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Table of Content

I. Introduction

1. Aim of Study & Research Question
2. Objective & Purpose: Personal Preconceptions
3. Method
4. Terminological Considerations
5. Disposition

II. Background: Situating the Field

1. Multiculturalism – A Theoretical Outline
2. Sweden's Integration Policy – A Field of Contest
3. Migration and Refuge of Kurds to Sweden
4. Diaspora – A Theoretical Discussion
5. The Kurdish Diaspora in Sweden
6. Specific Context: Students with a Kurdish Migration Background

III. Students in Two Kurdish Student Associations

1. KSAF & Zanin – Eleven Students
2. Informants – Biographical Notes
3. 'We' – The Students of KSAF and Zanin position themselves
4. Education
5. Belonging, Home and Identity

IV. Conclusion

I. Introduction

„Migrations have been part of human history from the earliest times. However, international migration has grown in volume and significance since 1945 and most particularly since the mid-1980s“ (Castles&Miller 2003: 4). The movement of people has become one of the most significant factors of global change (Castles&Miller 2003).

Today Kurds constitute one of the largest immigrant group within Western Europe. The reasons for migration differ, yet it can be assumed that discrimination and persecution often play a role in this process. The stateless situation of Kurds and their internal fragmentation originating from at least four national contexts constitute important elements of the Kurdish diaspora. Kurdish immigrants were, and often still are, seen as Turks, Iraqis, Iranians, or Syrians in their countries of immigration. Therefore the number of the Kurdish diaspora in Western Europe can only be estimated. According to estimations from 1997 around 650 000 people with Kurdish background were living in the respective countries (Ammann 1997: 217-220). The *Institut Kurde de Paris* speaks of 1.2 million Kurds living in Western Europe today¹.

At the start of the 21st century the Kurdish issue has gained greater prominence and is being addressed on an international level². The liberation of Iraq from the Saddam Hussein dictatorship in 2003 marked a crucial turning point in this respect. In addition to that, in 2006 the official collaboration agreement of the two opposing parties KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party) and PUK (Patriotic Union Kurdistan) signified an important step in the Kurdish struggle for independence (Amin 2008: 59; 11).

Kurds have gained a presence in the realm of international politics not only due to those developments but also because of a large and active Kurdish diaspora. The protests of the Kurdish diaspora in February 1999 “in response to the Turkish state’s capture of the Kurdish Worker’s Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan and his ‘repatriation’ for trial in Turkey highlighted the transnational character of contemporary Kurdish nationalism” (Humphrey 1999: 55). As Alinia Minoo has shown in her dissertation, the Kurdish diaspora is nowadays „an increasingly relevant actor in emerging ‘global politics’„ (Minoo 2004: 13). This actor consists of a broad range of people from varying backgrounds: age, gender, class, educational background, national contexts etc. The place of action varies as well, ranging from host countries and home countries to transnational spaces. Possibilities of acting are, in my point of view, often linked to the level of education.

¹ <http://www.institutkurde.org/kurdorama/> (Accessed 30 September 2009)

² For detailed information on the history of the Kurds see for instance van Bruinessen (1989), Kreyenbroek & Allison (1996), Strohmeier & Yalçın-Heckmann (2000).

1. Aim of Study & Research Question

Three parameters then evolve – social actor, place and educational level - which I use as the starting point as they illustrate important points of reference for the aim of this research. Keeping in mind the diversity within those parameters I have concentrated in the context of this study on the children of Kurdish immigrants³ in Sweden ('actor'), who have been born or have grown up in Sweden ('place') and who are now students at a university in Stockholm/Stockholm area ('education'). They are engaged in a Kurdish student association and thus show an interest and active involvement in their Kurdish background.

I have investigated the questions of *home* and *belonging* among those 'second-generation' Kurdish students. Interlinking education and feelings of belonging of 'second-generation migrants', from my point of view, reveals very important knowledge about an active and constitutive social group in this century's so called multicultural societies. By means of qualitative empirical research I have collected experiences and stories about home, belonging, educational motivations and future wishes, told by eleven students whose parents (in two cases only one parent) have migrated to Sweden. The aim of this MA thesis is to understand the students' broader experiences, thoughts and feelings concerning education and questions of belonging and to draw a picture of their interrelations. Considering the participants as social actors and the theoretical concepts I use as situational and contextual, constitute the points of departure in this study.

„It's all right that the parents worked in this level of, you know, they take restaurant jobs and taxi jobs and other jobs where no education is needed. But it's not good for us, the second-generation, the children, that they go this way, the same way.“
(Diyar, student participating in this study 70-73)

I have focused only on Kurdish students at university level who are members of two active Kurdish student associations, namely the 'Kurdiska Student- och Akademikerföreningen' (KSAF) and Zanin (meaning 'knowledge' in Kurdish). Those associations assemble primarily university students as well as a few young post graduates. The term 'Kurdish students' could be considered as incorrect or misleading and it would be better to speak of students with a Kurdish migration background. However, as they call themselves Kurdish students I will use the term in its self-descriptive and self-representative means.

³ The terminology around immigrants' children has been a matter of diffusion and thus requires a more detailed discussion which I have included in Chapter I. 4.

The student associations I have looked at can be seen as a result of the wish to create a platform of interaction and networking among people of similar age, ethnic background, and equal educational status. I was interested in which ways these students relate to their Kurdish background, how much these ways are connected to their parents' generation or to the creation of their own collective identity in the frame of these student associations. In this study I pay attention to both the meanings and representations created on an individual as well as on a collective level.

The following questions are central to my aim and objective of research and have functioned as guidance throughout the study:

- What are the reasons for second-generation Kurdish students who are members of KSAF and/or Zanin to strive for higher education and how does their Kurdish background as well as their growing up/childhood in Sweden relate to their educational ambitions?

And:

- How do their educational ambitions relate to their feeling of belonging?

Those two main research questions evoke further considerations, namely:

- What are the aims of the Kurdish student associations and what motivates the students to get engaged in those associations?
- Does their choice of university course relate in any way to their Kurdish background?
- Do they aim to contribute to the development of their home regions at some point in the future?
- What are their experiences and ideas of 'home' and belonging?
- How do the second-generation Kurdish students dissociate themselves from their parents' generation and why?

With those questions I aim to link the students' very concrete decision to study at university with their thoughts and feelings on questions of belonging and home.

In order to get a clearer understanding of my ambitions for this study I want to point out some aspects which frame my study and put it into context.

