TEMPORAL AND GENERATIONAL IMPACT ON IDENTITY, HOME(LAND) AND POLITICS OF BELONGING AMONG THE KURDISH DIASPORA

Abstract
The purpose of this article is to examine the experiences of two generations among the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden: those who migrated as adults and those who were born and/or raised in Sweden. The focus will be on issues of identity, home(land) and politics of belonging with regard to generational and temporal aspects. We will argue that there are significant differences among the older and younger generations with regard to their experiences that demand different theoretical and analytical conceptualisations.

Minoo Alinia[1*], Barzoo Eliassi[2]

[1]Department of Sociology, Uppsala University, Sweden

[2]International Migration Institute,
University of Oxford and Centre for Middle Eastern Studies,
Lund University, Sweden

1   Introduction

Departing from two different studies (Alinia 2004; Eliassi 2013) that look at older and younger 'generations' of Kurdish diaspora living in Sweden, this article focuses on what passage of time and rise of new generations mean for these two groups of migrants within the Kurdish diaspora and the diaspora in general. Our use of the term 'older generation' refers to migrants who moved to Sweden as adults, while the term 'younger generation' refers to migrants who were born and/or brought up in Sweden. These two groups make up the first and second generations of the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden. Differences with regard to conceptions of Kurdish identity, home(land) and belonging among these two generations of the diaspora illustrate the situatedness of diasporas and highlight the changes diaspora groups undergo with the passage of time and the emergence of new generations within the group. However, two factors that remain constant among the generations are the need and quest for home(land), identity and a sense of belonging. As previous studies about Kurdish diaspora have shown (Alinia 2004; Eliassi 2013; Khayati 2008; Wahlbeck 1999), nationalism has been a major ideological framework for construction of collective identity among the Kurdish diaspora. Nationalist discourses on homeland and belonging and imaginations of community can have a strong attraction for people involved in diaspora when there is a lack of identification and belonging to the country of residence because of exclusion and marginalisation. Thus, although the new generation continues to search for home(land), belonging and identity, differences exist in their conceptualisations of these terms compared with the older generation of Kurdish diaspora.

Kurdish refugee migration to Europe, including Sweden, mainly started in the 1980s as a consequence of a changed political situation in Iran, Iraq and Turkey. The Kurdish diaspora can be described both as a stateless diaspora and mainly a product of political oppression and economic deprivation (Eliassi 2013). There are no official figures about the Kurdish population in the West since they are registered as citizens of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. Yet, the Kurdish diaspora in the West is estimated to exceed one million immigrants (Hassanpour & Mojab 2005). The last two decades of Kurdish history can be distinguished as a period when the Kurdish diaspora has become politically mobilised on a large scale. Kurdish transnational communities and Kurdish diasporic spaces are established as an outcome of the intensified Kurdish migration and relationship with the countries of origin and among Kurds settled in different countries around the globe (Alinia 2004; Eliassi 2013; Emanuelsson 2005; Khayati 2008; Wahlbeck 1999). During the last two decades, a whole new generation within the Kurdish diaspora has emerged, as well as new issues, conflicts and challenges, for instance, regarding gender issues. While common experiences of being Kurdish and immigrants are shared among all generations within the diaspora, they maintain different contextual frameworks for their identification, sense of belonging and their notions of home(land).

Many studies of Kurdish diaspora have found that the Kurdish diaspora has contributed to the spreading and strengthening of Kurdish nationalism (e.g. Alinia 2004; Eliassi 2013; Emanuelsson 2005; Hassanpour 1998; Khayati 2008; Wahlbeck 1999). However, one question that arises is about the character of ethnic and national

*_E-mail: minoo.alinia@valentin.uu.se_

identities that emerge in such processes in which not only ideological and political convictions but also issues of gender, class, generation, country of origin, and socio-economic background have shown to have significant influence (Alinia 2004, 2014; Eliassi 2013). Even a simple comparison between diaspora studies can illustrate common experiences across various diaspora groups as well as differences within each single diaspora with regard to, for example, gender and generation (e.g. Alinia 2004: 331–336).

