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Imagining Homeland. Photographic Encounters in the Kurdish Diaspora.

By Eszter Ágota Hárs

Abstract (English)

Homeland is considered a crucial aspect of identity in diasporic communities. Through photographs, people can access absent places and times via their imagination. This thesis specifically addresses how second-generation Kurds in Vienna imagine homeland when viewing a selection of photographs from the collections of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir, depicting Kurdish everyday life in the Kurmancî-speaking Sunni, and Zaza-speaking Alevi Kurdish regions of Turkey. The research is grounded in participant observation and observant participation in artistic interventions organized by the Austrian Academy of Sciences-based ZOZAN project, as well as in photo-interviews conducted with seven Kurdish individuals. The photographic encounters in this study reveal the diversity and ambivalences of homeland imaginaries in the Kurdish diaspora. The photographs of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke evoked homeland imaginaries in my interlocutors, containing biographic and historical, as well as space-based narratives. The concepts of homeland that emerged in the photo-interviews were shaped by the qualities of the photographs, as well as by the participants' senses of Kurdishness. This thesis explores the concept of homeland in its construction, through photographic encounters, which not only enable a new visual perspective but also position imagination as a central concept in the relation of homeland with photography. The images of the collections reminded participants of their homeland because they triggered childhood memories and family narratives, depicted elements reminiscent of national and ethnic symbols, or elicited diasporic narratives of loss and vulnerability. The study demonstrates that the two personal collections of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir are regarded as meaningful and valuable artifacts related to identity and homeland by many within the Kurdish diaspora(s), underlining scholarly claims to make migratory archives more visible and accessible.

Imagining Homeland. Photographic Encounters in the Kurdish Diaspora.

By Eszter Ágota Hárs

Abstract (Deutsch)

Heimat wird als ein entscheidender Aspekt der Identität in diasporischen Gemeinschaften verstanden. Durch Fotografien können Menschen über ihre Vorstellungskraft Zugang zu abwesenden Orten und Zeiten finden. Diese Arbeit untersucht wie sich Kurd*innen der zweiten Generation in Wien ihre Heimat vorstellen, wenn sie eine Auswahl von Fotografien aus den Sammlungen von Werner Finke und Mehmet Emir betrachten, die den kurdischen Alltag in den Kurmandschi-sprechenden sunnitischen, und den Zaza-sprechenden alevitisch-kurdischen Regionen der Türkei zeigen. Die Forschung stützt sich auf teilnehmende Beobachtung und beobachtende Teilnahme an künstlerischen Interventionen des ZOZAN-Projekts der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, sowie auf Fotointerviews mit sieben kurdischen Personen. Die Studie zeigt, dass fotografische Begegnungen die Vielfalt und Ambivalenzen der Heimatvorstellungen in der kurdischen Diaspora offenbaren. Die Fotografien von Mehmet Emir und Werner Finke riefen bei meinen Gesprächspartnern Heimatvorstellungen hervor, Vorstellungen, die sowohl biografische und historische als auch raumbezogene Narrative umfassen. Die Konzepte von Heimat, die in den Fotointerviews auftauchten, wurden durch die Eigenschaften der Fotografien sowie durch die Vorstellungen der Teilnehmenden von Kurdischsein geprägt. Diese Arbeit untersucht den Begriff der Heimat in seiner Konstruktion durch fotografische Begegnungen, die nicht nur eine neue visuelle Perspektive ermöglichen, sondern auch Imagination als ein zentrales Konzept in der Beziehung von Heimat und Fotografie positionieren. Die Bilder der Sammlungen erinnerten die Teilnehmer*innen an ihre Heimat, weil sie Kindheitserinnerungen und Familiengeschichten hervorbrachten, Elemente darstellten, die an nationale und ethnische Symbole erinnerten, oder diasporische Narrativen von Verlust und Verletzlichkeit hervorriefen. Die Studie zeigt, dass die beiden persönlichen Sammlungen von Werner Finke und Mehmet Emir von vielen Menschen in der kurdischen Diaspora als bedeutsamen und wertvollen Artefakten im Zusammenhang mit Identität und Heimat angesehen werden, was den wissenschaftlichen Anspruch unterstreicht, Migrationsarchive besser sichtbar und zugänglich zu machen.

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1 Introduction

In the debate on diaspora, scholars coined a number of different definitions regarding the centrality of the homeland. Beyond the influential views in which homeland-orientation was a defining characteristic of diasporic communities (e.g. Safran 1991, Cohen 2022 [1997]), also perspectives emerged that are rather detached from place (e.g. Gilroy 1995) or not granting less importance to homeland-orientation (e.g. Brubaker 2005). Following the views that suggest homeland relations have an important role in Kurdish diasporic groups, this thesis takes William Safran's and Robin Cohen's theories as its foundation.

What most conceptualizations of homeland share is that it has a symbolic dimension. Homeland has been conceptualized by Safran as a static territorial entity of the ancestral homeland and at the same time as a mythicized place (Safran 1991) to be maintained by the diasporic community. Robert Cohen conceptualized homeland as something not only maintained but also (re)constructed by diasporan communities (Cohen 1996, 516). I suggest taking a constructionist approach seriously, that it is essential to pay attention to the practice of imagination for gaining a deeper understanding of the processes of diasporic identity making and homeland relations.

Although some scholars emphasized the role of visual media in processes of identity making and memory (See e.g. Anderson 1998; Hirsch 2008; Jäger 2003), the concept of homeland has not been exhaustively scrutinized from the perspective of its visual dimensions. Homeland in the Kurdish context has been explored based on literary texts, however there is no detailed analysis of photographs' role in homeland imaginaries. To address this gap, in this thesis, I discuss homeland based on the work with photographs. I am inspired by studies that explore the unique qualities of the photograph – such as its complex relation to truthfulness (Howard Becker 1979, quoted in Desille and Nikielska-Sekula 2021, 4), while it also containing multiple meanings (Trachtenberg 1989, quoted in Edwards and Morton 2010, 7), and its capacity to facilitate imagination, that is 'symbolic mobility' (Zittoun 2020, quoted in Salazar 2020, 769) in time and space (Schwartz 2009). I analyze the narratives, imaginaries and associations of homeland shared with me by my interlocutors as deeply emerging from these special characteristics of photography.

Following Ariella Azoulay, I understand photographs as results of a series of encounters (see 2011, 76) and thereby as continuities of the same process in which the initial encounter of the

photography took place. I am inspired by approaches which highlight the potential of photographs and photographic archives for reworking the cultural heritage of source communities through participative methods.

This research emerged in the context of my engagement in the research project *ZOZAN*¹ – *Investigations on Mobility through Multimedia Documentations, Art Interventions, Art-based Research and (Re)Presentations*² lead by Maria Six-Hohenbalken. The project *ZOZAN* employs art-based methods for inquiring past and present mobilities, transnational connections, and forms of representation in the Kurdish transnation (*ZOZAN Investigations on Mobility* 2025a). The project takes as its starting point two comprehensive multimedia collections created by the Austrian ethnographer Werner Finke and the Kurdish artist Mehmet Emir, thereby deeming photographs relevance in relation to mobility, diaspora and homeland.

Both collections are unique documentations of Kurdish culture and everyday life. Werner Finke recorded his collection between 1967 and the 1990s in the Kurmancî-speaking, Sunni Muslim-dominated southeastern region of Turkey. Mehmet Emir documented his village in the Zaza-speaking, Alevi-Kurdish province Dersim/Tunceli of Eastern Turkey for over 35 years.

Inspired by the richness, emotionality and depth of the responses to the photographs of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke in *ZOZAN*'s art-based interventions, I decided to use a selection from both collections as a starting point for exploring the concept of homeland in photo-interviews.

I perceive the photo-interviews conducted with my interlocutors as part of the process of photography, and therefore inextricably tied to the original encounter of the photographs' creation. I analyze the narratives, imaginaries and associations of homeland my interlocutors shared with me as deeply emerging from the special characteristics of photography and the historical contexts of the two archival photographic collections encompassing the photographs evaluated by the research partners. This thesis explores the concept of homeland in its construction, through photographic encounters, which does not only enable a new visual perspective based on photographic encounters but also takes imagination seriously a central concept in the relation of homeland with photography.

¹ Zozan is a Kurdish term, meaning high summer pasture.

² The project "ZOZAN – Investigations on Mobility via Multimedia Documentation, Art Interventions, Arts-based Research and (Re)Presentations" is funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), PEEK Project AR 682.

“But what is homeland for you?”, Mehmet Emir asked me at the beginning of our interview. “That would be also interesting to know.”

“Well, I don’t really know. I am not sure if I have a sense of homeland myself,” I replied.

(Mehmet Emir, personal interview, December 11, 2023, translated by the author from the original)

This short excerpt of an interview sheds light on the person and the visibility of the researcher in the field. My journey of exploring the meanings of homeland in the Kurdish diaspora has prompted me to introspect and sometimes share my own narratives about homeland. Having moved frequently in my childhood, and living sometimes with one parent, and at other times with the other, often in the company of the partners of my parents or their friends who needed a place to stay, I did not develop a cohesive sense of belonging in Hungary. Instead, my sense of homeland is fragmented, as I have continuously encountered new interpretations of this concept across the various contexts of my upbringing. These are the different communities in which I resided, the schools I attended, or the homes that I lived in. While Vienna has become my home, the concept of homeland still puzzles me. I might have asked different questions or even chosen a different topic for my thesis, had it not been the case.

1.1 The Question in a Nutshell

During my research, I wanted to find out whether, and if, how Kurdish individuals of second-generation in Vienna imagine homeland when encountering the photographs in the collections of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir. My thesis is therefore dedicated to answer the question: How do second-generation Kurds imagine homeland when viewing photographs selected from these two collections? This question arose from the observation that viewing these images was followed by strong emotional reactions in the Kurdish community. Following through my research question, I aim to explore the concept of homeland through working with second-generation Kurds’ imaginaries invoked by photographs from Kurdish inhabited regions.

The research question connects three sub-questions, which will have to be separately answered in dedicated chapters. The first one is about photographs and their capacity as media of imagination. How do photographs shape the imagination of homeland? Can homeland be imagined through photographs? To approach this question, I will review anthropological approaches to

photography and imagination, to explore the symbolic mobilities (see Zittoun 2020, quoted in Salazar 2020) enabled by the photographic encounter (see Azoulay 2011).

The second part of the question relates to the concept of homeland. Is homeland a term that can describe second-generation Kurds' relations to the Kurdish territories? Can one have multiple homelands and are there different kinds of homelands? Is homeland a real or a symbolic place? I will approach these questions, following with the literature on diasporas, based on a constructivist approach, which encompasses place-based experiences and affective imaginaries with all their ambivalences and contradictions.

The third part of the question will examine the ethnic and nationalist dimensions of the homeland imaginary, focusing on what makes the homeland distinctly Kurdish. In other words, I will explore the meanings of Kurdishness evoked in my interviewees by photographs. How does Kurdishness relate to the concept of homeland? I will analyze Kurdishness as a significant lens through which my interlocutors imagine the homeland, investigating the contexts in which Kurdishness is invoked to conceptualize the homeland.

1.2 What is New about this Research

This thesis, exploring homeland imaginaries together with photographs in two archival collections, aims to contribute to anthropological discussions of diaspora as much as it wants to highlight the perspectives of Kurdish individuals on archival documentations of Kurdish everyday life. On the one hand, it tries to bring new perspectives into the anthropological discourse through a detailed analysis of photo-elicited homeland imaginaries, offering arguments grounded in the perceptions of my research partners.

On the other hand, this thesis aims to contribute new perspectives from the narratives and ideas of Kurdish individuals to archival collections, which are in the process of going online and becoming accessible to all those in the source communities and beyond, becoming part of many people's historical narratives, cultural references, and probably homeland imaginaries. Therefore, the voices encompassed in this thesis provide important insights into the archival collections themselves, which I believe will be interesting to scholars who work on the reception and making accessible of archival collections.

Although participant observation, a key method in ethnography, has received considerable attention, combining participant observation with observant participation, along with genuine

reflections on the challenges this combination presents, could illuminate aspects of these methods that anthropologists often overlook or discuss less frequently.

Finally, based on the responses of my research partners, I speculate that the photographs by Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke discussed in this thesis may also be of interest to other Kurdish individuals residing in Vienna. These archives not only provide unique documentations of Kurdish everyday life but also represent a shared history that connects the Kurds and Austria.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

In the first pages of this thesis, two selections of the archives of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir will be presented. These photographs were the starting point for conducting this research, they were central elements in the interviews and essential in the field, always part of the conversations, art interventions and exhibitions which I followed during my research. This thesis builds its arguments based on the perception of these photographs by my research partners. Throughout the empirical chapters, I will frequently refer to the photographs, inserting placeholders for clarity. Given the centrality of the images for this project, the selections of Werner Finke's and Mehmet Emir's collections follow.

This will be followed by Chapter 3 "Theoretical Background" which reviews the state of research and contextualizes my project in the debates on homeland and diaspora, Kurdishness and photography as a medium of imagination. Chapter 4 "Methods" introduces the research methods of observant participation and photo-elicitation, and the methodological approach employed throughout the research with reflections on the benefits and drawbacks of these methods. Before the empirical chapters, Chapter 5 "Context: Second-generation Kurds and two Archival Collections" provides context information about the Kurdish diaspora(s) in Vienna, and the multimedia collections of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke.

I will present my ethnographic material in four chapters. Chapter 6 "Mehmet Emir in Conversation about Photography" explores the relationship of photography with homeland based on an interview with the Kurdish photographer Mehmet Emir. Chapter 7 "The Reception of the Photos" focuses on the photographs in the archival collections, and their reception in my interviews and the workshops. Chapter 8 "The Homeland" explores the notions of homeland in my interlocutors' accounts, closely observing how this relates to the photographs. Chapter 9 "Kurdishness in Photographs" analyzes the notions of Kurdishness as expressed by my re-

search partners in interaction with the photographs. While all three chapters will end with concluding remarks, a separate chapter in the final part of my thesis will integrate my results within the context of the scholarly debate. Finally, in the last chapter I will summarize the findings of this research, contextualize them in the scholarly debate, and also point out the limitations and questions left for further research.

2 The Photographs in the Photo-Interviews

2.1 *Photographs of Werner Finke*



Figure 1, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1967, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 2, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1974, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 3, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1977, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 4, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1977, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW

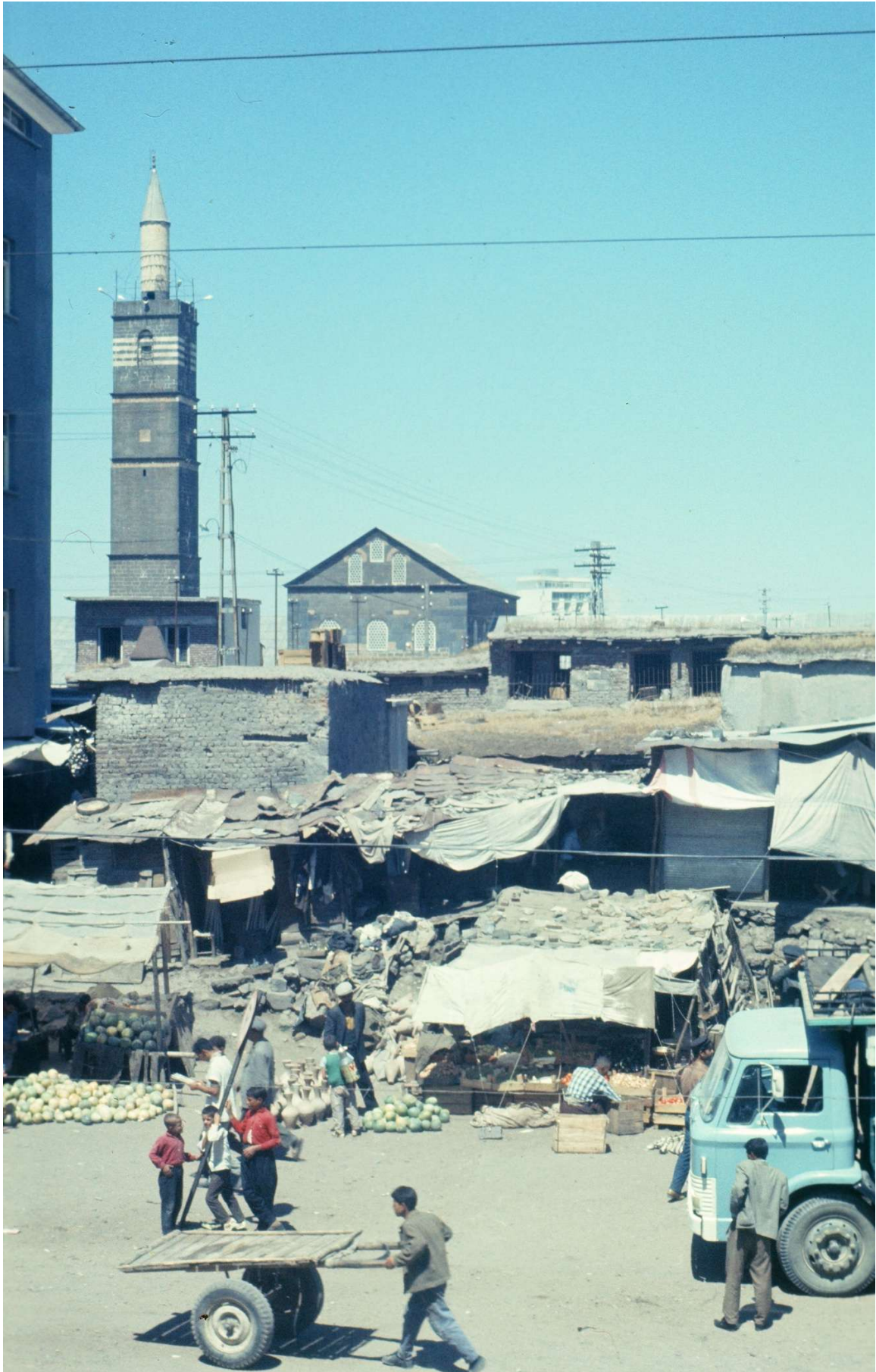


Figure 5, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1972, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 6, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1977, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 7, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1976, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 8, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1975, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 9, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1975, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 10, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1975, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 11, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1975, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 12, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1975, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 13, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1974, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 14, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1974, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW



Figure 15, Photograph by Werner Finke, 1968, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 ISA ÖAW

2.2 Photographs of Mehmet Emir's Collection



Figure 16, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1991, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 17, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1991, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 18, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1990, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved

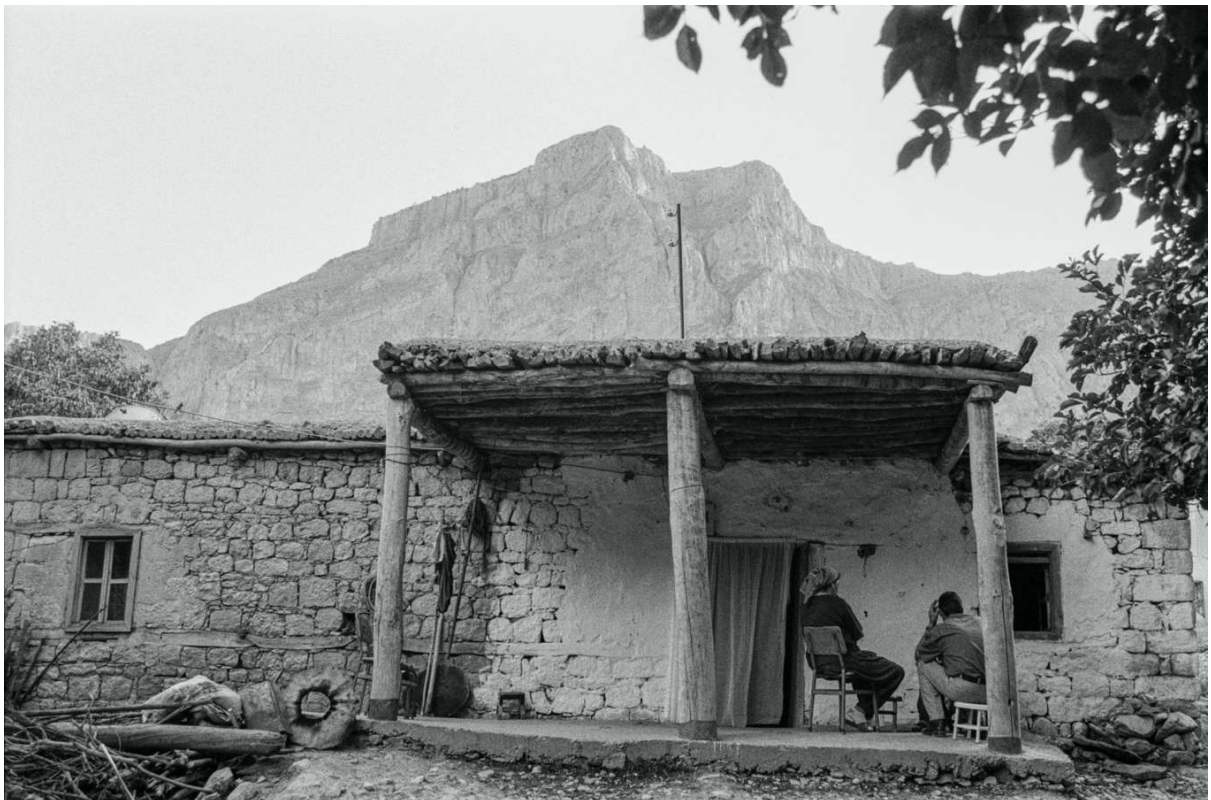


Figure 19, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1986, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 20, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 2000, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 21, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1986, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 22, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1984, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 23, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1986, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 24, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1987, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 25, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1986, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 26, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1988, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved

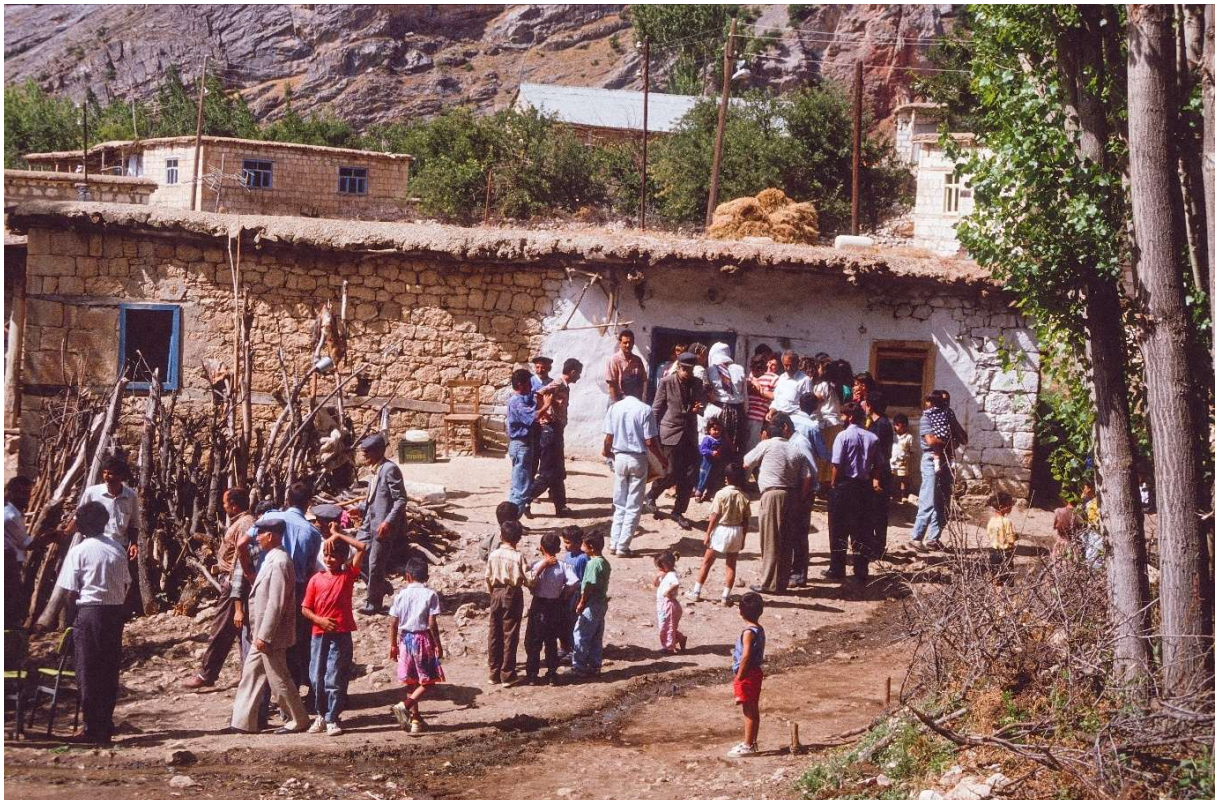


Figure 27, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1988, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 28, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1986, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 29, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1985, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved



Figure 30, Photograph by Mehmet Emir, 1997, © Mehmet Emir. All rights reserved

3 Theoretical Background

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of this thesis. The design of the empirical work examines how diaspora Kurds imagine homeland through photographic encounters. It will be necessary to situate my findings within anthropological discourses about the notion of homeland (tightly intertwined with the concept of diaspora), about Kurdishness as an ethnic and national identity, the process of imagination, and finally, about photography as a medium of imagination.

3.1 *The Anthropological Debate about Homeland*

This chapter focuses on the concept of homeland and its role in the discourse on diasporic communities and the definition of diaspora. The works reviewed here will provide a starting point for my discussion of the notion of homeland as it appears in the accounts of my interlocutors. I will briefly demonstrate how the concept of homeland has shaped diaspora discourse and introduce dominant conceptualizations of homeland in anthropology. Following this, I will highlight approaches to homeland from existing research on the Kurdish diaspora. Finally, I will explain how my research contributes to the discourse on the significance of homeland-orientation and its role in the collective and political identity formation of diasporic Kurds.

3.1.1 *Homeland in diaspora scholarship*

The concept of homeland appeared in the anthropological literature mainly in relation to the increasing number of works theorizing diaspora and migrant and transnational communities from the 1980s (Brubaker 2005, 1). Of course, classical pieces of anthropological literature are concerned with people's attachment to their region, as early anthropological analysis took territorial based units of culture for granted³. However, these works did not focus on conceptualizing people's sense of place, and perhaps for this reason, also did not scrutinize the concept of homeland.

Comprehensive theoretical works about the relationship of people to place emerged only from the 1970s (see e.g. Lefebvre 1991; Relph 1986 [first publ. 1976]; Tuan 1974; 1979) providing a range of frameworks for scrutinizing how place is tied to meaning, identity, experiences and

³ As an exception, I must mention the anthropological interest in the global spreading of cultural forms in the diffusionist approach (Wolf 1989, 13). However, as Wolf explains, this global interest was left as soon as anthropology started to be interested in studying living cultures through the method of fieldwork (ibid.).

emotions. These were followed by an increasing amount of anthropological works from the 1990s, interested in human life detached from closed territorial entities, in transnational and global processes (See e.g. Blanc, Basch, and Glick Schiller 1995; Burawoy et al. 2000; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011). Transnationalism emerged as a new theoretical orientation to overcome *methodological nationalism* in the study of migration. Indeed, among others Nina Glick Schiller and Peggy Levitt suggested to study migrants' embeddedness in multiple relations and localities spanning across borders through the concept of multi-sited and multi-layered *transnational social fields* (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, 1003).

The increasing theorization of diasporas is closely intertwined with the emerging inquiries of transnationalism. This attachment can be well illustrated by the formation of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* in 1991. In the preface of the first issue of the journal, Khachig Tölölyan also referred to diasporas as the 'exemplary communities of the transnational moment' (Tölölyan 1991, 4; also cited in Clifford 1994, 303). The contributions published in the first issue, including Safran's "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return" and Tölölyan's preface "The Nation-State and its Others" have been shaping the discourse on homeland in important ways.

The concept of diaspora⁴, which was originally formed on the basis of the Jewish [and Armenian and Greek] dispersion (Tölölyan 1991, 4; Safran 1991, 83; Eliassi 2021, 848; Brubaker 2005, 2), was increasingly used by scholars to include immigrants, expatriates, guest-workers, refugees, etc. (Tölölyan 1991, 4; Safran 1991, 83). This extension of the term diaspora has been criticized by numerous scholars for becoming useless for analytical inquiries (e.g. Brubaker 2005, 3; Safran 1991, 83). For example, as Schiocchet maintains, since the concept of diaspora entered the social sciences, it has become an overused term, today it can be used for any settlement away from home (Schiocchet 2022, 89).

Scholars who sought to differentiate diaspora from other forms of displacement and ethnic communities found that home(land) plays a central role in differentiating diaspora. Tölölyan (1996, 16, quoted in Ammann 2001, 55) notes that the distinction between ethnic groups and diasporas is ambiguous, as their boundaries shift due to complex dynamics. The key difference lies in the group's willingness to maintain institutional connections with their home region or the same ethnic group in other countries. In ethnic communities, these links are more individual

⁴ Some scholars point out the masculinist associations with the Greek origin of the term (see Alinia 2004, 27). Also Clifford notes that the accounts he draws on are male-centered (Clifford 1994, 324–25).

and less stable than in diasporas. According to Doraï, who draws on Portes et al. (1999), the difference between diaspora and transnational community is in their relationship to homeland: as the author argues, while the former has a symbolic relationship to it, the latter's relationship is real (Doraï, Al-Ali, and Koser 2002; Schiocchet 2022, 94–95).

In his contribution to the first issue of the above mentioned journal, William Safran pointed to the lack of informative value in the broad definitions of diaspora like that of Connor “that segment of people living outside the homeland” (Safran 1991, 83), and attempted to extend it with the following criteria (summary): 1. dispersal from a ‘center’ to a ‘periphery’, 2. collective memory of original homeland, 3. no hope of being fully accepted in the host society, 4. ancestral homeland as true, ideal home and place of return, 5. efforts for collective restoration and maintenance of homeland, 6. continuous relation to homeland (Safran 1991, 83–84). Safran's early definition positioned the concept of the homeland as a central defining factor of a diaspora. In his definition, the concept of homeland is limited to the original or ancestral homeland, which is a territorial or space-based approach to homeland.

However, Safran's persistent focus on the relationship with the homeland has been widely criticized. Clifford, drawing on studies on anti-Zionist Jewish communities, also pointed out the complexities that were ignored in Safran's definition of diasporic communities' relation to homeland. In contrast to Safran's definition, which is based on the desire to return to the ancestral homeland, Clifford argues that diasporic cultures “may be structured around a tension between return and deferral” (Clifford 1994, 308). Hence, Clifford's sense of homeland is more flexible to describe complex relations and ambiguities, bringing migrants' complex relations and identifications, that is, the affective dimensions in the forefront, rather than the myth of the homeland itself. As Clifford discloses, in diasporic discourses, homeland appears “[...] not as something simply left behind, but as a place of attachment” (Clifford 1994, 311).

In his critical article reviewing earlier contributions to the discourse on the notion of diaspora, Clifford, while welcoming Safran's attempt to define diaspora, pointed out the drawbacks of centering the definition around a single ideal type, thereby identifying the concept too closely with one specific group (Clifford 1994, 305–6). Moreover, Clifford suggested a more polythetic definition than Safran's, for which while keeping the six defining characteristics, the transnational connections of diasporas are not exclusively defined through the myth of homeland (Clifford 1994, 306).

Indeed, as Brubaker pointed out, the de-emphasizing of homeland orientation is characteristic for newer inquiries of diaspora (Brubaker 2005, 5). For example, in his influential book *The black Atlantic*, Gilroy speaks of a deterritorialized black cultural diaspora, in which “Cultural exchanges [...] could no longer be easily traced back to particular homelands” (Gilroy 1993, quoted in Cohen 2022, 14 [first publ. 1997]). While some scholars have explored approaches to studying diasporas that do not center on the relationship with the homeland (e.g., Brubaker 2005; Gilroy 1995), others have suggested reworking the concept of homeland, creating less spatially bound and more symbolic definitions, or shifting the focus to the concept of ‘home,’ (See e.g. Brah 1996; Boccagni, Murcia, and Belloni 2020; Ahmed 1999) which permits more deterritorialized perspectives. Such studies explore home, although often connected to the homeland, not exclusively located there, but also in other places such as places of arrival or the online space.

While acknowledging the insights brought by the critique of Safran, I am inspired by approaches fueled by his contribution, which offers a comprehensive understanding encompassing a range of different types of diasporas. These insights are helpful to think about the specificities of the Kurdish diaspora. Cohen, drawing on Safran’s definition, suggested, following Wittgenstein’s logic that the features of a diaspora should be seen as through the metaphor of a rope’s strands: each constituting more or less, but in different amounts and strength, thereby not getting their importance as single elements but from the way they overlap and reinforce each other (2022, 3 [first publ. 1997]). In this way, Cohen suggested nine defining features of a diaspora: dispersal, extension, retention, idealization, return, distinctiveness, apprehension, creativity and solidarity (ibid.). These elements, considered as the strands of the diasporic rope, do not feature all diasporas in the same way. Some might be missing while other elements can appear to varying degrees. As Cohen argued, “[...] the idea of diaspora does not attain its potency and efficacy by identifying one or even four basic elements but by understanding how commonly-found features in most diasporas are intertwined and mutually reinforcing” (2022, 3 [first publ. 1997]). Moreover, Cohen notes that the features of a diaspora can also change over time (2022, 3–4 [first publ. 1997]).

Emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the diversity of the reasons for and cultural context of the formation of diasporas, Cohen also developed a typology of diasporas which involved victim, labor, imperial, trade, deterritorialized and incipient diasporas (2022, 10 [first publ. 1997]). According to Cohen’s typology, the diasporic experiences that shaped early def-

initions of diaspora, such as those of Jewish, African, and Armenian communities, can be categorized as victim diasporas. As Cohens emphasizes, one diaspora can fit into many of the typologies, rather than conforming all aspects of one ideal type (2022, 10 [first publ. 1997]). Within his typology, Cohen also mentioned the Kurds as an example for incipient or embryonic diasporas.

Based on the work of Weiner (1986) and Van Hear (1998), Cohen suggests that “it possible to predict which groups are likely to end up as a diaspora, that is they are incipient or embryonic diasporas” (Weiner, 1986 and Van Hear, 1998, quoted in Cohen 2022, 15 [first publ. 1997]). In a later section, I will elaborate on this and other approaches applied to the study of Kurdish diasporas.

In the introduction to his book *Global Diasporas*, Cohen asks the reader about the relevance of homeland for the study of diaspora (2022, 20 [first publ. 1997]), a question to which I contribute to contribute through my thesis. The next section will provide a brief review of different symbolic conceptions of homeland.

Symbolic notion of homeland

Indeed, why is homeland such a central term when speaking of diasporas? Drawing on Conner’s work, Cohen explains the relevance of homeland for diasporas through its affective aspects: “Motherland, fatherland, native land, natal land, *heimatland*, the ancestral land, the search for ‘roots’ – all these similar notions invest homelands with ‘an emotional, almost reverential dimension’” (Conner 1986, 16, quoted in Cohen 2022, 142 [first publ. 1997]). Furthermore, quoting Kabir (2019), Cohen points to the importance of the body and its somatic memory in the affective ties to homeland:

“When leaders speak, people in the audience must nod and clap. They need to be moved by the poetry of their homeland, dance to familiar music, relish the food made by their grandparents, or drop their change into the tins held by those raising funds for co-ethnic victims of misfortunes. On occasions, they might want or need to take up arms to defend co-religionists or co-ethnic members of their group or stop the despoilation of their homeland. In less threatening settings, as Kabir (2019) argues, the lyrics in a song, the instruments deployed and the inspiration to dance can allow a diasporic awareness to be performed, not merely affirmed, while the body itself can become ‘a site of memory’.” (Kabir 2019, quoted in Cohen 2022, 18 [first publ. 1997]).

Moreover, Cohen argued that diasporas can not only restore but also create homelands. “Take a second example, namely accepting the idea (feature 4) that a diaspora may be concerned not only with the maintenance or restoration of homeland, but with its very creation. This will cover the cases of ‘imagined homelands’ that resemble the original history and geography of the diasporas’ natality in only the remotest way. In some cases (the Kurds or Sikhs come to mind) a homeland is clearly an *ex post facto* construction, yet they share many other features of diasporic groups.” (Cohen 1996, 516, emphasis in original). Although homeland implies a real place, in such cases it is not an independent political entity. Nevertheless, the idea of the homeland is constructed through diasporic discourses and diasporic communities often mobilize in the hope of creating an independent homeland.

Conversely, this shared imagination of homeland is also an important aspect of the solidarity of a diasporic community. The idea is that a diaspora can be held together and re-created through the mind, through cultural artifacts and through shared imagination (ibid), thus the idealization of homeland can be perceived as a creative act (Verstappen 2016: 27).

Cohen also remarked that the technological developments accessible have a great influence on the homeland relations of diasporas: “With the increased possibilities for travel in the digital age and the frequent discrepancy between favoured life styles in the diaspora and less secure ones at home, diasporas have nowadays supplemented or replaced a once-in-a-lifetime return movement. Instead, they have retained their connections to home by means of virtual re-creations of home and intermittent visits.” (2022, 7 [first publ. 1997]). As my thesis will focus on the medium of photography in its role of shaping the imaginaries of homeland, a further section of this chapter will outline the technological developments’ impact on homeland relations from the perspective on photography.

The notion of diasporic homeland, as Sanderien Verstappen reviews, used to encompass the meaning of home in migration studies (Verstappen 2024, 163). However, in course of the critical debate on diasporas which I described above, new meanings of home emerged in migration scholarship, including the portability of home, the creative reconstruction of home, and home as something people search for (Verstappen 2024, 163). In other words, for some scholars, the more deterritorialized notion of home replaced the notion of homeland.

While the concept of home might involve some aspects of homeland and vice versa, it is important to differentiate between the two terms. Based on the work of Blunt and Dowling, Paolo

Boccagni, Luis Eduardo Pérez Murcia, and Milena Belloni maintain that “Home connects material and symbolic worlds (Blunt and Dowling 2006, quoted in Boccagni, Murcia, and Belloni 2020, 22). Some scholars emphasized the affective dimension of home, pointing out how feeling at home can shape our sense of space (ibid.), while others see it as a set of relationships between individuals and environments (Boccagni, Murcia, and Belloni 2020, 23).

Drawing on Hayward’s understanding of home “as a set of relationships between individuals and their immediate environment” (Hayward, 1977, 11, quoted in Boccagni, Murcia, and Belloni 2020, 23), Boccagni, Murcia and Belloni argue that “The extent to which people’s experience of home is either positive or negative largely depends on the quality of the relationships they build within and across their domestic spaces, and the different scales they connect to ideas of home: the neighbourhood, the city, the country and so forth.” (2020, 23). As this quote reveals, different scales of spatial relations play into the idea of home, from the domestic place to the national level. This important dimension has not been part of the previous discourse on homeland.

While the notion of home tends to be associated by scholars with security and safety, some studies reveal how home can also be a space of alienation and oppression (Boccagni, Murcia, and Belloni 2020, 22–23). I believe this (often gendered) dimension of home(land) might stay hidden if we do not include the meanings of home when speaking about the homeland.

Nevertheless, home is not the same as homeland. As Cohen claims, the difference is, that ‘homeland’ necessarily implies a real place and not a virtual one (2022, 142 [first publ. 1997]). While homeland refers to the home left behind, I understand home as something in the present: the relationships in the homeland that are still relevant, as well as the new home, the relationships in the host country. Therefore, my thesis works with the notion of home(land), which, while respecting the individual and affective dimensions, as well as the different scales involved in the relationship, focuses on the home that is left behind, and that is also containing political dimensions of collective identity, which I will elaborate on in the sections about ethnicity and nationalism below.

Minoo Alinia recognized the two theoretical positions outlined above as two distinct analytical tools in the diaspora literature. She calls the approach, which is based on Safran’s definition a *(re)territorial* concept of diaspora, and the second approach, grounded in Paul Gilroy’s and others’ work, a *de-territorial* approach. The *(re)territorial* notion, which takes the Jewish dias-

pora as an ideal type, serves, according to Alinia as a descriptive tool for establishing the diasporicness of groups (Alinia 2004, 97–98). The de-territorial notion of diaspora, developed in works about African diasporic experiences, understands diaspora rather as a socio-cultural process. Scholars working with this approach mainly focus on identity formation as a response to exile, displacement, and exclusion.

Homeland as practiced

The homeland in Safran's approach (1991), is conceptualized by Sanderien Verstappen as an 'ancestral homeland', while in Axel's and others' approach, she observes an affective conceptualization of homeland. As Verstappen emphasized, quoting Axel, both approaches understand homeland as something that "exist *within* a community wherever it lives" (Axel 2002, 426, emphasis original, quoted in Verstappen 2016, 29). Hence, the critique of Verstappen is that both approaches propose concepts of 'placeless homelands', though which "the experiential aspects of the actual homeland remain abstract and unexplored" (ibid.).

A third approach to homeland in diaspora studies arose from the research on migrants' impact on economic development (see Verstappen 2016, 29–30). Studies within this approach work with the concept of 'homeland-as-practiced' through exploring the face-to-face interactions of migrants with homeland (ibid.). While a sense of homeland can arise when in exile (Anderson 1998, 59–60), and likewise, as Verstappen maintains, building on Clifford's distinction between "desired" and "lived" home, "[Migrants'] Identities are negotiated and reformulated as a result of encounters with the actual space of the homeland and with the people that live there" (Verstappen 2016, 32). The literature on migration's impact on development which looks at, for instance, remittances, sees migrants as active agents of development who create through face-to-face interaction a "homeland-as-practiced" (Verstappen 2016, 29–30).

If I can generalize that (re)territorial notions of diaspora promote an ancestral homeland concept, while de-territorial notions tend to work with an affective concept of homeland, chances are that by delinking diaspora from place, the very placeness of homeland and the lived experiences of it might get lost in analysis. For this thesis, explores how migrants imagine their homeland, acknowledging the placeness and the lived experiences connected to it, is essential. Moreover, I am taking from these approaches the perspective to homeland as something actively created by the diaspora members through shared imagination, remembering, engagement in social and political networks, and dreaming of a future. Inspired by an 'emplaced' notion of

homeland, although I do not directly engage with migrants' practices of maintaining their relations to and participating in 'homeland politics', I see imagining homeland as an active practice of migrants in this sense, in continuous correlation between circulating media and diasporan Kurds' movements, spatial experiences, and political and cultural engagements. In other words, imagining homeland, in the accounts of my interlocutors, is as much connected to place as it is a symbolic practice.

Accounts of Kurdish homeland

Beyond looking in general at anthropological theorizations of homeland, it is also important to note that "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" (Alinia 2004, 321). As Alinia points out, the historical circumstances of each diaspora affect its relation to homeland (Alinia 2004, 328). Therefore, in the next section I will highlight influential approaches to homeland from Kurdish studies and after briefly reviewing how these approaches relate to the broader anthropological discourse, I will come to my conclusions and situate my thesis within the literature.

Scholars working on the Kurdish diaspora found that homeland-orientation is highly relevant migrant population across different local contexts. The approaches in studies of Kurdish diaspora I reviewed highlight the heterogeneity of Kurdish diasporic groups in terms of population composition and the local context of the settlement countries. Scholars discuss homeland-orientation in relation to Kurdish nationalism, ethnic and religious identifications, and political mobilization. For example, Khalid Khayati (2008) emphasizes that it is important to recognize Kurdish communities as active diasporas engaged in transnational networks. Similarly, others suggest a social movements approach for exploring the Kurdish diaspora (e.g. Alinia 2004; Eccarius-Kelly 2002). Finally, the research on Kurdish diaspora contributes to the debate on homeland regarding its territorial and symbolic dimensions, thereby revealing ambiguities in diasporan Kurds' concepts of homeland (See e.g. Toivanen 2021; Alinia and Eliassi 2014; de Rouen 2019; Six-Hohenbalken 2018).