2. Objective & Purpose: Personal Preconceptions

My interest for this study arises from different aspects. Two already mentioned at the beginning concern the general situation of Kurds: Kurds are internally especially fragmented as they stem from mainly four different countries with Kurdish regions. They share the wish for their own independent nation-state which points to a common Kurdish cause. This wish, however, is shaped by various different, sometimes even contradictory, ideas of what a Kurdish nation-state should look like, how to reach that goal, and how power would be distributed in such a state. Hence, it is not only a geographical or national fragmentation but also a fragmentation on a metalevel in terms of ideas, visions, wishes, values, interests and so on (van Bruinessen 1992: 277). In the diaspora these patterns often continue to persist. However, the shared experience of being abroad and being part of a minority adds a new dimension to this metalevel. The wish for independence can become a predominant trigger in the process of diasporic group formation (Ammann 1997). This has been the case in my study. Additionally, the construction of a common history and tradition plays a crucial role here (Anderson 1983, Hobsbawm 1990, Gellner 1983).

My explicit concern with *educated* second-generation migrants is embedded in several thoughts. One is related to what Harald Runblom mentions regarding the special role of second-generation migrants:

„The best ambassadors and bridge-builders between countries were not always first generation immigrants who were often too occupied with their struggle for adjustment in their new country and too busy observing the day-to-day occurrences and political situations in their old homeland. This role might better be played by individuals of later generations who have their homeland feelings in their family history and who have a clear national identity with the new country, in combination with a sound and somewhat distant interest for the old homeland.“
(Runblom 2000: 14)

Runblom describes very accurately the changes which can occur in different migrant generations regarding feelings of belonging and kinds of abandonment. According to him, the original homeland does not play such a significant role in everyday life for the second-generation of immigrants. Instead the bonding appears in a more distant and abstract way. While the first generation faces many challenges in adapting to the new host society, the second-generation has grown up in this society learning the language, values and norms. Their relation to the majority of the society is different compared to their parents, as they are perceived as a much more self-evident part of the majority (e.g. through the knowledge of the national language).

In her research on second-generation Iranian students in the U.S., Mitra Shavarini notes a difference in generational comparison concerning the attitude towards one's ethnic

background as well: „In contrast to first-generation Iranians, this younger group openly displayed their sense of pride for their heritage. A decade earlier, this sort of cultural proclamation would most likely have had a negative reception by the American public“ (Shavarini 2004: 157). Following this statement, the expression of pride for one's heritage among the second-generation immigrants would then be more accepted by the majority society, and not seen as a sign of non-integration.

A pride for one's heritage has also become apparent in my study. It is embedded into a rather imaginative, often romanticized and idealized picture of the homeland as the concrete and real experience of the homeland relies either on years of early childhood or vacation. It has even been argued that in fact, the so-called second-generation, immigrants' children who have grown up in Europe, are actually more interested in and committed to Kurdish politics and Kurdish identity than their parents (Van Bruinessen⁴).

By concentrating especially on the *educated* second-generation I have two aspects in mind. Firstly, the more general discourse on the importance of education for social integration and cultural dialogue which has evolved through the increased multicultural characteristic of today's especially Western societies.⁵ The second refers to the more specific context of the Kurdish cause. Here I mean primarily the aim of Kurds of an independent nation-state and the wish for the maintenance of “Kurdish culture”⁶ in its various interpretations and meanings referring most often to language, literature, history and traditions. As van Bruinessen argues, perceiving ‘Kurdistan’ as a homeland and Kurds as distinct people has become stronger in exile (van Bruinessen in Emanuelsson 2005: 89).

A national project calls for people who are educated and who have the ability to contribute to building a state. “Strengthening diasporic influence requires developing professional, educated cadres at home and abroad that can effectively lobby foreign governments, financial institutions and the global media”, the scholar Denise Natali, who works as an honorary research fellow at the Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies in Exeter, writes in her essay ‘Kurdish Interventions in the Iraq War’ (2007). Hence I was wondering what students who had mainly or fully grown up in Sweden had in mind with their education and what their motivation for studying was. Did the Kurdish cause for example (aim for a state called “Kurdistan”) have an impact on their decision to go to university?

⁴ http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Kurds_in_movement.htm

⁵ <http://www.ku-eichstaett.de/Fakultaeten/GGF/fachgebiete/Soziologie/lehrstuehle/Soziologie3/Projekte/elfi/ProjekthintergrundLabIn>

⁶ For a detailed discussion on the meaning of “Kurdish culture” in this study see Chapter III. 5.

With the historical and the continuing background of oppression and persecution of Kurds in their home-regions, many Kurdish intellectuals had to flee. Many of those intellectuals have come to Sweden which has influenced the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden (Van Bruinessen⁷). Moreover, academics and educated people are important contributors to cultural maintenance and development. They can take on representative positions within the general public of the diasporic context (e.g. politicians such as Nalin Pekköl). The fact that various well-known Kurdish authors and musicians (e.g. Shivan Perwer, Kurdo Baksi, Mehmet Uzun) are living in Sweden has considerably shaped the Kurdish diaspora. As Khalid Khayati, a scholar from the department of Ethnic Studies (Linköping, Sweden), writes referring to Martin van Bruinessen „after Iraqi Kurdistan, Sweden is the country where the highest cultural activities take place. It is essential to observe that a significant number of authors, novelists, poets, politicians, political leaders, intellectuals, scholars, artists, musicians, singers and journalists have successively settled in Sweden since the 1970s“ (Van Bruinessen in Khayati 2008: 49).

As time and space for this master thesis is limited I have decided to concentrate on two student associations in Stockholm area. I have focused on students with a Kurdish migration background who are members of one or both of the two Kurdish student associations, KSAF and Zanin, and who are primarily studying at Stockholm university. This implies that my data depicts ideas, thoughts and feelings of students who are engaged and interested in their Kurdish background. It is important to be aware that this is not at all representative for all students with Kurdish migration background in Sweden or Stockholm as, for example there are many who fully distance themselves from their ethnic background, as I was told by one interviewee.

In general, the history of Kurdish student associations in Europe dates back to the 1960s. The ‘Kurdish Students’ Society in Europe’ (KSSE) was the first one to evolve. It was established in 1956 by 17 young Kurdish students in Wiesbaden, former West Germany. Until 1975 it grew to more than 3000 students from the different Kurdish regions, studying in various countries in Europe. The student association was split in 1975 into KSSE and the ‘Association of Kurdistan Students Abroad’ (AKSA). In the following years these two associations split again and further Kurdish student associations started to evolve. Today there is a broad range of different Kurdish student associations in Europe (Sheikhmous 1989).

