural society, and on the other hand by the growth of new forms of racism and xenophobia.¹⁰⁵ Terms such as ethnicity, identity and culture have acquired new meanings, which very often are political. In the Sweden of 1990, as Svanberg and Tydén note too, one did not talk about race, but about closely related cultures as opposed to more foreign cultures.¹⁰⁶

During 1984 and 1985 a huge media debate was launched in Sweden about refugee policies, which awakened a strongly negative opinion about refugees/immigrants. In the debate these were represented as being both liars and frauds. The refugee immigration was often described with words such as avalanche, stream, invasion, burden, and illegal immigrant, which could be associated with threats and danger.¹⁰⁷ The turning point in that period came in 1988 with a municipal vote about potential refugee reception in *Sjöbo*, located in southern Sweden. The municipality voted against receiving the refugees. A new party, *Sjöbopartiet*, was established mainly on the basis of racial ideology and resistance to refugee immigration. This party won many votes in local elections in several communities in *Skåne*, a region in southern Sweden. The process encouraged and inspired xenophobia and racism, and in the 1990s it gave rise to a social and political climate that was expressed by way of a number of racist street manifestations and cross-burnings, violent attacks against refugee camps and against private citizens.¹⁰⁸ The *Sjöbo* actions marked the politicising of refugee issues, and thereby

¹⁰⁵ Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz and Thörn 1999:14.

¹⁰⁶ Svanberg and Tydén 1992:40.

¹⁰⁷ Nematil 1998; Brune 1990.

¹⁰⁸ A popular scientific book published in 2003, *Lasermannen: en berättelse om Sverige* (The laser man: a story of Sweden), highlights the political climate in Sweden during the early 1990s. The author, Gellert Tamas, has interviewed Jan Ausonius, known as “the laser man”, who during several months in 1991-1992 shot 11 persons with a laser gun. What all his victims had in common was the dark colour of their skin and hair. Tamas argues that the crimes that “the laser man” committed were a result of the political climate in Sweden during that period. Even “the laser man” admits that he was very much affected and encouraged by the xenophobia and hatred against immigrants pursued by the right-wing populist parties like Ny Demokrati and various racist organisations.

hostile immigrant politics entered the political arena.¹⁰⁹ The Sjöbo events symbolised, furthermore, an antagonism between the political system and the national politics on the one hand, and the local politicians on the other. Immigration became connected to the welfare state's distribution policy also in other areas and was depicted as a component of it.¹¹⁰ In this respect, Sweden is not unique. Economic, political and social crises throughout Europe have created prerequisites for increased racism and extreme-right movements. Unemployment, growing class differences, the dismantling of welfare systems, and uncertainty over the future have led to political dissatisfaction that has favoured extreme rightists and racists.¹¹¹

The politicising of migration reached its peak in 1991 when a party, *Ny demokrati*, was elected to Parliament. Westlind says that its success occurred in an unstable political situation in which Swedish politics, and specifically social democracy, found itself in crisis. The real winner was *Ny demokrati*, which could absorb many dissatisfied voters through its populist appeal.¹¹² However, it is important to indicate the ideological dimension of the discourses on refugees/immigrants, its role in and its importance for the construction of "Us" and "Them" in the discourse of *Ny demokrati*. The us/them perspective is the right-wing populist point of departure, and its strong ideological dimension is linked to a national spirit of community to which "the other" cannot belong. In the national election of 2002, in 14 communities in Skåne, the conservative populist and the racist parties gained 29 delegate places. In the rest of the country, they gained delegate places in 15 communities.¹¹³ The increase is striking; and in contrast to 1988 and 1991, the voting core is much broader and includes all classes.¹¹⁴ In a newspaper article on the *Sverigedemokraterna* (one of these parties) and their election campaign, journalist Mustafa Can states: "During my twenty-six years in Sweden, I have never before experienced such racism and xenophobia that I

¹⁰⁹ Westlind 1996; Fryklund and Peterson 1989.

¹¹⁰ Fryklund and Peterson 1989:130-132.

¹¹¹ Pred 2000:268.

¹¹² Westlind 1996:130-132.

¹¹³ Kalla Fakta, TV 4, 24 October 2002.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

experienced during these six hours.”¹¹⁵

The racist and right-wing populist discourses, in their rhetoric, often relate to colonial conceptions of East and West, North and South. Their discourses are clearly linked to certain places, certain groups of people and certain cultures. These discourses draw up boundaries on all levels – psychological, social, territorial and national. They give the discussion strong psychological, historical and ideological dimensions which make the election success of the *Sjöbopartiet*, *Ny demokrati* and the *Sverigedemokraterna* comprehensible.

According to several other studies, also from the 1980s, the Swedish migration policy developed as an exclusionist policy. The government started to define refugees as a social and political problem, and the state policy on refugee migration was tightened.¹¹⁶ However, already before the 1980s, according to Pred, a restriction of Swedish refugee policy was on the political agenda of both *Moderata samlingspartiet* (the Conservative Party) and *Socialdemokratiska arbetarpartiet* (the Social Democratic Party).¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Abiri claims that in 1995 the term ‘refugee’ was “officially” introduced as a threat to Swedish security. She refers to the publication of *Sverige i Europa och världen* (Sweden in Europe and the World), “a Committee report dealing with the renewal of Swedish security policy.”¹¹⁸ The social and political situation, as well as the attempt to conform to the joint European refugee policies and the securization of migration, contributed to the government’s further restriction of the possibility to obtain asylum in Sweden.¹¹⁹ When politicians, researchers and elites stress the assumption that migrants are a threat, this can consequently influence both public opinion and policy-making.¹²⁰ The paradoxical result is that, on the one hand, the government regards immigration as a problem, while

¹¹⁵ “*I Sveriges namn*” (In the name of Sweden), *Dagens Nyheter*, 28 September 2002.

Mustafa Can received a prize in journalism for this reportage.

¹¹⁶ Ålund & Schierup 1991:11; Pred 2000; Abiri 2000.

¹¹⁷ Abiri 2000:3.

¹¹⁸ Abiri 2000:2.

¹¹⁹ Svanberg and Tydén 1998; Abiri 2000; Tesfahuney 1998.

¹²⁰ See Abiri 2002; vanDijk 1993.

on the other hand it tries to prevent and oppose racism and discrimination against immigrants.

To sum up this account, one can say that the Kurds meet in Sweden a contradictory mixture of everyday racism and exclusion as immigrants together with democracy and certain civil and social rights as citizens and residents of the country. As is evident in respondents' narratives in the present study, this ambivalent position deeply affects their experiences of and relation to Sweden.

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed and illustrated the position of the immigrant 'other' in the West. As citizens and residents in liberal Western democracies, refugees and migrants have obtained the possibility to enjoy general human rights and citizen rights, although in different degrees in different countries. Global migration is an irreversible historical process, and is also a component of the contemporary global system. However, it challenges the concept of citizenship and belonging and demands for adapting to new global conditions. Thus, global migration has become an issue of security and a highly politically charged one. The politics of Western states and the European Union are gradually changing in order to encompass this shift.

Sweden has been the first country to guarantee voting rights in local elections for foreign residents. Cultural freedom of choice has been the basis for the Swedish concept of cultural identity and citizenship since the mid-1970s.

Still, the juridical status of citizenship does not automatically give immigrants the status of equal members of the society. Regardless of this formal status, immigrants are considered as 'other' and are thereby subject to everyday racism and discrimination. They are not viewed or treated as equals by the society. Hence, there is a gap between formal and "substantial" citizenship. The social relations between refugees/migrants and the rest of society are determined by the position of the immigrant Other within the global distribution of power and dominance. Colonial conceptions of East and West, South and North in different ways strongly influ-

ence how immigrants are treated by host societies, including Sweden. The non-Western immigrants are particularly exposed to discrimination and exclusion in the Western societies. And besides these problems, the category of forced migrants and exiles suffer the traumatic experience of having no access to the places they are emotionally and socially related to.

PART II

THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMES

4 Diasporas

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, we are witnessing the growth of transnational social spaces, within which cultural, political and social activities are carried on. Many people act, take decisions and feel belongingness within a field of social relations, which bind together their countries of origin and their countries of residence.¹ Faist defines transnational social space, in which also diasporas are included, as “a combination of social and symbolic ties, positions in networks and organisations, and networks of organisations that can be found in at least two geographically and internationally distinct places”.² Transnational social space within which processes of economic, political and cultural transnationalisation are going on is characterised by a triadic relationship between groups and institutions in countries of origin and countries of settlement, as well as between minority groups/migrants and/or refugee groups. Diasporas – especially those made up of first generations – represent, according to Faist, a very distinct form of transnational communities.³ Hence, the concept of diaspora is narrower than the concept of transnational.

The concept of diaspora: etymologies and definitions

Diaspora refers to “dispersion from” and accordingly it is prefigured by a notion of a centre, a locus, and a “home” from where the dispersion occurs.⁴ Hence, the notion of home and “politics of location”⁵ constitutes a central aspect of diasporas, and as such it is a dividing line that distinguishes different notions of diaspora.

In general, two main categories of definitions of diaspora can be recognised. The first category takes the Jewish diaspora as an ideal type and model. It is primarily a descriptive typological tool, which establishes

¹ Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1995; Faist 1999.

² Faist 1999:40.

³ Faist 1999:40-47.

⁴ Brah 1996:181.

⁵ Brah 1996.

whether certain groups fulfil a number of criteria for being diasporic. Territoriality and return are central features in this notion. In the following I refer to this notion of diaspora as (re)territorial.⁶ The second category of definition, which I call de-territorial, mainly coming from the African experiences, regards diaspora as a socio-cultural process with focus on identity formations, mainly as responses to displacement, exile, and exclusion. It emphasises movement rather than territoriality and return. Desiring a “home” by this definition is not the same thing as desiring a homeland.

The metaphysics of return: (re)territorial notion of diaspora

This definition of diaspora, originally introduced by Safran,⁷ departs from the Jewish experience. Safran maps out diaspora groups according to several criteria, which the members of diaspora share in part. Safran suggests that the concept of diaspora should be applied to expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics:

- 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original ‘centre’ to two or more ‘peripheral’, or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as

⁶ By (re)territorial I mean both a general conception of territoriality and the particular Zionist conception of “re-establishment” and return. According to Said, a main ideological necessity for legitimising the Zionist vision was to give it “an archeology and a teleology that completely surrounded and, in a sense, outdated the native culture that was still firmly planted in Palestine.” Thereby, the need of legitimation from its “favoring the establishment of a Jewish National Home to favoring a ‘reestablishment’ of a Jewish National Home. It referred to the sixty-year Jewish sovereignty over Palestine which had lapsed for two millennia. It was according to Said precisely to enclose the territory with the oldest and furthest reaching of possible ‘realities’.” (Said 1990:225.)

⁷ Safran 1991.

their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.⁸

This sense of diaspora describes a project having a goal and direction, with return as the basic aspiration. Here, diaspora is mobilised to fulfil a nationalistic project.⁹ Safran has been criticised for essentialising diaspora's relationship to the territory by taking this particular experience as an ideal type. He has been criticised for leaving little or no room for ambivalences about return and attachment to the land¹⁰ as well as hybridities, internal conflicts and contradictions. For example, Clifford points out that in Safran's definition "the Jewish anti-Zionist critiques of teleologies of return are excluded".¹¹ Another basic critique directed at Safran's definition is that he associates diaspora with a notion of fixed and rigid features instead of dynamic social processes. Diasporic relations are not necessarily articulated in relation to a homeland as a territory, at least not to the degree that Safran asserts. Further, nationalistic aspirations should not be

⁸ Ibid. 83-84.

⁹ The "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991) of nations are ideological constructions of nationalist ideologies seeking to forge a link between self-defined cultural groups and state. Anderson classifies nationalism together with kinship and religion because the nationalist ideology has been able to satisfy individuals' need of participating and belongingness in the "mass society" through a concern with roots and cultural continuity. Concentrating on political aspects of nationalism, Gellner thinks that nationalism as a sentiment or as a movement can best be defined in terms of the political principle "which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (Gellner 1983:1). He states that this principle is the ground for nationalism as sentiment or as movement. He argues further: "Nationalist *sentiment* is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. A nationalism *movement* is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind." (Ibid.)

¹⁰ See Clifford 1997.

¹¹ Ibid. 248.

taken as a point of departure but rather as a matter of investigation because, as Gellner states, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist.”¹² Other factors, such as a common history of displacement, can be as important as a common origin. Safran is criticised for introducing strict criteria, which maintain conceptions of exclusivist and homogeneous communities.¹³ Though the term ‘diasporic community’ conveys a strong sense of difference, it is, as Clifford argues, not separatist. Separatist desires are only one dimension of it.¹⁴ Hence, (re)territorial definition strengthens the conception of place-bounded natural identities. In addition, diasporic forms of longing, common memory and (dis)identification are, as Clifford observes, shared by a broad spectrum of minority and migrant populations. The problematics of home and belonging are integrated with the diasporic condition, but how, when, and in what forms it is articulated are specific to the history of each particular diaspora. That is why it is necessary to stress and highlight the “situatedness”¹⁵ of diasporas. All diasporas do not develop an ideology of return. Return movement within the Jewish diaspora was a political project connected with the Zionists’ project of nation-building. Hence, it cannot be generalised to all diasporas.

Unwittingly, this definition of diaspora thereby abandons the notion of dispersal and firmly attaches diaspora to ideas/notions of the *deep nation*¹⁶ that legitimise claims on identities as place-bounded, to which only those who truly belong can have direct access and from which outsiders are exclu-

¹² Gellner 1964:169.

¹³ Clifford 1997:247.

¹⁴ Clifford 1997:255.

¹⁵ Brah 1996:182.

¹⁶ I have made a modification of the concept of “Deep England” (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992:41). Anthias and Yuval-Davis have borrowed the term “Deep England” from Wright, P. (1985). They use the concept in order to clarify how exclusionary ideologies like nationalism and racism essentialise and naturalise the relation between identity and place/land. Basing their view on Wright, they comment: “He has written on how racism has been fundamental to national identity in Britain, intrinsic to the sense of what he calls ‘Deep England’ to which those who truly belong are naturally attuned and from which outsiders are for ever excluded.”

ded forever. By this definition, diaspora makes exclusivist claims to territory, legitimised by discourses of collective memory and myths of the deep nation. It does not identify with mobility and movement; instead, the nomadological dimension is frozen into the bonded framework of the nation-state. The specific notion of diaspora as a temporary condition, which will be “righted” with the (re)establishment of a home/nation, erases perhaps the most diasporic identity of all – the Roma or Gypsies.

The sociologist Robin Cohen¹⁷ criticises Safran’s notion of diaspora for being limited to the Jewish experiences and forced dispersal, and argues for a broader definition. He also thinks that diasporic experiences are far more diverse and heterogeneous than united. Cohen’s critique of Safran is, however, not based on any distinct theoretical standpoint. His position is more ambivalent since he tries to connect the two notions of diaspora. Indeed, his effort is not very successful because the two notions of diaspora derive from two different theoretical standpoints. Departing from Safran, he modifies some of the latter’s criteria and adds several other criteria to the list. Thus, in Cohen’s definition, diaspora includes almost all groups of people living outside their countries of origin, while Safran considers that all dispersed minorities cannot “legitimately be considered diasporas.”¹⁸

Cohen distinguishes five kinds/types of diasporas: “Victim/refugee, imperial/colonial, labour/service, trade/business/professional, cultural-/hybrid/post-modern.”¹⁹ The “common features of diaspora” which, according to Cohen, members of a diasporic group share are:

- 1) Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions; 2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; 3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements; 4) an idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a col-

¹⁷ Cohen 1997.

¹⁸ Safran 1991:86.

¹⁹ Cohen 1997:178.

lective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation; 5) the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation; 6) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate; 7) a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group; 8) a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and 9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.²⁰

In Cohen's definition, as well as in Safran's, diaspora *per se* is not tied to the fact of dispersal, but to a return movement to the territorial homeland. Although Cohen's discussion of diaspora is more nuanced than Safran's, he still reproduces through his list of criteria the conception of fixed and homogeneous communities and the idea of the territorial basis of identity. Hence, he also confines diaspora within the framework of a nation-state and its boundaries. Furthermore, in Cohen's definition, living outside the country of origin in itself is the main criterion. In other words, in Cohen's definition being away from the homeland in itself seems to constitute the diasporic condition. Therefore, in his definition all categories of mobile people, and all who live outside their native places for any reason, constitute diasporas. Accordingly, it can be said that the territorial basis of identity becomes in some respect more essentialised in Cohen's definition, since he generalizes it to all groups of people living somewhere else than their place of origin.

Indeed we need to distinguish diaspora from other kinds of displacement and de-territoriality if the concept is to be analytically productive and useful. But the lists of criteria that give a fixed and a-historical conception of a dynamic process are problematical. While the etymology of the term 'diaspora' as dispersal gives primacy to de-territorialization, movement/flux and "nomadism", etc., the (re)territorial definition of diaspora gives primacy to the opposite, i.e., "spatial" fixity. Whereas the

²⁰ Cohen 1997:26.

term 'diaspora' connotes rootlessness, the (re)territorial notion reconstitutes or recovers diasporic existence as an energy/force routed to one specific goal, territory, home, nation-state.

An alternative approach to the theorization of diaspora, that will be discussed in the following, argues for an open and flexible definition of diaspora. However, there are also differences between scholars who work within this approach. Though they do not explicitly speak of some characteristic of diaspora and do not want to give such a clear definition, the basic characteristics of diaspora can be identified in their discussions. It is this alternative theoretical tradition that is my point of departure, although it does not mean that the experiences of the Kurdish diaspora can fully be analysed through this approach. The Kurdish diaspora's experiences lie somewhere between the African and the Jewish experiences. I will come back to this in Chapters 6–9.

“Location-in-movement”²¹: de-territorial notion of diaspora

This approach derives mainly from the experiences of the African diaspora and focuses on diaspora as a socio-cultural process. Edwards²² considers that the term 'diaspora' appeared after the Second World War in the historical work on black culture and politics, although black intellectuals and artists have long been engaged with themes of internationalism. The use of 'diaspora' emerged from the growing scholarly interest in black internationalism and particularly in the Pan-African movement and the issue of African resistance to colonialism.²³ Edwards points out that the term 'diaspora' was introduced largely to account for differences among dispersed Africans, in a way that a term like Pan-Africanism cannot.

In recent decades, British cultural studies have been an influential voice within diaspora studies and cultural criticism. The most prominent scholars in this field are Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall. Also within social anthropology numerous studies on diasporas have been made. James Clifford

²¹ Delgado and Romero 2000:15.

²² Edwards 2001:45.

²³ Edwards 2001:46.

is one of the influential anthropologists in this field. Some central concepts through which diaspora has been analysed and theorised by the above-mentioned scholars are *roots* and *routes*, *double consciousness*, *the changing same*, and *play of difference*. Despite differences, these concepts imply ambivalence, multiple attachments, and border identities.

Hall stresses heterogeneity, hybridity, and mixture as characteristics of diasporic identities. He argues that the concept of diaspora recognises points of deep and significant difference, as well as many points of similarity, which constitute our way of being.²⁴ However, the boundaries, which constitute diasporic identity, are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference. Diasporic identities are formed negatively through differentiation towards the countries of settlement, and positively through identification with the homelands. However, both of these processes are ambivalent, heterogeneous, and contradictory. Hall writes:

Vis à vis the developed West, we are very much 'the same'. We belong to the marginal, the underdeveloped, the periphery, the 'Other'. ... At the same time we do not stand in the same relation of the 'otherness' to the metropolitan centres. Each has negotiated its economic, political and cultural dependency differently. And this 'difference', whether we like it or not, is already inscribed in our identities.²⁵

This refers to identity formations through a process of continual identification and differentiation. The we-identity that appears as homogeneous and unified in relation to power and resistance, or refusal and recognition with and against the West, is internally heterogeneous and divided along lines of class, gender, sexuality, age, etc. Each of these categories and each individual negotiate their relationship to the majority of society differently. Hall argues that the relation to Africa is also nearly as complex as the relation with the West.²⁶ He states:

²⁴ Hall 1992a:225.

²⁵ Hall 1992a:228.

²⁶ Hall 1992a:233.

Whether it is, in this sense, an origin of our identities, unchanged by four hundred years of displacement, dismemberment, transportation, to which we could in any final or literal sense, return, is more open to doubt. The original 'Africa' is no longer there. It too has been transformed. ... it cannot in any simple sense be merely recovered. ... We can't literally go home again.²⁷

Relating to roots as a site of resistance, a positioning to resist exclusion and racism takes place in a continually ongoing process of "negotiation of identity", differentiations and identifications, a process that Hall calls the *play of difference*.²⁸ He stresses that we cannot speak for "one experience, one identity", without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute precisely the Caribbean's 'uniqueness'.²⁹ Cultural identity in this sense, he argues, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. Hall uses the three presences – African, European, and American – in the Caribbean to illustrate the idea of "traces" in our identity. Difference in this sense is not a pure otherness, and thereby he uses Derrida's term *différance*, which "sets the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the *trace* of its other meanings".³⁰

Roots and *routes* are, according to Clifford, not necessarily opposed but rather two closely related aspects of the process of resistance and survival, break and continuity. Diasporic consciousnesses "make the best of a bad situation"³¹ in a condition marked by loss, marginality, exile and exploitation. From this perspective, these identification processes are com-

²⁷ Hall 1989.

²⁸ Hall 1992a:228.

²⁹ Hall 1992a:225.

³⁰ Hall 1992a:229. Hall quotes Christopher Norris explaining the term *différance*. According to Norris it "remains suspended between the two French verbs 'to differ' and 'to defer' (postpone), both of which contribute to its textual force but neither of which can fully capture its meaning. Language depends on difference, as Saussure showed...the structure of distinctive propositions which make up its basic economy. Where Derrida breaks new ground...is in the extent to which 'differ' shades into 'defer'...the idea that meaning is always deferred, perhaps to this point of an endless supplementarity, by the play of signification". (Hall 1992a:229.)

³¹ Clifford 1997:257.

plex relations, which cannot be seen as a simple binary opposition in terms of past/present, we/them, here and there. Diaspora cultures, as Clifford argues, mediate the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering there.³² Clifford states:

Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots and routes to construct what Gilroy (1987) describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference.³³

This process may not be as much about being African, Kurdish, Muslim, etc. as about being American, European, etc. in a different way. This is what Gilroy, following W.E.B. Du Bois, calls a *double consciousness* which flows from “being both inside and outside the West.”³⁴ It is in Mignolo’s words a ‘border thinking’, which is a necessary consequence of being forced to leave the territory where one previously belonged, and becoming “located in a particular kind of *subaltern position* (my italics).”³⁵

Gilroy analyses the process of diaspora and cultural identity within the history of modernity. His concept of diaspora also highlights the ideological and political dimensions of diaspora. While Hall and Clifford focus more on the cultural production of diaspora, Gilroy also stresses its political dimension. In other words, it can be said that this political dimension is more explicitly discussed and central in Gilroy’s writings on diaspora. The Afro-

³² Ibid.

³³ Clifford 1997:251.

³⁴ Gilroy 1991:4.

³⁵ Delgado and Romero 2000:15. The subaltern (subordinated) is the key analytical term in Gayatri Spivak’s work, derived via the Subaltern Studies groups of historiographers from *The Prison Notebooks*, where Gramsci characteristically employs it to describe rural labour and proletariat. Spivak extends the reach of the term in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” by using it to figure social groups “further down” the social scale and consequently even less visible to colonial and Third World national bourgeois historiography alike; she is especially preoccupied by “subsistence farmers, unorganised peasant labour, the tribals and communities of *zero* workers on the street or in the countryside”. (Moore Gilbert 1997:79)

American thinker W.E.B. Du Bois' concept, *double consciousness*, is central to Gilroy's analysis of the Black diasporas' experiences. He writes:

Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness. By saying this I do not mean to suggest that taking on either or both of these unfinished identities necessarily exhausts the subjective resources of any particular individual. However, where racist, nationalist, or ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate political relationships so that these identities appear to be mutually exclusive, occupying the space between them or trying to demonstrate their continuity has been viewed as a provocative and even oppositional act of political insubordination.³⁶

Gilroy's Black Atlantic opposes nationalist imaginaries since it refers to a transient place and as Mignolo points out, it is "the location of those who have been dis-located from the territory."³⁷ Through Black Atlantic as a "location-in-movement"³⁸ Gilroy has introduced a meaning of 'location' which is not territorial, but "beyond the imaginary of the nation, of the territory with frontiers."³⁹ It is in this sense that Gilroy uses the metaphor of the Black Atlantic and calls it *the counterculture of modernity*. Gilroy describes the concept of diaspora as an alternative to the "metaphysics of 'race', nation, and bounded culture coded into the body";⁴⁰ and problematises the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging. This is one basic and fundamental difference compared to Safran and Cohen's notion of diaspora.

However, it does not mean that diaspora discourses and yearnings are free from a "metaphysics" of being. Therefore, Gilroy argues that the Euro-American modernity still determines the manner in which nationality and identity are understood within diaspora discourses. It conditions, according to him, a continuing aspiration to acquire a supposedly authentic,

³⁶ Gilroy 2003:50.

³⁷ Delgado and Romero 2000:15.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Gilroy 2000:123.

natural and stable identity. Hence, diasporas are not immune to exclusivist ideas of identity and belonging.

While strongly opposing essentialist notions of culture and identity, Gilroy problematises at the same time pluralist notions of identity. He points out that the difficulty with this position is that “in leaving racial essentialism behind by viewing ‘race’ itself as a social and cultural construction, it has been insufficiently alive to the lingering power of specifically racialized forms of power and subordination.”⁴¹ In other words, we need to debate identity in the postcolonial world within those historically specific developments which are characterised by forced and voluntary migration and displacements. Thus, Gilroy points out, “events and political processes that attempt to counter the control of the state or of global forces are in need of macro-narratives from the perspective of coloniality.”⁴² Accordingly, to trace origins in a historical past and identify with them is, as Hall rightly observes, about “using the resources of history, language and culture”⁴³ in the process of identity construction, survival and resistance in specific historical, social and political conditions. These are about representations within which identities are constructed and relate “to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself.”⁴⁴ Gilroy defines this process within diasporas, and the complexity of diaspora identification and consciousness, in a way that challenges both essentialist and pluralist positions by using a term of Leroy Jones (Amiri Baraka), *the changing same*.⁴⁵ Thus, the concept of diaspora disturbs the idea of essential, unchangeable and impenetrable identities “by focusing attention on the sameness within differentiation and the differentiation within sameness”⁴⁶ in analysing intercultural and transcultural processes and forms.⁴⁷ Gilroy describes the term as follows:

⁴¹ Gilroy 1991:5, 2003:68.

⁴² Delgado and Romero 2000:9.

⁴³ Hall 1996:4.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Gilroy 1994:211, 2000:129.

⁴⁶ Gilroy 1994:209.

⁴⁷ Gilroy 1994:207.

The phrase names the problem of diaspora politics and diaspora poetics. The same is present but how can we imagine it as something other than as essence generating the merely accidental. ... It is maintained and modified in what becomes a determinedly non-traditional tradition, for this is not tradition as closed or simple repetition.⁴⁸

It challenges both essential notions with its emphases on sameness and essence, and also pluralist notions with its emphases on (de)construction and change.⁴⁹ Gilroy is critical toward a simple either/or positioning of the essentialist (absolutist) and pluralist (relativist) views, and focuses rather on the complexity of diaspora identities and the complex relationship between “essence” and “deconstruction”, “roots” and “routes” and their continued (re)negotiations. This process will be discussed more closely in the next section.

Essence-claim: essence or politics of position

As discussed above, the descriptive typological or (re)territorial notion begins with diaspora discourses, their claims and their identity politics, and regards them as uniform empirical phenomena. The de-territorial notion regards diaspora discourses and their claims rather as politics of positions and responses to different socio-political and historical processes. Another central difference between these two notions is their conception of identity. The two notions of identity described by Hall are: identity as being (which offers a sense of unity and commonality) and identity as becoming (or a process of identification, which shows the discontinuity in our identity formation). Hall uses the Caribbean identities to explain how the first notion is necessary, but the second one is truer to the post-colonial conditions. The notion of identity as becoming considers the temporary positioning of identity to be “strategic” and arbitrary, while the notion of identity as being considers it to be a fixed essence.

These two notions of identity can, according to Smith, be identified as

⁴⁸ Gilroy 1994:211-212.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

two moments included in all social movements' discourses. Firstly, a moment in which social demands are organised around an "essence", that is, a fixed and a-historical identity like woman-ness, blackness, Jewishness, etc. Central to this *essence-claim*⁵⁰ is liberation of an "essence" which is assumed to have been suppressed and subordinated. The second moment, which is both complementary and contradictory to the first one, implies that each singular essence covers an actual plurality of positions. These two moments have an ambivalent and some times contradictory relationship. On the one hand, through this weakening of essentiality, the entire purpose of each social movement is called into question.⁵¹ On the other hand, "recovering" of the underlying "essence" is seen as a strategy of crucial importance, and such a "liberation" of a "true" identity becomes the highest possible achievement for both the individuals and the collective.⁵² Claims to essence are always political positions, and therefore should be seen and analysed in their context and from both their particular political and individual strategies. It is this aspect that the (re)territorial notion of diaspora fails to take into account.

As an example, the influential diasporic black resistance movement – *Rastafari* – can be mentioned.⁵³ As an "urban social movement"⁵⁴ among black diaspora it has contributed to the construction of a positive black identity as a strategy to resist the colonial notions of blackness, a strategy against colonial subordination and racial exclusion based on the negation of presence to blackness. Smith writes: "The informal process of turning towards Rastafari values – the 'journey to Jah' – is a turning away from white Western influences, Christianity, competitive individualism, and, in the British case, a rejection of traditional British values and racist conceptions of blackness."⁵⁵ The term 'black' is a relatively new construction. It was during the 1970s with the struggle for civil rights, the postcolonial revolu-

⁵⁰ Smith 1994:172.

⁵¹ Smith 1994:172; Gilroy 1991:5 and 2003:68.

⁵² Smith 1994:175-176.

⁵³ Smith 1994:174.

⁵⁴ Gilroy 1987.

⁵⁵ Smith 1994:176.

tion, and reggae music, that the Afro-Caribbean identity became historically accessible for the large majority of Jamaicans at home and abroad.⁵⁶ Smith states that in Jamaica, Rastafari constituted an effective refusal of the colonial identity politics by creating a distinct space at the margins of society, in which blackness became revalued as the trans-historical and transnational spirit of Ethiopia.⁵⁷ At the same time, it has to be pointed out that blackness, as well as all other political/collective identities, is a construction and a positioning, and as such it includes many different positions and internal boundaries. All essential identities are positionings and as such they are “always a politics of identity, a politics of position.”⁵⁸

The term ‘essence-claim’ is a concept for analysing this juxtaposition of contradictory elements in the discourses of social movements.⁵⁹ Mentioning the similar problematic in philosophy and deconstruction, Smith refers to Derrida’s term *metaphysics of presence* according to which “Deconstruction is positioned vis-à-vis presence as a supplement, not as an exterior entity or as an opponent.”⁶⁰ Deconstruction only appears to come after presence and, according to Smith, “actually ‘take place’, wherever there is something...there is never, then, a ‘pure’ deconstructive practice that escapes the metaphysics of presence... Deconstruction shows the impossibility of pure and complete essences, but never replaces essences.”⁶¹

Diversity and heterogeneity can be especially strong among transnational and de-territorialised social movements, as well as diasporas due to their transnational condition and dispersal over different places and different socio-cultural environments. The social and cultural process of diaspora represents a condition marked by diversity and mixture, something that opposes any essential and fixed claim on identity. However, as Gilroy points out, this process of identity in diaspora com-

⁵⁶ Hall 1989.

⁵⁷ Smith 1994:91-92.

⁵⁸ Hall 1992a:226.

⁵⁹ Smith 1994:173.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

munities exists and should be analysed within a historical context marked and dominated by the politics of modernity. It reminds us again about the complexity of this process and the dilemmas and contradictory processes and positions that are integrated with it.

After studying the current theories on diaspora and conducting my own study of the Kurdish diaspora, I have found that the process of formation of collective/political identity among diasporas can be best analysed and understood through a theory of social movements. In other words, diasporas can also be regarded as a kind of social movements. Also Gilroy has taken up this point when he calls black diaspora's cultural and political activities as "voices of social movement" and regards them as an "urban social movement".⁶² He writes: "...social movement theory can provide a valuable starting point from which this analytical and political transformation might be accomplished."⁶³ Further, the concept of social movements is useful for analysing diasporas because it provides theoretical frameworks to analyse the interactions between the social movement and individual needs. Moreover, I agree with those who consider that it is impossible to have a sharp definition, criteria or model which can be adapted to different diasporic groups. I also agree with those who think that the concept of diaspora needs to be defined and distinguished from other theoretical concepts, in order to become a useful analytical concept.⁶⁴ I choose a middle way because I find it necessary to distinguish diaspora from other kinds of displacement and mobility by highlighting its central characteristics. At the same time I am against any rigid list of criteria.

In the following I will discuss these points thoroughly via the concept of social movement. Connecting diaspora with the concept of social movement brings up the central political dimension in diasporic identifi-

⁶² Gilroy 1987:223. In his book *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (1987), Gilroy takes up this subject but he does not develop it further. Nor does he continue the discussion in his later writings on diaspora. Still, it is indirectly present in his writings and analyses of diasporic movements.

⁶³ Gilroy 1987:223-224.

⁶⁴ See for example Wahlbeck 1999.

cations and aspirations, something that needs to be taken into consideration in analysing diasporas. I will also discuss the central features of diaspora which, despite significant differences between notions of diaspora and diasporic experiences, are shared by all of them. The issues of home(land) (as symbol and/or as territorial place), desiring “home”, and politics of location – around which a collective identity takes form – are integrated with the notions of diaspora. Centrality of “home” is connected with the feelings of “homelessness” and traumatic experiences and memories of forced separation. Hence, “homing desire”⁶⁵ is integrated with the diaspora as a response to “dwelling-in-displacement”,⁶⁶ alienation and exclusion. What primarily distinguish diasporas and notions of diaspora from other forms of displacement are their meanings of “home” and thereby their politics of location or politics of “home”.

Diasporic mobilisations as social movements: towards an analytical framework

In their historiography of the term ‘diaspora’, Harris and Edmondson⁶⁷ distinguish two periods in the history of the term ‘African diaspora’: “an initial history of migration and ‘involuntary diaspora’, ...and the subsequent transnational formation of a ‘mobilised diaspora’, a phenomenon particular to the twentieth century.”⁶⁸ The initial period refers to the transatlantic slave trade, while the mobilised diaspora refers to the postcolonial African (migration and) diaspora and formation of the transnational network linking diaspora to the “countries of origin”. In the first period, homeland is a more distant and mythical place, while in the second period homeland is real and diaspora has a relationship with the “original homelands” through

⁶⁵ Brah 1996.

⁶⁶ Clifford 1997:254.

⁶⁷ Cited in Edwards 2001:55.

⁶⁸ Edwards 2001:55. The term “involuntary diaspora” presupposes a notion of voluntary diaspora. It opposes my point of departure in defining diaspora in this study, which is based on the assumption that diasporas are built on involuntary and forced dispersal. It seems that the term ‘diaspora’ in the quotation is used in its literal sense, just as dispersal.

transnational networks. Diasporic mobilisations are organised around political projects related to the home(land) in different ways, and they always involve construction of a collective identity that is reproduced and maintained within these networks. Mobilised African diaspora has emerged, according to Edwards, with the descendant Africans' "consciousness of the identity of their roots, occupational and communications skills, social and economic status, and access to decision-making bodies in their host country."⁶⁹ It means that a certain degree of socio-economic and political resources is one of the ingredients of diasporic mobilisation.

A strict distinction between these two periods can be problematic. The relationship with countries/places of origin can vary depending on different circumstances. With this reservation in mind, two periods can also be distinguished in the case of the Kurdish diaspora, which is the subject of this study. Deportations, forced departure and migration of Kurds can be traced back to at least the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ However, the active creation and mobilisation of transnational networks and activities among Kurdish diaspora are a phenomenon of the late twentieth century. The increase in Kurdish inhabitants in the Western liberal democracies, together with the improvement of the media and communication technology, have provided the conditions for the formation of Kurdish transnational networks and communities. In the following, the main features of diaspora will be discussed through the concept/theory of social movements associated with Melucci and the so-called identity paradigm.

Diasporic consciousness, collective identities, and collective action

The concept of mobilised diaspora includes as one of its components the formation/articulation of diasporic consciousness, i.e. the identification with a (political) project/goal around which the construction of a collective identity and collective action is carried. Social movements can be theo-

⁶⁹ Edwards 2001:55.

⁷⁰ Sheikmous 1990:88-91.

rised as collective/political identity and collective action. Social movements, in Melucci's definition, are associated with specific forms of social change as a result of collective actions. However, social change must be understood as numerous movements at different levels of location in transnational space, rather than a unified whole phenomenon. He argues that the unity which anyhow appears should be seen as a result rather than a point of departure. Therefore, Melucci regards collective action as the manifest level of a social movement that has its basis at the latent level of the social networks of everyday life, where alternative meanings and identities are formed.⁷¹ Thörn distinguishes two dimensions in this process of identity construction within social movements: an inward and an outward. Outwardly, collective identities are constructed in terms of difference and in opposition to other collectives. Inwardly, collective identities are constructed through contradictory interactions between individuals and groups that constitute different standpoints within the movement.⁷²

As a system of action, social movement implies, according to Melucci, three dimensions. One of them is *solidarity*, which is coupled to the feeling and construction of a "we", that is, a collective identity. The second is *social conflict*: the we-identity is defined against antagonists and opponents within a field where struggles around material and cultural values are carried on. The third is *social change*: the movement challenges and exceeds boundaries of the social system within which it acts.⁷³ In the case of Kurds, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, these dimensions are clearly manifested. They correspond also in the case of the historical African and Jewish diasporas. Furthermore, both the fact that social movements bring about some kind of identity transformations,⁷⁴ and the process through which these transformations take place as well, are basically shared by mobilised diasporas. Discussing the activities in black diaspora through the concept of a new social movement, Gilroy points out

⁷¹ Melucci 1991.

⁷² Thörn 1997:115.

⁷³ Melucci 1991:43-5.

⁷⁴ Eyerman and Jamison 1991.

that “their goals involve the transformation of new modes of subordination located outside the immediate process of production and consequently require the reappropriation of space, time, and relationship between individuals in their day to day lives.”⁷⁵

Collective identity is an interactive and common definition, produced by many individuals involved in the process of social definition.⁷⁶ The construction of a collective identity always implies collective action, which according to Melucci is a product of conscious orientations and political discourses. These aspects are also highly integrated in diasporas. An understanding of how the collective action takes form, and how individuals become engaged, requires analysis that involves the processes through which individuals define their common interests and thereby decide to act together.⁷⁷ The collective action’s “middle level” implies, according to Melucci, three dimensions.⁷⁸ The first is *mobilisation potential*, which can be seen as a subjective attitude based on objective circumstances. It has thereby, as one of its prerequisites, a “*deus ex machina*,”⁷⁹ that is, intellectuals, parties, and organisations in order to synchronise objective conditions and subjective attitudes and turn them into action.⁸⁰

Another dimension of collective action is a *recruiting network*, that is, the current networks of social relations, which facilitate the engagement process. The third dimension is *motivation for participation*, that is, about social interactions within the networks. Though the motivation has its roots in individual psychological features, it is built up and developed via interaction.⁸¹ Through interaction within the network, individuals create a common definition of their identity and their goals and thereby provide the possibilities for collective action. Hence, it can be said that participation develops on an individual level; however, it cannot solely be seen as an

⁷⁵ Gilroy 1987:224.

⁷⁶ Melucci 1991:49; Thörn 1997:115.

⁷⁷ Melucci 1991:45.

⁷⁸ Melucci 1991:46, referring to Klandermans and Oegema.

⁷⁹ Melucci 1991:46.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Melucci 1991:47.

individual phenomenon. According to Bowman, both the identity that arises out of such a process, and the politics to which it gives rise, depend on the various experiences that each group (or each individual) mobilises in its particular construction of identity, as well as on how those elements are articulated in the discourse.⁸²

To sum up, the concept of social movement can work as a fruitful analytical framework in the study of identity formations and aspirations within diasporas. In other words, because of the very similarities and shared significant elements, mobilised diasporas can also be analysed as de-territorialised social movements for the creation of collective identities and potentially even “homes”.

Dialectics of diasporic identification

Homing desire: “homelessness” and the politics of “home”

As already discussed, diasporas’ relationship to their homeland is very complex and contradictory. Brah considers: “The *concept* of diaspora places the discourses of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins.*”⁸³ Exile and forced displacement caused by slavery, pogroms, genocide and other forms of terror have all figured in the constitution of diasporas and the reproduction of diasporic identity and consciousness. Exile and forced separation imply a strong existential dimension, and living in exile is described as living in “a state of existential limbo.”⁸⁴ Thus, homing desire and politics of location/home are integrated parts of diasporas. Thereby, it can be said that diasporas are movements for the creation of a “home”. In this process, memory and the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration play important roles.⁸⁵ Yet the questions of what “home”

⁸² Bowman 1994:145.

⁸³ Brah 1996:193.

⁸⁴ Behar 1996:144.

⁸⁵ Gilroy 1994:207.

means, where “home” is, whether it is territorial or symbolic, and how it has to be created are matters of political projects and goals.

Diasporas’ relation to the home(land) is one of the most central issues. It can be said that desiring “home” is strongly related to the diaspora phenomenon and is integrated therein, just as it is integrated with and “essential” to the concept of exile. Hence, forced separation and exile can be seen as issues closely linked to the concept of diaspora. Gilroy analyses diaspora’s relationship to the home(land) by relating this to a process of non-voluntary displacement, usually created by violence.⁸⁶ He writes:

Diaspora identifies a relational network, characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering. It is not just a word of movement, though purposive, urgent movement is integral to it. Under this sign, push factors are a dominant influence. The urgency they introduce makes diaspora more than a vogueish synonym for peregrination or nomadism. Life itself is at stake in the way the word connotes flight following the threat of violence rather than freely chosen experiences of displacement.⁸⁷

Several other scholars also stress the factor of choice in the definition of diaspora.⁸⁸ Skinner defines those who have been expatriated by choice as “diaspora-like” but not a diaspora.⁸⁹ Exile and diaspora are very closely related to each other, though they are not identical.⁹⁰ While exile is very often associated with an individual condition, diaspora has a collective meaning/content. Diaspora implies not only homing desire but also collective action, a movement for creating “home”. Further, diaspora lacks the modernist and cosmopolitan associations of the word ‘exile’.⁹¹ Diasporas’ relationship to the home(land) is situational, and can also be affected in different ways by several interdependent factors such as the age of diaspo-

⁸⁶ Gilroy 1997:328.

⁸⁷ Gilroy 2000:123.

⁸⁸ Skinner 1993; Behar 1996; Brah 1996.

⁸⁹ Skinner 1993:13.

⁹⁰ Gilroy 2000:124.

⁹¹ Gilroy 1997:330.

ras/generation, political and ideological orientation, the political situation in the country of origin and access to it, the political situation in the country of settlement, and the position of the group and individuals in the society. Without considering these factors and without contextualising diasporas' yearnings and aspirations, one risks essentialising different situations and legitimising different politics.

Political projects and politics of home-making are a central aspect of diasporas. This is one central aspect that distinguishes diaspora from transnationalism and other kinds of mobility. All transnationals do not necessarily have memories or myths of a lost or distant homeland that mark diasporas. Further, they all do not have the sense of collective identity and political activities which diaspora implies. Clifford discusses diasporas' relationship to the homeland in terms of a political struggle for the definition of the local, as a distinct community in a context of displacement. 'Local' is a notion which usually stands for intimacy, community and belongingness.⁹² In this sense it is very close and synonymous to the terms "home", community rootedness, and "homeplace".⁹³ The process of creating a local community and identifying with those who are considered as co-members, and reckoned as "we", implies a process of differentiation and distancing from the outside, from "them". Nostalgia for lost origins, displacement and desire for a "home", for the "time past", together with a narrative of displacement, give, according to Hall, rise to a certain imaginary plenitude, "recreating the endless desire to return to 'lost origins', to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning."⁹⁴ It is a recurrent way of confirming identity and belongingness, which mobilises the fact of being "homeless" in order to garner the idea of community. How the question of "origins" is treated in this process, and how the relation to origins is articulated, are of significant importance for the definition of "home". Depending on whether it is defined in naturalised and essentialised terms, or as a historically constituted displacement, its socio-political

⁹² Hannerz 1996.

⁹³ hooks 1990.