To begin with, it is important to clarify the origins of the idea of Kurdish homeland. "Kurdistan", a term first used in the 11th century and today often used to refer to the Kurdish settled regions in the Middle East, was, as Birgit Ammann maintains, never geographically defined (Ammann 2001, 64). As Ammann reviews, the territories today referred to as "Kurdistan" are within an imaginary line, which the extent area of varies in different accounts, while in the

concept of diaspora, the area is marked in the original center or ancestral homeland (Ammann 2001, 64–65).

“[Kurdish informants’] 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.” (Alinia 2004, V). This short excerpt of Alinia’s research does not only articulate how different scales mix in the discourses on homeland but also sheds light on the differences within the Kurdish diasporas and their different imaginaries on homeland. As Cohen maintains quoting Zalme’s studies of the Gorani speaking Hawrami Kurds, it is essential to acknowledge diversity and differences within Kurdish diaspora (Cohen 2022 [1997], 138). Even my empirical material which is based on interviews with seven individuals reflects the heterogeneity of the Kurdish diaspora(s), as my interviewees have roots in different national contexts (Turkey, Syria and Armenia), as they come from different regional (urban or rural), social and cultural, as well as religious backgrounds (Alevi and Sunni Kurds), to just mention a few examples. The diversity of the homeland-relations is not only a result of the different cultural backgrounds of the Kurdish inhabited regions, but also of the different relations Kurds have to their countries of origin in which they were socialized, and of the different national movements that emerged in these contexts.

Khalid Khayati’s research emphasizes the significance of the local context in the Stockholm and Marseille regions for Kurdish diasporic communities (Khayati 2008, 6–7). Similarly, my study will yield results that are meaningful only within the specific local context of my research, thereby resembling the integration possibilities in Vienna and how they shape the diaspora formation of the Kurds. This topic will be explored in detail in a separate chapter dedicated to the Viennese context of the Kurdish community.

Scholars have demonstrated the importance of homeland-orientation in Kurdish diasporic communities (e.g. Brubaker 2005; Wahlbeck 2018; Six-Hohenbalken 2018). According to Alinia, the centrality of homeland orientation in the Kurdish diasporic discourses can be seen as 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” (Alinia 2004, 320). Thereby, the imaginaries of homeland are closely shaped by a sense of victimhood. This is also recognized by Khayati, who adds that beyond the traumatic dispersal from the homeland, the current conditions of the homeland also impact the diasporic discourses of the Kurds. “The experiences of trauma and homesickness (Alinia 2004),

which are abundantly and expressively depicted in the narratives of the diasporan Kurds, largely correspond to the general social and political conditions that prevail in the Kurdish homeland” (Khayati 2008, 3). However, drawing on Cohen’s work, Khayati reminds us that the victim diaspora discourse might hide some of the Kurdish experiences of migration other than forced migration and persecution, as well as the internal differences within the Kurdish diaspora (Khayati 2008, 5).

The focus on diasporan Kurds’ engagement in political projects allowed some researchers to shed light on identity and community formation in the diasporic space and explore diaspora as a term for self-definition. First of all, Alinia points out that it is important to differentiate between diaspora as a concept and diasporic discourses (Alinia 2004, 321). According to Alinia, Safran’s territorial notion of diaspora might hide its political dimensions (Alinia 2004, 320). Therefore, the author suggests a social movements approach for studying diasporas, to understand the role of political networks for diasporan communities while differentiating individuals’ emotional attachments, experiences of localities and political discourses from the definition of diaspora (Alinia 2004, 321).

As Alinia and Eliassi remind us, the construction of home(land) in the diaspora implicates political projects and forms of identity politics (Alinia and Eliassi 2014, 74) for which nationalism can be a major ideological framework (Alinia and Eliassi 2014, 73). My interviewees often referred to homeland as “Kurdistan”, a tendency that Alinia and Eliassi also noticed in their research (Alinia and Eliassi 2014, 79). In this way, the name “Kurdistan” gives a national framing for ethnic belonging while also emplacing the concept of homeland. Also Cohen maintained that territorial identity is important in the Kurdish struggle for recognition, autonomy and independence (Cohen 2022 [1997], 138). Thus the concept of homeland was observed as a central dimension of Kurdish nationalism today (Alinia 2004, 326).

Scholars working on Kurdish diasporas seem to agree that the notion of homeland has both symbolic and territorial dimensions which are likely important in the case of the Kurds. On the one hand, as a stateless diaspora, like in the case of the Sikhs and Palestinians, Kurdish homeland as a political entity does not exist in legal structures, but in the imaginaries and discourses of the Kurds. “The Kurds provide a particularly intractable puzzle. Although well-organized as a national group, they lost out at the end of the First World War when they failed to inherit a state after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Consequently, Kurdistan is not a recognized member of the UN and Kurds are spread out in a contiguous territory covering regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.” (Cohen 2022 [1997], 137).

The scholarly literature differentiates between stateless and state-linked diasporas, as while both are engaged in long distance nationalism (Anderson 1992 in Eliassi 2021:860), state-linked diasporas enjoy the many political advantages of the asymmetrical relationships in the world of nation-states (Eliassi 2021, 861). Thus, stateless diasporas' homeland relations can be seen even more as responses to marginalization, exclusion and "homelessness". (compare with Alinia 2004, V). According to Alinia and Eliassi, precisely this statelessness of the Kurds leads to the very personal and subjective notion of Kurdish homeland. They claim, "[...] 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." (Alinia and Eliassi 2014, 79). Hence, homeland is both a spatial and a symbolic category relating to territory/space and identity (Alinia and Eliassi 2014, 74).

Due to the dual nature of the imagined and territorial Kurdish homeland, the diasporic experience of it is also fraught with ambiguities and contradictions. For example, de Rouen's research reveals on the one hand, an idealization of homeland, it also reveals negatively connotated aspects of it such as persecution and poverty, poor health, economic problems, etc. (de Rouen 2019, 31). Moreover, Alinia's research shows the complicated relationship of diasporan Kurds to homeland including the impossibility of going home (Alinia 2004, 104–5). As we will see later, these ambiguities regarding homeland are also characteristic to the narratives of my interlocutors.

Eliassi argued that Brubaker's definition of diaspora is insufficient to describe the differences in homeland orientation between first and later diasporic generations. "Being dispersed, resisting assimilation and retaining a continuous orientation towards the 'original' homeland are constitutive hallmarks of many diasporic identities (Brubaker 2005, quoted in Eliassi 2021, 849–50). This minimal definition provided by Brubaker cannot be fixed across generations since younger generations who have not been or grown up in the 'original' homeland will experience their old and new homes differently, which in turn can lead to divided allegiances and belongings." (Eliassi 2021, 849–50). Focusing on homeland orientation in the second generation, my thesis aims to contribute data for a more nuanced view of diaspora which encompasses generational differences.

Surely there are differences between the way different generations of diaspora Kurds engage in political projects and discourses. Six-Hohenbalken points out that second and following generations are connected to the homeland through political and cultural activities (Six-Hohenbalken 2018, 73), while also due to increasing physical contact to the homeland shapes the new generations' relation to their region of origin, which they used to know mainly from the stories and memories of their parents before (Six-Hohenbalken 2018, 74). Some studies with second-generation Kurds also reveal the role of online media and communication in the imagination of homeland (see e.g. Toivanen 2021).

Indeed, scholars examined different media and their role in imaginations of Kurdish homeland. For example, Özlem Belçim Galip (2015) analyzed novelistic imaginaries of Kurdish homeland in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, as well as the Western diaspora. As another example, in a recent publication Ercan Altuntaş (2024) examined drawing as a way of imagining “Kurdistan” in the context of violence and destruction. Although the limits of this thesis do not allow me to explore these works in detail, I find it important to mention media other than photography, already explored in the imaginations of Kurdish homeland.

So far, I have not found many detailed accounts revealing how Kurdish homeland is imagined by second and later generation diasporans. The accounts of my interviewees reveal both their engagement in cultural and political networks of the Kurdish diaspora, and their visits and own experiences in the home region. In analyzing their imaginaries of homeland, I hope to contribute to a more differentiated understanding in second-generation Kurds' diasporic discourses of homeland.

3.1.2 Synthesis: homeland as conceptualized in this thesis

Anthropological research has produced various notions of homeland, each rooted in, while also shaping, understandings of diaspora. In this thesis, I explore homeland as a central aspect of diaspora, a place imaginary, yet real –that is, of geographic and political relevance –, shaped by narratives of victimhood and nationalism, which second generation Kurds are connected to through transnational networks, movements, homeland politics and imagination. Kurdish notions of homeland, shaped by the statelessness the diaspora and thereby often a sense of homelessness, is conceptualized as an ambiguous notion with multiple, interchanging and often contradictory meanings. These meanings are produced and shared by diverse media circulating in transnational space and thereby contributing to the emergence of homeland imaginaries shared by Kurdish communities across the globe.

Like many studies that build on Safran's influential work (1991), my research found that homeland orientation was central to the discourses of second-generation diasporic Kurds. While I agree with Safran's critics that homeland should not be treated as a fixed territorial category, I align with other studies on Kurdish diasporic communities that emphasize both the territorial and symbolic dimensions of the concept of homeland.

In my interviews, participants were free to express their personal sense of home(land), which varied, for example, from the entirety of "Kurdistan" to the Kurdish inhabited regions in Turkey, or a smaller regional unit such as a province or village. Thus, my research aligns with perspectives in which different scales—national, regional, and domestic—intersect (see Boccagni, Murcia, and Belloni 2020). However, since the highly deterritorialized concept of home suggested by Boccagni and others does not fully encompass the territorial and grounded experiences of my interviewees, I adopt the concept of home(land) or home(land)scape. This term, unlike a completely deterritorialized notion, allows me to express the duality of space and imagination in the Kurdish homeland, emphasizing, as others have noted in the Kurdish context, that homeland encompasses both symbolic and territorial domains.

I agree with Clifford (1994) and others who highlight the ambiguities inherent in the notion of homeland. As we have seen, this perspective is widespread in studies on the Kurdish diaspora. I interpret this characteristic of ambiguities both as a consequence of the Kurds' statelessness and as a reflection of the social, political, and economic transformations, including the destruction, that have occurred in Kurdish regions. Due to the political developments of recent decades, many places in these regions have become inaccessible. Consequently, homeland is sometimes accessible only through the imagination. My thesis is based on the idea that diaspora can be maintained and formed through shared imagination (Cohen 1996, 516). Cohen also noted that technological advancements play a crucial role in this process. While my research does not address all forms of technological advancements, devices, or practices, and is not comprehensive of all diasporic experiences, it focuses on photography as one technological tool used to facilitate the shared imagination of homeland.

My thesis aims to contribute to the anthropological debate on homeland and diaspora in two ways. Following Eliassi's call, who criticized the lack of perspectives from second and later generation migrants to the notion of diaspora (see Eliassi 2021, 849–50), my thesis aims to supplement previous approaches with the detailed analysis of views by second generation migrants.

The studies reviewed do not provide a detailed account of how imaginings of homeland emerge through encounters with visual media. The second contribution of my thesis to the debate on the homeland lies in the exploration –through the method of photo-interviews – of how second-generation Kurds imagine homeland in relation to visual encounters. This offers an example of the social constructionist approaches to diaspora that focus on individual experiences and expressions. Furthermore, by concentrating on photographs, my research will offer a detailed account of the narratives and imaginaries evoked by a specific set of visual expressions, shedding light on how homeland imaginaries arise from such visual encounters.

3.2 Kurdishness: an Ethnic Identity and a National Movement

As I revealed in the chapter above, studies indicate that nationalism and ethnic identity are crucial for Kurdish constructions of homeland (see Alinia et al. 2014). In this chapter, I will review how ethnicity and nationalism were explored by research on Kurdish diasporic communities and outline the base of my understanding of Kurdishness. While the two terms are often used interchangeably, ethnicity and nationalism are not the same.

Nationalism is mainly regarded as an ethnic (and traditionalist) ideology, grounded in national symbolism and historiography that establishes continuity with an ‘ancient’, ‘traditional’ origin (Eriksen 2015, 346). In other words, national identity is always connected to a territory. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish nationalism from ethnicity, as nations do not always correspond to one ethnic group, and an ethnic group cannot always be considered a nation (Eriksen 2015, 352). In the following sections, I will briefly introduce both terms to demonstrate this difference and explore how these notions intertwine in the concept of Kurdishness.

3.2.1 Ethnicity

In his introducing chapter to the concept of ethnicity, Thomas Hylland Eriksen points out that the term ethnicity received great interest in the anthropological literature since the 1960s, while nationalism from the 1980s and the word ‘global’ has been increasingly used since the 1990s (Eriksen 2015, 329).

According to Eriksen, ethnic groups can only be distinguished through the contact to distinctive others: “Ethnicity occurs when cultural differences are made relevant through interaction” (Eriksen 2015, 331). This approach is based on the volume published by Fredrik Barth in 1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. This volume started a new way of understanding ethnicity with a lasting influence until today. Barth shifted

the focus of the term which was previously defined by essential group membership criteria, to the processes of boundary making and maintenance of groups through the interaction with perceived others (Ammann 2001, 47–48).

In this understanding of ethnicity, based on Barth's ideas, ethnicity is relational and situational, it is not to be understood as a thing but rather as an aspect of a social process (Eriksen 2015, 334–35). Ammann, in agreement with this view of the situational character of ethnicity noted that it is important when, in which context and against whom an individual differentiates him- or herself (Ammann 2001, 53).

Moreover, the author highlighted the roots of the concept of ethnicity in the discourse on nationalism, what she termed the imaginative approach. Quoting Heckmann, Ammann defined ethnicity as memories, values, symbols, interpretations, constructions, and myths, which are determined by current needs or desires of a group or its elite (Heckmann 1992, 37, quoted in Ammann 2001, 49). This notion, as the author remarked, is based on Max Weber's notice of a subjective belief in a common ancestry (ibid.).

Kurdishness – ethnic identities

Reviewing the literature in Kurdish studies, Ammann argued that ethnic identity of the Kurds was either defined in essentialist terms, focusing on aspects of cultural homogeneity such as language, history, religion, etc.; or, “The other extreme is represented by a number of recent publications, which conceive Kurdish identity as constructed in the sense of not real and not justified (e.g. Akkaya 1995; Feigl 1995)” (Ammann 2001, 51, translated by the author from German).

While the essentialist approach, as I outlined above, was rejected in the mainstream literature on ethnicity which focused instead on boundary maintenance, Ammann criticized that some scholars working with the constructivist approach, made the mistake of rejecting the claim to Kurdish of identity because its heterogeneity and constructedness, thereby forgetting the essence of the constructivist approach, that is that ethnicity is not based on cultural substance but in the boundaries drawn in cultural interaction (Ammann 2001, 51–52).

Eccarius-Kelly, who is building on the notion of Kurdishness in the Turkish context, based on the works of Nicole Watts and Ramazan Aras, focuses on the subjective representations of self-identified Kurds. While Watts' notion of Kurdishness is defined by ascriptive characteristics such as mother-tongue and socio-cultural markers, Aras worked with a constructivist approach

which understands Kurdishness as constructed by social, political, economic and cultural processes (Watts 2010; Aras 2014, quoted in Eccarius-Kelly 2015, 176).

In the diaspora, as Eccarius-Kelly explains, Kurdishness also serves the differentiation from other ethnic communities and distancing oneself from experiences of racism and discrimination (Eccarius-Kelly 2015, 177). Thus, scholars explored “Kurdishness as the other”, or as a response to exclusion. In other words, as Aras described, marginalization lead to emergence of Kurdishness and Kurdish transnationalism (Aras 2014, 194). Also Alinia pointed to the potential of Kurdish identity as a resource to resist imposed immigrant identity (Alinia 2004, 323).

According to Ammann, ethnicity is one of the criteria of diaspora (Ammann 2001, 55). Kurdish collective identities have been informed by multiple political spaces in the form of the emerging nation states in which the Kurdish settled areas were incorporated in the 20th century, and related forms of inclusion or exclusion (Toivanen 2021, 67). Moreover, ethnic Kurdishness was shaped in response to nation-state building strategies of the states Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria and their minority politics affecting the Kurds (Toivanen 2021, 67). In other words, the same processes which lead to the transformation of Kurdish societies, mass migration and diaspora formation shaped the emerging notions of Kurdishness (see Alinia 2004, cited in Toivanen 2021, 67).

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the heterogeneity of Kurdish identities. Stuart Hall points out that diasporic identifications are multiple, diasporan people belong to multiple worlds and “[...] speak from difference” (Hall 1995: 206, quoted in de Rouen 2019, 28 quote modified). This view is also supported by Akkaya, who argued that due to the diasporic experience, Kurds developed multiple identities (2011, 8 quoted in Galip 2015, 40). Furthermore, Six-Hohenbalken observed that in recent years, within the collective identity of Kurdayetî (Kurdishness), Kurds are organizing in groups for partial identities such as Zaza, Alevi, etc. (Six-Hohenbalken 2018, 71). Moreover, Six-Hohenbalken highlighted that studies reveal Kurdishness can carry different meanings for the first generation than for later ones. For example, as Eccarius-Kelly observed in Germany, while their parents and grandparents carried the trauma of familial injustices, younger generations of Kurds were able to express a sense of marginalization (Eccarius-Kelly 2015, 187).

For her 2015 study, Eccarius-Kelly asked self-identified members in the Kurdish diaspora in Germany and the US to “curate” an imagined Kurdish museum (Eccarius-Kelly 2015, 173),

in order to grasp their subjective ways of expressing their political and socio-cultural identities. The research participants' ideas ranged from expressions of national struggle, everyday life and the tragic history, familial trauma and collective memory of the Kurds. Drawing on Eccarius-Kelly's focus on participant's subjective sense of Kurdishness, I explore Kurdish homeland, as a central aspect of diasporic Kurdish identity, a notion mutually shaping and being shaped my imaginaries of Kurdishness, based on my interlocutors' engagement, reflections of, and 'curating' of photographs.

3.2.2 Nationalism

Origins, as Alinia highlights, are not only tied to individuals' ways of identifying themselves but are also deeply rooted in social and political issues. In this way, identifications with people's origins are also often exploited by nationalist, exclusionist, or even racist ideologies and politics (Alinia et al. 2014, 22). Thus, it is crucial to view ethnic identification within broader social and political processes, and especially how it is embedded in nationalist discourses.

Drawing on Ernst Gellner, Eriksen defines nationalism "as an ideology which holds that cultural boundaries should correspond to political boundaries; that is to say, that the state ought to contain only people 'of the same kind'" (Gellner 1983, quoted in Eriksen 2015, 345). This idea is based on the nation as a unit of analysis, which turned out to be a modern construct.

Benedict Anderson's influential idea of the nation as an 'imagined community' is today common ground knowledge in the social sciences. The core of this concept lies in the 'imagined' nature of the nation: unlike in a family or tribe, the members of a nation, who feel they belong to the community, do not all know each other personally. Instead, they must imagine themselves as a community. As Anderson outlined, from the 18th and 19th centuries the imagined community of the nation replaced religious imagined communities, marking a change of consciousness, in which 'print-capitalism' and the collectively performed ritual of reading the newspaper enabled an increasing number of people to imagine themselves as part of a large, anonymous community (see Anderson 1983).

Kurdish nationalism

Scholars traced the origin of Kurdish nationalism back to the second half of the 19th century to the Sheikh Ubeydullah Revolt in 1880, which started "a new period in the development of the history of the Kurdish community, one shaped by the gradual growth of Kurdish national consciousness [...]" (Bajalan 2021, 105). Among the range of national symbols of the Kurdish

flag, the map of the Kurdish territories and the idea of “Kurdistan”, leaders of Kurdish resistance movements, the history of the Mahabad Republic⁵, etc., different Kurdish organizations and movements represent themselves with their own selections and forms of representation. Thereby, such symbols are incorporated in multiple historical narratives. For example, Galip explains how Newroz, a Kurdish spring festival⁶ became a national symbol (Galip 2015, 18). Newroz’s symbolic power for the Kurds is traced back to the legend of Kawa, a blacksmith who liberated the ancestors of the modern Kurds from the rule of the Assyrian king Zuhak (Galip 2015, 18; Rostami 2021, 734). As Galip explains, from the 1980s, the Newroz celebrations, suppressed by the Turkish authorities, were increasingly associated with Kurdish uprising and liberation. As the author emphasizes, the PKK⁷ played an influential role in reactivating the myth of Newroz (Galip 2015, 18).

Scholars have distinguished between nationalism within a nation-state and within a diasporic context, while some referring to dominant and subaltern nationalisms. These ideas are rooted in Anderson’s distinction between ‘official nationalism’ of the elites and popular nationalist movements. Quoting Seton-Watson, Anderson maintained that the European elite’s ‘official nationalism’ emerged as a counter-reaction to popular nationalist movements (Anderson 1983, 86). To understand Kurdish nationalism, it is crucial to consider the fact that Kurds do not have a nation-state. Kurdish nationalism is regarded by some scholars as a form of subaltern nationalism (e.g. Eliassi 2021). Drawing on Kastoryano, Eliassi emphasizes that “while stateless diasporas are involved in resisting the state nationalism that subordinates them, the state-linked diasporas tend to extend the nationalism of their home countries and establish a transnational nationalism” (Eliassi 2021, 863). However, it is important to acknowledge that Kurdish nationalist movements are not free of power-dynamics, hierarchies and top-down practices.

Aras adds that “Kurdish nationalism, as a homogenizing entity, has made a great contribution to the development of ethnic consciousness and the making of Kurdishness as ‘the other’.” (Aras 2014, 193). In other words, nationalist discourses of the Kurds also reproduce a sense of victimhood in collective identifications. The next paragraphs will focus on highlighting the

⁵ A short-lived, unrecognized Kurdish state (January-December 1946) in present Iran (for more information, see Garapon and Çelik 2021).

⁶ Newroz, the Iranian New Year is celebrated by the Kurds and by numerous other ethnic communities in the Middle East, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Balkans.

⁷ The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) is a militant guerilla movement, designated as a terrorist organization by several states, seeking autonomy for the Kurds in Turkey (for more information, see e.g. Bozarslan 2021).

aspects of diasporic nationalism and show how Kurdish nationalism has been conceptualized, with special regard of how these notions relate to ethnicity and homeland.

Homeland and nationalism in the Kurdish diaspora

Anderson defined the phenomenon of diasporic nationalism as ‘long-distance nationalism’, in which people in exile participate in the financial support and ideological production of nationalist movements in the homeland (Anderson 1998, 73–74). As Anderson points out, the characteristics (and possibly drawbacks or risks) of long-distance nationalism is that the long-distance nationalist can participate in the politics of their homeland without being accountable for their actions in the homeland (as they are not living there, the consequences of their actions do not affect their lives directly, including the judicial system, taxes, elections, etc.). This dynamics, as Anderson argues, has the potential of radicalization (Anderson 1998, 74).

The nationalist dimension of ethnic Kurdishness is shed light on in the discourse about the homeland. According to Anderson, the language of nationalism (he also calls a form of political love), connects the individual to space using kinship metaphors and the notion of home in terms like ‘motherland’, ‘Vaterland’, or ‘heimat’, to just name a few (Anderson 1983, 143). In Brubaker’s perspective, the homeland attachment is so central in the nationalism of diasporic groups that ‘long-distance nationalist’ groups are constructed as diasporas precisely because of their homeland involvement (Brubaker 2005, 2).

Some scholars argue that Kurdish national identity is rooted in the territorial notion of homeland, which is also shaped by a ‘state of statelessness’ (see Toivanen 2021, 58). According to van Bruinessen, the displacement of the Kurds has contributed to the transformation of “Kurdistan” to a political idea (Toivanen 2021, 75). In other words, as Aras explains, Kurdish nationalism, emerging in the context of the marginalization and denial of Kurds in their states of residence, has lead to the development of Kurdish transnationalism (Aras 2014, 194). However, as Birgit Ammann cautions, it is important to be careful when discussing the Kurdish national movement, as it is not ideologically or politically coherent (Ammann 2001, 355).

Scholars working on Kurdish nationalism revealed the relevance of a transnational lens. As Toivanen argues, the Kurdish nation is considered to include the Kurdish regions in four countries in the Middle East (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria), also referred to as “Kurdistan”, and as a fifth element the Kurdish diaspora in the West (Toivanen 2021, 28). Thereby, as Toivanen reminds, van Bruinessen argued that Kurdish nationalism greatly benefited from the

mobilization, lobbying and institutions in the Kurdish diaspora (Toivanen 2021, 97). As a nation divided to minorities in different nation states, the Kurds are considered by many scholars as a transnation (Toivanen 2021, 27).

3.2.3 Synthesis: How Kurdishness is conceptualized in this thesis

After reviewing the anthropological approaches to ethnicity and nationalism, and specifically to Kurdishness, I see Kurdishness as a relational and heterogenous category, which although tied to (self)imposed markers, is always defining itself in interaction with others. My observations draw on the constructivist approaches, which emphasize the larger processes behind ethnic identifications, and the particular historical contexts of diasporic groups. Specifically, I follow Birgit Ammann's call to focus on the process of imagination, which can help connect the self-identified cultural attributions with the larger processes constructing collective identities.

After Barth and Eriksen, I understand ethnicity as the drawing of group boundaries in the interaction with the 'other', and while such self-definitions of groups often entail essentialist and homogenizing characteristics, they have to be understood as relational and situational, constructed by the concrete circumstances and socio-economic and political position of the group. Based on Gellner and Eriksen, I understand nationalism as an ethnic ideology through which the Kurdish transnation is constructed as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983). As a subaltern form of nationalism, Kurdish nationalism is framed in opposition to the dominant others of the nation-states in which the Kurds live as a minority. Furthermore, drawing on scholars who have emphasized the significant role of diasporic communities in the Kurdish nationalist movement(s), I employ Anderson's notion of 'long-distance nationalism' to acknowledge how diasporic communities influence and shape the nation and are involved in the politics of homeland. My thesis posits that Kurdish homeland is (co-)constructed by the imaginaries of diaspora members, thereby both shaping and being shaped by the meanings of Kurdishness. Through the notion of Kurdishness, I examine the ethnic, political and socio-cultural identities performed by my interlocutors.

Some aspects of Kurdishness rooted in the marginalization and denial of the Kurds are only partially visible in my data. As the Chapter 9 "Kurdishness in Photographs" will demonstrate, the method of photo-interviews primarily brought the ascriptive characteristics of Kurdishness in the foreground, such as common cultural heritage, traditional ways of dressing, celebrations,

etc., while leaving little room for highlighting the processes behind the construction of Kurdishness such as the minority-status of the Kurds in their areas of settlement, their socio-political status, and the violent history of marginalization, denial and genocidal processes. The topics of discrimination, marginalization, poverty and racism, experienced by my interlocutors and their parents in the homeland or their current home in Austria were also discussed in my interviews but mainly not in response to the photographs. Rather, these topics emerged in the discussion after the formal part of the interview, often when I had already turned off the voice recorder.

Although both archival collections documented the transformations in Kurdish communities including the aftermath of violent events⁸, my interviewees often focused on the ‘positive’ aspects (homogenizing or essentializing aspects) of Kurdishness that can be read in the photos. I find it crucial to critically investigate how Kurdishness is constructed, and what is the role of the diverse media used for constructions of Kurdishness and imaginaries of Kurdish homeland. Therefore, a third and last theoretical chapter is dedicated to the concepts of imagination, imaginaries and photography before we delve into the empirical material of this study.

3.3 Imagination, Images and Imaginaries

To gain a perspective for analyzing how Kurdishness and Kurdish homeland are constructed, I rely on the notion of ‘imagination’ in the sense of Andersen, an individual yet collective act, with the potential of creating shared worlds. After reviewing the anthropological perspective to imagination, I will focus on photography as a media of imagination, which is being created, circulated, used and reproduced by diasporic actors for constructing Kurdishness and Kurdish homeland.

3.3.1 The imaginative approach

In his influential work about the history of nationalism “Imagined communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism”, Benedict Anderson outlined, what is now common ground in the social sciences, that the national community is something imagined and real at the same time, something produced by collective imagination.

⁸ Unfortunately, this thesis cannot give a detailed overview of the history of Kurdish territories, however, in a later chapter I briefly outline major historical processes including the forced assimilation, persecution and violence on Kurds in the context of the nation-states incorporating the Kurdish settlement areas. Both collections documented Kurdish life in Turkey across the 1980s-1990s, which were characterized by an intensive conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish guerilla forces.

Birgit Ammann traced back the imaginative approach, represented by Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and others, to being grounded in Max Weber's referring to the subjective beliefs of common ancestry (ibid.). Although representatives of the imaginative approach mainly apply the notion of imagination for the nation (Ammann 2001, 49), it can be felt a sense of belonging despite not knowing most of the other members of the community. As Anderson argued, "In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined." (Anderson 1983, 6).

Beyond nationhood, for example, Birgit Ammann explained the role of imagination for ethnic identifications, which I described in more detail in a previous chapter on the notion of ethnicity. Ammann argued that imagination is the process which utilizes cultural content for drawing ethnic boundaries (Ammann 2001, 52).

As Cohen and others argued, not only is the nation imagined as a community but also homeland can be regarded as an imagined place. Moreover, it has been observed that the imagined community and the imagined homeland are closely interrelated. Drawing on Anderson, Galip maintains that "the 'imagined territory of Kurdistan' in nationalist discourse have become one of the unifying elements of the Kurdish imagined community, in both 'homeland' and 'diaspora'" (Galip 2015, 14).

As I argued in a previous chapter, the Kurdish homeland is real yet imagined, consisting of connections to, experiences and memories from real places, mixed with emotional and political discourses, socio-economic dynamics and historical and biographic particularities inscribed in diaspora members' identity. What connects all these aspects, is the process of imagination, which received limited academic attention in the study of diasporic groups and homeland-orientation. In order to gain a deeper understanding, I will examine how imagination has been defined as a concept in anthropology, to then investigate its relation to photography and whether photography can be viewed as a medium of imagination.

3.3.2 Imagination in Mobility Studies

Imagination can be defined as "an ever-changing embodied and creative activity both embedded in and shaping the social and cultural world around" (Cangia' & Zittoun, 2020 quoted by Salazar 2020, 769). Noel B. Salazar also adds that "imagination is a concept indicating a dynamic psychological process" (Salazar 2020, 769).

Thereby, Salazar refers to Paul Ricoeur's four ways of imagination: imagining something that exists but is not there, imagining something that does not exist, imagining something through representing it with something else, and finally, imagining things that are not there as if they really were (illusion) (Ricoeur 1994, quoted in Salazar 2020, 769). With her 'imaginary loop model', Tania Zittoun explores imagination "as a symbolic kind of mobility through distal spheres of experiences, back and forth loops" (Zittoun 2020, quoted in Salazar 2020, 769).

Salazar importantly maintains that we lack a toolbox to study imagination. While there is no way to investigate what people imagine, researchers rely on people's expressions about their imagination (Salazar 2020, 769). Nevertheless, examining the image, the imagined and the imaginary, Arjun Appadurai characterized imagination as a social practice (1996, 31 quoted in Salazar 2020, 770–71). Thus, imagination can be analyzed within transnational social fields (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004), through which ideas are exchanged through intertwined networks and social relationships.

Understanding imagination as a mental process "that produces the reality that simultaneously produces it" (Salazar 2020, 770), scholars defined imaginaries as the products of imagination. According to Salazar, imaginaries are "(...) culturally shared and socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with the personal imagination and are used as meaning-making devices, mediating how people act, cognize and value the world" (Salazar 2020, 770).

Understanding imagination as "(...) an embodied practice of transcending both physical and sociocultural distance" (Salazar 2020, 773), scholars started investigating space and mobility along with the notion of imagination. Drawing on Jackson (2008), Glick Schiller and Salazar maintain that future imaginaries are important for migration as both the imaginaries of the new land, as well as the nostalgic memories of the homeland (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 194). Moreover, another significance of imagination for mobility is in the way governments intend to control not only migration itself but its meaning too (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, 195).

3.3.3 *Mediated imaginaries*

Anderson already scrutinized the role of the newspapers and mobilities connected to schooling and career for people to imagine themselves as part of the nation, as well as the colonial innovations of census, maps and museums, which enabled the state to view its domain as a bounded territorial entity (Anderson 1983). Moreover, Anderson also maintained that telecommunication and visual media help people imagine homeland and construct their identity from "there" (Anderson 1998, 68). Some scholars investigated different media applied for imagining and

constructing Kurdish homeland and Kurdishness. For example, studies by Keles (2014), Candan and Hunger (2008) explore how technological developments reinforced the cultural production of Kurdishness in cyberspace (Eccarius-Kelly 2015, 179).

Cohen mentioned the role of cultural artifacts in holding together the diaspora through shared imagination (Cohen 1996, 516). In the case of the Kurds, De Rouen showed how Kurdish refugees, by arranging their new homes and surrounding themselves with different objects, smells and sounds from the homeland, could inscribe Kurdish identity into their lives (de Rouen 2019, 28).

The monograph “Imagining Kurdistan” by Özlem Belçim Galip examines novelistic imaginaries of the Kurdish homeland. Galip’s starting point is the strong connection between the making of national identity and the creation of literary texts (Galip 2015, 6). Galip maintains that novels from the Kurdish territories of Turkey and novels written in the diaspora differ in their depictions of “Kurdistan” (Galip 2015, 221). In short, novelistic discourse, according to Galip is more ideological in the diaspora than in Turkish “Kurdistan”, which, according to the author confirms Safran’s statement about diasporic communities’ stronger affiliation with the homeland than the host country (Galip 2015, 223–24).

These examples show the importance of media and objects in the process of imagination and construction of homeland in a diasporic setting. My thesis aims to contribute to the emerging literature scrutinizing the role of media, and in my case, especially photography, in Kurdish imaginaries of homeland. The focus on photography intends to examine how this type of particular visual media reflects and shapes diasporan Kurds’ ideas and imaginaries of homeland. Therefore, the last section of this chapter highlights photography as a medium of imagination.

3.3.4 Photography as a medium of imagination

In the context of the Kurds, photography has been used as a method of surveillance and domination for the sometimes-genocidal intentions of oppressor states (see Sekula 2014, 30), while photographs also play a crucial role in the construction of Kurdish national identity. To gain a deeper understanding of the role of photographs in my interviews with Kurdish participants, it is necessary to review anthropological approaches to photography, which among its relevance as a methodological tool of research also became a subject of theoretical inquiries. In the methodological chapter of the thesis, I examine how photography, and especially photo-elicitation, is used as a research method in anthropological inquiries. Here, the focus is on the theoretical

dimension of the relation of anthropology and photography, and more precisely, how photography can function as a medium of imagination for constructing the homeland.

Photography and Anthropology

In the last three decades, an increasing anthropological interest emerged in photographs and photography (Edwards 2015, 235). According to Elisabeth Edwards, “Visualisation has always been entangled with the anthropological” (Edwards 2015, 235). On the one hand, scholars have argued that photography has always been bounded to power relations (Edwards 2015, 240). On the other hand, Edwards added that photography has been also embedded in the “sociability and affect of fieldwork” (ibid). Other approaches focused on photographs as sites of encounters. This section will give a brief review of these anthropological approaches to photography.

Edwards traces back in the long history of the relations between photography and anthropology, that negotiations of the tension between evidence and affect can be observed (Edwards 2015, 236). It is common knowledge that photographs have long been used as ‘evidence’ in anthropology and beyond, leading to a critical debate about their limitations in this respect (see e.g. Edwards 2015, 248). At the same time, Edwards emphasizes the materiality of photographs as “affective objects”, which leads to the understanding that photographs evoke responses which become ‘evidence of affect’ (Edwards 2015, 246).

Visual practices such as photography became the subject of critical inquiries in the 1970-1980s when scholars started to critically engage with anthropological knowledge production (Edwards and Morton 2010, 2). As Céline Cantat recalls Le Boulicaut’s observations, in photography, visual choices are not only aesthetic and technical, but also social and epistemological as emerging from power relations, these choices decide about questions of representation such as what or whom to capture, and how to show, from which perspective and composition (Cantat 2021, 241).

Critical approaches from the 1970s provided a Foucault-inspired analysis of photography, focusing on power, gaze, surveillance and objectification (Edwards and Morton 2010, 2–3). For instance, photography connected to early (colonial) anthropology was evaluated as a form of ‘scientific racism’ and devalued for being artificially staged (Banks and Vokes 2010a, 337).

These Foucauldian voices were criticized for dichotomizing and over-determining power relations and thereby ironically silencing the voices of the anthropological subjects which it intended to empower, portraying them powerless and passive under the colonial gaze (Edwards and Morton 2010, 3). Nevertheless, as Elisabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton argue, these

postcolonial approaches laid the grounds of the anthropological theorizing of photography (ibid). With the publication of the volume *Anthropology and Photography* (1992), a renewed anthropological interest was sparked in ethnographic imagery and archives (Banks and Vokes 2010a, 338)

One of the key connections of anthropology and photography is the archive, where the visual legacy of anthropologists is stored. Marcus Banks and Richard Vokes define the “photographic archive” as “a concept which refers to any set or collection of historical photographs, brought together with some purposeful intent, if only for storage” (Banks and Vokes 2010a, 338). Since the emergence of increasing critical inquiries of anthropological knowledge production, the archive, a place of knowledge production, has received growing theoretical interest, a development also referred to as the “archival turn” (Edwards and Morton 2010, 9) in anthropology.

While archival collections of photographs may be result of anthropological extractivism or state control, they can also become part of the cultural heritage of the source groups. As Allan Sekula points out, this is striking in the case of the Kurds, who “have been photographed repeatedly by the police and military forces of their oppressors” (Sekula 2014, 30), while other photographic collections, such as the work by Susan Meiselas emerged with the aim of contributing to the cultural heritage and the ‘national archive’ of a stateless group (Sekula 2014, 31). While the aim of the first one is to control and register individual members for constructing them as a type (Sekula 2014, 30), the latter approach can be characterized by a “reluctance to allow any one image to stand as a type for other images that were excluded” (Sekula 2014, 31).

Drawing on previous research by Rose (2000) and Edwards and Hart (2004), Edwards and Morton argued that archives are not historically neutral places but places where photographs are “being shaped by the processes and procedures of the institutions that curate them and the researchers who use them (Edwards and Morton 2010, 8).” Thereby, the migration of images in and out of the archive, and their transit between public and private places (see Banks and Vokes 2010a, 338–39) become of crucial importance and decisive for the social and cultural impact of the images. Moreover, archives share with anthropology the epistemological concerns of representation, authority, objectivity and authenticity (ibid).

Therefore, it is not surprising that a new trend in archival practices is the growing concern with reappropriating cultural heritage to indigenous communities. Edwards and Morton referred to studies which provide important insights about indigenous communities’ deal with their (often

colonial) visual legacy in the form of ethnographic photographs. Such studies reveal that indigenous communities are often ‘looking past’ the stereotypical and colonial ways in which their ancestors were portrayed and are rather happy to see images of them (Edwards and Morton 2010, 7). As Edwards and Morton explain, “the varied responses to archives by local communities often lead to the creation of new layers of institutional meaning and organization with respect to the way such photographs are curated” (Edwards and Morton 2010, 10).

The photograph as encounter

Elisabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton observed an increasing anthropological interest in photographs as contested sites of encounter and cultural exchange (Edwards and Morton 2010, 4). While not depoliticizing or denying the political use of photography in colonialism, these approaches focus on the constructive nature of photography, allowing the discussions of “the random inclusiveness (and hence visual excess) of photographic inscription, its fixity of appearance and yet potentially infinite recodability, the instability of photographic meaning, and its temporal and spatial slippages across both its literal and metaphorical border zones” (ibid).

Focusing on the aspect of encounter, Ariella Azoulay maintains, photography does not only capture what is there, but it can also generate events (Azoulay 2011, 70). Moreover, the author explains that photography has a unique form of temporality, as it is made of an infinite series of encounters (Azoulay 2011, 77). As the author describes, the encounter of those present in the situation of photography is inscribed in the photograph (Azoulay 2011, 76). Moreover, “The [later] encounter with the photograph continues the event of photography which happened elsewhere.” (Azoulay 2011, 75).

Thus, Azoulay does not perceive photographs as the products of the finished process of photography, but rather as an additional factor in this process. At the same time, she notes that the process of photography can only be discussed with the accessibility of the photograph (Azoulay 2011, 75). This focus on photographs as sites of encounters is what determines my approach to the photographs viewed and discussed together with my informants.

Photography and Imagination

Susan Sontag quotes Walter Lippmann who wrote in the 1920s that photographs had an authority over people’s imagination at that time, which is comparable to that of the written text before photography emerged and that of the oral word before printing, because they seemed real (Sontag 2003). What gives photography this incredible power over our minds? To explore how photography relates to imagination, and specifically the imagination of homeland, I will

start by reviewing the academic debate on photography and meaning, and explore how it relates to memory and space, which will bring us to my final conclusions.

As Morris-Reich and Olin argued, “imagination plays a role in each and every kind of photographic context” (Morris-Reich and Olin 2019, xiv). That photography and imagination are so deeply intertwined is also shown by Anderson’s metaphoric language of photography⁹ (1998) used for describing imaginaries of nativeness or nationhood. But to give a more obvious example, according to Wikipedia, the English term ‘imagination’ comes originally from the Latin ‘imaginatio’, which can be translated as ‘mental image’ (“Imagination” 2024).

In the 1990s through what was coined as the ‘iconic turn’ (Gottfried Boehm), the ‘pictorial turn’ (William Mitchell) and increasingly referred to as the ‘visual turn’, scholars explored the capacity of images to capture meanings that cannot be transmitted by words (Desille and Nikielska-Sekula 2021, 1). Drawing on Moxey (2008), Karolina Nikielska-Sekula and Amandine Desille write that images can not only be transmitters but also producers of knowledge, which they can produce independently or even against language (ibid).

Quoting Trachtenberg, Edwards and Morton highlight the uncertain relation of images to meaning, for “[...] images cannot be readily trapped within a single explanation or interpretation. They have a life of their own [...] ” (1989, xv, quoted in Edwards and Morton 2010, 7 quote modified). At the same time, Cantat remarks that photographs need language for interpretation, as they can be made sense of within broader political narratives (Cantat 2021, 241). Nevertheless, there are several factors which determine the way we make meaning of photography, from which I will highlight two that are relevant for my thesis.

Firstly, as several studies demonstrated, photography captures the passing of time and therefore invoke memory in their viewing (Banks and Vokes 2010a, 341). As Schwartz and Morton formulated the essence of it, “photographs made the past a palpable part of the present” (Schwartz and Ryan 2003, 5). In this sense, photographs can be explored as media of remembering and imagining the past. Several studies within and outside of anthropology inquired about this capacity of photographs.

⁹ E.g. see the following quotes: “The photographic negative of “the colonial,” the non-English Englishwoman, was coming into view.” (1988, 61); “For the native is, like colonial and creole, a white-on-black negative.” (1988, 62); or „From the perspective sketched out so far, one might be inclined to view the rise of nationalist movements and their variable culminations in successful nation-states as a project for coming home from exile, for the resolution of hybridity, for a positive printed from a negative in the darkroom of political struggle.” (Anderson 1998, 64).

The research of Marianne Hirsch reveals photography as a medium of memory or the transgenerational transmission of trauma (Hirsch and Spitzer 2009; Hirsch 2008). Hirsch examines the potential of photography to help imagine the unimaginable in her research on ‘postmemories’ and postgenerations of the Holocaust. “Photography’s promise to offer an access to the event itself, and its easy assumption of iconic and symbolic power, makes it a uniquely powerful medium for the transmission of events that remain unimaginable” (Hirsch 2008, 107–8).

Secondly, as a visual medium, photography can be sensed and made sense of through the act of seeing. Cantat summarizes John Berger’s views, as follows “[...] ‘seeing’ is a situated act, and a historically constructed process. When and where we “see” something will impact on what we see and how we interpret it.” (Berger 1972, quoted in Cantat 2021, 241). In the discipline of geography, the cultural and the visual turns allowed the emergence of studies which “investigated the ‘ways of seeing’ that structure and represent geographical practices, languages and ideas” (Schwartz and Ryan 2003, 3).