As a number of scholars (Armstrong 1976; Brubaker 2005; Cohen 1997; Radhakrishnan 1996) have also pointed out, there is a need to adopt a generational perspective whilst engaging with diaspora formation and its continuity but also with how its boundaries (e.g. community, family, gender) undergo erosion, maintenance or reinforcement. The need for a study of the temporal and generation aspects of diaspora communities and identities is for instance obvious in contemporary Swedish society where a new generation within diaspora communities, born or raised in the country, are approaching adulthood. By discussing the experiences of two generations within the Kurdish diaspora, this article will contribute to new insights and knowledge on how the Kurdish diaspora displays convergent and divergent experiences across generations. Two factors that contribute to conceptualisation differences are experiences and identifications in relation to countries of origin and countries of settlement. Accordingly, this study also highlights some new challenges that the rise of the new generations within diasporas imply for the Western liberal multicultural societies with regard to issues of democracy, citizenship and social inclusion.

2   Data and method

The empirical material consists of a total of 76 taped, qualitative interviews. The first author interviewed 26 Kurdish-speaking men and women from Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, settled in Göteborg and Stockholm. All respondents have come to Sweden as adults, and apart from one respondent, all have been residing in Sweden for at least 10 years. The vast majority of respondents come from urban environments in their home country, and are educated, with many of them holding university degrees from their home countries or Sweden in some cases. The respondents tend to be active in different political organisations, cultural associations and institutions. The second author interviewed 50 young Kurdish men and women from Kurdish regions in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. The interviewees are made up of both youth who migrated to Sweden at a very young age and youth who were born in Sweden. The interviewees come from Stockholm, Göteborg, Uppsala, Örebro, Lund, Malmö, Östersund and Kalmar. The young interviewees are made up of university students, upper-secondary school student, high school, unemployed youth and Kurdish student association members. The interviewees are all given fictive names in order to secure their confidentiality (see Alinia 2004; Eliassi 2013).

We use individual narratives of the interviewees to show how individual and collective identities are formed, altered, contested, affirmed and negotiated. Narratives can be viewed as a prism through which we can interpret human "lives in their social and political complexity" (Hammack 2011: 312). The concept of 'experience' is central for this article and the starting point has been the interviewees' descriptions of their experiences of living as Kurds, immigrants, young and adults, women and men in Sweden and how these affect their identity and their relations to both the Swedish and the Kurdish communities. Experiences that show themselves as knowledge of

reality in the interviewees' narratives have many dimensions and can have been direct or indirect, for example, conveyed or cognitive experiences (Essed 1991: 58). According to Widerberg (2002), experience is an activity of physical, verbal and mental character, where the researcher enters the articulation process. As Widerberg (2002) argues, there is a constructive tension between the lived experience and its discursive dimension, that is, how people interpret, describe and present lived experiences through various discourses and based on their positions in different power structures such as class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality and age.

3   Theoretical perspective

The diaspora theory constitutes the wider analytical frame of this article that examines continuities and changes across generations of Kurdish immigrants in Sweden. We depart from a definition of diaspora as a complex and intersectional social process characterised by two major elements (Alinia 2004, 2007). The first is the existential relation to and orientation towards a home(land), a homing desire and a need for "home" and belonging that occupies a central place in daily lives and identities of diaspora members. Homeland is used in both a symbolic and territorial sense. This should be understood in its context in order to avoid an essentialisation of the relation between identity and territory/place. Exile, exclusion and homing desire are closely related and can partly explain these feelings (ibid; see also Koser & Lutz 1998; Brah 1996). The second characteristic of diaspora is the formation of a collective identity around collective movement related to issues of home(land), belonging and community formation. Comprising specific political projects and actions aimed at constructing home and belonging, diaspora includes a particular form of identity politics and political activism (Alinia 2004, 2007; see also Brubaker 2005; Sökefeld 2006; Werbner 2007; Yuval-Davis 2011). Although all diasporas share the two above-mentioned characteristics, they differ when it comes to definitions of and relation to homeland, identity and belonging, and the way they relate to them, since each diaspora is located historically and socio-politically different.