⁹⁴ Hall 1992a:236.

and cultural outcome will be different.⁹⁵

Experience of place is always socially constructed, and therefore it is imbricated in the political dimension. Longing for home(land), as well as common experiences of displacement and exile, are powerful symbols that can mobilise people around what Gupta and Ferguson call “popular politics of place” and construct collective identities.⁹⁶ This actualises questions such as how and why spatial meanings are constructed, how isomorphic relations to place, identity, culture, and nation are imagined, as well as who contests this and what is at stake.⁹⁷ The individuals’ experiences, desires, and imaginations of place become politicised when they are absorbed by political discourses, and become politicised by relating to political projects. However, it is important to note that politisation of place is a very common policy pursued by both state ideologies and anti-colonial national movements.⁹⁸ The dilemma lies, according to Gupta and Ferguson, in the fact that such popular politics of place can as easily be conservative as progressive. This is a dilemma that Gilroy also highlights, observing that it has not been openly and explicitly subject to debate between the essentialist and the pluralist views on diaspora and identity.⁹⁹ He points out that diasporic cultural politics are not innocent of nationalist aims, since some of the most violent articulations of purity and racial exclusivism come from diaspora populations. However, as Clifford states, we need to make a distinction between dominant and subaltern aims of nationalism and distinguish “nationalist critical longing, and nostalgic or eschatological vision, from actual nation building.”¹⁰⁰ Still, their effects as a part of a resistance strategy cannot be predicted in advance.¹⁰¹

A “homecoming” can thus be described as one of the aims of diasporic politics, commitments, and desires. Nonetheless, firstly, the possibility, desi-

⁹⁵ Brah 1996:192.

⁹⁶ Gupta and Ferguson 1992:12.

⁹⁷ Gupta and Ferguson 1992:11.

⁹⁸ Gupta and Ferguson 1992:12.

⁹⁹ Gilroy 1994:5.

¹⁰⁰ Clifford 1997:251.

¹⁰¹ Smith 1994:174.

rability and meaning of such a homecoming should not be taken for granted. Secondly, “home” does not necessarily refer to a territorial home, and thus a homecoming does not necessarily mean returning to a territorial place. A homecoming can also mean the sense of total identification with, and belongingness to, a society or a place as in the fulfilment of nostalgia.

Politics of location and meanings of homecomings

Questions of return or homecoming have never been a matter of consensus among diasporas. Within both the African and Jewish diasporas there have been (and are) many contradictory attitudes toward these questions, though they have not always been the focus of analysis. As Clifford notes:

Diaspora cultures, constituted by displacement, may resist such appeals on political principle – as in anti-Zionist Jewish writing, or in black injunctions to ‘stand’ and ‘chat down Babylon’. And they may be structured around a *tension* between return and deferral: ‘religion of the land’/‘religion of the book’ in Jewish tradition; or ‘roots’/‘cut ’n’ mix’ aesthetics in black vernacular cultures.¹⁰²

Homecoming may refer to home both in the symbolic sense and as a territory. Homecoming in the de-territorial conception of diaspora is symbolic because the return movement and territoriality are not at issue. This kind of “home” cannot be contained within national and ethnic categories, and therefore exceeds the frameworks of national or ethnocentric analyses. It conceptualises the spaces between local and global, which are not embedded in ideas of territoriality/fixity and are in opposition to national imaginaries. It is a transnational spatiality which is rather a “location-in-movement.”¹⁰³ This diasporic space is seen less through notions of place and fixity and more in terms of the ex-centric communicative networks that have enabled dispersed populations to converse and interact. That is

¹⁰² Clifford 1997:252.

¹⁰³ Delgado and Romero 2000:15.

why Gilroy calls cultural productions of diaspora, and diaspora identities, the counterculture of modernity.¹⁰⁴

Diaspora identity and consciousness in this sense are connected less with a territory than with common experiences, memories and interactions. Diaspora identification and consciousness exist outside of, and sometimes in opposition to, the modern structures of power pursued by the institutions of nation-states. In the (re)territorial conception of diaspora, on the contrary, homecoming is territorial. In this notion an exclusivist, ethno-national identity is built around a political project of return and re-establishment. The list of criteria in the (re)territorial notion naturalises this political project by taking for granted the desirability and the possibility of return. It ignores the complications that a return may imply. If a return does occur, it can also entail a conflict between the returnees and the resident populations in many respects.¹⁰⁵ Homeland may not be a welcoming place with which homecomers can identify, because a return may turn out to be disruptive and even traumatic. Gilroy also points out that the possibility and desirability of return should not be taken for granted, although he considers that the degree to which return is accessible or desired provides a comparative element according to which “diaspora-histories” and political movement can be classified.¹⁰⁶ Once the possibility of “easy reconciliation” with either place of origin or place of residence exists, diaspora yearning and ambivalence are transformed into an unambiguous exile.¹⁰⁷ Such a homecoming is the final point where the diasporic movement comes to an end, and as Clifford puts it, “homecomings are, by definition, the negation of diaspora.”¹⁰⁸

“The nation-state has regularly been presented as the institutional means to terminate diaspora-dispersal, at one end through assimilation and at the other through return. In either guise, the nation-state brings the distinctive temporality of diaspora life to an abrupt end.”¹⁰⁹ Thus: (1) The

¹⁰⁴ Gilroy 2003:71.

¹⁰⁵ Skinner 1993:11.

¹⁰⁶ Gilroy 1994:208.

¹⁰⁷ Gilroy 1997:330.

¹⁰⁸ Clifford 1997:251.

¹⁰⁹ Gilroy 1994:208.

nation-state as space is the end station of diasporic existence, identity, and community. (2) The primary form of spatial organisation of the political under modernity – the nation-state – is essentially counter-diasporic. This spatiality strives towards collecting “all peoples” and “identities” and placing them in territorial entities on a global scale, while diaspora is characterised by dispersal and movement. However, paradoxically, the diasporic condition of “homelessness” can under specific historical and political conditions give rise to such kinds of spatiality by means of claims on homeland and territory. (3) The (re)territorial conceptions of diasporas are but manifestations of a nationalism not yet fixed, striving towards an end-state.

Summary

In this chapter I have identified two definitions of diaspora: de-territorialised and (re)territorialised. I have also argued for the necessity of highlighting the basic characteristics/features that distinguish diaspora from other kinds of de-territoriality and displacement. These basic features are the centrality of home(land) and homing desire as responses to displacement, exclusion and marginalisation, and the centrality of constructing collective identities around politics of location/home. I have argued that “home” is not necessarily a territorial place, in terms of a territory. Neither does desire for home necessarily imply return. How meanings of home(land) are articulated, and what a “home” signifies, are rather a political issue and the object of political projects.

Further, I have argued that mobilised diasporas can be analysed through a theory of social movements as a useful analytical framework. The centrality of the construction of collective identity and the processes within which it takes place has been my basic argument. Using the concept of social movement also brings the political dimension of diasporic identities and the process of identity formations in these movements into the focus of analysis. It thus provides theoretical tools for exceeding the double bind of essence-deconstruction, and focuses on the socio-political processes as well as political positions. As such it establishes a firm distinction between exile and diaspora, where the former has been conceptualised as an existential

condition of modernity and the latter as a situation that implies exile, yet cannot be reduced to it. As noted above, processes of collective/political identity formation within diasporic social movements are contradictory and multidimensional. Identity construction in this process takes form not only in relation to external collectives. It also takes form through a contradictory interaction between different standpoints within the movement. Accordingly, questions such as whether diasporas are homogeneous ethnic or religious communities or not become in this sense highly irrelevant.

An additional critique is that, in studies of diaspora, men's experiences have in general been taken as norms while women's experiences have been erased. However this tendency is assessed, I do not think that the etymological association of the Greek origin of the term 'diaspora' with sperm can be a serious argument for treating the concept as engendered.¹¹⁰ The term is rather connected with different diasporic projects around which collective identity and collective action are built. The current usage of the term in itself is not gender-specific, and contrary assumptions derive from the idea that equates diaspora with nationalism and ethnicity. This issue will be discussed in Chapter 9.

¹¹⁰ The argument is linguistically misleading in any case, since the Greek word in question primarily referred not to human reproduction but to agricultural sowing, which had no known gender emphasis in early times.

A Journey Through a Research Project: Reflections on Data, Theory and Methodology

Introduction

The research process is a “journey” through a project with a fairly well defined goal and direction. However, it is not a straightforward and easy journey. It involves obstacles, surprises, wrong turns, doubts, and many difficult decisions to make. It is like an adventure in a mysterious territory. It includes moments of doubt and resignation as well as many exciting moments of creativity and pleasure when one finds a way out, solves a puzzle and comes closer to the goal. Neither the theory, the method, nor the final product is exactly what one has imagined it would be. Therefore, Mulinari was right in saying: “The methods section is often written when the research process is finished; i.e., when the researcher has reached a result.”¹ This chapter is to discuss the process by which the study was carried out. It will describe the methodological positioning, the micro-politics of the research and the procedure. Methodological positioning places each product of knowledge into some specific theoretical and political field and distinguishes it from other fields.² In other words, it determines the framework of the research. This study is built on a multi-strategic approach.³ The main feature of this approach is the use of as many relevant sources of data and/or methodological and analytical strategies as possible for the research project.⁴

Methodological considerations

Theory-data and macro-micro in mutual interaction

I have used the qualitative interview method to capture individuals’ experiences. In qualitative interviews, knowledge is built up through an interplay and exchange of points of view between two people who speak together about a subject of mutual interest.⁵ My interviews have focused on the

¹ Mulinari 1999:36.

² Skeggs 1999.

³ Layder 1998.

⁴ Ibid. 68.

⁵ Kvale 1997.

respondents' individual understanding of their complex social and existential condition and how they relate to it. I started with life stories but very soon realised that the most suitable accounts for my purpose were semi-structured interviews. The theoretical point of departure, as well as the aim of the research, determined this shift. My purpose was not to go deeply into each individual's life story. I looked for strategies and ways by which people create meaning and context with the help of their experiences from the past and their experiences of change. I was investigating certain questions in the interviews for which open-ended interviews were not a suitable tool. I was looking for the respondents' experiences of being/becoming Kurds, their experiences of migration and exile, their notions of homeland and of Sweden, and their conceptions of themselves. I was also looking for the formation of diasporic identities and diasporic consciousness, and the construction of collective identity. Further, I wanted to bring out the most general and generalizing elements around certain themes in the interviews. I also wanted to create conditions for a certain degree of comparison for which semi-structured interviews are a useful tool.⁶

My meetings with the respondents and their narratives⁷ have involved many "surprises",⁸ enriching to follow up. They led to methodological and theoretical clarity and consistency. In this study, theory and data have been in continuous mutual interaction and have affected each other actively. The empirical investigation can, as Layder maintains, be used in order to test cer-

⁶ See May 2001:148-152.

⁷ The term 'narrative' is used very often in the study. I use it with a very broad meaning as a "metaphor for telling about lives" (Riessman 1993:17). I do not use the term for any analytical purpose. Indeed articulation of the lived experience by which people tell about their lives and "author themselves" (Geertz 1986:373) is a narrative. However, it is not necessarily a narrative analysis. Using narrative as an analytical concept implies that the story itself becomes the object of the narrative analysis. Analysis in narrative studies focuses on the "form of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers" (Riessman 1993:2). I do not conduct a narrative analysis because I focus on the content of the story and not on the form with which the story is built. My study investigates what people say, what their experiences are about, how they describe their experiences, and why they do as they do.

⁸ Miles and Huberman 1994.

tain aspects of the theoretical model one is using.⁹ It is, he argues, a process of “co-operative two-way borrowing from general theory.”¹⁰ He continues: “In this manner I believe that there is a place for a union between prior theory – acting as a model or guide to research – and theory which has developed out of direct engagement with empirical data and its analysis – acting as a potential modifier and shaper of the theoretical model.”¹¹

The theory–research relation in this study can be described by Layder’s approach of “adaptive theory”, which “falls somewhere between what are variously referred to as ‘theory-testing’ or hypothetico-deductive approaches on the one hand, and grounded-theory (or theory-constructing) approaches on the other.”¹² Adaptive theory is derived from a multi-strategic approach that, according to Layder, produces a “multi-perspectival ‘overview’, which increases the potential for more and more robust theoretical ideas.”¹³ Layder goes on to argue that the issue of induction and deduction is also related to the debate, which concerns the nature of knowledge production in research: that between empiricism and rationalism.¹⁴ He asserts that deduction and induction as well as empiricism and rationalism must be understood as discourses, which are potentially open to each other’s influence and can have constructive interactions.

An important aspect of this, Layder notes, concerns theories of truth upon which rationalism and empiricism are based. However, he recognises that both have something to offer, and that it is important to avoid either the extreme coherence or the extreme correspondence theories since they both lead to exaggerated claims about a better grasp of the truth. And he argues: “In order to look for the most adequate and powerful forms of explanation, adaptive theory draws upon both theories and occupies the intermediate ground between them in an effort to transcend the limitations of both.”¹⁵

⁹ Layder 1998.

¹⁰ Ibid. 15.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Layder 1998:132.

¹³ Layder 1998:68.

¹⁴ Layder 1998:137.

¹⁵ Layder 1998:139.

Layder argues that adaptive theory “endorses an epistemological position which incorporates both the ‘internal’ subjective point of view of social interaction while simultaneously appreciating that such activity always takes place in the context of wider social settings and contextual resources.”¹⁶ It focuses on the interconnections between agency and structure. It is therefore, as he argues, useful to research, which is a concern with a similar focus: “adaptive theory is most pertinent to research which attends to the interweaving of system elements (settings and contexts of activity) with the micro-features (interpersonal encounters) of social life.”¹⁷

I find the adaptive theory approach convincing and useful. In practice, it may indeed be more complex than this. The exact blend of inductive and deductive procedures is dependent on the circumstances of each researcher.¹⁸ It can be determined by the researcher’s basic theoretical and methodological orientation and the character of the study. It is also to some extent dependent on how one defines “reality”, knowledge, the collected data, etc. In this study, the empirical data consist of the respondents’ articulated experiences. I do not have any access to their realities but only to the representations of them. Further, the historical and socio-political frames within which the narratives will be analysed consist of the research done by other researchers. Moreover, selection of these sources in literature are guided by my theoretical and methodological points of departure. Knowledge is situated and located because it is produced by people who are always located in categories of gender, class, nationality, sexuality, age, etc.¹⁹

Experiences, articulations, and discourses

The concept of experience is central in this study. A point of departure for many feminist researchers, for whom experience is a central concept, has been the assumption that women share more or less the same experiences

¹⁶ Layder 1998:140.

¹⁷ Layder 1998:144.

¹⁸ Layder 1998:134.

¹⁹ Haraway 1997.

because they are women. However, this assumption has been increasingly questioned since it does not pay attention to the different material and social realities that divide women.²⁰ Experience as an analytical concept is very useful, though, and accepted within the social sciences and especially in feminist research.

Experience that manifests itself as knowledge about reality in the respondents' narratives has many dimensions. Experience refers both to direct personal experiences and to structural phenomena in one's definition of reality. Essed distinguishes four categories of experience: (a) personal experiences (experiences that one personally has had, or can have witnessed, or has heard about); (b) vicarious experiences (things that happen to others in the same situation/group that one has witnessed or heard about); (c) mediated experiences (something that one learns of through mass media); (d) cognitive experiences (the person's knowledge and perception of reality).²¹ Widerberg distinguishes lived and articulated experiences and notes that "there is a difference between lived experiences and the verbal articulations of experiences."²² However, she points out:

This does not imply that there is no interpretation of lived experiences or that they are 'excluded from' thought and thereby verbal interpretation. It only means that the passing of time on the one hand, and the articulation of the experience – verbally or in writing to another or to oneself as another through objectification on the other, make some important differences. One could perhaps say that the social in the lived experience becomes a more prominent aspect in the articulation of the experience. Its role as speaking partner, 'something' that you talk to and negotiate with, becomes clearer.²³

Essed and Widerberg's definitions of experience differ from that of Skegg, who thinks that it is not the individual who has experience, but the sub-

²⁰ Widerberg 1996; Cotterill 1992.

²¹ Essed 1991:58.

²² Widerberg 1996:130.

²³ Widerberg 1996:130.

ject who is constituted through experience. Hence, she regards experience as central in the construction of subjectivity.²⁴ She does not regard experience as the foundation for knowledge, but she argues that it produces the knowing subject whose identity is constantly under production. These are two different notions of experience, yet they do not exclude each other. It can be said more or less that the constructive character of experience is implicitly included and taken for granted in Widerberg and Essed's definitions. In this study I mainly use the concept of experience presented by Widerberg and Essed. However, it does not exclude the fact that our experiences are constantly involved in our identity process.

Experience, lived or verbally articulated, is according to Widerberg an activity of physical, mental, and verbal nature. It is in the process of articulation of experiences that the researcher enters.²⁵ Thus, it is articulations of experiences that constitute the researchers' data produced in the relation between the researcher and the persons under investigation within a "circular feed-back process".²⁶ And as Riessman points out, there is an inevitable gap between the experience as one lived it and any communication about it.²⁷ The researcher does not have direct access to people's experiences but to the representations and articulations of these.²⁸ There is thus, Widerberg argues, a discursive dimension in articulations that provides a constructive tension in relation to the lived experience. This discursive dimension refers to the way in which people interpret, describe, and represent their lived experiences. They do it via different discourses and from their positions in categories of class, gender, nationality, age, etc. Hence, articulated experience must be analysed also in relation to the social and political discourses through which people construct their perceptions of reality.

In representing the respondents' narratives, discourse analysis has also been used in order to trace the social and political discourses through

²⁴ Skeggs 1999:49.

²⁵ Widerberg 1996:131.

²⁶ Ferrarotti 1981:20.

²⁷ Riessman 1993:10.

²⁸ Geertz 1986:373; Riessman 1993:8.

which they perceive reality. Fairclough defines discourse as something that represents, constitutes and constructs social reality by giving it meaning, at the same time that it is formed by and expresses aspects of this reality. There is consequently, according to him, a dialectic relationship between discourse and social structures.²⁹ van Dijk considers discourse as involving, besides individual perceptions, also socio-cultural perceptions within a certain context.³⁰ As action and interaction in society, the content, structure, and strategy of discourses are multiply connected with underlying thoughts, conceptions, and processes in the society.³¹ Hence, discourses are, according to van Dijk, links between the social and the individual, between perceptions, thoughts and communications. Discourse enters into and influences all social practices. Thus, all social practices have a discursive dimension.³²

The analysis of discourses is, according to Sahlin, primarily intended to answer questions such as: which underlying prerequisites do they contain and what is taken for granted? Which perceptions of reality are they based on and leading to?³³ The discourse analysis should contribute to an understanding of the origins of the discourse in the specific social context and/or its consequences through the construction of reality and the knowledge that it creates.³⁴ As a particular way of presentation, a discourse implies a group of statements that together form what Foucault calls a “discursive formation”.³⁵ The statements relate to each other and share many elements. They refer to the same object and support a certain strategy, and a common institutional or political practice.³⁶ By producing certain kinds of knowledge, discourses can consequently support certain kinds of interests. In this respect discourses can sometimes function as

²⁹ Fairclough 1992:64.

³⁰ van Dijk 1993, 1997a, 1997b.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Hall 1992c:291.

³³ Sahlin 1999:90.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Hall 1992c:291.

³⁶ Ibid.

ideologies. As Hall argues: “A discourse is similar to what sociologists call an ‘ideology’: a set of statements or beliefs which produce knowledge that serves the interests of a particular group or class.”³⁷

Analysis: Individual experiences and social processes

As is evident from the discussion above, one of the main themes in this chapter is the coupling between the individual and the social, historical, and discursive context of which she/he is a part. Experience always involves a process of activity – an action rooted in a social situation. It involves a culturally and historically specific context in which real people exist. Making clear the connection between a person's experiences and the historical process implies the weaving together of the biographical and the historical through a back-and-forth movement, going from the biography to the social system and vice versa.³⁸

Essed uses an analytical model for interview analysis in order to link personal experiences to social processes. She calls it methodology within methodology, because of its double layer of meanings.³⁹ Quoting Polkinghorne, she writes:

In sociological use *Understanding* (with a capital letter) is a process whereby researchers, after grasping the meaning of specific data, translate this information into a form that can serve their research. The other sense of *understanding* (lower case) is broader and can be used to mean any type of comprehension.⁴⁰

In other words, sociological analysis of individual narratives is done by placing them in their social and historical contexts. Which position one takes on this question is a matter of basic methodological points of departure and

³⁷ Hall 1992c:292.

³⁸ Mills 1971; Ferrarotti 1981.

³⁹ Essed 1991:55.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

conceptions of claims about knowledge and truth. It also has social and political consequences. For example, the respondents' narratives about homeland and their relation to it can be analysed in two ways. It can be seen as the "truth" detached from time and space, out of history. In this way their feelings and relations can be essentialised and presented as something natural. The other way is to analyse their desire and their narratives in relation to different discourses and different social, political, and historical contexts. Thus the picture becomes very complex and shows different levels of the social reality we study. The social and political outcome of these two perspectives can also be very different. The difference between the two definitions of diaspora, discussed in Chapter 4, can be explained through these methodological differences; that is, it is not only a theoretical difference but also a methodological one.

In order to have a deep understanding of the respondents' experiences it is necessary to place them within the framework of different contexts – in relationship to different arenas such as postcolonial migration, exile, relationship to Sweden, Kurdish history, the Kurdish movement, and the Kurdish diaspora community. The primary objectives of the analysis are not, however, individual distinctive characteristics, but the general or generalizing elements that the narratives contain. These senses of belonging and identity are not fixed, but have to do with drawing borders and identifications. In that respect, they are situational and relational. They imply boundaries which are moved and displaced. The establishment of boundaries and identifications is a part of everyday life. But for people in flight, they become more intense and sometimes necessary in a context that is made up of quick and, sometimes, fundamental changes.

Interviews take place within specific relations, which are always coloured by relations of gender, class, nationality, age, etc. and all that affects what is said and how it is said.⁴¹ Riessman distinguishes five levels of representation in studying narratives: attending, telling, transcribing, analysing, and reading.⁴² Each level involves both an expansion and a

⁴¹ Widerberg 1996:132; Mulinari 1999.

⁴² Riessman 1993:10.

reduction. All these levels involve selecting features from the ‘whole’ experience as well as adding other interpretive elements. Hence, she argues that the researcher actively makes choices which can be accomplished in different ways. Obviously, she asserts, the agency of the respondent is central to composing narratives from personal experiences, but so are also the actions of others who listen, transcribe, analyse, and finally the readers.⁴³ Riessman points out thereby that an awareness of levels of representation forces us to be more conscious, reflective and cautious about the claims we make. There is not only a need for reflection and consciousness about them, but also a discussion of whether these different levels of interpretation affect the trustworthiness of our research.

Validity of validation criteria in qualitative interviews

In qualitative interviews, the researcher is the most important “tool” in identifying and following up the respondents’ narratives and understandings.⁴⁴ The characteristic of qualitative interviews is, as Widerberg notes, to follow up those parts of the respondent’s narrative that can highlight her/his understanding of the issue in question. How well this is carried out is dependent on the theme in the discussion, as well as the researcher’s and the respondent’s intentions and wishes.⁴⁵ Researchers are part of the society, and their language and pre-understanding are society’s language and pre-understanding. Also the respondents, as knowledge-bearing subjects and actors, have their own intentions and motives. Hence, causality or causal explanations in the sense that they possess within the natural sciences cannot be used within the social sciences and especially in qualitative methods.⁴⁶ These demand “limited location and situated knowledge”.⁴⁷ There is no “objective” knowledge and the only objectivity is, according to

⁴³ Riessman 1993:15.

⁴⁴ Widerberg 2002; Kvale 1997.

⁴⁵ Widerberg 2002:16.

⁴⁶ Widerberg 2002:27.

⁴⁷ Haraway 1997:59; Widerberg 2002.

Haraway, achieved by locating knowledge. She writes: "I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims."⁴⁸ We are marked by our positions in class, gender, nationality, sexuality, age, etc. and our actions are always coloured by them, even as researchers. Haraway rejects claims of "objective knowledge" and argues: "Only those occupying the positions of the dominators are self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated, transcendent, born again."⁴⁹ Objectivity, she argues, is rather achieved via critical positioning.⁵⁰ Thus, she talks rather about a kind of positioning and attitude towards knowledge production than about objective knowledge. By her definition, the latter is not a relevant aim.

Having this in mind, it is understandable why many researchers argue that the concept of verification and the procedures for establishment of validity as they traditionally are used are irrelevant for qualitative research.⁵¹ Kvale ironically calls the concepts of reliability, validity, and generalisability "the holy Trinity of social science".⁵² However, he does not reject the concepts but instead reconceptualises them in a way that is relevant to the interview research. He distinguishes three kinds of generalisability: naturalistic (built on own experiences), statistic (built on statistics), and analytic. The latter is the most relevant to the qualitative interview research. It implies that one makes a well-reflected assessment to see in which sense the results of research can give guidance about what will happen in other situations. It is built upon an analysis of similarities and differences between the situations. Reliability implies, according to Kvale, the consistency of the results of the research. It must be reflected through the whole process, during all stages of the research. Kvale points out, however, that too strong emphasis on reliability can counteract creativity and changea-

⁴⁸ Haraway 1997:63.

⁴⁹ Haraway 1998:62.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Widerberg 2002; Riessman 1993; Mulinari 1999; Kvale 1997, Ferrarotti 1981.

⁵² Kvale 1997.

bility.⁵³ Validity as a quality check must be carried out during the whole process, not only when it is finished.

The conception of objective knowledge has been the basis for the modernistic understanding of truth and validity.⁵⁴ The question of valid knowledge in this sense involves the philosophical question of what truth is. Three classical criteria of truth in philosophy are correspondence, coherence and pragmatic use. The correspondence criterion refers to the agreement between knowledge and external reality. Coherence implies the internal logic and consistency of knowledge. Pragmatic use relates the truth of knowledge to its practical consequences. In the postmodern understanding of knowledge, the basis for such a claim, especially concerning correspondence and coherence criteria, is strongly challenged and rejected. Knowledge is not considered to be a mirror image of reality but rather as a social construction of it. Thus the focus has come to lie on the dialogue about the relation between the methods, the results of the study, and the kind of object studied. Hence, Kvale notes that a shift has occurred from verification to falsification. Searching for absolute knowledge is replaced by the notion of defensible knowledge. Validity has then become a question of making reasonable and convincing interpretations.⁵⁵ Riessman argues that validation is the process through which we make claims for trustworthiness and not ‘truth’.⁵⁶ One criterion of trustworthiness is, according to her, persuasiveness and its “cousin” plausibility.⁵⁷

Kvale points out that too much emphasis on validity can be counter-productive.⁵⁸ He considers that there is a need of “de-mystifying” validation since it is an activity that people pursue in their daily life. Validation is, according to him, ultimately a matter of the researcher’s skilfulness/ability. It implies that the researcher, among other things, must engage in con-

⁵³ Ibid. 210-213.

⁵⁴ Kvale 1997:216.

⁵⁵ Kvale 1997:216-217.

⁵⁶ Riessman 1993:65.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Kvale 1997:227.

tinuous control, questioning, and theorising. Two more criteria of validity, closely related to researchers' efficiency, are communication and pragmatic use. Communication validity is proved by dialogue between competing discourses. Pragmatic validity emphasises usefulness and potential for contributing to change.⁵⁹ This is perhaps more central in feministic research, especially the part that addresses social movements and politics and is oriented towards change.⁶⁰ The feminist methodological points of departure have, according to Mulinari, been influenced by three theoretical interventions: the Frankfurt school, Kuhn's post-empiricism, and social movement theory. A central aim in feministic research influenced by critical theory is to highlight (an)other perception of reality that often has been invisible, silent and denied in the prevalent social system.⁶¹ Thus, I will argue that pragmatic use (in the sense of the political and social consequences of the research), alongside persuasiveness, plausibility, communication, trustworthiness and consistency, is a central criterion for validation of qualitative research.

Demarcation / selection and procedure

During the research process, one is constantly confronted with different choices concerning demarcation and selection, which are closely linked together. Each choice involves exclusion of things that are not embraced in the selection criteria determined by the aim of the study and the theoretical points of departure.

I am studying the process of Kurdish diasporic identity partly within the analytical framework of social movement theory. The concept of diaspora used in this study implies a quite central political dimension. Already here I have made my first demarcation/selection, since the respondents consist of those who in one or another way contribute to this process. All but two of the respondents are active within various Kurdish associations, parties

⁵⁹ Kvale 1997:224-225.

⁶⁰ Kvale 1997:72-73.

⁶¹ Mulinari 1990:47.

and/or other institutions. There are several Kurdish political parties and associations with different ideological and political orientations. However, the purpose of the study is not to study political parties, although it called for identifying the political positions and taking account of them. I have made another demarcation/selection based on these positions. Three main categories can be distinguished – feminists, Marxists and nationalists – which are central for different forms of identity politics, although feminism does not comprise an independent category in the same way that nationalism and Marxism do. These positions are not pure, but often overlap. Kurdish associations and political parties are generally organised around these positions, mainly nationalism and Marxism. Hence, I have tried to include all of these positions in interviews but not necessarily all parties or groups. I have excluded the religious organizations, because they do not have any important role in the Kurdish political identity and are not so extensive either. When it comes to geographical demarcation/selection I have not excluded any; i.e., people from all four countries are included in the study. However, most of the respondents originate from Iran, Iraq, and Turkey which are the source of the vast majority of Kurdish refugees.

Of the total of twenty-two respondents, nineteen have been living in Sweden for at least seven years and three others for less than seven years. The minimum of seven years of settlement in Sweden was a main criterion of demarcation/selection, since time is an important factor in life and in existence of diaspora as a social, historical and political process. As Cohen argues,

... 'time has to pass' before we can know that any community that has migrated 'is really a diaspora'. In other words, one does not announce the information of the diaspora the moment the representatives of a people first get off the boat at Ellis Island (or wherever).⁶²

However, I have made some exceptions. The three respondents who have been in Sweden less than seven years were interesting for the study in other

⁶² Cohen 1997:24.

respects. All respondents have come to Sweden as adults, except for one of them who came here when she was 15 years old. This was also a criterion of demarcation/selection. This is the so-called “first generation” of Kurds in Sweden that are in focus for this study. The youngest one was aged 30 at the time of the interview and the oldest were about 45. The vast majority of them have been politically active in their countries of origin and came to Sweden as political refugees. Almost all of them come from urban areas and have an education. They were all either working or studying at the time of the study. Except two, who are settled in Stockholm, all of them reside in Gothenburg. It would have been preferable to interview people in more places both inside and outside Sweden, but unfortunately I did not have the possibility to do that.

For reasons of confidentiality I will not present the respondents more closely. I have even excluded some quite important information, since it could help in identifying people. The names of the respondents are not their real names. A total of twenty-six persons are interviewed, although only twenty-two are used in the thesis. These consist of nine men and thirteen women. Some of the respondents have been interviewed twice, since with time new questions came up. I have been intentionally a bit cautious and “slow” in completing the interviews. I have done some interviews, withdrawn, worked on them a bit, and then begun interviewing again. This method has been useful in giving me time to work and develop my questioning and interview guide, and thereby to complete the interviews. The interviews were conducted from early 1999 until late 2001 and one interview was made in 2004.⁶³ The number of interviews was not decided in advance. I stopped doing more interviews when I realised that I did not get any new information. This is what in method discussions is called saturation and it is then that one can or should stop to collect additional data.

The contacts with respondents were made in different ways. I knew some of the people already. I met some others in a meeting where I asked them whether they wanted to participate in the study. I contacted some

⁶³ See Appendix 1.

others by way of the chairmen or other members of the associations. Access to respondents has not been a problem at all. The interviews were made in Swedish and Kurdish. The interviews with people coming from Turkey and Syria were made in Swedish because I do not speak the Kurmanji dialect or North Kurdish. With those coming from Iran and Iraq who speak the Sorani dialect or South Kurdish, interviews were made in Kurdish. All interviews were tape-recorded and are transcribed into Swedish. Since the dissertation is written in English, the transcribed narratives have later been translated into English. Hence, the narratives have gone through several translations: from Kurdish to Swedish and from Swedish to English. Moreover, transcription is in itself a kind of translation. Many nuances may go lost in the process of translation and from oral to written expression. Further, translation is not simply about changing the words; it is about different meanings, thoughts and cultural symbols. I have tried to be as exact as possible and to save the meaning and content of the narratives as much as possible. However, the problem of translation is still there.

The interviews mostly took place in the homes of the respondents. Some of the interviews were made at their associations. Two interviews were made at my home, and three at the Department of Sociology. The interviews often had a conversational form, but I was the one who determined the framework of the conversation. I set out my questions, but they were then free to develop them as they wished.⁶⁴ Certain people were more verbal and were happy to talk, while others spoke less. The narratives' emphases were also different for different persons. Each had his/her own favourite theme and talked more about it within the framework of the conversation. The interviews were on average 90 minutes long and were structured by four themes: the respondents' meaning of and relation to homeland; experiences of migration, exile and living in Sweden; their sense of themselves and their identity projects; gender relations. Each of these themes included several questions. Often even many sub-questions were mentioned during the conversation. Each of these themes constitutes

⁶⁴ See Appendix 2 for the reading of the interview guide.

a different chapter in the book. However, the different themes in these chapters and the internal structures of each chapter do not follow the questions in the interview guide. Analysis proceeded in several stages. Already while transcribing the interviews, different analytical themes came up and were formulated. They gradually took their final forms and structures in the chapters.

In the next section I will discuss the micro-politics of research, and how to document and reflect upon the research process. Through a basic motivation and argumentation of the micro-politics of research and procedure, I hope to give readers the possibility to evaluate both the research and its claims.

Micro-politics of research: ethics, roles, and power relations

Objects of study or co-creators: a discussion of ethics

Another aspect of critical theory is, according to Mulinari, to leave behind the sociological tradition according to which the respondents have the experiences and the researcher has the explanations.⁶⁵ It applies to conceptualising the people participating in the study as knowledge-bearing subjects.⁶⁶ The traditional distinction between object and subject illustrates, according to Skeggs, the role of knowledge in the (re)production of power and legitimacy.⁶⁷ From such a standpoint it is only the subject that can know, while the object is what one knows something about.⁶⁸

Opinions are quite divided among researchers in the field of qualitative research concerning the ethical aspects of nearness and distance to the object of study. Hence there is a dilemma inherent in the qualitative interview research. While the ability to emphasise and to focus upon relational interaction and mutuality is essential to qualitative interview research, it is

⁶⁵ Mulinari 1999:74.

⁶⁶ Fine 1994; Essed 1991; Mulinari 1999; Skeggs 1999; Widerberg 2002.

⁶⁷ Skeggs 1999.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 35.

paradoxically just that core which can entail a risk.⁶⁹ Kvale describes the interview as a situation with an asymmetric power relationship: it is the researcher who defines the situation, introduces the questions, etc.⁷⁰ He also describes the interview as a situation between humans, a conversation where the researcher should build up an atmosphere in which the respondents feel secure enough to talk about their feelings and experiences. I agree with Kvale, although a problem is that the power of the researcher is often taken for granted and dominates discussions about research ethics. The power relationship can vary with a number of factors, such as who the interviewed people are.

The problem is not only about the power of the researcher, but also about roles, conceptions, and expectations. Respondents agree to take part in a study because they have a certain idea/conception about the research, and not primarily because of the researcher. This does not mean that the researcher's credibility is unimportant. Concern for the risks of "misusing" one's own power (or for the informants' lack of power) sometimes goes overboard and dominates the discussion of methodology and research ethics. Consequently, the discussion has come to focus on whether or not one should appear as a friend or as a stranger.⁷¹ Indeed, this discussion in feminist research has its origin partly in the assumption that all women have the same experiences, and partly in a different relation to the respondents since the respondents are not regarded as objects but as knowledge-bearing subjects. Hence it raises the question of the relationship between researcher and respondent. Still, the conception of the researcher as very powerful and the respondent as a powerless object is taken for granted in such a discussion.

How do we know, and why do we take it for granted, that respondents want to become friends with the researcher?⁷² How does one know with any certainty that they are in need of the researcher's friendship, if one does not depart from the conception of respondents as an inferior collec-

⁶⁹ Mulinari 1999, Kvale 1997.

⁷⁰ Kvale 1997:117-119.

⁷¹ Cotterill 1992.

⁷² See Cotterill 1992.

tive? The friend/stranger discussion arises from a conception of the respondent as a victim, an object and an infant. In this way, the research's "Other" is unavoidably and unwittingly reproduced in such a discourse. In our relations with the respondents, it is not they who need us, but just the opposite. That they participate is not dependent upon the persona of the researcher, but upon their belief in research as an institution, and upon their conception of its function in the society. However, the authority of research cannot be taken for granted either. As Andersson and Persson point out, far from everybody trusts research or wants to participate in a research project.⁷³ They rather define the relation between researcher and respondents as an exchange relation. They consider, similar to Widerberg,⁷⁴ that respondents also have their intentions and wishes. Perhaps they do not make these explicit because, due to their belief in research, they assume that their demands and expectations will be met. This is the main reason why they participate. The question is whether the researcher lives up to these expectations, or can do so, or should. How does the researcher deal with her/his own and the respondents' conceptions about roles? What attitude does she/he have toward the respondents' expectations? These issues call for a more comprehensive problematic and require profound reflection. The discussion of research ethics should rather be based upon our view of the expectations, conceptions and sometimes the illusions of the respondents in regard to the research project.

The extent of nearness and distance to the respondents is determined by many factors and is situational. There is no general formula in this respect. It depends upon factors such as the purpose of the research, who the respondents are, the purpose for which we interview them, in what positions they participate in the study, etc. A more comprehensive question that also embraces the relationship with the respondents is formulated by Fine.⁷⁵ Her discussion is not about nearness or distance, but she is critical towards the Othering in which also social sciences have been invol-

⁷³ Andersson and Persson 1999:199.

⁷⁴ Widerberg 2002.

⁷⁵ Fine 1994.

ved. For her, the question lies rather on a political level, which implies questions such as whom we are studying, how, and why. Quoting Pratt, she writes: “The people to be othered are homogenized into a collective ‘they’, which is distilled even further into an iconic ‘he’ (the standardized adult male specimen).”⁷⁶ She uses the metaphor of a hyphen to illustrate the multiplicity and complexity of identities:

When we opt, as has been the tradition, simply to write *about* those who have been Othered, we deny the hyphen. ... When we opt, instead, to engage in social struggles *with* those who have been exploited and subjugated, we work the hyphen, revealing far more about ourselves, and far more about the structures of Othering.⁷⁷

By working the hyphen she means “to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations.”⁷⁸ A relation with the respondents is, as Fine points out, a negotiating situation – or rather should be seen as such. It implies that one ought to be able to discuss the conditions and the results with those involved. However, what is customary is that the collaboration is based upon a trust that is taken for granted. That is also a dilemma. It is impossible to avoid the fact that research involves different levels of objectification. But the question is about political positions towards research and its role in the society: it is whether we regard the respondents as “objects” or as knowledge-bearing subjects who are co-creators. Fine writes: “Like bell hooks and Joan Scott, Spivak asks that researchers stop trying to *know* the Other or *give voice to* the Other (Scott, 1991) and listen, instead, to the plural voices of those Othered, as constructors and agents of knowledge.”⁷⁹

How one positions oneself towards these issues is always a political

⁷⁶ Ibid. 74.

⁷⁷ Fine 1994:72.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Fine 1994:75.

decision, which has social consequences. Working within this tradition that I adhere to presupposes that one invents strategies for qualitative analysis which oppose both the reproduction of respondents as the research's "Other" and the romanticisation of them.⁸⁰

The researcher's double role – the dilemma of research

The "object" of the study in the qualitative interview method is an acting, thinking and speaking human subject. However, recognising the respondents as knowledge-bearing subjects and as active participants in the knowledge process does not hide the fact that, in the end, it is the researcher who has the privilege of interpretation, in which an element of objectifying is involved. It is the researcher who sets the framework for the discussion, interprets, and makes the selection of respondents and their experiences.⁸¹ The accounts of the respondents are also partial, just as the selections of the researcher are. In the presentation of the accounts, their experiences are reduced to written assertions where many expressions and nuances may get lost because they often cannot be rendered exactly. This is what Mulinari aims at when she writes about "the quiet violence in the soft method".⁸²

A way to prevent objectification of respondents is, according to Essed, doing research among one's equals. Research among one's equals is, according to her, from some aspects idealistic, because of its non-hierarchical relationship between researcher and respondent – their shared experiences, social equality and natural involvement in the problem.⁸³ It is, she points out, vastly important that one has total respect for the informants' points of view, and shows sincere interest in their narratives. She asserts that being an "insider" gives one the prerequisite to penetrate the experiences of the informants – which is of great value in explorative research.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Fine 1994:76-81.

⁸¹ Skeggs 1999; Mulinari 1999.

⁸² Mulinari 1999:51.

⁸³ Essed 1991:67-68.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Essed makes an important point here, but the problem is that we are not and cannot be equals since we are all, as Haraway argues, multiple in our identities. We are divided by our positions in categories of gender, class, age, sexuality, culture, ideology, politics, nationality, etc. And it is rare that all these aspects of identity coincide when people meet. Further, as Fine argues, a consequence of this may be the essentialist presumption “that only women can/should ‘do’ gender; only people of colour *can*/should do race work”.⁸⁵ I understand both Essed’s and Fine’s positions. However, these positions are not and should not be mutually exclusive.

To have the position of insider offers many advantages for research, provided that one is conscious about its disadvantages and risks and can handle it. As C. Wright Mills asserts, the need is “to use your life experience in your intellectual work, to constantly investigate and interpret it. ... As a social researcher you must control that rather complicated interplay, take hold of your experience and structure it.”⁸⁶ This means that one must deal with two roles at the same time, being simultaneously a researcher and a private person. It demands consciousness about the risks that can arise if one is not able to handle the interplay between these two roles. It is a matter of being able to move from one perspective to another – able to regard the problem from the inside and outside interchangeably. In this manner, to be an “insider” is a resource. To keep one’s distance does not imply having a distance to the subject of research, but having a completely different approach to it while one is totally present. Only then can one acquire a deep understanding of the problem, have a better perception of it and be more conscious of its gravity.

What I have felt as a very sensitive issue in my relationship to the respondents has been their unquestionable trust, as well as their unspoken/implicit expectations about my research. They helped me willingly and generously. Most of them spoke openly about their feelings and some even wept. Their trust makes me feel that I have an enormous responsibility. At the same time, I also have an enormous responsibility as a researcher to do

⁸⁵ Fine 1994:80.

⁸⁶ Mills 1971:214.

meaningful and trustworthy research. I know that I am the one who has the priority in interpreting, and that my interpretations cannot always agree with everyone's expectations or opinions – nor should they necessarily do so. I do not expect that the respondents totally agree with my conclusions, or that all of them should have one and the same opinion.⁸⁷ The prerequisite for eliciting and highlighting their perceptions, knowledge and opinions is that one is sincerely open and receptive to their accounts and experiences and takes them seriously. Further, in analysing their narratives one must put them into the political and historical context, to provide a deep understanding of them and avoid reproducing and legitimising prejudices. Both trustworthy research and faithfulness to respondents are promoted by considering questions such as: “Are the researched re-inscribed into prevailing of powerlessness? Are the micro-politics of the research relationships discussed? And how are questions of difference engaged?”⁸⁸

Where do I stand?

To position oneself as a researcher means to reflect upon one's own role in the research process. It is not to consider differences of power between the researcher and the respondent. Rather it involves a theoretical understanding of how the respondent's experiences create contexts for what is said, what is searched, and what is silenced. It consists of continuous reflection upon one's own presence in the research process, and also in the produced reports.⁸⁹ The research interviewer uses herself/himself as an instrument in the research. And as such, she/he builds upon an implicit bodily and emotional form of knowing that gives a privileged entrance into the life of the interviewee.⁹⁰ Therefore, it is important that the researcher observes her/his own role closely and critically.

My background as a Kurdish-speaker makes my contact with respon-

⁸⁷ See Kvale 1997; Mulinari 1999.

⁸⁸ Bhavani quoted in Mulinari 1999:48.

⁸⁹ Mulinari 1999:47-49.

⁹⁰ Kvale 1997:118.

dents easier. People are trusting. I have also, like them, the position of being an “invandrare”⁹¹ in a Swedish political and cultural context. Their trust and generosity in sharing their experiences, feelings, and knowledge with me greatly facilitated my work. At the same time this implies a great responsibility that demands constant reflection about my role and relation to them and their unspoken expectations of my research. I must continuously think about my double loyalties and roles and find a balance. If there is a big gap between what they thought I was doing and what I actually have done, then there is a problem. The questions that I have to reflect on are: (1) How can I handle this balancing-act in order not to reproduce and/or legitimise prejudices against Kurds – and at the same time conduct trustworthy research?⁹² (2) How can I penetrate the narratives and at the same time keep enough distance when I actually share part of these experiences? The fact is that, as Cotterill points out, the researcher can be very vulnerable, something that I have experienced. There is then a risk that such a situation, if the researcher is not conscious of it, can affect the research and the produced knowledge. Throughout the process I have grappled with these two questions. I want to do trustworthy research and am also very concerned about not betraying the trust of the respondents. However, as mentioned before, these two issues need not conflict in any way. Analysing experiences and narratives in their context, and linking them to social and political processes, exposes the complexity and multiplicity of identities and prevents an Othering of Kurds and their homogenisation into a collective.⁹³

I call myself neither a participating observer, nor what Lundberg terms an “attendant”.⁹⁴ In one way, I am what Essed calls an “insider”,⁹⁵ although in the outside position. Like the respondents, I am in exile, Kurdish-speaking, and identified as an “invandrare” in Sweden, an immi-

⁹¹ The Swedish word for an immigrant; for more discussion see Chapter 3.