⁷ http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Kurds_in_movement.htm

According to talks I had in my research, the two initial Kurdish student associations, KSSE and AKSA do not have any succeeding organizations in Sweden. Yet there exist a range of Kurdish student organizations in Sweden today, which I will describe in Chapter II. 5.

The student associations I have looked at claim to be party-politically independent. According to all my informants within this study this seems to be a rare phenomenon in the organizational scenery of the Kurdish diaspora. It is due to the fact that, as I was told, in order to get the financial support for projects and to be able to work within the Kurdish regions, collaboration with a Kurdish party is often indispensable. Yet it is interesting that most Kurdish associations, internet platforms and newspapers in Sweden are (according to talks I had during my research) party-political, although they present themselves as independent on their websites. The contradictions concerning the official and unofficial realities reveal the sensitivity and ambiguity of politics and religion in the Kurdish context. This has also appeared within my study. One example in this respect is KSF (Kurdistan Studentförbund i Sverige) Sweden's largest Kurdish student association. It was mentioned a couple of times in my interviews that KSF is affiliated to the PUK (Patriotic Union Kurdistan), although KSF itself claimed to be non-party political.

„It's called Kurdistan Studentförbund, Kurdistan student association, and it's kind of unspoken connected to the PUK. And that's also one of the most organized associations in Sweden, I would say.“ (Erdal 159-162)

The students of this study who have chosen to become members of KSAF or Zanin appeared rather liberal and moderate or even reluctant in expressing their political views and positions. In my understanding they lift the engagement in Kurdish issues from being party-political dominated to a new kind of perspective. To discover this new perspective is another line of inquiry in my research.

3. Method

This research is an ethnographic work. It took place in Stockholm and Stockholm area. My field was situated primarily around the campus of Stockholm University which constituted a main site of the student associations' activities as well as the study environment of most of the participating students in this research. Eight out of eleven interviews were done in the group rooms of the university library. This was a convenient way for most of my interviewees to meet up as they were at the university anyway, and it fulfilled the requirement of a quiet place. Two of my female interview partners asked me to come to their homes and I met one girl at the KTH (technical university) library. The activities of KSAF were most often located at

the main university campus as well - academic seminars were held at the lecture halls of the university, two parties took place in the university pub of the main university campus, one other party at the KTH campus. Moreover, I met some of my interview partners various times at random, in the library or around the campus and we had informal talks while having coffee together. It can be thus said that the university constituted the primary location of my field research.

This study was conducted with qualitative methods which aim towards 1. retracing subjective meaning, 2. describing social practices and social milieus, and 3. reconstructing of structures (Lamnek 1995: 38). I have followed the 'grounded theory' developed by Glaser and Strauss as an overall methodological frame of my study in which the development of a formal theory is based on empirical data. Research is understood as a creative construction of object-based theories (*gegenstandsbezogene Theorien*), which are continuously re-examined in exchange with the empirical data. Several of those object-based theories are needed to develop a formal theory (*formale Theorie*) (Wiedemann 1995: 440-441). Despite critique, concerning for example the large amount of data which have to be dealt with, or the selection and pre-knowledge of the field which are necessary, the approach can be appreciated for distancing from strong confined research practices in favour of a broad exploration and thus leaving as much space as possible for unexpected empirical outcome (Lamnek 1995: 111-129).

Following the 'grounded theory' I have analyzed the empirical data through the process of coding (*Kodieren*). In this process I have established categories. The most relevant ones can be recognized in the sub-chapters of the 'core'-categories: education and belonging (Wiedemann 1995: 443-444).

For this research I conducted semi-structured interviews. The idea of semi-structured interviews is to have open questions prepared which suggest the topics one wants to find out about while also having the option of adding questions during the interview which become important as well as changing the order of questions (Hopf 1995: 177). In my opinion this method gives access to both, informants who are very willing to talk and those who need more specific questions in order to answer. Thus the semi-structured interview seemed to me the most adequate method to find out about personal experiences concerning my research aim.

When formulating my questions I grouped them according to thematic titles. In the first part I focused on education and career wishes as well as the student's engagement in the student association. The second part I dedicated to issues of identity and home. This order proved to be very important as it was much easier for my interview partners to answer questions about

their studies than about identity. Asking about one's identity is a sensible topic and thus trust and loyalty play a crucial role here.

In the last part of my questionnaire I wanted to find out about the role of transnational networks within the context of future career since this topic has become highly significant in the course of globalization (Basch et al. 1994: 7). As migrants often tend to have a much broader transnational network I was wondering whether this was the case among the students participating in this study as well and if so, whether they considered it relevant for their future career. While doing my interviews, however, I discovered the marginal role of transnational networks for them in terms of career opportunities, whereas local networks proved to be of central importance. The rather exceptional high value, Sweden has for the Kurdish diaspora, might have an explanatory meaning in this respect, which I will elaborate later on.

For this study I conducted eleven interviews with Kurdish students and two with young Kurdish academics (males) who are working already. Five of those eleven students are females and six males. Six of the eleven students are in the board of KSAF and can be counted as the core of the association. The interviews were done in English. It seemed important in this respect that English is not my mother tongue either. Thus both of us, me as a researcher and my interview partners, sometimes faced difficulties in expressing our thoughts during the interview which has, however, now and then resulted in a relieving laugh. All of my interviews were recorded since I consider it very important not only *what* people say but also *how* they express their thoughts and opinions. Also, being able to accurately quote my informants in this work seems to me a high value. In this respect it was relevant to assure them anonymity, and especially to protect the anonymity of some of the women quoted within my work. The men very often said that it was no problem for them to have their names mentioned. Whether gender is a factor here remains an open question. For the security of my informants I will keep them all anonymous using Kurdish pseudonyms in the text instead.

During all of my research it has been much easier to get in contact with male students. Furthermore the women appeared more reluctant with their interview answers. The board of KSAF consists of nine people, seven of them are males and two are females. When asking my interviewees about whether they see a difference in the women's and men's engagement in Kurdish issues and the association, they reacted surprised and said that they hadn't noticed any difference. Concerning the interviews, one woman I interviewed said that maybe women were shy.

Besides doing interviews I was aiming at as many informal talks as possible to get a broader picture of the students I interviewed and also to speak to more people and gain further insights in general. Furthermore I took every chance to join in events organized by the respective student associations, which were mostly parties and academic seminars. At those occasions I had the chance of getting a picture of their engagement within those associations, their interaction with each other and the ways in which the Kurdish background appeared and determined social practices and activities. Concerning the informal talks and the participation in events, I had the impression that it helped a lot to be a student myself. Additionally, a very close friend of mine who comes from a Kurdish background made it easier for me in some situations (e.g. parties) to get in contact with people and sometimes she also helped as a translator.