Migration changes the relation between territory and cultural identity. The bonds between culture and geographic place, which otherwise are regarded as natural, are thus dissolved as an outcome of transnational migration and mobility (Castles & Miller 2009; Hall 1996; Tomlinson 1999). Diasporic identities can be described by some double epithets like "roots and routes" (Clifford 1997) or "uprootings/regroundings" (Ahmed et al. 2003). Ethnic and national identity becomes in this meaning, as Hall (1996) puts it, about using history, culture and language as resources in processes of identity construction, survival and opposition in specific historical, social and political situations.

Our studies, as well as a number of other studies, have found that the Kurdish diaspora has contributed to the spreading and strengthening of Kurdish nationalism. However, "one question that arises is about the character of ethnic and national identities which emerge in such processes. Can we call them, as Hall (1992) does, "new ethnicities"? In what sense are they new? Can the concept be used for understanding the two generations' experiences? (Alinia 2004: 332). Two closely related aspects in Hall's concept of "new ethnicities" are the relation to difference and the relation to political power (Alinia 2004: 332). It is around these two aspects that we will discuss similarities and differences between younger and older generations. Concerning the issue of difference, according to Hall it is the shift in meaning of difference that explains the meaning of "new

ethnicities". Hall explains: "There is the 'difference' which makes a radical and unbridgeable separation: and there is a 'difference' which is positional, conditional and conjunctional, closer to Derrida's notion of différance …" (Hall 1992b: 255). Also, "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). Based on her study of the older generation, Alinia (2004: 331–336) finds that such a shift does not correspond to the experiences of the older generation of the Kurdish diaspora but to the new generations when it comes to relation to identity, "home" and belonging. With respect to the older generation, 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" (ibid: 333). Experience of the younger generation of Kurdish diaspora affirms the "shift" that the concept of new ethnicity refers to. Thus, the way the new generation identifies does not mean any radical change or break with regard to the older generation. It is rather connected to dislocation and displacement when it comes to their sense of identity, "home" and belonging. In other words, the new generation can be more situational and reflexive with regard to their sense of identity, home(land) and belonging.

The other aspect of "new ethnicity", that is, the relation to political power, is according to our studies shared by both generations. These "new ethnicities of the margin" have no claims on political power in countries of settlement – in this case Sweden – and are therefore described by Hall, as a "positive ethnicity" that must be decoupled from nationalism, imperialism, racism and state (Alinia 2004: 332). The concept of new ethnicities is as Hall 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 ..." (Hall 1992b: 258).[1]

4   Immigrant 'other', citizen and Swede

As with many other non-Europeans and Muslim immigrants, Kurds are also regarded as a culturally remote and incompatible group in the Swedish society. The narratives of our interviewees show that in Sweden, in accordance with the relatively comprehensive research on ethnic discrimination, everyday racism occurs in different arenas in society (for an overview see Burns et al. 2007; de los Reyes & Wingborg 2002; Schierup & Ålund 2011; SOU 2006/79). At the same time, migration – due to the revolutionary development of mass media and communications technology – opens up possibilities for a transnational existence. All these processes must be located within a context where processes of re-territorialisation, origin and national belonging have, to a great extent, become political categories that constitute dividing lines, which in turn shape and influence the relations of majority and minority (Tomlinson 1999).

This section engages with the ways relations of dominance and subordination are constructed as outcomes of structural inequality and everyday life in Sweden. The majority of interviewees shared an awareness of not being a Swede or accepted as one. However, their experiences of and relation to Sweden cannot be described as homogeneous nor can these complex experiences be described as simply positive or negative. Their positions as both individual citizens and immigrants can explain some of this complexity and ambivalence. Differences between the older and younger generation are also related to experiences from home countries as a point of

reference and comparison when it comes to constructing and/or (re)creating the homeland. While the older generation have previous lived experiences from these places, the younger generation who were born and/or grew up in Sweden do not have this to the same extent. Consequently, young people who were born and/or brought up in Sweden feel more attachment to Sweden and have claims on social power and space in a way that the older generation does not. These experiences impinge on these two generations' experiences of and relation to Sweden and to home(land) and their sense of belonging in many ways.