⁹² Mulinari 1999.

⁹³ See Fine 1994; Mulinari 1999.

⁹⁴ Lundberg 1989.

⁹⁵ Essed 1991.

grant Other, an outsider. Still, I am an outsider in relation to the respondents since I am the researcher, and I am not working with any Kurdish group, political party or association. Hence, I prefer to place myself somewhere between the insider and the outsider – on the margin or border. As such, I enjoy the privileges of being both inside and outside at the same time, able to see from each perspective. However, I have also suffered the disadvantages of being an outsider. The interviews have frequently awakened memories of traumatic experiences from both the past and present for respondents, and especially for some of them. I have been touched not only as a listener, but also as one who shares parts of those experiences. Thereby I agree with Mulinari that the silent space which the absence of respondents leaves in the researcher's life is not the same as what the researcher's absence creates for respondents.⁹⁶ In order to do trustworthy research one must keep a distance and become a stranger. To be such a stranger, according to her, means daring to be alone with your material, your doubts, your uncertainties and, I would add, with your contradictory feelings. "This," she states, "is what the qualitative researcher's intellectual responsibility is about."⁹⁷

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed methodology, method and the procedure of the research. I have done 22 interviews with Kurdish women and men who are all, except two, settled in Gothenburg. The interviews are semi-structured and made in Kurdish and Swedish. The central analytical concept is that of experience. The respondents' narratives are considered as articulations of their lived experiences. Narratives have been analysed in relation to their social, political, historical and discursive context. The research employs a multi-strategic approach, since it is influenced by several methodological points of departure. It is quite close to the adaptive theory; and quite strongly influenced by feminist research; it also implies a discourse-analytic

⁹⁶ Mulinari 1999:54.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

approach. Further, I have discussed the research ethics and relation to the respondents as knowledge-bearing subjects. My role in the research and my relation to the respondents have also been examined. In relation to the respondents I position myself as both an insider and an outsider, conscious of the advantages and disadvantages of such a position.

PART III

“HOMELESSNESS”, HOMING DESIRE AND POLITICS OF LOCATION

6

Being a Citizen, Kurd, and Immigrant Other in Sweden

Introduction

In order to understand the process of identity among members of the Kurdish diaspora, it is important to look at their experiences of and relations to countries of settlement, and in this case Sweden. Experiences are subjective perceptions of reality, and articulation of experiences must be analysed and understood within the framework of individuals' knowledge and experiences, acquired during their lives. It is not possible to talk about the Kurdish diasporic identity without looking at the collective memories and the history of Kurdish identity. The collective memory, and history, and the individual lived experiences of denial, oppression and treachery as well as resistance, are important points of reference for Kurdish identity and consciousness. The process of construction and formation of Kurdish identity in countries of origin has been discussed in Chapter 2. The focus of this chapter lies on respondents' experiences of being Kurds and immigrants in Sweden. A brief overview of the south-north migration and Western societies' response to it, including Sweden, is already presented in Chapter 3. This chapter can also be regarded as a kind of context seen through the respondents' eyes. It serves as an entrance to and a background for the following chapters, which will focus on respondents' responses and actions based on and related to these experiences.

Experiences of displacement, exile, and otherness

The social and relational dynamic of *remembering together* reflects, according to Meddelton and Edwards,¹ a concern to examine how people collectively constitute and 'function as integrated memory systems'. It means that more than mere pooling of experience and 'memories' is at issue. It is also an active process where people articulate their experiences and discover features of the past that become the context for what they will jointly recall and commemorate.² People's experiences should also be seen as part of their social knowledge, interpreted and constructed through ideological

¹ Meddelton and Edwards 1990.

² *Ibid.* 7.

and political discourses, their beliefs and convictions, and their individual needs, within specific contexts. Recall and commemoration of experiences and memories enter into both the individual's and the collective's identity process. In this process both the past and the present are formed and constructed in a mutual interaction and negotiation. Experiences and knowledge from the present become the interpretive framework for the experiences and memories from the past and vice versa. Our memories and experiences, and also our own sense of ourselves, are under continuous reinterpretation and reevaluation.

The historical, political and socio-cultural situations in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria are different. Consequently, the historical and political requirements and conditions for the Kurdish identity and Kurdish movement in these countries are highly different and Kurds from these countries have different experiences and backgrounds.³ As a result of historical conditions the Kurds have remained far from being a united people. However, all Kurds, irrespective of where they are from, share in different ways, on the one hand, experiences of otherness and treachery, and on the other hand experiences of resistance and community maintenance. These experiences have become “engraved” on their collective consciousness and collective memory that transmit over generations.

Collective memory works like a store of knowledge that goes back to a long time ago, beyond current knowledge.⁴ National trauma and collective memory are subjects related to the construction of political community. Neal⁵ considers that national trauma is not necessarily an individual trauma for all members of a nation. Durability of memories of a trauma in an individual memory resembles the durability of the effect of the trauma in the memory of a nation. These collective memories or “traces and afterlives”⁶ can follow people through their lives and be conveyed in a process of transmission from parents to children.

³ See Chapter 2.

⁴ Neal 1998:201-204.

⁵ Neal 1998.

⁶ Malkki 1997:93.

Exile, forced separation, displacement, and otherness are among the most central elements in Kurdish collective memory and consciousness. They occur very often in literature, popular culture, oral stories, music, and in everyday communication. They are often very emotionally charged and awaken strong feelings. The issue of “home”, homeland, and relation to the homeland is also strongly influenced by the discourse of Kurdish nationalism. The absolute majority of respondents have come to Sweden as political refugees, and have been living in exile for many years. They all have their own individual histories, memories, and lived experiences of exile and forced separation.

The themes of exile and alienation,⁷ which are expressed in words like *xorbet*, *xeriby* (estrangement/alienation), *welate xeriby* (foreign/unknown places or countries), are frequent in respondents’ narratives. They use the word *xeriby* very often when they describe their feelings of living in exile. The Kurdish author Mehmed Uzun,⁸ settled in Sweden, remembers one special phrase which occurred very often in stories that his grandmother narrated for him as a child. The phrase was *welate xeribiye*. His story illustrates the integration of the phrase in Kurdish everyday life and culture.

It was, however, an unforgettable expression that survived as a part of my destiny: *welate xeribiye*. My grandmother...constantly repeated these mysterious words: *welate xeribiye ... welate xeribiye... welate xeribiye...* These words were really mysterious: they referred to countries never seen and never visited – the Caucasian mountains, Yemen’s deserts, the Greek islands, the Magreb... All these places were *welate xeribiye*, mysterious places to which the Kurds found their way but from which they never returned – countries that preserved their mystery and their unbridgeable distance. Their names became an integral part of Kurdish literature. [...] Later, during the endless nights in the prison, I came to know that the road to *welate xeribiye* was covered with

⁷ The term ‘alienation’ is used here in an effort to translate the Kurdish terms *xorbet* and *xeriby*. It is difficult to find an exact equivalent for these terms. Alienation here is used in its general meaning of estrangement. It is used in “its evidence of extensive feelings of a division between *man* and *society*...” (Williams 1976:32).

⁸ Uzun 1998.

Kurdish corpses... During these nights of imprisonment I listened, in the strains from a Kurdish *dengbej* (troubadour), to the sorrow, pain, sense of loss and suffering of those who were sent to *welate xeribiye*. ... The roads that led to *welate xeribiye* also opened for me. In the summer of 1977 I joined the two-hundred-year-long caravan of refugees.⁹

The theme of exile, which often is closely connected with alienation, also occupies a central place in the nationalist discourses that are expressed through different cultural activities. As Ahmadzadeh says, “Kurdish modern literature like Kurdish nationalism was a reaction to the newly-formed Persian, Arabic, and Turkish identities. Kurdish modern literature has been a crucial medium in the hands of Kurdish nationalism towards constructing an identity different from the sovereign identities.”¹⁰ Individual feelings of “homelessness” and alienation correspond with, and find a home in, the political discourses which give expression for such feelings and also construct the notions of an imagined Kurdish community and a Kurdish homeland. Loving and longing for Kurdistan, through poems, songs, stories, and nationalist discourses, has become a part of Kurdish cultural traditions.

Involuntary migration gives rise to a certain psychological condition that distinguishes it from “voluntary” migration. This condition has an impact on refugees and exiles at an existential level. As Kunz observes: “It is the reluctance to uproot oneself, and the absence of positive original motivations to settle elsewhere, which characterizes all refugee decisions and distinguishes the refugee from the voluntary migrants.”¹¹ Studying Kurdish diaspora communities in Finland and Britain, Wahlbeck¹² points out the psychological problems that are the same for Kurdish refugees regardless of their country of origin and country of settlement. He notes that the situation of Kurdish exiles in this respect is the same as that of other exile groups.

⁹ Ibid. 71-73. My translation from Swedish.

¹⁰ Ahmadzadeh 2003:133.

¹¹ Quoted in Wahlbeck 1999:8.

¹² Wahlbeck 1999:121.

As already discussed in Chapter 2, nation-states, as institutions of modernity, entered the Middle East in the aftermath of colonialism. One of the characteristics of these states has been their anti-democratic and authoritarian nature. Any demand for democracy and human rights has been regarded as political crime and resulted in strong punishment and even death. Many of the respondents have directly or indirectly been affected because of their political activities or just for “being” Kurds.

Immigrants and refugees do not enter a vacuum. They join a cultural system, a system of values, norms and social knowledge. In Sweden there is already a perception of the respondents as immigrants, as Kurds and as people born outside Europe.¹³ Meeting Sweden, or meeting Europe as some of the respondents express it, has often been the first meeting with a democratic system and with political freedom. Meeting Sweden has also meant meeting other Kurds and the Kurdish movement’s organisations and institutions. It has also meant opportunities to meet the larger world, intensified interactions, identifications as well as differentiations. All of the respondents appreciate Swedish society very much for the political freedom that they have experienced there. They also appreciate the possibilities and prerequisites that the society allows them as citizens.

However, in Sweden they likewise face racism, otherness and inferiorisation as *invandrare* (immigrants). Respondents’ experiences of being immigrants and Kurds in Sweden are often not positive and many of them have experiences of everyday racism and xenophobia. Almost everybody expresses lack of identity, a need for belongingness and identification. Their ambivalent position as citizen and immigrant marks their relationship to Sweden as well.

Respondents’ political, social and ideological background and their contemporary social and political position affect their relationship to Sweden. In their new environment they begin a process of being forced to revalue and negotiate their sense of themselves, their experiences and knowledge, in order to orientate themselves and find continuity in their

¹³ See Chapter 3.

identity. This process goes on within the framework of their experiences and knowledge, which at the same time have to fit in a new context. Individual experiences and perceptions are never a simple mirror image of reality, but are subjective interpretations of it. In spite of the diversities and differences that divide the Kurdish diasporic community, the Kurdish refugees' relation to Sweden can be analysed within a context where they all encounter Swedish multiculturalism – which implies on the one hand democracy and tolerance, and on the other hand exclusion, inferiorisation and otherness. The following sections include respondents' experiences of Swedish multiculturalism.

Meeting the two faces of Sweden: (I) democracy and “cultural freedom of choice”

The large-scale migration after the Second World War and especially since 1980 has made European societies more multicultural than before. Membership in a political nation-state is more and more separated from membership in a nation as an imagined community. There is consequently an unavoidable conflict and tension between the national state system and migration, since migration challenges the foundation of ethnic principles of citizenship and national belonging. At the same time that immigrants' relationship to the society is regarded as a problem, which is demonstrated in policy-making and discourses excluding immigrants from the national community, it has also raised issues of democracy, human rights and citizenship.¹⁴ Thus multiculturalism has during recent decades become a subject of political debates and policy-making. Multiculturalism has become an integral part of contemporary European politics and has in some places, like Sweden, become the official political ideology. The flip side of this policy is, however, according to Ålund and Schierup, that it makes the ethnic boundaries permanent by acknowledging cultural heritage.¹⁵

Immigrants in Sweden have less political influence than native Swedes

¹⁴ For more discussion see Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Ålund and Schierup 1991:1.

and have not become genuine partners in the political process.¹⁶ However, as citizens they have almost all formal rights that the native Swedes have. The policy on immigrants in Sweden since the mid-1970:s accepts ethnic and cultural diversity, and is based on “cultural freedom of choice”.¹⁷ Accordingly multiculturalism became a significant element in the Swedish model of welfare-state politics. It was intended to create social equality among ethnic groups and immigrants, and provide them with resources for exercising political influence.¹⁸ The structure of tightly regulated labour-market politics has guaranteed immigrants a minimum of social and economic security.

The concept of multiculturalism can imply different perspectives and definitions. The common denominator in scholarly work as well as political debates on multiculturalism is the relation to and the conception of culture. A basic positioning and point of departure for the concept of multiculturalism is, as von Brömssen argues, demand for equality and respect for all human variation and diversity. How these are to come about, though, is highly politicised and is a matter of political debates and policy making. The demand for dissociation and discourse that it reproduces is highly dependent on which meanings are given to the concept.¹⁹ von Brömssen distinguishes two perspectives on multiculturalism: a descriptive one and a normative one. The descriptive perspective alludes to the existence of many different cultures and cultural expressions in the same territory or nation-state. The norm implies that such a situation is normal and desirable. Multiculturalism as a norm can therefore imply questions such as how it should be organised, which legislation is needed, etc. In these questions lie implicit problems of power, freedom, equality and justice which lead to different political positionings.²⁰

¹⁶ Ålund and Schierup 1991.

¹⁷ Soininen 1999:690.

¹⁸ Ålund and Schierup 1991; see also Chapter 3.

¹⁹ von Brömssen 2003:95.

²⁰ von Brömssen 2003:98-100. A prerequisite for the concept as norm is what Charles Taylor (1994) calls “the politics of recognition”. Taylor demands equal recognition of “the specific” in different cultural groups, and also for opportunities for them to form and define their own identity as individuals and culture.

Respondents' experiences of and opinions about multicultural policy are divided due to their political and ideological orientations. However, all of them are very positive about the political freedom and social prerequisites that they have in Sweden. They all agree that as Kurds they have many more rights in Sweden than in countries of origin. Swedish immigrants, including Kurds, are organised in a number of so-called cultural associations, defined by their ethnic or national identities, where the central organisations are closely connected to the central state bureaucracy, with the state as their primary source of finance. *Migrationsverket* (the Swedish Board of Immigration) keeps in constant touch with these organisations and exercises economic control over their activities.²¹ It also defines the boundaries and sets the limits of their activities. Immigrant associations are defined basically as receivers of information and as recreational associations for preserving the immigrants' traditions and cultures. A condition for giving state grants to associations is that they have no connection with religious and/or political activities in Sweden and in countries of origin. In other words, as Schierup says, it is "formed on a purely 'ethnic' principle".²²

Paradoxes of multiculturalism

Opinions on multicultural politics are divided, reflecting the complexity and problems that are built into multiculturalism as a concept and as politics. Multiculturalism implies both inclusion and exclusion at the same time, because people living in the same society are positioned in different cultural groups.²³ Hence it constructs, legitimises, and maintains the ethnic boundaries and concepts of distinct culture and ethnicities. A basic problem in the construction of multiculturalism, according to Yuval-Davis, is the assumption that all members of a cultural collectivity are equally committed to that culture. It leads to the construction of the members of minority communities as homogeneous, and thereby it hides diversity.

²¹ Schierup 1991:117.

²² Schierup 1991:119.

²³ Wahlbeck 1999:15.

es and differences within groups and similarities between different groups.²⁴ Further, as discussed earlier, the concepts of multiculturalism as well as integration presuppose that immigrants' relationships to society are problematic.²⁵ These problematic relations must therefore be regulated and controlled by the state. As Wahlbeck argues: "Multicultural policies presume that there are easily recognizable communities which have clear cultural boundaries and constitute viable ethnic communities. These policies have also played a part in the racialization and culturalization of differences between groups in society."²⁶

Schierup states that Swedish multiculturalism gives rise to a dual policy of standardisation/assimilation on the one hand and of "ethnisation" on the other. On the one hand, immigrant culture and forms of political expression are processed, transformed, assimilated and standardized in order to be fit for Swedish public consumption. On the other hand, single ethnic cultural groups are defined as culturally unique and organizationally separated and are set apart from each other. The multicultural policy and discourse of integration, which according to Wahlbeck²⁷ is the dominant pattern of inclusion in multicultural societies, can also influence immigrant minorities in such a way that "ethnicism"²⁸ or "ethnisation"²⁹ becomes their own dominant ideological discourse and the basic infrastructure for their way of organizing.³⁰ The complexity and contradictory nature of the concept rules out any simplifications in terms of its being entirely good or bad.

"In this society there is really freedom"

Respondents' experiences of Sweden cannot be described as purely negative or positive. Their experiences are too complex and multidimensional. They

²⁴ Yuval-Davis 1993:405.

²⁵ Thörn 2002:97; Ålund and Schierup 1991; Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz and Thörn 1999.

²⁶ Wahlbeck 1999:17.

²⁷ Wahlbeck 1999:14.

²⁸ Cockburn 1998:39.

²⁹ Ålund and Schierup 1991.

³⁰ Schierup 1991:134.

have experiences of racism and exclusion, but they also have experience of being recognised as Kurds which is greatly appreciated. It has to be seen above all in relation to their experiences from the countries of origin, which is often a point of reference and comparison. When respondents talk about the advantages of living in Sweden, it concerns in the first place their political freedom and what this has meant for their political and personal advancement. Shapol tells us about her experience of living in Sweden:

There are many things here that I really appreciate. I feel that I have improved here. We were brought up in a system where you were not allowed to think by yourself and you did not dare to express yourself. All essays that we wrote in school had to be about Saddam Hussein and the Baath party. ... Here I feel that I have advanced, my personality has improved, and I have become more mature. Maybe it is because I have become older, I don't know. ... In this society there is really freedom but it has to be used in the right way.

Living in Sweden has made respondents more conscious about their political and human rights, according to themselves. They think that their political knowledge and awareness have advanced because they possess possibilities and access to different resources. They have acquired more opportunities to study, learn, organise and express themselves. They also recognise that they have learned to be more tolerant towards others. They say that their views and perspectives have widened and they have become more open-minded.

Azad, commenting on the nationally based identities, considers that in Sweden he has become more tolerant and more patient towards other nationalities and their rights. He says:

When I was in Turkey, my national feeling was more emotional. I mean I didn't have so much knowledge about what a nation is or what is the difference between Kurds and other nations, or why we are Kurds, etc. Here there is a possibility to meet other nationalities, and to study. ... Another important change was that I realised that it was not enough to be a member of a nation or to have a national/ethnic feeling. ... You must also be tolerant towards

other nations and cultures. In the same way that you want other nationalities and people to respect you as a Kurd or as a human being you have to respect other nations and other people even if they are occupants.

Sherko thinks that his world-view has become broader since he came to Sweden because of the easy access to the wider world:

I have always had a human feeling, an international feeling. However, this feeling became stronger in Europe because here I felt that the world is bigger than I thought. In Iraq you had access to the world in a limited way. You thought that the world was only Kurdistan and Iraq and a few other places. Here you see Chileans, Swedes, etc. The events in the world reach you quickly. You have access to many information sources, something which was impossible in Iraq.

Particularly nationalists, who constitute the majority of respondents, are very positive about Swedish multiculturalism. This is because many of them have experienced the recognition of Kurdish language and identity for the first time in Sweden. And they appreciate it very much.

“It has been a very nice environment for me”

The respondents appreciate the recognition of national/ethnic identities in Sweden. Some of them have been positively surprised when for the first time they experienced that being a Kurd was not only regarded as not a crime but was even recognised.

Goran talks about how surprised he was in his first meetings with the Swedish authorities:

In Sweden, for example, the first time when the police wanted to talk to me, they asked me if I wanted to have a Kurdish or a Turkish translator. I was very surprised that this was so important in Sweden. Later I realised that here there were both Kurds and Turks. I didn't know before, to be honest. ... Living in Sweden has been very good for me in order to find my identity. It is very important. Here there is more freedom to read whatever you want; to see wha-

tever you want; to discuss. It is very important to meet whoever you want without being afraid. It is a very nice environment. It has been a very nice environment for me. It influenced me in a positive way. However, I can't say that it also influenced my relationship to Sweden in a positive way.

Hana says that she has been very inspired by nationalism in Europe. She often refers to nationalism's role in Europe in order to confirm/defend her nationalist ideology. Also the encounter with other nationalities and their maintenance of national identity, which has become a point of identification/differentiation in the Swedish multicultural society, is an important point of reference for her:

Here I saw that all nationalities like Iranians, Arabs etc. talked very proudly without shame about their origins. ... For me personally, my meeting with Europe was a turning point. ... I did not care to be branded as nationalist and I have always said, okay, I am a nationalist and what is wrong with this? Is it not possible to be both nationalist and modern, defend women's rights, and defend nations' rights? ... As I said, my residence in Europe, the structure of these societies and the nation's sovereignty within the sovereign states and the building of a union between these sovereign states was a turning point for me... You think, okay, my language is not the same as their language (Persian, Arabic, and Turkish); why then shouldn't I say that I am from Kurdistan?

Evin has received her education in Arabic. She cannot write or read in Kurdish but her children, who are grown up in Sweden, have the possibility to learn writing and reading in Kurdish through attending courses in Kurdish. She says:

I talk Kurdish with my children because I want them to learn it. Now after attending courses in Kurdish they have also learned to write and read Kurdish. I cannot write and read in Kurdish but my children have the possibility to learn it here in Sweden. Here you become more conscious about your culture and nationality.

Living in European exile has made a significant impact on, and has provi-

ded the conditions for, the activities and organisations of Kurdish diaspora. Additionally, access to modern communications, transport, and information technology has provided access to information and possibilities for transnational networking. As Ahmadzadeh rightly points out: “Kurdish nationalism, both cultural and political, having faced much harassment in Kurdistan, has found a golden situation in the diaspora from which to narrate its identity and construct a Kurdish ‘imagined community’”³¹ Diaspora Kurds, especially those living in Europe, have played a major role by their contribution to the development of Kurdish language and identity. Many significant Kurdish cultural and political activities, which do not take place in Kurdistan, have found a home in exile. This will be discussed more closely in the next chapter.

Meeting the two faces of Sweden: (II) structural discrimination and everyday racism

As already discussed thoroughly in Chapter 3, a huge body of scholarly research highlights racism, exclusion and alienation faced by refugees and immigrants in the West. Colonial representations, which did not disappear with formal decolonisation, construct the conception of immigrants as a problem, as societies’ “Other”, and make them objects of various controls.³² The situation has even worsened after the attack of September eleventh, especially for Muslims and for people from the so-called Muslim world. A hierarchy of mobilities and the geopoliticising of migration are among the important aspects of the stratification in contemporary global society which affect migrants’/refugees’ everyday life. The relationship between the majority of society and migrants is also highly determined by the social stratifications and power relations at a global scale. Lutz,

³¹ Ahmadzadeh 2003:164.

³² See among others: de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002; Peralta 2002; Lindberg and Dahlstedt 2002; Lindberg and Mattsson 2004; McEachrane & Faye (eds.) 2001; Azar 2001a; Nemati 1998; Thörn 2002; Brune 1996, 1998; Ålund and Schierup 1991; Tesfahounay 1998; Mattsson 2001; de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari (eds.) 2003; Pred 2000. For more discussion see also Chapter 3.

Phoenix, and Yuval-Davis³³ assert that boundaries between Europe and the rest of the world are constantly being fortified. They claim that now, more than ever before, Europe is concerned with legitimising measures to keep out the “alien flood”. Measures to exclude “Others” go hand in hand with the construction of cultural, religious, or “racial” otherness.³⁴ They argue that racist nationalism is gathering force in contemporary Europe through a defensive discourse of constructing a “pure Europe”, cleansed of all foreign and “uncivilised elements”.³⁵ In this process, colour, culture, religion, origin, etc. can all be used to exclude, inferiorise, and exploit the “Other”. Marginalisation, exclusion and otherness that racialised minorities are facing in their everyday life affect their relationship to the society, their identification, and their sense of belonging. Even the official multicultural policy, according to Ålund and Schierup, “signifies a social condition in which, together with the politization of the cultural, a general culturalization of the political language has taken place.”³⁶

Sweden has not been a colonial power, but according to Hall no society can be excluded and defined as un-influenced by the cultural process of colonialism. Colonialism influenced not only the former colonies or colonial powers, but also those societies which formally were not involved.³⁷ Though Sweden was only marginally involved in colonialism, the notion of Swedishness, its boundaries, and the way other cultures are regarded still have to be analysed in relationship to this global process.³⁸ The notion of Swedishness affected by colonial history is a part of a situation where Europe appears as a global centre of knowledge and power.³⁹ The interconnectedness between colonialism, the modern project and the process of globalisation is discussed in the anthology *Sverige och de andra* (Sweden and the others) where a number of authors discuss how the colonial notions of world and

³³ Lutz, Phoenix and Yuval-Davis 1995.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 5.

³⁵ Lutz, Phoenix and Yuval-Davis 1995:8.

³⁶ Ålund and Schierup 1991:2.

³⁷ Hall 1996a.

³⁸ Pred 2000; Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz and Thörn 1999:17; Azar 2001a.

³⁹ McEachrane and Faye 2001:7; Jonsson 2001; Azar 2001a.

colonial power relations influence the social relations in contemporary Sweden.⁴⁰ The contributors discuss how these notions exist and operate within different sections of the society and different activities such as aid assistance, economic research, migration policy, and feminist emancipatory projects.

Brune finds connections between the portrayal of immigrants in newspaper headlines and the ones found in portrayals of the Orient in popular culture.⁴¹ Thereby the symbolic demarcations and conceptual separations expressed in terms of “Us” and “Them” are closely linked with divisions and hierarchy of spaces and places according to the colonial representations. This is, however, not limited to the media. It is also common in everyday conversations about “the immigrant”⁴² and in the labour market,⁴³ as well as in research.⁴⁴ Swedes and ‘Swedishness’ in the discourse on immigration and the labour market stand for the parameter of normality, and are desirable. Accordingly, immigrants represent varying degrees of deviation on a scale of similarity and difference, vis-à-vis the presumed Swedish standard.⁴⁵

As discussed in Chapter 3, the changing of the debate climate during and after the 1980s has given space to and established negative attitudes towards immigrants.⁴⁶ In many ways this was also pointed out by *Diskrimineringsutredningens kartläggning* (the Discrimination Investigation Report) a turning point and a new epoch in Swedish refugee politics.⁴⁷ The process that began during the 1980s culminated when *Ny demokrati* entered the Parliament in 1991. It changed the balance of power in the discursive and political context. Pred considers that racism in the popular imagination has usually been associated with violations and provocations by the extreme right. However, since mid-1998, there were according to Pred:

⁴⁰ McEachrane and Faye (eds.) 2001.

⁴¹ Brune 1990.

⁴² Brnic 2002.

⁴³ de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002; Carlgren, Andreas: *Dagens Nyheter* 20 November 2002 and 14 March 2004; Integrationsverket 2004.

⁴⁴ Mattsson 2001.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 195.

⁴⁶ Svanberg and Tydén 1991; Nematı 1998.

⁴⁷ Björk 1997.

clear signs that a new sensitivity to more widespread forms of racism was beginning to emerge. That racially inspired petty acts of everyday and innumerable intolerance and discrimination were becoming less and less easy to avoid acknowledging in some measure.⁴⁸

Everyday racism in the form of labour market discrimination,⁴⁹ in housing segregation,⁵⁰ and even in everyday conversations about immigrants,⁵¹ is illustrated by several studies.

Moreover, two reports published by *Integrationsverket* (the Board of Integration in Sweden) in 2002 and 2004 recognise that people born outside Europe are subject to systematic and structural discrimination in society and especially in the labour market.⁵² Andreas Carlgren, the head of the Board, states in an article published in 2002 that possibilities to get a job, your income and your job sector can be determined by your origin, not by your qualifications. He adds that the probability of getting a job promotion increases if you have a whiter skin and if you are born in countries closer to the EU and Sweden.⁵³ He points to the same problem even in 2004. In an article in a Swedish newspaper he writes that highly educated persons are excluded from the labour market because of the colour of their skin.⁵⁴ As illustrated in these reports, in recent years the Swedish authorities have realised the problem of everyday racism and structural discrimination of immigrants and its negative outcomes for the society in general.

Experiencing otherness as “invandrare” (immigrants)

The nearest English equivalent for the terms *invandrare* and *utlänning* are immigrant and “foreigner”. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the verb

⁴⁸ Pred 2000:270.

⁴⁹ Mattsson 2001; de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002; Integrationsverket 2004.

⁵⁰ de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari (eds.) 2003; Integrationsverket 2004; Molina 1997.

⁵¹ Brnic 2002:162.

⁵² de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002; Integrationsverket 2004.

⁵³ Andreas, Carlgre: Dagens Nyheter 20 November 2002.

⁵⁴ Andreas, Carlgre: Dagens Nyheter 14 March 2004.

“immigrate” describes a situation where one comes “as a permanent resident to a country other than one’s native land”, and the term “foreigner” means “a person born in or coming from a foreign country”. In the Swedish *Bonniers svenska ordbok*, the verb *invandra* means “to move in from another country”, an *invandrare* is a “person who has moved in from another country”, and an *utlänning* is “a person from another country”. All these terms bear notions of outside and inside through prepositional prefixes – in and out. They assume a centre as the point of departure, in relation to which inside and outside are defined. The Swedish term *utlänning* is even closer to the German term *ausländer*. According to Rätzel, *ausländer* means literally a person who belongs outside the (German) country.⁵⁵ It also implies an assumption of negation, non-belongingness. Moreover, since *vandra* in Swedish means to walk, wander, trudge and the like, *invandrare* carries connotations of pre-modern, purposeless infiltration that foster a perception of immigrants as border-violators rather than legitimate travellers and sensible settlers.

To be a Kurd in Sweden is not a problem in the same way that it was in the countries of origin. You can be a Kurd and work actively for your Kurdish identity in a quite favourable environment. However, for the majority of society you are just an immigrant and excluded from the national community through cultural, ethnic, racial boundaries. Hence, Kurds in Sweden are facing different kinds of otherness than they used to experience. The inferiorised collective immigrant identity that determines society’s relation to them is the negative mirror image of the Swedish identity. It is also documented by Wahlbeck in the case of Kurdish refugees in Britain and Finland. He states that most of the Kurdish refugees in these countries experienced various types of racism and xenophobia in their position of migrants.⁵⁶ Respondents’ narratives illustrate the everyday racism that they are facing as immigrants in Sweden.

⁵⁵ Rätzel 1994:83-4.

⁵⁶ Wahlbeck 1999:150.

“I have seen many things like that but I have tried to ignore them”

Hamid says that he has many experiences of discrimination. He points out that especially after September 11, 2001, the situation has become worse:

As an immigrant you see many examples in different occasions. In some places you can see that you are treated differently. However, if you pay so much attention to that or if you are very sensitive it will be difficult for you. Once, a friend of mine and I went to a petrol station to rent a car. My friend asked for a car and paid one thousand crowns in deposition. But they asked both of us to show our driving licenses, our ID-cards and our Visa cards. It took a long time to check our cards. Meanwhile a Swedish woman came in and wanted to rent a car. It was very different for her. She did not need to go through so many controls and everything was finished within a short time. When I protested and asked them why they checked us so much, they said that it is the rule. I was very disappointed. I can also give you more examples. Such things happened to me before too. For example in the bank you see that they treat you badly. I do not mean that they say bad/unpleasant things but they behave in such a way, their body language is not nice or they do not trust you or do not respect you. They ignore you and do not care if you are waiting a long time. I have seen many things like that but I have tried to ignore them. I cannot pay so much attention to these things because in that case my life will become very difficult. You cannot pay so much attention to them.

Repressing memories of such experiences is a strategy for Hamid to survive and to protect himself. He does not deny that he has been exposed to discrimination and everyday racism. But he has learned to live with these and he does not let them disturb his daily life. They have become a “natural” part of his daily life, so that he need not notice them any more.

In addition, there are people who repress such experiences and deny them. According to a report from the Board of Integration,⁵⁷ there is also a will among immigrants to deny and repress the fact that they have been exposed to discrimination. There is a quite strong dislike of regarding spe-

⁵⁷ de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002.

cial treatment and humiliating attitudes as discrimination. Denial of discrimination can even be seen as a way to avoid the stigma that can be associated with the role of a victim of discrimination. To acknowledge discrimination can be experienced as shameful and degrading.⁵⁸ Denial of being exposed to discrimination can be even a defence against a discourse that blames the victims of racism and discrimination. This discourse regards such crimes as reactions to immigrants' failures and inability to adapt. This kind of argumentation can be caused by the assumption that being a victim of racism is somehow connected with the victim's failure to fit into the society or to be successful, a discourse that puts the responsibility on the victim. It can also be due to the lack of knowledge about everyday racism, since racism is associated only with the violent actions of skinheads or neo-Nazis.

Hana points out an important aspect in her narratives, namely class that cuts across ethnic boundaries. She says:

I am satisfied with my situation and I think that I have been successful here. I have never met racism or xenophobia or inferiorisation because of the colour of my hair, or as a foreigner, or as somebody from an underdeveloped country. I have never met such things, but nevertheless I feel *xeriby* (alienation) when for example I see that I am neglected in some situations. Or when they ask questions like do you have this and that in your country? These questions communicate an immediate distance between you and that person. Or sometimes you see that even though a person is not as well informed as you, is less educated than you, has less general knowledge and experience than you, still he/she tries to put you down and make you feel inferior and ignorant. [...] I don't see myself as having failed, considering how many years I have been here. However, I know that foreigners are exposed to this tendency. I mean to separate them from the society, to "look down" on districts with a high density of immigrants, to place them low in order of preference and see them as culturally inferior. People think that it will degrade them if they settle down there. This has even influenced the immigrants' conception of themselves. An immigrant who gets a higher position in the society does not want to live in such districts any more.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 59-60.

“When you go to a shop you see that the assistants look at you suspiciously”
Azad and Shilan give us other examples of everyday racism, mistrust, and negative bias about immigrants. Feelings that they are degraded as immigrants and *svartskallar* (blackheads)⁵⁹ arise very often in the narratives. There are many situations in the everyday interactions between people where racism and discrimination occur. This can happen in a shop, in the bank, at the workplace, on the bus, etc. Azad tells about a memory when he was attending the language course for immigrants:

When we came to Sweden and were learning the language it happened that people “looked down” on us. Something that I will never forget is that our teacher in the language course for immigrants asked us if we had milk in our countries and things like that. He/she thought that we were from another planet or we came to Sweden because we didn’t have anything to eat. They saw us like that. ...

Shilan tells about a recurrent experience of suspiciousness towards her as an immigrant. This is mentioned by other respondents too.

There is to some extent mistrust towards foreigners. For example when you go into a shop you see that the assistants look at you suspiciously. They are worried and think that you will pinch something. This distrustfulness hurts, it disturbs me. They do not know you and do not know what kind of person you are. The assistant’s look is like torture for me. Some old women for example do not like foreigners and show it very clearly. ...

“A coloured man is less respected compared to a coloured woman”
As is already documented by previous research, immigrant men are more exposed to discrimination and racism than women.⁶⁰ Shilan’s and many

⁵⁹ The Swedish word *svartskalle* (blackhead) is a word with a very negative connotation, used to express dislike of immigrants and especially those of colour.

⁶⁰ Bredström 2003; See also de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari (eds.) 2003.

other respondents' experiences confirm this. She notices that there is a difference between how women and men are treated.

What I have noticed is that they (Swedes) first of all do not like foreign men and especially black men. Generally, a coloured man is less respected than a coloured woman. I have often seen that my husband does not have the same possibilities that I have. Men who are from the Muslim countries, according to Swedish society, are oppressors and dictators at home and their wives are seen as victims. Therefore women get more opportunities. I personally have not faced any obstacle but I have seen that there is much opposition against male foreigners and it is very obvious.

Reza has his own experience of being humiliated as a “blackhead man”. He says:

They think that all foreign men batter their wives. It happens that they try to teach you how you should treat your wife well. I get surprised/amazed at such things. Without knowing me the person tells me how I should behave and things like that. These things have happened to me. I get surprised how they can be like that. They don't know me and they don't know anything about me. When they get to know you more closely they become surprised when they realise that you are not as they thought.

Azad is critical towards the Swedish media for representing immigrants in a negative and generalised way. He admits that there are individuals among different immigrant groups that commit crimes. The problem is that the whole nation becomes responsible for them. If an immigrant man commits a crime all immigrant men are seen as responsible. The collective and negative conceptions of immigrants in Swedish media have been taken up and discussed by many scholars.⁶¹ Azad says:

If a non-Swede commits a crime then they talk about Kurds, Somalis, Iraqis,

⁶¹ Brune 1998, 1990, 1996; Nemati 1998; Grip 2002.

Iranians, etc. When a Swede commits a crime, he has a name. They say that Kalle, Thomas etc. has done it. The individual is responsible for his/her crime, not all the Swedish nation; but if a foreigner commits a crime, the whole nation gets responsibility for it. The person has no name but he is an Arab, a Kurd, a Persian etc. This is very bad.

“I am a Master of Engineering and get a job as a cleaner”

A more systematic and structural discrimination is what respondents experience in their contacts with the labour market, and also in the way mass media present immigrants. The Swedish National Board of Integration in two yearly reports underlines that the most intensive discrimination is experienced when people are applying for jobs.⁶² Sherko has his own experience of this:

Nowhere can create fundamentalism like Europe. [...] Here it is not like Iraq where they kill me physically because I am a Kurd. Here they kill my soul. I am a Master of Engineering from my country. Nobody asked me what I had done before, about my studies and so on. I applied for a job at the employment office for technical work. The official in the employment office knew everything about me and had all my documents. But she sent me to a job as cleaner. This is a tragedy. I didn't expect a job as a Master of Engineering, but she would never tell a Swede with the same education to work as a cleaner, would she? ... In Iran, Iraq and all other dictatorships they want to know what is in your head. They are interested in your dreams, your visions and your thoughts. ... Here the black colour of your hair, the colour of your skin becomes important. There, it was the content of your head, which was the problem – while in Sweden, a country associated with freedom, the colour of your head becomes a problem. This is the tragedy. The repression which I faced there was very clear. They came and killed you directly. Here they don't kill you physically but they create a psychic stress which is heavier.

⁶² de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002; Integrationsverket 2004.

According to one of the reports, the experiences of discrimination vary among different immigrant groups in Sweden. People born in Africa and/or Muslims are the most exposed. The total picture shows that those who most experience discrimination are people born in Africa, Iran, Ethiopia (as a distinct category), Turkey, and Latin America. The least exposed groups are people born in Denmark, Finland, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Vietnam. Those who experience discrimination in the labour market are people born in Africa, and after that people born in Iran, Ethiopia, and Iraq.⁶³ Kurds are not mentioned in the report as a distinct group. They are, however, included in the groups born in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. This pattern is valid for almost all other arenas where discrimination occurs.

Many of the respondents point out that they have personal experiences of discrimination and racism primarily as immigrants. This is because they are visible as immigrants in the Swedish public space since they do not look like Swedes or Europeans. It is easy to identify them as non-Swedes and as non-Europeans. But it is not easy (if at all possible) to identify them as Kurds because they merge into the category of non-European immigrants. However, the most conspicuous feature of respondents' experiences concerning how they are regarded as Kurds in Sweden is gender relations.

In the late 1990s and early 2000 two murders of Kurdish women by their male relatives dominated the discussions and the notion of Kurds in Swedish media and public debate. A new notion, "honour killing", has entered the discourse on immigrants. These crimes deepened the already existing conceptions of immigrant men from outside Europe as violent, and of immigrant women as victims and subjugated by men's control. Respondents feel that Swedes see all Kurdish men as woman-killers and all Kurdish women as victims of men's violence and control.

Experiencing otherness as Kurds

The Swedish debate on "honour killing" illustrated how the patriarchal

⁶³ de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002:56.

structures of power and dominance are explained and defined as cultural phenomena, specific to “immigrant cultures”. This debate in Swedish media and among authorities assumed very often that specific peoples, allow, promote and accept murder of women. This was represented as the counterpart and the opposite of Swedish/Western culture, which was implicitly represented as egalitarian.⁶⁴ In this debate the problem, with all its complexity, was reduced to culture perceived as something fixed and impenetrable. The social, political, and historical context and background and structures of power and dominance, which promote such a crime, were largely ignored.

Discourses of culture, according to Ålund and Schierup, have become both discriminatory and increasingly important in legitimating selective immigration and refugee policies.⁶⁵ They point out the emergence of a new common-sense cultural racism, in which the “dominant ideological trend has been towards culturalizing the ‘problematic’ rather than problematizing the structural restraints. Ethnocentrism seems to go hand in hand with cultural determinism and an emerging new cultural racism.”⁶⁶ Debate on “honour killing” illustrates how gender relations and women’s oppression are explained within the framework of the specific cultures and how they create racial boundaries. Culturalisation of the problem, and the discursive construction of gender oppression as a cultural act, delimit and associate women’s subordination and male dominance with some specific cultures. This construction, according to de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari, gives way to, and is the ground for, the conception that patriarchal structures only occur in certain cultures which exist within certain national boundaries.⁶⁷ Often in such debates there is a total absence of attention to maltreatment, rape, or cruelties that Swedish men commit against women.⁶⁸ These conceptions are based on and can be explained

⁶⁴ Grip 2002; de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2003:24.

⁶⁵ Ålund and Schierup 1991:9.

⁶⁶ Ålund and Schierup 1991:11.

⁶⁷ los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari 2003:24.

⁶⁸ Bredström 2003. In the anthology *Maktens (o)lika förklådnader*, de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari (eds.) 2003, in which Bredström’s article is included, there are many discussions and case studies concerning the problematic of racism and sexism.

through the concept of cultural racism, which characterises contemporary racism. It differs from traditional racism, as it classifies people in order of preference based on cultural differences where Western culture constitutes the norm.⁶⁹ The hidden logic of this cultural racism is the idea of a fixed cultural essence. Consequently, “other cultures” are seen as different from “our culture” and therefore disturbing the normal order.⁷⁰ In many cases of discrimination and exclusion, cultural differences are presented as an explanation.⁷¹ The discourse of cultural difference is based on a conception of a supposedly homogeneous, “modern”, and “normal” Swedish culture and a conception of a “traditional”, “foreign”, “disorderly” and “abnormal” immigrant culture.⁷²

Violence in general, and gender violence specifically, are what according to the respondents are most closely connected with the Kurds. They claim that Kurds are usually represented in Swedish media and Swedish public opinion as murderous and violent. During the late 1980s Kurds were suspected of the assassination of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme and were associated with violence and terrorism. However, the respondents state that, during the 1990s and since then, understanding and knowledge of the Kurdish question have gradually increased.

Dilsha says that Kurds are still seen as violent. She points out that especially those who have not had any contact with Kurds hold more of these conceptions. She says:

The question of the assassination of Palme and the fact that it was associated with Kurds made people more scared of Kurds. ... Each time you have to explain to people that it is not like that. Each time you have to defend yourself and explain because they are not aware of the situation. It hurts, doesn't it? When they look at you and say, “you look normal”. Of course I

⁶⁹ de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari (eds.) 2003; Ålund and Schierup 1991; Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz and Thörn 1999; Azar 2001a; Mattsson 2001; Jonsson 2004.

⁷⁰ Ålund and Schierup 1991:10; de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002:56.

⁷¹ Pred 2000; Mattsson 2001.

⁷² Grip 2002.

am a normal human being like you. I am not a murderer. Then they say “my God, how we thought wrong”. Sometimes it hurts you. ... Of course those who have contact with Kurds know about us while those who don't have contact are scared of us. But otherwise I don't think that Swedes care so much about who you are and for example why you are demonstrating and so on. They don't care so much. You are seen as an immigrant irrespective of where you are from or who you are.

The respondents mention different degrees of distance, indifference and dislike that they meet as Kurds and as immigrants. In particular, they often mention feeling that “Swedes” look down on them. However, a number of the respondents point out the importance of direct and more personal contact in order to prevent bias and collective notions of people.

“As if killing women is our culture”

All respondents underline that conceptions of Kurds in Sweden are negative. They are critical of generalisations which present Kurdish men as violent and as potential murders of their female relatives, and Kurdish women as victims and subjugated. Critiques of Swedish media occur very often in the narratives. Both Azad and Salah mention the negative descriptions of Kurds in media. Both point out the negative conceptions of gender relations among Kurds.