Photography and place

The concept of landscape was investigated as a ‘way of seeing’, which encompasses “multiple articulations of cultural memory and identity” (Schwartz and Ryan 2003, 3). While the visualization of landscape emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and developed various forms from painting to map-making, and literature, photography received increasing critical concern in its historical and cultural role as a media of representing people and place (Schwartz and Ryan 2003, 3–4). I already introduced research by scholars emphasizing the role of visual media in the construction of national identity (see e.g. Anderson 1998, 68). Now, after discussing the complex relationship of photography with meaning and imagination, I would like to expand on this debate by introducing research about nationalist use and discourse of photography, and landscape photography in particular.

Indeed, as Schwartz and Ryan explain, photography can be used for the construction of “symbolic landscapes of national identity, cultural difference and imperial order” (Schwartz and Ryan 2003, 5). Scholars have examined photography’s role in the construction of national identity and other kinds of ‘geographic imagination’ (see e.g. Schwartz 2009). Jens Jäger argued that the importance of landscape photographs for national identity lie in the fact that nationalist discourses attributed landscapes a representational power for the national character of the land and its inhabitants, based on the assumption that the physical environment shaped the character of its inhabitants (Jäger 2003, 117).

The invention of photography in 1839 shaped the representational character of landscape images for national identity in important ways, which are clearly articulated by Jens Jäger's research in the German and British contexts. In contrast to paintings, photographs were viewed as true copies and as such better suited for representing the national character of the landscape (Jäger 2003, 121–22). Moreover, as photographs became cheaper in the second half of the 19th century (Jäger 2003, 122), they became more accessible and therefore a more widespread medium of depicting landscape and involving it in popular national discourses.

Nevertheless, landscapes were not universally the most popular national symbols appearing on photographs. As Jäger describes in detail, in Germany, landscape photography acquired national importance much later than in Britain. Instead, in Germany, portrait photography was much more connected to national identity in the early decades of photography (Jäger 2003, 139).

Thus, photography can not only capture the passing of time, but also space. It can not only help us imagine what is not there anymore, but also what is not *there*. If we understand imagination as a symbolic kind of mobility in time and space, a photograph as a medium of imagination can bring us to distant times and places. Therefore, photographs can encompass the spatial and temporal dimensions of the imaginary construction of homeland, which is bound to 'geographical imaginations' as much as it evokes memories of and reflections on the past.

3.3.5 *Synthesis: photography as a medium of imagination*

Inspired by Elisabeth Edwards, I am exploring photographs in this thesis with respect to their dual relevance as "evidence and affect", that is, while investigating photographs in the archive as anthropological evidence of historical relevance, I am equally interested, if not even more, in their affective and imaginative dimensions which are shed light on by the perspectives of viewers from the 'source communities' and their descendants.

Therefore, I draw on Azoulay's notion of the encounter, to explore my interlocutors' perspectives on and interactions with the photographs and contextualize it within the *event* of photography, that is, within a series of infinite encounters, following the original encounter, emergence of the photograph. This perspective allows me to investigate photographs as a medium of imagination, encompassing multiple meanings through their ability to bring distant times and places closer and therefore evoke dreams and memories.

Although studies have shown the relevance of photography for national imagination in the case of both portraits and landscape photos in the German and British contexts (see Jäger 2003), it has not been sufficiently investigated how photography shapes homeland imaginaries in stateless diasporas, where the notion of homeland is deeply intertwined with feelings of loss and displacement.

3.4 Chapter Conclusions: The Imagination of Homeland Shaped by Affective Encounters in Photographs

This chapter started with Benedict Andersen's argument about the imaginary nature of communities, to scrutinize the academic debate about the role of process of imagination in the construction of homeland, a central part of ethnic and national identities. Understanding imagination as a social practice (Appadurai 1996, quoted in Salazar 2020, 770-71), and as a kind of symbolic mobility (Zittoun 2020, quoted in Salazar 2020, 769), I believe that paying attention to the practice of imagination is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of diasporic processes of identity making and homeland relations.

While scholars emphasized the role of visual media such as photography in these processes of imagination, as I outlined, in the Kurdish context, homeland imaginaries were examined in the form of literary texts, but there is no detailed analysis of photographs capacity to represent Kurdish homeland. My thesis aims to enrich the debate about Kurdish homeland with this visual perspective resulting from photo-interviews. I approach diasporan Kurds' concepts of homeland as a set of imaginaries created and shared through transnational social networks and relationships, while also shaping these networks and movements, as well as individuals' collective social and political identifications.

Many scholars working on photography analyzed the power dynamics embedded in the practice of photography and focused on photography as a tool of surveillance and power. While I take these approaches seriously, I am inspired by newer approaches which highlight the potential of photographs and photographic archives for reworking the cultural heritage of source families through participative methods. Following Azoulay and others, I understand photographs as results of a series of encounters and thereby as continuities of the same process in which the initial encounter of the photography took place. Thereby, I perceive the photo-interviews conducted with my interlocutors as part of this process of photography, which is therefore inextricably tied to the encounter of creation of the photographs.

I understand my data emerging from these photo-interviews as responses to photographs, responses which become ‘evidence of affect’, as Edwards called it (2015, 240). For this reason, I am carefully considering the affective dimension of my interviewees’ narratives and approach the imaginaries of homeland we discussed as they circulate in ‘affective economies’ (Ahmed 2004).

I understand photography both as a form of visual representation, often embedded in asymmetrical power relations, and as an event and an encounter that enables the production of meanings and imaginaries. Based on Berger’s (1972) concept of seeing, I emphasize the relevance of the interview situation and how it influenced my informants’ ways of interpreting the photos, which, in turn, shaped the imaginaries of homeland they shared with me. For example, presenting photographs as part of two archival collections likely influenced their perception of each individual photograph.

Finally, photographs, by virtue of their ability to make distant times and places intellectually and visually accessible, can evoke a range of associations and emotions that fuel our imagination of the depicted places and times. Inspired by studies that explore the unique qualities of photograph – such as its association with truthfulness, while also being open for diverse interpretations, and its capacity to facilitate symbolic mobility in time and space – I analyze the narratives, imaginaries and associations of homeland shared with me by my interlocutors as deeply emerging from the special characteristics of photography and the historical contexts of the two archival photographic collections encompassing the photographs evaluated by the research partners. Working with individuals from the second generation of diaspora, I record encounters with a lost homeland remembered from childhood memories and narratives of family members, but as my analysis will show, through these encounters, the photographs will incorporate into rich and lively imaginative homeland ties, thereby connecting to a large economy of circulating media and ideas.

4 Methods

This thesis is the result of an almost 2 years long involvement with different spaces of Kurdish diasporic communities as well as academic and artistic spaces connected to Kurdish diasporas in Vienna. My research focuses on the work with photographic documentations, joining an increasing anthropological interest in photographs and photography (Edwards 2015, 235). In response to Karolina Nikielska-Sekula and Amandine Desille's observation that images have been mainly analyzed as harmful representations of migrants and that reflections are needed on how to do ethical research with visual material, exploring both methodological and theoretical dimensions of the visual approach (Nikielska-Sekula and Desille 2021, 2).

Through the methods of participant observation and observing participation, photo-interviewing and group-photo elicitation, as well as literature research, and the curation and analysis of images, I follow the methodological principles of observation, participation, and (opening the self to) visual impression.

In the first part of the chapter, I will introduce the fieldwork process with a detailed description of my field visits and the methods of participant observation and observant participation. In the second chapter, I will report of interviews conducted for this thesis. These will be followed by brief descriptions and considerations of the analysis and data security-related issues. I will conclude the methodological part with personal reflections on my position in the field, as well as the possible advantages and limitations of the employed methods.

4.1 *Fieldwork*

Many influential scholars argued that fieldwork is the defining characteristics of anthropological research (Amit 1999, 1). As Fontein noted, ethnographic fieldwork today involves a large variety of methods and concepts among which participant observation, interviews and eventually visual methods are central (Fontein 2013, 58). A metaphoric description often used to explain fieldwork is 'deep hanging out' (Fontein 2013, 59).

In contrast to classical fieldwork, in which the researcher is expected to leave its ordinary place (Amit 1999, 2), I conducted my research in Vienna. Nevertheless, it can neither be called a 'fieldwork at home', as I moved here as an adult instead of being brought up in the city.

4.1.1 *ZOZAN - Investigations on Mobility through Multimedia Documentations, Art Interventions, Art-based Research and (Re)presentations*

I gained access to the field of the Kurdish diaspora in Vienna through my employment in the FWF-founded research project *ZOZAN - Investigations on mobility through multimedia documentations, art interventions, art-based research and (re)presentations* lead by Maria Six-Hohenbalken at the Institute of Social Anthropology (ISA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. This project is based on Mehmet Emir's and Werner Finke's multimedia documentations of Kurdish everyday life in Turkey, employing participatory and art-based methods, involving Kurdish communities in Austria, Turkey, France, Germany and the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan Iraq. The research team of ZOZAN organized eight arts-based interventions with Kurdish and non-Kurdish artists and participants. These workshops involved the presentation of a curated selection of the archives of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke, group discussions and artistic engagement and creative work based on the viewed materials and the topics which emerged in the group discussions.

Through the research network of ZOZAN, and following the snowball-principle, I gained access to most of my interlocutors. I have conducted fieldwork in three art-based workshops held in Vienna, which lasted from one weekend to a regular university semester class. During my employment at the Institute for Social Anthropology, I had the opportunity to gain further insights while accompanying the ZOZAN project to art-based workshops with the local Kurdish communities in other parts of Austria or abroad.

As a student collaborator in the ZOZAN team, I attended and helped organize three art-based workshops with participants from the Kurdish diaspora of Vienna and several others elsewhere. These workshops were based on the two large multi-media collections at ZOZAN: the ethnographic photographs, films, and objects collected by the Austrian anthropologist Werner Finke, and the photographs and films by the Kurdish artist Mehmet Emir. My employment at the ISA thus also allowed me to have access to the photographic materials I used for my research, which will be further discussed below. For all workshops organized by ZOZAN, a Kurdish or non-Kurdish artist was asked to lead an artistic intervention based on the collections in a group of Kurdish and non-Kurdish participants. I conducted participant observation, or observing participation in these workshops for my master's thesis.

The workshops were very well-documented, photos, audiotapes and videos were made of the participants. My interactions and contributions are thus recorded as research data in the ZOZAN project. Not being used to the camera presence, I often felt slightly nervous about being recorded. I imagine that many participants felt that way too, despite having agreed to the

film recording. Moreover, I was often taking fieldnotes in the workshops, thus contributing to the data collection process of the project beyond my own research for the master thesis.

Most of the participants at the workshops, as well as my interviewees, are educated adults between 25 and 60 years old. One of the workshop participants was the first person I interviewed, and she shared the contact of two further interviewees with me. Through these new connections, further people were introduced to me whom I could interview.

The art-based workshops in which I carried out participant observation, or observant participation, were mainly held in English or German language. Nevertheless, other languages, such as Kurdish Kurmancî, Zazaki, or Turkish were also present in the workshops. Besides the ZOZAN arts-based workshops, I attended two language courses at the Kurdish Culture Institute Vienna in Northern Kurdish (Kurmancî) A1 and A2, to acquire some language skills in at least one of the Kurdish dialects. I also participated in some of the Kurdish cultural events taking place in Vienna during the course of my research.

4.1.2 Participation and Observation in Art-based Workshops

When conducting participant observation and observant participation in the ZOZAN art-based workshops, I aimed to find out about general reactions in the Kurdish diaspora about the aforementioned two collections. My participant observations focused mainly on detecting important themes that are discussed by Kurdish participants when seeing these photographs. Moreover, the workshops provided me with the first contacts for conducting interviews on the topic of homeland.

Generally, my field visits were in institutional settings with members of the Kurdish diaspora who specifically wanted to get to know the two collections. Given the interactive design of the arts-based workshops, my role often switched from participant observation to observant participation, creating more flexible and also more complicated field dynamics, which I will reveal after briefly explaining the distinction between the two modes of “the awkward union of participation and observation” (Seim 2024, 122) in the field.

Participant observation and observant participation

Although participant observation became the main method of anthropological research after Malinowski, scholars pointed out that there is a tension between participation and observation (Seim 2024, 122), in which the researcher has to balance between the limitations of remaining an outside observer and the dangers of ‘going native’. As Fontein pointed out, one can never

either only participate or just observe, because we participate “in order to observe” (Fontein 2013, 75).

Whether choosing the role of the participant observer or the observant participator impacts on the sensory perception of the researcher in the field also influences the ways of collecting and interpreting the data. In contrast to participant observation, observant participation “[...] calls for a deeper involvement in the field and seeks to push the ethnographer a bit closer to the dream (or nightmare) of “going native”. Unlike the participant observer, who tends to invent a new and somewhat transient role as a hang around, the observant participator is more likely to occupy and enact the preexisting role in the field” (Seim 2024, 123).

Observant participation thus enables a more involved role in the field, or a kind of deepening of fieldwork, increased exposure to concealed activities and conversation and increased sensitivity to processes of embodiment (Seim 2024, 125). In the workshops, I often co-created artworks with Kurdish diaspora members based on the two archives. This helped me better understand the participants’ considerations when thinking about the two archives and possible modes of representation. Furthermore, participating in the workshops in this way allowed me to follow the deeply emotional and embodied process of reflecting on the photos and connecting them to one’s own life, and it pushed me to reflect on my own relation to the photographs and my positionality in the field. On the other hand, when staying in the role of the participant observer, I had more distance to the activities in the field, which allowed me to document the scenes better and reflect on the situation from a more analytic point of view. I will demonstrate this in the following section, in which I give a detailed description of the workshops.

Because of the ZOZAN project, its hosting institution, the Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA) often became a site for collaboration with and events in the Kurdish diaspora(s). Some of the workshops involved ISA as a place for the event, on several occasions research partners of ZOZAN such as the artists involved in workshops, community members, or people acquainted with or even related to the communities documented by Werner Finke came to the institute. As the place of storing this living archive, ISA affected the processes of Kurdish memory and identity work investigated by ZOZAN.

ZOZAN art-based workshops and other diasporic spaces

The first workshop (Art Intervention 1) was held by the Austrian artist Lisl Ponger on two weekends between the 20.-29. May 2022 in German language. The workshop involved twelve

participants, including me and another young colleague at the ZOZAN project (see Six-Hohenbalken et al. 2022b). The participants originate from different Kurdish regions and their ages varied between 25 and 65 years. The two multimedia collections were the starting point of the group discussions moderated by the artist with an associative research method. This meant that through collecting associations in a group discussion, main themes were defined, which then enabled the participants to work out and negotiate shared forms of representation, joined in a communal artwork.

These discussions centered around the themes of changes in the Kurdish regions of origin connected to different forms of migration. The participants discussed environmental challenges and political violence in the Kurdish regions, as well as Kurdish dialects and identity and the use of Kurdish symbols in public. The participants did not agree with all the questions. For example, the Kurdish situation in Iran was often compared with that in Turkey, involving many different experiences.

In the first part of the workshop, I remained in the role of a participant observer, mainly documenting the participants' interactions with fieldnotes, and not, or just minimally involving myself in the debate. This allowed me to observe participants' reactions to the archival collections, and the debate, their negotiation of multiple positions and identifications for a shared representation of Kurdishness.

The artist asked the participants to bring objects, photographs, etc. from their homes that they would want to include in the communal artwork. As a form of representation for these issues, Ponger suggested the creation of postal stamps which referred to the collections of Finke and Emir, as well as the personal objects and photographs of participants, while aiming to represent the central themes of discussion. In the second weekend, the group joined their personal objects, curated photos from the archives, and created small artworks such as paintings and scans of different objects as a basis for the final artwork. For the four sheets of stamps, the group designed one from a selection of photographs in the Finke collection, another from a selection of photographs from the Emir collection, and two from their memories in the form of photographs, scanned objects, and artworks.

My role switched in this second part to that of an observing participant, as I helped scanning objects, creating paintings and selecting photographs for the final artwork. As a non-Kurdish member of the group, I felt especially self-conscious about my words and actions, trying to be somehow useful for the group, while still trying to stay in the background.

The second workshop (art intervention 3) took place on the weekend of 18-20 November 2022 under the leadership of the Kurdish artist Rojda Tuğrul (see Six-Hohenbalken et al. 2022a). The first day of the workshop was held in Volkskundemuseum. It was in a large and cold room, we formed a circle of chairs for the participants. We were five participants, which felt like a very small group, especially in the large room. We were a young group, all between 24-45 years. Another similarity is that all participants studied or study something, and we all spoke fluent English, which was the language of the workshop for the whole time. I knew two (non-Kurdish) participants already and met the two Kurdish participants for the first time. Also, the artist might have already known the Kurdish participants, so the atmosphere in the group was intimate from the beginning.

Before the workshop, the participants were asked to choose two photos from the archives and preset in the first meeting what struck them about the photographs. After viewing a selection of photographs from the two collections, everyone had to show the pictures they had chosen and explain to the group what their associations were. We shared personal, in many cases emotional associations with the photos. The second day was held at the Institute for Social Anthropology, the base of the ZOZAN project. Originally a walk in the mountains of Lower Austria was planned for this day, but due to weather conditions, the activities were moved inside. On this day more people joined (9 participants), but still mainly young adults. The program consisted of different drawing exercises that were to complicate or reshape our thinking about place or homeland.

Based on the concepts of “On Touching” and “Re-animating” Rojda Tuğrul invited the participants to explore the two multimedia collections through drawing, writing, listening, and recording exercises (Tuğrul in Six-Hohenbalken et al. 2022a). The first concept focused on Werner Finke’s experiences in the Kurdish mountains, while the latter concerned Mehmet Emir’s documentation of his village. In the first exercise, the participants were asked to draw a landscape from their minds. In the second one, we had to draw with our non-dominant hand an absent object held in our other hand. Third, we drew selected objects such as pieces of cloth from the Finke collection. In the final session, a narrative was created by the drawings, and the participants’ narrations were recorded.

In this second workshop, my participation was almost limited to that of an observing participant, not only actively creating my own artworks, but I also shared many feelings and associations about the photographs of Finke and Emir. This more intensive participation and opening up in the field was very challenging, because on the one hand, I felt that I need to share my

thoughts and participate in the intimate discussions initiated by the artist, on the other hand, I was not sure how much space I can and should take with my own personal stories and feelings as a non-Kurdish member of the group. As we were talking about the experience of migration and loss, I could personally relate to much of the conversations and other participants' narratives and associations to the photographs. This caused ambivalent feelings of relating yet not belonging.

The third workshop (Art Intervention 5) was held at the Academy of Fine Arts in the framework of the seminar "Photography 4" led by Thomas Freiler in the summer semester of 2023 (see Six-Hohenbalken et al. 2023). The seminar was held in German, although it was switched to English from time to time. The course focused on analyzing existing photo collections. Using the multimedia collections of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir, the course covered archiving, digitization, and the potential for creating artistic projects from these collections. Participants also explored personal approaches and connections to archives, ultimately creating their own artworks.

In discussing the archives, the five students (one Kurdish and four Austrian) critically engaged with the question of representation. They formulated the following questions: Who has the right to talk about Others? Can a non-Kurdish person make an artistic contribution to a Kurdish topic? How is it possible to involve the perspective of Kurds? In the course of the seminar, the students decided besides their individual artistic contributions to organize a collective project with the leadership of a Kurdish student and the involvement of the Kurdish diaspora in Vienna. The photographic documentation of life on the summer pasture inspired the group to plan a butter-making workshop, as a reactivation of traditional knowledge in the diaspora.

I attended most of the classes, especially at the beginning of the seminar. As a team member of ZOZAN, I could provide information about the project, the ethnographer Werner Finke, or the content of the photographs. I also provided a reading list about the Kurds to the students and shared academic and cultural events concerning the Kurdish topic with them. My role in the seminar was ambivalent. On the one hand, I was attending the class among the students and learning new things about photography and archives from an artistic perspective. On the other hand, as someone working on the project, I could provide information, but I was also observing the process, collecting information for the ZOZAN team. It was a delicate situation in which I had to take care of a fine balance between these roles. Towards the end of the semester, after the students started to plan their projects, I stopped attending the seminar, as I could also not be of any help anymore.

For consistency, I will refer to the workshops as the first, second, and third workshops. The workshops started all with the group viewing a selection of photographs by Finke and Emir, the selection was made by the ZOZAN team. During or after the viewing of the photographs, usually, the artist leads a conversation among the participants on the collections. In this situation, the research team was observing or participating in the conversation, but the leadership was in the hands of the artist. In this, the art-based workshops differed from a usual group-photo-elicitation, in which the anthropologist would ask the questions.

I attended the workshops as a member of the ZOZAN team, with my role varying between a participant observer and an observing participant. As a student collaborator, I supported the ZOZAN team in the preparations of the workshops by gathering materials such as printing information about the project or collecting important materials from the Werner Finke collections such as photographs, drawings, etc. for the artists. I also joined a biographical interview with one of the artists, helped prepare posters, or cooked coffee for the participants. While I was helping the research team in setting up things for the workshop and documenting it, I also participated in all the discussions, artistic processes, and group interviews.

While the ZOZAN project investigates the broader issues of creative processes of artistic engagement connected to Kurdish mobilities and transformations in diasporic settings (involving Vienna, Bregenz, Hamburg, etc.) I realized that the insights of these workshops could also be useful for my own research interest in the theme of homeland, relating to memory, identity, and place. It struck me in the workshops how the photographs of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke affected the participants and inspired vivid discussions of Kurdish history, identity, and traditions, involving family histories, narratives of dispossession and displacement, or the agricultural technologies of the pastoralists.

I decided to focus on the concept of homeland when observing the interaction of workshop participants with the photographs of Finke and Emir. What is this imagined Kurdish space created and negotiated by the participants in the workshop? My thesis limits itself to analyzing the perspectives of second-generation Kurds in Vienna, instead of involving all the diaspora(s). However, when viewing my fieldnotes, I realized that it is difficult to differentiate the ideas of second-generation migrants from those of first generation, based on this material.

Generally, the number of first-generation participants significantly exceeded that of the second generation in the workshops. I suggest that the lower participation rates of second-generation Kurds from their less direct ties to their Kurdish homelands, in contrast to those having been

brought up in Kurdish areas more human contacts and more vivid memories from there. However, this does not mean that those of the second generation do not connect to their homeland, rather the way they connect requires further exploration. Indeed, the generational differences observed in the workshops seem to deserve further attention in the analysis that will build up on the workshops.

4.1.3 Photo-Interviews

This chapter introduces the photo-interviews conducted for this research, which are the main focus of my analysis. The first section introduces the method of photo-elicitation or photo-interviewing as it is discussed in the anthropological debate in terms of its relevance, benefits and limitations to anthropological research. In the second section, I will demonstrate how I used this method for my research and give a short introduction about each of the interviews I took.

The method of photo-elicitation

Photographs are seen in my research as tools and objects of research at the same time. On the one hand, I will use them as visual tools to explore the concept of homeland through evoking imaginations. On the other hand, I aim to contribute to the ongoing research about the audio-visual collections of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke, while giving voice to my interlocutors' interpretations. As Edwards and Morton maintained, "the varied responses to archives by local communities often lead to the creation of new layers of institutional meaning and organization with respect to the way such photographs are curated." (Edwards and Morton 2010, 10). Therefore, the photographs are not only research tools, but indeed subjects of research, which we explored together with my interlocutors.

In this chapter, I am interested in the potential and limitations of photographs as devices of anthropological research. Visual methods have been enjoying increasing popularity in anthropological research in recent decades. The previous experiences and results achieved by employing visual methods inspired me to work with archival photographs.

This thesis heavily relies on the research of photo-elicitation or photo-interviewing, which has been exercised in group settings and individual interviews. "Photo-elicitation involves using photographs to invoke comments, memory and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview" (Banks 2001, 87), as well as to learn about the visual media itself from the specific knowledge of the informants (Collier and Collier 1986, 104).

The method of photo-elicitation was introduced by John Collier in 1957 (Vila 2013, 51) and has been widely used in the social sciences since then. Researchers reported several advantages of this method, including that it reduces the hierarchy between researcher and informant (Vila 2013, 52), allowing a collaboration between researcher and informant in which the informant can take the role of an expert instead of research subject (Collier and Collier 1986, 105–6). In the group settings of the arts-based workshops, as I noticed, this kind of hierarchy was even more reduced when I was participating in the photo-elicitation sessions and interviews among the research participants.

As John Collier and Malcolm Collier (1986) pointed out, photographs help overcome the awkwardness of the interview situation, as “the informants are relieved of the stress of being the *subject* of the interrogation” and allowed to be in the role of an expert, and telling their stories spontaneously instead (italics in original Collier and Collier 1986, 106). Moreover, photo-elicitation, as Collier and Collier argue, makes the taking of notes by the researcher less uncomfortable (Collier and Collier 1986, 107).

According to Harper, images evoke deeper elements of the consciousness (Harper 2002 cited in Vila 2013, 52). Researchers working with the method claim that photographs can evoke and sharpen the memory (Collier and Collier 1986, 106; Banks 2001, 88). Specifically, the method of photo-elicitation has been used in several studies of social memory (see Banks 2001).

In the practice of photo-elicitation, Marcus Banks differentiates between researchers using photos taken by themselves and researchers using photographs taken by others, possibly decades ago (Banks 2001, 88). In the latter case, in which this study also situates itself, Banks points out the importance of the informants’ connection to the photographs. In this case, working with two archival collections, the participants were able to connect to the photos by the migration history in their families from the Kurdish territories where the photographs were taken.

Another differentiation of photo-elicitation method was made by Collier and Collier between individual and group interviewing, producing differences in the emotional association and factual responses of the participants (Collier and Collier 1986, 104). This research includes both forms of interviewing. Individual semi-structured photo-interviews will include a selection of 30 photos shown to participants in the same order. The selection will be based on the thematic focus of my research, aiming to choose photos depicting different aspects of Kurdish homeland.

The interviews

For this thesis, I conducted photo-interviews with seven individuals: five one-on-one interviews (including one online interview) and one double interview, each recorded between 35-90 minutes, between October 2023 and January 2024. I conducted all interviews in German language and added my English translations for them (for an overview of the interviews, see Table 1 “Interview participants”).

I recruited research participants of the second generation, as I am specifically interested in the homeland imaginations of those who grew up in Austria. In contrast to others (e.g. Osztovcics 2013) who define the second generation strictly through people who were born in Austria, I had a more inclusive approach, encompassing also individuals who arrived here as children. While looking for interlocutors, I noted that beyond all the cultural diversity I can expect in the sample –as Vienna’s Kurds come from different national, linguistic and religious contexts– they might also belong to different age groups due to several waves of Kurdish migration.

For the photo-interviews, I printed 30 photographs, of which I selected 15 photos from the Werner Finke collection and the artist Mehmet Emir selected 15 photos from his own archive on the theme of homeland. In making the selection, I chose photos that involve different aspects of everyday life in the Kurdish regions, such as peripatetic migration, agricultural work and animal husbandry, handicrafts and other types of work, festivities, music and dance, traditional attire and everyday clothing, people from different age groups, cities, villages and summer pastures, landscapes, etc. Beyond this, I tried to make a selection that includes different formal features, such as black-and white and color photographs, different camera angles, upright, and landscape format. The selection by Mehmet Emir was mainly met by association, that is, he selected photos that reminded him of homeland. A later chapter will explore his selection and associations.

I first interviewed Roza¹⁰ in October 2023, a young woman in her 30s whom I met in one of the ZOZAN art-based workshops in 2022. Roza, who studied law and is building a successful career, came to Austria as a child from the Kurdish regions in Southern Turkey. We met in the evening in a Viennese café of her choice where we had hot drinks and Sacher Torte. The recording of the interview took 36 minutes, however our conversation continued after turning off the recorder, adding important aspects to the discussion.

¹⁰ Except for Mehmet Emir, who specifically wished to be named, the names of all of my interviewees have been changed.

For a second interview, I met Firat also in October 2023, a young man in his twenties. We met at the university where Firat studies. I met Firat in different contexts of the Viennese Kurdish diaspora(s), and he also participated in one of the ZOZAN workshops. The interview took 1 hour and 22 minutes of recording in one of his breaks between lectures and other.

Third, I interviewed Çewlîg in November 2023, a young man in his 20s in one of the Kurdish organizations in Vienna. I met him through a shared acquaintance. Çewlîg told me that his family originates from Dersim/Tunceli, but he already grew up in Vienna. When I entered the organization, I did not know how to recognize him. When I saw people and asked them about him, they showed me to a café and seated me next to an elderly lady. As Çewlîg told me that he might bring a female friend to the interview, I thought that the lady was the friend and started a conversation with her. Also, many people came to me and asked who I was and helped me to find Çewlîg. Later, when he arrived, it turned out that the lady was not his friend, and the two of us went to an office room to record the interview. The recording of the interview took 42 minutes. It was followed by a longer informal conversation.

I conducted the fourth interview with the artist Mehmet Emir in December 2023, the recorded interview took 37 minutes. We agreed with the artist that unlike other participants, I will use his own name when referring to his statements. In this interview, I asked Mehmet Emir about the selection he made for me from his own photographs based on the concept of homeland.

The fifth interview took place online in a Zoom call with Ehmed, a student in his twenties whom I met in a Kurdish language course. Ehmed's family has roots in Rojava, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. The interview was recorded in video and took about 60 minutes. It was different from the previous ones as I could not show the photographs in the same way online as I did in my previous interviews. Thus, Ehmed could see only one photograph at once and had less time to observe each photograph and less opportunity to go back to previously seen images. Nevertheless, I was trying to give him the opportunity to compare the photographs by showing him all the photos a second time after having discussed them.

The interviews number 6 and 7 were conducted in a joint session, according to the preference of my interviewees. Serhat and Dilovan are friends whom I met through another informant. I recorded 60 minutes in our interview. This interview was special for me, as I could observe how my two informants whose origins are in different parts of the Kurdish regions, discuss and

negotiate the photographs. In this double interview, my questions played a smaller role in structuring the conversation, as the two participants also had many questions for each other about the photos.

For the interviews, I took A4 prints of the selected 30 photographs which were the basis of the interviews. I asked my interlocutors to choose some of the photographs which trigger any associations or memories of homeland in them. I also reminded them that it is perfectly fine to not choose any of the photographs as well, in case they do not meet their expectations. Interestingly, Roza and Firat decided to look through all photographs and talk about most of them. I also asked them to choose any number of photos which best represent homeland for them, if any at all.

I found it striking that most of my interviewees reacted to the photo-interviews by showing me photographs of their regions of origin and their family members, to prove the similarities with the images of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir.

Table 1, Interview participants

Interview	Participant	Age	Occupation	Gender	Decade when parents came to Vienna	Place of origin
Interview 1. 23.10.2023	Roza (pseudonym)	30-40	Lawyer	Female	?	South-East Turkey
Interview 2. 25.10.2023	Firat (pseudonym)	20-30	Student	Male	He came as a child without the parents	Armenia
Interview 3. 14.11.2023	Çewlîg (pseudonym)	20-30	Cook	Male	1980s	Turkey, Der-sim / Tunceli
Interview 4. 11.12.2023	Mehmet Emir ¹¹	50-60	Photographer, artist	Male	1960s	Turkey, Der-sim / Tunceli

¹¹ Mehmet Emir did not wish to use a pseudonym.

Interview 5. 21.01.2024	Ehmed (pseudonym)	20-30	Student	Male	1990s- 2000s	Autonomous Administra- tion of North and East Syria (Ro- java)
Interview 6-7. 23.01.2024	Serhat (pseudonym)	30-40	Works at the airport	Male	?	Turkey
	Dilovan (pseudonym)	30-40	Works at construc- tion sites	Male	80-90s	Turkey

I suggest that the ethnic and religious backgrounds, national context (from which part of “Kurdistan”), as well as the social, economic and political backgrounds of the interlocutors notably influenced their way of imagining homeland.

4.2 Processing the Data

4.2.1 Analysis

Using the open-coding software MAXQDA allowed me to structure, view and analyze my written, visual and audio-visual data at one place. This includes not only my field notes and interview transcripts, but also the audio files of the recorded interviews, as well as the JPEG files of the images I used for the photo-interviews, and finally the video recordings from the online interview I conducted with ZOOM. This was especially useful to later connect coded segments of various types of data.

The main function of MAXQDA that supported the analysis was the creation of codes. I developed the codes partially according to grounded theory, based on the data itself. The other part of the codes resulted from a thematic list of terms which also guided my selection of the photographs for the interview. In the process of coding, I connected and merged terms from the two lists.

4.2.2 Data Security and the Use of AI

This chapter will briefly describe the measures taken for keeping the data safe and protecting the identities and personal information of the research participants. This includes storing and using the data. In the second part, I will introduce how I used AI-generated tools to aid the writing-up of this thesis.

The storing and use of the data

Protecting the identity and personal data of my interlocutors was an important part of my considerations for designing the research process including the data collection and preservation. The empirical data collected was partially saved in the Cloud Service of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and partially on private hard disks.

As my fieldwork in the arts-based workshops was part of the larger research in ZOZAN, I did not collect the consent of the research partners separately for my thesis. I am referring here to the workshop participants in a completely anonymized form. This means that I do not include any personal information, based on which they could be identified. Unlike the interviewees, to whom I refer using pseudonyms, when describing the workshops, I only mention participants in terms of their gender and diasporic generation, e.g., female workshop participant of second generation.

Regarding the collections of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir, the publication of their images in this thesis was guided by ethical considerations such as protecting the identities of those depicted and dignifying representation. The photographs by Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir are not only being published in this thesis, but also in other publications (see e.g. Emir 2025; Six-Hohenbalken and Emir 2016) and digitally (see ZOZAN Investigations on Mobility 2025b; Six-Hohenbalken et al. forthcoming). In the case of Mehmet Emir, he had the consent from the people photographed in his village for publication. Regarding Werner Finke's photos, the Institute for Social Anthropology owns the rights for their use and publishing. The publication of the photos was prepared in close contact to the legal department of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The ZOZAN team is in contact with local communities in the areas where he took the photos. So far, the reactions from these communities about the publication of the images were very positive. People were especially happy to find images about their ancestors in the Werner Finke collection. Some people even remembered Finke and his visits from their childhood and were delighted to learn that the collection is becoming digitally available. On the

website of the project (ZOZAN Investigations on Mobility 2025b), there is a contact form inviting people to express any concerns regarding the publishing of the images.

In order to protect the identities of the people depicted in the photographs, these are published without any sensitive information such as their name of the people or the name of the settlements where the photos were taken. Instead, the larger region of origin of the photos is named, such as the province. Moreover, only a curated selection of the images is being published, so that photos with ethical considerations are held back. All photos are published under the strictest Creative Commons license (Creative Commons, n.d.) to protect them from any misuse.

In the case of my interviewees, I refer to them with pseudonyms chosen by them except if they left it for me. After explaining the aims of my research, I obtained written consent from the participants for the interviews. I obliged myself to destroy all the data in case they decide to withdraw from the research. I only stored data with the pseudonyms of my interlocutors, and did not write their full names anywhere in my field notes. About some of my interlocutors, I also do not know their whole names. After submitting this thesis, I stored the data on a separate hard drive, in a protected place.

The case of the artist Mehmet Emir was different, as we agreed that along with his art-work (following the copyright law), I will refer to his statements in our interview with his full name too. I obliged myself to provide a list of the statements for his confirmation before submitting this thesis.

AI-generated tools

I used two AI-related tools to support me in writing this thesis. Thereby, I paid special attention to not involve sensitive personal data of my interviewees. I translated selected quotes from the originally German interview transcripts to English with the help of DeepL, an AI-based online free translator program. The translation of DeepL were in all cases carefully proofread and corrected by me.

Furthermore, I used the Open AI Software ChatGPT for correcting some of the sentences or paragraphs where I felt that the English, which is not my native tongue, does not sound fluid enough. This helped me reformulate some of my texts in a way that it becomes easier to understand for the reader. In both cases I carefully left out all personal details of my participants. From the texts I inserted into these software, I removed all personal data.

4.3 Concluding Methodological Remarks

My role and positionality in the field had obvious consequences for the nature and quality of the data I collected. Being a young white woman from Hungary, a member state of the European Union, and what is more, connected to two prestigious institutions (Austrian Academy of Sciences, University of Vienna), I was most probably perceived by my interlocutors as a privileged person. On the other hand, as I conducted research in diasporic communities, my own background as a migrant who came to Vienna from elsewhere, who speaks German with a foreign accent and has left family members behind in my home country, has, I believe also played a role in the way I was perceived by my interlocutors. In many cases I could relate to their experiences of loss and of being perceived as the “other” in Austria.

The methods chosen for this study shaped the results at least as much as my position in the field. Working with selected images of two archival collections enabled me to explore the concept of homeland through a special form of mediated imagination, which brought very different results from if I had just conducted the fieldwork without photographs. Because of the visual qualities of the photos, many aspects came to light which I would have never asked my interlocutors about. Moreover, participating in group photo-elicitations in the workshops as well as conducting my photo-interviews allowed me to include more variety of perspectives and compare how the different settings might have influenced the perception and reactions to the photos.

My work with photo-elicitation as the major method of this research could benefit from the method’s potential of flattening research hierarchies (see Vila 2013) and enabling the research partner the role of the expert (see Collier and Collier 1986). Instead of being questioned in a strict order, my interlocutors could engage with photographs as the third subjects of the interview, thereby gaining more authority about both the process and content of the interview. As a result, in the interviews, participants shared intimate memories of their childhood and experiences of poverty from a different position than in classical interviews. The stories they shared were not only personally selected (instead of just answering questions of the interviewer), but these stories always had a relevance beyond their own biography: they helped interpret and contextualize archival photos.

Nevertheless, besides the many benefits of the method, I noticed the following problems. First, the selection of photographs influenced my interlocutors’ accounts of homeland in a way that the images brought nostalgic aspects of the old homeland to the foreground, while experiences

of exclusion and marginalization, and especially those in the new home in Vienna often stayed hidden. This was a bit different in the double interview of Serhat and Diloan, where, as I mentioned before, the photos were less central than in the other interviews, because the two interviewees exchanged their ideas and experiences with each other also independently from the photos.

Secondly, the observant participation in group settings, while it enabled me to grasp the depth of layers of interaction my interlocutors could experience while viewing and discussing the photos, the questions regarding my own positionality and embodied experiences in the field which this method fostered, brought up intellectual and emotional insecurities. One of the biggest personal challenges for me was the question of involvement in the role of an observing participant in art-based workshops. How do I explain my choice of conducting research in the Kurdish diaspora, and especially my participation in the workshops to my informants? Although I always told how I got involved with the topic, visiting a university course about violence narratives in the Middle East and later applying for an internship in the research project ZOZAN, where I currently work as a student collaborator. Nevertheless, I often felt that this was not enough explanation, or that I might be not justified to enter the discourse on the Kurds.

Third, the questions of personal involvement as an observing participant caused me many challenges. In one of the workshops, I was challenged to reflect on two chosen photographs and share my associations with the group. Some of the photographs reminded me of my family history, which evoked a similar emotional response from me as in the Kurdish participants. Coming from a family persecuted during World War II. in Hungary, I could relate to the photographs depicting the dispossession of and displacement of Kurdish villagers, and the narratives of growing up without a fixed home and an ever-changing family environment. When looking at one photograph taken by Finke of Kurdish tents on the side of a newly built town – where there used to be a summer pasture of the Kurds, I was reminded of the Jewish people hiding from the authorities in Budapest, like my grandfather, people not having their regular homes anymore, always on the “wrong place”, always in danger. Or seeing Emir’s portraits of survivors of the Dersim massacres of 1937-1938, even before I knew they were survivors of a genocidal event, I felt connected to the faces and looks of these old people in the photographs. Later I realized, they reminded me of the old Holocaust survivors I know. It was difficult to judge whether my own personal stories should be shared in the workshops or not. Nevertheless, the participants were welcoming when I shared information about it.

I believe that these challenges are partially the outcome of balancing participant observation and observing participation in the field. As a result, the research process and writing up took longer. One can hardly blind out personal reaction in such a situation, while not wanting to attract too much attention or ‘make it about oneself’ as an outsider.

5 Context: Second-generation Kurds and two Archival Collections in Vienna

Before delving the most important and rewarding part of the thesis, that is, into my interlocutors' narratives, I will give some context information about the Kurdish diaspora(s) in Vienna. It is important to gain a rough overview of the historical processes which have been forming this very heterogenous part of Vienna's residents. Moreover, this short context chapter will provide some information about the archival collections –which I also consider as part of the field –and their creators. Finally, the chapter will introduce the *ZOZAN Project* which granted me the opportunity to work with these collections and conduct participant observation.

This chapter contextualizes the field in which this thesis emerged in larger historical processes. I explored homeland imaginaries through the interaction of second-generation Kurds with photographs selected from the collections of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke. Therefore, to be able to contextualize my field, I will dedicate this chapter to the emergence and previous research on the Viennese Kurdish diaspora(s), as well as the archival collections of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir.

I will start by briefly introducing the current state of knowledge on Vienna's Kurdish communities. This will be followed by an excursion to briefly reviewing Kurdish history in the main Kurdish settlement areas in the Middle East. After that, I will return to discussing Vienna's Kurdish communities that emerged as a result of processes of migration and exile. In the second part of the chapter, I focus on the archival collections of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir, giving information on the biography of the creators, as well as on the context of researching these collections at the Institute of Social Anthropology (ISA) as well as in my Master Thesis. The historical and institutional relations sketched in this chapter are the framework within which I situate my research and make sense of the observed and recorded data.

5.1 The Kurdish Diaspora(s) in Vienna

According to the Institut Kurde de Paris, the number of Kurds globally was estimated 36 to 45 million in 2016 ("The Kurdish population," n.d.) and around 1,5 to 1,7 million Kurds lived in the diaspora in Western Europe ("Kurdish Diaspora," n.d.). Following Germany (850.000-950.000), France (230.000-250.000), the Netherlands (100.000-120.000), and Switzerland (85.000-95.000), in Austria, the estimated number of Kurds is 80.000-95.000 (ibid).

Scholars have argued that most Kurds in Austria originate from Turkey and the majority of Kurds are living in Vienna (Ahmad 2012, 17; Schmidinger 2013, 6; Hennerbichler et al. 2013). Citing the statistics of Thomas Schmidinger in his unpublished work *Kurdistan in Österreich: Kurden als 'imagined community' in der Diaspora*, Ahmad refers to about 100.000 Kurds in Austria from all Kurdish regions (Schmidinger 2010 cited in Ahmad 2012, 18). However, as Schmidinger writes in 2013, the number of Kurds in Austria has never been scholarly investigated (Schmidinger 2013, 7). In 2024, when I am writing this thesis, there are still only estimations. This difficulty of quantifying the Kurdish community is not special to Austria. As Alinia maintained, there are not official figures regarding the number of Kurds in European countries because migrants are registered through nationality instead of ethnic identification (Alinia 2004, 31).

Schmidinger points out that the Kurdish diaspora in Austria is very heterogenous, involving groups who came to Austria from different Kurdish regions, at different times and for different reasons (Schmidinger 2013). To gain a deeper understanding of the composition of the Kurdish diaspora(s) of Austria, I find it necessary to engage with its emergence through a historical perspective. While in this thesis I cannot give a detailed account of the political developments which forced Kurdish populations in several countries to leave their regions of origin, it is necessary to at least give a very brief overview and refer to the extensive works reporting about it.

Thus, Kurdish populations in the modern states of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran faced different histories of marginalization and oppression. In this way, modern Kurdish identity and culture was formed by experiences of violence, marginalization and exile (for an extensive analysis, see Aras 2014), which are reflected in the diasporic communities.

5.1.1 A Brief Introduction to the History of the Kurds in the Middle East

The Kurdish settlement areas in the Middle East, today mainly stretching the southeastern provinces of Turkey, the Western provinces of Iran, North- and North-Eastern parts of Iraq and northern parts of Syria, were for a long time organized in Kurdish chiefdoms within the Persian and the Ottoman empires. Although sources since the Middle Ages refer to the Kurdish presence in the Middle East, with the formation of modern nation states, the Kurds found themselves by the end of World War I. as minority groups within homogenizing nations.