“What do Kurds have to do with anthropology?” - This question was posed to me during my research process by a Kurdish PhD student in the social science field whom I had approached in a coffee store at the university. He openly displayed his scepticism and critique towards my study challenging my explanatory skills. In the end he gave me his business card, a slight sign of his approval for my study. This incident made me reflect immediately on ethical issues, my position as a researcher as well as the sense and usefulness of this study.

„The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision.“ (Haraway 1991: 190) I want to follow Donna Haraway here who suggests an embodied objectivity for scientific work which she calls *situated knowledge*. This means that all knowledge we gain in a research has gone through the eyes and thoughts of us as researchers. Moreover, it is not only the representation of scientific data which is interpreted by the scientist but also the research process itself, the collection of data, which the scientist as a person has an impact on.

The background of the researcher is perceived by the informants (Flick 1995: 154 -155): how old is she/he, what gender, which part of the world does this person come from, which status does he/she have (e.g. academic status) etc.

In my case this meant, a 25-year old woman, coming from Germany, studying anthropology in Stockholm as a foreign student, with the aim of doing her master thesis, not knowing Swedish very well and having neither a Swedish nor a Kurdish background. All those aspects, I would say, influenced my study in both helpful as well as complicating ways.

At first I thought that being a woman would help me especially in finding female interview partners. This proved not to be the case. Even though it might not have had any negative influence either, it was a challenge to gain women as interview partners throughout the whole

of my study. My age helped me as well as my status as a student since my informants are the same age group and are students as well. This meant that we were at a similar stage of life and were part of one and the same peer group: students. My German background proved interest to some extent and sparked of talks about my informants' relatives or friends who live in Germany and whom they have visited. One man, for example, mentioned that he had visited relatives in Cologne and he thought they were not very integrated. He related that to the fact that none of them could speak German and that they were living in a community of their own. He compared this situation to the Kurds he knows in Sweden, as well as himself, who make an effort to integrate, knowing the language and having a high social status in Swedish society, politics, arts etc. It seemed important for him to emphasize this difference of social status in terms of integration and successful career.

On the one side, being neither Swede nor Kurd has given me a 'neutral' position which might have made it easier for my informants to answer certain questions. On the other side, it has been a challenge all through my research especially concerning the language barrier.

At first, people were quite suspicious about my research and were wondering, what I was doing and what my position was. Getting in touch with Kurdish academics who enjoy respect among the Kurdish students has helped me to gain acceptance and support within my research field. Through encounters with those established Kurdish academics who had either done research on Kurds in Sweden or were working already I experienced great support, encouragement and trust towards my study. For this I want to express my gratitude and thankfulness. They helped me with further contacts and introduced me to the associations' members. The fact that they had an academic standing and were known and respected among the student associations seemed relevant for how the students welcomed and accepted me.

In addition to the empirical part of this study my research took place in form of theoretical reading of previous studies (dissertations⁸) on related topics as well as essays, articles, books and outlines of concepts and theories relevant to my study. Furthermore I drew on information from the internet.

Ethnographic writing which is still the most common way in anthropology to present knowledge is confronted with the challenge to translate meaning. And hereby it is necessary

⁸ Dissertations in Sweden on the Kurdish diaspora:

Alinia, Minoo (2004): *Spaces of diasporas: Kurdish identities, experiences of otherness and politics of belonging*. Dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Göteborg.

Emanuelsson, Ann-Cathrin (2005): *Diaspora global Politics: Kurdish transnational networks and accomodation of nationalism*. Dissertation, Department of Peace and Development Research, Göteborg University.

Khayati, Khalid (2008): *From victim diaspora to transborder citizenship? : diaspora formation and transnational relations among Kurds in France and Sweden*. Department of Social and Welfare Studies, Linköping University

to keep in mind that "Translation is always interpretative, critical, and partial" (Haraway 1991:195).

4. Terminological Considerations

Let me first address the terminological questions concerning the group of this study. Generally it can be said that they are all children to Kurdish immigrants in Sweden. However, not all were born in Sweden. Some came to Sweden as young children whereas others came in their early teens. This causes a challenge in finding a suitable term including these differences. As Rumbaut notes: „Differences in nativity (of self and parents) and in age and life stage at arrival, which are criteria used to distinguish between generational cohorts, are known to affect significantly the modes of acculturation of adults and children in immigrant families, especially with regard to language and accent, educational attainment and patterns of social mobility, outlooks and frames of reference, ethnic identity and even their propensity to sustain transnational attachments over time“ (Rumbaut 2007: 346). Rumbaut therefore argues for a very differentiated categorization of immigrant generations. Warner and Srole have distinguished between those who were foreign-born ('P' = parental), and those who have been born in the host-country of their parents (offspring of the immigrants – 'F1' = filial first) (Warner & Srole 1945 in Rumbaut 2007: 348).

Concerning this study, the participants belong to both of those groups. Four are born in Sweden, and the others are born in the different Kurdish regions. They have come to Sweden when they were between three and fourteen years old and could be called 'generation-in-between'.

Those differences between 'P' and 'F1', to follow the terminology of Warner and Srole, challenge the mode of comparison, however, but it could not be avoided in this research as I was relying on members of the student associations. And the associations' members do have different backgrounds in this respect. What I did try to set as a criterion was that the students participating in this study should at least have partly gone through the Swedish school system. I am well aware of the problematic effect it has in terms of comparison but in my opinion it can also be appreciated as representing a broader set of experiences. Above all, I consider the fact that they have gathered together as a group, forming a collective identity, as a greater shared experience or value in the realm of this study. Yet, while reading my ethnographic data those differences in growing-up have to be present.

At this point I clearly want to state how I understand and use this term in my research and work:

When I speak of second-generation in this study I refer to the immigrants' children, who have either been born in Sweden or have come to Sweden with their parents at the latest in their early teens. They have gone at least partly through the Swedish education system, have learned the Swedish language and have been socialized in Swedish society incorporating values and norms. In Sweden the term "second-generation immigrant" was in common use until questions came up about how long one remains an immigrant in Swedish society. This led the authorities to replace the term "immigrant" with the expression "persons of migrant origin". In the public discourse "immigrant" is still used, however, referring only to individuals of non-Nordic origin (Westin 2006). Swedish citizenship is based on the principle of *ius sanguinis* which means that it is gained through the parents. In contrast to *ius soli* where citizenship is determined by whether a person is born on the soil of the respective country, *ius sanguinis* ties citizenship to your parents being native or non-native (Westin&Dingu-Kyrklund 1997: 11; Khayati 2008:192).