Azad is very disturbed when he talks about the generalisations which, he thinks, characterise the debate on immigrant minorities, especially Kurds:

Swedish media present Kurds in a very bad way, especially concerning relations between men and women. For example, the case of the Kurdish girl who was killed in Iraqi Kurdistan came up every day in the media as if killing women is our culture.⁷³ It is not true. It has nothing to do with culture.

⁷³ When this interview, as well as others, was made, a first case of “honour-killing” had already taken place in Sweden in 1999 and received great media attention. Pela Atroschi was shot to death by her own father since she rejected an imposed marriage. The family was living in Sweden but the murder took place in Iraqi Kurdistan during the family's vacation.

Nobody asks for example how many Swedish women are killed every year; how many are raped every day, how many are battered by their husbands which in many cases they do not dare to report to the police because they are afraid of persecutions. ... Nobody asks if it is also Swedish culture. Of course it is not Swedish culture, just as the other is not Kurdish culture. They show a misrepresented picture of Kurds. Bad things happen in every society and one cannot connect them with the whole nation's culture.

Salah says that there is an understanding and knowledge of the Kurds' situation and their problems of national oppression. However, he admits that there are negative conceptions about Kurds in media and especially concerning gender relations.

Generally they see Kurds as a nation whose land is occupied, and that they are murdered, and persecuted. They know that. But unfortunately there are people who have negative conceptions about Kurds. They think that Kurds are aggressive and that they like war and weapons. Generally it can be said that they have actually a negative conception, unfortunately. ... they do not discuss Kurds so much. But what comes up in media concerning Kurdish women is mainly about murder, maltreatment, etc. It is only the negative things that come up. It means that they think that in Kurdish society killing women is a rule.

Concerning how Kurdish women and men are considered in Swedish society, Azad says:

Swedes think that all Kurds, Arabs, etc. are backward/uncivilised nations and that all of them batter their wives and that women do not have a right to say anything. They show more sympathy for women because they have a conception that all Kurdish men batter their wives. They think so. That is why they feel sorry for Kurdish women and see them as helpless victims who need help. They have such biases. They treat Kurdish women as children who know nothing and need to be helped and liberated.

Racialised boundaries stress identity as some kind of racial or cultural property, which in a natural way marks boundaries between human collectives. The cultural boundaries – which, contrary to the absolute boundaries of race-biology, introduce an idea of differences based on concepts such as development, change, progress and education – are based upon drawing up a relative border with a time axis, along which cultures and people can be measured by reference to their state of civilization.⁷⁴ These boundaries imply presuppositions about “the other”, which are related to certain places and cultures.

Studying four Swedish newspapers’ writings on a case of “honour killing” in early 2002,⁷⁵ Grip⁷⁶ finds some significant points, in agreement with other studies.⁷⁷ Despite the political differences that play a role in how different newspapers describe and present the “Other”, she concludes that generally there is a tendency to describe Us and Them in terms of difference by saying that “they are collective, and We are individuals; they are traditional, and We are modern; they are oppressed, and We are equal.”⁷⁸ These crimes are often represented outside their context. Culture becomes their only explanation. According to various studies, immigrant men are presented as women oppressors, guided by an oppressor culture. Kurds are those who are most associated with such cultural representations. The report from the Board of Integration⁷⁹ states that since the 1970s immigrant women’s and men’s relation to gender equality has been a recurrent theme when differences between the inhabitants born in Sweden and those born outside Sweden have been discussed. According to the report from the National Board of Integration, many researchers have noticed “how

⁷⁴ Azar 2001a.

⁷⁵ Fadime Shahindal was a young woman from a family of Kurdish origin. On 21 January 2002, Fadime’s father shot her dead because she had rejected an arranged marriage and chosen her own partner. Already during 1998 her case became well-known in Sweden because of huge media attention and a highly publicised court case against her father and brother who had threatened to kill her.

⁷⁶ Grip 2002.

⁷⁷ See among others, de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari (eds.) 2003; de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002:56.

⁷⁸ Grip 2002:46.

⁷⁹ de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002.

the debate about honour killing, patriarchal families, and the situation of ‘exposed girls’⁸⁰ have given way to a discourse in media and among authorities that presents immigrants as divergent from Swedish gender equality. Another consequence of this discourse is, according to authorities, that “Swedishness has come to be associated with a country and a culture that offers a unique free zone from gender oppression.”⁸¹

“Did your father force you to marry?”

Shapol, Shirin and Nashmil tell us about some of their personal experiences as Kurdish women. Their narratives demonstrate the conception of Kurdish women as subordinate and under control of their male relatives. They say that they have to defend themselves very often against such conceptions.

Shapol: As soon as you say that you got married in young age, they say, “Did your father force you to marry?” I had a chat with some colleagues at work. As soon as I said that I married my husband when I was twenty-one, they suddenly felt sorry for me and said: “Did your father force you to get married?” I said no, we also do marry because of love. They have such a notion about us, that men always decide for us women.

Shirin: My colleagues did not expect that I could travel or have activities by myself, because my husband would not allow me. They thought that I have to ask for my husband’s permission to do things. Not all Swedes, but some, think that Kurdish women are all sitting at home and cannot speak the language, have many children, and take care of home and children. This is how they regard Kurdish women. ... My neighbour told me that she did not believe that I was Kurdish. She thought maybe I was from Chile or something like that. They don’t expect you, as a Kurdish woman, to be independent.

Nashmil: To be a woman and Kurd, *oj*, a big problem. Swedish society “looks down” at us Kurdish women. They often wonder how it is possible that I live alone. They ask me if I am allowed to go to disco, such questions. They are right, they have heard so many strange things. We also have a lower position in our jobs, which makes it more difficult.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 64.

⁸¹ Ibid.

I agree with Ålund that “This force of an oppressive traditional patriarchal culture has, on the whole, been a dominant theme in conceptions of Swedish migrant women.”⁸² Ethnocentric and stereotyped culturalist conceptions occur not least within feminist research, in which immigrant women are largely invisible except in the role of objects and victims.⁸³ Kurdish women in particular have been the object of such othering debates.

Leyla is disappointed with how Swedish women see the Kurdish women. Like all other respondents, she states that Kurdish women are usually seen as ignorant, subdued and subordinated to their husbands and male relatives. Leyla points out both the lack of contacts and the lack of knowledge that contribute to the reproduction of prejudices and negative conceptions. She says:

They generally don't know so much about us. They see you, how should I say, not as their equals. They “look down” on us. Swedish women in general are not very interested in politics. There are many who don't know what March 8th is about, for example. ... They do not have any interest in knowing Kurdish women. They all don't know us. They keep a distance. But those who work with you and have contact feel a little more nearness.

All narratives demonstrate experiences of being regarded according to negative perceptions and biases, in the position of society's Other. However, the respondents also sometimes generalise their experiences and give a categorical notion of how “the Swedes”, as a collective, regard them. It can be a consequence of recurrent experiences of being treated according to collective and negative conceptions of immigrants, Kurds and Muslims. Articulation of such common experiences among the group can give rise to the formation of a discourse about “the Swedes”. This is also

⁸² Ålund 1991:49.

⁸³ Ålund 1991:63. These are, as Ålund argues, not unique to Sweden; they are also significant in the international feminist debate. In the USA, the Netherlands and Britain, white feminism has come under criticism because of that. Ålund refers to Philemona Essed who brings out the association between imperialism, racism and mainstream feminist values.

evident from the interviews and from the fact that my position as an “insider”, as both Kurdish speaking and “immigrant”, makes it easier for the respondents to talk about the Swedes as the Other.

“It does not matter who I am. There is already a conception of me”

To be born in the Middle East or in the so-called “Muslim world” does not make things easier for the respondents. There is an Orientalist discourse which they are facing and have to fight in their everyday life. They are seen not as individuals but as Orientals, Muslims, Kurds, and immigrants all of whom are stigmatised and Othered categories. Sherko describes his own experiences:

Generally the picture that Sweden presents about “the other” is always a collective picture. There are also classifications. The Nordic immigrants, or those from the other Western countries, are also “the other”. However, their position is higher than those from the East and especially from Muslim countries, where Kurds also come from. This group is placed lowest in the order of preference. All over Europe, Islam is considered hostile to women and is associated with veils and maltreatment of children. Then, automatically I am also included in this category. It does not matter if I am a communist, feminist, and atheist because there is already a conception of me. This is not a Kurdish property but it is a property that media ascribed to them and the West has created.

Reza has the same experience:

They have a collective perception of all foreigners. They have biases. Before they know you personally they see you in a certain way. They think, first, that all blackheads are Muslims and they get surprised when I say that I am an atheist. They also think it is unusual that you as an immigrant and Kurd can discuss intellectual and political issues. They look at you with surprise. I have experienced such things. They don't treat you as an equal, as a person who also is intelligent. There are of course bad people among Kurds as well as among all groups. But unfortunately they see everyone with the same eyes.

Evin is very disappointed and bitter. She experiences that as a Kurdish woman she is seen as ignorant, less intelligent and less cultivated.

They think that women from Europe are more developed and know more while women from the Middle East, including Kurds, are considered to be less developed and subjugated in their countries without any rights.

How people react to this situation, and how it affects their relation to Sweden and their notions of homeland and community belonging, is due on the one hand to their political and ideological beliefs and convictions, and on the other hand to factors like gender, class, generation, etc. According to many studies, this discourse can lead to politics of differentiation that can more or less force groups of immigrants into forms of “collective self-formation” and drive them into “racialised identity politics”⁸⁴

Summary

The focus of this chapter has been on the respondents’ experiences of living in Sweden. The ambivalent position of being immigrants and citizens is already discussed theoretically in Chapter 3. Here I have discussed the respondents’ experiences of that position. The chapter has discussed experiences of discrimination, everyday racism and exclusion as well as the favourable prerequisites that they have obtained for the maintenance of their Kurdish identity. The Swedish concept of citizenship and Swedish multiculturalism have, on the one hand, provided the conditions for the maintenance and strengthening of Kurdish identity, while at the same time contributing to the ethnisation of identities. On the other hand respondents are, as immigrants, excluded from the national community and are seen as society’s Other. In Sweden it is primarily their position as immigrants and non-Swedes that determine society’s relationship to them. Further, as immigrants from the Third World

⁸⁴ Pred 2000:281; de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari (eds.) 2003; de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002:56.

they are seen as inferior and less civilised, and their identity and culture are degraded. As Kurds, they claim, they are associated chiefly with violence and gender oppression. Men are seen as oppressors and women are seen as ignorant, subdued, and victims of men's oppression. Respondents feel that the Swedish people have in general a negative conception of Kurds and that Swedish media contribute to, construct and maintain the prejudices. It is indicated in the narratives that they also have created a discourse about Swedes and Swedishness. Although they often point out that there exist good and bad people everywhere, there is a kind of generalisation when they talk about Swedes. In the following chapters the focus will be on respondents' responses to their situation and what they do in order to survive and resist.

7 Tracing the Homeland

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the respondents' experiences of living in Sweden where the immigrant identity and position determine society's relationship to them. Chapter 4 discussed the centrality of home(land) for diasporas. The centrality of home(land) is, however, not dependent on any essential bond between people and territories/places. It is rather a consequence of different processes such as forced separation, involuntary migration, and conditions of exile, which together with exclusion, alienation and racism make the need of identity and community belonging urgent. In this chapter I will discuss the respondents' conceptions of homeland and politics of location, and how they relate to them and why. It will be discussed on the one hand within the context of the transnational social space, created as a common effect of mass media and mass migration, and on the other hand the Swedish responses to postcolonial migration.

Diasporic spaces of agency

As discussed in the previous chapters, the narratives show that the respondents have both positive and negative experiences of living in Sweden. These have been experiences of otherness, racism and inferiorisation, but also experiences of personal and political improvement. Politically they have received opportunities that they did not have in their countries of origin, although the opportunities often have been limited to political and cultural activities within their own group. Kurdish nationalism and the idea of a Kurdish imagined community have encountered favourable conditions and have expanded in exile wherever the political and social prerequisites have existed. An earlier example of this is the situation of Kurds who migrated to the Caucasus during the second half of the nineteenth century. Their cultural and political achievements after the October Revolution were significant. A Kurdish newspaper founded in 1928 has been in circulation ever since then except for some short periods. Broadcasting in Kurdish, which started in 1955 in Yerevan (Armenia), has continued to send its programs. A congress of Kurdish language, culture and literature was held in 1934 in Yerevan, an important step towards the

development of Kurdish literature in the former Soviet Union.¹

The position of Kurdish refugees in the West can be described by two main interrelated processes. (1) They have become residents and citizens of several liberal democracies of the West. The formal rights they enjoy in this position have been an important prerequisite for the development of a Kurdish identity, establishment of different Kurdish institutions and activities. Additionally, the rapid improvement of media and communication technologies has created great opportunities for transnational contact and networking. (2) They have become part of the “immigrant Other” of Western societies and subject to racial discourses and to policy-making. Immigration has the dual property of being a central object in, and a tool for, the “renationalising” of political discourse as well as being the object of government policy and practice.² The formal status of citizens does not necessarily give Kurds the status of equal members of the society. As Sassen argues: “Economic globalisation denationalises national economies; in contrast, immigration is renationalising politics.”³ Renationalisation of politics is demonstrated in both the discourse of everyday life and in governments’ policy-making.⁴ In the following I will discuss this ambivalent and paradoxical process and its impact on European Kurds.

The formal citizenship rights have been important prerequisites for the establishment of different kinds of transnational/global and local Kurdish institutions, which have increased since the early 1990s. Other important prerequisites for this process have been the growth of the number of Kurds in the Western countries, alongside the revolutionary improvement of media and communication technologies during the last decades. The common effect of the mass migration and mass media in the appearance of the transnational social spaces has been addressed by a number of studies.⁵ Transnational networks of migrants influence society

¹ Ahmadzadeh 2003:133.

² Sassen 1996:62.

³ Sassen 1996:59.

⁴ Ålund and Schierup 1999.

⁵ Appadurai 1996; Castles & Miller 1998; Sassen 1996; Pries (ed.) 1999.

and politics in both countries of origin and countries of settlement. In particular, transnational networks of exiles and political refugees and their political and cultural activities are often regarded by the political power in the countries of origin as a threat towards state sovereignty. Hence, they have often become a subject of interstate diplomacy and the conditions of their activities are very often determined by international relations.

Besides political parties there are a huge number of different Kurdish organisations and institutions of varying character. Most of these institutions and organisations are working in different ways to support Kurdish culture and language, which normally have been either totally prohibited or subordinated and discriminated. Besides the more durable and stable institutions, several institutions of different kinds occur, built around social, political and cultural issues related to the home countries and also to Sweden. However, the most significant Kurdish institutions that have played a central role in the (re)production of Kurdish identity have been Kurdish media.⁶ Media have contributed to the appearance of a transnational social space within which Kurdish culture and identity are articulated. In particular satellite TV channels have been of crucial importance, not least because they are widely accessible. A number of studies note the central role of the Kurdish diaspora in development and spreading of Kurdish nationalism.⁷

*Kurdish migration: dispersal from the territory
and gathering in the movement*

Exile for Kurds has implied traumatic experiences, but at the same time it has given them a space and the possibilities to develop their identity and movement. In exile and among the diaspora, the idea of Kurdish nationalism and the imagining of a Kurdish national community have spread significantly during the last decade. This has been a consequence of the Kurds' large-scale migration and their transnational networking and acti-

⁶ Hassanpour, A. 1995, 1998; van Bruinessen 1999.

⁷ Ibid.

vities. The Kurds have in fact had a transnational character and have been a diaspora for a long time, but they have become a “mobilised diaspora”⁸ especially during the last two decades. In other words, the transnational formation of networks has more and more linked the Kurdish diaspora to their countries of origin and to other countries. The large-scale Kurdish migration, together with the establishment of different Kurdish transnational institutions and especially Kurdish media, has led to the creation of a Kurdish transnational space, a diasporic space.

“It was first during my escape that I met other Kurds”

The revitalizing of the Kurdish movements in all parts of Kurdistan during the last decades, besides causing many traumatic experiences, have also increased the political consciousness and solidarity between Kurds. Leyla tells us about her traumatic experiences of escape to Iran in order to escape the Iraqi regime’s reprisals in the early 1990s, after the Kurdish uprising. Her narratives imply not only traumatic experiences but also new insights. Leyla says:

I had not met many people from Iran (she means Kurdish people) before. It was first when we were forced to escape from the Iraqi regime’s invasion of Kurdistan that I met other Kurds. I saw how much they cared about us and helped us. I saw that they were also Kurds just like us. I will never forget their kindness, their solidarity and generosity. If it had not been because of this situation we would not have met these people. We have been separated from each other by the states and their boundaries. In my hometown the social relations were very limited. Our social intercourse and marriage was limited to people from there because we did not want to marry people from other cities. Here (in Sweden) the differences between us have become less as a consequence of contacts. My husband and I now have many friends from Turkey and Syria. I have more friends from Iran than from Iraq and it is very natural for me.

Salah has the same experience. He first met Kurds from the other parts of

⁸ Edwards 2001:55. For more discussion of mobilised diasporas see Chapter 4.

Kurdistan during his escape via neighbouring countries where Kurds are also living:

I have always believed in a unified Kurdistan, a unified Kurdish state. However, we did not have any social contact with Kurds from other parts or it was very limited. During my escape via Iran and Syria I came into contact with Kurds from these countries and became aware of their situation, the oppression that they were facing and their social life. Now I have friends from all parts of Kurdistan and it makes me feel that Kurds are more, that we are more. This is because we are free and can talk about our common wound. Here we have become more conscious of our similarities as well as our differences.

Kurdish migration has two dimensions. On the one hand it means disintegration, dispersal and scattering. On the other hand it means integration since it bridges over different national boundaries that have divided the Kurds. Many of the respondents admit that they met Kurds from the other parts than their own for the first time during their escape and in exile. In Sweden they have the possibility to meet people from all parts of Kurdistan. It has been a challenge for the political boundaries that have divided them. In exile it has become possible for them to meet across dividing national boundaries, to identify, to build social networks, and to establish an idea of a Kurdish nation, to reproduce their literature, improve their language, etc.

Kurdish media and practices of stateless agents

According to Anderson, the novel and the newspaper were two central cultural artefacts and prerequisites for the idea of the nation as an imagined community.⁹ Print capitalism, according to Anderson, made it “possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways”,¹⁰ that is, as imagined

⁹ Anderson 1991.

¹⁰ Ibid. 36.

national communities. And we can roughly say that with the rapid growth of displacement and mobility, national imaginations have become deterritorialised. They are no longer limited to the national boundaries. The revolutionary improvement of media and communication technology has been another contributing factor for the appearance of transnational and deterritorialised imagined communities. These opportunities have in particular been important for stateless people and non-state actors in constructing collective identities and carrying on their struggles. Prerequisites have been created for them to build opinion, to play a role in international politics and to influence international relations and policy-making, although to a limited extent.

The globalised international world economy and 'the new transnational configuration of power' have changed the role of nation-states in the twentieth century.¹¹ Sassen points out:

Beyond the facts of economic transnationalization, in dealing with immigration the state confronts the ascendant international human rights regime. Immigrants and refugees bring to the fore the tension between the protection of human rights and the protection of state sovereignty."¹² However, the international human rights regime operates partly inside the nation-state. Insofar as immigrants and refugees have gained considerable rights, this can be read as a "devaluation of citizenship as a condition for access to rights."¹³

The Kurdish transnational communities have an impact on their countries of origin and countries of settlement, and thereby play a role in international politics. New technologies such as "satellite broadcasting and global computer networking are changing the traditional regime of international relations, which is based on generally well-defined and protected national borders."¹⁴ The launching of the Kurdish satellite channel *Med-TV* was

¹¹ Brah 1996.

¹² Sassen 1996:60.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hassanpour, A. 1995:11; see also Appadurai 1996.

regarded as a threat by the Turkish state, which accused the channel of being a mouthpiece for separatist Kurdish guerrillas. The TV channel was licensed in and up-linked from England and was beamed to Western Asia (including Kurdistan), Europe and North Africa.¹⁵ According to Hassanpour the *Med-TV* in November 1995 had a total of 178.55 hours of broadcasting, consisting of the following programs: youth, children's, music, culture/art, film/drama, history/archaeology, current affairs and news.¹⁶ Turkey used diplomacy to pressure the British government and its broadcasting commission to revoke the channel's licence.¹⁷ Finally *Med-TV's* license was revoked in April 1999.¹⁸ However, the broadcasting continued via a new channel, *Medya TV*, which started almost at the same time. The channel is licensed from Paris and broadcasts to 77 countries in the Middle East, Europe, and North Africa.¹⁹ According to the *Medya TV* program guide, in October 2002 the channel had a total of 403 hours of broadcasting. It broadcasts daily between 11.00 and 24.00. The programs consists of news, documentary, analysis, women, children, music, film, literature, entertaining, etc.²⁰ Programs are sent in both Kurdish dialects, Kurmanji and Sorani but also in Turkish. There are three other Kurdish satellite TV channels: *Kurdistan TV*, *Kurd Sat TV*, and *Mesopotamian TV*. The first two channels belong to the two main nationalistic political parties, which since the early 1990s are ruling over Iraqi Kurdistan. They send daily from 16.00-23.00.²¹

Kurdish satellite TV channels are regarded by previous studies as the most influential instruments for the conception of a Kurdish nation and construction of Kurdish national identity.²² These studies consider that the satellite TV, besides being a "mouthpiece for the Kurdish nationalism",²³

¹⁵ Hassanpour, A. 1995.

¹⁶ Ibid. 4.

¹⁷ Hassanpour, A. 1995.

¹⁸ "Revocation of Med TV's broadcast licence, Press Release 23 April 1999": <http://www.ib.be/med/>.

¹⁹ <http://www.medyatv.com>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ <http://www.kurdistantv.net>.

²² Hassanpour, A. 1998; van Bruinessen 1999.

²³ van Bruinessen 1999:20.

also works as a “language academy”²⁴ and leads to the improvement of Kurdish literature and culture in a favourable European environment. It has also opened opportunities for cultural contacts and solidarity with other marginalized groups.²⁵ Besides satellite TV channels, there are also a huge number of websites, magazines, newspapers and other institutions such as publishing houses, printing houses and libraries. Between 1975 and 2003, 77 Kurdish newspapers and magazines have been published in Europe by Kurds from Turkey alone.²⁶

Among these institutions radio and TV have been more observed because they have had more influence and effect on the identity process among the Kurdish diaspora. They are also the most accessible and are widely spread. However, the use of Internet in general is increasing constantly and there are a huge number of Kurdish websites. These activities have resulted, according to van Bruinessen, in the renaissance of Kurdish culture and language. He writes: “the Kurdistan on the ground has been supplemented with the Kurdistan of the airwaves and in the cyberspace, and much of the Kurdish nationalist struggle is going on in the latter.”²⁷

In Sweden, according to Ahmadzadeh, two determining factors for the development of Kurdish literature have been freedom of publication and certain facilities in the form of state subventions for promoting the literature of minorities.²⁸ The Kurdish library in Stockholm is one significant example that was opened in 1997, and since then its activities and its book collection have expanded.²⁹ Ahmadzadeh, referring to Utas, states that after Iraqi Kurdistan and the Caucasian Republics the highest level of Kurdish cultural activities is maintained in Sweden. The role of published books, journals, periodicals and organised seminars and conferences in Sweden is very great.

In Gothenburg, where this study is carried out, there are also a number

²⁴ Hassanpour, A. 1995.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rigoni 2003.

²⁷ van Bruinessen 1999:20.

²⁸ Ahmadzadeh 2003:164.

²⁹ Tayfun 1998. See also <http://www.kurdishlibrary.org>.

of different institutions, organisations, and activities. Among them, cultural associations and local radio stations, which will be discussed in the next section, play a certain role in mobilising and organising Kurdish activities.

Cultural associations and local radio stations in Gothenburg

As institutions for the state-organised multiculturalism, cultural associations are financed and defined by the state. As also discussed in Chapter 6, the opinion among Kurds is divided concerning the role of cultural associations. They are criticised by the left and also by feminists, while nationalists are more positive about them. Cultural associations on the one hand contribute to the construction and maintenance of the notions of ethnic and cultural boundaries. On the other hand they give the opportunity to many people to meet, make social networks, pursue activities and acquire recognition and self-confidence. The associations' goals and direction are mainly defined by the state's immigration and cultural policy. As institutions for the state-organised multiculturalism they are, according to Schierup, intended to contribute to the "integration" of the Kurds into Swedish society.³⁰

Kurdish cultural associations have existed in Gothenburg since the 1980s. There are mainly four such associations in Gothenburg, which are to some extent, but not totally, divided along national, linguistic and political lines. Of these associations, one was founded by Kurds from Turkey and its activity is mainly directed towards Kurds from Turkey. Two were founded by Kurds from Iraq. These two associations' relationship has often been influenced by the relationship between the two parties in Iraqi Kurdistan. There is also a much younger association founded by a number of Iranian Kurds in 1999. Kurds from Syria do not have their own association but they are involved in these associations. There are also some minor associations founded by different religious or linguistic subgroups. These are not included in this study. The relationship between these associations and their activities is often strongly influenced by the political

³⁰ Schierup 1991.

situation in the countries of origin and the relationship between different Kurdish parties. As Wahlbeck also observes in the case of the Kurds in Britain and Finland: “the social organization of the Kurdish refugee communities is largely a continuation of social relations in Kurdistan. ... The political allegiances that exist in Kurdistan have a profound influence on the social organization of the refugee community and its associations.”³¹

Associations have different kinds of activities. They usually have courses such as Kurdish folk dancing for children, language courses in Kurdish, cooking, sewing etc. These associations are also public places/spaces for people, where mostly men meet to discuss politics, make social contacts, etc. They celebrate the Kurdish festivals and carry out political activities like organising demonstrations, contacting politicians on various issues, etc.

There is a Kurdish women’s association founded by some feminist women. They have tried to avoid the usual boundary-making along national and political lines and, according to themselves, they try to gather Kurdish women from all parts of Kurdistan irrespective of their political and ideological convictions. As an association, they do not sympathize with any political party, while members can have their own party affiliation. They organise courses and seminars, and make networks with Kurdish women’s associations in other countries.

There are at least six Kurdish local radio stations in Gothenburg.³² They broadcast once or twice per week, between one and four hours, for Gothenburg and its vicinity. Altogether they broadcast about 20 hours per week. Their broadcasting consists of programs about politics, women, children and youth, culture, etc. They work as a kind of contact network between Kurds by mediating different kinds of political and cultural activities, etc.

To sum up, freedom of speech and association as well as multicultural policy have, on the one hand, benefited the suppressed minorities, including Kurds, by providing opportunities for them to reproduce their culture and language and maintain their identity. Further, as van Bruinessen argues, the

³¹ Wahlbeck 1999:178.

³² Also other migrants and minority groups have such radio broadcasts. This is in accordance with Swedish multicultural policy, which was discussed in Chapter 6.

involvement in political activities offers a sense of meaning and self-respect to people who are in marginalized positions as immigrants.³³ On the other hand, it can in some degree also lead to the maintenance of “ethnicism”³⁴ as a result of “ethnicisation”³⁵ of political life.

Kurdish cultural associations and Swedish multiculturalism

Cultural associations cannot be discussed in terms of the positive or negative. They are complex and multidimensional. Although their activities are defined and regulated by the state, the state’s control is not total. They can define their goals and activities within the general policy. It is demonstrated in the narratives that associations differ from each other.

Kurdish cultural associations: culture reservoirs or platforms

“We teach Kurdish culture”

Some respondents, active in some of these associations in Gothenburg, often talk about relations with Swedish society and integration. They are very concerned about the official discourse of integration. They see the associations’ lack of contact with the society as a failure. The goal of activities and contacts with the society is, according to them, to mediate the Kurdish culture to Swedes. However, such contact seems not to be contact between equalparts. They rather have to try to make themselves attractive for, as Schierup expresses it, Swedish public consumption. Salah, who is himself active in an association, thinks that there is no contact between the association and Swedish society:

I think that this association has not been any bridge to Swedish society. On the contrary, it connects me more to the Kurds. These associations are supposed to mediate our culture to other people but unfortunately this contact

³³ van Bruinessen 1999.

³⁴ Cockburn 1998.

³⁵ Ålund and Schierup 1991.

with Swedish society is very limited. This association does not work as a bridge because there does not exist any contact between this association, and other associations as well, and Swedish society. On the contrary, the association's activities work rather as an obstacle while it contributes to more contact with the Kurds.

Shapol is a member of another association. She does not think that working in an association is an obstacle to her contacts with society. She points out the positive aspects of working with the association. Shapol also talks about “teaching” Kurdish culture and mediating it to the society. She says:

When for example you apply for a job and say that you are active in a Kurdish association then they appreciate you more. They value you higher. Then they know that you are active in this and know people and have social competence.³⁶ ... The Kurdish association is like a bridge, a representative in relation to the Swedes. We teach Kurdish culture there and arrange parties and things like that. We should do something that makes Swedes also come there and know us. It is through these associations that we can create occasions for Swedes to meet us.

Her description illustrates segregated spaces where contacts are not made on an equal basis. Associations are defined as representatives for ethnic groups, and they work as cultural restorers where cultures are preserved in order to be “sold” to the Swedish multicultural “market”. This is the basis for the contact that these institutions of multiculturalism ought to bring about. However, the other side of associations is that they may play a role

³⁶ The discourse of “social competence”, according to several studies, among them the report from the Board of Integration (de los Reyes, Paulina and Wingborg, Mats 2002), has been used within the labour market as an instrument for discrimination. It implies the assumption that immigrants as a collective lack the qualities that Swedes have, and moreover it embodies the implicit assumption that they can never acquire those qualities. It has been used for exclusion of immigrants, especially those born outside Europe, since they are considered to be culturally distant from the Swedes. As an instrument it both hides and legitimises discrimination.

in helping people in some degree and on some issues. They are places where people (usually men) can feel at home, make social contacts and break their isolation. In this way, associations actually play a role. In the case of Finland and especially Britain, Wahlbeck finds that Kurdish associations can be useful resources for refugees in order to solve new problems they face in the country of settlement.³⁷ Most of those who work with associations talk about the self-confidence that being a member of an association offers them. They feel stronger. This seems to be the most important thing for them. Exclusion and segregation very often force immigrant/refugee groups to fellow countrymen. These spaces are like “no-man’s-lands” where they can create a space for themselves. The respondents also admit that they get a better reception and are taken more seriously when they contact “the society” as members of or representing an association rather than as private persons.

“It is good to have a platform”

There are people active in some other associations that define their goals and activities quite differently. They do not mention any critic towards the formal policy behind associations, but they have their own policy and their own definitions of their activities. Azad, a member of an association, defines the aims of his association’s activities differently than do Salah and Shapol. He admits that associations can be a bridge but also an obstacle in contact with society, depending on how their activities are defined and organised. However, for him the association is mostly a platform, a way of organising activities and people and meeting the society in a more organised way. He says:

Sweden is an organised society, a society of associations. Therefore it is also good that we as foreigners are organised and have a platform where we meet the society, discuss our demands to the society and the society’s demands to us. This is good in my opinion, but these associations shouldn’t work as a wall between the society and us.

³⁷ Wahlbeck 1999.

There are also among the respondents some who are very critical towards associations and the policy behind them. Kawa, who identifies himself as a Kurd and is very keen on his Kurdish identity, does not have any contact with any association. He explains the reason as follows:

I like to participate in political activities in order to bring about changes. I do it with pleasure but there does not exist such an atmosphere within Kurdish associations. They are very much guided by the state and it is understandable because they are dependent on the state's financial supports. Hence, their activities are also directed by the state. They have to have certain activities like giving courses on this and that. Otherwise they wouldn't get money.

Other groups, which for different reasons are critical towards cultural associations, are Marxists and feminists. Marxists criticise associations for being instruments for Kurdish nationalism. Feminists criticise associations for being places made by men and for men. This will be closely discussed in Chapter 9. Ålund and Schierup comment the multicultural policy as follows:

The scenario of state-sponsored multiculturalism hence appears to have turned into a tower of Babel, with immigrant organisations configuring the particular and the particularizing 'cultural' at the expense of the culturally amalgamating and structurally common. This tends to draw immigrants into a politically paralysing separatedness and disconnectedness *vis-à-vis* one another as well as in relation to society in general.³⁸

Although I generally agree with Ålund and Schierup's critique, I find their account sometimes one-sided. Especially based on the respondents' experiences and all nuances in their narratives, the problem with Ålund and Schierup's critique of associations becomes more obvious.

In the next section I will discuss the relationship between the Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish nationalism.

³⁸ Ålund and Schierup 1991:19.

Kurdish diaspora and Kurdish nationalism

Kurds' settlement in Western countries, their transnational condition and the growth of Kurdish nationalism have been subject to a number of studies. These studies stress the appearance of a Kurdish diaspora³⁹ and its central role for the strength and spreading of Kurdish nationalism.⁴⁰ While the mid-twentieth century may be seen as the birth of Kurdish nationalism, the late twentieth century is seen as a new era of Kurdish nationalism. The existence of sizable Kurdish communities in the West and their activities have, according to these researches, provided the conditions for a unified Kurdish national identity, which challenges the Kurdish local identities and loyalties including allegiances to families, clans and tribes. Further, the mass migration of Kurds has resulted in internationalisation and deterritorialisation of the Kurdish question.⁴¹ Analysing the conditions of democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan (in the late 1990s), which since the 1990s is ruled by the two Kurdish parties, Gunter mentions some basic problems that prevent democracy such as primordial loyalties, proliferation of guns and armed militias, and the disastrous economic situation.⁴² He argues that primordial loyalties continue to work against a viable Kurdish nationalism in Iraqi Kurdistan. However, the Kurdish community in the West is according to him a kind of guaranty or hope for future development. He states:

The creation for the first time of an increasingly influential and in part highly educated Diaspora of some 1 million Kurds in the West represents another positive factor. Already this new Diaspora is carrying out an important lobbying role both in the West and in the Kurdish homeland itself. ... The next generation of this new Kurdish Diaspora may be expected to become gradually more pan-Kurdish in outlook.⁴³

³⁹ Wahlbeck 1999; Sheikhmous 2000.

⁴⁰ van Bruinessen 1999; Hassanpour, A. 1998; Sheikhmous 2000.

⁴¹ Hassanpour, A. 1998; van Bruinessen 1999; Gunter 1999.

⁴² Gunter 1999.

⁴³ Ibid.136.

Also van Bruinessen argues that nationalism as a political ideology has become more widespread in the Kurdish diaspora. He points out that the so-called second generation of immigrants, who are born and/or grown up in Germany, actively identify as Kurds. These young people care more about the Kurdish identity and politics than their parents do. van Bruinessen considers that the marginalization, low social position and exclusion which migrants experience in their everyday life, and consequently their need for identification, community belonging and human respect, constitute one of the explanations why Kurdish nationalism has developed in Europe. van Bruinessen writes: "To especially the marginalized members of the second generation growing up in Germany, involvement in PKK activities offered a sense of meaning and self-respect."⁴⁴

The important role of the Kurdish institutions and intellectuals localised in the West for the advancement of the Kurdish language is often stressed by researchers. However, without a popular base, intellectuals and institutions may not be able to do very much. For example, the satellite TV channel *Med-TV*, which started in March 1995, had a cost of \$3.2 million by mid-August 1995.⁴⁵ Quoting the director of British Cable & Satellite (ITC), Jon Davey, Hassanpour points out that the project was owned by private investors and received continual support from the Kurdish business sector across Europe.⁴⁶

Kurdish nationalism has found a favourable environment in exile. This has happened both because of the political and social prerequisites and opportunities, and because of the psychological effects of exile and exclusion that make the need for community belonging, longing for home(land) and belongingness a central element of people's everyday life.

Exile, homesickness and nationalism

As Said points out, exile and nationalism are closely associated with each

⁴⁴ van Bruinessen 1999:11-12.

⁴⁵ Hassanpour, A. 1995:3.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

other.⁴⁷ He considers that nationalism fends off exile and prevents its ravages by affirming the home created by a community of languages, culture and customs. That is why he compares the interplay between nationalism and exile with “Hegel’s dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other.”⁴⁸ He writes: “Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages.”⁴⁹ Exile as a discontinuous state of being raises for people who experience it a need to reconstitute their broken lives, a need for continuity of their identities and community belonging.⁵⁰ Thus, they usually “choose” to see themselves as parts of an ideology, a movement or a restored people. Additionally, for people who see themselves as stateless, as many Kurds do, the question of homeland, origin, and territorial belongingness, articulated in nationalist discourses, becomes attractive. The question of homeland as a territorial place also lies at the heart of Kurdish nationalism, which in turn has strongly influenced Kurdish culture and politics in different ways.

The emergence of nation-states in the Middle East is more or less parallel to the emergence of a new narrative discourse, the novel.⁵¹ Analysing and comparing Persian and Kurdish novels concerning the affinity of the novel with nationalism and nation, Ahmadzadeh⁵² finds that the most central question in Kurdish novels is the question of identity, which is highly politicised. Further, he considers that Kurdish novels are generally “occupied” by political questions to such an extent that the social questions have been ignored. The Kurdish novel is, according to him, necessarily linked to Kurdish nationalism, which in turn is enhanced by the increasingly developing Kurdish novel.⁵³ The nationalist discourses

⁴⁷ Said 2000:176-177.

⁴⁸ Said 2000:176.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Said 2000.

⁵¹ Ahmadzadeh 2003.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid. 303.

concerning homeland that Ahmadzadeh has identified in his study are the following: (1) While in Persian novels the idea of the home country is taken for granted, and the desired changes are within the frame of existing national borders, in the Kurdish novel the aim of the struggle is shaped by the reality that the rights of the Kurds and their identity have been denied. In the novels there are often ongoing wars and the central governments are seen as enemies. (2) The mother symbolises the homeland. The mothers in novels do not have any functional role but they are often deprived, dying or sick. The “helpless mothers” are according to him an expression for lack of a Kurdish homeland. (3) In all Kurdish novels the idea of home country is vague, although there are always obvious mentions of Kurdistan and the Kurds. (4) Kurdish nationalism, fighting for the rights of the Kurds, and *wilat* (homeland) are frequently mentioned. However, the *wilat* is occupied by the enemy who has denied the Kurds all their rights. The official borders have not resulted in dividing the Kurds as far as their national feelings toward the imagined community are concerned. (5) The search for a national identity is strongly reflected in the longing for a Kurdish homeland and national sovereignty.⁵⁴

The narratives in my study show that the respondents’ longing for the homeland at an individual/emotional level is more about existential needs of continuity, community and belongingness. Homeland, as lived experience, is engraved in their memories of friends and family, but also of colours, smells, sounds etc. In this sense, as Brah argues, home is “the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, ... all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations.”⁵⁵ Such individual feelings, in correspondence with the political discourses where these are articulated, can become politicised, and in this process political and human existential needs become very closely involved. Home(land) becomes at the same time both a symbol for comfort, intimacy, belongingness, continuity and also a political project, tied to Kurdish nationalism. Hence, the individual experiences of

⁵⁴ Ahmadzadeh 2003:294-303.

⁵⁵ Brah 1996:192.

a locality can become politicised when articulated with political discourses of “imagined community” around the “popular politics of place”.⁵⁶

Where/What is the homeland?

The respondents’ identifications with places and people are complex relations, which cannot be seen in terms of we/them, here and there, etc. Diaspora cultures, as Clifford argues, mediate the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering there.⁵⁷ In this process people articulate and bind together both roots and routes, here and there, to construct alternative social spheres where they feel belongingness. These diaspora spaces are not, as Clifford rightly observes, separatist or isolationist, although these claims are an aspect of them. Indeed these claims have to be seen as responses and reactions to the social conditions and relations that surround them.

A diasporised home: in the no-man’s-land of diaspora spaces

Kurds are classified as a “non-state nation”⁵⁸ or “proto-nation”.⁵⁹ Both of these terms represent groups that operate in a manner normally associated with a nation-state. The defining characteristic of the non-state nation is, according to Bertelsen, its asserted or enacted implication of sovereignty. Groups such as Kurds, Palestinians, Sikhs and Sri Lankan Tamils are by Hylland Eriksen called “nations without a state” since they have many substantial characteristics in common with nations. They act as if they were a nation-state. Bertelsen points out, however, that this definition does not suggest that all non-state nations desire complete independence and a separate state.

The fact that Kurdistan does not exist in a juridical-political sense, i.e., as a country, can explain the respondents’ ambivalent concept of home-

⁵⁶ Gupta and Ferguson 1992:12.

⁵⁷ Clifford 1997:257.

⁵⁸ Benjamin 1997:2.

⁵⁹ Hylland Eriksen 1993:14.

land. There are four parts of Kurdistan belonging to Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. In recent years many Kurds have started to talk about Kurdistan in terms of a unified territory by using geographical indications such as south, north, east or west Kurdistan instead of political locations and divisions. By doing so, they create the idea of a new political geography including a united Kurdish territory, which brings the existing national states' boundaries into question. Indeed, this discourse is not new since as a discourse of Kurdish nationalism it is as old as Kurdish nationalism itself. However, what is new is its spreading. Thus, according to respondents, it seems to occur more often among the Kurdish diaspora than among Kurds in the countries of origin.

Kurds' relation to the countries of origin is very ambivalent. Some do not recognise these countries as homelands. Others make a distinction between homeland in an individual sense, that is, their place of birth, their city, village, etc., and homeland in a political sense, Kurdistan. As individuals they have emotional attachments to certain places such as place of birth, places where they have memories and histories. They have continuous contact with their relatives and families. Here we see a difference compared to historical African and Jewish diaspora. The homeland in this case is a lived experience of a territorial place, not a mythical land. There are different conceptions of homeland among respondents that I try to discuss under different themes. The most striking are the subjective and consequently various constructions and notions of homeland. It is not taken for granted what or where the homeland is. In other words, there is no given, existing homeland.

The nationalist discourse

"Kurdistan is my mother"

Kurdistan is often described by some of the nationalist respondents as a mother.⁶⁰ As Yuval-Davis⁶¹ argues, gender relations are at the heart of cultural constructions of social identity and collectivities. She writes:

⁶⁰ See also Ahmadzadeh 2003.

⁶¹ Yuval-Davis 1997.

A figure of a woman, often a mother, symbolizes in many cultures the spirit of the collectivity, whether it is Mother Russia, Mother Ireland or Mother India. In the French Revolution its symbol was 'La Patrie', a figure of a woman giving birth to a baby; and in Cyprus, a crying woman refugee on roadside posters was the embodiment of the pain and anger of the Greek Cypriot collectivity after the Turkish invasion.⁶²

Thus these nationalist discourses, by producing a certain kind of knowledge and meaning, portray reality and produce objects of knowledge that are shared by people within a certain society.

Women become constructed in this way as representatives for the collective's identity, symbols for the nation and bearers of its honour. This "burden of representation"⁶³ has deprived many women of their lives. The Kurdish case is no different from other nationalist movements in this respect. Mojab⁶⁴ argues that Kurdish nationalists "depict women as heroes of the nation, reproducers of the nation, protectors of its 'motherland,' the 'honour' of the nation, and guardians of Kurdish culture, heritage, and language."⁶⁵ Referring to the *Feminist Review* in 1993, Lutz, Phoenix and Yuval-Davis state that in general women are symbols of the nation while men are its agents in the nationalist and racialised discourses.⁶⁶ These "burdens of representation" make women very vulnerable and exposed, as symbols of nations in violent national(ist) conflicts and boundary maintenance of the nation, by controlling women's sexuality.⁶⁷

There are both women and men among respondents who depart from this nationalist discourse. For Salah and Taban, Kurdistan means a mother, their mother, nation's mother. Salah does not think of a certain part of Kurdistan but the whole of Kurdistan is his mother and homeland. He wants to see it as a sovereign country:

⁶² Ibid. 45.

⁶³ Yuval-Davis 1997:47.

⁶⁴ Mojab 2000.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 89.

⁶⁶ Lutz, Phoenix and Yuval-Davis 1995:9.

⁶⁷ See "Women in Conflict Zones", *Canadian Woman Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2000.

Kurdistan is my mother. It is my homeland and it should have its own boundaries and its own flag. Kurdistan is everything for me. I am ready to give everything and even my life for a free Kurdistan. Kurdistan means everything for me and I belong to that *welat* (homeland) called Kurdistan irrespective of which country it belongs to.

Taban describes in a very emotional way her attachment to and conception of Kurdistan as a distant mother:

Kurdistan is like my mother, to her arms I always wish to return. I have always thought highly of Kurdistan as a mother. It is as if your own mother has been away and has disappeared from your eyes and you miss her. It is the same feeling. I miss it all the time and my feelings are the same feelings that one has for one's mother. I miss Kurdistan also like my *nishteman, welat* (homeland) always.