According to the Institut Kurde de Paris, today the majority of the approximately 36,4 to 45,6 million Kurds globally lives in the Middle East (ca. 36 to 44,1), from which 26 to 20 million

live in Turkey, 10 to 12 million in Syria, 8 to 8,5 million in Iraq and 3 to 3,6 million in Syria ("The Kurdish population," n.d.). The inherently heterogeneous Kurdish minorities are, on many instances, culturally and linguistically distinct from the majority populations, which contributes to their tensions with the states. However, Kurdish identity, despite its long history, is not a stable category but has been shaped by the historical developments in their settlement areas, such as Kurdish tribal structures in the Ottoman Empire, late nation-building, persecution and various forms of outmigration. In the following paragraphs I will briefly summarize the history of the Kurds in these nation-states.

Turkey

The Kurds had been part of the Ottoman Empire since the 16th century (Toivanen 2021, 60). Under the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid (1876-1909), the Kurdish tribes enjoyed privileges by participating in the Hamidiye-regiments, and many Kurdish leaders took part in the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 (Strohmeier and Yalçın-Heckmann 2010, 82–84).

While Kurds with Yezidi faith, were persecuted already in the 19th and the in beginning of the 20th centuries, fled to Armenia and Georgia (Strohmeier and Yalçın-Heckmann 2010, 170), for the majority of the (mainly Sunni Muslim) Kurds, the situation became critical after the Exclamation of the Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

While the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 promised interim authority for the Kurdish territories (McDowall 1991, 13), the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 in which minority status was defined by religious affiliation did not guarantee any cultural rights for the Kurds anymore.

As influential scholars in the field of Kurdish studies have analyzed, in the 1920-1930s, the new Turkish state enacted several policies banning expressions of Kurdish cultural identity, such as the use of the Kurdish language, which in turn lead to several revolts by the Kurdish population – brutally depressed by the state which ordered executions, deportations and razzias in the Kurdish inhabited regions (see e.g. Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi 2021, 4; McDowall 1991, 14).

With the Tunceli law in 1935, the borders of today's Tunceli province (Osztvics and Arslan 2018, 22), Dersim was the last territory to be integrated in the emerging Turkish nation-state. Dersim's population has been distinct from the Sunni majority of Turkey, not only in terms of language, but also regarding religion. The status of Zazaki, or Zaza, spoken in Dersim, is debated—whether it is a separate language or a dialect of Kurdish (ibid., 26). Similarly, the ethnicity of Dersim's population is debated, with some arguing that they are a Kurdish group,

while others claim they constitute a distinct ethnic group. The religion practiced by the Zaza speaking population of Dersim, Alevism is considered by many as one of the branches of Islam, particularly influenced by Sufism, however, the main pillars of religious practice differ from those in Islam (Ozkul et al. 2022, 3–4; for more information, also see Dressler 2022).

In 1937-1938 Seyyid Riza's revolt in Dersim/Tunceli was followed by the Turkish state's military campaign and massacre of thousands of Zazaki speaking Alevis and Kurds of the region, and initiated a mass displacements (see e.g. Kreyenbroek and Omarkhali 2021, 552). Following the suppression of the Dersim revolt (1937-1938) and until the 1960s, in Turkey a period referred to as "quiet years" followed regarding the Kurds (Gabrielyan 2024, 242). This period was characterized by resettlement and migration from the Kurdish territories into centers, causing a massive abandonment of Kurdish agricultural land (Gabrielyan 2024, 254–55).

The 1960 military coup brought a short period of limited democratization, which enabled an increasing political awareness of the Kurds under an emerging educated and cosmopolitan Kurdish elite (Gabrielyan 2024, 242–43), leading to a growing cultural production such as publishing in the Kurdish language.

With the growing political organization of the Kurds in Turkey in the 1970s, and the emergence of Kurdish political parties (McDowall 1991, 16), the conflict between Kurdish organizations and the Turkish state increased, leading to the darkest times of Kurdish history in the 1980s (Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi 2021, 8) with even more suffering and exile movements from the Kurdish territories.

With the 1980 military coup in Turkey, all oppositional, Kurdish and leftist political activity was brutally suppressed bringing about imprisonments and tortures (Gabrielyan 2024, 246). Under the military regime, all "Kurdish cultural, linguistic and political identity was eradicated by law" (Gabrielyan 2024, 247), including the banning of the use of Kurdish language, banning the use of the terms "Kurd" or "Kurdish", or giving Kurdish names to children (ibid). As Gabrielyan argues drawing on Entessar, this suppression of all cultural and ethnic expressions further radicalized the Kurdish movement with the militant PKK guerillas (Entessar 1992, 96, quoted in Gabrielyan 2024, 247).

In the 1980-1990s, popularity of PKK grew, supporting the struggle for an independent Kurdish state (Gabrielyan 2024, 248). In 1984, the PKK started its attacks on the Turkish state, which responded with increased military presence and declared a state of emergency in the Kurdish

regions (Gabrielyan 2024, 249–50). Until 1999, around 3000 villages were destroyed and 3 million people displaced in the region (Gabrielyan 2024, 251).

In Turkey, in 2013 a ceasefire stopped the ongoing conflict between the PKK guerillas and the Turkish state, the repressive regime of Erdoğan lead to the end of the peace negotiations and a remilitarizing of the conflict (Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi 2021, 17–18). After the negotiations finally broke down in 2015, the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK resumed, resulting in further state violence targeting not only the Kurdish militias but also the local civil population in the conflict zones, as well as the oppression of the non-militant parts of the Kurdish national movement (Yegen 2015, quoted in Yegen 2021, 329). According to Mesut Yegen, 2015 brought a shift in the Kurdish movement in Turkey, starting a new period of Kurdish nationalism (ibid., 339-30).

Iran

Similarly to Mustafa Kemal's Turkey, the Iranian government in the 1920s under Reza Chan strived for the cultural and linguistic homogenization of the society (Strohmeier and Yalçin-Heckmann 2010, 146). The predominantly Sunni Muslim Kurds, in contrast to Iran's Shi'ite majority, became targets of the state's homogenization policies. This meant among other things the disarmament of the Kurdish tribes and their displacement from the Kurdish territories to other parts of Iran (ibid., 147). After the first World War and in the beginning of the 1920s, several Kurdish revolts broke out in Iran (Dryaz 2021, 407). Until the 1940s, the Kurds in Iran faced brutal sedentarization policies (Strohmeier and Yalçin-Heckmann 2010, 155).

After the occupation of Soviet and British forces, the Kurds of West Iran claimed independence and founded the short lived Kurdish republic of Mahabad (1945-1946) under the leadership of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) (McDowall 1991, 17). In the Mahabad republic, Kurdish became the official and teaching language (Strohmeier and Yalçin-Heckmann 2010, 151). However, after the Soviet Union did not support the Kurdish republic anymore through the Azerbaijan People's Government, in December 1946, Mahabad was occupied by the Iranian troops (ibid., 152). The Kurdish movement in Iran could not achieve major developments in the late 1940s and 1950s. Both the Tudeh party and the KDPI were banned and many of their members imprisoned (ibid., 153).

Due to the economic and social changes in the 1970s and 1980s, the Kurdish movement in Iran could spread (ibid., 154-155). At the end of the 1970s, exiles returned to Iran to rebuild the weakened KDPI (ibid., 156), nevertheless their demands were rejected by the government. The

Islamic Republic in Iran was proclaimed in 1979 – constitution did not include rights for ethnic minorities, its focus Shiism brought a certain marginalization of the Sunni population, including the Kurds (ibid., 157).

The 1980s in Iran were formed by the events of the Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988). Iran managed to reestablish control over most Kurdish territories (ibid., 160) and the Kurdish efforts for autonomy were not successful. The repressive policies against the Kurds did not stop with the end of the war, the Iranian government sent military troops to the Kurdish regions (Dryaz 2021, 417).

The new reformist government from 1997 under Muhammad Khatami promised a liberalization with stronger recognition of minority rights (ibid.). Nevertheless, after 2005, a restrictive stance against the Kurds returned under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (ibid., 418). From 2013, the newly elected Hasan Rouhani failed to keep most of his promises for protecting minority rights (ibid.).

Since 2016, military clashes between the PDKI and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards renewed (Dryaz 2021, 429). According to Massoud Sharifi Dryaz, around ten armed organizations claim to represent the rights of the Kurds in Iran, while trying to mobilize for the shared goals of democratization, decentralization of power and establishing a federal system (Dryaz 2021, 429–30). In 2022, the violent death of Jina Mahsa Amini¹² led to long-lasting protests against the authoritarian government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Iraq

Iraq which became an independent state in 1930 with the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty (McDowall 1991, 20), was not without demands for freedom by the Kurdish communities which have been fragmented by cultural and political differences (see McDowall 1991, 19). Mustafa Barzani's revolt (1943-1945) was defeated with the help of the British Airforce (Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi 2021, 5).

After the coup d'état in 1958, General Qasim's rule in Iraq, although tolerated Kurdish political and cultural striving in its first years, became repressive from the 1960s, after an armed conflict broke out between the Iraqi and Kurdish forces and continued after the Ba'athist coup in 1968 (Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi 2021, 6). The proposed autonomy agreements in the 1970s did

¹² Jina Mahsa Amini (DMG Jîna Mehsa Emînî) was a 22-year-old Kurdish woman who was arrested for not wearing the Hijab and died shortly while in custody, according to eyewitnesses as a result of police brutality.

not succeed, leading to the retreat of the Kurdish forces in 1975 and further fragmentation of the Kurds to an internal conflict (Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi 2021, 6).

During the Iraq-Iran War 1980-1988 Kurdish forces tried to use the situation to drive out governmental forces from “Kurdistan” (McDowall 1991, 22). In the context of Saddam Hussein’s Arabization efforts, Iraq’s Kurdish population was facing genocidal violence. In 1988, the city of Halabja was target of a chemical attack which claimed about 5000 victims (Bozarslan 2021, 272). This was only the beginning of the Anfal Campaigns, in which the Iraqi state killed more than 100.000 civilians¹³ in chemical attacks and executions, destroying entire villages¹⁴, causing mass displacement and forced disappearances (Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi 2021, 8).

After the First Gulf War in 1991, Kurdish uprisings in Iraq achieved control over the Kurdish territories, which however was mostly regained by the Iraqi army, leading to massive Kurdish refuge to Iran and Turkey (Jongerden and Akkaya 2021, 811–12). Nevertheless, after the establishment of a no-fly-zone over the region, the foundation of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) was enabled (ibid., 812). By 1994, the KRI was divided between the two conflicting parties KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) in the emerging civil war (Stansfield 2021, 366). The regions of Suleymaniyya-Garmian under the PUK and of Erbil-Dohuk under the KDP developed two distinctive political cultures with divided political, military administrative, as well as economic organizations (ibid., 366-67). In 2003, the overthrowing of Saddam Hussain’s government has brought a system change in Iraq, and it also brought new developments in the Kurdish society; the new generations became more critical of the political leaders in the KDP and the PUK (ibid., 368).

In the 2000s, Iraq’s political instability grew, until 2007 brought a civil war between the Sunnis and the Shiites (ibid., 372). The rise of ISIS (later transformed into IS) in 2014 was followed by several attacks on the Kurdistan Region (ibid., 374). The IS brought a “quasi-genocidal violence” against the Kurdish speaking Yezidi community in Iraq, leading to mass exodus (Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi 2021, 12, 16). Since the systematic destruction Yezidi community in Şingal, also referred to as the 74. *ferman* the religious community of the Yezidis is

¹³ There are no reliable statistics regarding the number of victims in the Anfal campaigns. Scholars have estimated different numbers; according to Joost Hiltermann, the number of civilian victims ranged 50.000 to 100.000 (Hiltermann 2008, quoted in Bozarslan 2021, 273), while Alexander Mikaberidze referred to 100.000 to 150.000 and Kerim Yildiz estimated 180.000 victims (Yildiz 2007, 25).

¹⁴ According to Choman Hardi, 2.600 Kurdish villages were destroyed (Hardi 2011, 107), while Alexander Mikaberidze estimates 4.000 (Mikaberidze 2011, 67), and Ofra Bengio 4.500 (Bengio 2023, 279) villages.

mainly surviving in diasporic settings (Six-Hohenbalken 2016, 5). By 2015, an influx of refugees came to KRI fleeing IS from Iraq and Syria, putting further strain on the depressed economic situation (ibid., 375).

Syria

The majority of the Kurds in Syria arrived from Turkey to escape the persecution in the 1920s (Strom 2005, 475), during the short-lived independent Syrian Arab Kingdom (1919-1920) and in the period under French control over Syria (1920-1946). Syria became a sovereign state in 1946. Unlike the Kurdish populations in Turkey, Iraq and Iran, the Kurds in Syria did not organize revolts in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s (Strom 2005, 475).

After the World War II., as Jordi Tejel describes, the Kurdish national movement was in crisis, therefore, politically Kurds engaged with the Syrian Communist Party (SCP), making Qamishli one of the political centers of communist activity (Tejel 2021, 438–39). In 1957, Kurdish political forces united in the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria (KDPS) demanded cultural rights for the Kurds and strived for political autonomy (ibid). These demands were suppressed by the United Arab Republic (1958-1961). Kurdish transborder relations with Iraqi Kurdish organizations were perceived as a national threat for Syria (ibid., 440).

From the 1960s the Kurdish political landscape in Syria became further fragmented along with the Iraqi KDP. During the reign of the 1961 declared Arab Republic, more than 100.000 Kurds were declared non-Syrians and lost all their citizenship rights (McGee, 2014: 171–81 quoted in Tejel 2021, 441)¹⁵. The Syrian Kurds in the 1970-1990s were heavily effected by regional conflicts and unable to unify the Syrian Kurdish movement (Tejel 2021, 442). Under Hafez al-Assad's regime, Syrian Kurdish organizations were divided by different partisan movements in Iraq and Turkey (Tejel 2006, 117-33, quoted in Tejel 2021, 443).

The 1980-1990s brought several clashes between the Kurdish community and the Syrian police, such as by the Newroz celebrations in 1986 and in 1992 when Kurds remembered the 30th anniversary of the 1962 census in which so many Kurds lost their citizenship rights (Strom 2005, 475). These clashes were followed by mass arrests and several deaths in the Kurdish community (ibid.).

¹⁵ Quoting Hazan 1979, Lise Strom refers to 120.000 Kurds who lost their citizenship rights and thousands of Kurds who were forcibly disappeared in the 1960-70s.

In the context of the Damascus Spring (2000-2001), the Kurdish issue in Syria gained visibility through the public actions of the Yekîti Party (Tejel 2021, 444). In 2004, after security forces killed six people in riots that escalated following a football match, in what has been known as the Qamishli uprisings, Kurdish parties united against the regime, until their disagreements regarding the demands presented in the Declaration of Damascus 2005 caused them to split again (ibid., 445).

In the 2010s, the Kurdish regions entered an instable period caused by the conflict between Syria and Iraq (Bozarslan, Gunes, and Yadirgi 2021, 16). In 2011, following the assassination of Mashaal Tammo, leader of the Kurdish Future Movement, the Syrian uprising was joined by protests in the Kurdish inhabited regions, which later turned into clashes between the militarizing Kurdish forces and the government (ibid., 446-47). As the Syrian regime withdraw its forces from most of the Kurdish territories in 2012, the PYD (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat) took control to founded the autonomous region of Rojava¹⁶ (ibid., 447).

In 2013, the PYD (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat) with other political fractions and civil organizations founded the *Movement for a Democratic Society* (TEV-DEM) to govern the Kurdish controlled territories in Northern Syria (ibid., 448). The military importance of the PYD increased after the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)¹⁷ in 2014, when the US supported the YPG (Yekîneyên Parastîna Gel, People's Defence Units) (ibid., 451). In 2016, the PYD established a federal administrative system on the controlled territories under the name Democratic Federation Rojava – Northern Syria (Tejel 2021, 448). The same year, they renamed the federation Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria, and in 2018, the name was changed again to Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (ibid., 449).

Kurds in the post-Soviet space

Finally, a significant Kurdish population of approximately 0,4 to 0,5 million lives in the former USSR (see “The Kurdish population,” n.d.). Most of the Kurdish population in the post-Soviet space lives in Armenia, and Azerbaijan as well as Georgia (Strohmeier and Yalçin-Heckmann 2010, 171).

¹⁶ Today called the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, by Kurds often referred to as Rojava or Rojavayê Kurdistanê (“the West” or “Western Kurdistan”).

¹⁷ A Salafi-jihadist group, also known as Islamic State (IS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Islamic State of Iraq al-Sham (ISIS), and Daesh.

As I mentioned earlier, the persecution of Yezidi¹⁸ Kurds in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries led to an increased immigration to Armenia and Georgia (see Strohmeier and Yalçın-Heckmann 2010, 170). Since the 18th century, Muslim Kurds already lived in the Caucasus (de la Bretèque 2021, 459). After October Revolution in 1917, Soviet sedentarization policies were combined with making education in Kurdish language possible, which led to a significant increase in Kurdish publications (Strohmeier and Yalçın-Heckmann 2010, 170). The situation of the Kurds in the 1930s became more difficult due to Russian centralization policies and general mistrust against non-Russian minorities (ibid.).

In the Soviet era, which promoted atheism, religion was limited to the private sphere (de la Bretèque 2021, 461). After World War II, a Kurdish cultural revival took place in the Armenian Soviet Republic, and from the 1970s and 1980s, Kurdish cultural life thrived in Georgia, promoting Kurdish literature and newspapers, folklore, cinema, theatre and radio (de la Bretèque 2021, 463–65).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation of the Kurds in the Caucasus became difficult. During the Nagorno-Karabakh war (1988–94), among Azerbaijanis, ca. 18.000 Muslim Kurds fled from Armenia (Strohmeier and Yalçın-Heckmann 2010, 171). The war led to a conflict between the Muslim and Yezidi Kurds, many of the latter fought on the side of the Armenians (de la Bretèque 2021, 467). The Yezidis, who were considered Kurds during the Soviet era¹⁹, claimed a separate ethnicity, replacing Kurmancî with the new language of Ezdîkî (ibid.).

Synthesis: The history of the Kurds in the Middle East

This very brief overview, which could at no time do justice to the complexity of Kurdish history, sheds light on major events shaping Kurdish identity and organizing, underlining the constructivist approach to ethnicity. In other words, the events leading to Kurdish migration, and the foundations of Kurdish diasporic communities, have been shaping, transforming Kurdish self-understanding and nation-building.

The historical fragments introduced above, divided by militarized borders, are deeply intertwined with each other. The simplification of a highly complex history in this brief description aimed to outline the different political spaces where exiled Kurds came to Vienna from. As

¹⁸ Yezidism (also known as Yazidism or Sharfadin) is a monotheistic religion of a Kurdish-speaking group, deriving from pre-Zoroastrian Indo-Iranian tradition (for more information, see de la Bretèque 2021).

¹⁹ Group belonging was defined by nationality and not religion (de la Bretèque 2021, 459).

Bozarslan, Gunes and Yadirgi explained, the emergence of new technologies in the 2000s and 2010s allowed non-censored intra-Kurdish communication, broader than ever before, greatly contributing to inter-Kurdish integration. These processes of transnational Kurdish communication and inter-Kurdish integration are reflected in my interlocutors' homeland imaginaries and within them the negotiation of Kurdish identity.

These accounts shed light on the incredible suffering carried in Kurdish cultural memory, which is transferred to the second and further generations of diaspora Kurds. Considering these historical developments is crucial for grasping the concept of the victim diaspora, which, as we saw in the theoretical review, offers important insights to understanding Kurdish diasporic narratives and identity.

Finally, it is important to note that the historical accounts quoted here are by no means universally accepted. While I selected sources by internationally known scholars who work on the Kurdish issue, national historiographies in the discussed countries narrative these events differently. For instance, the Dersim genocide in 1937-1938 had been unacknowledged in Turkey until recently (see Goner 2019). Moreover, Goner's research shows that even since these events are publicly discussed, there are differences within the Kurdish population, including altering versions of gendered remembering (see, *ibid.*). Furthermore, in the turbulent history of the Middle East, the Kurds were not always the victims, in some instances, they were also perpetrators, as in the Armenian genocide, for example. Thus, the contested history of the Kurds is embedded in multiple and evolving discourses.

5.1.2 Kurds in Vienna

The first wave of Kurdish migrants came to Vienna for their studies in the 1960s and many of them joined transnational Kurdish student networks (Six-Hohenbalken 2002, 35; 2018, 68). In the late 60s and early 70s, due to the Labor Agreement with Turkey, many Kurds came to Austria and other European countries as guest workers (see Six-Hohenbalken 2018, 68). After the 1970s, due to the political developments in the Middle East, Kurdish people arrived as migrants and refugees fleeing political violence in their places of origin (Six-Hohenbalken 2018, 68–69). In 2004, a larger Kurdish community arrived to Vienna from Syria, and as a latest development to the time of writing, Kurds of mainly Yezidi faith came from Georgia and Armenia, as Schmidinger reported (Schmidinger 2013, 8–9). After the IS-led genocide against the Yezidis in 2014-2015, new waves of Yezidi and Kurdish refugees from Iraq and Syria arrived to Austria (Schmidinger 2020, 28–30).

Unfortunately, there is not enough literature available on the developments in recent years in Austria's Kurdish diasporas. However, comparing the estimated number of the Kurds in Austria (85.000 to 95.000) ("Kurdish Diaspora," n.d.) with earlier figures — 40.000-80.000 in 2018 according to Maria Six-Hohenbalken (2018, 69) and 20.000-60.000 in the 1990s, as calculated by Östen Wahlbeck (2018, 416) — indicate a significant influx of Kurdish migrants.

The Kurdish diaspora(s) in Vienna are, as I discussed in the beginning of this chapter, very heterogenous. Maria Six-Hohenbalken pointed out, the cultural and political organizations and activities of Vienna's Kurds resemble this diversity. As the author remarked, compared to the European countries such as Sweden or France, the opportunities of Kurdish intellectuals, academics and artists for public participation and recognition in Austria were more limited due to a lack of funding (Six-Hohenbalken 2013, 12).

Among the specific legal conditions in Austria for building associations, the migration system, characterized with a chain migration following the labor agreements with Turkey shaped the formation of two major Kurdish institutions in Vienna: *Feykom – Verband der kurdischen Vereine* in Österreich and *Kurdisches Zentrum* (Six-Hohenbalken 2013, 14–15). While *Kurdisches Zentrum* is more heterogeneous in its political orientation than *Feykom*, both organizations have been covering a broad range of responsibilities, from the representation of political interests and media relations to social work and refugee care, as well as the organization of cultural events (ibid, 15). Beyond the representations of political parties, there are several other organizations in which Kurds in Vienna participate, such as Alevi or Yezidi associations (ibid, 17).

As Six-Hohenbalken outlined, the Viennese Kurdish diaspora(s) include several internationally known visual artists, musicians, authors but also transnationally active journalists (see, ibid). Several Kurdish filmmakers living in Vienna have been engaging with transnational film production, giving visibility to stories about Kurdish suffering and migration, culture, and Kurdish homeland (ibid, 23-24). As the author described, also several individuals are working for Kurdish transnational media based in Vienna.

Saya Ahmad and Mona El Khalaf observed in 2013 about the *Kurdisches Zentrum*, that a significant amount of its activities relied on the use of social media (Ahmad and El Khalaf 2013, 225). Moreover, the association mainly focuses on constructing the feeling of Kurdishness, as the authors explained (ibid). I suggest that beyond the cultural production in the diasporas, also visual content circulating in online spaces shape the views of second-generation Kurds about homeland.

5.2 *Kurdish Life in Two Archival Collections*

As I explained earlier, the findings of this thesis are based on photographs selected from two archival collections and their perception in the Kurdish diaspora. The following paragraphs provide a brief introduction to the research project ZOZAN which combines these two collections in its work, and the emergence and creators of the collections of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke, which ZOZAN works with in its art-based research.

5.2.1 *The ZOZAN Project*

The two archival collections are united in ZOZAN, a research project at ISA, led by Maria Six-Hohenbalken at the Institute of Social Anthropology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (for more information, see Institute for Social Anthropology, n.d.). *ZOZAN – Investigating Mobility via Multimedia Documentations, Art Interventions, Art-based Research and (Re)-presentations* does not only digitalize parts of the archival collections to make them accessible online and in print publications but also uses them as the starting point for investigating past and current mobilities and multiple belongings within the Kurdish transnation.

The research team of ZOZAN applies multimodal participatory methods and specifically organizes art-based workshops. Moreover, ZOZAN involves several artists and researchers in the research on Werner Finke's and Mehmet Emir's archives. The research of ZOZAN is published in several instances (See e.g. Six-Hohenbalken 2024), thereby contributing to the fields of anthropology and Kurdish studies and specifically to the debates on mobilities and transformation, art-based and participatory methods, identity and memory work in the diaspora.

Since the beginning of the ZOZAN project, the photographs of these collections reached different parts of the Kurdish transnation through the art-based interventions in Turkey, Austria, Germany, France and the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan Iraq, via social media, and through exhibitions and other events. As I explained in the methodological section in more detail, each of the ZOZAN art-based workshops started by viewing a selection of the photos and videos of multimedia collections of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir and followed by group discussions and artistic engagement. In the arts-based interventions, the photographs of Emir and Finke were distributed, fragmented and altered by artists and workshop attendees. Moreover, these images were shared on many instances via social media such as in Facebook groups, Instagram pages, etc.

5.2.2 *The Werner Finke Collection*

Werner Finke (1942-2002) was an Austrian ethnographer and ethnology student who documented the Kurdish territories of Turkey from the late 1960s until the 1990s by taking photographs, recording audio and video materials, writing fieldnotes and field diaries, and collecting ethnographic objects.

Finke, who never finished his studies, was mainly interested in material culture and everyday life in the Kurdish regions, and he especially closely documented the life of semi-nomadic Kurdish pastoralists. His research focused on the material and visual culture, including agricultural and handcrafting practices of Kurdish semi-nomadic pastoralist tribes in the southeast Anatolian mountains (Six-Hohenbalken and Emir 2016, 131). With a donkey purchased for this purpose, he followed the semi-nomadic tribes to the high summer pastures in the mountains. Finke, who worked in Austria as a riding instructor, returned to the Kurdish territories in Turkey almost every year for ca. 2 months (ibid.). A biographical account about Werner Finke is in preparation and will soon be published (see Six-Hohenbalken forthcominga).

Werner Finke's estate is stored in two major institutions in Vienna. He sold around 1.000 ethnographic objects he collected to the Weltmuseum Wien (World Museum Vienna), at the time, Museum für Völkerkunde (Museum of Ethnology) (Six-Hohenbalken forthcomingc). After his death, Finke's sister Sylvia Widhalm offered his legacy to the Institute of Social Anthropology (ISA) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences, where it is currently stored, researched and digitalized. The collection, which encompasses about 30 000 slides and photos (8 mm and 16 mm films), audio recordings²⁰, diaries and notebooks²¹ and textiles (Stockinger forthcoming, 114).

The collection of Werner Finke is not only archived and researched but also digitalized at ISA, and a curated selection of the collection is published online. This process of publishing the images has been, as I explained in the Methods chapter, guided by ethical considerations for protecting the identities of the depicted individuals by holding back any personal information by which they could be identified, and by carefully view the materials to publish only a curated selection.

Making the collection available is indeed an important aspect of the ZOZAN project. In the Serhat region, where Finke conducted his fieldwork, the ZOZAN team is also in contact with

²⁰ For more information about the audio recordings, see Khanna Omarkhali (Forthcoming)

²¹ For more information, see Six-Hohenbalken (Forthcoming)

the source communities. This communication is important for ZOZAN not only to gain feedback from the source communities, but also in terms of research, as individuals from these regions can often provide important information.

5.2.3 Mehmet Emir's Collection

Mehmet Emir, a Kurdish photographer, author and musician, created a unique collection documenting Kurdish everyday life and its transformation in his village Zimeq in Dersim/Tunceli over 35 years. Born in an Alevi Kurdish community in 1964, Mehmet Emir followed his father—who came as a guest worker—to Vienna at the age of 16 (Six-Hohenbalken 2013, 20–21).

Emir worked with his father in road constructions but also developed a passion for photography. His father worked in his free time as a photographer, documenting weddings and other celebrations in migrant communities (ibid). Out of longing for the homeland, Emir started taking photographs, videos and audio tapes documenting the life in his village in his summer holiday visits. After working as an actor and musician among others, Emir studied photography at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. His photographic and literary works not only documented everyday life in his village during his summer visits, but also life in Vienna's periphery, such as the life circumstances of first-generation migrants (ibid).

During the decades, Emir recorded more than 20 000 photos in his village, Zimeq (Emir 2025, 12). His works have been exhibited in several places including London, New York and Istanbul (transcript, n.d.). The multimedia collection involves beyond photographs also video films and audio collections. For example, Emir recorded interviews with and took several photographs of survivors of the Dersim massacre 1937-1938. Moreover, he also recorded in an ethnomusicological project traditional music in Dersim/Tunceli (see *Mehmet Emir - Kurdische Barden, Traditionelle Musik aus Dersim* 1998).

Currently, Mehmet Emir is working at the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage and the Institute for Social Anthropology, not only supporting the digitalization of Werner Finke's collection, but he also provides parts of his own collection for research in the ZOZAN project. As the photos of Werner Finke, Mehmet Emir's photos are also central to ZOZAN's arts-based interventions, in which his photos are interpreted, commented on, recreated, fragmented, decontextualized and recontextualized by artists and workshop attendees. While his photographs are not digitalized at ISA, Emir has been and is currently publishing large parts of his collections in print publications (see e.g. Emir 2025).

5.3 Chapter Conclusions: Second-Generation Kurds and Two Archival Collections

This chapter gave a brief overview of the history of the Kurds in the Middle East, tracing the events which led to Kurdish outmigration of the original settlement areas, and which have shaped Kurdish identity at the same time. After World War I, the Kurdish population found itself as minority groups in the emerging nation states of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, facing marginalization and violent conflicts with the states across the 20th century and lasting till today, which lead to massive waves of Kurdish outmigration.

The Kurdish diaspora(s) in Vienna are rooted in the persecution of the Kurds in their countries of origin on the one hand, and in the economic opportunities opening up in European countries in the context of guest worker contracts in the 1950s - 1970s on the other hand. As I outlined, the majority of the Kurds in Austria arrived from Turkey, however, there is a significant number of Kurds who fled Iraq and Syria, as well as Iran. As in many European countries, the Kurdish diaspora(s) in Austria built political organizations and a vibrant cultural life (see Six-Hohenbalken 2018). However, as Six-Hohenbalken argued, especially the second and third generations of Kurds connect with their homeland mainly through cultural, political and social activities in the diaspora. The Austrian Academy of Sciences-based ZOZAN project sheds light on how cultural production and processes of identity making and collective memory intertwine in the Kurdish diasporas.

The archives of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke, which are at the heart of the ZOZAN project, represent the past and represent mobilities and transformations in Kurdish society which are relatable and relevant for second-generation Kurds living in Vienna. While Mehmet Emir's collection documents a Zaza-speaking Kurdish Alevi community in Dersim, tracing the transformations of and massive outmigration from a village, Werner Finke's collection followed the vanishing semi-nomadic life in the Kurdish mountains in Kurmanji speaking Sunni Muslim communities in the Kurdish mountains. Thus, both collections, to different degrees, relate to the migration histories of my interlocutors and their families.

Throughout the ZOZAN art-based workshops, the two collections became known and used in other Kurdish and non-Kurdish cooperating institutions such as, for example, the Institut kurde de Paris (see "Invitation to ZOZAN Workshop 8," n.d.), the Museum am Rothenbaum of World Cultures and Arts in Hamburg (see MARKK, n.d.) or the Schaumbad in Graz (see "ZOZAN

Workshop #6 | Schaumbad,” n.d.). In the context of the workshop in Hamburg, the Kurdish artist Hêja Netrik gave a concert in the museum.

The images of the Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke collections have been decontextualized and recontextualized, shared on social media, exhibited, discussed, and reproduced by many institutions and individuals across the Kurdish transnation. The widespread interest in the photographs across different Kurdish communities underlines their relevance for the diasporic processes of identity making and homeland relations in these communities.

6 Mehmet Emir in Conversation about Photography and Homeland

I was lucky enough that Mehmet Emir was available for an interview, in which I questioned him about his ideas of homeland and how homeland appears in his photography, and how he made the selection of photos on the topic of homeland, which I used for the photo-interviews with other interviewees together with Werner Finke's photos.

Emir's perspectives are not only interesting as the views of an artist who created the photographs, but also as the views of a second-generation Kurd who came to Vienna as a child. In the interview, we viewed Emir's selected photographs together and he shared his insights about them.

[...] und eben [...] in meinem Falle, was meine Fotos wahrscheinlich wichtig macht, ist, dass ich über diese Fotos erzählen kann, weil ich ja die Geschichte kenne. [...] Aber ab dem Zeitpunkt, wo ich diese Geschichte nicht erzähle—transformiere [...] auch in Sprache—diese Fotos könnten überall entstanden sein im kurdischen Teil [...] und daher [...] braucht man immer Informationen zu den Fotos, damit sie eben noch ihre Bedeutung haben, oder die Bedeutung entsteht eigentlich später.

([...] and in my case, what probably makes my photos important is that I can talk about these photos, because I know the story. [...] But from the moment I don't tell this story – transform [...] also into language— these photos could have been taken anywhere in the Kurdish regions [...] and therefore [...] you always need information about the photos so that they still have their meaning, or the meaning actually arises later.) (Mehmet Emir, personal interview, December 11, 2023)

This short excerpt from my interview with Mehmet Emir just points to the importance of the 'original encounter' of photography (see e.g. Azoulay 2011) which allowed the creation of the photographs in the first hand. The information about this original encounter can often only be told by the photographer to a larger audience. The artist, whom and whose work I introduced in a previous chapter, allowed me to have an insight into these original encounters of his photographs which he selected for me to include in my photo-interviews with other participants.

He curated the selection of 15 photographs on the theme of homeland, thereby choosing those of his works which reminded him of his original homeland or home village in the Der-sim/Tunceli region of Turkey. Beyond gaining an insight into his complex ideas about homeland and photography, I recorded some of Emir's personal narratives about the places and people depicted.

Moreover, in our interview, we talked about photography and its potential and limitations as a medium of representation or imagination of homeland. Emir also pointed out the role of the photographer and the relation of visual images to language.

6.1 Photography and the Traces of People

I was especially interested in what Mehmet Emir thinks about photography and photographs' capacity to represent the homeland. As we will see, people and the 'traces of people', as he formulated, were central in his considerations. This section focuses on one aspect of how photographs represented homeland for the artist: through people and the relationship with them.

Das Visualisieren funktioniert meiner Meinung nach nur über Menschen, in dem man Menschen fotografiert. Weil ich meine, Landschaften, die tun sich auch andauernd verändern, und ich glaube nicht, [...] dass die Fotografie allein [...] das schafft, weil die [Fotografie] braucht auch immer [...] eine gewisse Erklärung, also [...] um etwas zu visualisieren. Es kann nur ein schönes Foto sein, aber das kann überall sein. Aber um ein Foto interpretieren zu können, [...] muss man die Spuren des Menschen finden, der eben in dieser Landschaft etwas verändert hat, und das eben in Form von Architektur. Ja. Und wo der Mensch eben [die Landschaft] verändert hat, dann kann man ja irgendwie einer Fotografie zuschreiben, woher diese Fotografie ist, aber ansonsten nur die Fotografie allein... Wenn es nur um die Landschaft geht, kann die Fotografie das nicht schaffen.

(In my opinion, visualization only works through people, by photographing people. Because I mean landscapes, they are also constantly changing, and I don't think that photography alone [...] can do that, because it always needs a certain explanation, that is, photography, in order to visualize something. It can just be a beautiful photo, but that can be anywhere. But in order to be able to interpret a photo, you have to find the traces of people who have changed something in this landscape, in the form of architecture.

Yes. And where man has changed it, then you can somehow attribute a photograph to where this photograph is from, but otherwise just the photograph alone... If it's just about the landscape, photography can't do that.) (Mehmet Emir, personal interview, December 11, 2023)

In this excerpt, the photographer pointed out that for him, photographs can only be contextualized through people and the ‘traces of people’. That is, while he mentioned taking photos of people landscape photos can be recognized through architecture and other changes made by people in nature. While, as Jäger argued, landscape photographs have been shaping the imagination of the national homeland (see Jäger 2003), I find it interesting to question how homeland is recognized in photos and landscape photos through the ‘traces of people’.

Indeed, when we started talking about the individual photos and the reasons why Emir selected them for the interviews, it became clear that people and the ‘traces of people’ were of crucial importance. In many cases, the photos serve as memory objects, reminding the artist of his village through its residents whom he photographed. In this section, I will briefly discuss two examples about how portrayal-photos represent the life of individuals from the homeland, and one example depicting how homeland appeared through the ‘traces of people’.

Das ist ein Mann, der war auch ein Steinmetz und [wie] viele Familienschicksale, [...] er war zum Schluss ja zu ganz allein. Obwohl er im Dorf war, [ist er] ganz allein in seinem Haus gestorben. Also, obwohl er Töchter hatte und so weiter, die sind alle verheiratet gewesen, weg.



(This is a man who was also a stonemason and [as] many families' fates, when he was all alone at the end. Even though he was in the village, he died all alone in his house. So, although he had daughters and so on, they were all married, gone.) (Mehmet

Emir, personal interview, December 11, 2023)

The black-white photo (Figure 20) portrays an elderly man from the village. As Mehmet Emir told me, the man already passed away lonely. The artist remembers the occupation of the man, and also what happened to his daughters who left the village. This kind of knowing the people,

their lives and their family members also played a role by other photos for choosing them in the selection about homeland.

Another example is the photo (Figure 29) which depicts two boys with a donkey. When we viewed this photo, Mehmet Emir told me that one of the boys –now a grown-up – has already married and has two children, while the other one did never marry.



In both cases, the photos remind the artist on the life of the people depicted, and on what happened to them or their family after taking the photo. In a way, the photos can be seen as memory objects, reminding on a past that is gone. On the other hand, through the photos, the lives of the depicted people are intertwined into the homeland which is imagined through Mehmet Emir's photographs.

In other cases, the Mehmet Emir chose photos which did not depict people, but 'traces of people', which reminded him of individuals from his village. For example, the artist selected a photo depicting a stone and wood building (Figure 16) because it reminded him of his neighbors, and because it was the first house to be seen when one entered his village. He emphasized that the reason for selecting the photo was not the architecture. So, on the one hand, the photo



served as an object of memory, the house being a trace of the villager who was living in it. On the other hand, the house also marks a specific place in the village, a topic I will discuss in the next section. Beyond the relationship with the people who lived the house in Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 16), the photo also marks a place on the 'mental map' of the village. As Mehmet Emir explained, this house was the first one he saw when entering the village. The photo thus represents not only the house what it depicts, but the people who lived there, as well as its place within the village.

As we have seen, Mehmet Emir chose some photos to his selection of photographs on the theme of homeland based on the individuals portrayed and his relationship with them. In other cases, such as the photo Figure 16, the artist selected photos about the built environment in the village, what he called as traces of people through the changes they made in the landscape. Taking photos of these people and what reminded of them, can be also understood as a way of maintaining the homeland.

6.2 Photos as Objects of Representation

Some photos were chosen by Mehmet Emir, not because they reminded him on people from the homeland, but because they depict everyday scenes which represented for him something important about the village and its community. In this section, I examine how photos represent



homeland through depicting abstract ideas about the community and specific characteristics of how people live in the village. In other words, I suggest that these photos selected by Mehmet Emir show another aspect of homeland; that is the uniqueness of the community in its ways of relating to place and organizing life and how people belong to a place, and what is people's place in the village. In this sense, the photos appear as objects of representation.

For example, a photo (Figure 28) depicting a vehicle parked in the middle of the village and surrounded by people evoked in the artist a sense of homeland because it shows people gathering to say goodbye to someone who is leaving the village.

Bei dem ist es so, was für mich schön ist, dass so viele Leute, Leute, die weg gehen, sich verabschieden, und dass sie alle einfach zu dem Bus kommen. [...] Und eben Verabschiedungen, das halt immer etwas sehr, sehr trauriges [ist], und was die Heimat zur Heimat machen, sind eben diese Verabschiedungen. Es ist egal aus welchem Grunde du einen Ort verlässt; ob wegen der Arbeit, für bessere Arbeitsbedingungen oder Lebensbedingungen woanders. Aber trotzdem die Abfahrt, das Weggehen ist eigentlich das Traurigste. Und eben auch mit der Hoffnung, dass du wieder kommen wirst oder nicht, und so weiter. Das gilt eigentlich für jeden. Aber natürlich aus einem kleinen Dorf wegzugehen, das ist natürlich umso schlimmer, [da] die sozialen Beziehungen da irrsinnig stark sind, und das Fehlen von nur von einer Person, [...] das spürt also jeder. Jeder [...] hinterlässt einen Platz, einen großen, leeren Raum im Dorf. Denn in kleinen Ortschaften ist es der Raum, da sagt man, sein Platz ist da, und wenn jemand stirbt oder auch wenn jemand weggeht, also, das fällt sehr stark auf, als in einer Großstadt oder so, das wird einem nicht so auffallen.

(That's what's nice for me, that so many people, people who are leaving, say goodbye and that they all just come to the bus. [...] And goodbyes are always something very, very sad, and it's these goodbyes that make a home(land) a home(land). It doesn't matter

for what reason you leave a place; whether it's for work, for better working conditions or living conditions somewhere else, but nevertheless the departure, the leaving is actually the saddest thing. And also with the hope of whether you will come back or not, and so on. That actually applies to everyone. But of course leaving a small village is all the worse because it's also very strong, because the social relationships there are incredibly strong, and this lack of just one person [...] so everyone feels it. Everyone has... leaves a place a big, empty place in the village, because in such small, in small villages it's the place from where you say your place is there, and when someone dies or when someone goes away, well, that's very noticeable than in a big city or something, you won't notice that.) (Mehmet Emir, personal interview, December 11, 2023)

This act of saying goodbye, as Emir explained, are precisely what makes homeland a homeland, because they reveal that everyone has a place in the community and those who leave the community, leave an empty space behind. This view of homeland relates to the previous category ‘traces of people’, however, rather than the individual biographies of the depicted people, what represents homeland in the photos here is that they depict an event or a characteristic of the community as a whole.

As another example, the photo (Figure 21) depicting two elderly men sitting on a branch reminded Mehmet Emir of the different conception of old age in the homeland: in contrast to the Western world, old people in his village did not use to retire but work and stay independent for their whole life instead.



Also [...], wenn ich mir diese Fotos anschau, dass die alten Menschen immer bis zu ihrem Tod eigentlich gearbeitet haben und immer die Möglichkeit hatten, sich zu treffen und so weiter. Und

dadurch [...] finde ich es einfach schöner. Also in dem Sinne haben sie ja keine Betreuung gebraucht, also dass [...] man sagt, ich arbeite so viele Jahre, und dann gehe ich in Pension... Die haben einfach weitergelebt, gelebt bis [...] zu der Zeit, wo sie tot umgefallen sind, und es war vorbei, aber ansonsten waren sie ein Teil des Lebens und ähm in dem Sinne, weder haben sie sich vor den jungen Kindern versteckt noch was anders...

(So [...] when I look at these photos, I see that the old people always actually worked until they died and always had the opportunity to meet up and so on. And because of

that [...] I just find it nicer. So in that sense, they didn't need any care, that [...] you say, I'm going to work for so many years and then I'm going to retire... They just carried on living, lived until [...] the time they dropped dead and it was over, but apart from that they were part of life and, um, in that sense, they didn't hide from the young children or anything else...) (Mehmet Emir, personal interview, December 11, 2023)

As the two examples show, Mehmet Emir's photos have multiple layers of meaning for the artist, and as I analyzed in their relation to homeland, they serve as objects of representation. Both examples show how photos related to homeland depict everyday scenes from the community which have a deeper meaning for Mehmet Emir, as they show something unique about the village and how people live there.