It is not uncommon for respondents from the older generation to experience democracy for the first time in their lives in Sweden, something they highly appreciate and talk about as the most positive aspect of living in Sweden. When they talk about the advantages of living in Sweden, this mainly refers to political freedom, democracy, gaining awareness of their personal and political rights as citizens and as members of minority groups and what these mean for their personal and political advancement. While the old generation can experience upward and downward mobility related to migration and their pre-migratory experiences, the younger generation lacks to a great extent such pre-migratory lived experiences to relate to and compare with. Soma, a woman from the older generation, says:

> 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 [...]. 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 that 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.

As it is expressed in the quotation above, gender also plays a significant role in how the older generation experiences social mobility due to the situation in countries of origin (see Alinia 2014). Members of the younger generation rather speak about their experiences of Swedish citizenship and the ways they are obstructed from exercising full citizenship rights. Formally and legally they feel they possess these rights but informally they are denied them in practice. The younger generation feels more attachment and belonging to Sweden compared with their parents who more often relate to and identify with places other than Sweden. For the older generation, identification is not basically defined in relation to Sweden as it does for the younger generation, although Sweden is there as a powerful element. Although marginal, some nationalist oriented members of the older generation express understanding and acceptance of experienced exclusionary nationalist discourses and practices in Sweden. While admitting discrimination, Salah a man from the older generation says:

> In general I know that we are counted as third-class citizens and not even as second. This is unpleasant. [...] But 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, Swedes go first, and I think that it is also their right.

In contrast to the older generation, members of the younger generation, even nationalists, more often express strong criticism

and frustration about exclusionary discourses and practices in Sweden as they feel more attachment and have more claim on space and belonging. It is common for members of the younger generation to say "I am a Swede" while the members of the older generation instead say "I feel Swedish" when they want to express their strong attachment to Sweden. However, despite their will and their claim to a Swedish identity, the younger respondents also express awareness of not being regarded as Swede. A young man, Soran, a member of the younger generation says:

> I feel Swedish and I am Swedish if I am allowed to say that. [...] Because people become suspicious when I say that I am Swedish as though I have said something wrong. And if I say Swedish, they always ask "but from beginning". What beginning? I was born here in Sweden. But they see me only as "Swedish on paper" ("papperssvensk") and not as "Swedish Swedish" ("svensksvensk").

Consequently, there is a discrepancy between formal and informal ways of belonging to the Swedish society, constituted through various exclusionary practices and thresholds. For the younger generation, the Kurdish and the immigrant background become an imposed foreground in determining their identity, origin and belonging, which they also learn to adopt. In the new Europe, we have seen how the political climate has grown harsher in relation to migration on a discursive, political, structural and institutional level (Keskinen et al. 2009; Schierup & Ålund 2011). As non-European immigrants, our interviewees express negative experiences of the Swedish society. Each one of them has stories of discrimination and exclusion, insults, belittlement and stereotype attitudes. According to the interviewees, Kurds in Sweden are portrayed particularly in relation to gender-based violence. Some of the narratives bear witness to experiences of exclusion from the Swedish society irrespective of how much they wish or try to become part of it. They feel that they are rejected because of their origin and that it does not matter how much they try. Also, those among the interviewees (from both groups) who regard themselves as Swedish or having multiple identities experience that they are not admitted into society and are not fully accepted as members of the Swedish society (Alinia 2004; Eliassi 2013).

Respondents' experiences of racism on a daily basis can be best described by the concept of 'everyday racism' (Essed 1991: 100). By using this concept, Essed links micro-experiences of racism to the structural and ideological contexts in which they are shaped. The notion of everyday racism does not necessarily mean that people have conscious racist beliefs, but rather that they act in a way that reinforces racist structures and ideologies. Shilan, a member of the older generation, describes a recurrent experience of suspiciousness towards immigrants, something that was also referred to by other respondents. Shilan says:

> 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 and 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.