They are very clear about their nationalist convictions and discourse even in describing their own personal feelings. For Salah, identities and belongingness are “naturally” bounded to territory. He regards the whole “Kurdish soil” as his homeland because he is a Kurd:

I think that the Kurds constitute a nation, a nation with a common history, a common soil and its own geography. My identity is Kurdish. I mean that my root is Kurdish.

In opposition to this nationalist discourse there is a “counter-discourse”⁶⁸ of the Kurdish left that take the nationalist project into question. A counter-discourse is an existing discourse that has its own rules and boundaries, its key concepts, taken-for-granted assumptions and arguments. It opposes a hegemonic discourse that stands for dominating values, conceptions, and expressions.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Sahlin 1999:86.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

The counter-discourse of the left

“Kurdistan is not holy for me”

Any mention of Kurdistan as an origin and as a political entity is highly political. It is a central element of the Kurdish nationalist discourse towards which the left’s critique is directed.

Hamid, as a Marxist, identifies with workers and poor Kurds. He is very critical towards nationalists and their claims on Kurdish identity and Kurdish origin:

Kurdistan means for me my birthplace, my family and my memories. Memories of my life and my participation in the political struggle. ... I do not mean that I am not proud of workers and poor Kurds. I am proud of them, but not all Kurds or Kurdistan are holy for me. I feel that you belong to the place where you are living. For example, it is not funny when a child is born here and says that he/she comes from Kurdistan. ... When people ask me I said that I am a Kurd and come from Iran. I don’t like it that people say that they come from Kurdistan. It is not real. Why do they deceive themselves? ... I neither know nor accept a country called Kurdistan because according to me each part of Kurdistan has its own economic situation. I never feel close to the Kurds from Turkey. Because of the situation in Turkey I feel that they are brought up in a different way. The ideal and the idea of Kurdistan is only a fantasy and doesn’t have any material grounds.

Nashmil is very critical towards the Kurdish nationalist parties that since the 1990s have governed Iraqi Kurdistan:

I think it will be nice if Kurdistan will be an independent country, a Kurdish state, not because I am a Kurd but because it will be an ending of the war. However, I don’t want us to be a state under a party’s rule. How long should Kurds be like that? Those who are ruling now, they are worse. They kill women, they started civil war, etc. The Kurdish parties that rule over Kurdistan care only about their own interests and not about people. I have been living not only in Kurdistan but also in other parts of Iraq. I care about the whole of Iraq, not only Kurdistan.

The Kurdish left is not a homogeneous group either. In the counter-discourse of the left there is sometimes a tendency to denigrate experiences of the local. It can primarily be understood as a response to the discourse of Kurdish nationalism and to ethnicism. It is, as demonstrated in Nashmil's narrative, defined as cosmopolitanism or internationalism. Tomlinson distinguishes two kinds of cosmopolitanism: cosmopolitanism as an ideology and as an ideal. As an ideology, cosmopolitanism is considered privileged over the local.⁷⁰ Cosmopolitanism as an ideology is, according to Tomlinson, elitist, masculine and Eurocentric. It denigrates locally lived experiences and practices "*by implication* as somehow narrow, benighted, parochial, conservative, incestuous, ill informed, lacking the broader picture and so forth."⁷¹ A cosmopolitan ideal, on the contrary, does not have to exclude the perspective of the local. He states: "...we could say that the cosmopolitan is not an ideal type to be opposed to the local. She is precisely someone who is able to live – ethically, culturally – *in both the global and the local at the same time*. [...] We may be able to think of cosmopolitanism as a sort of 'ethical glocalism.'⁷² In the counter-discourse of the left, one can find a blend of these two kinds of cosmopolitanism.

There are others, among both nationalists and left-wingers, who are more ambivalent, and there are also those who distinguish between their personal feelings and perceptions of homeland and the political/ideological positionings. This in-between position, which includes the majority of respondents, will be discussed next.

Lived experiences, political discourses and geo-political realities: positions in between

Azad distinguishes his individual/emotional relation to homeland from his political convictions. He is aware of the political nature of the nation and national identity. Lived experience of a locality⁷³ is what for Azad and the

⁷⁰ Tomlinson 1999: Ch. 6.

⁷¹ Tomlinson 1999:189.

⁷² Tomlinson 1999:195,196.

⁷³ Brah 1996.

others in this category gives meaning to the homeland and Kurdistan. It implies their memories, their personal and family history, the place's nature, etc:

Homeland for me is the place where one is born and grown up. For me this is homeland. It lies in human nature, in the human soul. I still dream at night of my childhood, my friends and our games. But if you see that politically, I mean I was born in a small village with 50-60 households, but when I see it from a political point of view Kurdistan consists not only of my village or city but Kurdistan has its own geography. All that geography where Kurds are living in the Middle East is Kurdistan for me, although I have been only in one or two parts of Kurdistan. However, emotionally there is a special bond between my birthplace and me.

All respondents do not make the clear distinction that Azad does. There is rather a clear ambivalence implicit in their narratives. Some of the nationalist respondents define/describe Kurdistan as a place or land with a folk of common origin, who share a language and culture. At the same time they very often refer to and think about their own lived experiences, memories, and relations when talking about homeland. Some others define homeland as the part of Kurdistan they come from, distinguished from the juridical-political state where they belong and distinguished from "Kurdistan".

Alan and Hana point out the importance of common history, language and culture. Homeland for Alan is the part of Kurdistan where he comes from. He says:

As my homeland I think of Kurdistan, the Iranian Kurdistan where I used to live and where I grew up and have my memories from. It is there I wish I could return to. Kurdistan for me is a place with a people who differ from the rest of Iran regarding language and culture.

Hana says, like Alan, that Kurdistan is a place with a people with a common culture, traditions and language. For Hana, like Alan, Kurdistan is first of all the place where she comes and from where she has her memories and her relatives. For them it is their experiences of different localiti-

es that primarily give meaning to their perceptions of homeland. Hana also includes Iraqi Kurdistan in her definition of homeland since she also has lived experiences from there, while she does not mention the other parts of Kurdistan, in Turkey and Syria. She excludes other parts of Iran as well in her definition of homeland and defines them as neighbours:

Kurdistan reminds me of a people with its own language. But Kurdistan reminds me primarily of those people I grew up with, my childhood and my family. But also I think of Iraqi Kurdistan, our common culture. It is important that we have a common culture. When you think about Kurdistan, you also feel that it is a place with a people/folk that has its own culture, traditions, and its own language. They have things in common with their neighbours, for example with the Iranians. ... There are a lot of memories, emotions that are coupled with the word Kurdistan. Kurdistan recalls those things that you wish you could experience once again. ... It is a feeling about another kind of belongingness. I mean that I belong somewhere else. I do not belong here.

Dilsha, unlike other respondents, idealises Kurdistan in her imagination. She left her village and came to Sweden when she was fifteen and has not returned. She also talks about Kurdistan as her freedom since identifying with it gives her confidence.

What does Kurdistan mean to me? I have not been in Kurdistan. I was not born there. We were forcibly moved from Kurdistan for two hundred or two hundred and fifty years ago according to history. Thus, there is a longing for Kurdistan. Though I haven't been there, it feels like a very beautiful land for me, very interesting for me. I feel Kurdistan to be very multicultural. I know people here from different areas in Kurdistan. You know that it lies between four boundaries, yes, Kurdistan is my freedom.

As discussed earlier, there is an ambivalent and vague meaning of homeland among the respondents. There is no given answer to what/where homeland is. There are rather subjective experiences, positionings and images that construct the meaning of homeland. This phenomenon is not

new – it has a long history and deep roots in Kurdish cultural traditions. Because of the Kurds' transnational condition and their dispersion at least between four sovereign states, their identities and their attachments to places are multiple, complex and highly ambivalent. Kurdistan as homeland for Kurds is, as discussed before, a political construction rather than a political reality. It is interesting to note that homeland for those who do not have so many personal experiences and memories, such as Dilsha, tends to be more or less a product of idealised imagination, while for those who have lived experiences, it is more complicated. Homeland awakens, besides longings and desires, also often contradictory feelings, hesitations and memories of traumatic experiences.

Hesitations, ambivalences and the uncertain homeland

As is shown in the respondents' narratives, there does not exist any given place that they all can refer to when they are facing the question about where/what their homeland is. Their meaning of homeland is a blend of political discourses and individual wishes, conceptions, longings and experiences. Their attachments to place are multiple: Sweden, Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, the place of birth, Kurdish diaspora communities, and "Kurdistan". One can say that there does not exist any given place/country which all of them both emotionally and politically can call homeland, but at the same time there is more than one place, both real and imagined, that they relate to. Homeland, in the sense of the places to which they are emotionally attached, is inaccessible for many of them in different ways. It is also often associated with traumatic memories, danger, and risk.

Goran begun to identify himself as a Kurd in Sweden and he is very pleased with that. However, he is not sure if he wants to live his life in Kurdistan. His lived experience of the place (his personal sense of homeland) and his political conception of it do not correspond. It often gives him feelings of guilt. He says:

It is very interesting. We want Kurdistan to be an independent state but I may not choose to live there. Do you know why? When it is about the pri-

vate Goran, I have better relations with the Turks. It is very interesting, better!! I do like Turkey more than Kurdistan, to be honest. If I have the possibility I may procure a house in Turkey but not in Kurdistan. But I swear, I will not say that I want to give my life, but I will give I don't know what, if only all Kurds will be lucky and happy.

He was on the verge of tears when he said the last sentence. We stopped the interview for a short break. Goran has contradictory feelings because of his double loyalties and attachments. These give him feelings of guilt and betrayal. He personally identifies with Turkish-speakers while politically he identifies himself as Kurd and is very keen on doing so.

Soma's narrative indicates her conception of belongingness, homeland and roots. It also shows her contradictory feelings and hesitations. She feels belongingness to Kurdistan because she regards people and identities as rooted in soil and territory. At the same time she realises that there is no Kurdish state that she can call homeland:

Kurdistan is for me my homeland in the same way that every people wants to have a homeland. We say that homeland is sweet/beloved. How should I say, now we are living in *xeribayeti* (exile), to its soil under our feet we owe a debt of gratitude. While in my own land/country I do not owe any debt of gratitude because it is my own soil, my own land. This is the difference. Now when we say that we come from Kurdistan, we say that from our heart, but at the same time we feel most deeply inside us that this seems to be something that we have created by ourselves. ... It is just some few years ago that people started to say that we are a Kurdistan folk. ... It is Kurdistan but at the same time you feel that it is not mature, that it is too early or immature. At the same time that you say Kurdistan you hear a voice inside you that hesitates and wonders if it is true that we are a country or it is still the same?

Evin wishes to return one day and expresses a strong homesickness. She does not feel at home in Sweden. She wants to return. When I ask her where she wants to return, it becomes more complicated. She may, spontaneously, mean returning to Syria where she comes from and where her family are living. However, when I ask where, her answer seems to be a

blend of her political conception of home (all parts of Kurdistan) and her lived experience (Kurdistan in Syria) – and when it proves to be impossible, the alternative is Kurdistan in Turkey. She says:

Because you live in a foreign country, you don't really feel that you are at home although you have a job, house and your family here but still you don't feel at home really. This is all the time in my thoughts, I don't know about the others but I know that I will return one day.

M.A.: Is it your family that you miss or the country, the land?

No, it is the whole country. I will feel happier in my land and it is not only because my mother and my brothers and sisters are living there, no, I don't think that it is because of that. The land or country, when you live in your country everything is totally different. Half of my life I have been living abroad and still cannot forget. With every day my feelings become stronger because I want to go back and live there.

M.A.: When you say "my country", what do you mean by that? Kurdistan or Syria?

I mean Kurdistan, the whole Kurdistan. It does not matter which part.

M.A.: When you say that you want to return, where do you want to return to? There does not exist any Kurdish country.

Of course. But I have many relatives in Turkish Kurdistan. Half of my relatives are living there. We have been there and visited them many times. For me it does not matter because when they divided Kurdistan half of our village came to belong to Turkey and the other half to Syria. We on both sides of the border could hear each other, talk to each other. We couldn't cross the border. Sometimes we could see when somebody was buried on the other side.

For Sherko, Kurdistan is primarily associated with traumatic memories and experiences, and with political problems, not least because of the war and conflict between the two Kurdish parties there:

Kurdistan for me in general is a *welat* (homeland), which is occupied by the most ugliest, most cruel dictators in the world. A people that only because they are Kurds have been facing the strongest punishment. They even beco-

me victims of the war between their own people in power. ... The word Kurdistan, besides the beautiful *welat*, reminds me of wounds, sobering, blood, humiliation so that I get damned. Kurdistan for me is only strong memories of murder and disappearing of comrades and friends. ... One day I went around in a cemetery in Gothenburg and looked at gravestones. All the dead people died really old. ... None of them died an unnatural death. Here nobody dies an unnatural death. You could read on the gravestones that all of them had lived a normal life and had died a natural death. In each cemetery in Kurdistan, it does not matter which part of Kurdistan, you can see nothing except execution, murder, torture, etc. You don't see even a commemorative text on their graves. ... Here people die their natural death. For us there does not exist natural death. I mean natural death does not exist in our society.

However, despite the strong homesickness and longing, the place of birth is not accessible and/or it is, for various reasons, not a safe and/or hospitable place. Kurdistan in the sense of a political unity does not exist. Neither is it the same place that they once left. However, the complexity of the question often comes up when you ask where they wish to return to or where the homeland is. They often have an ambivalent relationship to the countries of origin or do not recognise them as homeland. Kurdistan, to which they often relate, does not exist as a political unity. Hence, their meaning of homeland is very vague and diffuse. It becomes rather a construction. Besides the individual and emotional feelings and experiences, there are also political discourses that they presuppose when articulating their experiences. It is of crucial importance to take these discursive, historical, and political contexts into account in analysing their narratives. It may be one of the problems with Safran's and in some degree also Cohen's concept of the diaspora's relation to homeland.⁷⁴ The socio-political contexts are almost excluded or are not paid attention to in Safran's notion of diaspora's relation to homeland. Hence, by their definition, the diaspora's desire and yearning for homeland (in a territorial sense), its political discourses and projects, appears to be something "natural".

⁷⁴ Safran 1991; Cohen 1997.

A home(land) in Sweden?

The respondents see neither Sweden nor their countries of origin as homeland. Their belongingness to Sweden is in juridical terms, i.e., they see themselves as Swedish citizens but not as Swedes. Neither are they regarded as Swedes by the society. They are excluded from the national community and from the social networks of everyday life. The national identity is rather built up, often as a result of a fusion of both membership in a political nation-state and identification with a national culture.⁷⁵ However, Kurdistan as a political unity does not exist, while their citizenship in Sweden is a reality. They do not see themselves as a minority in relation to Sweden. This is also documented by Wahlbeck concerning Kurdish communities in Britain and Finland: “The Kurds do not regard themselves as a minority within the context of the country of exile; instead their ethnicity is defined within social relations in the country of origin.”⁷⁶ They do not define their relations to Sweden in terms of absolute differentiation, but rather by an ambivalent relationship, although the way they relate to Sweden differs depending on their political, ideological convictions and/or their social situation. The dual orientation towards both countries of settlement and countries of origin is also considered in Wahlbeck’s study.⁷⁷

I ask them how much belongingness they feel towards Sweden.

“I don’t want to belong anywhere/I am a citizen of the world”

Many leftist respondents say that they do not want to belong anywhere or that they do belong everywhere. They take this position partly on the basis of a cosmopolitan ideal.⁷⁸ Tomlinson demystifies the ideal of cosmopolitanism by saying that all people are in this sense cosmopolitan, and that they are global at the same time as they do not exclude the perspective of the local. This is what he calls “ethical glocalism.”⁷⁹ For some individuals,

⁷⁵ Hall 1992a:296; Gellner 1992.

⁷⁶ Wahlbeck 1999:122.

⁷⁷ Wahlbeck 1999.

⁷⁸ Tomlinson 1999: Ch. 6.

⁷⁹ Tomlinson 1999:196.

taking this position can moreover serve as a way to avoid becoming emotionally in touch with any place, since one has already experienced a rupture. This is demonstrated in Hamid's narratives.

Hamid admits that he does not like to belong to any society or to any place. But he would like to live in his place of origin where he has grown up and where he has his family:

I don't feel that I am Swedish, but as long as I live here, I must adapt myself to the Swedish society. ... However, my belongingness towards Sweden is like if, for example, tomorrow I have to leave and settle down in Norway, it does not mean anything to me. Maybe I feel that I am more accustomed to Sweden, have memories there, have friends, have a social life irrespective of whether it is good or not. These things are a part of my life.

M.A.: Do you mean that it is easy to leave Sweden?

No, no, no.

M.A.: Do you have any emotional bond to the society as such?

No, no. I mean I don't want to have it.

M.A.: Is it the same concerning Iran or your birthplace?

No. You feel that it is a little stronger because you come from there, have left behind you a lot of things, have done lots of things. However, if I don't have the possibility to be there, it does not mean so much either. But if there were to be some change I would like to return. I don't think that I will miss Sweden so strongly, no, it is not so.

M.A.: Do you mean that you will not miss Sweden in the same way that you now miss your place of origin?

I don't know. I don't know now. Once I spent a period of several months in another country and I felt that I wanted to come back to Sweden. It was little like that. I thought about Sweden. Sweden was in my mind. It is not that you don't think about Sweden, but by now I have not been away for a long period to see how much I miss it.

Sherko identifies himself as a citizen of the world and as such he also regards Sweden as his "home". He admits, however, that he is not recogni-

sed as a Swede by the Swedish society and he is not welcomed. Neither is he seen as a Kurd in Kurdistan. About his attachment to Sweden, he says:

Do you know what? I actually feel no belongingness to any society. The entire world is my home. I place myself higher, to a human identity in which I find my existence. Thus, I stay above all ethnic, religious, and local identities. I feel belongingness to Sweden because now if I go to Kurdistan, they will see me not as a Kurd but as a Swede. Here Sweden dose not accept me. But above all these I have a human identity that connects me to Sweden. I try to contribute to its improvement, but unfortunately there is an invisible hand that throws me out of the society. I feel belongingness but there is a force that throws me out and keeps me away from its home. ... I am facing a lot of problems, which I did not have before. In Iraq I was killed as a Kurd but I was not deprived/inferiorised as a blackhead. But here you are humiliated also for the colour of your hair.

It can be said that he is neither accepted, nor belonging totally to anywhere rather than belonging everywhere. In spite of his will to belong to Sweden, he is not welcomed or accepted. Like other respondents, he does not belong to the privileged mobility positions within the hierarchy of mobile people. As “undesired” mobile subjects from the South, they do not have the freedom of choice to move, to stay or to belong.

This is demonstrated in Reza’s experiences. He says:

I wish it were not like this. I wish you could feel at home everywhere. I wish that there were no boundaries. But it is not like that. Then you see the place you come from, where you have your memories and your parents as your homeland. I wish I could feel belongingness everywhere. But here you are always facing the question “Where are you from?” It tells you that you don’t belong here and that this society doesn’t accept you. You are and will remain, as they say, an *invandrare* (immigrant). Hence, it forces you to relate to the place you come from even if you don’t want to. It affects even children. My son is eight years old and was born in Gothenburg. He has never been in Kurdistan and doesn’t know what Kurdistan is. But since he started to go to school and has been asked where he is from, he has started to say that he is Kurdish and comes from Kurdistan. He asks me very often about Kurdistan, about my past

and what I have done there, etc. We haven't told him such things.

The absolute majority of respondents are living in Sweden because they have no choice. Yet how much they feel at home, and whether they feel belongingness or not and how they relate to Sweden, also differ depending on their private situations. They negotiate their relationship to the society individually.⁸⁰ They all identify themselves as Kurds in relation to the outside, but at the same time each individual defines and negotiates her/his relation to Sweden out of her/his own situation. Having children is one of the important factors in some respondents' relations and above all their bonds to Sweden. Both women and men express it.

"My children are Swedish. I cannot see myself as a guest here"

For Shilan, her children are central for her belonging to Sweden. She knows that she is going to stay here because of her children. At the same time she wishes that the situation would change so that she can return when she gets old:

As a human being, wherever I live I have some mission. As long as I cannot return to my country, I must set my roots here. I cannot see myself as a guest here. If I do it I cannot go forward. At the beginning I thought it would be some few years but now I realise that the time passes, nothing happens there and I am still here. My children have grown up here. They are Swedish. They think Swedish and they also often talk Swedish with each other. I see that I have put my roots here. I must become a part of society, take part in their culture and their thoughts. That is why I lean more to this direction. I must see myself as a Swede and do my duties and demand my rights. However, I still do not want to live here as a retiree. I hope that there will be changes in Kurdistan so that I can return. If not, maybe I could, because of the weather, spend summers here and winters in a warm country.

For Kawa, too, his children are the central point in his life in Sweden. It

⁸⁰ Hall 1992b.

makes him feel at home in Sweden and feel a kind of belongingness. He feels belonging to Sweden at the same time that he very much misses his place of origin. Like Shilan, he feels quite deeply rooted in Sweden, yet the place of origin is very emotionally present in his life:

First of all I have two children. They are going to grow up here in this society. I want all the best for them. Since I live here, I try to do my best for this society. I have such feelings. ... As I said, emotionally I don't feel that I live in a foreign country. This is a society where my children are going to grow up. ... My life philosophy has not been shaped by nationalism. Where there is soil is my home. It does not matter where in the world I live.

M.A: Do you ever miss your place of origin? If you do, how?

I do, very strongly, actually. Now it is so that there are many things that I have left behind me. Many memories of nature and people, what they look like, etc. I do not have them and I have not had them for a long time. I wish I could see them again because I didn't leave them voluntarily. I liked them, I fought for them. There are games I would like to play. There is another air there. It is another society and I miss it a lot. How should I say, emotionally, to live in Sweden is a construction, it is an artificial feeling. It is something that I have accepted because I did not have any choice. It feels in a way more normal for me to live in Kurdistan. It would be more normal for me to be there. But it is not possible.

All of them are aware of the fact that they are going to live here perhaps all their lives. They do not see any possibility of change in the near future in the countries of origin so that they can return. They think it is best to build up their lives here even though they do not give up the hope that they one day will return. But they also know that this is easier to say than to do. It is especially difficult for those who have children. Chambers argues that the history of diasporas questions and undermines each simple notion about origin, tradition and linear development:

One foot is here and the other always elsewhere, straddling both sides of the border. [...] Migrancy... calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the

promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility.⁸¹

Azad says, as Shilan too pointed out, that as a newcomer in Sweden he thought that his exile would be short and that he would return within a few years. But he has realised that it is not the case because of the fact that the situation in the country of origin has not changed so much. Even if any fundamental change were to occur, a return is not always easy, possible or desirable. He is critical toward people who see their residence in Sweden as temporary and are waiting for a return that may never happen:

I personally think like this. Of course we are Kurds, a distinct nation, but today we live here and we don't know how long. Maybe we will die here. Or maybe we will go back next year. However, I don't think like that any more. Maybe some years ago I thought that sooner or later we will return to Kurdistan, but now I have realised that it is not a good way of thinking. Even if you will return tomorrow you have to make something of your life here, participate in this society. ... One who has left his/her country, and becomes a refugee in other places, loses many things, this is true, but at the same time one obtains other things if one wants and is open.

A “home” in diaspora community

“You are somebody in your own society”

Some other narratives illustrate a feeling of alienation and estrangement in relation to society. A Kurdish identity and the Kurdish community thereby become the “home” where people feel belongingness, consolation and meaning. These narratives illustrate the continuous tension and conflicts that they are facing in their everyday lives. They live here while the “homeland” is highly present in their lives. They are torn between “here” and “there”. In the past and in the memories of the past they find consolation and meaning and acquire resources to survive the often hard reality of eve-

⁸¹ Chambers 1994:17, 5.

ryday life as immigrants. Goran's narrative illustrates this situation well. He says:

In Sweden I came back to my home. You understand. You know, people who flee their home and live in another milieu can never keep all of what they used to have. It is impossible – 99.9 percent of those people either lose their identity or go back to their identity, in a much stronger way than before. ... I met my identity accidentally here. I never asked myself why, I just did it. It has, of course, both advantages and disadvantages. ... The ongoing movement, the ongoing war in Kurdistan, gives people also a lot of worry. It is impossible to have a private life, it is not possible. I am not so active in the movement but one of those most passive. However, when they caught my leader I became more Kurdish. When the Med-TV started, the Kurdish channel, my wife and I used to say that the more we look at the TV the more we become Kurds. ... You feel that you have to do something for your country. I have found my identity here, but I also have a heavy burden to carry on my shoulders. If I become very committed to it I get tired; if not, my heart becomes, you know, I cannot breath. It is what I feel as a newly becoming Kurd in Europe. Scaring.

Goran has started to identify himself as a Kurd in Sweden, where the Kurdish diasporic community and his political commitment have become his “home”. This “home” was the only one that was accessible for him and he felt welcomed there.

This is also what Alan's experiences are about. However, Alan identified himself as Kurdish and was politically active long before he came to Sweden. He became a nationalist in Sweden. For him the involvement in the Kurdish diasporic community and its activities lies on a clear existential level. His narrative is very much about the hard reality of living as an immigrant and also the sense of belongingness and identification, not necessarily in a territorial sense. Alan says that his national identity has become stronger. Being involved in the Kurdish diaspora community and its activities has given him a “home”:

This is my personal experience and not some analysis. You feel a strong

pressure on you and a need for an identity. ... We had lost our identity both as private persons and as political activists and members of an organisation. We had no access to our own society and culture either, to compensate for this gap. However, we have grown up with Kurdish culture and it is there. Here, it becomes important again. You go back to that because you need an identity in this society. You come into the labour market very late and even when you get a job you are seen as a foreigner. It gets worse if you cannot speak the language so well. Such things constitute a social pressure on you and raise many questions. You start to think of your old memories, your childhood and your society where you grew up. You want to know yourself anew, identify yourself anew. When I meet my friends we very often talk about the past. Instead of talking about the present and the future, 70-80 percent of our conversations consist of our common memories from the past. The social and emotional needs force you to look back to your memories. Nobody can take your memories from you because they are a part of you. They are the only things you have left. ... You are somebody in your own society. You have many opportunities and you have possible choices. You feel that you belong to the society and can have an effect on it. You get recognition. Here you are frustrated, you cannot speak the language or do not have a job. When you get a job, you have a low position and you often work with other foreigners like yourself. ... The whole social system is unknown to you and it takes time to get used to it. You see that you are nothing, you do not play any role, and you do not belong and cannot affect it. Of course the system is also in your favour but it cannot fill your feelings of emptiness. ... In a Kurdish context, you belong and can have an effect and do something positive. You can play a role in the Kurdish society here and exert influence when you cannot participate in and influence the Swedish society. You can do it both through individual contacts with friends, 95 percent of whom are Kurds, and also through being active in the association. You can at least make someone happy, do something for someone.

Alan's narrative demonstrates very clearly the existential need of identification, belongingness, human respect, recognition and active participation. However, despite the feelings of alienation and exclusion he still does not want to isolate himself. He tries not to lose contact with Swedish society, which is mainly via mass media. In spite of all this, Alan still sees himself as a part of the society. Against his will, he has even decided not to

install a satellite dish because of the risk that otherwise he and his family will see only the Kurdish TV and get totally outside the Swedish society. Like many of the respondents, he follows news and socio-political processes in Sweden and in the rest of the world via media.

There are many others who may not reflect as much over the situation as Alan does. As Reza says, many people have become more isolated and have turned away from society. National and ethnic identities have become very central in this process. He regards this process as a reaction to the need for belongingness. And he argues as follows:

Unfortunately, when you don't have the possibility to come into society, you cannot learn the language in a good way. Therefore feelings of exclusion and estrangement become stronger. The lack of contact with the society forces people to draw towards what they consider to be their roots. I see that nationality has become much stronger among Kurds here than for those who are living in Kurdistan. Kurdish identity and the Kurdish flag have become very central here, while people there have other urgent problems such as managing their everyday life, job, class conflicts/divisions, etc. Here, on the contrary, the only important thing has become issues about origin and nationality. Of course, I am not an exception and I have been affected as well by this situation. You become affected regardless of whether you want it or not.

“Diasporising of home”,⁸² which means that the concept of diaspora signals “processes of *multi-locationality across geographical, cultural, and physical boundaries*”,⁸³ summarises well the narratives about homeland. Most of the narratives testify to a sense of multi-locationality and movement. Return arouses many questions and hesitations. A return movement in the sense that Safran and Cohen mention does not exist. In spite of their wishes to return, they are aware of the fact that it is not easy. However, this knowledge does not make them stop dreaming and hoping to return one day. To keep these dreams alive is a way to survive the conditions of exile and otherness.

⁸² Brah 1996:190.

⁸³ Brah 1996:194.

Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the respondents' conceptions of homeland and their relation to it. The centrality of homeland and the relation to it are among the main features that distinguish diasporas from other kinds of displacement and mobility. The meaning of homeland and the relation to it are also among the issues that distinguish the two notions of diaspora discussed in Chapter 4 as (re)territorial and de-territorial. While the (re)territorial notion regards homeland aspirations and return as a point of departure, the de-territorial notion sees it as a reaction to displacement and means that the issue of return should not be taken for granted. Homeland in the de-territorial notion is not defined in terms of territoriality. Clifford, Hall and Gilroy point out the ambivalences, contradictions and differences within diasporas and are critical towards the (re)territorial notion's picture of homogeneous diaspora communities.

This study confirms the de-territorial notions of diaspora presented by Gilroy, Hall, Clifford, and also Brah.⁸⁴ Narratives show, however, the differences between Kurdish diaspora and both the historical Jewish and the historical African diaspora. In contrast to them, the members of the Kurdish diaspora, at least the so-called first generation, have lived experiences of places they call homelands. There is also a material bond between them and "homelands" where their families and relatives are living. Their lived experiences of homeland do not necessarily correspond to their political notions of it. These ambivalences indicate the discursive dimension of experiences.⁸⁵ This also confirms the political dimension of diasporic identities and projects, and highlights the need of contextualising experiences. Furthermore, the narratives show that the articulations of homeland, the relation to it, and how it is expressed must be analysed in connection with different socio-political and discursive contexts.

The most striking thing in the narratives is that there does not exist any given homeland. Homeland for the respondents is a vague, ambiguous and ambivalent conception. Homeland is not concrete; it is mostly about

⁸⁴ See Chapter 4.

⁸⁵ See Chapter 5.

a subjective feeling and individual and political constructions based on lived experiences and political discourses. There is often ambivalence towards the countries of origin as homelands, at the same time that Kurdistan does not exist as a juridical-political reality, as a state. Most of the respondents do not feel at home and/or do not feel welcomed in Sweden either. Consequently, the Kurdish diasporic community and movement, built around various politics of location, becomes the “home” where they can find a sense of continuity and belonging. This “home” is a space that exceeds several territorial borders and several nation-states. The respondents always have one foot in Sweden and one somewhere else. They find themselves in the borderlands between several localities. In other words they bridge over these societies with their simultaneous attachment to them. The Kurdish diaspora’s “home” is built around the Kurdish movement, Kurdish identity and politics. It creates a sphere where homelands and Sweden are interwoven in a continuous interaction within which Kurdish identity and culture are (re)produced. The socio-political and cultural activities also fill an additional central function: they give a sense of self-respect and confidence.

As the narratives show, there does not exist any unified notion about homeland and return. Articulation of a Kurdish diasporic identity, in which the relation to homeland is central, is associated with collective actions where the external boundaries of the identity come into focus. There are also many internal boundaries around which different identities and positionings, and also different conceptions of homeland, are formed and defined.

**To Be(come) a Kurd in Sweden:
Strategies of Resistance and Survival
and Politics of Identity**

Introduction

In the previous chapter the respondents' notion of and their relationship to homeland was discussed. It was shown that there is no given or unifying definition of what/where homeland is. The individual lived experiences of localities are quite similar for all respondents, while the political constructions are different. There is no given Kurdish homeland in a political sense, but subjective constructions. The diasporic space that bridges over the countries of settlement and countries of origin seems to offer the respondents a "home". It is also in this "home" that the construction of the Kurdish identity and the construction of "Kurdistan" as homeland of Kurds are going on. Very close to the issue of homeland are the politics of identity and identity projects, another central feature of diaspora as a social process and movement. This chapter will focus on respondents' identity projects and their different strategies to create and maintain their identities within the framework of their positions as Kurds and immigrants in the Swedish context and also their political and ideological orientations. The discussion focuses on how respondents (re)act to the relationship of power and dominance, in which they as immigrants and Kurds are regarded as inferior and treated accordingly.

Interactions, identities and power relations

The collective social knowledge, including cultural values, norms, prejudices, etc., that people share in a society, is (re)produced through their ongoing social interactions within a language community. Everyday interaction as an activity which produces kinds of knowledge that we take for granted implies, according to Berger and Luckman, three central processes: externalising, objectifying, and internalising.¹ These processes of social interaction always imply power relations. Individuals' perceptions of the world and of themselves are formed through an ongoing process of interaction and negotiation with the society. We interpret others' perceptions of us, react to them,

¹ Berger and Luckman 1979.

and construct our identity based on our sense of who we are and which kind of resources we can mobilise. We react to others' perceptions through certain filters that consist of our political and ideological orientations as well as our positions in categories of gender, class, nationality, sexuality, age, etc. The characteristic of the social relations of power and dominance – such as the relation between the coloniser and the colonised – is, according to Fanon,² one-way communication and lack of mutuality. Thus, questions such as who has the power to define the other, and who is dependent on the other's recognition, are central in analysing such relations. In these relations the inferiorised identity becomes an object for the superior identity's actions.³ The colonial conception of “the Other” did not disappear with formal de-colonisation, and it still affects social relations on a global scale.⁴ However, how the Othered respond and react, how they define themselves and how they relate to the colonial conceptions is dependent on many different factors mentioned above. Some may identify with the inferior conception of themselves, some may resist it, and some other may react in other ways. Identities are often personal and political projects in which we participate, empowered to a greater or lesser extent by resources of experience and ability, culture and social organisation. Identity politics' movements, in which also diasporic movements can be included, are political according to Calhoun, “because they involve refusing, diminishing or displacing identities others wish to recognise in individuals”⁵

The process of identity implies processes of negotiations, differentiations and identifications. As Clifford argues, in studying diaspora identities, the focus should be on diaspora's borders and on what it defines itself against – on (dis)identifications rather than essential features.⁶ Diaspora's collective identity is built through ambivalent, heterogeneous and contra-

² Fanon 1967.

³ Fanon 1967; Azar 2001b.

⁴ See Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz and Thörn 1999; Tesfahouney 1998; Azar 2001a; Mc Eachrane & Faye (eds.) 2001; de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari (eds.) 2003; Pred 2000; Jonsson 2004.

⁵ Calhoun 1994:21.

⁶ Clifford 1997:250.

dictory processes of differentiation from the countries of settlement and identification with homelands. There are two dimensions in this process: a political and an individual one. Political identities are always collective and create a sense of a “we”, which is defined in relation to a “them”, against which “we” are unified. Most of identity politics involves claims about categories of individuals who putatively share a given identity.⁷ “Moreover,” Calhoun argues, “we can see that...there are a plethora of claims of ‘basic’ or ‘root’ or essential identities that stand on different grounds, that cohabit with different political bedfellows, that open (or foreclose) different insights or coalitions or conflicts.”⁸

However, at the same time each individual has in everyday life her/his own relationship towards those who are defined as “them”. Hence, there are relations and identifications that exceed the boundaries between different collectivities. There are also differentiations within all collectivities that call their very claim of unity and homogeneity into question. Hence, as Gilroy and Hall state, there are differences within the sameness and sameness within the differences.⁹

The Kurdish identity, as discussed in Chapter 2, has been formed in a process of resistance against the imposed national identities and the nation-states’ identity politics in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. Thus, to (be)come a Kurd has always had a political dimension. This process also continues in exile and among the Kurdish diaspora. Further, it has acquired additional dimensions and even become a strategy of resistance against the stigmatised immigrant identity. Before entering this issue, I will discuss some pre-migratory experiences in order to illustrate the continuity and change that this process implies. The Kurds in Sweden have experiences of two kinds of “ethnic” subordination. They have, as Kurds, experiences of subordination and oppression in the countries of origin, although different in each country. In Sweden they experience another kind of “ethnic” subordination and othering, primarily as *invandrare* (immigrants).

⁷ Calhoun 1994; Smith 1994.

⁸ Calhoun 1994:19.

⁹ Gilroy 1994:211, 2000:129; Hall 1992a.

To be(come) a Kurd: some pre-migratory experiences of denial and resistance

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the historical framework of Kurdish identity is formed, according to Vali, by the dialectics of denial and resistance.¹⁰ This fact is also illustrated in the narratives. However, the respondents' experiences differ depending on which country they are born in. The four countries have different "Kurd politics", which have had an impact on Kurdish reactions and identity formations. To identify oneself as a Kurd has been often a political act in itself, a way to resist the imposed identity politics. Still, in many of the narratives one can see an ambivalence in the attachment to different places, a process of double consciousness. Some of the narratives show very clearly the relational character of ethnic and national identities and their specificities in each part.

Goran's experiences of his childhood and youth in Turkey are traumatic. These experiences and memories from the past make him, today as a "Kurd", feel both guilty and humiliated. He now regards the politics of forced assimilation as a humiliation to his human dignity and as political oppression. This gives him reason to fight for what he calls a worthy life, for being himself. However, his memories also illustrate a double consciousness, contradictory feelings and double attachments, which have been a result of living between two cultures and two identities. He cannot speak Kurdish but speaks Turkish very fluently. He is very keen on identifying himself as a Kurd and differentiates himself from the Turkish identity, though he admits that he does like Turkey as a country. He says:

In order to become a good citizen, have a good future, have a good education, have rich and proficient friends you have to talk very good Turkish, look like Turks, be dressed as Turks and be brought up as a Turk. My parents tried very much for us to be like that. Maybe it was not their fault. The situation forced them. They never talked Kurdish with us. ... I didn't care about that either. I also wanted to become somebody. ... Our neighbourhood was Turkish and I had only Turkish friends and I thought it was in my favour to

¹⁰ Vali 1998.

have Turkish friends. We had a playground where we played. Poor Kurdish children – they wanted to come and play with us, I will never forget this, and we threw them out. We said, bloody Kurds want to come and take our toys. We were so egoistic. ... I feel that I am very clean now. I have felt very dirty before, do you understand? For example, when I was living among Turks I said that I was a Kurd. I never denied it, but it is interesting that when I was among Kurds I said that I was a Turk. When I was living among Kurds, I thought no, I can't live with them, I don't desire such a life with poverty, dirt, ignorance, unemployment and a lot of other things.

Although the historical and contextual conditions are different, these experiences can still be best described with Fanon's words:

Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle.¹¹

It is at this point that Fanon states that the “colonial slave” has internalised the master's picture of himself/herself as inferior at a deeper level, in the mind.

Kawa, unlike Goran, comes from a family where everyone identified themselves as Kurds. However, he started to identify himself as a Kurd in an active and political way only when he came in contact with different institutions such as schools, the police, etc. He then began to differentiate from Turks and Turkish identity. His narratives very clearly highlight the relational aspect of ethnic/national identities.¹² Kawa says:

It was first when I was about ten years old that I started to think of people in terms of Kurds and Turks. We saw that as Kurds we were not accepted. We had to change our identity and become Turks. It was bad to be a Kurd.

¹¹ Fanon 1967:18.

¹² Hylland Eriksen 1993.

Kurds were looked down upon and as Kurds we realised that something was wrong. Then we started to read books and listen to the adults' discussions about politics. We were curious. Then came our reaction and it was quite strong, a reaction against being inferiorised and unwanted. In the school, when we said that we were Kurds, we were reprimanded and they said that there were no Kurds and that we were mountain Turks. It had the opposite effect. We became more motivated, angry and disappointed and in the end we saw them (police, teachers, etc.) as enemies.

Mariam identifies herself as a Kurd and feminist. She was born and grown up in her mother's home city in Iranian Azerbaijan, and her mother tongue was Turkish. In Iran the Kurdish identity has not been banned or prohibited as in Turkey, but the oppression has been much more subtle and indirect. Mariam's father was a Kurd although he hid his Kurdish background in order to escape problems. Mariam decided to identify herself as a Kurd and started to learn the Kurdish language when she was a young adult. Her identification as a Kurd was a reaction to the discrimination and oppression that her father was facing, which forced him to hide and in some way even deny his Kurdish background. She says:

My father is a Kurd, my mother is a Turk. My father came to Azerbaijan to work and there he married my mother. But except my mother, nobody knew that he was a Kurd. He knew that this was a sensitive question. He said that he was Persian. He knew that if he said that, he couldn't marry any girl there. It was like that. Then when I attended the eighth grade, I coincidentally had a chance to know about that. ... My father said to me that I was not allowed to tell anybody. It became an eye-opener for me, became a spark in my head. ... I became very curious about Kurds and Kurdistan. My grandmother usually told me stories that Kurds were bandits and killed people, etc. I became more and more curious. Finally, I moved to Kurdistan when I was studying the last year in secondary school. I enjoyed it very much. Finally, I married a Kurd despite my family's opposition. The conceptions about Kurds were very unfair. I felt that Kurds were very unfairly treated. ... I identify myself as a Kurd. I say everywhere that I am a Kurd. I also did it before I came here. I have been living by now for many years

among Kurds and with Kurds. I don't make any difference between people or languages, but when you feel that you have been treated unfairly, then you get such a feeling and ask why. I think about my father's pain and how much he was humiliated and oppressed.

Because of the same problem Mariam's father was facing, it happened very often that Iranian Kurds did not say that they were Kurds when they were outside of Kurdistan.¹³ Shilan says that when she was studying at the university in Tehran she did not say that she was from Kurdistan. She talked Persian very fluently and it was no problem for her to hide her Kurdish background in order to escape problems. However, Shilan admits that her emotional attachment to Kurdistan was no stronger than to other places because she had lived more of her life in the Persian-speaking cities.

I have been living the largest part of my life in Iran, in Tehran and Kermanshah, from eight years of age until I was twenty-two. ... In Tehran, Kurdishness was not an issue for me. Because I could speak Persian very well, I did not say that I was a Kurd, nobody knew about that either. It was not necessary.

It was, though, not always easy or possible for everybody to hide their Kurdish background. Reza tells about his own experiences and feelings of inferiority because of his Kurdish background.

I don't see myself as a nationalist in the sense that I would depreciate other nationalities. But I have suffered very much already as a child. To be honest, as a Kurd I have been humiliated. I grew up in a Kurdish family where everyone talked Kurdish. We didn't have radio and TV and therefore the Persian language was very alien for me. Suddenly, when I started school I had to talk and study in Persian, a language that I couldn't speak. In such a situation you feel as a child that you are less intelligent and less talented

¹³ The situation has changed since the Iranian revolution, 1979, which created a sense of solidarity between people in the country. Many of the biases about minorities were questioned and rejected.

when you don't understand the language. It was so I felt. It gave me very bad self-confidence, with feelings of shame and inferiority. National oppression also has social and psychological effects, not only political ones.

Those respondents who are from Iraqi Kurdistan have different experiences. They have been recognised as Kurds since the country was formed in the early twentieth century and have acquired a kind of limited cultural autonomy. However, since then, they have also been involved in war with the central government until the late twentieth century. In Iraq, the ethnic/national boundaries between Kurds and Arabs were drawn quite clearly. The problem for them was not whether they could identify themselves as Kurds – it was instead about political power. Sherko as well as Shapol and Salah are from Iraqi Kurdistan. Sherko describes his experience of the situation as follows:

Kurdish is of course our national identity, and because of that we get murdered and oppressed and rooted out. However, I have always had a human feeling, an international feeling. I have never hated Arabs because I knew that Arabs were also oppressed by the regime. I was both a Kurd and a citizen of the world. ... In Iraq, as Kurds, we are facing oppression, rooting out and killing. It was a fascist regime that just wanted to root out the Kurds. ... After the genocide of Jews, the genocide of Kurds is the most extensive but nobody cares about that. ... I get furious that, in a time when boundaries are becoming so close to each other and cameras reach all over the world, 182,000 people disappeared and were murdered in Iraq and nobody asked why.

Thus war, national oppression and disasters during many years in Iraqi Kurdistan brought about an ethnicisation of identities. Thereby the maintenance of a Kurdish identity for the Kurdish people in Iraq has become central in many ways. It is seen as a matter of political struggle against national oppression by the left and/or as a suppressed essence by nationalists.

Shapol's narratives show the importance and centrality of the Kurdish identity in her family, something that has affected her:

In Iraqi Kurdistan I can say that we had a degree of freedom compared to

other parts. I am happy that I am from a family that cared about the Kurdish question. My father was a *peshmarga* (Kurdish guerrilla) since 1974. I am brought up in a family where *Kurdayeti* has been always important. We never felt like anything else than Kurds.