6.3 Chapter Conclusion: Mehmet Emir in conversation about his photography

To conclude, in this chapter, I highlighted two aspects of homeland and how it relates to photography based on the interview conducted with Mehmet Emir about the selection of 15 photographs from his own collection about the theme of homeland.

Generally, I observed that the people and their traces and places in the village played a crucial role in the photo selection. On the one hand, the images that reminded the artist on homeland show people and the 'traces of people', that is either portrays of people from the homeland, or photos of places or things which remind him on people from the homeland. In this sense, homeland is constructed by the biographies of and the artist's relationship to the people who are living in it. On the other hand, the interview with Mehmet Emir revealed that some aspects of homeland are rooted in the abstract meanings connected to the life, social structures and values in the community, such as the importance of each individual and their 'place' in the village, which becomes visible through the acts of saying goodbye.

7 The Reception of the Photos

One of the key interests in my study is the interaction of the research participants with the photographs selected for photo-elicitation. How did the method of photo-elicitation and the art-based interventions influence the data that emerged? What was the impact of the personal backgrounds and experiences of the participants on the way they read the images? And how did my interlocutors relate to the photographs regarding their sense of homeland and diaspora?

I am interested in the encounter of second-generation Kurds with two photographic collections. On the one hand, I aim to explore this encounter on a narrative level, concerning the different imaginaries, memories, and narratives about homeland evoked through photo-elicitations. On the other hand, I aim to focus on the selected photographs and learn about them through the responses of my interlocutors. This chapter will focus on the latter aspect. What does it mean for second-generation Kurds to engage with these photographs?

As I outlined in my theoretical chapters, photographs have been conceptualized as products of not only technical and aesthetical decisions, but also of epistemological and representational power, emerging from often unequal power-relations (see e.g. Edwards and Morton 2010; Canat 2021). Due to this complexity, as I outlined, photographs can become potential devices of control and surveillance while they can also become empowering part of the cultural heritage of the source groups, which is especially striking in the case of the Kurds (see Sekula 2014).

For this reason, Kurdish voices about photographs from their source communities are especially relevant for exploring how the archival collections relate to their own sense of Kurdishness and whether the collections can become part of a ‘Kurdish national archive’. Furthermore, as I am drawing on Azoulay’s notion of photographs as spaces of infinite encounters (see Azoulay 2011), I analyze the accounts of my interlocutors as contemporary and locally specific entries into the infinite encounters of the photos. In other words, in this chapter, we will delve into the meanings attributed to the photographs by my interlocutors.

7.1 *Some ‘Ways of Seeing’ Photographs*

Drawing on Berger’s notion of ‘ways of seeing’ (1997 [first publ. 1972]), I will start by giving a general overview of what aspects could have contributed to my interlocutors’ ways of seeing, interpreting and reacting to the photographs. This will be followed by a short summary of the reactions I could observe in the workshops, and those in the interviews. The interlocutors in

the arts-based workshops organized by ZOZAN, as well as in my photo-interviews, encountered photographs selected from the two collections in different research settings.

Generally, workshop participants found themselves in more formal settings – the project team prepared the workshops in mainly institutional spaces, and the workshops were held in the presence of 3-6 researchers, 1-2 artists and sometimes 1-2 representatives of the respected spaces. Moreover, the rooms were equipped with technological devices such as a projector, cameras, audio recorders, laptops, etc. The workshops followed a more-or-less planned procedure consisting of opening presentations by research team members and artists, group-photo-elicitation, shared or individual artistic assignments, shared meals, etc. Thus, the workshop participants spent together at least 3-5 hours at once.

In contrast, the photo-interviews I conducted took place at places suggested by my interlocutors: for some it was a Viennese coffeehouse, for others, it was inside a Kurdish association, or with their family. Moreover, most interviews were one-on-one interviews, while one interview was a double interview, with the presence of one family member of an interviewee. The interviews were thus in a much more familiar or intimate atmosphere. They also took less time in general.

Both during the workshops and during the interviews, I had the impression that the interlocutors were very interested in seeing photographs selected from the two archives. Most of the reactions I could observe, align with the studies which record indigenous communities' rather positive reception of the visual images recorded of their ancestors (see Edwards and Morton 2010, 7). However, correlating to the number of participants, the reactions show more diversity in the workshops than in the interviews. To illustrate this, I collected some examples for the reception of the photos in both cases.

7.1.1 Reactions in the Workshops

In the ZOZAN arts-based workshops, people from the Kurdish community and beyond had different reactions to the photos of the Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke collections. As it was often the workshop leading artist who selected photographs from the collections to present for the group in the beginning of the workshop, participants in the workshops were often presented a different selection from the photographs. While most of the participants expressed very positive opinions about the collections, there was more diversity to be observed. Some participants raised critical points regarding Werner Finke's photographs. For example, one participant in the first arts-based workshop found his collection reductionist, because it only shows peasants

and craftsmen (Workshop Protocol, Six-Hohenbalken 2022, 20). This corresponds to the Foucauldian view of photography as ‘gaze’ and ‘objectification’ (Edwards and Morton 2010, 2–3). Moreover, the participant criticized that Werner Finke sold some of the objects he collected in the Kurdish territories to the museum, as he “set them in value” (ibid.). These comments highlight the critical points of the power dynamics in the photographic encounter between Werner Finke and the Kurdish source communities.

It is important to note that such critique was only expressed about Werner Finke’s collection, the photographs of Mehmet Emir were always perceived as authentic and genuine representations of Kurdish culture. Although such reactions from the side of Kurdish participants in the context of Vienna were marginal, they are important to consider, both in relation to the collection of Werner Finke, as well as relating to the methods employed.

The collections reminded the participants in many cases of their family histories and biographies. During the final discussion of the first workshop, one participant said that the photos evoked many memories in him. Some participants discussed the photos as “memory objects” (Workshop Protocol, Six-Hohenbalken 2022, 22). For example, as a reaction to seeing a selection of the archives, some of them shared their private photos with the group. In the first workshop, one participant showed her own photos from her time as a peshmerga²² (Workshop Protocol, Six-Hohenbalken 2022, 28). Another (non-Kurdish) participant said that the photos provided her self-reflexion and enabled a journey into the past (Workshop Protocol, Six-Hohenbalken 2022, 66).

Some workshop participants appreciated the photos as a “chance for Kurdish culture” (Workshop Protocol, Six-Hohenbalken 2022, 46). While I am not sure if the participant meant a chance for Kurdish cultural heritage, discussing Kurdish history, or something else, I observed that workshop participants tended to view the photographs in connection to the Kurdish culture as a whole, and therefore connected them to larger topics related to the Kurds. For example, some participants used the viewing of the photographs as an opportunity to discuss Kurdish history. One participant in the first workshop said that you can notice on the photos how the political situation changed (Workshop Protocol Six-Hohenbalken 2022, 27).

Hence, in the workshops, regardless of viewing the archival images and their publication as a way of recreating stereotypical and reductionist representations of or as a chance for Kurdish

²² Resistance fighters

culture, in many instances, the participants perceived and discussed the photographs as part of a collection, and as artifacts closely relating to Kurdish identity and homeland.

7.1.2 *Reactions to the photos in the interviews*

In the interviews, my informants did not express critical views about the collections or their creators. Their reactions were predominantly positive, and many of them expressed that it feels good to see these photos.

Some of my interview partners became very enthusiastic during the interviews and showed me their own photos of family members or places, or photos from the internet that the archival photos reminded them of. Dilovan, who spent a few years in his early childhood with his grandmother in Turkey, showed me photos of his grandmother, and Roza, who also came to Austria as a child, showed me photos of her village in the Kurdish regions of Turkey to underline how little such Kurdish settlements have changed in Turkey since Werner Finke took his photos. As these two examples demonstrate, the act of showing personal photos in the interviews could have very different functions and intentions.



In the interviews, most participants connected the photos to the past. In some cases, the interviewees noted that the photos look old to them. Çewlîg, whose family comes from the Dersim region, explained that Werner Finke's photo (Figure 11), depicting four women dancing, looks old to him, mainly, because of the way the

ladies are dressed.

In an even larger amount than in the workshops, during the interviews the participants shared personal memories. However, they did not talk about the photos' capacity to serve as objects of memory. Rather than focusing on the photos as a collection, the interview participants discussed them as individual objects. While some of the photos were appealing to them and could represent Kurdishness, others were of less significance.



Some of the interview participants connected the photos to celebrations and legends of the Kurds. Seeing Mehmet Emir's landscape photo (Figure 24), for example, Çewlîg told me a local legend about the mountains in his region of origin, which is also where the photo was taken. The story of *Silbûs û Tarî*, two lovers who could not unite, is that they became the two mountains next to each other, visible from his village (Çewlîg, personal

interview, 14.11.2023, Pos. 47). In the interviews, however, participants stayed by biographic narratives, rather than connecting the photos to Kurdish history.

Finally, I noticed that in the double interview of Serhat and Dilovan, the photos generally had less relevance than in the interviews I conducted one-on-one with the interviewees. In the one-on-one interviews, the images, their sequence, and my questions dictated the structure. In the double interview with Serhat and Dilovan, they told stories not always prompted by the photos and also took the initiative to question each other. This resulted in a focus on their exchange, which was at least as important as the photos. To conclude, the reactions to the photographs were generally similar in the personal interviews and the arts-based workshops. However, I observed less critical reflection regarding the position of the photographer, or the practice of ethnographic collection, and more personal narratives and memories were shared in the interviews. Generally, the participants in my photo-interviews shared more personal memories connected to the photographs, which will be discussed later in this chapter in detail. In contrast, in the workshops, participants connected the photographs often to larger topics of Kurdish history and politics. Unlike in the interviews, where, except for the one double interview, the individual photos always stayed in the focus, in the workshops, the participants' contributions did not always stay in close contact with the photos.

I could observe three main categories in the research participants' reception of the photos. In many cases, the participants perceived the photos as aesthetic objects, focusing on their formal characteristics. In other cases, the photos served as a kind of evidence for confirming some of the knowledge, experience and views of the interlocutors. Finally, the photos were also used as affective and memory objects, inspiring my research partners to share personal memories and feelings. In the following, I will dedicate a separate section to each of the three major categories.

7.2 Photographs as Aesthetic Objects

The object of the photograph was not only interpreted dependent on the situation of the encounter, or on the content of the photo, but also through specific aesthetic and form-related aspects.

The formal aspects of the photographs were, in some cases, significant in how my interlocutors evaluated the images, especially in terms of color. In other cases, the interviewees found many of the images “just beautiful,” without identifying any formal characteristics that made them beautiful. This was sometimes linked to associations with their homeland, but not always.



For example, when looking at Werner Finke’s photo (Figure 13) which depicts woman with younger girls making butter with a *meşk*²³, Serhat said that he just finds the image beautiful.

Also ich weiß nicht ob das [mich] jetzt an Kurdistan erinnert, aber ich finde das Bild einfach schön.

(Well, I don't know if it reminds me of Kurdistan, but I just think it's a beautiful picture.)

(Serhat [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024)

Nevertheless, it was more often the case that interlocutors found those images beautiful which reminded them on their homeland, or evoked personal memories in them. In many cases, the colors of the images influenced how the interviewees reacted to them. In some cases, it was decisive, whether the photos are color photos or black-white ones.

For landscape pictures, interlocutors had a strong preference for color instead of black-white, finding it hard to relate to the black and white landscapes but speaking with enthusiasm about the color landscapes. This also seemed to influence whether participants associated the photo with their homeland or not. This can be observed in the different reactions evoked by a black-and-white landscape photo compared to a color landscape photo.



Mehmet Emir’s photo (Figure 24) evoked very vivid reactions and powerful associations with homeland. For example, Ehmed identifies the landscape as Kurdish, specifically because of the color of the soil.

²³ Kurdish (Kurmançî): goatskin bag for making butter.

Aber von den Bergen, wie sie aussehen, ist es für mich ganz klar, weil ich sehe, halt, das ist keine... Der Boden. Es ist dieser Boden, dieser orangene, bräunliche Boden.

(But from the mountains, the way they look, it's quite clear to me, because I can see, stop, that's not... The ground. It's this ground, this orange, brownish ground.) (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024)

He added that even if this photo was not made in the Kurdish territories, he would associate these mountains with “Kurdistan”. (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024). Also, the other informants associate this photo with homeland or Kurdishness. According to Roza, it could also be in her region, while Firat sees it as typically Kurdish, that he has also seen in Armenia. Moreover, this photo reminded Firat on a happy memory of his childhood, and it inspired Çewlîg to reciting one of the local legends of his region from the mountains. For many participants, the mountains are powerful symbols of “Kurdistan”.

Despite the imaginary of Kurds as mountain people neither Ehmed, nor other participants associated Werner Finke’s black-white landscape photo (Figure 3) with homeland or the Kurdish territories. The black-and-white landscape evoked a very different amount and quality of responses by the participants than the colored photo.



Werner Finke’s photo (Figure 3) was evaluated by the participants as “it could be everywhere” (Serhat and Dilovan), “not distinctly Kurdish” (Ehmed). Both Serhat and Roza noted that it could be in “America” as well. According to Dilovan, the photo is more difficult to recognize or read, because it is black-white. If one could see the color of the rocks, it would be easier, he said (Dilovan, personal interview, 23.01.2024).

The black-and white photos depicting people (1, 17, 18, 19, 20) were mainly commented on by Ehmed, Serhat, Çewlîg, Firat and Dilovan. Unlike the black-and-white landscape discussed above, black-and white pictures depicting people (photos) were evaluated by the participants as reminiscent of homeland. For pictures depicting people, however, the presence or absence of color did not seem to matter. They spoke equally enthusiastic about portraits in black and white and color.



Mehmet Emir's portrait (Figure 20) of an elderly villager, was evaluated as “typically Kurdish”. According to Serhat, all elderly Kurds used to look like this (Serhat [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024). Firat explained that the man's attire and mustache convey a “Kurdish homeland feeling” (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023). Regarding this male portrait, Ehmed noted that although the man does not look like the Kurds in his place of origin (Rojava), if it is “generally about Kurdistan”, (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024).



Color photos depicting people evoked similarly strong associations from the participants. Especially photos portraying women reminded my interlocutors of female family members: mothers, grandmothers, aunts. For example, when seeing photo Figure 11, Roza found the silver jewelry of major importance for associating the picture with the Kurdish regions in Southern Turkey. For Firat, the white aprons looked familiar. Also, Çewlîg found that the white color of the clothing fits the Kurdish culture. For Ehmed, also the skin tone of the depicted women played a role in identifying picture with homeland.

To conclude, in photos depicting people, as the two examples implicate, the research participants similarly favored both color and black-and-white images. While the black-and-white portrait of an elderly man was evaluated as a typical representation of the Kurds, the color photo of dancing women also reminded some of the participants on specific parts of the Kurdish regions.

Thus, the color of the photos influenced the way my participants read and evaluated them mainly in the case of landscape photos. While color landscape photos were clearly favored to black-white photos, images depicting people were equally well evaluated regardless of their color. Just like in portraits and other photos depicting people, in photos of architecture the color also did not matter. While I do not have a confident answer to why color was so important in the case of landscape photos, I assume that the reason could be what Mehmet Emir told me in our interview: it is necessary to find the traces of people in order to read a photo. As a participant noted, the color of the soil in the color landscape photo helped him ‘identify’ the image as ‘Kurdish’. For others, the flock of sheep was another ‘hint’. In the case of the black-white landscape photo, participants did not see any characteristics that were associated with ‘Kurdishness’ or the Kurdish regions.

7.3 *Objects of evidence*

When viewing the images, my interlocutors in many cases used the photos as a kind of evidence for backing up their personal experience, knowledge, historical narratives and political views about Kurdish life, history and homeland. The following sections aim to provide some examples for how participants contextualized the images within their own experiences or larger knowledge and belief systems.

7.3.1 *Evidence of Kurdishness*

Indeed, the traces of Kurdish people in the landscape, or what can be visually recognized from “the Kurdish culture” was the most important layer of recognition for my interviewees. While I dedicated a separate section to explore my interlocutors’ views of Kurdishness, in this section, I aim to show how they used the photographs to underline their ideas. In many cases, my interviewees used the photos as references to show how things were like in their homeland. In some cases, the participants selected photos which for them represented Kurdishness because they show specific aspects of Kurdish culture such as traditional attire or celebrations.

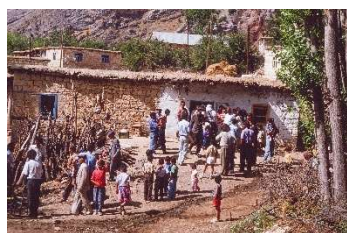


When seeing Werner Finke’s photo (Figure 11) which depicts women dressed in traditional attire, Ehmed noted that “[...] even more “Kurdistan” is not possible in one picture, that’s really clear”. Ehmed also highlighted the elements that helped him localize the picture, which not only include traditional attire and dancing, but also other aspects of how the people depicted look like, such as their skin tone and their facial features.

Die traditionelle Kleidung, die Kopfbedeckung, auch ehrlicherweise das Aussehen der Frauen, ihre Gesichtszüge, die Hautfarbe, so solche Sachen. Man sieht das also, das ist eindeutig die Kleidung, vor allem ganz traditionell: mit Tanz, wie sie tanzen.

(The traditional clothing, the headgear, also honestly the appearance of the women, their facial features, the color of their skin, things like that. So, you can see that it's clearly the clothing, especially the traditional clothing: with dance, how they dance.)
(Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024)

Moreover, the knowledge regarding specific aspects of Kurdish culture also includes festivities, agricultural techniques and handicrafts, etc. For example, Ehmed powerfully interpreted Mehmet Emir's photos (Figure 23 and 27) as scenes of a Newroz celebration. When viewing Emir's photo (Figure 27) which depicts people gathering in front of a house in the village, at the beginning he was uncertain about how to read the photo. However, while looking at the image, he started speculating that it could depict a Newroz celebration.



Ja, auch hier, die Leute haben vielleicht keine traditionelle Kleidung an, aber diese klassische Kleidung nenne ich es mal schon. Wieder der Hintergrund, mit Dorf, mit Berg im Hintergrund, ich weiß nicht, vielleicht ist es wieder Newroz, weil man wieder so viel Holz sieht, kann gut sein. Deswegen ja, deswegen habe ich es auch sofort gesehen. Also man sieht es hier schon wieder eindeutig, die Leute feiern Newroz [...], und wenn ich ein Bild sehe, wo Leute Newroz feiern, verbinde ich das sofort mit Kurdistan, logischerweise. Also ich weiß nicht, wie es andere Völker machen, weil Newroz feiern nicht nur wir Kurden. Aber ich glaube, keiner feiert Newroz [...] so sehr wie Kurden. Halt, weil die anderen Völker verbinden es nicht zwingend mit [...] dem Volk in einer nationalistischen Weise oder in einer nationalen Weise, aber Kurden halt schon. Deswegen glaube ich keiner feiert Newroz so sehr wie Kurden. Deswegen, wenn ich ein Bild sehe: Stapel Holz, Dorf, Menschen: sofort!

(Yes, here too, the people may not be wearing traditional clothing, but I call it classic clothing. Again, the background, with the village, with the mountain in the background, I don't know, maybe it's Newroz. Again, because you can see so much wood ²⁴again, it could well be. That's why yes, that's why I saw it straight away. So, you can clearly see it here again, people are celebrating Newroz, and when I see a picture of people celebrating Newroz, I immediately associate it with Kurdistan, logically. Because I don't know how other peoples do it, because it's not just us Kurds who celebrate Newroz. But I don't think anyone [...] celebrates Newroz as much as Kurds. That's because other peoples don't necessarily associate it with [...] the people in a nationalistic way or in a national way, but Kurds do. That's why I don't think anyone celebrates Newroz as much

²⁴ Wood is necessary for Newroz celebrations, because fire is a central element connected to traditions, such as jumping over the fire, for example.

as Kurds. That's why, when I see a picture: pile of wood, village, people: immediately!)
(Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024)

The reason why he associates the image with Newroz, is one the one hand, based in his experiences; seeing the pile of wood in a village gathering of people reminds him on Newroz cele-



brations. On the other hand, Ehmed associated the image with Newroz because of his knowledge of the significance of Newroz for the Kurds. In other words, the political discourses about Newroz in Kurdish diasporic spaces, which Ehmed participates in. Therefore, the image evoked a sense of Kurdishness and Kurd-

ish homeland because it reminded Ehmed of Newroz celebrations which have a symbolic significance in Kurdish nationalist discourses.

He read Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 23) that depicts people gathering around a van and he also explained that interpreting the image as a Newroz celebration makes him associate the photo with homeland:

Wenn ich genau hinschaue, was sie da machen, auch wie sie aussehen, und dass ich hier so einen Stapel Holz sehe, der wahrscheinlich verbrannt wird, dann ist es eindeutig; die feiern Newroz. Das [...] ist Heimat. Das könnte bei uns genauso sein. Weil wir feiern auch Newroz. Nicht hier, weil hier bei uns in Österreich macht man kein Feuer, aber unten in der Heimat [in Qamischli], schon. Doch doch! Das ist sehr eindeutig.

(If I look closely at what they're doing, and how they look, and I see a pile of wood that's probably being burned, then it's clear that they're celebrating Newroz. This [...] is home. It could be the same here. Because we also celebrate Newroz. Not here, because we don't light fires here in Austria, but back home [in Qamishli], we do. Yes, they do! That's very clear.) (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024)

Ehmed explained that he interpreted Mehmet Emir's photo from Dersim/Tunceli as a Newroz celebration because Newroz celebrations in his region of origin in Syria would look similar. What I find interesting is that he associated the photo with homeland through interpreting it

within a national discourse. In other words, Ehmed interpreted the photo as a Newroz celebration of the Kurds, which, aligning with nationalist discourses, he also sees as a symbol of Kurdishness. As Özlem Belçim Galip outlined, Newroz became an important political symbol of freedom and Kurdish uprising since the 1980s (Galip 2015, 18). In this way, a type of cultural knowledge and political ideas pertain to the way my interlocutors saw the photographs, and how the images were used to confirm their imaginaries of Kurdishness.

In some cases, for Ehmed, a photo could be only understood if the viewer knows that it depicts a scene in the Kurdish regions. For example, he described some of the photos as showing “the deepest gund²⁵,” but also noted that this would not be evident if he did not know that the photo depicts a Kurdish settlement: “So, if I know that they are photos from Kurdistan, then I can clearly see that it looks like somewhere deep in the gund and in the deepest village” (Ehmed, online inter-view, part 1, 21.01.2024).

What connects all the examples above is that the participants interpreted the images by closely linking them to their ethnic identity. While in some cases, the participants identified what gave them the ‘hint’ of seeing the photos as Kurdish, in others they just referred to their knowledge which stemmed from their upbringing and being culturally connected to “Kurdistan”. Although this section focuses on examples from my interview with Ehmed—as these illustrated my argument best—this aspect of reading the photos through ethnic identifications could be observed in other interviews too²⁶. Thus, the reading of the photos was shaped by my interlocutors’ ideas about Kurdishness and Kurdish homeland, aligning with diasporic discourses and ideas, as well as ethnic identifications. In this way, the images served as ‘evidence of Kurdishness’.

7.3.2 In relation to other media

In contrast to the previous examples, I would like to highlight how, in some cases, the participants interpreted the images in relation to other media, such as their own photos, books, social media, or other images from archival collections. Unfortunately, the limitations of this thesis prevented me from conducting systematic research on the intertextuality of the photos and their interpretations. However, it is important to note that my interlocutors, when viewing the photographs, connected them to other media.

²⁵ Gund is a Kurdish (Kurmancî) word for village.

²⁶ For a more detailed analysis of my interlocutors’ interpretations of the images through Kurdishness, see chapter 9 “Kurdishness in the Photographs”.

When viewing Werner Finke's photo (Figure 4), Roza explained that the region of her village in Turkey looks very similar, even though she knows that this picture is older.



Ja, und was typisch ist, denn ich muss [...] sofort an unser Dorf denken! Wie noch nicht weiterentwickelt die Dörfer sind. [...] Unser, [...] die nächstgrößere Stadt, die schaut noch genau so aus. Das wird ein Bild sein aus den Siebzigern, Achtzigern. Es schaut aber noch immer so aus. [...]

(Yes, and what is typical, because I must [...] immediately think of our village! How undeveloped the villages are. [...] Ours, [...] the next biggest town, it still looks like this here. That will be a picture from the seventies and eighties. But it still looks like this. [...]) (Roza [pseudonym], personal interview, October 23, 2023)

To prove her points, Roza showed me her own photos she took in recent years in her Kurdish village. She emphasized that the Kurdish villages (of Turkey) did not change since the 1970s, when many of the photos were taken by Werner Finke; the roads are still dirt-roads, people still use horse-driven carriages. Without delving into the content of this excerpt, which I will do extensively in a later chapter, here, I just aim to illustrate how Roza interpreted an archival photo in relation to her own photographs and did this to explain a statement. This, Werner Finke's photo became a type of evidence in this moment of the interview.



As another example, when viewing Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 21) of two men sitting on a felled tree, Ehmed, who originates from Syria, noted that even though the men depicted did not look Kurdish to him, he could still recognize that it should be Kurdish men, "because older Kurds from Turkey dress like this". The reason he knows that, he explained, is that he has seen other images and videos [about Kurdish men in Turkey] before (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024). Thus, the previous visual encounters allowed him to interpret the image as he did.



For Firat, media such as books and photographs previously seen played a similar role in interpreting the photos. When seeing Werner Finke's photo (Figure 13), he immediately identified it as 'Kurdish' and as expressing a "Kurdish homeland feeling". He recognized the goat skin-bag hanging on the tripod and told me how it was used for making butter. As he explained, he has never seen this process in person, but in photos and books about Kurds (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023).

The familiarity with the two archival collections also seemed to play a role in how the participants read the images. Roza and Firat, who both participated in one of the ZOZAN arts-based workshops before the interview, tried to guess sometimes if a photo was taken by Werner Finke or Mehmet Emir (for example, Roza: photos Figure3, 13, and Firat: photo Figure10). For example, when discussing Werner Finke's photo (Figure 3), Roza, who claimed that the image does not remind her on Kurdish homeland, also added that it could be one of Finke's images from Beytüşşebap, or one of Mehmet Emir's photos from Dersim. Similarly, looking at photo Figure 10, Firat mentioned that the image looks familiar to him from Finke's collection. While other participants, who encountered the images for the first time, did not care much about the identity of the photographer, for the two who were already familiar with the two collections, this information played a role too.

As I mentioned in a previous section, for the workshop participants, it was more significant that the images were part of specific archival collections, and they more often referred to them as such. Some participants, for example, who were critical of Werner Finke's role as an ethnographer, did not view Finke's photos so much as representations of Kurdish identity, but rather as reproductions of stereotypical representations of the Kurds.

These interview excerpts demonstrate that participants contextualized the photos within their knowledge, experience and political views. Furthermore, in many cases, they related the images to other media or interpreted them based on other media they consumed. Therefore, what is considered applicable knowledge for authentically interpreting the photos also varied. The examples presented in this section show how participants treated the photographs as 'evidence', serving for example the confirmation of their views of Kurdishness, their conviction about the oppression of the Kurds or their personal knowledge and experiences from the Kurdish territories.

However, during the process of writing this chapter, I had to remark that I could not systematically analyze how the images from the two collections and the ways they were read by the participants were shaped by other media. Although I realized that intertextuality is an important aspect of how photographs relate to homeland, it is beyond the capacity of this research to sufficiently address the ways in which the photos are connected to other media. I suppose, this is one of the biggest limitations of this thesis and a topic which needs to be addressed in future research.

7.4 *Memory objects*

Finally, I would like to present some personal associations and memories of my interlocutors that were evoked by the photographs to show how the images served as ‘memory objects’ and ‘affective objects’ in the photo-interviews. It stroked me that the scenes of everyday Kurdish life in Turkey looked so familiar for most of my interviewees, despite being brought up in Austria and even if some of them were from Kurdish regions other than where the photos originate from. The participants focused on different aspects of the images when viewing them.

For example, Firat, whose family originates from Armenia, was reminded by the situations



depicted in the images of similar ones in his homeland. When viewing Mehmet Emir’s photo (Figure 17), he noted that the way elderly people sit in front of the village, especially in the evenings, is typical of Kurdish villages in his home region. Also, the photographer Mehmet Emir chose this photo from his archive because

it reminded him of how much the elderly people always have to talk about. By contrast, Ehmed, who, like Firat, does not originate from the Kurdish regions in Turkey, focused on the way people are dressed. Regarding the photo (Figure 17), he said that the clothing of the women strongly conveys a sense of Kurdishness. He noted that especially older women in his family dress this way. Additionally, Dilo van used the photo (Figure 17) to explain to me how people in his village looked.

On the other hand, in many cases my research partners noted differences, they pointed out elements in the photos that did not look familiar to them. In some cases, despite the difference between the context in the images and the places my interviewees came from, they expressed some kind of “familiarity” in the photos.



For example, when seeing Wener Finke's photo (Figure 8), Firat mentioned that he has never seen such attire by the Kurdish people in Armenia. Still, the photo looked familiar to him, as it reminded him on eating together in Armenia, and sharing stories with each other. "We are often sitting together like this by the table in Armenia" he said. The use of the present tense is notable, because Firat has not been to Armenia for many years. I suppose that with "we", he means Kurdish people in Armenia.

Some of the photos evoked more personal memories of my interviewees' childhood and reminded participants on their family members. Although none of the participants was reminded of their father by any of the photographs, memories of their mothers, grandmothers, grandfathers or great-grandfathers were brought up.



Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 25) reminded Roza of her mother, and Werner Finke's photo (Figure 11) reminded Çewlîg of his mother. Although Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 25) portrays a man next to a hardly identifiable person, harvesting grains with a scythe, in Roza it evoked memories about her mother, who, growing up in a Kurdish village in Turkey, had to work hard in the agriculture. This was the type of work her mother hated the most, Roza explained.



Werner Finke's photo (Figure 11) depicting women dressed in Kurdish traditional attire and dancing folks' dances, did not only remind Çewlîg on his mother, but also on Kurdish women in general. It is "typical Kurdish women culture" he said, especially with the gold, which his grandmother, mother and sister would all agree, is very important. He added that his mother and sister both love wearing such traditional dresses, as it shows how proud they are and how much they love their culture.

Furthermore, some participants were reminded of their grandmother by one or the other image,



typically those who spent time in their Kurdish hometown in their childhood. For instance, Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 18) which depicts an elderly lady standing in a garden in front of a pile of firewood and other objects where two small children are playing,

reminded Çewlîg of his grandmother, and the times he and his sister used to spend with her. They used to be always behind her, watching her work, he said (Çewlîg [pseudonym], personal interview, November 14, 2023)



Another photo of Mehmet Emir (Figure 19), which depicts people sitting on the terrace in front of a stone house, reminded Dilovan of his grandmother with whom he spent his early childhood, before returning to his birth city Vienna at the age of six. He remembers sharply the everyday life there, waking up every morning early with his grandmother and helping her with the work in the household. The families of both Dilovan and Çewlîg originate from the Dersim/Tunceli region, where Mehmet Emir documented his home village.



Werner Finke's photo (Figure 6) depicting an urban street scene reminded Firat of his grandfather. Seeing the photo (Figure 6), Firat explained, pointing to the man in the middle of the photo, wearing gray suite, that people in his village in Armenia, involving his grandfather, used to dress like this [elegant, wearing a shirt and a suit] even when working outside [in the fields] (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023).



As a last example, Firat connected Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 24) which shows flocks of sheep in the mountains, to his great grandfather, who, as Firat knows from family stories, had a flute that he used to play when he was up in the mountain with the sheep (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023). What looks like the "typical Kurdish homelandscape" for Firat, is thus also carrying the memory of his ancestors.

As the examples above demonstrated, some of the photos reminded my interlocutors of personal memories or family members. Most of the images which reminded my interlocutors of their family members are from Mehmet Emir's collection. Of my interviewees, Firat and Çewlîg commented the most photos with that they reminded them on family members. Both young men shared with me in our interview, that they cannot return to their home village for different reasons: while Firat needs to escape conscription into the army in Armenia, Çewlîg and his family must stay away for political reasons. I speculate that not being able to return

might impact their associations. Nevertheless, other interviewees were also reminded of their family members, which highlights the qualities of the photographs as ‘objects of memory’ and ‘affective objects’.

7.5 Chapter conclusion: The reception of archival photos

This chapter presented the diverse reactions of my interlocutors to the photographs, involving the evaluation of the photos in the workshops, and analyzing their reception by my interviewees. I observed three different modes of using the photos: as aesthetic objects – evaluating based on formal and aesthetical characteristics, as objects of evidence – using the photos as evidence or representation for something abstract such as ideas about Kurdishness or homeland, and finally as memory objects – when the photos evoked personal memories in my interlocutors. While the photos did not only work in one or the other mode, instead, often evoking personal memories while also representing an abstract theme, I found it useful to explore these three modes separately.

In the workshops, the participants²⁷ expressed more critical reactions to the photos than in the interviews. While I am not sure what the exact reason for that was, I suggest that it could either depend on the sample: the workshops feature a larger sample size than the interviews, while the average level of education in the workshops also often exceeded that of the interviews. Another reason for differences could be in the methods: in the workshops, there were generally many members of the Kurdish community who could engage in discourse with each other and the researchers, while in the interviews the interviewees were with one exception alone with me.

Using the method of photo-elicitation influenced my data in three ways: the images impacted the narratives my research partners chose to share with me, the participants evaluated the photos based on their own experiences and imaginaries, and in some cases, they used the images as evidence to underscore their narratives. Thus, there was a reciprocal impact between the participants’ narratives and the photographs. This mutual influence emerged through the act of imagination.

²⁷ Although two individuals I interviewed also participated in one of the ZOZAN art-based workshops, the rest of my interviewees did not participate in the art-based interventions, and I did not interview most of the workshop participants.

Another difference between the workshops and the interviews was that workshop participants rather tended to see the photos as part of an archive while interview participants saw them as individual objects, even though before the interviews, I always presented both archival collections briefly. One reason for this difference might be that Mehmet Emir, the creator of one of the archival collections, was present at the workshops and introduced his work personally to the participants, which might have made the collection more concrete, leaving a stronger impression of the archive.

For most interviewees, the readability of the photos was influenced by their formal/aesthetic features. Generally, the photos depicting people evoked more intense reactions and associations with homeland and Kurdishness than landscapes. This corresponds with Jäger's observations about the inferiority of nature photos to portraits in Germany (Jäger 2003, 132). Moreover, by landscapes, the participants preferred the color image against the black-white one.

In my understanding, the photos served both for Mehmet Emir and the other interviewees in most cases as memory objects, as well as and objects of evidence/representation. My interview with Mehmet Emir as well as the other interviews clearly demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between images and meaning, or as Edwards and Morton quoted Trachtenberg, that "the relationship between images and imprinted meanings is fraught with uncertainties, for like opaque facts, images cannot be readily trapped within a single explanation or interpretation. They have a life of their own..." (Trachtenberg 1989, xv, quoted in Edwards and Morton 2010, 7).

While Mehmet Emir emphasized the importance of knowledge about the original context in which the photos were created, some of my interviewees, without knowing that original context, also spoke about a kind of knowledge based in their upbringing and heritage, which is crucial for understanding the photos. In my understanding, Mehmet Emir's view demonstrates the argument that "Photographs need language [...]" for interpretation (Cantat 2021, 241). His narratives about the photos highlight on the one hand the relevance of the individual people and their traces in the landscape – the life histories of those photographed by him and the social relations in the village, on the other hand, they focus on the passing of time and the transformations undergone. For grasping these dimensions of the photos, one needs someone to tell these narratives.

Other interviewees highlighted the relevance of a different kind of knowledge, rooted in one's upbringing, family narratives and use of media informing about Kurdish culture and heritage.

Interviewees explained that they could relate to the images because they recognize specific aspects of Kurdish homeland or Kurdishness in them, which they knew from being exposed to Kurdish culture, for example having it seen in other photos, books, or social media. In this way, they also used the photos to confirm their narratives and ideas. In my understanding, these remarks underline how images and their interpretations are incorporated in what Deborah Poole called ‘visual economies’ (Deborah Poole, 1997, quoted in Banks and Vokes 2010b, 338). This latter point will be further demonstrated in the following chapters.

Finally, the interviewees used the images as memory objects, as these reminded them on personal memories on events of their childhood or on family members. While in most of my interviewees, one or more photos evoked such personal memories, I observed that those who are not able to return to their homeland because of political, economic or other reasons, shared the most such memories with me.

8 The Homeland

... und was die Heimat zur Heimat machen, sind eben diese Verabschiedungen. [...] das Fehlen nur von einer Person, [...] das spürt also jeder. Jeder [der stirbt oder weggeht] hinterlässt einen Platz, einen großen, leeren Platz im Dorf...

(... and it is precisely these farewells that make a homeland a homeland. [...] if only one person is missing, [...] so everyone feels that. Everyone [who dies or leaves], leaves behind a place, a big, empty place in the village...) (Mehmet Emir, personal interview, December 11, 2023)

This chapter is about what Mehmet Emir beautifully describes in this excerpt: what is homeland and what is that makes homeland a homeland? Approaches the research question based on the narratives of my interlocutors, I will explore the concept of homeland in the context of visual encounters with archival images. Therefore, the question is: How do second-generation Kurds imagine their homeland when viewing a selection of photographs from the Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir collections?

In my interlocutors' accounts many different views of homeland can be found. I have categorized these views to the larger categories of land-based notion of homeland, and mental notions of homeland, and skills-based notions of homeland. I will present examples of these based on my observations in the workshops and also based on my photo-interviews. As in the photo-interviews, several different views of homeland emerged, I ordered those in more sub-categories, investigating the village as a kind of land-based homeland imaginary, and looking at mental views of the homeland based on belonging, tradition, freedom and childhood. Furthermore, I will show how these categories are intertwined with each other, further highlighting another notion of the homeland, named the home(land)scape.

After scrutinizing these views of the homeland, I will show how the family house in the original homeland shaped the views of some of my interlocutors. As a last theme, this chapter will investigate closer the ambivalences in the homeland imaginaries of my interlocutors, taking Clifford's (1994) and others' argument about the complexity and tensions in diasporans homeland relations seriously.

Before delving into my interlocutors' narratives, I would like to make a short excursion concerning the linguistic context of the term homeland. I conducted the interviews in German, the preferred language of all my interviewees. I struggled to decide whether to translate homeland with the German term *Heimat*, which refers to the country or place where someone or something is *heimisch*, that is native (see v. d. Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2025); or *Heimatland*, a place where someone comes from or spent most of their childhood (v. d. Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften 2021). Other dictionaries such as Duden ascribe the childhood to *Heimat* ("Duden: die Heimat," n.d.), and connote *Heimatland* with descent or ancestry ("Duden: das Heimatland," n.d.). I will not continue boring the reader with these slight differences, but rather get to my point, which is that the meaning of these terms is blurry.

The nationalist connotation of the term in German is disturbing, given the historical context. Furthermore, in today's globalized world, it seems inappropriate to employ a concept that assumes homogenous national entities. This is something that was also questioned by some of my interviewees, as we will see.

Homeland, as it is used in the anthropological literature about migrants, mainly describes the country of departure. If we take the word apart, it consists of two parts: *home* and *land*, the land where the home is. How ironic, that homeland is not where home is, migrants are building or have built their homes in their destination. Moreover, in the case of the Kurds, most people do not mean a nation-state when they say homeland, as the Kurdish territories are divided mainly between Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, suffering a long history of oppression.

8.1 *Homeland in the Workshops*

The idea of exploring the concept of homeland together with photographs selected from the two collections arose from my fieldwork in the ZOZAN art-based workshops which were held with members of the Kurdish diaspora as well as non-Kurdish participants like me. The workshops generated three different views of homeland: the land-based homeland, the mental homeland, and the skills-based homeland. Each of these views correspond with some aspects of the notions of home(land) presented in the literature by Safran (1991), Cohen (2022 [1997]), Axel (2002) and Boccagni et al. (2020). One important limitation of my data emerging from the workshops is the combination of views of first- and second-generation migrants, which in some cases cannot be clearly separated. Overall, the workshops thus show the co-existence and relevance of multiple homeland concepts for the Kurdish diaspora.

Already in the first workshop, the group discussed the differences of attachment to and memories of the Kurdish territories in the first and the second generation. The group mainly consisted of first-generation migrants, except for a young Kurdish woman who was there with her mother. As one of the participants (man, first generation) claimed, the question of the culture of memory is especially interesting for the second generation. Another participant (a woman, also first generation) mentioned that her daughter moved to the Kurdish territories and visits sometimes Vienna now just as she (the correspondent) visits “Kurdistan”. Yet others posed the question of why the second generation is less [politically /culturally] active or does not speak Kurdish fluently. One second-generation participant shared her concern that being too nostalgic about old things like dengbêj²⁸, handmade clothing, etc., blinds out the current realities of Kurdish people living in the Kurdish territories. ‘They might listen to rap music instead’- she said.

8.1.1 The land-based homeland

In the first workshop, people approached the topic of homeland through land-related issues such as oil, dams, etc. in Kurdish territories were important for the participants to discuss. To understand the relevance of these issues for my interlocutors, the following paragraph highlights the relevance of energy resources in the Kurdish territories for Turkey.

In the Kurdish territories, the Turkish government implemented large-scale projects to extract its hydro-resources such as the building of dams on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, while the region continued to be economically underdeveloped. Already in the 1950s, hundreds of thousands of Kurds were displaced resulting from the mechanization in the Kurdish regions of Turkey (Gabrielyan 2024, 254).

As a result of the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP), which includes the construction of 22 dams and 19 hydroelectric plants, more than 350.000 people were displaced (Ökten 2017, 417). According to Gabrielyan, resulting from the large water projects of GAP and the armed conflict in the region, over 4000 settlements were destroyed and millions of people displaced (Gabrielyan 2024, 264). These projects have caused the displacement and further socioeconomic impoverishment of the local Kurdish population (ibid., 258).

²⁸ Dengbêj is a Kurdish folklore (bard) tradition of performing epic songs. The dengbêj “singer-poets” perform in weddings and other social gatherings (see Demir 2021, 832).

Similarly to water, other resources of the Kurdish territories have been extracted by the Turkish state in a way that further deepened the inequalities. Between 1954-2001, most of Turkey's oil was produced in the Kurdish territories (Gabrielyan 2024, 256). As Gabrielyan explains, the revenues generated from petroleum production in South-East Turkey were not used to benefit the development of the region (Gabrielyan 2024, 244–45). Moreover, the cheaper electricity produced in hydroelectric power stations built in the Kurdish territories contributed to Turkey's industrial development, while the South-Eastern regions still experienced power shortages (ibid, 257).

The participants who or whose parents (and in one case, husband) came from the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, were much concerned about such issues. One participant said: "I wish we had not a single drop of oil!". The importance of place, land, and borders in this workshop is, I speculate, reflected by the collective artwork of the group: postal stamps that can cross borders and connect places and people. As in the Kurdish territories, people's movement is massively controlled by military stations and some places are not accessible, postal stamps which can move freely symbolize the dream of a liberated "Kurdistan". Moreover, through the postal stamp, the imagined country of "Kurdistan" could be visually constructed.

Kurdish homeland was imagined through various categories collected by the participants as the most important themes of "Kurdistan". At the same time, participants brought personal objects, photos, and memories that they wanted to include in representing their homeland. To highlight the exploitation and destruction of Kurdish land for resources, workshop participants scanned an oil lamp and included photos of fire. This interpretation of homeland aligns with Cohen's symbolic notion, which highlights the role of cultural artifacts and shared imagination (Cohen 2022, 142 [first publ. 1997]).

The land-based homeland, as I observed in the workshops, corresponds with Safran's notion of the 'ancestral' or original homeland, Cohen's (2022 [first publ. 1997]) symbolic notion of homeland, as well as also Axel's (2002) concept of homeland as an affective process. While these accounts from do not confirm any of the six criteria in Safran's definition (see Safran 1991, 83–84), except for highlighting diasporans' concern with the collective restoration of homeland (if only in a mental scale), these narratives confirm the Safran in the relevance of a space-based notion of homeland for the Kurdish diaspora.