Experiences of discrimination involve identification of and awareness about different visual markers that one has or lacks and the possibility or the impossibility of attaining them. Blend, a man from younger generation, refers to the way his belonging to Swedishness is rejected by mainstream society that sets up different thresholds to exclude people who do not fulfil the criteria like having the "right" skin colour, hair colour, eye colour and accent. Another man, from the younger generation, Alan, provides an example of structural inequality within the labour market:

> I remember once in 2004 when I applied for a job. One of the members of the board at the company told me that "we have a lot of you in our company". I told him: do you mean *svarta* (blacks)? He said, "yes, we have two Iranians". I told him that he must be joking. I was shocked and destroyed. Racism is often lying under the surface.

The quotes above illustrate the experiences of racism and exclusion and how they can impinge on respondents' sense of belonging (Anthias 2002). Alan's narrative also illustrates how a diversity discourse can be used to conceal and manage organisational arrangements based on white dominance through employing a few non-white immigrants. The will to be accepted as a Swede and at the same time losing hope of that was also shared by a large number of respondents from the younger generation as well as some respondents among older generation. For the young people, the homeland and transnational Kurdish communities cannot be a point of reference in the same way they are for their parents' generation. Their relationship to their 'homeland' and transnational Kurdish communities is more ambivalent. At the same time, they are aware that they are subordinate to ethnically Swedish youth. Some interviewees who migrated to Sweden at a young age talked about a 'journey' from a more comfortable initial contact with the Swedish society as a welcoming and exciting society to a harsh reality of othering and ethnic exclusion as they grew up. Rezan, a woman from the younger generation says:

> When I came to Sweden, it was so exciting, a new country with a new language. I learned the Swedish language very fast and I really did not feel at the beginning that I did not belong to Swedish society. But it was during secondary school that I started feeling and thinking about not belonging to Sweden when I received comments from my classmates: "You bloody Turk" ("jävla turk"), or "You bloody wog" ("jävla svartskalle").

Ethnic slurs that target immigrants can be understood as a performative act of symbolic violence and a strategy of inferiorisation that not only denigrates the immigrant at an individual level but also reproduces the everyday othering of immigrants as not belonging to the Swedish society and thus turning them into objects of structural domination (Eliassi 2013). A theme that both older and younger generations mentioned when talking about racism and discrimination is what Essed (1991: 31) terms 'gendered racism'. The interplay between racism and sexism is especially manifested in the discourse about honour killing in Sweden in which violence against women is culturalised and ethnicised (Alinia 2011, 2013; Carbin 2010; Eduards 2007; Eliassi 2013; Gruber 2007; Wikström 2007).

5   Undesired Kurds: not integrated enough

The Kurdish youth were not merely exposed to external othering processes by the Swedish society but they were also involved in

internal othering and hierarchisation of different Kurdish identities. In this regard, the younger generation divided Kurdish youth into two categories: integrated Kurds and newly arrived Kurdish youth labelled as "imports". Kurdish youth who were described as "imports" were assigned collective negative attributes like "sexist", "backward", "uncivilised" and "unintegrated". For Ala, who is a young woman, the "imports" are not only aesthetically "ugly" but also represent a group who are not able to integrate into the Swedish society:

> Those Kurdish guys with white shoes, country bumpkins, tight jeans, disgusting perfume and ugly hairstyle. It happens that they approach me and I just want to vomit. I tell them to go and get a life. [...] The imports think that the Kurds who are integrated in the Swedish society have lost their Kurdish identity. I tell them in Kurdish that they should go and learn Swedish, and learn how to dress themselves and behave like normal people [...] I really don't like these guys.

Class, gender, (hetero)sexuality, ethnicity and age intersect in the construction and subordination of this putative category, the "imports". Awareness of a racialised and stigmatised Kurdish identity in Sweden can explain the emergence of these derogatory slurs that Kurdish youth and other racialised groups use to draw social boundaries and stress their differences and similarities as well as to position themselves as "Swedes" and "assimilated/integrated". Further, this implies distancing themselves from other "undesired" and "unintegrated" people with immigrant backgrounds who have a different way of dressing, behaving and speaking Swedish (often "broken"). Although internal othering is demonstrated more by the younger generation, it is not limited to them. Equally, a few respondents from the older generation gave expression for such feelings. It was expressed mostly in blaming the victims of discrimination for not being integrated enough. This internalised image of immigrants as 'culturally deviant' alludes to how assimilationist ideologies contribute to efforts of sustaining a status quo and unequal power relations that exist between the ethnic Swedes and the immigrant population (Eliassi 2013).