Evin comes from Syria, where there is no region called Kurdistan. The Kurdish areas are divided because of the policies of Arabisation and forced resettlement that have been carried out against the Kurdish population. The Kurdish identity and language, however, are not prohibited. Evin talks very much about the importance of her family in the formation of her identity as Kurd:

In Syria it is not a problem if you say that you are a Kurd. I knew that I was a Kurd. We talked Kurdish at home. The Kurdish soul, so to speak, was strong in our family.

All these memories and experiences have been reinterpreted and rearticulated in the shadow of the respondents' contemporary life and their political-ideological position. These experiences are also a store of knowledge, a frame within which contemporary experiences are articulated. Each new experience of oppression, each new trauma, each new mobilisation leads to the (re)construction and strengthening of the collective memory and collective identity. As was illustrated in the narratives, respondents from different parts have different experiences. Their personal experiences and memories interact with, and are influenced by, the political situation within which the Kurdish identity has been formed in these countries.¹⁴ The narratives show a continuity in the respondents' Kurdish identity in exile. The Kurdish identity has also acquired other dimensions in exile. To identify with the Kurdish imagined community has become both a strategy to resist the imposed immigrant identity and a way to survive the exclusion from Swedish society.

¹⁴ See Chapter 2.

To be(come) a Kurd in Sweden: individual identity projects and political discourses

The Kurdish national identity has borne the mark of political and cultural diversity of the “other” because of the transnational condition within which it was formed.¹⁵ In the context of (Swedish) exile, the Kurdish identity becomes more ambivalent, complex and multiple because it has to relate to additional points of references. Depending on their ideological and political convictions and their relation to Sweden, respondents “choose” different strategies for their relations to society and in creating their own identity. To be more exact, one can say that their identity process, their sense of the self and their perceptions of Sweden are closely connected to each other. This process takes place mainly within the framework of their social, political and ideological positions upon which they draw the boundaries of their identities.

The various identity projects identified in the narratives have both individual and political dimensions. The individual dimension is primarily connected with the respondents’ personal experiences of living in Sweden. The relationship between migrants – especially those from the Third World – and Swedish society is influenced by the colonial relations according to which they are stigmatised and inferiorised.¹⁶ The perception of their own inferior position takes place in large part through learning the language, culture, norms, and collective knowledge and consciousness of the host society. In this process it is clear that language is something more than merely a tool. Using language can be rather seen as a social act.¹⁷ One outcome of such a process is the double consciousness¹⁸ that provides them with wider views and perspectives, but also makes them aware of their inferiorised position in relation to the majority of society. They become aware of who or what they “are”. This point is very clearly illustrated in the following quotation taken from Fanon:

¹⁵ Vali 1998, 2003; see also Chapter 2.

¹⁶ See also Pred 2000; Tesfahuney 1998; Azar 2001a; van Dijk 1993; Brune 1990, 1998; de los Reyes, Molina and Mulinari (eds.) 2003.

¹⁷ Fanon 1967:Ch. 1.

¹⁸ Gilroy 1993, 1994, 1997, 2003.

“Look, a Negro!” It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile. “Look, a Negro!” It was true. It amused me. “Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.¹⁹

The political dimension seems to have a great impact on the respondents’ reactions to the various “external stimuli”. It can partly be explained through the presence and centrality of politics in the everyday life of the Kurds and in the Kurdish culture. The most dominant ideology of the Kurdish movement has been nationalism. As noted in Chapter 2, Kurdish nationalism is dominated by primordialist and ethnicist notions of national identity and belonging. The primordial conception of identity and origin “identifies national identity with human nature, as a quality inherent in the human individual, defining his/her social and political existence.”²⁰ Characteristic of the ethnicist conception is, according to Vali, that it usually is “informed by other political and ideological discourses, mainly Marxism, liberalism and democratic theory.”²¹ In this approach, discourses of identity and origin coincide and the Kurdish community and identity are defined on the basis of common origin in terms of a uniform Kurdish ethnicity.²² The Kurdish nationalist ideology has, according to Hassanpour,²³ undergone considerable differentiation, especially since the 1960s. He states that by the 1980s “ideological/political trends that may be identified as ‘populism’, ‘socialism’, ‘national democracy’ and ‘national socialism’ had appeared in the literature and programs of the political parties. Marxism-Leninism has exercised considerable influence on *Kurdayeti*.”²⁴

¹⁹ Fanon 1967:111-112.

²⁰ Vali 2003:60.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hassanpour, A.1992.

²⁴ Ibid. 64. *Kurdayeti* is a term for Kurdish nationalism.

Hence, if we imagine the Kurdish movement and politics as a continuum, we can see on the one pole Marxists and on the other nationalists. Between them, however, we can find various combinations. This situation creates a blend of different and often ambivalent and contradictory positions that sometimes make it difficult to define or position them as purely Marxists or nationalists, left or right, etc. However, within the Kurdish movement nationalists have been generally those who have dominated the field, although of course there have been exceptions in some periods and some places. The left has been more fragmented despite periods of glory when it has played a significant role and has influenced the movement, especially in Iran and Turkey. Fragmentation and contradictions among the left have many times been connected with the Kurdish national question and the left's position towards it.

For the purpose of this study, and based on my data, I distinguish a right-oriented and a left-oriented nationalist discourse in the narratives. It is not a satisfactory distinction because it can give a notion of pure and distinct political positions. In spite of that, as analytical categories they facilitate the analysis. However, the specific political meaning of the left and right must be understood within the framework of Kurdish politics which is, as mentioned earlier, very much influenced by Marxism-Leninism. Accordingly, four categories of identity projects can be distinguished in the narratives. (1) Those respondents who choose a politics of resistance in which the active construction of a positive Kurdish identity is central. In this way they create an identity alternative to the stigmatised immigrant identity. I position this category as left-oriented nationalist. (2) Those who see the national boundaries rather as natural and unavoidable. Thus, they seem not to have any active strategy for constructing the Kurdish identity since they seem to see the Kurdish identity as a natural part of them. This category is positioned as right-oriented nationalist. (3) Those who have strongly internalised the stigmas and the inferior identity that society allots them as Kurds and as immigrants, and identify with them. Hence they have a very ambivalent relation to the Kurds and are very keen as individuals to differentiate themselves from them. I position also this category as right-oriented nationalist because it has a notion of national boundaries as natural. (4) The cate-

gory of leftists who criticise and oppose nationalism, both the Swedish and the Kurdish. It has to be pointed out that all four categories are internally very heterogeneous and divided.

Resisting imposed identities

“I am not a Swede, nor an immigrant. I am a Kurd”

The Kurdish identity has been constructed as a reaction to the exclusive national identities in the countries of origin. Claiming Kurdish identity has been a sign of resistance and a political act. To “be” Kurd, and to fight for the maintenance of a Kurdish identity, is one of the central issues in the Kurdish movement (particularly for the nationalists). To be a Kurd in Sweden, on the contrary, is not a problem since the Kurdish identity is recognised by the state and society. The Kurdish identity is inferiorised and depreciated as a non-Western identity, yet Kurds are not regarded as a threat to the national identity of the state as they were in the countries of origin. They do not demand any minority rights in Sweden either. Their relation to Swedish society is rather determined by their position as immigrants. Kurds as well as other immigrant minorities in Sweden have the right to organise themselves and work for the maintenance of their culture and identity. But irrespective of who they are, and how they define themselves, they are identified by society as immigrants. It is the immigrant identity, a position of non-Swedishness and otherness, that determines their relationship to society. It is a negation, a negative identity, and the negative counterpart of the Swedish identity. Hence, claiming Kurdish identity in Sweden has also become an active strategy for many Kurds to resist both the imposed *invandrare* (immigrant) identity and assimilation.

In Sweden, Goran tried to become “a good citizen” and adapt to the Swedish way of life while maintaining his identity. He realised soon that he was not appreciated or welcomed in Sweden.

When I came to Sweden I liked this country a lot and I wanted to adapt to it. I saw Sweden as my second homeland. ... Now I see myself as a Kurd. Today I am living as a human being, but before I lived as a weed. I see myself neither as a Swede nor as an immigrant but as a Kurd who wants and wishes to go back. How Swedes, the state or the people, treat immigrants – it does not matter. Or how immigrants are dressed or behave, which bothered me a lot before ... I see it as a problem between them, and I do not belong to any of them. ... I want to be accepted for what and who I am. I do not care any more about what the Swedish people think about me. I do not feel any belonging to Sweden. I tried so much to make them see me as an equal but it did not work. Still, after ten years, they ask you “where are you from? Do you miss your homeland? Do you like Sweden?” Now I know that whatever I do I still will not be accepted as an equal. That is why I will not try any more. I feel much better now and I am satisfied with myself. It is as if I try for revenge. I can’t hold out any more. ... I am proud of being a Kurd. It does not mean that I am a racist, does not mean that I depreciate other nationalities, never, never. We say that as a Kurd, I also have the same value as a Swede here, that much, no more, no less.

“To discover” the Kurdish identity, as it is expressed, is a way to avoid “becoming” an immigrant – to resist imposed collective identities and inferiorisation. For this group, the Kurdish identity is more or less also a conscious political strategy in order to create a positive Kurdish identity. Goran expresses this point very clearly when he differentiates himself from both Swedes and immigrants. While differentiating himself from the Swedish society, where Goran is not welcomed as an immigrant, he identifies with and finds a home in the Kurdish diaspora community. He came into contact with the Kurdish movement in Sweden and started to identify himself as a Kurd. His Kurdish identity has strengthened during his years in Sweden as he realised that in Sweden he would not be seen as an equal. His bitter experiences have influenced him and his private life. His strong differentiation from Sweden and his identification as Kurd is both a political act and an individual strategy of survival.

“Being” a Kurd, and becoming involved in the Kurdish community, is also a way to resist exclusion and subordination, a way to gain self-confi-

dence and self-respect. Dilsha came to Sweden with her parents when she was fifteen. For her, too, the Kurdish identity is an active strategy, an alternative identity in the context of exile and alienation. Something that both Dilsha and Goran have in common is that their commitment to the Kurdish movement mainly started in Sweden. They have the same needs for identification. To be a Kurd gives Dilsha self-confidence and self-respect. She describes it as follows:

It is important to have one's own identity. As long as you do not have your own identity, you cannot be stable and neither you can help other people and their society. ... As long as you respect yourself you can respect other people. ... Then you know who you are, you would never get lost. ... The majority of those who do not know themselves, do not have any self-esteem, and do not have own identity, see themselves as immigrants. Of course I am an immigrant as well but I dare to come into the Swedish society. I dare to declare myself. I also dare to learn about them. I have more understanding and respect for their culture, society. When you do that, then you also get more respect from them.

Such a process is also noted by van Bruinessen, who has studied the process of Kurdish identity among the Kurds in Germany. He finds that especially for the "second generation" of Kurds the Kurdish identity and participation in the Kurdish movement are a way to resist alienation and exclusion. Political activities give them self-confidence and self-respect.²⁵ Each individual acts differently in this process and defines her/his own relation to the society based on their own specific situation, needs and experiences. While Goran almost totally differentiates himself from Sweden, Dilsha does not. In fact, Goran is not representative of the respondents because most of them do not make such a total differentiation. Dilsha's strategy, on the contrary, is not so much built on a sharp differentiation, despite the fact that she also has experienced everyday racism and discrimination.

²⁵ van Bruinessen 1999.

It does not matter how much I try, like, talk perfect Swedish, accept the Swedish society, do everything, but still when I am sitting in the tram, phew! – an immigrant. I see then that I am just an immigrant. Then I realise that I am not one of them. I try to do all the best but I am not one of them. [...] I have now been living here half of my life, fifteen years here and fifteen there. Even though I have been living here so long and studied here and so on, I have not many Swedish friends. That may be because I have many people around me, like my family and my relatives. But I want to give my children the best of Sweden and Swedish culture instead of those bad sides that I have from my culture. All cultures have bad and good sides. I always take the best things from both Swedish and Kurdish culture and try to convey them to my children so that they do not feel outside any of them. I will be on both sides and experience both sides.

It can be said that Dilsha's and especially Goran's position as immigrants, and their contact with the Kurdish diasporic network and their involvement in the Kurdish movement in Sweden, have had a great impact on their identity. However, for those who already were involved in the Kurdish movement when they came to Sweden, the situation is slightly different, though not fundamentally. I ask Azad about how his commitment to the Kurdish movement and his Kurdish identity would be affected if his situation in Sweden were different. He says that he has not encountered any problem in Sweden and that his political activity did not begin in Sweden. He admits that if he had his own country, then maybe he could live here as a Swede and not care about his national identity. He thinks that if a nation does not have a free place in the world, its own country, this nation will not be free anywhere in the world. However, having the position of an immigrant and the lack of his own identity is still very important to him. Azad says that having one's own identity gives people more self-respect and more self-confidence. However, he admits that identities are changeable. He is aware of the fact that when you live in other places than your native place, you become something in between, whether you like it or not. But he thinks that it is better to maintain your own identity in order to maintain your self-confidence and self-respect, because you will never be accepted as a Swede even if you want to. To identify as a Kurd

seems to be primarily a political strategy for Azad to resist oppression of the Kurdish identity in general, and at the same time a response to the need of identification. He says:

You become something strange. But even the Swedes, now we are talking about Sweden, will not accept you as a Swede and do not respect you either. I do not mean that you don't have to have contact with Swedes. I don't mean that. ... What I mean is that first of all you have to have a platform to stand on, I mean, you have to have a place, have some place where you can stand and then... That is why my Kurdish/national feelings became stronger when I came to Sweden. It is not only about the Kurds. You see for example the Muslims, Jews, etc. ... It is about identifying yourself with something.

The Kurdish identity becomes in Azad's description a place, a platform, a space, one's own room and a "home" where he can feel strong through belonging to a Kurdish imagined community. It is both a strategy of survival and an active and conscious identity project and a strategy of resistance. Azad is also, like Dilsha, more open to Swedish society. At the same time he is very critical towards everyday racism, discrimination and the way immigrants are treated. He continues:

There are things in Swedish society that may not fit our values or one may not like them. It is normal but we have to accept those things that are good and are useful instead of rejecting them and saying that it is not our culture. Cultures change every day; not only Kurdish culture but all cultures are like living bodies. They go through changes as a natural process. ... I don't think that it is right to say that Swedes do not accept us, and that we should keep together and isolate ourselves as soon as one faces opposition. This is wrong.

This conception of national identity, compared to that in the next section, is mostly based on the idea of nation and nationalism distinct from naturalised local attachments.

There are others who strongly identify themselves as Kurds while they are much more influenced by the discourse of the left and do not want to

be identified as nationalists. Kawa does not identify himself as either a nationalist or a Marxist. He does not blame nationalists in the same way as the leftists usually do. He identifies himself as a Kurd and wants to be recognised as a Kurd. For Kawa, his Kurdish identity is a site of resistance. He describes his Kurdish identity as follows:

I had my Kurdish identity already before I came here. I was already a Kurd. It was formed through a movement/struggle. ... For me the meaning of being Kurd has changed all the time. I have not been rooted in any tradition but I have managed to adapt to the society I live in. ... To be a Kurd has become such things as freedom, high values and a source of inspiration since it gives fighting spirit.

Claiming Kurdish identity as a “suppressed essence”²⁶ to resist oppression has long been an inspiration and motive for mobilising and opposing the national oppression in the countries of origin. In this process, it has become an inseparable part of the Kurdish culture and everyday life. It also works as a point of resistance and survival in the context of exile and otherness as immigrant. However, it also has another side. At the same time that it encourages resistance against the oppression, it essentialises the constructed collective identity. This is an inherent risk in such projects and it is the paradox of these resistance movements. The social and cultural process of diaspora represents social processes marked by diversity and mixture, something that opposes any essential claim on identity. Claims to essence and all essential identities are always positionings and as such they are politics of identity, politics of positions, and must be seen and analysed in their context and from their particular strategies.²⁷ The process of essence-claiming among diasporas should be seen and analysed within a historical context marked and dominated by the ideology and politics of modernity.²⁸ Giving expression to a Kurdish identity, Kurdish culture and

²⁶ Smith 1994.

²⁷ Hall 1992b; Smith 1994.

²⁸ Gilroy 1993, 2003.

Kurdish origin also means representing a Kurdish “essence”. The risk and the inherent dilemma are, as Fanon²⁹ and Gilroy³⁰ point out, that it can lead to the creation of the myth of the original and homogeneous own culture, and thereby it can contribute to essentialism and racial thinking. This is demonstrated in the next section.

Paradoxes of resistance

“Stone is heavier in its own place”³¹

The ambivalence deeply inscribed in the resistance movements and the political mobilisations is coupled to the process of essence-claim that these movements imply.³² We see an ambivalent attitude towards these movements in both Fanon and Gilroy. On the one hand they recognise the need for an African consciousness, or at least anti-colonial consciousness, to fight colonialism, oppression and racism. On the other hand, they direct a sharp critique towards any kind of mythologisation of the black identity.³³ As discussed in Chapter 2, the Kurdish identity has been created in response to imposed national identities and against denial and exclusion. However, paradoxically, the Kurdish identity has itself become essentialised and naturalised in this process. Thus, the process has a long history in the Kurdish movement, as long as the movement itself. Yet it both influences and is influenced by the movement.

As is evident from the narratives, the respondents’ experiences of Sweden are complex. On the one hand, they have positive experiences of Sweden as a country which has given them refuge, protection and political freedom, and provided them with the possibility of maintaining their own identity and culture. On the other hand, the vast majority of the respondents are strongly critical of the way they are treated as immigrants and

²⁹ Fanon 1967.

³⁰ Gilroy 1993, 1994, 1997, 2003, 2000.

³¹ This is a Kurdish expression which refers to attachment to place. It means that people mean more and are valued more in the place where they belong.

³² Fanon 1967; Azar 2001b; Gilroy 1987, 1997, 2000; Smith 1994.

³³ Fanon 1967; Gilroy 1993, 2000, 2003.

Kurds, and of the everyday racism and discrimination. Some others, however, do not see these things as a problem but rather as a natural reaction. This category of nationalists expresses understanding for everyday racism and discrimination of immigrants. They seem unable to criticise such a phenomenon because they share its basic conceptions about identity and culture as fixed, place-bounded and a-historical categories. Neither do they have the general critical position towards power and dominance relations that characterises the left and the left-oriented nationalists. This group of respondents also experience these problems, but they justify and accept them as natural/normal consequences of displacement. Ronak is aware of the discrimination that immigrants are facing and she also has her own experiences. In spite of that, she says:

Concerning the political power here, its position towards Kurds is the same as to other foreigners. Maybe those with black skin face much more opposition; otherwise it is the same for all. No foreigner can have a position of power; no foreigner is allowed to work in sensitive job positions. You are the second-class citizen. It is like this.

Despite the criticism and feelings of discomfort towards these phenomena, she sees them as normal and says:

I believe that these differences exist in all corners of the world. I don't think that you can find anywhere in any system that people would recognise people from another country as compatriots. ... I mean maybe I also would be like that. We have the same feelings towards the homeland and *natawa* (nation/folk) and *millat* (nation).

This positioning is based on a “naturalised geography” that, according to Shapiro, creates the ideological manoeuvres through which imagined communities are given essentialist identities.³⁴ The claims of a right to the

³⁴ Shapiro 1994:495.

land/soil and of belonging to specific places represent primordial ties in nationalist movements, whether liberating, defensive or aggressive.³⁵ A right to the land gives, in this perspective, a right to discrimination and exclusion of those who do not belong to the same land. This is inspired by the idea of *deep nation*³⁶ to which those who belong have access, and from which those who do not belong are excluded forever.

Based on such a conception, Salah does not see discrimination as a problem but as a natural right. He is critical of how media write about Kurds, especially concerning gender relations. He admits that Kurds are inferiorised and that there are people who have a negative conception of Kurds. However, Salah expresses understanding despite his awareness of the problem:

I personally have not felt that I have been depreciated. Maybe I have been lucky. Neither do I think that Sweden is such a society. However, in general I know that we are counted as third-class citizens and not even as second. This is unpleasant. Although I have studied here, and have a good job for which I have worked hard, if I were in Kurdistan I would have a much better position than this. The job would have been easier for me and I would have a more stable position. We say that a stone is heavier in its own place, and I believe in that. Yes, it is true that my position as an immigrant has affected me and my life. I see that I am an alien and, irrespective of how much I am respected, they themselves go first, and I think that it is also their right.

According to Shapiro, “right discourse”, that is, natives’ right over a territory, which reproduces the state-oriented sovereignty model and legitimises politically the state-centric mode of authority, plays an important role in the process of essentialising imagined community. Despite the processes of transnationalisation and globalisation and their significant challenge to the geopolitical map of states, it still remains the primary model of space.³⁷ The state-

³⁵ Cockburn 1998:12.

³⁶ I have made a modification of the term “deep England” mentioned by Floya Anthais and Nira Yuval-Davis (1992). For more discussion see Chapter 4.

³⁷ Shapiro 1994:482.

oriented map continues to supply the moral geography that dominates what is ethically relevant. “Rights” as a juridical position, departing from a “fixed address based on a historically legitimated title”,³⁸ provides the requisites and reproduces the notion of essential communities and deep nation.

Salah and Ronak talk about discrimination as an unquestionable and “natural” consequence and right, a right that originates from a “natural” belongingness to a place, to a territory, to a nation. Hence, the notion of “naturalised geography” in such a discourse, which is illustrated in the narratives, refers to a primordial sense of identity. As a citizen Salah has the same rights as the native Swedes. However, as immigrant/refugee he is excluded from the national community and discriminated, something that according to him is justifiable. At the same time, discrimination of immigrants is severely criticised by Swedish authorities and is seen by them as structural racism.³⁹ This category of respondents lacks the ideological and political tools to see through discriminatory actions and everyday racism. To understand the problem of racism, and especially to be able to see more subtle forms of exclusion and discrimination, is very difficult for people who are preoccupied with ethnic/racial differences.⁴⁰ They are not able to do that because the link between nationalism and racism “is especially strong when the national collectivity is constructed purely in terms of origin, racist exclusion, inferiorisations and exploitations.”⁴¹ They do not see the link between nationalism and racism, which is the essential bond between identity, culture, place and essentialisation of the imagined communities. On the one hand they see the phenomena, experience them in their everyday life and are disturbed by them. On the other hand they cannot fully criticise them because they share the same basic conceptions. Instead they are very concerned about praising Swedish nationalism and stressing their respect and understanding of it.

³⁸ Shapiro 1994:496.

³⁹ de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002; Integrationsverket 2004.

⁴⁰ Gilroy 1992.

⁴¹ Lutz, Phoenix and Yuval-Davis 1995:4. See also Shapiro 1994; Brnic 2002; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Goldberg (ed.) 1990; Gilroy 2000.

Unlike the former category, this category does not have any active strategy for the construction of the Kurdish identity. They seem not to see any need for that. It may partly be because they see a national identity as a natural and unquestionable property. To be a Kurd is self-evident for Salah. He says:

It is natural that I *am* a Kurd. I don't need to feel like a Kurd because I *am* a Kurd. [...] It has to do with the nation. I think that the Kurds are a nation, a nation that has a common history, a common soil and its own geography. My identity is Kurdish. When I say that I am Kurdish, I mean that my *ragas* (root) are Kurdish.

Salah proceeds from a Kurdish discourse opposing the dominant nationalisms' denial of Kurds' existence and their rights. However, for Salah the Kurdish identity itself has become essentialised. Territorial and naturalised national identity, the strong and natural bond between identity and territory, is included in all nationalist narratives. As Hobsbawm argues, an attempt to establish objective criteria of nationhood is made by referring to criteria such as language, ethnicity, common territory, common history, common culture, etc.⁴² These nationalist narratives that lie behind and sanctify and legitimise the right discourses and the idea of deep nation justify discrimination. That is why these respondents do not see any reason to be counted as equal citizens in Sweden when they do not belong to that territory and soil or do not have the "same blood".

For Evin, to be a Kurd is a matter of blood-relationship.

For me and for my brothers and sisters, it does not matter who you are. We will do everything for you only if you are a Kurd. We will give everything we can because my father taught us that we Kurds, it doesn't matter if we are from Iran, Iraq, Turkey or Syria, we have the same blood. ...

⁴² Hobsbawm 1990:5.

Hence, the other side of this positioning can, despite their modesty and gratefulness to Sweden, be unavoidable alienation and self-isolation. Seeing cultures and people as plants, rooted in their “original” soil, means consequently that it is impossible to get involved with other cultures (people) because they have different origins and roots. However, irrespective of these conceptions of identity, culture and place, the respondents are living in this society and they are in a continuous interaction with it. Their identity and culture are thereby not as pure as they wish or believe.

Quite closely related to this category is the third category of respondents, who seem to identify with the inferior position and conception of being immigrants and Kurds in Sweden.

Internalising Inferiority

“It depends on yourself and your social competence”

As discussed earlier in this chapter, relations of power and dominance are characterised by one-way communication. The one-way communication implies the notion that “we” have nothing to learn from “them”: they must be rather taught. The one-way communication often creates an inferiority complex in people who are objects of the exclusive and superior identity’s actions and are dependent on its recognition.⁴³ Their culture and identities are objects of a systematic depreciation and degradation. The vicious circle will not be broken as long as one has internalised and accepts the representation of herself/himself as inferior.⁴⁴

This category consists of a minor group among the respondents. They are, however, very much influenced by the discourses of nationalism. They are not active in any political party or association, and are not, according to themselves, interested in politics at all. They are, however, involved in different cultural activities. Soma identifies herself as a Kurd and is very keen on doing so, especially in order to distinguish herself from the Arabs:

⁴³ Fanon 1967; Azar 2001b.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

When somebody asks me where I come from, I quickly answer Kurdistan. It is pleasant when you say that you are Kurdish. I can never say that I am Iraqi. It feels very, very hard. We ourselves know that we are not Arabs but Kurds. ... and a Kurd belongs to Kurdistan. If I say that I am Iraqi it sounds as if I say that I am an Arab.

These people describe themselves as successful in integrating with Swedish society. They mean that those who are treated badly should blame themselves because they do not adapt to Swedish society. Though they identify as Kurds, their relationship to the Kurdish society in Sweden is more ambivalent than the other categories'. They are very critical towards Kurds and their criticism is expressed from a superior position, from the "master's"⁴⁵ position. Swedes are their reference points, and the Swedes' recognition and judgement are very important to them.

Soma judges Kurds severely because according to her they still are living in their past and do not try to integrate into Swedish society. She has a very ambivalent position. On the one hand she wants to emphasize her Kurdish identity. On the other hand she keeps her distance from those Kurds who do not behave according to the "Swedish norms". Her narratives illustrate strong contradictory feelings, positionings and identifications. She says:

One has to be crazy to sit at home all day long and follow the news from there. It does not work. It is not normal at all. I would go crazy with it. I cannot do like this. It is not *Kurdayeti*⁴⁶ either, because if the Swedes see you doing that, they will not be impressed by you. They will not appreciate it and will not think that you are maintaining your traditions. I saw an old man in the street who was dressed in a Kurdish dress. It is not at all handsome for me. I feel ashamed for that. Do you know why it is shameful? To get dressed in traditional clothes is something cultural that you wear on special occasions. Look at these people (the Swedes). They are Swedes and

⁴⁵ Fanon 1967.

⁴⁶ A term for Kurdish nationalism.

they call themselves Swedes everywhere but they get dressed in their traditional clothes once a year at Midsummer. They show their nation's progress and its development from what they used to be to what they have become. I have also seen an old woman in Kurdish clothes in the street. I do not like it. Instead one can get dressed in orderly clothes. That is all. If they cannot do that it is better not to come here. At their age what do they have to do here? We have many things wrong. Many times we wonder why this country is so successful while we are not. It is simple; when one does not use one's reason one does not make any progress.

Soma is very critical towards the Kurdish community in Sweden and what she sees as its self-isolation and its close social relations. Thereby she differentiates herself from them and her position can partly be explained as a strong reaction to it. She seems to be very instrumental and pragmatic by herself. However, this is mostly a combination of her senses of inferiority in relation to Swedes and superiority in relation to Kurds. She describes Swedish society as more equal, modern and rational, which according to her is almost the opposite of Kurdish society:

We do not learn anything from each other except grumbling about this society. That is why *Kurdayti* for me does not mean having Kurdish friends. I have no Kurdish friends, and I do not have any relation with Kurds. I don't want to see all Kurds as my family and relatives just because I am living here in *xeriby* (exile/alienation). ... That is why I appreciate that one makes contacts with Swedes and other nationalities in order to learn different norms and traditions. It is good to learn a little from each of them, but generally I prefer to have contact with Swedes. I like it.

Similar to Soma, Rahman also describes the Swedish culture in terms of progress. Swedes are presented as modern and progressive, a conception that is confronted with the notion of Kurds and other immigrants/refugees as regressive, un-modern. Further, he sees racism and racial hate against immigrants as just reactions to immigrants' way of being:

I live in ..., which is one of the worst quarters not only in Gothenburg but also in Sweden. I can say that I myself am the worst racist in this area because I have seen so many bad things from the foreigners, including the Kurds. That is why I say that those Swedes who hate you because you damage their country are right. And concerning the Kurds, I say that it is very important to make a good impression on Swedes. I do not think that the Swedes will hate you if you do that. Because they see that you as a Kurd are living here because you want to learn and improve yourself. But when a Kurd attacks a Swede in the street and pinches his or her wallet, then how will this person think about Kurds?

Both Soma and Rahman seem to regard themselves as the true representatives of the Kurds and Kurdish identity. The other Kurds' way of being is, according to them, damaging for the image of Kurds and does not make any good impression on Swedes.

In their view, the immigrants themselves are responsible if things go wrong. Rahman argues that it is one's own responsibility if one is treated badly as an immigrant. According to him it is because of the lack of "social competence". He says:

I know a Kurdish guy who is a student at university and is very clever. Many of his classmates ask him to help them in their studies and he does help them. One day the guy said to me: "It is very strange, when my classmates go out together they never ask me to join them." I said to him OK, I have a different situation. When my colleagues go out, they always ask me and even sometimes they insist that I go with them. How would you analyse these two situations? ... One can conclude that it depends on yourself and your *social competence*. I said to my friend that since I know him he has been expectant. He waits for them to ask him. He does not take the initiative and contact people.

As already discussed, the discourse of "social competence" has been used for exclusion of immigrants, especially those born outside Europe since they are considered to be culturally distant from the Swedes. As an instru-

ment it both hides and legitimises discrimination.⁴⁷

Soma's and Rahman's position can mainly be explained through their individual strategies. They evaluate themselves and other immigrants/refugees by their degree of what they call integration and "social competence". They have internalised and accepted the conceptions of immigrants including Kurds as inferior, as less civilised, less modern, less rational, etc. Thus, they want to distance themselves from this group. At the same time they stress their Kurdish identity.

These three categories derive from nationalist concepts of identity and culture. However, the position of the third category is not necessarily a consequence of nationalism. As was illustrated in the narratives, these three categories differ in both their political orientations and individual strategies. Within the Kurdish diaspora, as well as within the Kurdish society in general, there are many different and contradictory positions and many boundaries at different levels that divide the Kurds. Besides their common boundaries towards the outside and the common enemies, they also define and position themselves in relation to and in opposition to each other within the field. Another, and more basic, internal conflict is that between nationalists and Marxists. However, as already discussed, both of these categories are far from being homogeneous and unified. The internal boundaries between different groups and standpoints are sometimes highly ambivalent and sometimes very diffuse. In the next section I will illustrate the counter-discourse of the left that strongly opposes nationalists.

Kurdish identity and the counter-discourse of the left

"The national question cannot define my identity"

The identity politics pursued by the left is built around class and class conflicts, and Kurdish nationalism is seen as an obstacle since it divides the working class along national boundaries. The left is, in the same way, accused by nationalists of being an obstacle to national liberty since they divide the nation along class boundaries. As already discussed, none of the political

⁴⁷ de los Reyes and Wingborg 2002.

positions mentioned in this study, including left, are homogeneous or unified. As mentioned, there is a leftist discourse which strongly opposes nationalism. When I talk about counter-discourse of the left, it is primarily this position that I refer to. Political identities take form and are constructed in this process partly when these different categories and positions formulate themselves in relation to each other. Marxists and nationalists each try to strengthen their own power and dominance within the field.

Sherko and Hamid oppose nationalism and its identity politics. A Kurdish identity is not a determining factor for their identification. Sherko describes himself as first of all a human being. He says:

I am not a Kurd because I speak Kurdish. All these identities are constructions. I have been punished from the beginning because I am a Kurd. I have also fought for my Kurdishness. But it is here that I draw my boundary towards the others. It is possible to be a Kurd and defend the Kurdish people without being a soldier who kills Arabs and Turks exactly in the same way that the Turkish or Arabic soldier kills the Kurds. Out of an identity as a human being I defend the rights of Kurdish people, not because I am a Kurd and must have a country. To be a Kurd is not because I was born of Kurdish parents or that I talk Kurdish. I have a common history with that society; I share a long common memory with them and have social bonds there. I have been living 28 years of my life in that society. My Kurdish identity is not congenital. ... I have no problem with being a Kurd. You cannot escape from the fact that you are a Kurd and it is therefore I fight against national oppression. But my human feeling is stronger and these two should not oppose each other.

And Hamid describes himself as Marxist and communist, saying:

Of course I am a Kurd, but because I have been active within the left, I define myself as Marxist and communist. It is from this perspective, as a Marxist, that I see the national issue. The national question does not mean so much to me. That is why it cannot define my identity.

Hamid, as well as other respondents, admits that nationalism has become

stronger and more spread among the Kurdish diaspora. He as well as other Marxists sees this tendency as a problem. However, he seems to regard any local attachment as a problem. On this point he distinguishes himself from Sherko. Hamid says:

Feelings of *xorbet* (alienation, estrangement), feelings of being away from the homeland strengthen their national feeling. Then they even influence their children. They teach their children about their background and their past and about where they come from and how they came here, etc. Unfortunately, these things also become important for the children. This influences them in a negative way.

Nashmil identifies herself as a communist and avoids identifying herself as Kurd. She prefers to say that she is Iraqi, something that she regards as an act of internationalism. She does not want to be associated with the nationalists, and opposes them in this way. She partly distinguishes herself from both Hamid and Sherko when she says:

I have never believed in nationalism and never felt or identified myself as a Kurd but as a human being.⁴⁸ It does not matter. I can have social intercourse with all people, but mostly I have contact with the Iranians who are in the same party. If somebody asks me, even in Iraqi Kurdistan, where I am from, I will say that I am from Iraq. I have always felt like this. When you work with this party you become international.

As we see, these three respondents who all identify themselves as Marxists differ in their relation to the Kurdish identity and in the way

⁴⁸ I asked a person who belongs to the same organisation as Nashmil to introduce me to a woman from their organisation to interview. It was in this way I came in contact with Nashmil. I did not know before the interview whether she identified herself as a Kurd or not. However, I decided to use her interview despite my point of departure (to interview people who identify themselves as Kurds). The reason was partly because she was the only one who was available and partly because it quite well illustrates the internal conflicts and contradictions.

they identify themselves.

As discussed earlier, the two main political ideologies within the Kurdish movement are nationalism and Marxism. Feminism, on the contrary, has not existed as an independent political ideology with its own political platform. There are feminists within nationalist and Marxist positions. Hence the feminist movement/position is divided and subordinated to these two dominant political ideologies. During my fieldwork, problems of gender relations and gender antagonism within the Kurdish diaspora became ever more manifest. I will therefore discuss these issues more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Summary

This chapter has focused on different strategies of identity and different identity politics in the context of exile and otherness. These strategies are discussed on both individual and political levels. The political and the individual aspects are closely related to each other and affect each other. The political dimension has been analysed mainly by referring to the history of the Kurdish movement, the history of Kurdish identity, and the political and ideological directions involved in these processes such as Marxism and nationalism. These two have always had a contradictory relationship, at the same time that they have affected each other very much. Reactions towards otherness, discrimination and racism, and the relationship to society in general are very much coloured by these ideologies as well as the individuals' positions in class, gender, age, etc. Those who identify themselves as leftist and communist are in general critical towards nationalism and racial discrimination, though they are not in any way homogeneous or unified.

Marxists and the left-oriented nationalists are more critical towards the otherness and discrimination of immigrants. However, among the nationalists there is more ambivalence on this point since they do not always have the ideological shelter to resist and criticise racial thinking and discrimination, especially when it is not directed at them as Kurds. The left-oriented nationalists are very critical of the way they are treated as

immigrants and as Kurds, and they claim Kurdish identity as a political strategy to resist the imposed immigrant identity – while the right-oriented nationalists express understanding for racial discrimination, and see it as the natural right of the natives’ “because it is their country”. The third category, which I also define as right-oriented nationalist, is even very critical and condemning towards the Kurds and other immigrants. Their criticism is often from a superior point of view and they distance themselves from the Kurds. They identify with the prejudices and negative notions about immigrants, including Kurds, and thereby differentiate themselves from them and want to draw nearer the Swedes.

Thereby, it can be said that the Kurdish diaspora includes different kinds of Kurdish identities with highly different meanings. These positions are sometimes very contradictory and are all involved in the struggles to influence the culture and politics of the Kurdish diasporic movement. This situation is comparable to the Palestinian one, which Glenn Bowman describes: “...there is no ‘Palestinian’; there is only a plurality of Palestinians”.⁴⁹ He argues that this may lead Palestinians from one domain to see those from another as foreigners, or even as enemies. This consideration also corresponds to the situation of the Kurds, and thus one can say that there is no ‘Kurd’, there is only a plurality of Kurds.

The foregoing also confirms the de-territorial notion of diaspora, concerning the emphasis on the contradictions and ambivalences that are inherent in diasporic identities. The issue of identity and identity politics is another central feature of diaspora alongside the issue of homeland. These two issues are closely related to each other and even overlap each other quite often. The Kurdish identity, and the identification with the Kurdish imagined community, has become a “home” for many Kurds. In these process of diasporic movement, both individual and political identities, projects and intentions are intertwined and absorbed in a collective action that in turn reconstructs and strengthens the collective identity.

⁴⁹ Bowman 1994:160.

9

Gender Strategies, Identities and Community Belonging

Introduction

In the previous chapters the respondents' relation to Sweden and homelands and their sense of identification and belongingness have been discussed. The ideological and political orientations' central role in the respondents' identifications and their relation to "homeland", to Sweden and to the Kurdish diasporic community were considered. This chapter will investigate the impact of gender on these processes. During my interviews with the respondents I realised that sometimes there are differences between how women and men experience their life and their situation in Sweden, and how they relate to Swedish society and to the Kurdish community in Sweden. As already discussed in Chapter 4, diaspora, both as concept and as social process, has been defined in some scholarly works as masculine. This is partly based on the etymological associations of the term, and partly based on the idea which equates diaspora with ethnicity and nationalism. I find both problematic. Diaspora in itself is not gender-specific but it is rather the political projects, around which diasporic movements are mobilised, as well as the social and political context within which diasporas are acting, that determine their gender dimension. Thus, each diasporic movement must be studied specifically and in its historical and socio-political context. This chapter focuses on the respondents' experiences of gender relations, women's position within the Kurdish diaspora community in Sweden, and their sense of identification and belongingness.

The contexts and dimensions of Kurdish women's identity

Gender, according to Indra, is "a key *relational* dimension of human activity and thought informed by cultural and individual notions of men and women – having consequences for their social or cultural positioning and the way in which they experience and live their lives."¹ Gender identities, roles and powers are actively constituted at a number of different spatial scales and in relation to a number of different social, cultural, economic

¹ Indra 1999:2.

and political processes.²

A study on the Kurdish women of the diaspora must take into account three different socio-political contexts. Kurdish women's complex identity and struggles have different dimensions related to these contexts. First, as refugees from the Middle East and from the Third World they are seen as inferior and are facing racism and exclusion. They are represented and treated according to certain stereotypical images. Hence questions of racism and global/colonial power relations must be taken into consideration. The second dimension is the women's experiences of migration and the influence of migration on gender relations. As women, regardless of their migrant position, they achieve certain social and legal rights in Sweden, which are not always taken for granted in their countries of origin. This affects gender relations and usually changes the power relations within the family in favour of women. Further, it has an impact on women's relation to Sweden. The third dimension is the relationship between national liberation movements and gender questions.

Third World women, struggles and stereotypes

As a political identity, the concept of the Third World represents oppositional struggles – against racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, and monopoly capital.³ It includes, however, many internal differences, contradictions, and boundaries. As Mohanty argues, cultural, racial, class, ethnic, national, and sexual orientations and differences among women and among men must be given more significance. The term Third World, according to Johnson-Odim, is applied frequently in two ways: “to refer to ‘underdeveloped’/overexploited geopolitical entities, i.e., countries, regions, and even continents; and to refer to oppressed nationalities from these world countries.”⁴

Despite their great diversity, Third World women have much in com-

² McDowell and Sharp 1997:400.

³ Mohanty 1991:4.

⁴ Johnson-Odim 1991:314.

mon in their relationship to the international women's movement. Johnson-Odim asserts that while the oppression of marginalized Euro-American women is "linked to gender *and* class relations, that of Third World women is linked also to race relations and often imperialism. These added dimensions produce different contexts in which Third World women's struggles must be understood."⁵ In recent decades many scholarly works have directed powerful criticism towards the concerns of the "Western" feminist politics that reflected issues dominating the lives of white middle-class women. McDowell and Sharp see the calls to international sisterhood and solidarity as exclusive rather than inclusive. They, as well as other critical voices, therefore emphasise attention to race, class, and gender divisions, and highlight cleavages between women as well as unity among them.⁶

These different dimensions are well demonstrated in the narratives: experiences of being women, being immigrant 'other' and being Kurd, that is, being immigrant/refugee women from the Third World settled in the West. As illustrated in the previous chapters, there is a stereotypical notion of Middle Eastern women, including Kurdish women, as passive victims of their violent and oppressive male relatives. Middle Eastern women's struggle for their emancipation and social change, and their participation in the anti-colonial struggles and national liberation movements, have been marginalized and ignored. These women are often portrayed as passive victims. In order to challenge these stereotypes and bring out their political implications, there is a need of contextualising women's struggle. A way to challenge the political agendas behind the Orientalist and sexist stereotypes is to link them to the broader context of international relations in the region, influenced by the history and culture of colonialism. These stereotypes reinforce the existing power disparities in the international

⁵ Johnson-Odim 1991:314. These distinctive dimensions are, however, according to McDowell and Sharp (1997:5), rather different subjectivities with transformative rather than additive effect.

⁶ See among others McDowell and Sharp 1997:5; hooks 1981, 1990, 2000; Mohanty 1991; Mohanty, Russo and Torres (eds.) (1991); Lutz, Phoenix and Yuval-Davis 1995; Minh-ha 1989.

political arena.⁷ Sharoni mentions several examples, both contemporary and historical, of widespread women's resistance against imperial and neo-colonial practices. These examples, according to her, are indicative of the complex relationship between gender, Middle East politics and international relations. Sharoni, following Mohanty and Harding, asserts that starting from women's struggles and life creates a "space in which women's initiatives and struggles in the Middle East and elsewhere may elicit new interpretations regarding the gendered nature of local, regional, and international politics."⁸

As Sharoni states, there is a need for "calling attention to questions, contradictions, and complexities embedded in the discourses that inform the lives and struggles of women in the region."⁹ She outlines three interlocking stereotypical images of Middle Eastern women: Orientalist, sexist and nationalist.¹⁰ The sexist and Orientalist stereotypes go hand in hand in both scholarship and media in order to establish the essential otherness of Middle Eastern women by juxtaposing Western and Middle Eastern cultures and images of Occidental and Oriental women. The sexist images, she continues, "reconstruct a traditional division of labour based on rigid distinctions between the so-called 'public' and 'private' spheres: Men are portrayed as being in charge of the public political sphere whereas women are confined to the domestic sphere."¹¹ She describes these images as utilized to reinforce women's subordination, to silence their voices and complicate their struggles.¹² Nationalist stereotypical images of Middle Eastern women, on the contrary, "have emerged in the context of women's participation in anti-colonial struggles and national liberation movements through the region. Two common representations are: women as fighters and women as mothers of the nation."¹³

⁷ Sharoni 1997:431.

⁸ Sharoni 1997:426.

⁹ Sharoni 1997:427.

¹⁰ Sharoni 1997:430.

¹¹ Sharoni 1997:430-431.

¹² See also hooks 1990.

¹³ Sharoni 1997:431.