The discourses of the marginalization of the Kurdish regions in the four nation states through different industrial projects of extraction aligns with Cohens argument about the power of diasporic discourses for the shared imagination of a common homeland. Finally, the accounts presented above reflect Axel's (2002) view of the homeland as an affective and temporal process, as it emerged through the shared narratives of land exploitation of the participants. To conclude, through the land-based notion of homeland, "Kurdistan" is imagined through what happens in Kurdish territories –what happens to Kurdish land –, and by affective objects representing these processes (Verstappen 2016, 28). Being place-based and symbolic at the same time, this notion confirms Verstappen's critique of Axel's (2002) and others' placeless notion of homeland (see Verstappen 2016, 28–29).

8.1.2 The mental homeland

Another notion of homeland I could observe in the workshops was what we call here mental homeland. It corresponds with the symbolic notions of homeland suggested by Cohen (2022 [first publ. 1997]) and also relates to Boccagni et al's (2020) deterritorial notion of home. Moreover, the accounts presented below will show that the mental notion of homeland can have a national framing. This notion of homeland was often raised in relation to experiences of loss.

In the first workshop (see Six-Hohenbalken et al. 2022b), the mental notion of homeland appeared in the shared artwork of the group. For example, the three colors of the Kurdish flag appeared in the form of scanned objects such as colorful paprika and painted nails. Participants told stories about the time when all Kurdish symbols were prohibited, how one had to be especially careful not to accidentally include the three colors next to each other when for example placing colorful balloons at a birthday party. Otherwise, one could be charged with separatism by the authorities. Thus, with choosing the random objects of colored nails and paprika in the national colors, participants aimed to represent the suppression of Kurdish cultural expressions. Moreover, this example underlines the argument of Alinia and Eliassi (2014) that Kurdish constructions of homeland also implicate political projects.

In the second workshop (see Six-Hohenbalken et al. 2022a), this notion of homeland was clearly dominating. The group approached the topics of land and homeland more abstractly, not only through discussions but also with drawing exercises. The participants discussed homeland and land through their personal meaning for them and drew and described imaginary land-

scapes. Kurdish participants who were of the second generation brought up their family histories –full of loss and dispossession. The artist argued that our imagination is linked to memories and postmemories of the homeland transmitted by our parents. This way, homeland was imagined by the participants as something we carry inside, something that is part of the self. This interpretation of homeland aligns with Axel’s view as something that “[...] exists *within* a diasporic community wherever it lives” (Axel 2002, 426).

With this example, I aimed to show that the notion of the mental homeland, corresponding to Alinia’s observations, is shaped by Kurdish experiences of trauma and homesickness (2004). Moreover this example reveals homeland as something we carry inside, an idea that shapes our sense of space (compare Boccagni, Murcia, and Belloni 2020, 22). However, unlike Boccagni, Murcia and Belloni’s deterritorial notion of home, these accounts of the mental homeland are shaped by spatial experiences of my interlocutors.

The mental homeland thus resembles Robin Cohen’s (2022 [first publ. 1997]) argument of the construction of homeland through diasporic discourses and also resembles Minoo Alinia’s observations about the importance of subjective constructions and individual experiences (Alinia 2004, V).

8.1.3 *The skills-based homeland*

Finally, a third way of imagining homeland was one focusing on skills and knowledge connected to it. Beyond representing a symbolic notion of homeland which emerges through diasporic discourse and shared imagination (Cohen 1996, 516) this notion of homeland focuses on skills that are identified with the ancestral homeland. While resembling Safran’s (1991) idea of the ancestral homeland (without confirming its six characteristics), this notion, again, underlines Cohen’s (2022 [first publ. 1997]) argument about the diasporic discourse and shared imagination. In a way, the skills-based homeland also relates to the notion of homeland-as-practiced (see Verstappen 2016, 29–30). However, instead of economic practices like the sending of remittances, the skills-based homeland emerges through the re-enactment of knowledge from the ‘ancestral homeland’. In other words, instead of maintaining the homeland (Safran) through financial support, here we can observe a symbolic kind of maintenance of the homeland through the remembrance and reenactment of the skills and traditional practices identified with it.

In the third workshop, one of the events was a communal performance of butter making, to which many second-generation Kurds and other diaspora members were invited by a Kurdish

student taking the leadership in the seminar. While viewing the selection of photographs prepared by the Kurdish student, people started discussing the technologies, and how people did things, like making carpets, spinning, or making cheese. There were some disagreements among the guests, which were about the different ways of reconstructing the past.

While on the one hand, the images depicting traditional pastoralist lifestyle evoke a sense of homeland, Kurdish and non-Kurdish participants expressed concerns about the knowledge which was lost through the displacement of Kurds and the abandonment of pastoralist lifestyle. Indeed, the systematic destruction of Kurdish land and settlements and the forced migration brought also the destruction of the forms of knowledge connected to Kurdish pastoralist lifestyle, thus being a form of epistemicide.

In this sense, the reconstruction and re-enactment of such skills and knowledge served the imaginary construction of homeland. The students of the seminar built a modern kind of *meşk*²⁹ (goatskin bag) which they hung on a ladder to re-enact traditional Kurdish way of butter-making in the workshop. The mother of the Kurdish student, who herself lived in the Kurdish territories, was invited to lead the communal butter making. All guests were invited to participate in the process. Some of the Kurds started singing traditional songs while pushing and pulling the heavy container filled with milk which was used for making the butter. The shared act of the butter making enabled participants to imagine their homeland through re-experiencing of lost knowledge. In contrast to many Kurdish traditional activities, butter making is something that is normally not practiced or seen in the diaspora. The mother of the Kurdish student who organized the event explained that after moving to Vienna, she stopped making butter, because the milk you can buy here does not contain enough fat, and the whipped cream is too expensive. Moreover, the goat skin-bag, traditionally used for making butter, cannot be bought here. For these reasons, the re-enactment of butter-making enabled the imagination of the old, ancestral' homeland.

Beyond the ZOZAN workshops, I observed other ways of the skill-based homeland in Vienna's Kurdish diasporic spaces. Such re-enactments of skills and reconstructions of knowledge took place, for example, in Kurdish language courses, where second and third-generation Kurds who grew up speaking German (and in many cases the official language in their countries of origin such as Turkish or Arabic), learn of the Kurdish dialects. Similarly, in dance courses, diaspora Kurds reconnect with traditional forms of dancing and costumes.

²⁹ See footnote 23.

To conclude, the notion of a skills-based homeland aligns with Safran's (1991) notion of the 'ancestral' homeland through highlighting the diasporan desire to maintain the original homeland. However, here, we see a symbolic discourse, and what is more important, a discourse that emerged in the space of an art seminar, reflecting the current trend of questioning hegemonic notions of knowledge and valuing marginalized and repressed forms.

8.1.4 Synthesis: homeland in the workshops

The workshops enabled different ways of talking about and imagining the Kurdish homeland, based on the artistic approaches involved. It became evident that encountering photographs from the two archives, Kurdish diaspora members in Vienna, both of first and second generation, evoked strong associations, memories, and emotions connected to the Kurdish homeland. I believe that the approaches and ways of imagination were largely influenced by the artists. However, what all workshops revealed was the relevance of personal experiences of loss and victimhood, aligning with Alinia's observations (2004).

In the first and third workshop, the voices of Kurdish immigrants (first-generation) seemed to dominate for different reasons. As in the first workshop, most of the participants were of the first generation, in the third workshop, the group (with the leadership of the second-generation Kurdish participant) decided to invite someone from the first generation (the mother of the participant) to take over the leadership of the workshop. The reason for this decision was that the group wanted to re-enact traditional knowledge from the summer pasture in the form of butter-making, which had to be done by someone who experienced the job herself.

I conclude that these observations in the art-based workshops shed light on three different ways of imagining the homeland. These imaginaries reflect encountering the two photographic archives as a whole, rather than individual images. As individuals from the first and second generations participated in all workshops, their discourses were shared and mixed up, as well as their actions. These notions of homeland therefore do not enable a differentiated perspective on the homeland imaginaries of the second generation. For this reason, the focus of my analysis lies rather in the interviews, which will resemble these notions to varying degrees.

8.2 Homeland in the Interviews

This section explores how my interlocutors described the concept of homeland both verbally and visually during the interviews. That is, how they defined homeland, and which images they

chose to explain it. Compared to my observations in the workshops, the data gathered from my interviews provided more detailed perspectives on the concept of homeland.

Regarding the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora in Vienna, Christoph Osztovcics observes “[...] in the so-called second generation, i.e. people who were born in Austria, for example, this concept of homeland is often different and the desire to return is less strong, or evoked retrospectively.” (Osztovcics 2013, 231 translation by the author). My findings align with this observation: individuals from the second generation did not express plans to return to their homeland.

To begin, I will emphasize the complexity of the homeland relationships of my interviewees, who often navigate multiple homelands. This aligns with Clifford’s perspective of the ambiguous relationship of diasporans with their homeland, oscillating “between return and deferral” (Clifford 1994, 308). The rest of this chapter will present six distinct views of homeland that emerged from my photo-interviews, categorizing them into two broad groups: the mental homeland and the land-based homeland. It is important to note, however, that my interlocutors’ perspectives are multifaceted and cannot always be neatly classified into a single category.

The land-based views of homeland include views that focus on physical location and places. In contrast, the mental category includes interpretations rooted in abstract notions, such as values, cultural identities, and traditions. These narratives highlight the multidimensional nature of homeland as understood by my interlocutors—not only geographically, but also in terms of content. For instance, many participants described the homeland using land-based views, while also invoking ideas of belonging or tradition. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that these interpretations are deeply intertwined with the participants’ personal biographies and family histories.

Finally, I will dedicate the last section of this chapter to exploring the recurring motif of the house in my interlocutors’ narratives. When my interlocutors identified photos with homeland, as we will see, their views were sometimes shaped by a home in which they stayed as children, and the practices connected.

8.2.1 Multiple homelands

First of all, the accounts of my interviewees confirm views about the multiple identifications of diasporans (see e.g. de Rouen 2019, 28; Özlem Belçim Galip 2015, 40). Consequently, aligning with Osztovcics’s (2013) observations, the interviews clearly show that second-generation Kurds in Vienna do not wish to return to the original homeland, or this wish is not stronger

than their ties to their homes in Austria. Thus, Safran's (1991) perspective on the homeland-orientation does not fit second-generation Kurds in Vienna, as my observations reveal.

Most of my interviewees located homeland in both Vienna, as well as the Kurdish territories. They lifted the notion of homeland on a transnational level by identifying multiple places as homeland. For Roza, for example, homeland could be at the same time a Kurdish village in Turkey, the city of Vienna, or even a village in Styria. She explained that these are not only places where she has lived before, but also places where she feels comfortable. Other participants gave a more detailed explanation about why they consider a place their homeland. For example, Ehmed explained me his sense of homeland regarding Vienna and "Kurdistan".

Ganz allgemein, ich bin hier geboren, ich bin hier aufgewachsen, hier ist meine Heimat. Aber ähm, wenn ich solche Bilder sehe, dann erinnert mich das ganz stark auch an Heimat, weil ich bin immer noch Kurde, und ich bin immer noch, das ist immer noch meine Kultur, sage ich mal, weil es gibt einen Unterschied in meinen Augen, gibt es einen Unterschied zwischen da halt, Österreich ist natürlich meine Heimat, weil ich bin hier geboren, aufgewachsen, aber ich lebe nicht die österreichische Kultur. Zu Hause lebe ich kurdische Kultur, und wenn ich solche Bilder sehe, so Heimat, kann man zweiseitig sehen. Einerseits natürlich, dort, wo man geboren, aufgewachsen ist, ist die Heimat, und andererseits natürlich auch nach der Kultur, nach der Abstammung ist auch Heimat. Und da muss ich ganz klar sagen, dass, wenn ich solche Bilder sehe, sehe ich Heimat, weil das ist meine Kultur. Wenn ich solche Frauen sehe, solche Männer sehe, sehe ich meine Heimat darin.

(In general, I was born here, I grew up here, this is my home. But um, when I see pictures like that, it also reminds me very strongly of homeland, because I'm still Kurdish, and I'm still, this is still my culture, I say, because there's a difference between, in my eyes, there's a difference between, Austria is my home, of course, because I was born here, grew up here, but I don't live the Austrian culture. At home, I live the Kurdish culture, and when I see pictures like this, you can see two sides of homeland. On the one hand, of course, homeland is where you were born and grew up, and on the other hand, of course, homeland is also based on culture and ancestry. And I have to say quite clearly that when I see pictures like this, I see homeland because that is my culture. When I see

women like that, when I see men like that, I see my homeland in them.) (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024)

Ehmed thus differentiated between two kinds of homeland here. He emphasized that it is obvious that Austria is his homeland because this is where he grew up and that is where his home is. However, when seeing these photographs, recognizing Kurdish culture evoked a sense of homeland in him. So, we have a place-based or biography-based homeland on the one hand, where one grew up, and a culture- or tradition-based homeland on the other hand, with which one identifies based on ethnicity. Reading this excerpt of our interview, I understand that he has a light preference for the first homeland, Vienna. I suspect this light preference because of his way of formulating: “in general [...] here is my home” as a first statement. Then he introduced the other homeland through starting the sentence with “but”, as a kind of contrast or complementation. What blurs these two concepts of homeland, however, is that inside his home (which is in the Austrian homeland), he lives the Kurdish culture – the Kurdish homeland. Thus, we cannot clearly separate these homelands.

The two competing and complementing homelands emerged in other interviews too. When I asked Dilovan how he would describe homeland, he said that he feels at home both in Turkey’s Kurdish part, as well as in Vienna. Like Ehmed, Dilovan also prefers Vienna as he has more connections here, but certain things like Kurdish or Turkish music remind him of his village. His notions of homeland thus highlight both human connections or belonging on the one hand, and culture or tradition on the other. While the Kurdish homeland, as for Ehmed, is for Dilovan also a culture or tradition-based homeland, they both mentioned different media that evokes this sense of homeland in them. In the case of Ehmed, the photographs we were viewing in the interview were what reminded him of the (original) homeland, Dilovan mentioned music. I find it interesting that among Kurdish music he also named Turkish music, something that people also listen to in the Kurdish territories in Turkey.

These examples align with Six-Hohenbalken’s view that second and later generations of Kurds connect with the original homeland through cultural, political or social practices (Six-Hohenbalken 2018, 73). I condensed in the previous chapter such descriptions of homeland through the notion of the mental homeland. In the following section, I will scrutinize different sub-categories of this notion.

8.2.2 *The mental homeland*

The concept of the ‘mental homeland’ which emerged from the interviews encompasses cultural, political and social identification of homeland. It contains views which highlight specific aspects of culture or tradition, sociality, and values.

Some of my interviewees defined homeland by the feeling of comfort or well-being, without any reference to other criteria. For example, Serhat explained that for him, homeland is where one feels the most comfortable. Serhat was born and grew up in Austria, with repeated visits to the village of his father in Kurdish Turkey.

[...] ich glaube, Heimat ist immer da, wo man sich am wohlsten fühlt. [...] Denke ich mir, manchmal fliege ich in ein anderes Land, und denke mir, wow, das ist meine Heimat.

([...] I believe that home is always where you feel most comfortable. [...] I think to myself, sometimes I fly to another country and think to myself, wow, this is my home(land).)

(Serhat [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024)

As this excerpt shows, Serhat’s notion of homeland is not place-based. Moreover, it also does not have a dimension of time, homeland can be anywhere and anytime. This view aligns with Boccagni et al.’s (2020) deterritorial notion of home. While others also expressed the necessity of feeling comfortable, unlike Serhat, they formulated more detailed descriptions, allowing me to construct their views through sub-categories based on belonging, freedom, tradition, or childhood.

Homeland as belonging

Some of my interviewees defined homeland through the notion of belonging. Roza, for example, defined homeland through a feeling of belonging and through social relationships, in contrast to a nation-state, and where one has roots.

Ich würde Heimat eigentlich jetzt von [...] meinem jetzigen Gefühl aus nicht explizit [als] ein Land verstehen, von dem ich den Reisepass habe, und [wo wir herkommen], weil ich glaube, für mich ist mittlerweile Heimat primär definiert durch [...] das Gefühl

der Zugehörigkeit, wo fühle ich mich eher zugehörig als Heimatbegriff, im Sinne von Gesellschaft, Gesellschaft und Ort.

(From [...] my current feeling, I wouldn't actually understand homeland explicitly [as] a country that I have a passport for and where we have our origins, because I think for me home is now primarily defined by [...] the feeling of belonging, where I feel I belong rather than the concept of homeland in the sense of society, society and place.) (Roza [pseudonym], personal interview, October 23, 2023)

I found it interesting that she formulated this through a contrast, thereby also pointing to another, hegemonic notion of homeland –based on national citizenship– which she does not share. At the same time, with “society and place”, she highlights the dimension of space and place for the notion of homeland.

Similarly, in Mehmet Emir’s account, homeland is a place where one belongs, and this belonging reflects in the relationship to the people who live there. Looking at the images depicting his village, he said:

Was diesen Ort schöner macht, sind Menschen, mit denen ich dort aufgewachsen bin, mit denen ich eine bestimmte Zeit dort verbracht habe.

(What makes this place more beautiful are the people I grew up with there, with whom I spent a certain amount of time there.) (Mehmet Emir, personal interview, December 11, 2023)



This reveals, on the one hand, that for him, homeland comprises the social relations that are maintained in one place. When viewing his photo (Figure 28), an image of the villagers gathered to say goodbye to someone leaving the community, Emir pointed out the importance of this event. This is what makes it a homeland, he says, these kinds of acts of saying goodbye.

To conclude, the examples above highlight the role of belonging in my interlocutors' sense of homeland. While Roza defined belonging as a feeling distinct from bureaucratic forms of belonging, such as citizenship, Mehmet Emir emphasized the importance of social relationships in the homeland and the events that symbolize these connections.

Homeland as tradition

In many cases, my interlocutors associated the homeland closely with folklore tradition and culture. Photos depicting people in traditional attire, playing music or dancing, often evoked a sense of homeland. As I will demonstrate, while associating homeland with tradition has for some to do with the family history, in other cases it aligns with nationalist narratives, or rooted in the belonging to a social movement.



When I asked Roza to choose those photos that would represent her sense of homeland, she first pointed at Werner Finke's photo (Figure 9), which depicts musicians at a wedding in the foreground and several men dressed in festive attire, dancing *govend*³⁰, in the background. Kurdish dances and music have been very important for her, she explained. Roza explained that she is historically interested in the Kurdish dances and that the musicians in Kurdish society have an important role in preserving Kurdish culture³¹. Similarly to Roza, other interviewees also associated homeland with images which depicts scenes of Kurdish culture, folklore tradition and crafts, and see these as an important aspect of Kurdishness. While I will scrutinize my research partners' accounts of Kurdishness in chapter 9, the rest of this section explores in what ways the participants identified tradition with homeland.

Firat recognized the patterns on the carpet woven by a woman in Werner Finke's photo (Figure 15). For him, this photo represented homeland on the one hand because of the patterns of the carpet, and on the other hand, the view of the working woman.



Ah, ja, schau, da sieht man, wie diese Frau einen Teppich strickt. Das würde für mich auch das kurdische Heimat-Bild zeigen, eine arbeitende Frau [...]. Und das sind auch so ähnliche kurdische Teppichmuster, wie ich sehe, und [...] solche haben wir auch zu

³⁰ Kurdish (Kurmanji) for a traditional Kurdish dance.

³¹ A more detailed analysis of Roza's narrative will follow in chapter 9 "Kurdishness in photographs".

Hause. Und ich assoziiere das mit Kurden, dieses Muster. Also diese Teppichmuster, und in Person habe ich das [Weben] noch nie gesehen, [...]. Da rechts unten, sieht man auch bisschen Muster. So eine Muster haben wir auch auf unseren Teppichen zu Hause.

(Ah, yes, look, you can see this woman knitting a carpet. For me, that would also show the Kurdish homeland-image, a working woman [...]. And these are also similar Kurdish carpet patterns, as I see, and [...] we also have similar ones at home, and I associate that with Kurds, this pattern. So, these carpet patterns, and I've never seen [weaving] in person [...]. You can see a bit of a pattern down there on the right. We also have a pattern like that on our carpets at home.) (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023)



He later added that these Kurdish patterns have some cultural meaning, that we could look up in a book. Firat's association with homeland is not only about the working woman and the traditional craft, but the image also reminded Firat on his family home, where they have a similar carpet.

I noticed that Firat's reaction to another photo was quite similar. Werner Finke's photo (Figure 13) depicts a woman with two girls making butter in a goatskin bag called *meşk*³² in Kurdish. This photo reminded Firat of his family, not because he saw them making butter like this, but because they collected songs that were sung by women during this work. Firat connects these photos to his family, while at the same time connecting them to Kurdish culture in general. Thus, recognizing homeland in Kurdish culture and tradition for Firat has to do with his family and how they relate to these phenomena.

Recognizing Kurdish traditions also evoked a sense of homeland in Ehmed. As he explained, "[...] for me a strong home(land) reference also has to do with the fact that I recognize that it is something Kurdish" (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024). For example, some of the photos reminded him of the fest of Newroz (or Nowruz), also called Iranian or Persian New Year, which is one of the most important holidays for the Kurds. As I already pointed out when analyzing an interview excerpt in Chapter 7, "The Reception of the Photos," he referred to homeland as he identified the scene as Kurdish—based on the interpretation of the photo as a Newroz fest. He added that for Kurds, Newroz has national relevance, as "no

³² See footnote 23.

one celebrates Newroz as much as the Kurds” (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024).

In the theoretical chapters, I quoted Özlem Belçim Galip, who described the political relevance of Newroz (see 2015, 18). In this excerpt, Ehmed also referred to the national relevance of the celebration. In this case, the homeland associated with Kurdish culture and traditions has a political dimension too, as a symbol of Kurdish nationalism and resistance.

I observed a similar dynamic in the case of Çewlîg who also lives with his family in Vienna, keeping the Kurdish traditions. Moreover, Çewlîg is actively involved in one of the Kurdish associations of Vienna, which, as he explains has great importance for him.

Also bei uns ist es so, ich meine, wie gesagt, ich war zuletzt [...] 2014 [...] in meiner Heimat, und seitdem bin ich auch nicht mehr gegangen, nie wieder, aus politischen Gründen. Aber warum ich immer meine Kultur so beibehalten habe, warum ich mich halbwegs auskenne, also ich kenne mich jetzt nicht so perfekt aus, aber ich [kenne] viele meiner Traditionen [...]. Das ist dann also aus dem Grund, dass ich in den Verein gehe. Also dieser Verein hat mich sozusagen [mit der Heimat verbunden] gehalten. Ich kenne viele Jugendliche, die nichts von ihrer Kultur ahnen, die keine Ahnung haben, was [ihre Großeltern] so erlebt haben, was deren Eltern erlebt haben, wissen sie nicht, haben sie keine Ahnung, haben sie nie nachgefragt. Mich hat das immer interessiert, was vor mir passiert ist, wie meine Familie vor mir gelebt hat. Und sie haben auch vieles erlebt, und sie haben auch viel Schmerz gesehen, viel Freude auch, aber auch viel Schmerz. Und warum ich immer so bin. Also, meine Familie ist halt auch sehr streng, also eine strenge Familie, die halt ihre Traditionen beibehält, [...] der ihre Traditionen wichtig sind. Das war halt immer aus dem Grund, dass dieser Verein... Also wir sind immer zu diesem Verein gekommen und [waren dadurch] immer [mit] unsere[r] Kultur [verbunden]. Also ich kenne zum Beispiel viele dieser Traditionen [...] aus unserer Folklore Gruppe, also wir hatten so eine Tanzgruppe, und ich kann von ganz Kurdistan viele Tänze, also von jeder Region kann ich einen Tanz. Also, das waren eh manchmal alte Tänze, und von jeder Region habe ich immer was mitbekommen, immer was mitgemacht. So ist auch meine Schwester, also wir sind sehr traditionell verbunden, was das angeht. Natürlich in diesem kapitalistischen System, kann man nicht so sehr mit Kultur und eben halt so

daran ankern, weil das System dich dazu bringt, dass du modern arbeiten sollst, modern leben, sonst das System bringt uns leider so dazu. Also [...] wie sehr wir [...] dagegen kämpfen, kommt es immer noch bisschen in einem Schritt, also wir halten zwar unsere Kultur [...]. Dabei ist es halt auch immer wieder schwer, immer halt mit dem System zu kämpfen.

(So, with us it's like this, I mean as I said, the last time I was in my homeland was in 2014 and since then I have not gone back, never again, for political reasons. But why I've always kept my culture like this, why I know my way around to some extent, so I don't know my way around so perfectly now, but I know many of my traditions [...]. So that's the reason why I go to the association. So, this association has kept me [connected to my homeland], so to speak. I know a lot of young people who have no idea about their culture, who have no idea how their grandparents experienced things, what their parents experienced, they don't know, they have no idea, they've never asked. I was always interested in what happened before me, how my family lived before me. And they also experienced a lot, and they also saw a lot of pain, a lot of joy, but also a lot of pain. And why I'm always like this. Well, my family is also very strict, a strict family that maintains its traditions, its traditions, that its traditions are important to them. It was always for the reason that this club... So, we have always come to this association and have always been connected to our culture in. For example, I know many of these traditions from our folklore group, so we had a dance group, and I know many dances from all over Kurdistan, so I know a dance from every region. Well, that was sometimes old dances anyway, and I always got something from every region, I always took part in something, and yes, why I always take part, my sister is like that too, so we are very traditionally connected as far as that is concerned. Of course, in this capitalist system, you can't really anchor yourself to it with culture, because the system makes you work in a modern way, live in a modern way, otherwise the system, unfortunately, makes us that way. So no matter how hard we fight against it, it's still a bit of a one-step process, so we still keep our culture, [...]. But it's always difficult to fight against the system.)
(Çewlîg [pseudonym], personal interview, November 14, 2023)

In this long quote, Çewlîg does not only describe his “strict” family as a reason for him being so strongly connected with the Kurdish culture, but he also mentions the role of the Kurdish association where his whole family is active at. Again, homeland is connected to Kurdish traditions, and Kurdish traditions have a political dimension. This excerpt does not only his ideas

about homeland, but also highlights the importance of maintaining the homeland. In this case, homeland which is associated with Kurdish culture can be maintained through knowing and practicing these traditions. This aspect connects it to the previously introduced skills-based notion of homeland – the act of practicing the tradition becomes the basis of constructing the homeland.

Moreover, what shows me the resistance dimension in his sense of homeland are the last two sentences in this quote, in which he argues that preserving their culture can only work as part of a resistance against the capitalist system, which otherwise “makes you work in a modern way, live in a modern way”. Being part of a Kurdish association is, as he explained, what keeps him connected to his homeland and Kurdish culture, and thus, the political discourses of the association reflect in his views about homeland. Thus, Çewlîg’s narrative aligns with Alinia’s observations that “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, quoted in Alinia and Eliassi 2014, 79).

To conclude, recognizing Kurdish folklore culture and traditions in the photographs has evoked a sense of homeland in my interlocutors in different ways. While Firat associated it with the microcosm of his family home, in Ehmed’s and Çewlîg’s narratives include a political dimension of nationalist discourses and political movements. While reading through the cases defining homeland through Kurdish culture, I realized that it is necessary to scrutinize the relationship between homeland and Kurdishness, which will be scrutinized in the last empirical chapter. These examples reflect the heterogeneity of the Kurdish diaspora. Though connected by the photos depicting what my interlocutors recognized as Kurdish culture or tradition, which evoked a sense of homeland, the reasons for associating these cultural aspects with homeland varied, linked to personal or national narratives.

Homeland as freedom

Another dimension of homeland in the narratives of my interlocutors was freedom or independence. As we will see in the lines below, Firat defined homeland as the freedom to connect to a collective identity. He recognized this collective identity in images depicting Kurdish traditional culture, pastoral lifestyle and crafts, traditional attire, and festivities.

Heimatland ist eigentlich auf vielen Bildern drauf gewesen, was ich gesehen habe: die traditionellen Hochzeiten, die Trachten, und die Berge vor allem, die Berglandschaft,

die traditionellen Trachten, und für mich ist Heimatland einfach Freiheit, und das haben die Kurden nicht, das heißt, sie sind entweder [...] in den Fängen der Türkei oder des Irak oder Syriens, und Armeniens ja, für mich wäre Heimatland einfach Freiheit.

(Homeland was actually there in many of the pictures that I saw: the traditional weddings, the traditional costumes, and the mountains above all, the mountain landscape, the traditional costumes, and for me the homeland is simply freedom, and the Kurds don't have that, that is, they are either [...] in the clutches of Turkey or Iraq or Syria, and Armenia, yes, for me the homeland would simply be freedom.) (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023)

For example, Werner Finke's image (Figure 12) of Kurdish people crossing a river on their way to the high plateau evoked a sense of freedom in Firat. The following short excerpt of our interview illustrates this well.



Firat: Und Ähm, zum Beispiel, die in den Bergen wohnen oder auf den Feldern oder auf den Almen sind und mit der ganzen Familie und mit dem ganzen Hab und Gut, mit den Pferden, Eseln, oder ähm, Maultieren einfach gemeinsam über die Flüsse und Berge, einfach hinaufgehen oder hinunter, ins Tal und genau da halten alle zusammen und helfen einander. Da werden dann zum Beispiel die Zelte zusammen aufgebaut, die Frauen kochen das Essen, die Männer gehen jagen oder hüten die Schafe. Also diese Erinnerung, dieses Gefühl kommt mir von Armenien bekannt vor. Ich habe das zum Teil gesehen und zum Teil auch gehört von Erzählungen, dass das so gemacht wird, gemacht wurde.

Interviewer: So was denkst du, über diese Lebensweise? Oder so, was erweckt in dir diese [...]?

Firat: Ich denke das sofort an die Freiheit. Man ist frei.

(Firat: And um, for example, those who live in the mountains or are in the fields or on the mountain pastures and with the whole family and all their belongings, with the horses, donkeys, or um, mules simply walk together over the rivers and mountains, simply up or down into the valley and that's where everyone sticks together and helps each other. The tents, for example, are put up together, the women cook the food, the

men go hunting or herd the sheep. So this memory, this feeling is familiar to me from Armenia. I've seen some of it and heard some of it from stories that it's done that way, that it was done that way.

Interviewer: What do you think about this way of life? Or what does this [picture] evoke in you?

Firat: I immediately think of freedom. You are free.) (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023)

As this excerpt reveals, for Firat, the pastoral and semi-nomadic life Kurdish tribes used to have in the mountains becomes a symbol for the freedom he associates with homeland.

Mehmet Emir expressed a similar view about the relevance of freedom for having a sense of homeland. Unlike Firat, he associated statehood with freedom instead of pastoralist lifestyle and used the term independence instead of freedom. Nevertheless, both of them pointed out the statelessness of the Kurds as the reason for their lack of freedom.

Ja, also natürlich, im Falle der Kurden ist es auch eine Tatsache, dass aus politischen Gründen eben es nicht angenehm ist. Ich glaube, ich meine, ich kann das nur für mich vielleicht, [...] sagen, warum der Begriff Heimat bei mir und bei vielen Kurden eine große Bedeutung angenommen hat. Dass Kurdistan dann in vier Teilen aufgeteilt wurde, und dass es dort immer Kriege gegeben hat, dass man die Menschen dort nicht leben lassen, und dass man die Natur zerstört hat und diverse Sachen... Und das macht das Gefühl der Heimat aus. Oder, [...] dass man so auch auf die eigene Herkunft so pocht oder so manchmal stolz ist, oder [...] unbedingt das als Heimat bezeichnet, und so weiter. Weil letztendlich Heimat ist, auch was man besitzt, denn das ist die Landschaft, das ist dein eigenes Haus oder das ist auch eine gewisse, eine gewisse Unabhängigkeit...

(Yes, well, of course, in the case of the Kurds, it is also a fact that it is not pleasant for political reasons. I think, I mean, I can perhaps only say this for myself, I can say why the term homeland has taken on a great significance for me and for many Kurds. That Kurdistan was then divided into four parts and that there have always been wars there, that people have not been allowed to live there and that nature has been destroyed and various things... And that makes the feeling of homeland or [...] what one insists on

one's own origins or is sometimes proud of or [...] by all means calls homeland and so on, because in the end homeland is also what you own, because that is the landscape, that is your own house or that is also a certain, a certain independence...) (Mehmet Emir, personal interview, December 11, 2023)

This excerpt from my interview with Mehmet Emir highlights how the political violence, oppression and dispossession experienced by the Kurds since decades shapes their relationship with homeland, and the notion of homeland. As the artist insightfully remarked, the act of calling it homeland is a kind of response to the situation there.

To conclude, Firat defined homeland as something that the Kurds do not have, as the freedom or guaranteed by the status of the nation-state that is not given. In contrast, Mehmet Emir, while also finding the roots of homeland in the missing independence of the Kurds, he also highlights the importance calling it a homeland. These views align with Alinia's research, arguing that the notion of the Kurdish homeland is shaped by narratives of victimhood (see Alinia 2004, 320). More precisely, these accounts demonstrate Alinia's and Eliassi's argument about the way statelessness shapes Kurds' notions of homeland (see Alinia and Eliassi 2014, 73), as well as the ambivalences in Kurdish notions of homeland, also highlighted by Alinia and Eliassi (ibid., 79).

The childhood's homeland

In some cases, images that my interlocutors identified with homeland evoked memories of their childhood. Although many of my interlocutors mentioned their childhood when talking about the homeland, I would like to highlight here two accounts which I think represent two contrasting views of the childhood's homeland.

First, I would like to note that not all interlocutors connected homeland to childhood. For example, Serhat, whose rather deterritorialized view of homeland I introduced before, clearly refused to have any feeling of homesickness to the Kurdish village, which he experienced as a "wasteland" as a child. I will now focus on the accounts which did connect childhood with homeland.

Firat's case, for example, can demonstrate the effect of childhood on the way of imagining homeland. Recognizing homeland in relation to nature and animals, roots in Firat's childhood memories. As a child, Firat spent quite some time in the Kurdish villages of Armenia, where

his family originates from. When I asked about his favorite activities as a child, he recalled playing outside with other children and especially spending time by the cows and horses of the village.

Und ich erinnere mich, wie ich klein war. Da waren wir in den Dörfern, ich meine von Verwandten von uns, und da sind die Kühe zeitig in der Früh, alle Kühe vom ganzen Dorf, haben sich im Ort, im Ortsinneren versammelt. Alle Kühe, [...] die Bauern haben einfach die Kühe [...] gehen lassen. Die Kühe wussten wohin sie gehen, und von [der] Mitte des Ortes sind die Kühe dann mit einem Hirten [gegangen]. Da gibt's alle paar Tage einen anderen Hirten, der mit ihnen auf die Almen geht, und das hatte ich als Kind sehr geliebt. Und spät am Abend sind dann alle Kühe zurückgekommen, und jede Kuh wusste, [...] zu welchem Haushalt sie hingehen musste. [...] das war unglaublich. Ja, also, der Stall war offen, sie sind selber reingegangen.

(And I remember when I was little. There we were in the villages, I mean by our relatives , and early in the morning the cows, all cool from the whole village, gathered in the village, in the center of the village. All the cows, [...] the farmers just let the cows go. The cows knew where they were going, and from the center of the village, they went with a shepherd. Every few days there was a different herdsman who took them to the mountain pastures, and I loved that as a child. And late in the evening, all the cows came back and each cow knew which one had to go to which household. [...] that was incredible! Yes, well, the barn was open, they went in themselves.) (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023)

I felt that this was one of Firat's favorite stories to share. His eyes were bright and smiling when he told me about the incredible habit of the cows to approach the grazing pasture and then returning to their barns in the evenings, independently, according to schedule. To my surprise, Firat was not the only one reporting of such a custom.

Dilovan, who spent his early childhood in a Kurdish village in Turkey, recalled similar memories about the cow of his grandparents when observing Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 19) of people sitting on the terrace of a house in the mountains.



Zusammen Frühstück machen, und dann haben wir die Kuh rausgelassen, okay, und die ist weggegangen. Ich schwöre es dir, die ist einfach weggegangen, die wusste schon wo, [...] alleine, ja. Wusste wo die hingeht, und die war ganz pünktlich wieder selber wieder zurück. Ich schwöre! Ich mache keinen Spaß, wirklich!

Aber es ist kein Witz, ge? [...] Genau, und da als die Kuh schon weg war, gab es Arbeiten zu Hause, also, Frühstück machen [...] für die anderen, ich habe immer geholfen, und dann, wenn wir gefrühstückt haben, hat jeder dann seine Arbeit gemacht.

([...] Making breakfast together, and then we let the cow out, okay, and she left. I swear to you, she just left, she already knew where, [...] on her own, yes. Knew where she was going, and she was back on time herself. I swear! I'm not joking, really! But it's not a joke, right? [...] Exactly, and when the cow had already left, there was work to do at home, so, making breakfast [...] for the others, I always helped, and then, when we had breakfast, everyone did their work.) (Dilovan [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024)

However, this memory does not evoke similar conclusions about Dilovan's childhood home, as in Firat's case. Despite a similar admiration of the cow's behavior, Dilovan's story continues differently.

[...] Ja genau [...], dann ist jeder seine Arbeit, [du] weißt eh, hat jeder seine Arbeitswege gehabt oder seine eigene Arbeit und ich habe dann immer geholfen als die Kuh weg war. Die Kuhscheiße raus aus dem Stall, das haben wir so dann gemischt so mit Stroh und dann einfach solche Patzen gemacht.

([...] Yes, exactly [...], then everyone did their own work, you know, everyone had their own routes, or their own work and I always helped when the cow was gone. We took the cow shit out of the barn, mixed it with straw, and then just made these pats.) (Dilovan [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024)

While Firat's childhood memory contains an ideal image of Kurdish village life (identified as homeland), suggesting a harmony between the people and nature, Dilovan remembered the

poor circumstances, and the housework where he had to help as a very small child. To conclude, the association of homeland with childhood can evoke Safran's (1991) idealized view of homeland, however depending on the personal biographies. This underlines the argument by Boccagni et al that the experience of home can not only mean safety and comfort, but it depends on the home environment (see Boccagni, Murcia, and Belloni 2020, 22–23). Nevertheless, the examples show how the view of the mental homeland can be fueled by childhood memories.

Synthesis: the mental homeland

With the help of the term mental homeland, I explored views of homeland shared by my interlocutors which were rooted in abstract notions, such as belonging, tradition, freedom and childhood. With focusing on these notions, I could highlight the heterogeneity of the homeland imaginaries of my interlocutors, showing for example, that associating homeland with childhood could be a Safranian, idealizing perspective of homeland, while it can also be embedded in discourses of victimhood. I observed this diversity of responses by most of the categories. The reason for this diversity, I suppose, lies in the biographies of my interlocutors.

8.2.3 The land-based homeland

I also noticed land-based notions of homeland which are focusing on location or place. Nevertheless, it does not mean that these notions do not have aspects of the mental homeland, but rather that their focus is on land. In this category, I observed two different views, one based on a village or other rural settlement I call the 'homeland as gund'³³, and the other based on the mountains or landscape which I call the 'home(land)scape'. Through these views, I argue that there is an ambivalent, or even contrasting, relationship between them. The views focusing on the village align with discourses of victimhood, while those based on the mountains or landscape more closely resemble the Safranian, idealized view of the homeland.

Homeland as gund

Images of Kurdish rural settlements in many cases evoked a sense of homeland in my interlocutors. The participants shared some associations when they said that an image reminded them on homeland: they all pointed out the economic underdevelopment of Kurdish villages.

³³ See footnote 24.



Of all the photographs, Roza chose at the end Werner Finke's photo (Figure 2), an image depicting a Kurdish village, with a perspective from above the roofs of houses, revealing the beds and other furniture on the roof.

Ich muss an mein Dorf denken. Das Dorf auch, [das] zum Teil so ausschaut, diese Betten gibt es ja noch immer in der Form. Die sind [...] natürlich die sind da noch aus Holz, die jetzigen sind ein Metallgestell. Und genau, auch dieses Jahr, habe [ich] auch auf so einem Bett geschlafen, die Sterne also ansehen, also es ist [...] na das ist etwas typisch, also, das ist halt wirklich für mich von allen Fotos: Heimat.

(I have to think of my village. The village too, some of it looks like this, these beds still exist in this form. They are [...] of course, they're still made of wood, the current ones are made of metal. And exactly this year on a bed like that, I slept on a bed like that, looking at the stars, so it's [...] well, that's something typical, so, that's really for me from all the photos: Homeland.) (Roza [pseudonym], personal interview, October 23, 2023)

As another example, the same photo (Figure 2) also reminded Dilovan of his village. What he noticed immediately were the construction materials of the houses built. He made a comment about how easily these old stones can break. When he explains where he lived with his grandparents in Turkey, Dilovan uses the frame "in the deepest village". Dilovan is not the only one who highlighted the poverty of the Kurdish villages. While Roza's account seems exclusively positive in what she said about the first image, other images of similar settlements which reminded her on homeland also evoked more similar associations to Dilovan's.



Roza described it as follows when she saw Werner Finke's photo (Figure 4) depicting a road leading into a rural settlement in the mountains.

Ja, und was typisch ist, dann muss ich auch [...] sofort an unser Dorf denken! Wie noch nicht weiterentwickelt die Dörfer sind. Also, bei den kurdischen Gebieten, man sieht, die Straßen sind kaum gemacht, die Häuser sind einfach gemacht, und teilweise auch

[...]. Aber [...] draußen, also einfach Putz findet man nicht. Das ist halt typisch für viele Häuser in der Gegend. Also man merkt, dass es wirtschaftlich gesehen benachteiligt wird. Und [das] ist ja einer der Punkte, den die Kurden gemeinsam haben. Dass sie wirtschaftlich, egal wo in Kurdistan, benachteiligt sind.

(Yes, and what is typical, because I also [...] immediately think of our village! How undeveloped the villages are. So, in the Kurdish areas, you can see that the roads are barely made, the houses are simply made, and in some cases [...]. But [...] outside, you don't find simple plaster. That's typical of many houses in the area. So you notice that it's economically disadvantaged. And that's one of the things the Kurds have in common. That they are economically disadvantaged, no matter where in Kurdistan.) (Roza (pseudonym), personal interview, 23.10.2023)

Ehmed, who was born and grew up in Vienna, and whose parents came from Qamishli, a bigger Kurdish city in Syria, used the exact same phrase when he saw Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 16), “in the deepest *gund*” (Kurdish term for village). Also, when seeing another photo by



Mehmet Emir (Figure 19), Ehmed explained that he recognizes that it is a Kurdish village because the houses look old and “come down”. However, unlike Roza and Dilovan, Ehmed did not specify what makes it look like that to him.

The accounts presented above share that they identified rural settlements with the concept of homeland – the images of these settlements reminded my interlocutors at their homeland. At the same time, they emphasized poverty or economic marginalization that makes the settlements look alike. While Dilovan and Roza, who both lived in their home village for the first few years of their lives, both highlighted experiential aspects of the economic marginalization – the missing plaster on the walls of the houses, the bad quality of the roads or the construction materials –, for Ehmed, the photos depicting settlements which reminded him on his homeland just ‘looked old’ and ‘come down’. I believe that the reason for the varying depth of the answers lies in my interlocutors’ biographies. However, the fact that Kurdish villages in Turkey were also recognized by someone who has never been there before as Kurdish (and reminiscent of homeland), shows in my opinion that these images are embedded in transnational visual industries – that is, through online spaces, the Kurdish transnation constructs a shared imaginary of the homeland through sharing and viewing images of the Kurdish territories across the borders.

As a consequence, Ehmed who grew up in Vienna and originates from the Syrian city of Qamishli, also associates images of rural villages in Turkey with homeland. Thus, through the concept of the *gund*, the participants constructed a view on the homeland which is based in the settlements. In other words, the settlements became a kind of image representing this aspect of the homeland.