To make the reading of this work more fluent I will use the terms 'students' or 'interviewees' to refer to the students with a Kurdish migration background who have participated in this study and whom I had an interview with.

When I speak of informants I refer to both students whom I interviewed as well as students and young academics I have had at least two informal talks with.

Due to the political fact that a state called 'Kurdistan' does not exist so far I will use the term Kurdish regions. However, the term 'Kurdistan' appears in the quotations of my interviewees.

5. Disposition

This work is divided into four main parts. The introductory part (Part I) includes the aim and research question of this study, my personal preconceptions (objective & purpose), the method I used, some terminological considerations as well as the disposition. In Part II which is divided into six chapters I give insight into the background of this research. I will first discuss the concept of multiculturalism as a theoretical frame of my study. Highlighting its values as well as problems I will move on to Sweden as the national context of my research depicting the history and development of its integration policy. In order to understand the broader context of the Kurdish students who stand at the centre of this study, the history of Kurdish migration to Sweden will be outlined followed by a theoretical discussion of the concept of diaspora and a description of the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden. Part III contains the presentation of my empirical data. By introducing in detail first the two Kurdish student associations I have looked at, second the students I interviewed, and third the position they take in the broader diaspora, I want to give an idea of the very concrete and specific context

of this study. This description gives insight into the engagement of the students and shows some of their primary principles and aims as a group. Following my research aim I focus then first on the questions relating to education and second on topics of 'identity', 'home' and 'belonging'. In the final part (Part IV) I want to give answers to my research questions by connecting education as well as identity, home and belonging, with each other. The research results will be considered in the broader theoretical context of this work. To conclude this study I want to give some suggestions for further investigations in this field.

II. Background: Situating the field

1. Multiculturalism – A Theoretical Outline

As the world becomes more and more connected through the means of communication (internet, media, etc.) and transportation, the movement of people has gained velocity. To my question in an interview of my study how transnational contacts are kept alive I earned an answer with a smiling face:

„I mean everyone uses internet now so through msn or texting by phone or talking on the phone, it's not like we write letters to each other (laughs). But we try to meet up as much as we can or to actually meet in neutral places such as going on vacation with each other.“ (Sozan 589-592)

Today's means of communication, like the internet and possibilities of travel, especially for European citizens, have become self-evident and a part of everyday life for people in all different social classes. Appadurai notes: "The story of mass migrations (voluntary and forced) is hardly a new feature of human history. But when it is juxtaposed with the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations, we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities" (Appadurai 1996: 4). Through developing his concepts of 'ethnoscapes, ideascapes, and mediascapes'⁹ Appadurai captures the new sense of migration and draws attention to the constant flow of travel experiences and images projected by the media which shape our imagination and thus our everyday lives (Appadurai 1996: 3, 33). On the one hand this challenges the nation-state world order but on the other hand it has enhanced feelings of nationalism.

Nations are invented as Gellner states and have to be understood in their historical being. Even though they tend to imagine themselves as old they are in fact a product of modern times. "Nationalism is not the awaking of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations

⁹ Three of the five dimensions (together with technoscapes, financescapes) of global cultural flows developed by the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai in his famous book "Modernity at Large" (1996), in which he explores the character of modernity.

where they do not exist" (Gellner 1964 in Eriksen 1993: 79). Anderson has described nations as „imagined communities“, and nationalism as a „cultural artefact“ (Anderson 1983: 4). With this definition he refers to the people who consider themselves as members of a nation and who imagine a communion with all the other members of this nation even though they will never meet most of them. Whereas Gellner stresses the political aspects of nationalism Anderson aims to explain national sentiments and feelings that are constitutive for nations. Yet, they both stress that nations are ideological constructions (Eriksen 1993: 100).

In the course of the 20th century, the societies *within* nation-states have changed fast and social spaces *across* or *beyond* nation-states have increasingly evolved. The latter one has been approached theoretically in concepts like „diaspora“ or „transnationalism“¹⁰ to which I will return in more detail in Chapter II. 4. The social changes *within* nation-states have politically been tried to answer with the idea of multiculturalism.

It is primarily today's societies of the world's 'western' nations which are referred to as multicultural. They are considered a result of the fast and growing migration processes in the context of globalization. The birth of discourses on multiculturalism as a concept was assigned by the need to pay attention to these developments on a political level. It started in the 1970s (initiated among others by Pierre Eliot Trudeau¹¹), with multicultural policies in Canada and Australia, countries which have been built in their post-colonial form out of a rapid immigration from all over the world. Whereas the initial multiculturalism was implemented in post-colonial states that "lacked independent nation-founding myths and clear breaks with their colonial past [...] this could not be so in the United States, the next stage of multiculturalism's *tour de monde*, where a strong sense of political nationhood and centripetal melting-pot ideology could only clash with multiculturalism's ethnicizing and centrifugal thrust" (Joppke & Lukes 1999: 3). This second stage was to be introduced in Europe, too.

The policies were aiming to take into consideration the ethnocultural variety of societies and to guarantee equality among its citizens as an important condition for creating a national feeling in liberal democracies. The initial idea of multicultural policy thus was to protect the different cultural groups of a society in their parallel existence by introducing group rights and to promote equal treatment by the state. Since its implementation in the 1970s the policies have become much more complex. Although the multicultural approach is generally still considered to be the most appropriate answer to many of today's societies it has evoked harsh critique over the past few decades (e.g. Susan Moller Okin 1999, Seyla Benhabib

¹⁰ See also, for instance, Vertovec&Cohen (1999) and Kokot & Tölölyan&Alfonso (2004).

¹¹ kanadischer Premierminister zwischen 1968 und 1984: http://www.migration-boell.de/web/integration/47_755.asp

1999). Susan Moller Okins essay "Is Multiculturalism bad for Women?" (1997) for instance, kicked off an intense discussion on the problems of accomplishing religious and ethnic rights with gender equality, putting into question the value of multiculturalism. "Two fields of theory and practice, feminism and multiculturalism, both aiming to enhance equality models become locked in awkward mutual rejection" (Strasser 2008: 2).

The general critique on multiculturalism, that followed, points towards an understanding of cultural groups as homogenous and essentialist lacking an awareness for differences within groups as well as other social parameters like class, gender, age etc. which in the words of Ålund become „hidden under the mask of constructed cultural differences. In phrases such as cultural differences, clashes between cultures, or cultural distance, 'culture' becomes the general medium through which social differentiation and inequalities are understood" (Ålund 1991: 84). The term *culture* which is put at the centre of multicultural policy is thus not least a reason for the controversial debates concerning multiculturalism.