National liberation movements and gender questions

The relationship between subordinated nationalism and/or national liberation movements and their relation to gender equality and female emancipation have been problematised by many scholars.¹⁴ Enloe¹⁵ argues that in many post-World War II states it is “business as usual” with indigenous masculinity replacing colonialist masculinity. The indigenous nationalists have not brought about any fundamental change in this regard. According to Enloe, they are “likely to produce just one more actor in the international arena.”¹⁶ Nagel¹⁷ relates this problem to the fact that “the culture and ideology of hegemonic masculinity go hand in hand with the culture and ideology of hegemonic nationalism.”¹⁸ She describes nationalist politics as “a major venue for ‘accomplishing’ masculinity”,¹⁹ because: firstly, the national state is essentially a masculine institution since most state institutions have been and are dominated by men; secondly, the culture of nationalism emphasises and resonates with masculine cultural themes, and the “micro-culture” of masculinity in everyday life articulates very well with the demands of nationalism; and thirdly, women occupy a distinct, symbolic role in nationalist culture, discourse and collective action, a role that reflects a masculine definition of femininity and of women’s proper place in the nation.²⁰

Making a historical analysis of racial and sexual violence in colonial Africa, Mama²¹ observes that colonialism brutalised, degraded and domesticated African women. Women were humiliated not only as colonial subjects but also in gender-specific ways. However, violence against women and abuse of women continued even in postcolonial Africa and during and after

¹⁴ See Mama 2001; Chatterjee 2001; Radhakrishnan 2001; Tiffin 2001; Rajan Sunder 2001; Nagel 1998; Enloe 1990.

¹⁵ Enloe 1990.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 64.

¹⁷ Nagel 1998.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 249.

¹⁹ Nagel 1998:251.

²⁰ Nagel 1998:249-252.

²¹ Mama 2001.

the national liberations. The history of abuse of women, she argues, shows continuity between colonial, nationalist and postcolonial systems concerning gender questions.²² The treatment of women in several independent states shows, according to Mama, that women's participation in the national liberation movements and in armed struggles does not necessarily mean a progressive gender policy. On the contrary, she states: "perhaps the poor status of the vast majority of women in postcolonial African countries can be traced to the terms of this participation."²³ Mama traces the problem in the contradictory construction of women in nationalist ideologies: "On the one hand, nationalists have called for their own 'new woman,' while on the other hand, they have construed women as the bearers of and upholders of traditions and customs, as reservoirs of culture."²⁴

Regarding gender questions and Indian nationalism, Chatterjee²⁵ and Radhakrishnan²⁶ maintain that Indian nationalism supplied an ideological principle of selection to make modernity compatible with the nationalist project. This policy of selection lies, according to Chatterjee, behind the dichotomy home/world: "The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity."²⁷ The world is the domain of the male while the home, represented by the female, must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world. As Radhakrishnan argues, this distinction makes women the "pure and a-historical signifier of 'interiority'."²⁸ Radhakrishnan thinks that the problem with postcolonial nationalism, and especially the Third World nationalisms, is that they sustain and continue "the baleful of Eurocentrism and Orientalism". They internalise rather than problematise conceptions of Orientalism and Occidentalism, based on the essentialist distinction between "the East" and "the West". "The only difference is",

²² Ibid. 265.

²³ Mama 2001:259.

²⁴ Ibid. 259.

²⁵ Chatterjee 2001.

²⁶ Radhakrishnan 2001.

²⁷ Chatterjee 2001:156.

²⁸ Radhakrishnan 2001:196.

Radhakrishnan argues, “that whereas in Orientalism the Oriental is a passive subject, in nationalism the object has become an active ‘subject’, but one that remains captive to categories such as ‘progress’, ‘reason’, and ‘modernity’, categories that are alien to him or her.”²⁹

Gender equality has also been seen as a by-product of national liberation in the Middle East. The question of gender equality and sexuality, according to Accad,³⁰ has never been recognised as a central problem in the Middle East because it has been subordinated to different political ideologies and movements. She states:

In most discussions of third world feminism, sexuality and the privatised oppression of women by men are relegated to secondary issues. When sexuality and/or male domination is raised as a significant factor, conflicts arise over the validity of Marxism versus feminism, economic equality versus sexual equality, national revolution versus women’s rights...³¹

Concerning Kurdish nationalism, Mojab argues that in spite of its support for women’s emancipation, Kurdish nationalism has rather been a major obstacle to the development of the feminist movement by relegating gender equality to the future, subordinated to the achievement of independence. The nationalists’ formal policy has been gender equality, but in practice they have not done much for that.³²

Women’s position in Kurdish society seems to be as contradictory as the Kurdish society itself. Kurds settled in different countries also differ significantly. However, it is common for all of them that they are highly male-dominated. In spite of that, throughout Kurdish history we find women reaching high positions and becoming the political, and in some cases military, leaders of their communities. There have been, and are, several well-known women who have been central figures within the

²⁹ Radhakrishnan 2001:199.

³⁰ Accad 1991.

³¹ Ibid. 238.

³² Mojab 2001:8-9.

Kurdish movement and earned great respect and recognition.³³ These women are, however, according to van Bruinessen, not representative of the masses since they have often belonged to the aristocracy.³⁴ Western visitors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have often described the strong character of Kurdish women whose role has always been relevant in Kurdish society as mother, partner, political chief, and sometimes fighter and bandit.³⁵ Still, as discussed also in the case of Africa and India, women's participation in national liberation movements does not necessarily mean a progressive gender policy. There are obviously divided opinions about whether these women may be representative of Kurdish women or whether they indicate anything about the position of Kurdish women in Kurdish society. I will not follow up the issue in this study although it is an interesting topic for research.

The Kurdish movement and political activities have, in spite of such male domination and gender inequalities, been an arena open for women to participate in to different degrees. Women's participation, their insistent efforts and their "latent feminism", as hooks³⁶ expresses it, have overcome all obstacles to create a space and an arena for them within the movement. Fighting against national oppression and for social justice has been appreciated and is rather seen as the obligation for all members of the nation, including women. However, the nationalist movements have generally not paid attention to the question of gender equality and feminism. The images of Middle Eastern women, including Kurds, emerging in the context of women's participation in anti-colonial struggles and national liberation movements throughout the region, are two: women as fighters and as mothers of the nation.³⁷ Women's participation has increased in both quality and quantity during the last decades, but the question of gender relations is still relegated to the future.

³³ van Bruinessen 2001:107; Galletti 2001.

³⁴ van Bruinessen 2001:96-104.

³⁵ Galletti 2001:209.

³⁶ hooks 1990.

³⁷ Sharoni 1997:431.

Yuval-Davis and Anthias identify five major ways in which women have been implicated in nationalism: as biological reproducers of the members of national collectivities; as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups (through restrictions on sexual or marital relations); as active transmitters and reproducers of the national culture; as symbolic signifiers of national difference; and finally as active participants in national struggles.³⁸ In its representations of women, or in the relegation of equal rights to the future, the Kurdish case is not different from other nationalist movements. As Mojab writes:

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, women joined the ranks of guerrillas fighting against Turkey and Iran, entered parliamentary politics, published journals, and created women's organizations. However, the patriarchal nationalist movement continues to emphasize the struggle for self-rule at the cost of the struggle for equality. Nationalists depict women as heroes of the nation, reproducers of the nation, protectors of its 'motherland', the 'honour' of the nation, and guardians of Kurdish culture, heritage, and language.³⁹

Women and migration

The majority of research within the field of migration studies is based on the experiences of male immigrants. The same gender blindness has also, according to a number of studies, dominated the field of research on forced migration and refugee studies.⁴⁰ Many investigations document differences between women's and men's experiences of migration in order to highlight and to theorise women's experience.⁴¹ These studies focus mainly on family situation and responsibilities; women's role in the creation,

³⁸ Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989:7.

³⁹ Mojab 2000:89.

⁴⁰ Indra, Doreen (ed.) 1999. There are a large number of articles in this volume that highlight gender dimensions of the forced migration by focusing on experiences of women.

⁴¹ Wright 1995; Alicea 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Jones-Correa 1998; Sassen-Koob 1984, Sassen 1997, Pessar 1995, Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1995.

development and maintenance of transnational communities and transnational family and kinship networks; and how gender is affected by the migration to a highly industrialised society.⁴² Some others focus on women's community belonging and political participation,⁴³ and some on the impact of the restructuring of the global economy and global relations between capital and labour in terms of women's migration.⁴⁴

Sassen-Koob⁴⁵ describes the global processes of economic restructuring as "one element in the current phase of Third World women's domestic and international migration". She writes:

Some of the conditions that have promoted the formation of a supply of migrant women in Third World countries are one expression of the broader process of economic restructuring occurring at the global level. The particular expression in this case is the shift of plants and offices to the Third World countries. Similarly with conditions that have promoted a demand for immigrant women in large cities within the United States. The particular expression in this case is the general shift to a service economy, the downgrading of manufacturing – partly to keep it competitive with overseas plants – and direct and indirect demand for low-waged labour generated by the expansion of management and control functions centred in these large cities and necessary for the regulation of the global economy.⁴⁶

The "feminisation of the job supply" and the increase of female migration are therefore strongly related to each other. An increase in female migration is documented by a number of studies.⁴⁷ Jones-Correa asserts that in the last fifteen years the study and evaluation of immigration patterns has undergone some change. In the 1970s there was a new emphasis within academic

⁴² See for example Alicea 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1995; Pessar 1995; Darvishpour 2002; Eyrumlu 1998.

⁴³ See for example Jones-Correa 1998.

⁴⁴ See for example Sassen-Koob 1984; Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1995.

⁴⁵ Sassen Koob 1984.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 1161-1162.

⁴⁷ Jones-Correa 1998; Sassen Koob 1984; Alicea 1997; Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1995.

literature on household decisions about migration – while previously it was assumed that men migrated first and women and children followed, and therefore men made most of the decisions about migration.⁴⁸ According to these studies it is women who create, develop and sustain the transnational kinship networks and communities and “transnational motherhood”.⁴⁹ They migrate both with and without families in search for job. They are forced to leave behind their families and children, who are often looked after by other female relatives or by the children’s fathers.⁵⁰

The large majority of these studies are made in the American context and are connected with labour migration. In addition, the structure of the societies and the migrant policies in the United States and Sweden are different. However, in spite of the significant differences, the above-mentioned studies give a broad perspective on post-colonial migration in general and women’s migration in particular. Regardless of differences between Sweden and the USA, and despite the differences between the characteristics of migration in these studies, respondents in the above-mentioned studies and those in my study share many experiences of being women and immigrants from the Third World.⁵¹ It means that they are, on the one hand, objects of racism and xenophobia and are excluded from the national community. On the other hand, as women they receive better positions within the family and in society in general. Women who are supposed to be bearers of the tradition become those who first challenge it.

Jones-Correa’s study of Latin American immigrants focuses more on the gender differences according to social mobility and sense of belonging and political participation. He studies male and female immigrants’ commitment in ethnic organisations and in American politics. He finds that for male Latin American immigrants, migration means a downward mobility. They take jobs in the receiving countries with status and class positions well below those they held in their home countries. The immi-

⁴⁸ Jones-Correa 1998:336.

⁴⁹ Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997:548.

⁵⁰ Alicea 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997.

⁵¹ See for example Jones-Correa 1998:336; Alicea 1997.

grant organisations they form and participate in compensate for their loss of status by providing a social sphere where they get recognition and respect. Women, on the contrary, usually enter the labour market with less previous work experience, and therefore experience less downward mobilisation and suffer less from status inconsistency. Moreover, working for pay advances women's position in the household and in society in general. Jones-Correa concludes that:

The structuring of social and economic experiences in the United States leads to very different kinds of organizational incentives for immigrant women and men. ... While male-dominated organisations choose to appeal to the home country, women and others on the margins of immigrant organizational structures choose instead to appeal directly to arbiters in their new political environment. The choice of strategy, I argue, is gendered.⁵²

After studying Dominican women in the United States and the impact of wage-working in their social and family life, Pessar concludes that as Dominican immigrant women become heavily involved in the wage labour force, conflicts within families become more visible. Their economic independence and resources offer women more confidence and they assert their rights to greater autonomy and equality within the household.⁵³ These studies also have many similarities with some studies made in Sweden concerning gender relations after migration.⁵⁴ Darvishpour⁵⁵ and Eyromlou⁵⁶ find that the increase of divorces among Iranian families is a consequence of the changing of power relations within families and the social and economic situation that has created prerequisites for women's independence and emancipation. They consider that women's economic independence and their involvement in the society on the one

⁵² Jones-Correa 1998:327,335.

⁵³ Pessar 1995:44.

⁵⁴ Darvishpour 2002; Eyrumlu 1998; Alinia 2004.

⁵⁵ Darvishpour 2002.

⁵⁶ Eyromlou 1998.

hand, and the Swedish family policy on the other hand, challenge the patriarchal structure and change the balance of power within the families in favour of women. According to them, the family as an institution goes through a significant change, which in turn affects the relationship between couples and also between parents and children.

However, as Alicea rightly points out, women's sense of belongingness and their relationship to the countries of settlement and countries of origin cannot be seen within the framework of a "home/host dichotomy".⁵⁷ This dichotomisation, according to her and other researchers,⁵⁸ is a result of a dichotomisation and categorisation of host and home in terms of modernity and tradition, progressiveness and backwardness, etc. She writes:

This binary thinking mirrors earlier feminist thought that dichotomised and located women's oppression in the family and promised independence in the market place. The market/family dichotomy seems to be implicit in the home/host binary framework when scholars argue that, because it provided more paid work opportunities, the host society offered women more freedom than the home country ...⁵⁹

Reality shows rather a contradictory and ambivalent relationship. I agree with Alicea because, on the one hand, the achievement of economic independence and better social positions encourages women to come closer to the countries of settlement. On the other hand, unfavourable racial and class conditions push them back to their own communities. Additionally, the "home/host dichotomy" conceals the different family structures that women experienced in their home countries, as well as benefits, freedom, and resources that home societies offered them. She argues that setting the transnational networks in the centre is itself a way to prevent such a dichotomization and simplification. Puerto Rican women in Alicea's study believed that their migration would be an escape from gender oppression.

⁵⁷ Alicea 1997.

⁵⁸ See Bhabha 1999; Sassen 1999.

⁵⁹ Alicea 1997:600.

They highlight the inequities at home and their desire to break away from the repression. Paradoxically, Alicea asserts, traditional gender expectations coupled with women's sense of moral obligation and their desire to resist race oppression and disadvantaged class conditions in Puerto Rico and the United States keep them tied to subsistence work that extends across national boundaries. These women construct homes and homeland communities as familiar places that give feelings of comfort, yet they are aware of the gender oppression that makes up 'home.'⁶⁰ These "homes" in such contexts become sites of survival and resistance.

In the next section I will discuss how female respondents relate to Sweden and what the difference is between them and male respondents in this regard. However, it is important to emphasise that Kurdish women and men are also divided by class, education, origin, culture, age, politics, ideologies, language, etc. Many of the respondents have also pointed out that they cannot talk about Kurdish women in general because of the great variations and differences. Further, it is important to note that narratives in this chapter differ from those in Chapters 7–8 and, like those in Chapter 6, include not only the individual lived experiences but also vicarious experiences, mediated experiences and cognitive experiences.⁶¹

Gender strategies, identity and community belonging: (I) in relation to Sweden

"Men are living in the past...we think more about the future..."

Most of the respondents experience that women are more open and receptive and find it easier to make contacts and adapt to new conditions. Almost all of the respondents point out that Kurdish women in general have been more successful in Sweden than Kurdish men. They mention different reasons for this, and even additional reasons can be found in the narratives.

Bahar has been politically active for many years. Now she is active in a Kurdish cultural association. Bahar's narrative demonstrates how diffe-

⁶⁰ Alicia 1997:621-622.

⁶¹ For more discussion about these different forms of experiences see Chapter 4.

rently women and men experience their lives in Sweden and how they deal with the situation. It includes, as in many other narratives, discourses that describe women and men according to certain conceptions of how they are, which attributes they have, etc. Further, like many other female respondents, Bahar mentions that it has been easier for her to face the problems of exile and “adapt” to the new environment:

I had no problems in adapting to Swedish society. I think that it is in general easier for women than for men. Men are living in the past and their past constitutes a great part of their lives here. The past is also important for us women but we do not forget the future. Women are more open to the new conditions and we think more about our children’s future and ourselves. I have also been facing discrimination but I have tried to handle it. I also feel that I have lost many things, my identity, my social position, my social networks and so on. But maybe women are more patient and can handle difficulties better than men. Women in our societies are oppressed, whereas we have more rights here. Another thing is that for women in general it is easier to adapt to new conditions, while this is very difficult for men. ... Here there are positive things for women as for example in relation to divorce and children and like that. But when I was in Kurdistan I had no problem as a woman. I was a free human being and in my father’s house nobody ever told me something or prevented me in any way. I was free to choose my job. Nobody prevented me. Personally, I have not experienced any oppression and that is why here I did not feel any difference.⁶²

⁶² Bahar talks about her father’s house and not her parent’s house. This is based on men’s position as the head of the household, even though it is often women who take care of the household and is its representative. Indeed this is not specifically Kurdish but is coupled to the patriarchal structures and is reproduced in every-day life. A. Hassanpour, studying the (re)production of patriarchy in the Kurdish language asserts that the unequal distribution of gender power is clearly demonstrated and reproduced. He describes Kurdish patriarchy as follows: “Kurdish patriarchy, much like language, is a system of subsystems. It is the system of gender rule and, among other things, a cultural institution, a form of social organisation, an Islamic way of life, a secular male order, a political economy of gender relations, a form of class power, a mode of signification and a meeting point of tribal, feudal, and national traditions. It is woven into the very fabric of language, oral and literary traditions, modes of thinking, music, dance, behavior, emotions, habits, attitudes, and dress codes”. (Hassanpour, A. 2001:258)

Bahar's narrative shows the complexity of the situation and the diversity of social reality. She says that she has not been subordinated, an experience that she shares with several other female respondents. However, Bahar's experiences also show that besides the social and juridical rights that women achieve in Sweden, their position is also influenced by other factors besides the mere change of their roles and power relations. Women's better self-conception, self-confidence and feelings of continuity in their identities may be even partly due to the continuity of their role as mothers and caretakers. As mothers they have still the main responsibility for the children. It also forces them to come in contact with society, to learn the language and to be informed. As they are responsible for their children, they may also prioritise their children and their role as mothers above all other roles and activities. For example, some women have decided to reduce their activities in the association because of their children, while their husbands pursue activities to the same degree. To be mothers often gives them a sense of continuity, while men on the contrary lose their social position and the continuity of their identity to a greater extent. The men's role and identity have been mostly associated with their profession and/or their position in the family and in society. Further, as mentioned in Chapter 6, men take racism, opposition and suspicion much harder than women do. The downward mobility that they experience both within the family and within society, as well as their experiences of everyday racism, are indeed discouraging experiences for them. The present study confirms previous studies' conclusions on this issue.⁶³

Several respondents consider, like Bahar, that women are more practical and they live more in "reality". According to the respondents, women are more involved in the family's daily life and its practical day-to-day concerns. In spite of many couples' belief in gender equality, it is still the woman who has the main responsibility for home and children, and this responsibility also forces her to be more practical.

Soma's narrative shows a conscious strategy of a practical/pragmatic

⁶³ Alicea 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Jones-Correa 1998; Darvishpour 2002; Eyrumlu 1998.

way of being in order to cope with the problems and manage her and her children's life in Sweden:

I do not know anything about the situation in Kurdistan because I do not want to. If I think of Kurdistan and my memories I become sad. Then I cannot do my job and my life will get very difficult. I am a Kurd, I am homeless, my homeland is there, my family are living there and my destiny has been like this. The past will not come back. I simply have to accept it. Instead of sitting and always thinking and talking about Kurdistan, as many Kurds and especially Kurdish men do, I can do something else for myself and my children.

Soma's narrative is partly a reaction to the male-dominated Kurdish community. However, it also shows her ambivalent relation to Sweden and to the "homeland". That women feel better and are more involved in the society does not mean that they also feel at home or are welcomed. Rather it may be because they are forced to be more rational and live in the present. Bahar and Soma's experiences are perhaps best explained by the concept of "female consciousness". Feminists define female consciousness related to the area of reproduction as the social activity that mothers have in common. They think that specific women's consciousness evolves from these practices.⁶⁴ Female consciousness is a "productive consciousness that is grounded in the material historical reality of childbirth ... female consciousness centres upon the rights of gender, on social concerns, on survival."⁶⁵ Maternal thinking derives from the work mothers do, with love, nurture and growth of children.

Many of the respondents also mention that women are more open in talking about their problems and seeking help, and that it is always easier for them to make informal contacts. These are often mentioned as an attribute that women "have". According to Reza, men are not good in these respects. He says:

⁶⁴ Mulinari 1996:176.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

It is difficult to say because there are differences. There are also the same difficulties for women in being accepted, but in spite of that they have been better in making contact. I think women are more open and try more. I think there is something that women have, I mean they are good at coming closer to the society and talking about their problems. And therefore they get understanding and sympathy while men are more turned inward and thereby they don't get the same understanding and sympathy from the society. ... But we cannot say that women's contact with Swedish society is so great that they become absorbed and cut or lose their contacts with the Kurdish society.

Being good at "adapting" to Sweden is one of the characteristics that most of the respondents ascribe to women. Many of the women admit that they personally have been good in "adapting to the Swedish society". However, as is evident in Reza's experience, this openness and willingness is not mutual.

"I have been good at adapting to Swedish society"

Being good at adapting to Swedish society is an expression that occurs very often in the narratives when respondents (female and male) describe women's relation to Sweden in more positive terms. It is a dominant discourse about immigrants' relation to Sweden and embraces certain meanings, certain identity politics and certain values. It is a discourse that defines Sweden as the norm, and adapting to Sweden is therefore regarded as a measure for peoples' success or failure.

Many of the respondents (both women and men) say that women have been more successful in Sweden and they mention additional reasons for this. They believe that it has been easier for women to get a job and find a way into the society. It is partly because as women they get more sympathy, contrary to men. It is also partly because of the fact that they are more willing to take any job they get and they are ready to start from scratch. As other researchers, for example Jones-Correa,⁶⁶ also testify, many women, though not all, get a job for the first time in their life in the

⁶⁶ Jones-Correa 1998.

country of settlement and, even if the job has a low status, they do not suffer losing their status in the same degree as men.

Women's more favourable conditions in Sweden, compared to the countries of origin, and their advancement, which is stressed by most of the respondents of both sexes, affects their relationship to Sweden. Many of the women talk about adaptation to Swedish society and the Swedish way of life. Soma does not have much contact with the Kurdish community and wants to become more involved in Swedish society. She says:

I have been good at adapting to the Swedish way of life. ... Women are more social and get involved in Swedish society and with other cultures on the whole. In this regard men also have problems. In their countries they have power within politics and in their private life, while here they lose all of it. ... Here everybody becomes the same and gets the same papers in their hands. Then he realises that he does not have any power, that he cannot even support his family. ... Women, on the contrary, become conscious here and become stronger. She tries to improve herself, and it does not make her husband so happy. He is afraid of losing her. He is worried that the woman becomes conscious of her rights and may leave him.

Generally, both women and men testify that women have been better in learning the Swedish language and in making contacts. Many respondents mention women's longing for freedom and their appreciation of the rights they have achieved in Sweden as a reason for their positive and active way of relating to Swedish society. These narratives show that it is not only economic independence that makes a difference in women's life, but also the fact that they, as women, have a much stronger position both socially and legally in Sweden compared to their countries of origin. Sherko points out women's longing for freedom and their appreciation of the freedom they have achieved here, which encourages them to be more involved in social life. He asserts:

There is an interesting expression that says that when a family comes to Europe, the woman lives in the present, the children in the future and the man in the past. ... Women love and appreciate freedom more because they have been more suppressed.

However, as Goran points out, this does not mean that women are appreciated by the society or that they are welcomed as a part of it. He says:

Women learn the language much faster. It is very interesting. I wonder why. I say that they are hungry to learn because they have not always had the possibility to go out, work and earn their own money, and meet people without being oppressed. They learn much faster than men. There are men who have been living here for 20-25 years and still cannot read a letter in Swedish. Women adapt themselves much, much faster or better, better than men. They are also open to new things. It does not mean that they are integrated in the society or are welcomed into the society but they are many steps in front of men. They try to escape traditions. They are tired of bloody traditions.

It is important to stress that women's open and positive attitude towards Sweden does not mean that Swedish society's attitude towards them is also open and positive. This issue has been discussed especially in Chapters 6 and 7 concerning respondents' experiences of living in Sweden.

Although there are some respondents who, opposed to the absolute majority of the respondents, think that women have not been as successful as men. However, the reality is much more complex and calls any simple explanation into question. There are women who have been successful in different degrees. There are also those who have failed. Previous researchers confirm what the majority of respondents point out, namely that women have been more successful compared to men.⁶⁷ In spite of all diversity, the experiences of most of the respondents show that Kurdish women have been good at managing their exile and the processes of resettlement. However, as Alicea⁶⁸ rightly considers, differences between family structures in the countries of origin and country of settlement, and the subjective notions of and differences in resources, freedom and benefits, imply that living in Sweden can be experienced very differently by different women. To settle in Sweden can for many women mean more burdens as well as a loss of social position and identity, and consequently a loss of confidence and self-respect.

⁶⁷ Darvishpour 2002; Eyrumlu 1998.

⁶⁸ Alicea 1997.

Obstacles, problems and the double pressure on women

Respondents' experiences of living in Sweden as Kurds and as immigrants, and the problem of everyday racism, exclusion and discrimination, are already discussed in Chapters 6–8. Apart from these problems and the favourable position that they achieve as women, the situation can be more problematic for at least one group of women. According to the respondents, this group is quite large. I agree with Alicea that migration and achieving economic independence cannot in themselves necessarily be a guaranty for women's freedom, equality and positive self-conception. Indeed, women's economic independence challenges the patriarchal structure in the family and creates significant prerequisites for a more equal gender relation. However, as also documented in other studies, it is not enough.⁶⁹ Those women who work outside of their home and are economically independent do not necessarily have a much better situation at home, according to the respondents. They often suffer a double pressure. They feel that they have a double burden at the same time that they have more possibilities. They work outside; at the same time they bear almost the whole responsibility for home and children. Dilsha is one of the women who mention this problem:

I will give you an example. My neighbours, they go out, both women and men. When they come home, they share the housework much more. They divide much more at home so that they can have time off when they both are free. But it is not like that for us. When both come home from their work it is the woman who starts to work. There are of course some women who may oppose this condition. ... Within the family, she gives support to the family and she takes a lot of responsibility. She takes the largest responsibility on herself. Working at home, working outside, political activity. That is why I think the Kurdish woman is strong and takes more responsibilities than other women in the region.

Another problem that, according to the respondents, a large number of women are facing in Sweden is that they become more controlled by their

⁶⁹ Alicea 1997; Pessar 1995.

men, their families and the exile community. There are men who are worried about “losing” their wives and daughters. They know that women can leave them if they want to. Many of the respondents, both women and men, assert that the resource-weak women in particular have become more isolated and oppressed in Sweden. In other words, it implies a class dimension that must be taken into consideration together with gender and ethnicity. It is in the intersection of gender, class and ethnicity that gender oppression within the Kurdish diasporic community should be analysed. Women in this group, who are very numerous according to the respondents, have lost their confidence and courage because they have lost their social network (kin, neighbourhood, etc.) within which they used to get support, recognition and comfort. Not least the cleavages within the family, and conflicts with the children because of generation conflicts, different values and different ways of being, become a central problem.

Leyla says that the pressure, the social control and old traditions become so strong here that women are anxious not to deviate from the norms and rules. She is, however, quite critical of women in that social position and says:

Women do not have any strong will either. They surrender. They are worried that people will say that they have become Europeans, and things like that. Women do care and are anxious about others’ opinions and about their moral judgment. It is like women here are more under the control of men than in their home countries. Here people do care more about the traditions.

Thus, it can be concluded that diasporic Kurdish women generally are facing at the same time both sexist/Orientalist and nationalist stereotypical images in their everyday life. Further, immigrant women, including Kurdish women, are experiencing a double patriarchy. This point is very well described by Bhabha:

Put ‘patriarchy’ in the dock by all means, but put it in a relevant context; sentence sexism but specify it too. ‘Patriarchy’ in India, for instance, intersects with poverty, caste, illiteracy; patriarchy in liberal America is shored up, among others, by racism, the gun culture, desultory welfare provision;

patriarchy and gender-relations in migrant communities are complicated by the fact that women, young and old, are often caught between the benevolent patronage of a Western liberal patriarchy and the aggressivity of an indigenous patriarchal culture – threatened by the majority culture and challenged by its own ‘second’ generation.⁷⁰

However, it varies quite a lot depending on the women’s positions in the categories of class, education, urban/rural origin and culture. Moreover, what happens with indigenous patriarchy in migrant communities is that women’s position as the nation’s symbol becomes a subject of negotiations because her position socially and privately, her rights and her sexuality, become a matter of negotiations. The private domain of the nation, the home “inhabited” by women as the “spirit of the nation”,⁷¹ also becomes subject to negotiations and change.⁷² This often challenges the existing gender relations and thereby is seen as a major threat. It is demonstrated in the narratives about the reinvention of traditions and usage of culture and tradition for legitimating gender inequality.

Women, who by nationalist ideologies are considered as bearers of tradition, symbols of the nation, the representatives of the “spirit” of the nation, are those who often challenge the traditions and their boundaries. One of the roots of many conflicts within the families and many of the divorces amongst immigrants in Sweden has to do with this condition.⁷³ However, women also need to sustain their relationship to their own communities even though they do not always feel comfortable with this. The reason is, as Alicea⁷⁴ also points out, and as is discussed in the previous chapters, that the unfavourable racial and class conditions push them back to their own communities, at the same time that the achievement of economic independence and a better social and juridical position encourage

⁷⁰ Bhabha 1999:81.

⁷¹ Chatterjee 2001: 156.

⁷² Chatterjee 2001:156.

⁷³ Darvishpour 2002; Eyrumlu 1998; Alinia 2004.

⁷⁴ Alicea 1997.

them in their contact with Swedish society. Their position and their belongingness to both the Swedish and the Kurdish society is much more ambivalent than the men's.

Another problem is, as Hana points out, that some women also lose the political and social role they used to have in their country of origin, and which gave them respect and recognition and was an important part of their identity. She says that in their countries of origin these women have been parts of various networks where their knowledge and experiences were appreciated. They have been respected and recognised in their neighbourhood and kin, while in their new environment they lose almost all of these resources. Hana says:

In general women have been more successful here in adapting to the European society. Men have not succeeded to the same extent. They have not been able to adapt and to become bi-cultural, while women have become bi-cultural very easily. However, regarding social position, the same women cannot have the same social position here. They lose the position they used to have. That is because this society has a different culture and different social relations. For example, the collective is very, very important there and one tries to become accepted and respected by the collective while it is not so important here. That is why our women cannot keep the same position within this society. She adapts easily, but unfortunately she loses her position. For example, a woman who used to be an agitator in our society becomes an ordinary woman here. Of course such a woman can defend her individual freedom and her individual rights and she can adapt quickly.

Another point is that not only a loss of the political and social function, but also a devaluation of domestic work, so-called "traditional women business", devalue women's central role within the family and society. hooks problematises this very brilliantly when she discusses the situation of black women and their role in the black resistance movement. She writes:

Overall devaluation of the role black woman have played in constructing for us homeplaces that are the site of resistance undermines our efforts to resist racism and the colonizing mentality which promotes internalised self-

hatred. Sexist thinking about the nature of domesticity has determined the way black women's experience in the home is perceived.⁷⁵

The sexist/Orientalist images of Middle Eastern women are also partly based, on the one hand, upon a dichotomisation of private and public spheres, or home versus world,⁷⁶ and on the other hand upon depreciation of domestic, unpaid work that women do.⁷⁷ The internalisation of these images also leads, as Radhakrishnan⁷⁸ argues, to the dichotomisation of East and West, whose boundaries are represented and symbolised by women.

Gender strategies, identity and community belonging: (II) in relation to the Kurdish community

As discussed especially in Chapter 7, the sense of belongingness that both women and men experience is very individual, at the same time that they also engage in political discourses. The same can be said about their sense of homeland. There is no given homeland in their narratives. Neither is Sweden seen as homeland by the respondents, mainly because of experiences of exclusion and everyday racism and their feelings of being unwelcome. The diasporic communities and political and cultural activities, and the Kurdish identity around which they are mobilised, has become a “home” for the Kurdish diaspora. However, there are differences between how women and men feel towards these communities and which position they have in them.

Politics is an integrated part of the Kurdish diasporic community's daily life. It is very much around the Kurdish politics and movement that the Kurdish diasporic identity and community are organised and mobilised. Politics also constitutes an important theme in the narratives. However, from the narratives, it seems that Kurdish women are less included than men in organising and pursuing political activities of the Kurds

⁷⁵ hooks 1990:45.

⁷⁶ Chatterjee 2001.

⁷⁷ Sharoni 1997.

⁷⁸ Radhakrishnan 2001.

in Sweden, and many of those who used to be active in political parties have abandoned them. Many of the respondents explain such a process by arguing that women have negative experiences of their activities in different organisations.

“politics with a big moustache”

Hamid complains that many women who used to be politically active have left politics. He explains it as follows:

... Unfortunately, in some way also maybe because they do not have any credence towards political organisations they are coming away from them and instead they use their energy and potential in other ways. But there is a group of women who turn away from the society. They care only about the home and their private life and luxury. These are also a part of life but they turn them away from the social questions, questions that also affect them and their children's life. You see a doubleness in them, for example how they treat girls and boys. You can see some of them do it. But generally they are progressive and can better go forward in the society. ... Now they have more confidence and their confidence increases so they can take more positive steps. Generally they are social and can find themselves and their place very fast, and this is positive.

M.A.: You said that they have come away from politics. Do you mean that they are less political?

I feel so and I think it depends on the fact that they don't trust political organisations because of the experiences they have from the past. They have participated in political organisations before and have seen the differences between men and women. This has influenced them negatively because within these organisations, even the Marxists, there existed patriarchal thinking. In some way women were marginalized, for example, you see that the number of women in higher and important positions is very low. The same women you see now are better and more forward/ahead than men. This shows that she can be better, that she has the capacity and that she can work and that she can do whatever she wants.

Hamid seems to be disappointed with at least some women who may care about themselves and devote their time to themselves while they do not

care about politics. He seems to regard them as traitors, as persons that have given up and are self-centred. At the same time he reflects on the reason why they do not trust the political organisations. It is not politics but the political institutions that they have given up.

According to most of the respondents, women's involvement in and their influence on the Kurdish movements are perhaps not as large as the men's. However, this does not mean that women are passive or do not care about social and political issues. Based on the narratives it can be said that women's position is due to several specific factors that will be discussed in the following.

The first reason for women's sceptical and distancing position in relation to Kurdish associations and other institutions is that they often do not feel comfortable in their contact with them. They feel that, as women, they are subordinated in Kurdish associations where the old patriarchal relations still dominate. Although this is against the association's formal principles, they do not seem to do much about it. Criticism is directed at associations by both women and men and by feminists (both leftists and nationalists) and Marxists. Hana, who identifies herself as a nationalist, points out another aspect of this problem and says that women in general have fewer experiences of organised political activities, and that they do not dare to compete with men and assert themselves in the presence of men and/or discuss with them. According to her, the old patriarchal values and traditions become even stronger. Hana's narrative also demonstrates the absence of feminism and feminist issues in Kurdish politics. It seems as if they mutually exclude each other. She says:

I must say that unfortunately, unfortunately, these associations are politicised and men who come together there, they are also unfortunately politicised. I mean that our men have gone politically backward here instead of going forward. ... When they come here, they start to think about things that they never used to think about. To defend the Kurdish culture, to defend this and that Kurdish. On the whole, this defence of tradition and culture draws them backward. Therefore they do not give any opportunity to women to come up, to assert themselves and discuss gender issues. The atmosphere is masculine. In a totally masculine milieu where all talk about

politics and think that they can do more than everybody else, a woman doesn't dare express herself in a relaxed way.

M. A.: Do you think that if associations were not politicised they would have been better for women?

If associations didn't have a political milieu it would be much easier for women to take their own place there and feel at home and be active. But because they are politicised it is an obstacle.

M.A.: Do you mean that women are less interested in politics?

They are not less interested but they cannot compete with men. In some way they are not taken so seriously. The result is that women have lost their self-confidence. Why it is like that, I don't know. I don't know why they become like that. Women who once could talk to the people and were respected and recognised have lost their whole self-confidence.

Hana's narrative is striking. It illustrates very well the problem of patriarchy in Kurdish politics. The problem is not women's lack of political interests or participation, but the way politics are defined and organised. It means, as Mulinari notes, that it is not women's lack of the political that must be problematised, but the political.⁷⁹

Sherko, as a Marxist, is one of those who are critical towards how gender questions have been pursued within Kurdish politics. He says:

We have a woman, a poet, Kajal, who says that politics in our society is made by moustache. It means that Kurdish politics have been patriarchal. Politics in our society has been a male domain. Men have done it. Here, our problem with the cultural associations is that they are not places where you can make progress. These are created on the basis of male domination. They are places where men sit and play Domino. You see that there is a male power that makes politics with a big moustache. ...

⁷⁹ Mulinari 1996:155.

In the narratives there exists an implicit notion of politics and the political, connected with a distinct political arena which implies a distinction between the private and the public. Such a distinction is “at the core of women’s subordination” since the definitions of politics are themselves political.⁸⁰

As instruments of the state’s multicultural policy, cultural associations are built around the idea of distinct cultures and ethnicities.⁸¹ Further, associations as Kurdish public spaces are politicised like everything else in Kurdish everyday life. Politics and ideology of nationalism have “traditionally” been central in these associations. Moreover, nationalism, ethnicity and masculinity are closely related. This relation is well manifested in the respondents’ experiences of associations. They are, according to many of the respondents, public places for men where they meet, get recognition and maintain their social relations and create social networks. However, associations differ from each other regarding gender relations as well as many other issues. Women from different associations have different experiences but these differences do not seem fundamental.

Hence, some women have started to build their own association. Mariam and Shirin want to highlight women’s situation rather than subordinate gender issues as they think that the Kurdish movement has done. Together with some other women they have established a Kurdish women’s association because they think:

All Kurdish associations are built by men and for men. We do not feel comfortable in these associations because they treat us as children. Women lose their confidence in these associations. We saw a need for a women’s association where women would feel comfortable, improve themselves and become aware of their rights.

“Maybe 70 percent of men don’t want to have women in associations”

The second reason why women do not participate so much in Kurdish

⁸⁰ Mulinari 1996:155.

⁸¹ Ålund and Schierup 1991.

organisations is, according to many of the respondents, simply that many men, though not all of them, do not allow their wives to go to associations or to other activities while they do so themselves. Further, there are men in these associations and organisations that oppose women's participation and involvement and their physical presence. Salah, a member of an association, says that a large number of men who come to his association do not want to have women there. He says:

Maybe 70 percent of men do not want women to come up, to come to associations. The woman maybe wants to come here but her husband, her brother or her father does not allow it. They come themselves, sit here and say a lot while their women are not allowed to come here. There are also women who are not interested in coming here or being active. But those who are active don't come here either because they see that there are a lot of men here and they do not feel comfortable. ... These men think that they are better and more capable than women. They think that the association is only for men.

These men are, according to Salah, amongst those who spend most time in this association. Many respondents share these experiences. However, I was surprised that a woman from the same cultural association gives a more positive picture of gender relations in their association while her co-member Salah, who is a man, is critical. It may be because she tries to justify her contact with the association, which normally is seen as a male domain. She says that she is respected and that she does not face any problems. It seems to be a defence against a critical opinion from the outside directed at associations or/and at women. Moreover, a reason why the male members express more critical opinions than their female co-members may be that their contact with associations is seen as more natural. They do not need to defend or justify it, while women on the contrary may feel for diverse reasons that they have to justify and motivate their participation. The reason is partly the fact that associations are seen by some people (women and men) as public places for men where women have no business, and partly the fact that associations are criticised, especially by women, for subordinating women. Another reason for men's critical opi-

nion and women's defence of associations may be that they are interviewed by a woman. For men it can be a way to avoid criticism from me, while for women it can be a way to justify their cooperation with an organisation that is seen by some women as patriarchal.

Taban is a woman from the same association as Salah. She says:

It is difficult to answer. In our association I have always been respected. ... Women themselves must become active and come to the associations. ... One cannot draw back and just complain of not being taken seriously. ... I am the only woman who comes here and works here and have always been respected by everybody here.

Indeed it is different in different associations, but it seems that women outside of the associations do not always identify with these women either. This does not mean that they necessarily have such considerations from a critical point of view. It may be because they have accepted that women should not go there. Many of the respondents, both female and male with experiences of membership in different organisations, both leftists and nationalists, more or less confirm these assertions. However, none of these associations do accept discrimination of women. In one association they have even introduced a policy according to which nobody is allowed to behave in an insulting way towards women. What is considered insulting or not is also a matter of definition. This seems not to be very effective, because women are still not going there in the same natural spirit as men do.

Evin is a member of an association. She says:

There are many women in my association. We also have women on the board of the association. My organisation always supports women and wants them to come forward. That is why I like it. ... However, many of the men do not like it but they have no choice. They have to accept it because the organisation wants to support the women.

In almost all associations there are some days for women only. It means that men do not go there on these days, which is once or twice a month.

On these days women have the place to themselves and pursue different activities. In one association women have started a capital fund for financial support to the members.

The associations' formal policy is gender equality, but this does not mean that it is also practiced, or that everybody agrees with the policy and believes in it. It can be said that even women do not always act against patriarchy, and they do not always have the ambition to turn the masculine atmosphere in associations into a more equal one. As Nagel rightly observes, masculinity and nationalist ideology can affect women as much as they affect men. Thereby women are also contributing to the reproduction of the patriarchy and to their own subordination.

Women do social life and politics differently

The third reason why women are distancing themselves from associations is that associations are mainly men's space for constructing and maintaining social relations. In associations they can locate themselves, get recognition, construct and maintain their identities. For women, on the contrary, these institutions mean reproduction of their subordinated and marginalized position. They do not feel at home. Women often meet their friends at their houses, which constitute the space for social relations and contacts. Moreover, women have a central role in maintaining families' social relations with relatives and friends in Sweden, in countries of origin and in other countries of settlement. This is also shown by studies of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants in the USA.⁸²

Contact with the associations and visiting their offices do not necessarily mean political activity. For many of the men who visit associations, it is first of all a way to meet people, make and maintain social contacts. Azad clearly points this out in his narratives. He considers that men's physical presence in the associations does not mean in itself that they are more politically active than women. They often go there for social rather than political reasons:

⁸² Jones-Correa 1998; Alicea 1997.

... men are not that active either. They don't do so much, I mean they come and sit and smoke. You can't say that men are more active than women. I don't think so. ... It is, however, easier for men, after work or when they are downtown, to go to the association and spend one or two hours there. It is so but it does not mean that men are more active than women. It is not like that.

Goran is very critical towards men and honours women for their trustfulness and their commitment in the association's activities, despite the fact that the association in practice has become a place for men. He says that women are interested in politics and also show it in their practices, even though they have many other things to do.

In our association half of the members are women, formally. But in reality it is often men who come here. It is not only because of traditions but you know women take care of children, cook, clean, etc. They do not have so much time. It is difficult for them. ... For example, we have a folkdance group that consists only of women. You may wonder where the men are. They are traitors. ... When women say that they will do something they just do it. But the men are always like that. Women are stable, they know what they do and you can be sure that they, contrary to the men, do what they have promised. When we have demonstrations women are always there. It is our experience. We see these things all the time. When we say that we will do something in the association and invite everybody we see that women are more active. They do what they promise. Maybe they take things more seriously than men.

Most of the respondents, like Goran, admit that, irrespective of whether women work outside home or not, they still have the responsibility for home and children. This means, according to Dilsha, that women's assignments have become heavier here and that they have less time for themselves. She says:

In Sweden it is necessary that both men and women work outside of home. Mothers [Kurdish] now have both these roles. When she comes home after work, she still has other things to do at home, like taking care of children, home, guests and housework. Men do not take responsibility for the home

and children, and that is why they have more free time for themselves. After work they are free and have more possibilities.

It can be concluded from these narratives that women's distance from associations and political parties does not mean in itself that women are less political. They do politics in different ways. Their distance from Kurdish institutions can even be seen as a silent protest. It is also partly because, as the respondents assert, they do not have so much time.

Moreover, above all these, as Mulinari argues: "It is essential to underline that the dichotomy between public and private is culturally and historically specific."⁸³ Her description of the public and private in Latin America, the location of politics in the private and in everyday life, is quite compatible with the Kurdish societies. Mulinari writes:

Much political activity in Latin America occurs outside the formal political process. The meaning of private shifts its character when trespassed by wars, revolutions, armed struggle and military dictatorship. Politics and family life are linked together and many political discussions take place at the Sunday dinner.⁸⁴

It is also impossible to make a strict distinction between the public and the private in this regard in the Kurdish diaspora. Further, as is evident from the narratives, women have a central role in organising the social networks of everyday life which are significant for the existence and maintenance of the diasporic community and its activities.

Defining the problem of gender inequality is very important and determining for the social outcome. Therefore, the way in which the problem is defined can be a part of the solution or a part of the problem, depending on how it is defined.

There is consensus among the respondents about the male dominance and patriarchy in the Kurdish society and politics. Further, almost all of

⁸³ Mulinari 1996:161.