Homeland in the mountains – the home(land)scape

For Firat, many images which he associated with homeland represented what he named the *homelandscape*. I immediately felt when I heard him say this word, that it will be one of the central puzzles for my analysis. This word possibly includes the notions of homeland, home, and land landscape. As I understand it, beyond encompassing the notions of the skills-based homeland and the land-based homeland, this term encompasses a further dimension: the pictorial dimension.



Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 24) evoked in Firat a sense of homeland and represented for him, as he formulated the "homelandscape". When I asked him what that meant, he explained that the combination of goats and shepherds in the landscape of mountain pastures evokes this feeling of a Kurdish home(land)scape for him. (Interview with Firat, 25.10.2023). Although he did not exclusively use this term for landscape images, the nature and the life bound to the Kurdish mountains were always a central aspect.



For example, when viewing Werner Finke's photo (Figure 14) together, Firat summarized his thoughts, concluding:

Und ja, genau, [...] aber das Bild zeigt für mich eine Zeit, das Gefühl einer kurdischen Heimatlandschaft auf jeden Fall. Ja, in der Natur stricken oder die Stricke herstellen. Das ist für mich typisch Kurdisch auf jeden Fall.

(And yes, exactly, [...] but for me the picture shows a time, the feeling of a Kurdish home landscape in any case. Yes, knitting in nature or making the knitting. For me, that's definitely typically Kurdish.) (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023)

The image of women in Kurdish traditional attire spinning evokes in Firat the concept of a home(land)scape (Heimatlandschaft), which in my view combines the following elements: 1. Living out the Kurdish culture, 2. Acting out Kurdish traditions, 3. Living in nature in the Kurdish mountains. Thus, home(land)scape, a sense of harmony of a people with their history and culture in nature, emerges as a mythical imaginary about the Kurdish homeland.

Although Çewlîg did not use this term, the ‘Kurdish mountain-life’ and connectedness to nature also evoked a sense of homeland in him.



When I asked him to show me if any of the photos remind him of homeland, Çewlîg, pointed at Werner Finke’s photo (Figure 12), which depicts nomadic or semi-nomadic Kurds, crossing a river. For him, seeing these people is a piece of homeland, Çewlîg explained. Even though he does not come from a *koçer*³⁴ family, for

their nomadic way of life and values, the people are highly respected by the Kurds, he says.

To sum up, the home(land)scape is a mental notion of homeland as much as it is a land-based notion. In this case, the object of the photograph can give space for the two important aspects, that is showing that homeland is both spatial and symbolic category.

Concluding, the interlocutors associated images depicting rural settlements or landscapes and images reminding them of mountain life with homeland, thereby constructing a land-based notion of homeland. I think the two sub-categories I noticed, the *homeland as gund* and the *home(land)scape* are in contrast to each other. While the *gund* aligns evokes narratives aligning with the concept of the victim diaspora (Cohen 2022 [1997], 10), the *homelandscape* transmits an idealized notion of homeland which relates to Safran’s (1991) conceptualization.

8.2.4 The house in the homeland

For the last section of this chapter, I will reflect on the accounts of my interlocutors concerning the house of their family in “Kurdistan”. As I noticed, in some cases the experiences bound to this house also formed their notions of homeland. What did my research partners recognize in the photos from the house they had left behind?

They shared narratives about the house itself, how it shaped their life, about members of the household they left behind in the Kurdish territories. Such narratives also included people and

³⁴ Kurdish term for nomad or nomadic.

objects identified in the photographs that they related to their home, that is figures compared to members of their household, objects identified from their current homes, or memories.

Dilovan, who lived with his grandparents in a Kurdish village in Turkey as a child, remembered the house in which they lived in detail. Looking through the images, he picked Werner Finke's photo (Figure 2) to show me how the house in which they lived looked like.



Da habe ich also [von der Zeit] als ich eineinhalb Jahre alt war, bis ich fast sechs Jahre alt war, habe ich in der Türkei gelebt. [...] Bei meiner Baba³⁵, das ist die Oma, von der Oma, bei der Mutter meines Vaters. [...] Aber im tiefsten Dorf, das ist [...], das kannst

du dir vorstellen. Wir haben in einem Haus gelebt, wir haben ein altes Haus gehabt und ein neues Haus, ja. [...] Das alte Haus hatte ich, [...] Schau warte... Das alte Haus hat so ausgeschaut, ge? So wie diese Häuser. Aber das war... schaut so wie diese Häuser [aus], ja? So hat das ausgeschaut. Und zum Beispiel das war so alt, wirklich eine alte Holztür, wie von der Steinzeit, weist eh so mir Haken und deswegen zum Einhängen, und die Wände waren verputzt. Dieser Putz, ja? Der war aus Kuhscheiße und Stroh, halt vermisch. [...] Ja, die Wände und der Boden auch. Also, es gab keinen Beton am Boden, sondern der war am Boden auch, und dann war nur ein Teppich drüber.

(I lived in Turkey from the time I was one and a half years old until I was almost six. [...] With my Baba³⁶, that's my grandmother, my grandmother's grandmother, my father's mother. [...] But in the deepest village, that's [...], you can imagine. We lived in a house, we had an old house and a new house, yes. [...] I had the old house, [...] but the old house looked like this, and for example, it was so old. Look wait... The old house looked like this. Like these houses. But this was... looks like these houses, yes? That's what it looked like. And for example, it was so old, it was really an old wooden door, like from the Stone Age, it had a hook and so it could be hung up, and the walls were plastered. This plaster? It was made of cow shit and straw, just mixed together. [...] Yes, the walls and the floor too. Well, there was no concrete on the floor, it was on the floor too, and then there was just a carpet over it.) (Dilovan [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024)

³⁵ Short for Babaanne, Turkish word for grandmother.

³⁶ See footnote 35.

He was telling me this in a way, as if he would also want to convince himself, that this all had happened. He often asks back questions like (Right? You know?) to make sure that I grasp what he is just telling me. Diloan's descriptions and the honesty that characterizes them, really touched me, I often did not know how to show my respect for what he has been through. This excerpt of our interview presents the house from the inside, while the photo shows the outside of such houses. It gives a glimpse about the difficulty of life in an economically marginalized village. The house itself symbolizes the position of the Kurds, I would speculate.

Like Diloan, Çewlîg also shared narratives associated with the house in a Kurdish village,



where he spent time as a child. Moreover, as Diloan, he also recalled memories with his grandmother. For example, Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 18) reminded Çewlîg of his grandmother and how he and his sister used to play behind her while she was working.

Da merke ich, das ist ein Foto aus Dersim, das an der Frau, wie sie sich angezogen hat, also das ist so typisch Dersim Kultur auch auf dem Kopf, *kofî*³⁷, und über dem *kofî* ist das weiße Tuch. Und da ist es so, dass das erinnert mich an meine Oma. Dieses Streu, also was auch so wie Streu ist, eigentlich komplett noch Holz. Also, das ist alles Holz, was sie halt benutzt immer für den Winter, das benutzt sie dann immer. Ende des Jahres gibt's das nicht mehr. Weil der Winter so vorbei ist. Und dann ist auch schon vorbei, dass die zwei Jugendlichen, also die zwei Kinder, erinnern mich an mich und meine Schwester, [...] wie wir [...] draußen waren [mit unserer] Oma [...]. Also, wir waren immer hinter ihr her, also hinter meiner Oma, also wie sie die Arbeit macht, wie sie so ist, und wie hart sie eigentlich arbeitet, in der ganzen Streu, Gebüsch, also, das ist auch so, was wir erlebt haben.

(Now I realize that this is a photo from Dersim, because of the woman, how she's dressed, so this is so typical of Dersim culture, even on the head, kofî³⁸, and over the kofî is the white cloth. And it reminds me of my grandmother, this litter, that is also like litter, actually all wood. So, it's all wood that she uses for the winter, that's what she

³⁷ Kurdish (Kurmançî) for head-dress

³⁸ See footnote 37.

always uses. At the end of the year, it's gone. Because the winter is over. And then it's already over that the two youngsters, the two children, remind me of me and my sister, as we were someone outside [...] and grandma here. Well, we were always after her, so after my grandma, how she does the work, how she is, and how hard she actually works in all the litter, bushes, so that's also what we experienced.) (Çewlîg [pseudonym], personal interview, November 14, 2023)

The excerpt does not focus on the house as a building but a place where one lives and works at the same time, and where social relations are organized. Although the image does not show much of the house, the wood in the image reminded Çewlîg on how his grandmother used to work to have firewood for heating the winter.



Werner Finke's photo (Figure 14) which depicts two women spinning, also reminded Çewlîg of his grandmother, as she was also spinning like the women in the image, while standing. It is called *teşî*³⁹ in Kurdish, he explains. Telling me about the kinds of work women used to do, describes the role of women in in his region. They used to say, he explained, that the woman gets up first, before the sun. Çewlîg added that his grandmother used to wake up before the sun too. Beyond the childhood memories of his grandmother, Çewlîg made a strong connection to the difficult life of Kurdish women that he saw as a child and the Kurdish culture.

While the other participants did not share any stories or memories about their past homes, the narratives about the homes described here also convey a sense of distance. Çewlîg recalled a childhood home to which he cannot return for political reasons and Diloan provided a detailed description of his childhood home in Turkey, yet his account suggests a sense of alienation from that home. These narratives align with the ideas of Boccagni, Murcia, and Belloni (2020), who argue that the concept of home can encompass not only positive experiences.

³⁹ Kurdish (Kurmançî) for hand-spindle

8.2.5 *Synthesis: homeland in the interviews*

So far, I tried to focus on the views of homeland in my interlocutors' accounts, based on the associations they shared with me. I introduced four views of homeland within the category of mental homeland, and two land-based views of homeland.

As I noted in the beginning, the complex views of my interlocutors can by no means exclusively fit one or the other category. Still, exploring these aspects individually enabled me to highlight the dual nature of the homeland as land-based yet imaginary, while it also helped highlighting key motifs that my interviewees associated with homeland.

While analyzing these narratives, I was sometimes overwhelmed by the data, thinking that everything is homeland, and nothing is homeland. Specifically constructing categories that cannot perfectly be separated from each other, and which cannot perfectly describe the narratives of my interlocutors was frustrating. But I suppose that this explains something about the concept of homeland, that is, in people's imaginary, homeland is connected and intertwined with different discourses, narratives, memories and desires, reflecting the messiness of human realities.

What the narratives here mostly shed light on is also the ambivalent nature of the homeland concept. As I showed, the view of homeland presented above align with narratives of victimhood and with Safran's views of an idealized homeland at the same time. I can just repeat what Alinia and Eliassi observed, that homeland is in subjective, political and ambiguous ideas (Alinia and Eliassi 2014, 14).

Therefore, the last section of this chapter is dedicated to further entangling these ambivalences, which will hopefully help us better understand how the views introduced above relate to each other.

8.3 *'Homelessness' and the Diaspora Blues*

In the first section, we saw that the informants have multiple identifications with places as the homeland. How these places relate to each other in the concepts of my interlocutors, needs further attention. Generally, my interlocutors' accounts align with previous research on the Kurdish diaspora which highlights the ambiguities in the notion of homeland (see e.g. Alinia and Eliassi 2014).

In this section, I will try to trace the deeper meanings behind the ambivalences of the notions of home(land). That means, the concept of homelessness is not simply an antagonist to home and homeland, but they are all complimentary elements of homeland identity. In other words, the gaps and ambivalences collected under the notion of homelessness might reveal some of the reasons behind the specific ways of my interlocutors of imagining and relating to their homeland.

As we have seen, many of my interlocutors expressed ambivalent feelings and thoughts about homeland and belonging, which I will compile through the concept of ‘homelessness’. I will present in this chapter three aspects of ‘homelessness’, which I identify as the roots of ambivalence in my interlocutors’ notions of homeland.

On the one hand, I believe that the stateless position of the Kurds – which goes hand in hand with the political violence and instability in the Kurdish regions – is one of the major factors causing ambivalences in Kurds’ homeland relations, which I will explore in the first section.

On the other hand, the narratives are closely tied to the migration biographies of my interlocutors, who either arrived to Austria in their childhood or were born here, growing up between two countries, and navigating different cultural contexts. However, the meanings behind this ambivalence vary depending on the social context and biographies of my interlocutors. In the second and third sections, I will explore homelessness rooted in my interviewees’ experiences of alienation and the lack of opportunities to return or visit in the original homelands.

8.3.1 Statelessness

The first aspect of homelessness I identified in this account is the experience of statelessness, the fact that Roza does not belong to the major population in any country, and her ethnic identity is not reflected in a bureaucratic sense such as a passport at all. The issue of statelessness was central in Firat’s account too, who defined homeland as ‘the freedom that Kurds do not have’.

Räumlich gesehen [...] Ich könnte jetzt nicht explizit sagen, wo ich mich [in der] Heimat fühle, weil da gibt es ja, there is the same, I would switch now to English, there is the same [...] it is called diaspora blues: too foreign to stay, too foreign to leave. Sprich man ist hier fremd, im Land wo man lebt, und man ist fremd im Land wo man herkommt. Weder noch, also weder, wo ich hier lebe, [...], bin ich in meiner Heimat, noch wenn

ich in der Türkei bin, in der Heimat, weil [wenn] man von dem Begriff von Heimat ausgeht, als wirklich Teil oder basierend auf Reisepass, Zugehörigkeit, Staatsbürgerschaft, wird man das nie haben können.

(Spatially speaking [...] I couldn't say explicitly now where I feel [in my] homeland because there is, there is the same, I would switch now to English, there is the same [...] it is called diaspora blues: too foreign to stay, too foreign to leave. In other words, you are a foreigner here, in the country where you live, and you are a foreigner in the country where you come from. Neither, so neither, where I live here [...], am I in my homeland, nor when I am in Turkey, in my homeland, because you can never have that when you leave the concept of homeland, as a real part or based on passport, belonging, citizenship.) (Roza (pseudonym), personal interview, 23.10.2023)

I believe that what Roza articulated here points to a shared experience among many in the Kurdish diaspora(s), extending beyond her own biography. Her references to the statelessness in this excerpt highlight it as a significant root of the ambivalent homeland-relations of my interlocutors.

Another interesting point about the statelessness of the Kurds lies in the division of the Kurdish inhabited regions and how Kurds integrate the national borders into their notions of homeland.



For example, as I already explained in a previous chapter, Ehmed created a kind of hierarchy within the Kurdish territories when talking about his associations with homeland. This can be observed when we compare his associations with two photos. Werner Finke's photo (Figure 2) reminded Ehmed of the city of Mardin.

Mardin ist nicht meine Heimat, also nicht meine Heimat-Heimat dort, wo wir ursprünglich herkommen.

(Mardin is not my homeland, I mean it's not my home-home where we originally come from.) (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024)

However, when looking at Finke's photo (Figure 5) that depicts a busy market square in an urban settlement, Ehmed made a strong relation to his homeland in Rojava.



Also, wie gesagt, einfach mir das Bild herzeigen und sagen, was siehst du? Ich weiß nicht, ich würde nicht sofort auf eine kurdische Stadt draufkommen. Irgendwann sicher. Aber wenn ich es weiß, genau, so könnte es in Qamischli auch ausschauen. Also, das ist wirklich Heimat-Heimat.

(So, as I said, just show me the picture and say, what do you see? I don't know, I wouldn't immediately think of a Kurdish city. At some point for sure. But when I know, exactly, that's what it could look like in Qamishli. So that really is home-home.) (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024)

Coming from Rojava (Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria), Ehmed does find the depicted Kurdish settlement in Turkey familiar, although it does not look like Rojava. His sentence reveals that he does not recognize the settlement depicted (which he identifies with the city of Mardin) as his homeland, but also ‘not-not’. Meaning, he distinguishes between Heimat and Heimat-Heimat hierarchically, Heimat meaning the collective of Kurdish territories, and Heimat-Heimat standing for Rojava, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. On the other hand, Ehmed also explains that he can make reference of an object to the homeland if he recognizes that it is something Kurdish.

That is, he does identify both Rojava, the Kurdish Autonomous Administration of North Syria as his homeland, where his family comes from, as well as other Kurdish territories, including those in Turkey, where the photos were taken. However, he refers to Rojava as Heimat-Heimat, and the rest as only Heimat, hinting to a stronger sense of homeness of Rojava.

Thus, Ehmed’s notion of homeland is that he creates a kind of hierarchy within the Kurdish territories. That is, he does identify both Rojava, the Kurdish Autonomous Administration of North Syria as his homeland, where his family comes from, as well as other Kurdish territories, including those in Turkey, where the photos were taken. However, he refers to Rojava as Heimat-Heimat, and the rest as only Heimat, hinting to a stronger sense of homeness of Rojava.

The way Ehmed formulated these relations makes me suggest that the difficulty of navigating the desire of a Kurdish homeland on the one hand, and the reality of the division of the Kurdish territories to four nation states of the other hand cause an ambivalent view of homeland.

Thus, both aspects of statelessness: the lack of official recognition and citizenship rights as a Kurd on the one hand, and the tension between the dream of a united “Kurdistan” and the differences of the Kurdish regions (in terms of state control, culture, language, etc.) on the other hand can be identified as the roots of a fragmented view of homeland and ambivalent homeland relations in the diaspora. These two aspects could be seen as examples aligning with Alinia’s argument that Kurdish homeland relations are shaped by a sense of ‘homelessness’ (see Alinia 2004).

8.3.2 *‘Homelessness’ in alienation*

The second aspect of ‘homelessness’ focuses on experiences of alienation in the migration histories of my interviewees. Such experiences emerged from their integration in Austrian society as children, but also from their encounters with the original Kurdish homeland.

Roza recalled her efforts, after she came to Austria as a child, to develop a sense of belonging in the new homeland. She wanted to do everything like her classmates, to have something in common with them, and she wanted to become an Austrian, she explained. Dilovan, who was born in Austria but stayed for his a couple of years with his grandmother in Turkey, also remembered coming back to Austria as a six-year-old child and having to learn German again.

My interviewees did not talk much about their experiences of growing up in Austria. However, after I mentioned that most of my friends in Vienna are foreigners like me, Serhat and Dilovan started talking about experiencing racism, although Dilovan is “half Austrian”, as the child of an Austrian mother and a Kurdish father from Turkey (Dilovan, personal interview, 23.01.2024). Serhat explained that it is one of the reasons he does not feel at home here.

Ich bin hier aufgewachsen [...], aber ich kann hier, glaube ich, noch 20 Jahre leben. Ich werde mich hier nie zu Hause fühlen, weil die Menschen machen das aus, und vielleicht auch, wenn die Menschen nicht so denken. Es ist in mir schon irgendwie drinnen, dass ich mich hier nicht willkommen fühle. Es ist sehr-sehr... Ja. Nicht schön, sag ich jetzt mal. Als Ausländer habe ich das Gefühl, du musst dich hier immer doppelt beweisen [...]. Und dann natürlich, kommen welche, [...] die sind Ausländer, halt andere, und die machen natürlich alles kaputt dann, das, was du eigentlich aufbaust. Dann musst du dich noch mal mehr beweisen. Also, du beweist dich eigentlich, weil andere Ausländer, die sich nicht beherrschen können, was auch immer, oder sich nicht benehmen können, das

einfach musst du dann halt immer ausgleichen, und das ist halt ziemlich schwer und [man] kommt da nicht hinterher. Weil, [...] das fällt halt auf, wenn die Ausländer Blödsinn machen, weil man die gleich sieht.

(I grew up here [...], but I think I can live here for another 20 years. I'll never feel at home here, because people make that difference, and maybe even if people don't think that way. It's already somehow inside me that I don't feel welcome here. It's very very... Yes. Not nice, I'll say for now. As a foreigner, I have the feeling that you always have to prove yourself twice here [...]. And then of course some people come, they're foreigners, just others, and of course they ruin everything, then what you actually build up. Then you have to prove yourself even more. Well, you actually have to prove yourself, because other foreigners who can't control themselves, whatever, or can't behave themselves, you just always have to make up for that, and that's quite difficult and you can't keep up. Because [...] it's noticeable when the foreigners do stupid things because they are seen straight away.) (Serhat [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024)

Serhat highlighted the extreme visibility in the Austrian society as a “migrant”, which puts pressure on people to perform extraordinary. He puts the fault on “other foreigners” whose mistakes he has to correct. The only reason Serhat sticks out from the majority is his slightly darker skin tone. These experiences thus alienate Serhat from Austria.

Being seen as different, for Diloan is also something he experienced in Turkey, as people there would see him as a “blondie” or a “rich European” (ibid). Facing stigmatization by society creates a certain distance for them to these places.

Feelings of alienation did not only arise from experiences of being seen as the other, but also from other forms of feeling unwell. Serhat, who was born in Austria, remembers his first visit to the village where his father grew up in the Kurdish part of Turkey.

Also, bei mir ist es so, dass als ich damals zum ersten Mal im Dorf war, war das so. Es war irgendwie schon ein Gefühl von okay, da kommt mein Vater jetzt her, aber für mich war das jetzt nicht so wie Heimat, weil als Kind natürlich siehst du die Sachen ein bisschen mit einem anderen Auge, da siehst du schnell, dass da alles nur Ödland ist und für mich langweilig. Einfach langweilig, weil ich komm aus Wien, da gibt es Spielplätze,

Fußballplätze, also viele Möglichkeiten gegenüber dem Dorf, wo mein Vater aufgewachsen ist, wo eigentlich [...], da gibt es einfach gar nichts, genau. Da muss man einmal wieder lernen, mit Steinen zu spielen oder einfach mit nichts auskommen, nur mit dir selbst und mit den anderen Kinder. Ähm, jedoch, wenn ich diese Bilder sehe, dann habe ich schon einen Bezug zu denen. Also, ich fühle mich schon irgendwie, als, als hätte ich eine [...] Gemeinsamkeit. Allerdings, [...] diese Heimatweh habe ich überhaupt nicht.

(Well, for me, when I was in the village for the first time, it was like this. It was somehow a feeling of okay, that's where my father is from, but for me, it wasn't like home, because as a child you naturally see things with a different eye, you quickly realize that it's all just a wasteland and boring for me. Simply boring, because I come from Vienna, where there are playgrounds, soccer pitches, so lots of opportunities compared to the village where my father grew up, where actually [...], there's just nothing, exactly. You have to learn to play with stones again or just get along with nothing, just with yourself and with the other children. Um, but when I see these pictures, I can relate to them. So, I kind of feel like I have something in common. However, [...] I don't have this feeling of homesickness at all.) (Serhat [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024)

It becomes clear that even though he feels some kind of connection to the places, people, and things depicted in the images that document Kurdish everyday life in the mountains, Serhat does not consider the Kurdish territories as his homeland. As a child, being used to the living standards and the cultural context in Vienna, Serhat saw his father's village as a "wasteland" where "there is just nothing" and therefore could not connect to the place.

Alienation in both places, I believe lead to an ambivalent, abstract and highly deterritorial concept of homeland in Serhat's case, which aligns best with Boccagni et al.'s (2020) perspectives on home.

Also ich weiß auch nicht, weil du jetzt sagst, was ist Heimat für mich. Ich weiß auch nicht, ob Österreich meine Heimat ist. Ich bin hier zwar aufgewachsen, großgeworden, lebe mein ganzes Leben dann schon hier. Allerdings glaube ich einfach, dass Heimat da

ist, wo man sich am wohlsten fühlt. Ich denke mal, ich könnte jetzt auch nach Südamerika auswandern und dort sagen, das ist Heimat für mich nach zehn Jahren oder nach einer bestimmten Zeit.

(So I don't know either, because you're now saying what home is for me. I don't know if Austria is my home either. I grew up here and have lived here my whole life. However, I simply believe that home is where you feel the most comfortable. I suppose I could emigrate to South America now and say that this is homeland for me after ten years or after a certain period of time.) (Serhat [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024)

In the old home, there are no opportunities, and in the new home, they feel you will never be accepted. Here, Serhat defines homeland as a place where you feel most comfortable and expresses his uncertainty about Vienna being able to be that place for him. To feel good at a place, that is to feel at home, for Serhat it is important that he has what he sees as opportunities in the homeland and that he is accepted in society. As these two important parameters exclude each other, Serhat's notion of homeland remains an imaginary that has not been found yet.

To conclude, experiences of alienation in the new and old homelands arose from racism and other stereotypes, but also from economic or cultural differences. My interviewees expressed different degrees of homelessness based on these experiences, which influenced how much they could identify a place with their homeland. For Serhat, homeland became an exclusively mental category, applied to a future imaginary place, rather than a real one. However, experiencing racism in Vienna and poverty in the Kurdish regions did not have the same effect on others' notions of homeland. Others navigated with these experiences through defining two separate homelands such as Ehmed, one based on social relations in Vienna, and one on culture in "Kurdistan". Roza, on the other hand, articulated this fragmentation through defining both old and new homes and homelands and not homelands at the same time.

8.3.3 *No hopes of return*

In some cases, the Kurdish homeland was beyond reach for my interviewees, caused by economic underdevelopment or political persecution. In such cases, my interviewees tended to define homeland through culture and tradition.

For example, Firat came to Austria as a child to enjoy better education, but now he is not able to visit his home country, as he is afraid of being recruited for military service there. Thus, he could not meet his parents for many years. The situation is even more complicated, as other family members also left Armenia for economic reasons. As he told me, his mother left Armenia to find work in Russia, and he hears from his family from time to time how more and more people are leaving their villages in Armenia to find work somewhere else. As we saw in the previous pages, Firat often associated the homeland with tradition, his family members, or the Kurdish mountain landscape. His views of homeland were close to Safran's perspective, depicting an idealized, harmonious place.

Çewlîg told me that the last time he could visit his homeland was in 2014, and he could not return since then for political reasons. What helps him despite all this to have some contact with his homeland, as he told me, is his activity in a Kurdish association and its folklore group. (Çewlîg [pseudonym], personal interview, November 14, 2023) Thus, the homeland becomes a place of no possible return and moves to the realm of resistance, which materializes in practicing Kurdish traditions and acting out other aspects of Kurdish collective identity.

8.3.4 Synthesis: 'homelessness' and diaspora blues

To sum up, on the one hand, some of the ambivalences regarding homeland emerged from the fact that homeland cannot be considered a place of return for reasons such as the experience of statelessness, economic underdevelopment, as well as conflict and persecution in the Kurdish regions. Austria cannot always be considered as a homeland for the second-generation Kurds despite growing up or even being born here, for reasons of racism or cultural alienation. Moreover, the ambivalence, as I claimed in the beginning, is also in the concept of homeland itself: it is based on a national bias and assumes a singularity of place.

The multiple forms of belonging and identification experienced by my interlocutors who live their lives in a transnational diasporic space, cannot be entirely captured through the notion of homeland. This becomes evident from the definitions of my interviewees, who navigate contradicting and complementing notions of homeland, as we have seen in the paragraphs above.

8.4 Chapter Conclusion: The Homeland

This chapter explored my interlocutors' imaginaries of homeland through the concepts of the 'mental homeland', the 'place-based homeland', the 'skills-based homeland' and 'homelessness', each concept highlighting one aspect in the narratives shared by the research participants.

While many of these concepts emerged from both my observations in the workshops as well as the photo-interviews, not all aspects which I observed in the workshops could be found in the interviews. For example, the ‘skill-based homeland’ emerged through a workshop through the interactions of many diaspora members through shared remembering and acting out of knowledge and practices connected to Kurdistan. In one-on-one interviews, this aspect could not be observed, as the focus was on the individual biographies and family histories of the participants.

The empirical material presented in this chapter aligns with some of the perspectives in the diaspora literature. My findings confirm Clifford’s (1994) argument about the complexity and ambivalence in diasporans’ homeland relations and aligns with other scholars who emphasized these ambivalences based on their studies of the Kurdish diasporas (see e.g. Alinia and Eliassi 2014). Moreover, Clifford’s critique of Safran, that diasporans are not only connected to their place of origin but are also embedded in other transnational connections (see Clifford 1994, 306), is also reflected in my material. This can be observed, for example, in Ehmed’s narratives about the Kurdish regions in Turkey. However, my data also shows that Safran’s idealized perspective on the ancestral homeland (see Safran 1991) is still a strong motif in the imaginaries of homeland.

Aligning with Six-Hohenbalken’s (2018) view that changes in the second and later generations’ homeland relations resulting from increasing opportunities of encountering the original homeland through travel and the use of increasing online exchange of media and information, I suggest that this is largely contributing to the ambivalent notions of homeland which emerged.

The views of my interlocutors resemble Cohen’s (2022 [first publ. 1997]) perspective on the construction of homeland by diasporic discourses. This could be observed by the mental notions and the land-based notions of homeland, which relate to symbolic and territorial perspectives in the literature. However, the land-based notions of my interlocutors were also symbolic: identifying homeland with the *gund*, the Kurdish village in economically marginalized areas, aligns with victim narratives of the diaspora. Identifying homeland with the Kurdish mountains or the landscape, on the other hand is connected to diasporic views of an ideal traditional life in the Kurdish homeland. I believe that these views strongly relate to the characteristics of photographs as a form of representation.

Moreover, the affective dimensions of homeland, as emphasized by Axel (2002, quoted in Verstappen 2016), became evident as well. My interlocutors often connected homeland to their

family members, childhood memories or moral and cultural values, as we have seen in the section describing versions of what I called the ‘mental homeland’. For example, the accounts categorized in ‘homeland as tradition’ show, the maintenance of the homeland (see Safran 1991) can be transferred to the symbolic domain, as the knowledge about and practicing of Kurdish traditions, also relating to the perspective of the ‘homeland-as-practiced’.

9 Kurdishness in Photographs

This chapter explores my interlocutor's sense of Kurdishness that was evoked by the photographs selected from the collections of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke. When discussing homeland, my interviewees frequently associated the Kurdishness of the images with their concept of homeland, prompting me to explore Kurdishness as a significant aspect of homeland orientation in a dedicated chapter.

It was common for my interlocutors to react to the photos of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir by describing them as “typical Kurdish” or “very Kurdish”. To understand this, I will discuss some of these photos and the narratives they inspired, aiming to provide an overview of the sense of Kurdishness revealed through photo-elicitation. In other words, this chapter investigates what made an image appear “Kurdish” to my participants. Why are specific aspects of the images, motifs and symbols representative of Kurdishness for my interviewees?

This chapter does not include and analyze all photos that my participants identified as Kurdish, nor does it capture the full range of meanings Kurdishness holds for them. Instead, I have chosen to focus on the images that evoked the most vivid and diverse narratives, which I could meaningfully connect in my analysis. In the next sections, I will present a curated selection of images alongside with my interlocutors’ interpretations of Kurdishness. This chapter focuses on two primary dimensions of Kurdishness: Kurdish places and Kurdish practices. While it is not feasible to distill each category into a single overarching concept, I will organize the findings based on the main themes emphasized by my interlocutors.

The first part of this chapter focuses on photos of places that my interviewees associated with Kurdishness. In the second section, I will present photos considered “typically Kurdish” due to the activities depicted, which I interpret as embodied practices of Kurdishness. Finally, I will argue that Kurdishness evolves as a kind of ‘shared language’ in constructing the imagined community of the Kurdish transnation, as a difference marker, as well as it represents social order and continuity between past and present.

9.1 Kurdish Places: Traces in the Landscape

This section analyses how landscape photos and images of settlements evoked a sense of Kurdishness in the participants. I will explore mountains as symbols of traditional Kurdish life and

freedom, and the *gund*, that is rural settlements, which often serve as representations of the economic marginalization of the Kurds.

9.1.1 *Kurdish Mountains and pastoralism*

Es gibt so viele Geschichten über die Berge, so vieles über die Berge, was man erzählen sollte und erzählen muss. Zum Beispiel bei uns im Dorf gibt es zwei Berge, die haben eine Liebesgeschichte. Das heißt [Silbus û Tarî] also, beide konnten also, sie konnten sich nicht vereinen, und dann sind sie eben halt, so, ich erzähle jetzt mal die Kurzfassung, und aus Liebe, weil die zwei sich niemals getroffen haben, niemals zusammengekommen sind, wurden beide zu zwei Berge. Also schau doch sehr schön, wenn ich dann später irgendwie die Fotos zeigen kann, also zwei Berge, die einfach gegeneinander so sich anschauen. Also das ist das halt bei uns so eine Liebesgeschichte und das hat mich so an meine Gegend erinnert.

(There are so many stories about the mountains, so many things about the mountains that should and must be told. For example, there are two mountains in our village that have a love story. That is [Silbus û Tarî], so they both couldn't, they couldn't unite, and then they just, I'll tell you the short version now, and out of love, because the two never met, never came together, they both became two mountains. So it's really nice to be able to show you the photos later, two mountains just looking at each other. So that's also a love story for us and it reminded me of my region.) (Çewlîg [pseudonym], personal interview, November 14, 2023)



Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 24) reminded Çewlîg on a local legend about the mountains in his region of origin Dersim/Tunceli, where the photo (Figure 24) by Mehmet Emir was created. This example demonstrates how Kurdishness is imagined through the mountain landscape. Through the local legend, Kurdish culture is inscribed into the mountain landscape, thereby serving as a kind of mnemonic object. In the chapter about homeland, I revealed how a landscape photo evoked a sense of homeland from some of my interlocutors. As I discussed there, for Firat, the landscape as on the photo of Mehmet Emir (Figure 24) evokes the feeling of a Kurdish homeland, or home(land)scape. Other participants (Ehmed,

Roza) also recognized the photo as “typical for the mountains of Kurdistan” or “homely”. Here, revisiting the same photo, I would like to focus on how the image represented Kurdishness for Firat, as I find his explanations very illustrate.

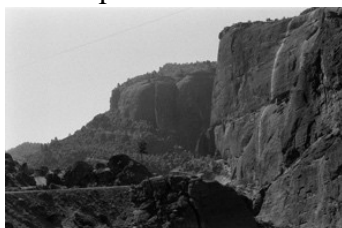
Das Gefühl dieser kurdischen Heimatlandschaft: Berge und Schafe natürlich mit dem Hirten. Das ist traditionell kurdisch. [...] Ja, man sagt ja, die Kurden sind ein Volk der Berge.

(The feeling of this Kurdish homelandscape: mountains and sheep with the shepherd, of course. That is traditionally Kurdish. [...] Yes, they say that the Kurds are a people of the mountains.) (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023)

Firat described the photo as “typically Kurdish” and “traditionally Kurdish” and added that the Kurds are “mountain people”. He emphasized that the view of the herd of sheep in the mountains is what makes it look “typically Kurdish” to him and what evokes a sense of homeland at the same time. The landscape photo (Figure 24) evoked in Firat memories which I discussed in the chapter about homeland already: memories of his own childhood and stories he was told about his great-grandfather, a shepherd who played the flute to pass the time in the mountains. These memories encompass a sense of harmony with the nature and a complex multisensory experience of the visual (landscape), emotional (freedom, happiness) and auditory (flute, Kurdish traditional music) which merge into a sense of Kurdishness.

Also Ehmed associated Mehmet Emir’s photo (Figure 24) immediately with “Kurdistan”, even though he told me that the Kurdish region in North Syria where his family comes from does not have mountains, he associates mountains with “Kurdistan”. In my interpretation, for Ehmed, the mountains are a symbol for Kurdishness, which is supposed to connect the Kurds, whether they actually have mountains or not.

Not all photos of the landscape in the Kurdish region evoked an association of homeland or the



evaluation as “Kurdish” by my interlocutors - let us remember the negative reactions to the black and white photo by Werner Finke (Figure 3) which I discussed in a previous chapter. As I argued there, the participants criticized that the black-white image could

have been anywhere, as one cannot identify it based on the colors.

As Mehmet Emir pointed out, the changing quality of the landscape makes it hard to recognize it (as homeland or as Kurdish for instance), if there are no traces of the people to see. To continue this idea, in Emir's photo (Figure 24), I propose that my interlocutors powerfully read the combination of the herd in the mountain landscape of traces of the Kurdish people, their pastoral lifestyle and way of living it the nature, these traces help them imagine Kurdishness. This means that while they all identified the landscape as Kurdish, when it came to explaining what makes it look Kurdish to them, they highlighted stories, values, memories. In other words, the mountains are places where Kurdish life is imagined and remembered.



The animals seemed to be an important aspect for some in identifying the mountain landscape with Kurdishness. Firat immediately associated Emir's landscape photo (Figure 24) with pastoralism, highlighting the flock of sheep on the image. However, on other images, not landscapes, the animals did not seem a strong marker of Kurdishness enough. Viewing Mehmet Emir's image (Figure 29), although Firat noted that donkeys are important pack animals for the Kurds, he still "did not see much Kurdishness" on the image.



The view of domesticated animals on Mehmet Emir's photos (Figures 29 and 30) also prompted Ehmed to remark that the donkey and the goats are important in the village of the Kurds. While he was hesitating about the image depicting two boys with a donkey (Figure 29), the photo of a herd (Figure 30) did not necessarily look "Kurdish" to him, because it "did not show enough" for him to recognize.

To conclude, I observed two dimensions of Kurdishness in the mountain images. On one hand, the mountains reminded my interviewees of the traditional pastoralist lifestyle of the Kurds, evoking memories and legends that served as a link to the past. On the other hand, the mountains emerged as a shared symbol for all Kurds, functioning as a kind of common language of Kurdishness and reinforcing the imagery of the Kurds as a "mountain people."

While Mehmet Emir's landscape image (Figure 24) highlighted domesticated animals as an important marker of Kurdishness, images that primarily depicted animals were not as strongly identified as Kurdish. I conclude that my interlocutors regarded the mountains as powerful symbols of Kurdishness, with the animals seen as part of a traditional pastoralist Kurdish lifestyle rather than as independent visual markers of Kurdishness.

9.1.2 The Gund

In the chapter about homeland, I already introduced the idea of the *gund* (Kurdish for village), as a concept encompassing the economic marginalization of Kurdish inhabited rural areas. I argued that identifying such settlements as homeland (especially for Kurds who have roots in cities and not such settlements) can relate to diasporic discourses of victimhood, symbolizing the oppressed status of the Kurds. In what follows, I will zoom into the narratives my interlocutors shared with me to gain a deeper understanding of how it evolves as a form of Kurdishness.

My research partners tended to describe rural settlements in the Kurdish regions as the *deepest gund*, or *typical gund*. As I understand it, the term *deepest gund* involves the meaning of economic marginalization and poverty, while it also encompasses Kurdishness in using the Kurdish word for village. As Sami Zubaida wrote, “What Turkish Kurdistan has in common with its Iraqi and Iranian counterparts is that it constitutes the poorest and least developed part of the country.” (Zubaida 1991, 2). Through these strong associations, Kurdishness for my interlocutors (Ehmed, Roza) involves the connection to the social-geographic marginalization of the Kurdish settlements.



This photo of Werner Finke (Figure 2) shows according to Ehmed “clearly a Kurdish region”. It reminded both Dilovan and Roza on their village, Roza also explained to me why. She identified the beds on the terraces and the mud houses as “typical [Kurdish]” and recalls her memories of sleeping in such a bed on the roof.

The image recalls memories of embodied experiences in Roza. By emphasizing that such beds still exist, and people continue to sleep outside this way, she creates a connection between the time the photo was taken and the present in the Kurdish villages.



Similarly, another photo of Werner Finke's (Figure 4) depicting a rural settlement evoked in Firat memories of his childhood when visiting the Kurdish villages in the Armenian countryside, where children could play freely whatever they wanted.

Das war... Eine der Lieblingssachen für mich, weil da waren die Kinder oft draußen, haben gespielt und gemacht, was sie wollten, und damals sind wir manchmal zu Besuch in die Dörfer gefahren, und ich habe mit meinem Bruder und den Kindern im Dorf alles Mögliche draußen gemacht haben...

(That was... One of my favorite things, because the children were often outside, playing and doing whatever they wanted, and back then we sometimes went to the villages to visit, and I did all kinds of things outside with my brother and the children in the village...) (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023)

In this account, the image represents, for Firat, a place from the past filled with happy childhood memories and the theme of freedom of “doing whatever they wanted”. Similarly to the landscapes of mountains and nature, the image of a settlement reminded Firat on freedom, a value he identifies with homeland. For both Firat and Roza, images of rural settlements evoked positively charged personal memories.

Beyond connecting personal experiences to the images of rural settlements as in this case, another important aspect for my interviewees association was identifying the “underdevelopment of the Kurdish regions” in the images. For Roza, this image of Werner Finke (Figure 4), which also reminds her on her village, looks “typical [Kurdish]”, because it shows how “underdeveloped” are the villages in the Kurdish territories. She emphasized that much on the photo still looks the same in her village, and it shows, as she explained, how economically disadvantaged the Kurdish regions are, which is for her one of the things shared by all Kurds. Again, as in the previous photo, she emphasized the continuity between the past and the present, but on a structural level.

Also Ehmed described the economic underdevelopment of the villages when he viewed Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 19). He used the terms “typical gund”, and “the deepest gund” for describing this and other photos (e.g. Figure 16).



Also hier schon, weil man sieht eben dieses Haus wieder älter, wieder bisschen herabgekommener, typisch Gund – Dorf, halt, alte Häuser. Die Leute dort sind sehr ärmlich, sage ich mal, und was es auch hergibt, ist im Hintergrund der Berg. Also wenn ich so ein Bild sehe, dann kommt mir schon nicht sofort auf den ersten

Blick, aber ich könnte schon die Idee haben im Kopf, dass es Kurdistan ist. [...] Also, wenn ich weiß, dass es sich um Fotos aus Kurdistan handelt, dann sehe ich ganz klar, dass es wie irgendwo im tiefsten gund, und im tiefsten Dorf aussieht.

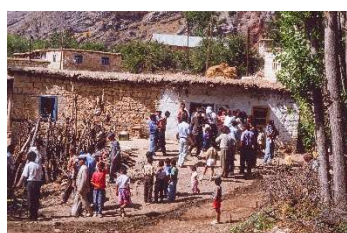
(Well, here it is, because this house looks older again, a bit more run-down, typical Gund village, old houses. The people there are very poor, I'd say, and the mountain is in the background. So, when I count a picture like that, it doesn't immediately come to me at first glance, but I might already have the idea in my head that it's Kurdistan. [...]) So, if I know that they are photos from Kurdistan, then I can clearly see that it looks like somewhere deep in the gund and in the deepest village.) (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024)

Just like Roza, Ehmed used the present tense, interpreting the photos with a sense of ‘timelessness’, in which the ‘Kurdistan’ depicted in the photos is brought to the present. In other words, my interlocutors did not include the dimension of time when describing these photos, the photos depicted a ‘timeless Kurdistan’ to them.



Ehmed's use of the conjunctive in reading the images is striking: “If I know [...] the I can clearly see [...]. So, knowing that these scenes are in the Kurdish territories, he argues, fills them with meaning, helps him recognize that it is “somewhere deep in the gund”. Nevertheless, many images he associated with Kurdish vil-

lages, he remarked the economic marginalization. As he explained viewing Mehmet Emir photo (Figure 16), “Because the Kurdish village looks like this, such houses still unfortunately, they still don't have very modern houses.”



Ehmed also showed another interpretation of Kurdishness of villages, based on the recognition of tradition and practices of Kurdish culture, then the socioeconomic position of the settlement. Interpreting Mehmet Emir photo (Figure 27) of a wedding scene as a Newroz celebration, Ehmed remarked that the photo unambigu-

ously shows a Kurdish village. In this case, the Kurdishness of the images does not align with a victim narrative in the diaspora but rather highlights tradition as a common language of Kurdishness. Moreover, the Newroz celebrations, as I explained in a previous chapter, also carry a political dimension due to their association with Kurdish resistance. While this aspect was not commonly applied to villages, I will present in the next section that it was a major marker of Kurdishness related to cultural practices.

To avoid creating one-sided and stereotypical representations, I would like to address the rural-urban binary as it appears in the accounts of Kurdishness presented here. Images of towns or cities (e.g. photo Figure 5) were less represented in the selection of photos (as well as in the collections themselves), and those included in the selection for the interviews were less frequently identified as “typically Kurdish” compared to rural photos. An exception is Werner Finke’s photo of Diyarbakir (Figure 5), which, according to Ehmed, could resemble Qamishli—a city in northeastern Syria, Rojava, where Ehmed’s family originates. Others also recognized this image as Kurdish. I speculate that the strong association of Kurdishness with rural settlements stems from the portrayal of villages in my informants’ narratives as ‘timeless,’ in contrast to the rapidly changing cities, which are not as easily linked to Kurdish identity.