Culture has become a key word in public, scientific as well as political discussions in the second half of the 20th century until today. An endless amount of meanings has been ascribed to the term making it even useless in the eyes of some scholars who have called for a deconstruction of the term 'culture' (Adam Kuper 2000). In my opinion the broad use of the term makes abandoning it impossible. Furthermore, the idea of multiculturalism, despite being contested still a present part of today's political discourse and practice, is built upon this term. And last but not least wouldn't it be rather arrogant to claim that the use of the term is nonsense when so many people we study use it themselves, may it be in essentialist or other ways. As Baumann notes: "If the people we study come out with theories we find false, we cannot simply rubbish them as 'false ideology' or 'false consciousness'" (Baumann 1999: 90). The task then becomes not to neglect the empirical reality (in which essentialist ideas about culture are still dominant) and at the same time provide a useful tool for future multicultural settings which would be a processual understanding of culture.

In his remarkable book "Multicultural Riddle" Gerd Baumann unravels the features of multicultural thinking, its problems and potentials, offering a way to deal with this challenging task. He considers the main problem of multicultural thinking in the thingification of human phenomena such as for example ethnicity or religion. This process of reification neglects that those phenomena are in fact the products of people's actions and identifications. (Baumann 1999: 63) In his multicultural triangle he explains the three core features of multiculturalism being nationality, ethnicity and religion which all appear as culture. In the end, the question is whether culture is understood as a thing one possesses or as a process one shapes, a choice between an essentialist view on the one side and a processual view of culture on the

other side. The first one has remained the influential one (looking at the public discourse), however, it is of no use in any form of the indispensable multicultural future setting as we all take part in more than one culture - national, ethnic, religious, a culture associated with a region, a social category, feminists, artists, and so on. Baumann suggests acknowledging the presence of both, the essentialist and the processual view of culture, by comprehending multiculturalism not as a theory but as discourses of and about culture on two levels: one being the way of talking in speech and the other one being a way of social action. Only then we will be able to "find out empirically how exactly people manage to shape dialogical identities while at the same time reifying monological ones" (Baumann 1999: 140).

In my opinion Baumann points out important aspects in our struggle with multicultural thinking and practice and offers some useful solutions in dealing with them. I agree when he says that we need to look at what people mean when they speak of culture and how it might vary in different situations and in different practices. As we are confronted with an increasingly diversified world today, the task becomes not to lose sight of the multiculturalist approach but instead to meet the challenge of discussing "the slippery concepts of class, race, gender, ethnicity or religion and the different and sometimes contradictory assumptions of needs" (2008: 31), as the anthropologist Sabine Strasser has put it. And she continues that "the threat facing European societies is not 'multiculturalism without (reified) culture' (Anne Phillips 2007), but '(reified) cultures without multiculturalism'" (Strasser 2008: 31).

While some scholars, e.g. Will Kymlicka or Ayalet Shachar, understand culture as a normative universe through which we aim to grasp the meaning of the world, other scholars see it as a tool for mobilizing group identity (Strasser 2008: 26), like Arjun Appadurai who describes culture as "a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situations and embodied difference" (Appadurai 1996:13). But most scholars from social and political sciences would agree these days that culture is not a thing or an object but rather a constructed set of meaning, never static, marked by a constant process of change (Strasser 2008: 26). It can never stand still and comes into existence only through being performed by the people. "If culture is not the same as cultural change, then it is nothing at all" (Baumann 1999: 26). Understanding culture in a non-essentialist way of being socially constructed and ever-changing has been a widely shared view in academic discourse. I want to refer to Anne Phillips who in my opinion captures an important sense in which culture matters: „Culture matters, as part of the way we give meaning to our world, as an important element in self-ascribed identity, and as one of the mechanisms through which social hierarchies are sustained“ (Phillips, 2007:15).

Phillips points towards three processes in which culture comes into play: in the construction of meaning, identity and social hierarchies. To me this pins down very central and relevant fields for the usefulness of culture in the context of this study.

Besides the problematic cultural aspect, there is one political aspect of multicultural thinking, I want to point to, before moving on to the national context of Sweden: the common national identity. Bhikhu Parekh (2000) considers a shared national identity as especially relevant in the context of multicultural societies as it offers a common sense of belonging for all individuals of a society across varying memberships to different groups. Yet, the national identity also carries a special danger in multicultural societies, as different value systems and ideas of a good life can clash. In order to solve this paradox which arises here and to use the valuable and to avoid the dangerous aspects of a national identity, Parekh suggests four conditions a national identity should meet: 1. it should be located in the political structure of the political community and focus on publicly and collectively shared aspects, rather than the widely shared individual characteristics (such as customs, family structure etc.); 2. it should allow its members multiple identities; 3. it should include all its citizens and 4. accept them as equally valued and legitimate members of the community (Parekh 2000: 230-236). What Parekh stresses is that it is not about denying any kind of historically inherited identity of a political community but to encourage the community to officially declare itself multicultural. "This affirms its cultural plurality, legitimizes its minorities, and counters such cultural biases as its self-definition, symbols and institutions inevitably contain" (Parekh 2000: 236).

The above described position of a critical, political multiculturalism has been a critique towards the other big position in multicultural debate, liberal culturalism (Will Kymlicka), which represents the idea of an equal citizenship for all members of a state neglecting multiple membership rights and duties (Strasser 2008: 8).

Sweden has been generally considered a multicultural society (Khayati 2008, Kamali 2004) and has supported cultural diversity through various policies. Values of social equality, democracy and multiculturalism are thus commonly associated with Sweden. However, a differentiated view shows that this image of Sweden as a perfect socially equal and multicultural society has its grievances, too. Social exclusion, discrimination and racism have persisted over the last decades as present features in Swedish society. Such exclusionary and discriminative sentiments as well as unemployment have been part of the everyday life of many immigrants living in Sweden. Within my research the look (black hair) and the foreign names have been mentioned as the most common reasons for discrimination. Experiences of discrimination appeared in everyday life situations such as being denied

entrance into a club. „When you're going to a pub or something you can be denied entrance because of your name or your look or stuff like that.“ (Furat198-199), I was told in an interview.

In Swedish society it is most often the broader Middle Eastern and not the Kurdish background which is of relevance in discriminative situations. As one of my interviewees described it, „The Swedish don't see me as a Kurd they see me as an immigrant you know, a person from the Middle East. It doesn't matter where I am from in the Middle East“ (Diyar 438-439). The Kurdish background, however, can become an issue with immigrants from Turkey who don't accept 'Kurdish' as a background. „What do you mean by 'Kurdish', there is no Kurdish“ (Furat 221) was the answer a Turkish person gave to a student when this student said that he was Kurd.