⁸⁴ Mulinari 1996:162.

them admit that this is even worse among the diaspora Kurds. However, the respondents differ concerning the definition of the problem and the solutions. Differentiations primarily follow the ideological lines and political discourses which will be discussed in the following.

Explaining gender inequality

Almost all of the respondents point out the fact that the Kurdish regions in all the four countries are very marginalized and underdeveloped as a consequence of the national oppression. Additionally, constant wars and different kinds of systematic damage have often destroyed the infrastructure in these areas, especially in Iraq and Turkey. This situation has indeed had significant impact on all dimensions of social life in these societies, including gender relations. These conditions contribute among other factors to the maintenance and reproduction of the patriarchal structures. In the respondents' narratives about gender inequality, three discourses can be distinguished: (I) national oppression as the cause of the problem; (II) women are accused of being responsible, since women are regarded as the reproducers of the nation both physically and culturally; (III) patriarchal structures and norms as a problem. This discourse detaches gender inequality from the national issue and other political issues, and recognises it as a problem.

I. National oppression

“In a Kurdish state, as a Kurdish woman I will be heard much better”

There are respondents who attribute the problem of gender inequality to the national oppression. They often have a conception of a suppressed, pure and original Kurdish identity and culture, which is equal. “The real Kurdish identity” is a phrase which occurs in the narratives of nationalists. This discourse refers to an “original” Kurdish identity and culture that has been suppressed by the dominant cultures and identities. It is a part of the identity politics practiced by the Kurdish nationalists. The nationalist discourses in general consider that Kurdish women have more freedom compared to the other women in the region like Arabs, Turks and Persians.

They often refer to an image of Kurdish women as more free and equal. Evin, a woman who is working with a cultural association, says:

Everywhere in the Middle East, women have problems, and not only Kurdish women. But I think that Kurdish women are freer compared to the others, as I know. You know, in Syria for example, because of Islam their women are not as free as Kurdish women. For Kurds maybe religion is not as important as for them.

M.A.: If there were a Kurdish original culture, which promotes gender equality, how would you then explain women's situation in Kurdish societies?

It is not Kurdish culture. We must go back to the past, read in the old Kurdish books and documents where there is a lot which confirms that this is not our culture. My grandmother has had much more freedom than my generation.

Hana, referring to the Western observers' descriptions, compares the time before the nation-state building and the time after that, when Kurdish areas came under the rule of the different nation-states. She says that women were much more free before than after the building of the nation-states:

There is even a book from one hundred years ago written by an Orientalist. In a part of the book, in one or two pages, Kurdish women are compared with other women from the neighbouring nations. The author writes that Kurdish women are freer. ... According to the author Kurdish women had even participated in horse-riding competitions with men. ... The more urbanised they became, the more the dominant powers took over.

Hana, as well as other respondents, believes that Kurdish women are doubly oppressed, once as women and once as Kurds:

Kurdish women are oppressed, once like all other women in the society because they are women and once because of the national oppression because they are Kurds. The national oppression also implies keeping the Kurdish society back, which means that women suffer a double oppression in the society.

She also thinks, similarly to Evin, that in a Kurdish state women will have more freedom and better conditions for being equal to men. Hana also sees the problem at a political level by relating it to the state and its gender policy. She says: However, examples from other parts of the world have shown that one's

As a Kurdish woman you have two tasks. One is to fight for the national issue and the other to fight for women's issue. When as a Kurdish woman I look at this question, it is often so that the women's issue can be solved by the state through different rules and so on. It later becomes the culture of the society. If as a Kurdish woman I talk about the culture of the Kurdish nation regarding gender issues, I can say that I don't know because we have never had a Kurdish state to see how it treats women. ... In a Kurdish state, as a Kurdish woman, I will be heard and satisfy my demands much more than in Iran.

"own" nation-state is not a guarantee of gender equality. The continuity of gender inequality and women's subordinated position in nationalist movements and in liberated nation-states are evident.⁸⁵ This is because the basic notions of gender relations and of woman and her role in society are the same in all nationalist ideologies. This fact is also illustrated in the present study.

There are respondents who define the women as a problem instead of problematising women's situation. However, among the respondents this discourse is quite marginal. It blames women for reproducing their own subordination in their roles as mothers and reproducers of the nation.

II. Women should blame themselves

"Men are not responsible. We are all children of our mothers"

Many of the respondents point out women's role in the reproduction of the patriarchy. They mention for example that women treat their girls and boys differently. Boys are usually allowed to do whatever they want, but not girls. Of course, both women and men do participate in the reproduction of the patriarchal relations. Both women and men are brought up in

⁸⁵ Mama 2001; Chatterjee 2001; Radhakrishnan 2001.

a male-dominated society, in a patriarchal structure where they are socialised into their gender roles. However, there are some women and men among the respondents that lay the whole responsibility on women and ignore the structure of patriarchal power in the society. There is sometimes hatred and bitterness in these respondents' narrative when talking about this issue. Leyla says spontaneously that Kurdish women compared to other women from the Middle East are freer in some respects. At the same time she says that Kurdish women have fewer ambitions and are less committed than, for example, Persian women. Her analysis becomes more elaborate when I go on to ask more. She says:

Kurdish women are lazier. Are lazier and have not the ability.

M.A.: Do you mean that the problem is that they are lazy?

No, it is not laziness either. They are tired. She feels that she has been tired in her country and now she wants to rest. Or she has become accustomed to her dependence on her husband and here she becomes dependent on the social allowance. She does not care to go out and become involved in the society and make an effort. ... Also, Kurdish women are not good at enjoying their life. They don't have any zest for life. The situation that we have had and that uneasiness and tiredness, we still carry them with us even here. You have become a person without any joy of living, frigid and depressed.

Leyla's narratives describe a sense of resignation. This can be explained partly by the traumatic experiences that have affected these women's lives, partly by the fact that as women, they have been socialised in a position of dependence; finally it may also be because they, as women, do not see any solution.

Azad is very critical towards women. According to him, women do want to partake of all rights which this society offers them, but they do not want to partake of obligations. He stresses very often that rights and obligations are related to each other and that women care only about the rights but not about their obligations. Azad also blames women for being reproducers of their own subordination because they are women who bring up children and teach them norms and values. Consequently, he concludes that if the culture of the nation has failed in any respect, it is women that are respon-

sible and must be accused. They have, according to him, not been good mothers. However, he is quite alone in his opinion on this issue. He says:

Of course, men have power in all societies, not only in the Kurdish society. There are differences even in Sweden. A problem which I see is that above all a Kurdish woman, as a human being, does not try to make progress, that is to say, she does not participate in society. In this way I mean that Kurdish women's situation is not good. There are also many Kurdish women who are very successful, but these are a minority and are not so many. Especially those who come from the countryside and whose husbands work and earn money do not feel any need to go out and do something. They sit at home and do nothing. They don't learn the language ... Most Kurdish women are like this, unfortunately. ... Some women sleep until noon because they have no job to go to. She doesn't work, doesn't go to school. At night she sleeps very late because she sits with some other women and talks rubbish and then gets up at noon. ... Of course all things have their causes but I think that they are satisfied, otherwise they should try and fight. ... In my opinion, it is not because men don't allow her but because she herself doesn't feel any need, or it is difficult for her. ... I think it is not men's responsibility since they are brought up by their mothers. It is woman who brought up man. We all are the children of our mothers. It is woman who has brought us up, not men. Especially in Kurdistan children are with mothers all the time while fathers are outside and don't know what is going on at home.

Azad's opinion, which is even readable to a much weaker extent in Leyla's and Hamid's narratives, may also partly be a reaction to a discourse that puts the responsibility for gender oppression on men instead of the patriarchal structures.

There are other respondents who see the problem in patriarchal structure and norms. Gender questions among the Kurdish movement have been very much related to the ideological and political orientations. The left part of the movement has paid more attention to gender issues, although to a limited extent. This is even observed by Mama when she discusses the independent African states' gender policy. She finds that the socialist states have been better in this regard, compared to the capitalist states.⁸⁶ However, among the respon-

⁸⁶ Mama 2001.

dents the issue seems in some cases to exceed the political and ideological lines. Among the group who are critical of the patriarchal structure and norms one can find both left-oriented nationalists and Marxists.

III. Male dominance and patriarchal structures

“Kurdistan will not be free, as long as its women are not free”

All those who identify themselves as feminist and/or defend women’s rights, regardless of political and ideological lines, are critical of the Kurdish society as well as the Kurdish movement and its institutions concerning gender relations. They argue that gender issues must be highlighted and discussed independently.

Women who are critical of the patriarchal structures within the Kurdish society and movement have a more ambivalent relationship to the Kurdish community, and are more angry. Some of these women are also working in different ways for women’s rights. Ronak identifies herself as a nationalist and feminist. Towards the outside, she identifies herself as a Kurd, but in relation to the Kurds she identifies herself as a feminist and woman. She says:

Women’s struggle against different kinds of repression based on ethnicity, class, etc. must derive from women’s thoughts and women’s reason, not men’s thinking and reason. Women must take their place in these arenas as well. Women must put their imprint on these movements. Only when the power has become fifty-fifty can you say that the women’s movement has balanced the power. We will fail again if we continue to bind ourselves to male ideologies.

Mariam, Shirin and other women involved in the Kurdish women’s association have been accused of dividing the Kurdish movement by bringing up gender issues. Ronak, Mariam and Shirin identify themselves as Kurds in relation to the “outside” while they define themselves as feminists and as women in relation to the Kurdish community. Mariam says:

Many Kurdish men say that we weaken the Kurdish movement by bringing up such conflicts. Our answer to them is that Kurdistan will not be free as long as its women are not free. Men have always decided on different political issues in the Kurdish movement and now we see the result. Women have also been involved in the Kurdish movement, but political decisions have always been taken by men.

According to Mariam and Shirin another problem is that women do not go to the women's association either. They say that those women who are their target group do not come there. They want to encourage those most isolated women to come out. According to them, most of the women who come to the meetings or visit the association are persons who already have an active social life and are relatively independent individuals. Shirin is critical also of other Kurdish institutions that ignore women, such as Kurdish media. She says:

... It is sad to watch Kurdish television because you see only male writers, poets, doctors and so on. We also have women in such positions, but it is as if these women do not exist. You never see them on television. We simply do not exist for them.

Alan regards the problem of gender inequality as a problem connected with the state and political system, not with culture. He is also critical of those who say that gender inequality or other problems are influences from other cultures, though he also admits that Kurds in different parts of Kurdistan are influenced by the dominant cultures. He says:

There are those who maintain that all bad things in Kurdish culture are influences from other cultures. I don't say that. I think that, for example, differences between Iraqi and Iranian Kurds originate from the fact that women's situations in Iraq and Iran differ from each other. This has also influenced us. Further, the legislations that exist in Iraq and Iran have been different and these have also strengthened differences.

Summary

In this chapter, I have highlighted the internal contradictions of Kurdish diaspora regarding gender. However, there are many other internal divisions concerning class, origin, religion, language, politics, culture, rural/urban origin, lifestyles, sexuality, generation, etc.

My conclusions are primarily based on the respondents' experiences. But they bring out some tendencies and processes which can be recognised in many other contexts. The narratives demonstrate differences between women's and men's experiences of living in Sweden and how these influence their relationship to the Kurdish community and Sweden. Women show more ambivalence towards the Kurdish diasporic community. On the one hand, they feel at home in the Kurdish community in relation to the exclusive Swedish society. On the other hand, they are critical of their subordinated position within the Kurdish community. They are often sceptical towards the Kurdish institutions since they do not have positive experiences of working with them. Feminism, as an ideological and political movement, is very weak within the Kurdish diaspora. Those organisations and movements which bring up the issue of gender inequality have often done it as a by-product of class or national struggles. However, in comparison it must be pointed out that the Kurdish left has paid more attention to gender issues and has done more than the nationalists.

As immigrant women in Sweden, Kurdish women also have an ambivalent position. On the one hand they, as well as men, in their position as immigrants from the Third World are facing racism, exclusion and inferiorisation. On the other hand, as women, they enjoy more rights than they used to have in their countries of origin. The narratives show that they, compared to men, have a more positive relation to Sweden. They show more openness toward the society and learn the language faster. Most of the female respondents express their will to "adapt" to the Swedish society. They are, however, as immigrant women from the Third World, stigmatised and excluded from the society. Compared to women, men face racism more directly and in its more naked form. They experience more opposition from the society than women do. They often experience a downward social mobility, which is not encouraging. Men's reduced and

worsened position and their strong feelings of exclusion can make them resistant towards the society. Hence, for many of the respondents Kurdish identity has become something more than identification. It appears to have an almost existential meaning for many. They reproduce their Kurdish identity continuously through their social networks, talking about their memories of the past, and through their engagement in Kurdish associations etc. Women, on the contrary, show more ambivalence towards the Kurdish society. They mention that they are living in the present, not least because they bear the main responsibility for the family and children. Hence, they are also more involved in society.

There is consensus about the existence of gender inequality and women's subordination among the respondents. There are, on the contrary, three different explanations and discourses about its causes. One takes the national oppression to explain gender inequality, the second blames women for being bad mothers and reproducers of their own subordination, and the third regards the male dominance and patriarchal structures as the main cause of the problem.

The Kurdish identity as a project includes many internal subdivisions, among them the Kurdish woman's identity. To be a "Kurdish Woman" is a project about resistance against women's subordination within the Kurdish community, as well as resistance against imposed national identities. At least that is what the women active in the Kurdish women's association express. The Kurdish movement has always been a priority whereas women's emancipation has been a subordinated issue. This situation demonstrates the complexity of the women's situation due to a range of different antagonisms.

PART IV

CONCLUDING REMARKS

**Diasporic Movement for Location:
the Kurdish Experience**

Introduction

The main sociological question in the thesis has been how displaced populations, especially migrants and refugees, relate to questions of origin, homeland and national belonging in a situation where, on the one hand, these questions have an increasing impact on identities and social relations and, on the other hand, nations and nationalities are hierarchically positioned in a global power structure. The thesis has investigated these questions by focusing on the Kurdish diasporic experience. The study is based on individual experiences, but also a great amount of previous research and other literature have been used for contextualising and analysing the narratives. Historicising and contextualising, that is, studying experiences within their historical and socio-political context, have been central for this study. Narratives have been analysed within the framework of respondents' experiences of and relation to Sweden, countries of origin and the Kurdish diasporic community and movement.

The aim of the thesis has primarily been to study the Kurdish diasporic experiences, identities and movement from the perspective of people who are involved in these processes. It includes respondents' experiences of exile, everyday racism and exclusion in their position as Kurds and migrants, as well as their experiences of civil rights and political freedom in their position as citizens. It also involves their activities and networking with regard to the formation of collective identity and community. The study has investigated the construction of subjectivities and social relations in a historical and socio-political context conditioned by their pre-migratory and their contemporary experiences of subordination and exclusion as well as their strategies of survival and resistance.

An additional purpose has been to examine the current theories of diaspora and to contribute to theoretical improvement and clarification of the concept. A basic and significant step in this direction has been to identify diaspora's central features and its political dimension and bring them into the centre of analysis. Further, the study has highlighted the ways in which individual experiences and actions interact with social processes and structures within the framework of the diasporic movement.

*Central features of diaspora: homing desire,
collective identity and movement*

This study has argued for distinguishing the concept of diaspora from similar concepts very often equated with diaspora. The distinction is achieved by emphasising the central features that characterise diasporas. One of these central features is the “essential” relation to homeland, the way it is articulated, its centrality and presence in diasporas’ everyday life. In this definition, homeland is not necessarily territorial but it can also be symbolic, depending on different historical and social as well as political projects and politics of location. The centrality of homeland for diasporas is related to the forced migration and conditions of exile and exclusion. It is a response to feelings of displacement, to experiences of otherness and subordination, and to need of identification and belonging, rather than an effect of any essential bond between people and territories. The other central feature is the process of collective identity and community formation organised around the politics of location/home. These two issues are central in all diasporic experiences and it is at these points that differentiations and contradictions between diasporic experiences, discourses and theories occur.

Diasporic projects, aspirations and desires are articulations of lived experiences of different localities – countries of origin and countries of settlement – linked to the political discourses. A critique that this study directs towards the (re)territorial notion of diaspora, introduced by Safran, is that it takes diasporic discourses as “objective realities” without taking their political dimensions into consideration. The respondents’ narratives presented in the previous chapters show that a collective return movement or other such project does not exist in the Kurdish diaspora, while one of Safran’s and Cohen’s criteria for defining diasporas is the existence of a collective return movement. A critique directed toward Safran is that he has excluded ambivalences and contradictions in the issue of return within the Jewish diaspora by excluding anti-Zionist critiques of a return project.¹ Further, the respondents’ narratives indicate that the notion of homeland and return among the Kurdish diaspora is highly

¹ Clifford 1997.

ambivalent and contradictory. Thus, I agree with the critique of Safran for essentialising and generalising a specific project in its relation to and articulations of homeland and return. I consider Safran's notion of diaspora as both methodologically and theoretically problematic.² A point of departure in this study has been the fact that the diasporas' aspirations, discourses and identities always imply a political dimension. Therefore each diaspora has to be studied in relation to socio-political processes in countries of origin, in countries of settlements, and within the diasporic community, which condition its aspirations and projects. Moreover, as Clifford notes, it is important to distinguish between diaspora as a concept and as a social process and diasporic discourses. My theoretical point of departure is the de-territorial notion of diaspora introduced in Chapter 4, although the specific history and context of the Kurdish diasporic experience differ from those of both the historical African and the Jewish diaspora, which constitute the empirical bases for the two notions of diaspora.

Making an analytical distinction between the individual emotional attachments and experiences of localities and the political discourses and projects is significant for the definition of the diaspora, for understanding such social and political processes and for the trustworthiness and reliability of the research. It is such a distinction that seems to be absent in Safran's notion of diaspora. And the problem with the de-territorial notion, except Gilroy's, is that it does not bring out the political dimension of diaspora processes and aspirations clearly and explicitly. I realised in my study that there was a gap in diaspora theories in this respect, and that there is a need for an analytical framework which links individual motives and actions with the socio-political structures. Accordingly the theory of social movements appeared as relevant as fitting a piece in a jigsaw puzzle. In order to put interactions in the centre and highlight and analyse relations between the individual and the political within the diasporic movement, the theory of social movements is both useful and indispensable. In this regard, the study hopefully contributes to theory by reconciling and complementing the current views of diaspora.

² For discussion see Chapter 4.

Integrating the theory of diaspora and the theory of social movements

Interactions in focus

Following Gilroy, I have tried to go beyond dichotomies of essence and construction. Instead I have stressed the interwoven political and individual/emotional dimensions of diasporic yearnings, identities and projects in which moments of “essence” and “deconstruction”, “roots” and “routes”, “difference” and “similarity”, “here” and “there”, “past” and “present” are included. It is the interdependence and dialectic relationship between these dichotomies that characterise diasporic yearnings and identities. Any analysis of diasporas must be able to identify these interwoven and symbiotic processes and focus on their interactions and relations. Additionally, a study of diasporic identity and aspiration must imply different levels of analysis and different dimensions of social processes and focus on their interactions. It thereby demands a “middle level” of analysis that, as Melucci points out, can identify and expose processes through which the individual and the collective, the political and the emotional meet and create conditions for collective identities and collective actions within a certain context. It was in this sense that I found the theory of social movement enriching, useful and necessary as an analytical framework for studying diaspora movements, identities and projects.

Considering the political and the individual

The construction of a collective/political identity, which always implies collective action, is according to Melucci a product of conscious individual orientations and political discourses. These integrated aspects were clearly manifested in the narratives. The mobilisation potential included in this process consisted of: (1) the respondents’ lived experiences and their subjective attitudes based on their objective life condition, namely their subordinated positions as migrants and Kurds in Sweden; (2) intellectuals, parties and organisations that synchronise, define and lead activities; (3) an existing network of social relations which serves as a recruiting

network for the Kurdish movement and its related institutions. These networks of social relations are at the same time a strong motivation potential for individuals to participate. This was evident both in the present study and in previous studies on Kurdish diaspora.³ These circumstances, on the one hand, provide Kurdish political parties and institutions with the natural and already existing social networks of everyday life as recruiting networks. On the other hand, diaspora movements and networks of relations and activities become a “home” for people who need it in order to survive exclusion and marginalisation.

As was shown in the study, the respondents’ participation in diasporic networks and movement develops on an individual level. However, it cannot solely be seen as an all-individual phenomenon. Although the motivation has its roots in individual features, it is according to Melucci built up and developed via interaction. Both the identity that arises out of such a process, and the politics to which it gives rise, depend on the various individual experiences mobilised in particular constructions of identity, as well as on the way those elements are articulated in discourses.

Diasporic movements, including the Kurdish one, imply three very closely related dimensions: solidarity, social conflict and social change. The Kurdish identity as a collective identity, a point of solidarity (a we-identity), is defined against antagonists and opponents both inside and outside the field of Kurdish movement and politics. Outwardly, Kurdish identity is constructed through a contradictory process of differentiation and opposition towards other collectivities. The Kurdish identity was formed in opposition to imposed national identities in the countries of origin.⁴ Further, in conditions of exile and exclusion the Kurdish identity is mobilised as a resource in order to resist the imposed immigrant identity and survive exclusion and exile.⁵ Inwardly, it is constructed through contradictory interactions between Kurdish individuals and groups with different standpoints within the movement. This was also shown in Chapters 6–9 by highlighting the internal

³ Whalbeck 1999; van Bruinessen 1999.

⁴ See Chapter 2.

⁵ See Chapters 6–9.

contradictions and conflicts regarding ideological and political orientations as well as gender. These chapters demonstrated a sense of solidarity and a collective identity as well as diversities and internal boundaries of the Kurdish diasporic identity and movement. They revealed how the Kurdish identity is negotiated and (re)constructed in processes of boundary-making, identification and differentiation inwardly and outwardly. Moreover, diaspora movements challenge and exceed boundaries of the social system within which they act and bring about social changes. The impact of the Kurdish diaspora's movement on the social and political processes addressed in this study and in previous studies illustrates this aspect.⁶ One example, as mentioned in Chapter 7, consists of the transnational activities pursued by the Kurdish diaspora and especially the central role of Kurdish media. According to this study and also previous studies, the Kurdish diaspora has had a significant impact on spreading and strengthening Kurdish nationalism, on deterritorialisation of Kurdish politics, on shaping opinion about the Kurdish question and on creating a transnational space for Kurdish political activism.

Kurdish diasporic experience and politics of location

Considering power structures

Diasporas are one kind of social phenomenon where a complex social process characterised on the one hand by dispersion, dislocation and social exclusion and on the other hand by movements for location can be best observed. I have hopefully succeeded in giving an idea of the complexity that these processes imply. The Kurdish experience of diaspora, as a “piece” of such a social process, throws light upon how origins, relation to a place, and national belonging become highly politicised and constitute exclusionary demarcation lines, and on how they impact majority-minority relations in the global society. Moreover it shows how refugees, especially those from nationalities and origins positioned in the margins of the global structure of power, can be affected by this condition and how they react. It illustrates

⁶ See Hassanpour A. 1995, 1998; Rigoni 2003; Tayfun 1998; van Bruinessen 1999.

how social relations between them and receiving societies can look.

Focusing on the structures of power and exclusion has been one point of departure in this study. The respondents' experiences and their responses, activities and identities cannot be understood without considering the social and political context and power structures that condition them.

Concerning these issues the following question is mentioned by Safran. He asks:

In the relationship between perceptions of discrimination, actual oppression, and diaspora sentiments, which are the independent and which are the dependent variables? Is there a reciprocal causality? Is diaspora consciousness a concomitant of a feeling of otherness, of alienation, or of a lack of hospitality on the part of the host society, or, on the contrary, is the lack of hospitality a response by the host society to the exceptionalism that diaspora consciousness signifies?⁷

There is no simple and general answer to these questions. They must always be articulated specifically in each diaspora and its relation to the society and its position in power structures. As Hylland-Eriksen rightly argues, it is not the quantity of a group but its position in the structures of power that can define a group as a majority or minority.⁸ Hence, generally the answer will be that there is a complex mutual relationship with a strong power dimension. Accordingly, the question is about who has the power to define the other. Who is dependent on the other's recognition?⁹ As is demonstrated in the narratives, the respondents' experiences of everyday racism, discrimination and exclusion in their position as Kurds and immigrants have a significant impact on their relation to the society. However, the narratives also illustrated that respondents themselves sometimes have categorical and collective conceptions of Swedes and Swedishness. They, too, have their "we" and "them" categories. Never-

⁷ Safran 1991:96.

⁸ Hylland-Eriksen 1993.

⁹ See Chapters 6 and 8.

theless, in the end this does not affect any native Swedish individual's life chances or her/his position in the society, in the labour market, etc. But of course exclusion and discrimination affect the society in the long run and in different ways. For example, in extreme cases they can give rise to total disidentification and destructive reactions.

Movement for location

The dispersion of Kurds can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Hence, experiences of exile, dispersal and diaspora are closely involved in the Kurdish culture and history of the last two centuries. The "homeland", Kurdistan, has in this process become very central and particularly influenced by nationalism that entered the Kurdish political scene in the twentieth century. This is demonstrated and at the same time reproduced in political discourses, as well as in poetry, prose, arts, music, oral histories, everyday conversations, etc. However, the last two decades of Kurdish history can be distinguished as a period when the Kurdish diaspora on a large scale has become mobilised. This means that a Kurdish transnational community, a Kurdish diasporic space, is established as an outcome of the intensified relationship with the countries of origin and among Kurds settled in different countries around the globe. This has been possible mainly because of two parallel processes. Firstly, the last two decades of Kurdish migratory history are characterised by a change in the character and the direction of Kurdish migration since the start of Kurdish refugee migration to the West in the late 1970s. Secondly, this change has taken place in a period of human history that is characterised by the rapid growth and spread of mass media and communication technologies to varying extent in different parts of the world, though concentrated in the West.

It can be said that Kurds' settlement in the West has on the one hand provided the Kurdish diaspora with a number of democratic rights, for example the right to organise and carry out political and cultural activities, etc. In Sweden, where this study is carried out, the multicultural policy has provided especially favourable conditions in this regard. On the other hand, as migrants and as people born outside Europe, Kurds are degraded,

excluded, marginalised, and facing discrimination and everyday racism. A common effect of these two processes is that the Kurds increasingly have been pushed back to their own “ethnic” communities at the margins of the society. Exclusion and the need of identification and belonging on the one hand, and the political and social opportunities to organise and carry out cultural activities on the other, have contributed to the strengthening and maintenance of their communities. In this process, Kurdish transnational institutions have played a significant role alongside the intensive social networks of everyday life. Further, a characteristic of Kurdish diasporic communities is that they usually are highly politicised, since politics is an integrated part of the exiled Kurds’ everyday life. This situation has altogether contributed to the strength and expansion of the Kurdish national identity and Kurdish nationalism.

The Kurdish identity in this process is not formed in a sense of total differentiation in relation to Sweden, despite the respondents’ experiences of racism, discrimination and exclusion. The Kurdish diasporic identity and communities rather “inhabit” the spaces between the local and the global and bring them together in a contradictory and complex process of constant (re)negotiations, identifications and differentiations. Hence, their sense of belongingness is very complex and multidimensional. As discussed in Chapters 6–9, these communities are not homogeneous or unified. They contain many internal differences and contradictions – both political and ideological – as well as distinctions based on gender, class, generation, lifestyle, culture, origin, language, religion, etc. These differences impact the individual’s relation to Sweden as well as to the “homeland” and to the diasporic communities.

However, common to all of these positions is their effort and desire to become “located”. Location with this meaning is symbolic rather than territorial. It is about creating spaces and platforms, which can give them self-confidence, solidarity and belongingness. As discussed earlier, all individuals involved in these communities have in common that they are exiles and immigrants and that they are excluded from the spaces of power, from the Swedish national community and its networks of everyday life. They have a need for connection, recognition, identification, continuity and

belonging. The diasporic communities, networks and activities offer them a “home”, a platform, a “location” where they can orientate themselves and meet society. It gives them a “we-identity”, a sense of belongingness and solidarity with an imagined community that exceeds many national boundaries. These diaspora spaces are in many respects, as demonstrated in this study, essential for people in order to survive. According to Massey,¹⁰ an important aspect of space and spatiality is its connection with social power. She talks about “*spatialized* social power”, claiming that “it is the power relations in the construction of spatiality, rather than the spatiality alone, which must be addressed.”¹¹ Hence, it can be said that diaspora spaces are created in a process of struggle for location and spatiality, for social power and for survival.

Location in movement

This study has argued that the centrality of homeland for diasporas is not necessarily territorial and coupled to a project of nation-building. The desire and longing for homeland on an individual basis rather give expression to a need of belonging, and are a response to exclusion and subordination. People in this study mobilise historical, social and political resources in their new society in order to locate themselves and stand out and make their lives meaningful and bearable. Memories, cultural traditions and resources, intellectual activities, social networking, political activities, etc. are among such resources that can be identified in the respondents’ narratives and in their strategies of survival and process of identity. By this I do not mean that for every single individual these activities are necessarily raised and caused by the condition of exile and migration. They are, however, highly conditioned and affected by it.

The specific historical situation of each diaspora affects its articulation of, and relation to, homeland. Such a specific characteristic of the Kurdish diaspora is, as demonstrated in Chapter 7, that no given home-

¹⁰ Massey 1999.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 291.

land exists which all the respondents can relate to. There are instead different localities from where they have experiences and to which they are emotionally and socially attached. They have personal memories of, as well as existing social and emotional bonds to and relations with, these places. When the respondents talk about homeland in an individual sense they often mention places where they were born and/or grew up and from where they have experiences and memories, while their political notions of homeland are related to different political discourses. Nationalists in general refer to Kurdistan as homeland, although there does not exist a country with that name. Their relations to the countries of origin are very ambivalent. Countries of origin, Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, are not recognised by them as homelands. Marxists usually relate in different ways to the ideal and/or ideology of cosmopolitanism and do not want to become associated with any local identity. Thus, neither Kurdistan nor countries of origin are mentioned by them as homeland. However, it must be pointed out that neither nationalists nor Marxists are homogeneous and unified groups. Neither can articulations of homeland be discussed in simple dichotomies rather than as more ambivalent and mixed positions in between.

In interviewing the respondents I could not identify any given answer to the question of what/where the homeland is. It is rather a matter of subjective individual and political articulations and constructions. Moreover, the Kurdish diasporic communities mainly consist of involuntary and forced migrants and political refugees. This means that a return is neither desirable nor possible in the current situation. Memories and experiences of these places are often traumatic. Hence, the respondents are ambivalent and have contradictory feelings concerning “homeland” although they all express a wish to return one day. Return is first of all a dream, a hope and a wish relegated to the future. The respondents do not have any hope of return in the foreseeable future. The exception is perhaps the Iraqi Kurds. Because of the new political situation in Iraq since 1990, they seem to be more hopeful, though very sceptical at the same time. As one of the respondents said, “maybe we are going to die here, so we have to put our roots here and make something of our lives”. They all try to build up their lives in Sweden at the same time that the dream of homeland and the relation to it

are present in their everyday life. Their transnational networks and communities, social relations and activities regarding the politics of location have in this process become their “home”. In these interactions they reconstruct their memories, create their identities and get recognition and continuity, and create and maintain a diaspora space. They create a sense of collective identity and sustain their communities. Thus, they are located in movement in two senses. Firstly, they are located in movement in the sense that Gilroy expresses with the metaphor of “Black Atlantic”, a location which is not territorial but refers to a transient place. It goes beyond the imagination of the nation and territory with boundaries. Secondly, they are also located in their political and cultural activities and movement and in their imagined community of the Kurdish nation. Thus, their social networks and communities have become a “home”, a location in itself.

Kurdish diaspora and gender relations

In Chapters 4 and 9, I problematised the very categorical assumptions about the masculinity of diaspora. As social processes, diasporas have a gender dimension. To what extent they are defined by masculinity depends on the socio-political, cultural and historical context that surrounds them, as well as their historical and socio-political background and the political projects they are built around. Hence, this is a matter of empirical investigation for each specific case. However, it must be pointed out that, as discussed earlier, the diasporic condition of exile and homelessness benefits the ideology of nationalism closely related to a masculinist discourse, which legitimises gender inequality. Accordingly it gives way to male dominance and gender oppression. It is from this point of departure that the relation between diaspora and gender must be discussed. Further, each diaspora is unique and must be studied specifically also regarding its relation to gender.

This study has highlighted the issue of gender in order to bring out the Kurdish women’s experiences of migration, exile and diaspora as well as their role in these processes. The Kurdish women’s relation to Sweden, to the countries of origin, to “homeland” and to the Kurdish diaspora community differs from men’s experiences in various ways. Indeed, for both men and

women their political orientations, as well as their social situations, are very central in their relation to these different points of reference.¹² However, alongside general political orientations, gender is among the central factors that have an impact on these relations. This study has shown that women are far more ambivalent in their relations to Sweden and to the Kurdish diasporic community. As women, they benefit from living in Sweden and thereby are more open towards Sweden, at the same time as they are more critical towards the Kurdish community. By that I do not mean that gender oppression does not exist in Sweden. Of course Sweden is not an exception in this regard. The difference is that struggles for gender equality are high on the political agenda in Sweden and women's rights are supported by the law. This is not the case in the countries of origin. The respondents all recognise that women are subordinated within the Kurdish diasporic community. Therefore women have less confidence in the Kurdish community than men, and are more sceptical and critical towards it. However, in spite of their often more positive and open attitude toward Sweden and their will to become part of the society, Kurdish women, as well as men, experience that they are excluded from the society and degraded as migrants and Kurds. It is rather in the Kurdish community and in their social networks and activities that women find a "home", although they often challenge its boundaries in different ways.

Final remarks: "new ethnicities", new generations

Nationalism and the imagination of a national community constitute one of the powerful ideologies that appeal to exiles and diasporas, and it is also the one that has the most favourable conditions for spreading in these surroundings. There is a dialectic relationship between exile, homesickness and nationalism. Nationalist discourses and imaginations of a community can have a strong attraction when there is a lack of identification and belonging because of exclusion and marginalisation. This study, as well as a number of other studies, has found that the Kurdish diaspora has contributed to the spreading and strengthening of Kurdish nationalism. There

¹² See Chapters 6–8.

are also Marxists and feminists who in different ways oppose the nationalist discourses and have an impact on the movement. They are, however, quite marginalized compared to the nationalists. The left is fragmented and feminism is weak.

One question that arises is about the character of ethnic and national identities which emerge in such processes. Can we call them, as Hall does, “new ethnicities”?¹³ What does this mean and in what sense is it new? He explains it as follows: “There is the ‘difference’ which makes a radical and unbridgeable separation: and there is a ‘difference’ which is positional, conditional and conjunctural, closer to Derridá’s notion of *différance*...”¹⁴ It is this shift in meaning of difference that according to Hall characterises the “new ethnicities” as plural, open and hybrid, and which engage rather than suppress difference.¹⁵

Two closely related aspects in Hall’s concept of new ethnicities are the relation to political power and the relation to difference. These “new ethnicities of the margin” are of course not in power, and they even have no claims on political power. Therefore they do not have the same relation to difference as those in power have. It means that they are not exclusivist and are not compelled to exclude other “ethnicities” in order to exist. It is, according to Hall, a “positive ethnicity” that must be decoupled from nationalism, imperialism, racism and state. It is, he argues, about “a recognition that we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture... We are all, in that sense, *ethnically* located and our ethnic identities are crucial to our subjective sense of who we are.”¹⁶ However, it must be emphasised that “new ethnicities”, like “ethnic” identities in general, do not emerge and operate in a vacuum – they are relational. How they relate to difference is very much dependent on and

¹³ Hall 1992d.

¹⁴ Ibid. 255. “Derrida uses the anomalous ‘a’ in his way of writing ‘difference’ – *différance* – as a marker which sets up a disturbance in our settled understanding or translation of the word/concept. It sets the word in motion to new meanings without erasing the *trace* of its other meanings.” (Hall 1992a:229.)

¹⁵ Hall 1992d:257.

¹⁶ Hall 1992d:258.

conditioned by how they, as different, are treated. From my findings I argue that we can talk about new dimensions and functions possessed by ethnic, as well as national and religious categories of identity, rather than a shift, even though Hall does not talk about a fundamental shift. We can talk about transnational and deterritorialised contexts that condition ethnic identities and relations, rather than a shift in ethnicity as such.

As demonstrated in this study, the Kurdish diaspora identity is not primarily constructed in opposition to the Swedish identity or Swedish society, but in opposition to the dominant national identities in the countries of origin. Kurdish identity in Sweden is rather mobilised partly as a resource in order to resist the otherness and stigma that the imposed immigrant identity implies. Kurdish identity is mobilised in this sense as a point of difference, at the same time that its boundaries are open and reflexive. Hence, the point is that the Kurdish identity defined in relation to Swedes and the Swedish society is not the same as the Kurdish identity defined in relation to the dominant national identities and states in the countries of origin. In relation to Sweden it is more open, reflexive and positional. In that sense it is compatible with Hall's notion of "new ethnicities". However, as also demonstrated, it still has exclusivist and essentialist claims on identity and belonging. Both in Sweden and in the countries of origin, Kurdish identity is an identity in the margins, but it is conditioned by very different socio-political contexts and has different relations to the state and society. In Sweden, migrants', including Kurds', relation to the society and to the state is defined by their position as migrants, which is a negative identity, that of non-Swedes and not as Kurds, Gambians, Afghans, etc. The Kurdish identity is seen as an ethnic and cultural property existing outside the society and limited to their associations and their private life. It is even supported by the state within the framework of its cultural politics.

Although I admit that Hall makes a considerable point in his thesis on "new ethnicities", I share Gilroy's emphasis on the political dimension in such identity processes coupled to the relation of power and dominance, oppression and resistance. I also share Gilroy's and Fanon's concern about the risk of the essence-claim inherent in resistance movements mobilised around ethnicity and nationalism. I share their ambivalent position towards these

processes, that is, on the one hand supporting them in their struggles against racism, discrimination and ethnic and national oppression, and at the same time recognising and criticising their claims on essential identities.

Moreover, it can be said that the concept of “new ethnicities” is more compatible with younger generations as well as with older communities of diasporas. This is related to my other point which is about multipositionality, and I would especially like to stress that the issue of generations is significant in this process. In this study I have investigated the issue of gender and its impact on the Kurdish diasporic movement and identity while I have left aside many aspects, and among them is the aspect of generations. I speak of generations in two senses: generations of individuals and generations of communities. The Kurdish diasporic movement and identity will differ if we look at the so-called second, third, fourth, etc. generations or if we look at the Kurdish community after ten or twenty years. I will give an example to clarify how younger generations position themselves towards ethnicity and nationalism. Sernhede¹⁷ has studied a hip-hop collective in a suburb of Gothenburg, consisting of a group of immigrant youths all born and/or grown up in Sweden, with parents from countries in the Middle East and Latin America. These youths regard themselves as constituting an ethnic alliance, which would represent all immigrant youths from all suburbs in Sweden. They worked hard to create respect for the suburb to which they belonged and which was their “home”. They were creating, according to Sernhede, a “territorial mythology” that constituted “a kind of ‘nationalism of the neighbourhood.’”¹⁸ This kind of “nationalism” is outside the national and ethnic imaginations. It is a nationalism within quotation marks.¹⁹ They have social relations and activities that cannot be defined within ethnic and national boundaries. Ethnic and national categories are rather an element of the group and of their identities as well as categories of class, gender, etc. The reason is partly, as

¹⁷ Sernhede 1998.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 168-169.

¹⁹ This is evident from the title of the book Sernhede wrote on these youths, “Alienation is my nation” (2002). The title is taken from interviews with one of these youths.

Sernhede argues, because:

Things are different for the young. In the nursery, everyone plays with everyone else, and in school you co-operate with students from a different ethnic background. During leisure time you are out in the streets and cultivate companionships, which supersede the ethnic boundaries drawn by parental culture. All young people are at a stage in their lives when they are seeking both their outer and inner selves. ... They readily absorb and test out the different expressions, articulations and views of the world inherent in different cultures.²⁰

This is not the case for the people who participated in my study. They are the first generation of Kurdish diaspora in Sweden and adults of a young diaspora community. As such they are, on the one hand, still very affected by the Kurdish movement and politics, and have experiences of – as well as existing and intense social and emotional bonds to – their “homelands” and the Kurdish diaspora community. On the other hand, as the “first generation”, they encounter much greater difficulties and obstacles in becoming a part of Swedish society. They are accordingly to a large extent pushed back into their own communities and therefore do not always have the same relation towards the “outside”. As the “first generation” they “have”, however, memories, lived experiences, and connections with a place to which they can relate when they are excluded from the receiving societies, while the “second generation” do not always have these in the same way. What do the latter have? What are their strategies?

As argued above, we are located not only in ethnic categories but also in other categories such as gender, class, generation, lifestyle, origin, history, nationality, culture, education, sexuality, politics, etc. Furthermore, these categories do not exist in a vacuum but are included in, and interact with, social and political processes that always imply power dimensions. Neither are these categories isolated from each other – they intersect and

²⁰ Sernhede 2002:167-168

affect each other. Moreover, as argued and illustrated in the study, it is not only our location in these categories that constitutes our sense of ourselves and our positionings but also our individual experiences, motives and actions. I have already discussed the Kurdish diasporic identity and movement related to the so-called first generation, in which the issue of gender and gender relations has also been highlighted. It would be interesting to follow the same processes among the younger generations of diaspora communities.

The following table is a list including some information about the respondents. The names are fictitious. The ages of respondents are not specified but only the decade they were born in. The interviews were conducted from May 1999 to December 2001. Only one interview was made in January 2004.

Name	Sex	Born	Country of origin	Year of arrival in Sweden	Education	Date of interview
Alan	Male	1950s	Iran	1990	University	August 2000
Azad	M	1960s	Turkey	1987	University	March 1999 + May 2001
Bahar	Female	1960s	Iran	1990	Gymnasium	August 2000
Dilsha	F	1970s	Turkey	1985	Gymnasium	May 2001
Evin	F	1960s	Syria	1992	University	July 2000
Goran	M	1970s	Turkey	1989	University	May 1999 + May 2001
Hamid	M	1950s	Iran	1992	Gymnasium	December 2001
Hana	F	1960s	Iran	1992	University	June 1999 + May 2001
Kawa	M	1960s	Turkey	1989	University	May 2002
Leyla	F	1950s	Iraq	1995	Gymnasium	June 2000
Marjam	F	1960s	Iran	1989	Gymnasium	August 2000
Nashmil	F	1970s	Iraq	1995	Gymnasium	August 2000
Rahman	M	1960s	Iraq	1994	University	December 2001
Reza	M	1950s	Iran	1992	Gymnasium	January 2004
Ronak	F	1970s	Iraq	2001	University	November 2001
Salah	M	1960s	Iraq	1988	University	March 2001
Shapol	F	1970s	Iraq	1982	University	May 2001
Sherko	M	1960s	Iraq	1993	University	November 2001
Shilan	F	1950s	Iran	1991	University	November 2001
Shirin	F	1960s	Iran	1985	University	August 2000
Soma	F	1950s	Iraq	1989	University	July 2000
Taban	F	1960s	Iraq	1984	Gymnasium	March 2000

Presentation

Name, age, profession, year of arrival in Sweden, reason for migration.

Part I: Kurdish identity, Kurdistan

- 1) How did you identify yourself in your country of origin?
- 2) How and with which group(s) do you identify now?
- 3) How do you think that your identity (Kurdish) has been affected during these years in Sweden?
- 4) Which factors have been important in this respect – for example, to be immigrant, the Kurdish movement, etc.?
- 5) What does it mean for you to be a Kurd? How do you define your Kurdishness?
- 6) Where do you usually think of when you hear the word homeland?
- 7) What does Kurdistan mean for you?

Part II: Gender

- 1) What does it mean to be a Kurdish woman?
- 2) How would you describe the Kurdish woman?
- 3) How would you describe the Kurdish exile community concerning gender relations?
- 4) Why do you think that women are participating less in the associations?
- 5) How do you think that Kurdish women's and men's situation is in Sweden regarding learning the language, job, contact with the society, etc.?
- 6) How do you think that Kurdish media and other institutions treat women?
- 7) How is the relationship between women and men in your association?

Part III: Sweden

- 1) How do you think that the Kurds are mentioned in Swedish public debate?
- 2) Do you have any personal experiences of being treated as a Kurd and as an immigrant in a special way?
- 3) How do you think that Kurdish women and men are regarded by the Swedes?
- 4) Do you feel any belongingness and participation in the Swedish society both emotionally and socially/politically?
- 5) Are you more engaged and interested in the Kurdish political issues or in Swedish ones?

Part IV: Kurdish associations and Kurdish media

- 1) How do you think that your engagement in the association affects your relation to the Swedish society?
- 2) What does your involvement in the association mean for you?
- 3) Which kind of Kurdish media do you mostly use? Why?
- 4) How do you think that Kurdish media generally affect you and other people around you? Which role do they play in your and others' life?

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