To conclude, images depicting rural settlements were highly associated with Kurdishness, in most cases, my interlocutors pointed out the economic marginalization of these settlements. In some of the narratives, the time dimensions were absent, expressing a kind of ‘timelessness’ of the photos. These accounts, which integrate the economic marginalization of the Kurdish regions with Kurdishness, align with Eccarius-Kelly’s remark on the second generation’s tendency to express the marginalization faced by the Kurds (see Eccarius-Kelly 2015, 187). The narratives of victimhood emerging from discrimination and oppression in the homeland, become constructive elements of the ethnic identities of diasporans, thereby appearing as a shared language of Kurdishness.

9.2 Kurdishness in Embodied Practices and Tradition

In this section, I will explore Kurdishness connected to embodied practices of performing Kurdish culture and tradition, based on my interlocutors’ narratives evoked by selected photos depicting people by activities they identified as traditional, such as festive meals, dancing or wearing traditional attire. Before delving into the analysis, I have to note that expressions of Kurdish identity were banned on many instances, especially after the 1980 coup during martial law. The bans included using the words “Kurd” or “Kurdish” (Gabrielyan 2024, 246–47), using Kurdish names (Cengiz Günay 2012, 159), and the military dictatorship banned the Kurdish language, music and literature (ibid., 268). This drastic oppression of cultural expression marked the evolving senses of Kurdish identity.

I will first analyze responses to an image of Werner Finke (Figure 8) depicting a festive meal in which my interviewees connected Kurdishness to representations of social order and tradition in the sense of connecting the present to the past. This will be followed by analyzing two

images of Werner Finke (Figures 11 and 9) about evoking narratives of traditional Kurdish music and dances, in which, drawing on Demir's work (see, 2021) I analyzed the sense of Kurdishness of my interlocutors as a shared language, connecting the Kurds across the trans-nation. Finally, I will connect the responses to the previous two photos to those of a photo by Mehmet Emir to analyze Kurdishness in my interlocutors' narratives about the wearing of traditional attire as a difference marker against the Western culture in the new homeland and as marker of gendered social order in Kurdish society.

9.2.1 *Eating: Social Order and Continuity*



Sitting together on the floor and eating, as depicted in Werner Finke's photo (Figure 8), was recognized by some participants (Roza, Ehmed, Firat) as 'typically Kurdish'. Although some of the elements of the image were recognized by most interlocutors as central to what makes the image look "Kurdish", their narratives

and associations also centered about various aspects, as we will see.

Und [...] auch typisch, dass man [am Boden] sitzt beim Essen und vor allem auch die Metall [Teller], das ist auch typisch Kurdisch. Das gibt es ja auch bei uns über[all] und auch, dass jede mit also, es gibt gewisse einzelne Teller, aber meist kommen halt mehrere so in die Mitte, und mehrere essen aus einem Teller. Das ist halt so, auch typisch. [...] Man bedient sich alles, je nachdem, zum Beispiel, das könnte ich mir vorstellen, dass es für die zwei sind oder für drei Personen, und das da halt für die nächsten, und ja. Also das ist auch etwas, was bis jetzt noch immer so in der Art existiert. [...] Und natürlich, was auch sehr Kurdisch ist, ist das das Brot. Aber das ist so ein Essen, [...], wie von der Hochzeit das wahrscheinlich sind und essen. Das ist eine Konstellation, da würde man jetzt auch, also wir sind auch auf dem Boden gesessen, und haben so gegessen mit diesem Brot. Also es ist eins zu eins, man sieht, dass die Kultur, gewisse Kulturzüge über Jahre, Jahrzehnte hinweg gleichbleiben. Also, es ist jetzt heute noch immer so.

(And [...] it's also typical to sit [on the floor] while eating and especially the metal [plates], that's also typically Kurdish. That's also the case here everywhere and also that everyone eats from one plate, so there are certain individual plates, but usually there are several in the middle and several eat from one plate. That's just how it is, also

typical. [...] You help yourself to everything, depending on, for example, I could imagine that it's for two or three people, and that's for the next one, and yes. So that's also something that still exists in this form. [...] And of course what's also very Kurdish is the bread. But this is something we eat, [...], like from the wedding, that's probably what we eat. It's a constellation where you would also, well, we also sat on the floor and ate like this with this bread. So it's exactly the same, you can see that the culture, certain cultural traits remain the same over years, decades. So it's still like that today.) (Roza [pseudonym], personal interview, October 23, 2023)

In the excerpt above, Roza described the photo in detail and connected it immediately to her own village in the Kurdish inhabited regions. She explained that she is familiar with this setting from her own village, and powerfully interprets the image as a wedding scene, describing its details such as many people sharing a plate. Furthermore, she highlights the temporal continuity of the tradition to the present, thus in this account of Kurdishness the intertwining of past with the present plays an important role. Proceeding with her interpretations, Roza focused on the gender aspect of the image: the separation of men and women for the meals.

Etwas, was an dem Bild sehr typisch kurdisch ist oder prinzipiell unserer Gesellschaft zuzuschreiben ist, ist: Männer und Frauen essen getrennt. Und auf dem Bild sieht man das also, man sieht es explizit, dass es in dieser Gegend auch eher sehr bedacht ist, gesellschaftliche Trennung, oder Hierarchien einzuhalten. Und das ist halt auch etwas wirklich so typisch für unsere Kultur, dass Männer und Frauen stets getrennt essen, auf der Hochalm noch immer. Also bei uns gibt es diese Trennung noch immer [bei] Hochzeiten. Meine Cousine hat dieses Jahr geheiratet. Da war die Trennung auch explizit, Männer essen da, Frauen essen da.

(One thing that is very typically Kurdish about the picture, or can be attributed to our society in principle, is that men and women eat separately. And in the picture you can see that, you can see it explicitly, that in this region, people are also very careful to maintain social separation or hierarchies. And that's also something really typical of our culture, that men and women always eat separately, even on the high alpine pastures. We still have this separation at weddings. My cousin got married this year. There

was also an explicit separation, men eat there, women eat there.) (Roza [pseudonym], personal interview, October 23, 2023)

Pointing to the gender-based hierarchies in Kurdish society, Roza again highlighted the fact that this aspect of gender hierarchies which makes the image look typically Kurdish is still existing in this form. Thus, Kurdishness is connected to social order in this account. Also, Firat recognized the photo as “the traditional meal of the Kurds” and it evoked personal memories in him, even though he noted the clothing the men on the picture are wearing is different from the one Kurds wear in his region in Armenia.

Ja also das ist, ich sehe an diesem Bild, das traditionelle Essen oder Mittagessen der Kurden, wo man am Boden sitzt, gemeinsam, und da sieht man auch, kein Besteck, gab es kein Besteck oder verwendet man kein Besteck zum Essen, sondern isst das meiste mit der Hand und mit dem Fladenbrot, wie man hier sieht. Das ist auch sehr traditionell, das kenne ich auch von Armenien, und da nimmt man einfach mit dem Fladenbrot das, was auf dem Teller ist, und isst es so. [...] Es vermittelt so ein... Ja, ein familiäres Gefühl, und also ich kenne das, was wir bei uns in Armenien oft auch so gemeinsam bei einem Tisch sitzen. Und hier bei diesem Bild sieht man auch, das sind nur Männern, das hab ich bei den Kurden in Armenien auch erlebt, da haben die Frauen einen anderen Raum und die kurdischen Männer bei einem anderen. Genau, und da [...] redet man dann über verschiedene Themen, die zum Beispiel aktuell sind, oder man erzählt alte Geschichten von früher.

(Yes, so that's what I see in this picture, the traditional meal or lunch of the Kurds, where you sit on the floor together, and you can also see that there is no cutlery, there was no cutlery or you don't use cutlery to eat, but you eat most of it with your hand and with the flatbread, as you can see here. That's also very traditional, I know that from Armenia too, and there you simply take what's on the plate with the flatbread and eat it like that. [...] It conveys such a... Yes, a family feeling, and I know what it's like here in Armenia, where we often sit around a table together. And here in this picture you can also see that it's just men, I've also experienced that with the Kurds in Armenia, where the women have a different room and the Kurdish men have a different room. Exactly,

and there [...] you talk about various topics that are current for example, or you tell old stories.) (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023)

As we can see in the excerpt, for Firat the way of eating while seated on the floor, without cutlery and with the bread makes the scene look Kurdish. He identified the gendered separation of the meal and he remembered also taking part in Kurdish meals with only men. Finally, for Firat, this “Kurdish meal” also involves a component of storytelling, namely sharing stories of the past by the table. He did not refer to the continuity of this tradition to the present.

As we have seen, personal experiences of “the traditional Kurdish meal” fueled the participants' association of this photo as Kurdish. Based on their different gendered and cultural experiences, the two participants highlighted slightly different aspects of the photo. They both identified a few aspects as important, such as eating on the floor and with the hands and the bread instead of cutlery. The position and use of the body during the meal carried the meaning of Kurdishness. Moreover, both highlighted the gendered separation of the meal as an important aspect. Thus, they connected the idea of Kurdishness with social order and gendered hierarchies in Kurdish society.

9.2.2 *Music and Govend – a Shared Language of the Kurds*

This section highlights two photos of Werner Finke which depict people in Kurdish traditional attire, dancing *govend*. We will explore what my interlocutors found “Kurdish” about these images and what kind of narratives they evoked.



When viewing Werner Finke's photo (Figure 11) of women dressed in traditional Kurdish attire, dancing *govend*, a traditional Kurdish dance, many of my interlocutors described it as “typically Kurdish”. Govend, as Demir remarks, is an important expression of Kurdishness for newer generations in the diaspora, not only serving as the celebration of Kurdish culture and tradition, but also expressing struggle and resistance, govend, can be seen as a common language for the Kurdish diasporas, an ‘embodiment of Kurdish indigeneity’ (Demir 2021, 838–39). This is especially remarkable in the way Çewlîg described the photo.

While the photo represented for him “typical Kurdish women's culture”, he explained me the relevance of singing and dancing for the entire Kurdish culture. In his account, dancing is part

of the everyday Kurdish life and belongs especially to the female realm. As such, women become symbols representing Kurdishness, their social position becoming part of ethnic and national identity.

Da habe ich eh darüber erzählt, also wie sehr kurdische Kultur [...] sich mit Tanzen erklärt. Im Tanz ist es eher so. Also diese Kultur ist so eine reiche Kultur, so wie soll ich sagen? Singen und Klang ist für uns immer mit dabei, also egal, was wir machen, egal ob wir herumgehen oder auch wenn wir weinen, auch [wenn] wir [...] trauern, die Musik in uns ist immer mit uns dabei. Also ich finde das schon sehr krass, wie sehr Kurden eigentlich die Musik und das Tanzen generell sehr lieben. Also, ich erkläre es jetzt mal so. Also wenn wir fröhlich sind bei einer Hochzeit, singen unsere kurdischen Frauen, also die ganzen Frauen kommen in der Wohnung zusammen, und sie singen über die Braut und [den] Bräutigam. Sie mögen es einfach, [...] zu singen, selber zu tanzen, und wenn sie trauern, dann weinen sie und trauern und singen nochmal über den Toten. Also das ist schon eine sehr, also, was ich krass finde, so wie sie sich mit Musik also äußern können, was ihre Denkweise von Musik ist, singen sie einfach. Das Tanzen ist eben halt so etwas beim Tanzen werden immer [...] die glücklichsten Hormone in die Freie gestellt oder so. Sie lieben es einfach zu tanzen. Also *dahol*⁴⁰ und *zurna*⁴¹, das ist so, unsere, unser Standard. [...] Früher hat man nur von Mund zu Mund gesungen, also da hat man nur gesungen und nur getanzt. Also das gab es nicht einmal früher. Es ist später dann nachgekommen. [...]

(I talked about how much Kurdish culture explains itself through dance. It's more like this in dance. So, this culture is such a rich culture, how should I put it? Singing and sound is always with us, so no matter what we do, no matter if we walk around or even if we cry, even if we mourn, the music in us is always with us. So, I find it very striking how much Kurds actually love music and dancing in general. Let me explain it like this. So, when we are happy at a wedding, our Kurdish women sing, so all the women come together in the apartment and they sing about the bride and the groom. They just like to sing and dance themselves, and when they mourn, they cry and mourn and sing again

⁴⁰ Drums used in the Middle East and the Balkans

⁴¹ Wind instrument used in Central Asia, West Asia, the Caucasus, Southeast Europe and North Africa

about the dead. So that's a very, well, I think it's amazing how they can express themselves with music, what their way of thinking about music is, they just sing. Dancing is just something like that, dancing always brings out the happiest hormones or something. They just love to dance. So dahol⁴² and zurna⁴³, that's our, our standard. [...] In the past, we only sang from mouth to mouth, so we only sang and only danced. So that didn't even exist before. It came later. [...] (Çewlîg [pseudonym], personal interview, November 14, 2023)

It is interesting that he immediately connects dance with singing, music and musical instruments. Singing and dancing are, according to Çewlîg, a way of thinking or self-expression of the Kurds. It is striking how Çewlîg gives similar but still different meaning to dancing and singing. He first said that Kurdish culture “explains itself through dancing.” This is the first thing he noted when he sees the picture. Later in this section, he said that “I think it's amazing how they can express themselves with music, what their way of thinking about music is, they just sing”. This aligns with Demir’s perspective on *govend* as a “common language for Kurds living in disparate parts of Europe” (Demir 2021, 839).

When viewing Werner Finke’s photo (Figure 9), Roza also highlighted the importance of music and dance for Kurdish culture. She focused on the role of musicians in the middle of the image. For Roza, Kurdishness is in the music and the musicians are the “hard disk of Kurdish culture”.



[...] Obwohl für mich als eine Person, die halt mit den Kurdischen Tänzen extrem historisch befasst, das sind die Personen, die eigentlich die wahre kurdische Kultur aufrechterhalten. Denn die sind diejenige die wissen, welche Tänze, welche Musik, welche Melodie also, die sind eigentlich die eigentlich die CD, die Hard-disk der kurdischen [...] Kultur eigentlich. Meiner Meinung nach. Es ist sehr schade, dass die eher von der Bevölkerung belächelt werden, obwohl sie das Wissen in sich tragen, der Grund dafür sind, warum es die kurdische Kultur [...] noch immer auch so fest, aufbewahrt wird.

⁴² See footnote 38.

⁴³ See footnote 39.

([...] Although for me, as a person who is extremely historically involved with Kurdish dances, these are the people who actually maintain the true Kurdish culture. Because they are the ones who know which dances, which music, which melody, so they are actually the CD, the hard disk of Kurdish [...] culture. In my opinion. It's a great pity that they tend to be ridiculed by the population, even though they are the ones who have the knowledge, the reason why Kurdish culture [...] is still so firmly preserved.) (Roza [pseudonym], personal interview, October 23, 2023)

Unlike the accounts before, Roza's account reveals internal differences within Kurdish society: people do not take musicians seriously, musicians do not belong to the community, even though they are the ones who keep up the Kurdish culture. She also positions herself as opposed to "the population" who "ridicule" the musicians, as someone who is "extremely historically involved with Kurdish dances". As for the photo depicting the festive meal in the previous section, the image (Figure 9) has a relevance as a kind of continuity to the past for Roza.

To conclude, Werner Finke's photos Figure 9 and 11 evoked strong associations with Kurdishness. In Çewlîg's account, dancing and singing is mainly subjected to women. Their singing is something that accompanies Kurdish life in all situations, from the happiest, to the saddest ones. Thus, for him, in the image of dancing and singing, Kurdishness expresses in a way social order, the role of women in Kurdish society. Moreover, as part of everyday life, this creates an image of a homogenous society.

Unlike Çewlîg, Roza transmits a heterogenous image of Kurdish society. However, for both of them, music and dances are of crucial importance for Kurdishness. While for Çewlîg, Kurdishness in the music and dances is a kind of 'common language' for the Kurds, through which they express themselves, for Roza, Kurdish culture is more like a shared treasure which needs to be maintained and saved across the passing of time. Thus, I interpret, Kurdishness, for Roza presents a continuity between the past and the present. In both cases Kurdishness is something practiced or acted out.

9.2.3 Traditional Attire and the Everyday

The photos by Werner Finke (nos. 9, 11) were significant representations of Kurdishness not only because they depicted activities such as music and singing but also due to the traditional attire worn by the individuals shown.

Another aspect of this excerpt is Çewlîg's emphasis on the role of women in the forms of expressing Kurdish culture. Turning his attention to the dresses of the women, Çewlîg empha-



sized how much women in his context like to wear Kurdish traditional clothing nowadays.

Also meine Mutter, meine Schwester, die kurdische, also das kurdische Kleid, die kurdischen Trachten, wir lieben es, also wir fühlen uns auch komplett wohl damit, also ausgenommen, dass es sehr bequem ist, ist es auch sehr. Es zeigt uns einfach, wie stolz wir eigentlich sind, also wie sehr wir unsere Kultur lieben. Also, meine Mutter, sie liebt ihre kurdischen Kleider, sie fühlt sich auch da auch sehr wohl damit, und ja, das ist so typisch, immer die Frau, also, das ist so, da sind die Frauen schon, sie ziehen sich gerne an.

(So, my mother, my sister, the Kurdish, so the Kurdish dress, the Kurdish costumes, we love it, so we also feel completely comfortable with it, except that it's very comfortable, it's also very comfortable. It just shows us how proud we are, how much we love our culture. So, my mother, she loves her Kurdish clothes, she also feels very comfortable with them, and yes, that's so typical, always the woman, well, that's the way women are, how they like to dress.) (Çewlîg [pseudonym], personal interview, November 14, 2023)

For Ehmed, photo Figure 11, like other photos depicting women (Figure 13, 17, 18), could be evaluated as "Kurdish" precisely because of the look and clothing of the women. I also observed Ehmed referring to women and their Kurdish clothing in a similar way. Looking at Werner Finke's photo (Figure 17), Ehmed explained: "*I also have* women in my family, older women, who wear something like this". I suppose a similar connection of Kurdishness with women here, women wear the Kurdish looking clothing, they wear the "Kurdishness", just like they dance and sing it in Çewlîg's account. In both cases, Kurdishness marks social order and women's place in Kurdish society.

A third, and somewhat different narrative about Kurdishness in attire of the women depicted on the photo Figure 11 was shared by a female participant. For Roza, this photo represents Kurdish culture at the best.

Mein Lieblingsbild. [...] Da blüht, da blüht wirklich mir mein Herz. Es ist einfach kurdische Kultur die Trachten, die Details, die Ketten. Vor allem diese Gegend, die ist eher bekannt dafür, dass sie sehr viel Silberschmuck haben. Weil Gold ist eher bei uns im Süden, [...] bei denen eher das Silberschmuck. Und das ist einfach etwas wundervolles. Und das ist halt etwas, was man eben in Europa sehr schwer findet. Auch diese Trachten. Wenn überhaupt, [...] gibt es nicht mehr so viele, die diese Trachten anziehen wollen würden, [...]. Nein es ist einfach ein sehr schönes Bild. Das ist halt kurdische Kultur.

(My favorite picture. [...] It really makes my heart bloom. It's simply Kurdish culture in the costumes, the details, the necklaces. This region in particular is known for having a lot of silver jewelry. Because gold is more common here in the south, [...] with them it's more silver jewelry. And that is simply wonderful. And that's something that's very hard to find in Europe. Even this traditional costume. If at all, [...] there aren't that many people who would want to wear these traditional costumes [...]. No, it's simply a very beautiful image. That's just Kurdish culture.) (Roza [pseudonym], personal interview, October 23, 2023)

Here, although also noticing the differences of the scene to her region (silver instead of gold jewelry), Roza, the image depicts Kurdish culture as a whole. Unlike the previous two interlocutors, she did not highlight the role of women in transferring Kurdish culture but noted instead that not many people would like to wear such clothing today. This remark creates a distance between the “typically Kurdish” scene and the Kurds in Roza's context. Roza also pointed to the specialness of the jewelry with as “something that's very hard to find in Europe”, drawing a line between Kurdishness and current homeland, or society of arrival. In other words, Kurdishness is constructed in the boundary drawn against the new homeland in terms of culture.

Viewing Werner Finke's photo (Figure 9), an image depicting musicians on the summer pasture



and men in the background, dancing govend, my interlocutors found Kurdishness in the dressing of the men as well. Firat found that the men are dressed “traditionally Kurdish”, and Ehmed explained how the turban of the men can be differentiated from other groups, because of the Kurdish style of binding it. These comments

were shorter than what these participants told me about the previous photo (Figure 11) depicting women. Finding Kurdishness in traditional dressing, Roza's account revealed even more complexity when viewing photo Figure 9. She commented on wearing the traditional attire as “that is more or less living out Kurdish culture”.

While all Çewlîg, Ehmed and Roza found traditional attire an important marker of Kurdishness, the accounts of the two men, Çewlîg and Ehmed rather focused on women, while Roza's account revealed temporal and social gaps, such as the current tendency of not wearing traditional clothing and the peripheral position of musicians in Kurdish society, and it presented Kurdishness also as a marker of difference.

Finally, I must include the comments on another photo, which was identified as Kurdish be-



cause of the clothing of the people depicted. Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 17) evoked a sense of Kurdishness in many of my interviewees.

For Firat, the image recalls memories of the Kurdish settlements in the Armenian countryside. While he is hesitating whether the image depicts a typically Kurdish scene, it gives him a “Kurdish feeling”, and the way the men look like in this photo helps him evaluate it as Kurdish.

[...] schwarzweiß, sehr schön, ja, also dieses Bild finde ich [schön], wenn alte Leute draußen, alte Männer und Frauen draußen im Schatten sitzen. Das habe ich oft gesehen in den Dörfern. Das ist typisch kurdisch oder muss nicht kurdisch sein. Aber ich kenne das von den Kurden genau am Abend, vor allem wenn, wenn die Sonne langsam untergeht, sitzen die älteren Menschen draußen, manchmal, trinken Tee oder [...] reden und erzählen Geschichten oder schauen einfach, was gerade passiert. Wer kommt und wer geht, und da sieht man, die älteren Frauen auf dem Bild, die auch [...] Kopfbedeckungen haben. Da kann ich jetzt natürlich nicht viel dazu sagen, ob das Kurdinnen sind. Aber bei den Kurden ist typisch auch der Schnauzbart Schnurrbart. Der Schnurrbart ist bei den Männern auch. Dieser Mann hat so eine typische kurdische [...] Hose. Die Hose ist typisch Kurdisch, ganz weit, und ja, vor den Häusern. Sie sitzen praktisch vor den Häusern im Schatten, und weil es im Sommer untertags oft sehr heiß [ist], und am Abend wird es kühler, dann sitzen sie draußen. Ja, das zeigt mir, also bringt mir auch das kurdische Gefühl wieder [...].

([...] black and white, very beautiful, yes, so I like this picture of old people outside, old men and women sitting outside in the shade. I've often seen that in the villages. It's typically Kurdish or doesn't have to be Kurdish. But I know this from the Kurds, especially in the evening, when the sun is slowly setting, the older people sit outside, sometimes drinking their tea or talking and telling stories or simply watching what is happening. Who comes and who goes, and you can see the older women in the picture, who are also wearing [...] headgear. Of course, I can't say much about whether they are Kurdish women. But the moustache is also typical of the Kurds. The moustache is also typical of men. This man is wearing typical Kurdish trousers. The trousers are typically Kurdish, very wide, and yes, in front of the houses. They practically sit in front of the houses in the shade, and because it's very hot during the day, often in summer, and it gets cooler in the evening, they sit outside. Yes, that shows me, so it also brings back the Kurdish feeling [...].) (Firat [pseudonym], personal interview, October 10, 2023)

Although he starts by hesitating whether the scene looks Kurdish, Firat describes the scene depicted on the photo in detail as he imagines it. He adds descriptions as for example “the sun is slowly setting”, or “drinking their tea or talking and telling stories or simply watching what is happening. Who comes and who goes”, which he imagined as part of the typical Kurdish scene depicted. While for Firat it is the men who look Kurdish with their moustache and their trousers and he cannot identify the women, Ehmed sees it exactly the other way around.

So genauso meiner Familie habe ich auch Frauen, ältere Frauen, die sowas anhaben, und die Männer von der Kleidung geben sie nicht zu viel her, muss man fairerweise sagen, aber das Aussehen halt ein bisschen. Aber was [man] vor allem verstärkt mit Kurdistan dann in Verbindung bringt, sind die Frauen rechts, also ihr Kopftuch verrät es mir, und was ja und was sie machen. Ich glaube, die eine isst so Nüsse oder diese Sonnenblumenkerne.

(I also have women in my family, older women, who wear them, and the men's clothes don't give them away too much, to be fair, but they do look a bit like that. But what I associate more strongly with Kurdistan are the women on the right, their headscarves tell me that, and what they do. I think one of them eats like nuts or these sunflower seeds.) (Ehmed [pseudonym], online interview, January 21, 2024)

Ehmed identified the headscarves of the women as Kurdish looking. The headscarves also catch Serhat's attention, who described the image more in detail. Serhat finds both the women and the men on the photo as looking “typically Kurdish” and “traditional”. It reminds him on Kurdish acquaintances of his family.

Also was ich jetzt typisch Kurdisch empfinde, ist diese Schnauze von dem Herren und natürlich diese [...] Kappe, genau, und bei den Frauen, dass das auf jeden Fall, weil früher um die Bekannten die zu uns gekommen sind, also manche von denen, die haben auch dieses Kopftuch gehabt mit [...] diesem Schmuck, oder diese Details. Ist halt mit dem Textil ist alles dasselbe, derselbe Stoff wie das Kopftuch, [...] nur enger zusammen genäht. Man sieht das Gestrickt, gestrickt oder bestickt auf dem Bild Nummer 17, dann sieht man es ganz gut, die zwei Damen. Das finde ich sehr, sehr, als ja traditionell [würde ich es] bezeichnen.

(So what I now find typically Kurdish is this muzzle of the man and of course this [...] cap, exactly, and with the women, that this is definitely the case, because in the past, around the acquaintances who came to us, some of them, they also had this headscarf, this headscarf with [...] this jewelry, or these details. It's all the same with the textile, the same fabric as the headscarf, just sewn tighter, tamer. You can see the knitting, knitted or embroidered on picture number 17, then you can see it quite well, the two ladies. I think it's very, very traditional.) (Serhat [pseudonym], personal interview, January 23, 2024)

Mehmet Emir's photo (Figure 17) evoked in many interlocutors a sense of Kurdishness. While Firat first evaluated the scene (old people sitting outside) as typically Kurdish and focused on the clothing of the depicted people to explain what looked Kurdish to him. Ehmed and Serhat also evaluated the clothing of the depicted people, although while for Firat it was the men's dressing that looked Kurdish, Ehmed identified the women's, and Serhat, who identified both men's and women's dresses as Kurdish.

Although only Firat's account seems for the first sight illustrative of what the image evoked in him or what meanings behind the “Kurdish” evaluation is, both Ehmed's and Serhat's accounts involve a piece of personal imagination. When Ehmed reads the photo, he interprets it as if of

one the women is eating nuts or sunflower seeds. This interpretation suggests that in such a scene with women dressed “typically Kurdish”, that would be a likely thing to happen. Serhat also reveals that his evaluation of the image, and the clothing worn by the people in it is based on his previous experiences of meeting Kurds who wear such “traditional” clothing. Kurdishness, in this case is familiar and traditional at the same time, existing in the details of the dressing such as the fabric of the headscarves, the moustache, or the style of trousers.

To conclude, images depicting people playing music, dancing and wearing traditional attire were highly associated with Kurdishness. Kurdishness was associated with eating practices, dancing, singing, music, and traditional ways of clothing. In many cases (Ehmed, Çewlîg and Serhat) it was specifically the look of women on the picture that looked Kurdish to them. Moreover, Çewlîg's and Roza's accounts also revealed gendered hierarchies in Kurdish society. In the case of men, what was evaluated by many interlocutors as Kurdish are traditionally male pieces of clothing (trousers, turban) or the moustache, which are important markers of masculinity.

When Kurdishness was associated with the practice of Kurdish traditions and performing Kurdish culture through these photos, it appeared to my interlocutors as a shared language of Kurdishness, something that all Kurds have in common, something connecting Kurds across the regions and the diasporas. These views were also mixed with understandings of Kurdishness through tradition as representations of Kurdish social order, as the examples of gender hierarchy by festive meals or gendered roles of “wearing” the tradition show. While the view of Kurdishness as a common language was rather a way of connecting Kurds across place in the present, the view of Kurdishness in tradition, often expressed by Roza, as connectivity with the past examples a temporal connection of Kurds through the concept of Kurdishness.

9.3 Chapter Conclusions: Kurdishness in Photographs

This chapter explored Kurdishness in my interlocutors' responses to the photos we viewed together from the Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir archives. The examples above reveal how images evoked a sense of Kurdishness in my interlocutors with motifs such as eating, dancing, traditional costumes or landscapes. While it became evident which motifs the participants identified on the images as Kurdish, their narratives also revealed motifs that were not depicted but considered as important aspects of Kurdishness by my interviewees such as singing, telling

stories, or the abstract ideas of family, solidarity, and freedom. I analyzed the views of Kurdishness my interviewees shared in two main categories: based on photos associated as depicting Kurdish places and based on those seen as showing Kurdish practices.

While some images were commented on by my interviewees as “does not look Kurdish,” it was rather a seldom reaction. Generally, Kurdishness in the responses of my interviewees was connecting all the Kurds, rather than representing partial identities such as based on political or religious affiliation, language, etc. Despite this, the accounts shared were rather subjective. In many cases, my interlocutors associated those photos with Kurdishness which evoked personal memories in them. We have seen this in the accounts of Serhat, Firat, and Roza. Çewlîg and Roza referred to family members on mainly connects Kurdishness with the one or more occasions when telling me about an image that looked Kurdish to them.

In both images of places and of practices, I recognized more-or-less the same types of Kurdishness. The most common forms were associated with connectivity, either in space or time. For connection in space, I used the concept of *Kurdishness as a shared language*, to highlight, how Kurdishness is applied to phenomena that are thought of as shared by all the Kurds and connecting Kurds across all the Kurdish regions and diasporas, such as traditional dances and singing, or the celebration of Newroz.

The other kind of continuity represented by the idea of Kurdishness was continuity in time. In this view, Kurdishness connects one to the past through the practice of performing or preserving tradition. Examples for this are the mountains, when associated with the past pastoralist lifestyle of the Kurds as a symbol of Kurdishness, or the performance of Kurdish dances and music, which saves Kurdish culture across the time. This view was especially characteristic of Roza’s responses, who tended to highlight that the practices, contexts she identified as Kurdish, still exist today.

To a lesser but still significant extent, views of Kurdishness also expressed internal or external differences. As internal difference, Kurdishness was often applied to phenomena that represent social order, as the gendered hierarchies in Kurdish society⁴⁴. This is reflected in the responses about the gendered separation of sitting order to Werner Finke’s image (Figure 8) depicting a festive meal in a pastoralist, Sunni Kurdish community, or in Çewlîg’s account (in response to

⁴⁴ It is important to note, that the two collections of Werner Finke and Mehmet Emir document two culturally, linguistically and religiously different Kurdish contexts. While the Serhat region, documented by Werner Finke, is dominated Kurmancî speaking, Sunni-Muslim Kurds, Mehmet Emir’s Dersim/Tunceli region is inhabited by Zazaki speaking Alevi Kurds. Social hierarchies and gender norms are far from identical in these two contexts.

Werner Finke's photo Figure 11) about the role of women in expressing Kurdish culture through singing and dancing.

Some responses also highlight Kurdishness as a difference marker, aligning with the classic literature on ethnicity (see Barth 1969). The images depicting rural settlement elicited from most of my interlocutors' narratives of Kurdishness marking the economic marginalization of the Kurds in their regions of origins. These views of Kurdishness as difference a marker align with narratives of victimhood in the diaspora as an important identity forming. Eccarius-Kelly identified such expressions of injustice as characteristic of the younger generations (see Eccarius-Kelly 2015, 187). Less often, Kurdishness was formulated as a boundary against the context in the new homeland. An example is Roza's comment on the importance of traditional Kurdish jewelry, which cannot be found in Europe, or Ehmed's emphasis on the higher national importance of Newroz for Kurds than for other people in the Middle East. While my interviewees did not often express explicitly Kurdishness as a difference marker, the notion of the cultural homeland, as I will argue in the conclusions, highlights boundary-making in the construction of homeland through ethnic identifications.

Finally, aligning with Eccarius-Kelly's findings (see Eccarius-Kelly 2015, 177), the examples above show that the views of Kurdishness expressed by my interlocutors are strongly associated with homeland. This is also resembled in my search results in Instagram with the keywords "Kurdistan" and "Kurdishness", which I introduced in the context chapter about the Kurdish diasporas. Indeed, it is difficult to differentiate between the meanings of homeland and Kurdishness based on my interlocutors' accounts. I believe, that the reason for the closeness of these terms lies in what Alinia observed, namely that Kurdishness has been formed by the same processes which lead to the emergence of the Kurdish diasporas (Alinia 2004, quoted in Toivanen 2021, 67), namely political instability and oppression, economic marginalization, persecution, and denial. On the other hand, as my results show, Kurdishness fills the function of some kind of connectivity, thereby lifting the subjective concept of homeland on a higher level of sharedness among the culturally and politically diverse Kurdish regions.

10 Conclusion

This thesis, which is based on empirical research in Vienna in 2023-2024 conducted in the art-based interventions of the research project *ZOZAN – Investigations into Mobility through Multimedia Documentation, Art Interventions, Art-based Research and (Re-)Presentations*, as well as on photo-interviews with seven individuals, focused on exploring how second-generation Kurds imagine homeland when viewing archival photographs of Kurdish everyday life, selected from the collections of Mehmet Emir and Werner Finke.

The research followed the question of how second-generation Kurds in Vienna defined Kurdishness when viewing a selection of images. Based on the narratives of my interlocutors, I concluded that second-generation Kurds imagine homeland when viewing photographs from Mehmet Emir's and Werner Finke's collections in multiple and contradicting views, land-based and mental homeland imaginaries, which are shaped by diasporic discourses and the notion of Kurdishness. The theoretical framework of this thesis lies mainly in diaspora literature and its notions on homeland, as well as the debate on photography and imagination. Based on these discourses, I approach the research question through three sub-questions, closely scrutinizing the role of photographs as media of imagination, pursuing the associations and perspectives of homeland shared by my interlocutors, and analyzing Kurdishness as an important aspect of the homeland imaginaries in my research partners' narratives.

The first part of the research question is about photographs and their capacity as media of imagination. How do photographs shape the imagination of homeland? Can homeland be imagined through photographs? While scholars emphasized the role of visual media such as photography in these processes of imagination, as I outlined, in the Kurdish context, homeland imaginaries were examined in the form of literary texts (see Galip 2015), but there is no detailed analysis of photographs capacity to represent Kurdish homeland.

This thesis analyzes photographs as powerful media of imagination. Inspired by studies that explore the unique qualities of the photograph – such as its complex relation to truthfulness (Howard Becker 1979, quoted in Desille and Nikielska-Sekula 2021, 4), while also being open for divers interpretations (Trachtenberg 1989, quoted in Edwards and Morton 2010, 7), and its capacity to facilitate imagination, a kind of 'symbolic mobility' (Zittoun 2020, quoted in Salazar 2020, 769) across time and space (Schwartz 2009)– I analyzed the narratives, imaginaries and associations of homeland shared with me by my interlocutors as deeply emerging from the

special characteristics of photography and the historical contexts of the two archival photographic collections encompassing the photographs evaluated by the research partners.

I am inspired by approaches which highlight the potential of photographs and photographic archives for reworking the cultural heritage of source families through participative methods. Following Ariella Azoulay (2011), I understand photographs as results and platforms of a series of encounters, and thereby, as continuities of the same process in which the initial encounter of the photography took place. Thereby, I perceive the photo-interviews conducted with my interlocutors as part of this process of photography, which is therefore inextricably tied to the encounter of creation of the photographs. Through photographic encounters, the participants fill the archive with subjective meanings, and the artifacts thereby become containers for individual narratives and emotions.

As Chapter 7, “The Reception of the Photos”, demonstrates, the photos evoked homeland imaginaries shaped by the aesthetic characteristics. They were used as ‘evidence’ for diasporic and national discourses of homeland, and they also reminded my informants on lived experiences and family histories, serving as memory objects that prompted symbolic mobility to the past. Furthermore, the way my interlocutors read the photos and whether the photos elicited imaginaries of homeland in them was shaped by their ideas of Kurdishness, as well as diasporic and nationalist discourses. In other words, the collective identities and discourses of Kurdish organizations were also reflected in how participants imagined homeland when viewing the photos. The photos prompted imagination as symbolic mobility across geographic and temporal distances, which allowed the emergence of a broad range of homeland imaginaries, encompassing personal and socio-political aspects on multiple levels. Conclusively, through enabling the spatial and temporal symbolic mobilities, that is, the imagination of homeland and Kurdishness—connecting Kurds across time and space—the photographs proved to be powerful media of imagination which were able to provoke and reflect the complexity and multiplicity of my interviewees’ homeland imaginaries.

The second part of the question relates to the concept of homeland. Is homeland a term that can describe second-generation Kurds’ relations to the Kurdish territories? Can one have multiple homelands and are there different kinds of homelands? Is homeland a real or a symbolic place? This thesis is based on a concept of homeland as both territorial and imaginary (Cohen 2022 [first publ. 1997]), shaped by experiences of displacement, marginalization, oppression, and denial (Alinia, 2004). The research is grounded in Robin Cohen’s argument that diasporas can not only maintain, but also create homelands by imagination (Cohen 1996, 516). As I argue,

paying attention to the practice of imagination is essential for gaining a deeper understanding of diasporic processes of identity making and homeland relations.

As I demonstrate in Chapter 8 “The Homeland”, the research findings show multiple, ambivalent and complex views of homeland, which align with some of the perspectives reviewed in the diaspora discourse. My findings align with Safran’s (1991) views about the significance of the relationship to homeland, but I agree with critics such as Clifford (1994), and scholars working on the Kurdish diaspora (e.g. Alinia 2004), that his approach is promoting a view of fixed, territorial, homogenous entities, which is problematic because it leaves little room to consider the contradictions and ambivalences in the homeland concept. Some of my interviewees identified multiple places as homeland, imagined various homelands based on belonging, tradition and family histories, and yet others limited the concept to an imaginary, deterritorialized homeland.

Two major categories of homeland emerged in my interlocutors’ narratives: land-based and mental notions of homeland. These encompassed both territorial and de-territorial notions, as well as idealized (Safran 1991) and victim narratives (Eliassi 2021) closely connected to perspectives of Kurdishness, which seemed to be one of the most frequently used explanations for which images reminded my interviewees of homeland. The land-based notions of homeland encompassed narratives linked to landscape images of the ‘Kurdish mountains’ as well as photos depicting rural settlements, and also ideas of ‘Kurdistan’; that is, narratives about the Kurdish land. The mental notions of homeland include views associating homeland with ideas, values and tradition, discussing how images of traditional Kurdish attire and folklore dances, and photos that reminded my interlocutors of freedom or belonging were chosen as representations of homeland by them. As some people recalled memories of their childhood homes based on photos which reminded them of homeland, I dedicated a separate section about the narratives of the house in the homeland. Moreover, as my findings show, the views of homeland shared by my interlocutors were often fragmented and filled with narratives of victimhood, resulting from experiences of exclusion, but also of statelessness, which, aligning with Eliassi’s remarks (Eliassi 2021, 865) emerged as an important aspect of the homeland relations of my interviewees. I scrutinized my interviewees’ accounts of the lack of homeland that arose from these experiences through the notion of ‘homelessness’.

The third part of the question refers to the ethnic and nationalist dimensions of the homeland imaginaries, focusing on what makes the homeland in my interlocutors’ accounts distinctly Kurdish. In other words, it explores the meanings of Kurdishness evoked in my interviewees

by photographs. What makes an image look Kurdish to my interlocutors? How does Kurdishness relate to the concept of homeland? This thesis approaches Kurdishness as an ethnic and national identity, which is highly fluid and situational, heterogeneous and yet a strong self-ascribed identification among Kurdish individuals.

My findings align with studies following a constructivist approach to Kurdishness, as it has been shaped by political, social, cultural and economic processes (Aras 2014, quoted in Eccarius-Kelly 2015, 176). Ethnic Kurdishness—and Kurdish transnationalism—have emerged in response to processes of nation-state building in the Middle East (Toivanen 2021, 67), experiences of marginalization (Aras 2014, 194), and the resulting processes of migration and diaspora building in Kurdish society (see Alinia 2004, cited in Toivanen 2021, 67). Kurdish nationalism, despite its long roots (Bajalan 2021, 105), remained a ‘subaltern nationalism’ due to the failed nation-state formation (see Eliassi 2021), formulated against the dominant, state-linked nationalism in the countries where the Kurdish population forms a minority (see, Kashtoryano 2004, quoted in Eliassi 2021, 863). The Kurdish national movement(s) have been largely shaping identity making in the diaspora(s), and with that impacting homeland relations and the imaginaries of homeland.

According to my findings, Kurdishness serves as a connecting force of the Kurds across the globe or across history, while it also served as a difference marker in the sense of boundary making (Barth 1969), when, for example, a culture-based Kurdish homeland was contrasted with a new homeland based in social relations and belonging. Moreover, Kurdishness in my interlocutors’ perspectives, while resembling homogenizing cultural attributes, also marked differences integral to Kurdish society such as gendered hierarchies. For example, my interlocutors identified Kurdishness with images depicting Kurdish mountains and pastoralist life, as well as rural settlements in the Kurdish regions which were linked to national discourses of freedom and resistance and diasporic discourses of victimhood. Furthermore, viewing images of a festive meal and women dancing in traditional attire, my interlocutors linked Kurdishness to social order and gendered hierarchies, and to the embodied practices of dancing and singing, which they described as a ‘common language’ or a ‘shared treasure’ of the Kurds.

This research underlines the importance of homeland-attachment in the nationalism of diasporic groups (Brubaker 2005, 2). In other words, I argue based on my interlocutors’ narratives, that associating homeland with Kurdishness lies in the construction of difference and commonality through ethnicity, which helps navigating ambivalent and multiple homelands.

Before concluding, I must acknowledge the limitations of this thesis, which might allow future research to make use of it. Firstly, during the research process I noticed that the intertextuality of the images is important. In some of my interviews, the participants referred to social media accounts and images circulating in online spaces. I started to inquire about this through searching for images in the online platforms Facebook and Instagram through typing the words “Kurdish” and “Kurdistan”, however I noticed that research which systematically establishes the links between online and offline circulation of images would exceed the limits of this thesis. Therefore, I suggest that research about the online representations of Kurdish homeland and Kurdishness is necessary and would complement my findings. Secondly, William Safran’s (1991) remarks about the dynamics with the host country such as experiences of exclusion and discrimination were also resembled in my findings. Nevertheless, as these topics were mentioned only to a limited extent and not as a response to any of the photos, I must acknowledge that the method of photo-elicitation as I applied it did not give much space for discussing these aspects. Instead, the positive aspects of diasporic identity could be accessed through photo-interviews.

This study understands ‘imagining homeland’ as an active practice of migrants, in continuous correlation with circulating media and diasporan Kurds’ movements, spatial experiences, and political and cultural engagements. In other words, ‘imagining homeland,’ on the accounts of my interlocutors, is as connected to place as it is a symbolic practice. Ultimately, this thesis contributes to a deeper, visually informed understanding of the concept of the homeland based on the perspectives of Kurdish individuals and provides valuable insights for future studies. While this thesis has addressed homeland imaginaries in relation to photographs from Mehmet Emir’s and Werner Finke’s collections, further exploration is needed in the intertextuality of visual perspectives to homeland in media and social media accounts to fully comprehend the concept of homeland as it is shaped by visual media.

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