6 To be Kurdish: a strategy of resistance and survival

Historical experiences of oppression and resistance are important repertoires for the construction of belonging and identification among Kurdish immigrants in Sweden. For Kurds, migration to Sweden involves once again occupying a minoritised position not only as Kurds but also as gendered and racialised categories such as immigrants, "wogs", Muslims and Middle Easterners. 'To be' a Kurd and to become involved in the Kurdish community in Sweden can be a strategy to actively create an alternative identity and home in relation to the forced and stigmatised immigrant identity and exclusion from the mainstream society. Constructing a diasporic Kurdish identity is thus about nurturing a positive Kurdish identity based on self-confidence and respect. This was emphasised by a number of respondents from both the older and younger generations. It is also a "homecoming", which means to belong, to feel at home, welcomed and confident. However, as it is manifested in the respondents' accounts, there are no homogeneous notions of Kurdishness, homeland and belonging (see Alinia 2004, 2014; Eliassi 2013). These differences are related to social divisions like class, ethnicity, gender and generation. Political and ideological convictions and experiences

of and relations to countries of origin and countries of settlement also impinge on their different perceptions with regard to Kurdish identity, homeland and belonging. Some identify strongly as Kurds while others do not define themselves in national and ethnic terms – the majority of those interviewed are positioned somewhere in-between. However, what is common to both younger and older generations is their mobilisation of Kurdish culture, language, common memories and experiences of oppression and resistance as resources to give themselves a platform from which they can meet society and create their identity, feel secure and experience their lives as meaningful (Alinia 2004; Eliassi 2013). Notwithstanding his aspiration to belong to Sweden where he lives his everyday life, Reza a man from the older generation feels that he is not welcomed or accepted. He says that in Sweden 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.' Another man, Azad, 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. Azad, a man from the older generation, 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.

These experiences are also shared by Dilsha, a woman from the older generation. Being a Kurd is an active strategy, an alternative identity that provides Dilsha with self-confidence and self-respect in relation to Swedish society:

> 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. [...] 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 can you 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 and see themselves as immigrants.

The Kurdish identity becomes a location, a platform, a space, one's own room and a "home" where they 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. There is however differences between the two generations with regard to their identity formation. Members of the older generation define in the first hand their Kurdish identity in relation with and in opposition to the ethnic oppression experienced in their countries of origin. The Kurdish identity becomes for the older generation a resource that they mobilise to resist the stigmatised migrant identity while for the young generation the situation is much more complex. They do not all have their own lived experiences of

ethnic oppression in the countries of origin but these experiences have been partly extended to them through their parents, family members, Kurdish media and political institutions, and the Kurdish diaspora communities. Yet, the younger generations' own active involvement in Kurdish identity politics also plays an important role in endorsing continuous identification with politicised Kurdish identity (Eliassi 2013). Nevertheless, compared with their parents' generation, they have more contact with the mainstream society and share much more space with other youth through school and various leisure activities. They compete about the shared public spaces with not only youth of Swedish background but also with other youth with immigrant background who face the same exclusionary practices and same needs of identification and belonging. The young generation have experiences of conflicts and contradictions not only with youth of Swedish background but also with youth of Arabic, Persian and Turkish background, seen as representatives of the majority and the political power in their countries of origin in the Middle East. Karwan, a member of the young generation, says: "I have had a difficult time with Arabs and Turks and I have been convicted 13 times because of different fights that I have had with Arabs and Turks about Kurds." Use of violence was not limited to the young men with Kurdish backgrounds but some of the young women also spoke of regular conflicts with young people with Turkish backgrounds in Sweden. Leyla, a member of the younger generation says:

> I have realized that no matter how much I try with them, I cannot be in accord with them. When I meet them it feels like meeting an eternal provocation. They know that you are a Kurd. They try to provoke you for being Kurdish. It feels like that they want to humiliate you and you get irritated at them all the time. When I went to secondary school and I was one of the few Kurds at that school. I was harassed by the Turks for three years and they even called me a PKK-whore. These guys were older than me and I fought with them. They threatened me and my little sister. They were fascist Turks.