All in all discrimination was not such a formative feature in the lives of my informants. They described it more as a talk of ignorance or insensitivity which they faced in Swedish public. Some also mentioned a „positive discrimination“, situations in which people (mostly Swedes) showed interest for their specific ethnic background.

The housing segregation can be considered as one decisive example to show the construction of 'racial' and ethnic boundaries in Swedish society (Westin&Dingu-Kyrklund 1997: 67; Khayati 2008: 207). The housing segregation also has great impact on the second-generation Kurds. As one of my interviewees has mentioned, „one party has made it that there is only one ethnic group living there. In every block, there is a different ethnic group. Like one block only Arabs, one block only Turks, one block only Africans. So it depends where you live“ (Ferhat176-179).

Although these exclusionary developments have partly been dealt with by improving policies I want to draw the attention now to some of the gaps and problems in Sweden's history of implementing policies of multiculturalism and integration.

2. Sweden's Integration Policy – A Field of Contest

Compared to other European countries such as the UK or France, Sweden does not have such a long history of large scale immigration. It started to increase in the 20th century and constitutes until today a formative element of Swedish society. In the course of this time the reasons for immigration as well as the policies to answer the social aspects of immigration have changed.

In Sweden the history of immigration since 1940 can be divided into four stages: 1940-48: Refugees from neighbouring countries; 1949-71: Labour immigration from Finland and

Southern Europe; 1972-89: Family reunification and refugees from Third World countries; 1990-today: Asylum-seekers from South-eastern Europe and the free movement of professionals within the European Union (Westin&Dingu-Kyrklund 1997: 3-4). This division gives a general overview for the home regions of the immigrants as well as the reasons for immigration.

After World War II labor immigration started to lead to actual demographic changes in Swedish society. This development, however, was not considered from a social point of view but was instead exclusively seen as an economical need (Kamali 2004: 57-58).

It was only in the late 1960s when the National Board of Immigration was established (1969) and political authorities started addressing the social aspects of immigration in form of an 'adjustment policy'. Assimilation was at that time seen as the solution to deal with the social aspects of immigration in Swedish society. As the assimilationist approach did not show success, the policies shifted in the 1970s towards the idea of multiculturalism. Despite this shift, discrimination and social exclusion accumulated in the following decade, which led to policies facilitating stronger integration (Emanuelsson 2005: 94, 95).

It was especially through the development of the economic crisis in the 1990s that anti-immigrant sentiments arose among the Swedish public (Sander in Khayati 2008: 189). To prompt the increasing social marginalization of primarily immigrant groups Swedish politicians answered with various policies, one being the so-called 'Metropolitan Program' which was implemented by the Swedish Parliament in 1998 (Jensen 2008¹²). In form of various projects in the fields of urban planning, education, economic growth and democratic participation, the government attempted to decrease social and ethnic segregation and to work for equal living conditions and opportunities and a broad social inclusion. Despite these projects „the immigrant and refugee populations in the suburbs continue to suffer from social marginality, stigma and ethnic segregation“ (Khayati 2008: 194). What are the reasons for the integration problems which keep on persisting today? Some research has been done in the last two decades which offer some answers to this question.

Three principles form the basis of Sweden's integration policies which have lasted until today: *equality*, *freedom of choice*, and *partnership* (Westin&Dingu-Kyrklund 1997: 8). The second principle - to choose freely one's own cultural identity – which is a central feature of multicultural policy, has become a matter of contest. On the one side it is seen as a way towards an integrated society and a tool to meet challenges of cultural diversity. On the other side the actual practice of multicultural policy has been criticized for not having reached the

¹² <http://gupea.ub.gu.se/dspace/handle/2077/18906>

desired goals. In 1991 Carl-Ulrik Schierup noticed that „the Swedish experience could be depicted as one in which, as the result of specific forms of articulation between radical and ethnic claims and the institutional practices of an enlightened leftist technocracy, authentic forms of agency have become blocked“ (Schierup 1991: 148). The question becomes what the exact mechanisms are that block agency and how they can be resolved. According to the sociologist Massoud Kamali, who at the beginning of the 21st century conducted an empirical research on the issue of integration in Sweden, the Swedish integration policy clearly divides the public and the private sphere by giving immigrants the right to obtain one's own cultural identity and language only in the private context (Kamali 2004: 59). Such a privatization of culture implies that 'cultural activities' of minority groups, which are generally supported, are supposed to happen in the minorities' own milieus. Hence, the integration policies do not encourage a social exchange and relations between minorities and majority but on the contrary even prevent it.

In his research Kamali has investigated on how the principle of integration is implemented and actively practiced in Swedish society and why it has not led to the desired results which he describes as an "active participation in the production and reproduction of social life and of possessing or gaining a sense of belonging and satisfaction" (Kamali 2004: 184). He has found the reasons in the realm of administration. While Swedish society is multicultural, the administrative institutions in Sweden only respond to social 'problems' in a mono-cultural way in which its officers have been trained in. Hence, according to Kamali, the caretaking welfare system in Sweden leads to a negative integration, namely the dependency of immigrants on the state (Kamali 2004:179).

This view is also pushed forward by Aleksandra Ålund who already in 1991 described the immigrant policy as contradictory. „[...] Swedish pluralism is organized via a polarization of two basic types of contrasting 'ethnicities'. The Swedish institutional (administrative/organizational) 'ethnicity' confronts and homogenizes the immigrants' ethnic diversity with a system of regulations and rules which must be learned by participants in an ordered society“ (Ålund 1991: 73).

The differentiation between society, as multicultural and the administrative body, as mono-cultural neglects, that immigrants are social actors in society. The freedom of living one's own cultural identity is understood as a private matter, limited to certain aspects of social life, e.g. establishing organizations, offering the immigrant children the possibility to speak their parent's language of origin. The public sphere on the other side is determined by norms and rules, considered to be neutral, but actually are a product of social practices reflecting in general the ideas and interests of the privileged group. Kamali describes this duality very clearly:

„[...] the consequence of such a schematic understanding of social behavior and the notion of culture leads to division of an individual into two different persons, *the cultural being* and *the social being*. The cultural being keeps his of her cultural identity through some „cultural“ actions; and the social being acts in accordance with the *objective* social norms rules. The duality, which forms the basis of Swedish immigration policy, eliminates the totality of human practice, in which men and women act in accordance with their understanding of particular situations“ (Kamali 2004: 84).