However, relations with other youth are not only characterised by competition and exclusion but also mutual understanding, friendship and respect across national lines. These friendships across ethnic and national boundaries apply also to the older generation. What these narratives demonstrate are the everyday negotiations and struggles for identity construction and location among people with Kurdish backgrounds in an ongoing process of constructing collective and personal identity in a context where nationalism and national identification have become central. In these processes, youth show more vulnerability and stronger need for identification and location.

7 Home(land): 'here' and 'there', now and then

Differences between younger and older generations are perhaps more manifested when it comes to their perceptions of and relation to home(land). Roughly it can be said that homeland for the older generation is something real, a physical place from which they have lived experiences and to which they have real and material bonds. For the younger generation, on the contrary, homeland is imaginary, something they 'create' according to their wishes and needs. For the older generation, homeland is connected to their experiences and memories from the past and means a continuation of their identities. For them, perceptions of homeland are not only based on their

existential needs but also very much based on their ideological and political convictions. Yet, the imagined homeland is also experienced in reality through trips made by the younger generation. Alinia (2004) distinguishes several different positions among the first generation of the Kurdish diaspora based on ideological and political beliefs and orientations: The two polarising perspectives are consisted of the nationalist discourse and the counter discourse of the left, while the majority of the respondents are located in positions between these two based on lived experiences, political discourses and geopolitical realities. Regarding hesitations, ambivalences and uncertainties with respect to homeland, Alinia writes:

> [T]here 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 homeland which they 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. (Alinia 2004: 219)

Older generation's 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 harsh reality of their present everyday life as immigrants. Their lived experiences of homeland do not necessarily correspond to their political notions of homeland. These ambivalences indicate the discursive dimension of experiences that was discussed earlier. 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.

For the younger generation, creating and imagining a homeland seems to be more urgent as an existential need here and now. However, the young people's sometimes idealised and utopian notion of the Kurdish homeland (Kurdistan) converts often to disappointment when they travel to Kurdistan and spend some time there. With Sweden as their point of reference, they find out about social and political problems and realise that they are despite all more Swedish than Kurdish. Moreover, they realise they are not regarded as Kurdish but as Swedish. Awa a woman, member of younger generation, says:

> When I travelled to Kurdistan some years ago, I felt: hell, I don't have anything here. It feels like another country. It does not mean that I don't want to go back but you get confused. First, you go down there and think: I am going to live here. But as soon I was there, I felt that I could not live there. I cannot live there but I cannot forget it either.

While perceptions of homeland for the older generation are not only based on their personal experiences of migration but also to a high degree are based on their ideological perceptions and political projects and experiences, for the younger generation it is mostly a

consequence of their individual needs of location in an exclusionary Swedish context. The ideological and political convictions and lived experiences from the past that impact the older generation's perception of homeland are absent in younger generation's accounts. The younger generation construct an idea, often an ideal notion, of a Kurdish homeland to cope with negotiations and drawing of boundaries regarding identity, belonging and space in relation to other youth in Sweden. On the contrary, in relation to "newly arrived Kurds", they regard themselves more or less as Swedes. While older generation seem to be more confident departing from the Kurdish political realities, own experiences, identities and existing transnational ties and identifications with homeland and the Kurdish diaspora community, the younger generation shows more vulnerability and an urgent existential need of location and belonging. For them, homeland is about 'here' and now and not much about 'there' and then as for the older generation.

The emergence of the Kurdistan Region in Northern Iraq has entailed a strong transnationalisation of Kurdish diaspora, although mainly limited to the Kurds of Iraq. However, even when it comes to the issue of returning, the younger respondents and women (Emanuelsson 2008) show much stronger ambivalence and even also much clearer unwillingness regarding the idea of living in Kurdistan. Most of them say that they will not be able to live in Kurdistan especially when they have been there once. First generation respondents, on the contrary, more often maintain a dream of returning alive even if they are not sure if or when they will return. But the dream of return seems to be as existential for them as the creation of a home(land) is here and now for the young generation.

8   Diaspora formations, generations, changes and continuities

The Kurdish diaspora is dispersed around many states in Western countries and there are strong indications that transnational Kurdish identities will emerge with convergent and divergent experiences due to different political arrangements that they are embedded within. The political development and dynamics of the countries of origin and settlement impinge on the narratives of belonging, continuity, transformation and weakening of the Kurdish diaspora. As Schierup et al. (2006: 247) point out, radicalised minority cultures, networks and community building must be seen as a product of society's ongoing general transformation related to exclusion, discrimination and everyday racism directed at these groups, rather than as an expression of imported immigrant culture. 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.

Kurdistan more often referred to as homeland is very central in respondents' narratives, especially the younger generations'. However, what is most striking is that while homeland is very central for them there does not exist any given homeland. The homeland is thus a vague, ambiguous and ambivalent conception. It is mostly about a subjective feeling and individual and political constructions based on lived experiences, collective memory and history and political discourses. Consequently, the Kurdish diasporic community and movement, built around various politics of location, become the diasporic "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 these societies with their simultaneous attachment to them. The Kurdish diaspora's "home" is built around the Kurdish movement, Kurdish identity and politics and in that sense it is "a home in movement" (Alinia 2004, 2007). In the case of the African diaspora's experiences in West, Gilroy (1993) accords such diasporic conditions with the metaphor "Black Atlantic". It is a question of a "home" that is not territorial but rather refers to a fluid or impermanent place – a transnational home that transcends notions of nation and bounded territory.

For the older generation of 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 (Turkish, Arabic, and Persian). However, for the younger generation of the Kurdish diaspora, the Swedish identity and Swedish society have much more significance. Interestingly, at the same time, this younger generation has at times exhibited more essentialised notions of Kurdish identity, in response to exclusion and othering that they face. What is common among both generations is that the Kurdish identity in Sweden is mobilised, largely 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.

Yet, according to the concept of "new ethnicities", the meaning of Kurdish identity, home(land) and belonging for the younger generation is more situational, ambivalent and flexible. These categories are more displaced and dislocated for them compared with their parents' generation. There is, however, a tendency toward a reactive and ethnicised Kurdish identity among the Kurdish diaspora due to experiences of misrecognition and political marginalisation together with the strengthening of national and ethnic identities as political categories. Thus, in line with Gilroy (2000), we also emphasise the political dimension in such identity processes that are coupled with relations of power and dominance, oppression and resistance. On the other hand, the political, cultural and economic situation of the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden will impinge highly on the political processes in Sweden with regard to migration and mobilisation processes of Kurdish identity politics and its search for an alternative home(land).

Minoo Alinia is associate professor of Sociology at the Department of Sociology, Uppsala University. She holds a Ph.D in sociology and her dissertation on Kurdish diaspora was the first major work on diaspora in Sweden. She has published a number of articles and book chapters on diaspora theory, diasporic identities and mobilizations, everyday racism, gender and migration. She is the author of Honor and violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan (Palgrave Macmilan 2013) which is an intersectional critical study of violence in the name of honor. She has also published on the way gender, sexuality and issues of gender equality have been used in racializing discourses on migrants and Muslims in Sweden. Email: minoo.alinia@soc.uu.se

Barzoo Eliassi has a PhD in social work and social policy. He is a researcher at International Migration Institute, Oxford University. He is the author of *Contesting Kurdish Identities in Sweden: Quest for Belonging Among Middle Eastern Youth* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013). His latest publication includes *Orientalist Social Work: Cultural Otherization of Muslim Immigrants in Sweden* (Journal of Critical Social Work). He has published on social policy, multiculturalism, statelessness, homeland, ethnic inequality and politics of belonging among Kurds and immigrants in Sweden. E-mail: barzooeliassi@gmail.com

Notes

1. Another related concept, based on study of younger generations of diasporas, is "nationalism within quotation marks" (Sernhede 1998), a kind of nationalism that is outside the national and ethnic imaginations.

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