In order to reduce the still present discriminative discourses and practices it is thus desirable to aim towards a participatory democratic ideal in which the citizens actively participate in constructing and shaping the public sphere (Kalm 2003: 86-87), in the words of Anne Phillips a shift from a 'politics of ideas' to a 'politics of presence' (Phillips 1995).

The critic and suggestions have been taken into account by the governments. Thus, as some scholars argue, in the 21st century the idea of integration has been further developed and is nowadays considered as a process where minority groups as well as the majority participate actively (Berruti et.al in Emanuelsson 2005: 95). It can be said that a consciousness has been developed for the difficulties outlined above and an attempt to foster the importance of citizens' participation in society. Gilroy noted already in 1987 that we need to understand „the cultural not as an intrinsic property of ethnic particularity but as a mediating space between agents and structures“ (Gilroy in Ålund&Schierup 1991: 20). It is the social space in which culture as an ever-changing set of meaning is constantly constructed. When talking about integration and multiculturalism we thus ought not to lose sight of the great importance of social interaction.

The concept of identity¹³ being a core feature in this discourse requires a respective understanding as well: „But identity is not only a private matter. It must be lived out in the world, in a dialogue with others. [...] From a subjective point of view, identity is discovered within oneself, and it implies identity with others. The inner self finds its home in the world by participating in the identity of a collectivity (for example a nation, ethnic minority, social class, political or religious movement)“ (Kuper 1999: 235).

After having sketched out some relevant aspects of migration, integration and multiculturalism in Sweden as the national context of this study I will turn now to the specific context of the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden.

¹³ For a theoretical discussion of 'identity' see Chapter III. 5.

3. Migration and Refuge of Kurds to Sweden

The history of Kurdish migration to Sweden started after 1965 and has continued until today. It is a history which can be seen in the context of modern migration processes, in which the movement of people has gained significance and velocity. Castles and Miller consider the increasing inequalities, the political, economic and demographic pressures, the growing political and ethnic conflicts, and the creation of new free trade areas, as the primary reasons for this development which they term the 'age of migration' (Castles&Miller 2003: 4).

The reasons for Kurds to migrate have differed over the last four decades due to economical, political and social circumstances both, in the Kurdish 'homeland' as well as in Sweden. In the 1960s it was especially men from rural Turkey (central Anatolia) who migrated due to a demand in the Swedish labour market. The labour migration was then followed by family reunion at the start of the 1970s. Women and children were moving to Sweden to join their husbands and fathers respectively. Furthermore, Kurdish refugees and asylum seekers started coming to Sweden, mostly from Turkey. It was in 1971 that the first Kurdish political refugees came to Sweden as a result of the military coup in Turkey in 1971. Kurds from Turkey are most likely to form the largest group of Kurds living in Sweden (Khayati 2008: 202 f.). Since Kurds appear within most statistics as Turks, Iraqis, Iranians or Syrians, this, however, cannot be said for sure. It remains a general problem that the number Kurds can only be estimated. (Wahlbeck in Emanuelsson 2005: 81) In general the number of Kurdish migrants in Sweden is fairly large. According to estimations there are about 25.000 to 40.000 Kurds living in Sweden today (Emanuelsson 2005: 83).

Kurds from Iraq are assumed to be the second biggest group in Sweden. They have significantly come to Sweden after the second Golf War and the collapse of the Iraqi administration in northern Iraq in 1991. The migration of Iraqi Kurds into Sweden continued in the 1990s until the start of the new millennium but was then restricted through the decision of the Swedish government in 2002 in which Kurds originating from the Kurdish autonomous zone in northern Iraq were not considered to be in need of protection in Sweden anymore (Khayati 2008: 203).

Kurdish refugees from Iran have arrived mainly at the beginning of the 1980s as a reaction to the Iran-Iraq war from 1980-1988 and the Islamic revolution in 1979.

The Syrian Kurds constitute the smallest group among the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden. Reasons for migration have been policies of arabization and displacement and an ongoing lack of citizen rights (Khayati 2008: 202-205).

Before giving a more detailed picture of the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden, its activities and features, let me first give you an overview on the concept of 'diaspora'.

4. Diaspora, Transnationalism – A Theoretical Framework

The two scholars, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur who have a background in English/American literature, have pointed out that *diasporas* cannot be understood without thinking them in their historical and political context and being aware of the close linkage to the geopolitical phenomena of nationalism and migration (Braziel&Mannur 2003: 3).

Originally the term diaspora was used to describe the forced dispersal and displacement of Jews, Armenians and Greeks. The meaning of diaspora, however, has changed, especially over the last few decades (Tölölyan 1996: 3). The term 'diaspora' has become widely known and used gaining a broad range of meanings and being applied in different contexts (e.g. ethnocultural diasporas but also other diasporas like queer diaspora, white diaspora etc.) and in a variety of different disciplines. The sociologist Rogers Brubaker talks in this respect of a 'diaspora' diaspora, a dispersion of meaning, which has evolved (Brubaker 2005). Khachig Tölölyan has described it as a re-naming of different forms of dispersion (Tölölyan 1996: 3).

Today the term 'diaspora' is used to describe rather any "de-territorialized" or "transnational" population (Vertovec &Cohen 1999: xvi). Cohen and Vertovec have therefore tried "to arrest the tendency whereby the continuing potency of the terms is threatened by its misuse as a loose reference – conflating categories such as immigrants, guest workers, ethnic and 'racial' minorities, refugees, expatriates and travellers" (Cohen &Vertovec 1999: xvii). This change in meaning is not as such a huge problem but if we forget these changes, then it does become problematic (Tölölyan 1996: 10).

In order to keep the term in its descriptive means valuable we need to describe our understanding of it.

James Clifford characterizes diaspora in reference to Safran as a "history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, and alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" (Clifford 1994: 305). He adds, however, that this definition ought to be considered as an "ideal type" and that in practice groups should be identified as more or less diasporic even if they only match two or three of the basic six features (Clifford 1994: 306). In my opinion, Clifford's definition remains useful but especially in reference to the second-generation migrants and the Kurdish diaspora, it misses some aspects, e.g. the ambiguous feeling of 'home' and 'belonging' or two features named by Robin Cohen: A commitment not only to the maintenance of the homeland, but to its very creation and "the

possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism” (Cohen 1999: 274).

According to Brubaker diaspora is defined by three core elements: 1. dispersion in space; 2. an orientation towards the 'homeland', real or imagined; 3. a boundary-maintenance vis-a-vis a host society (Brubaker 2005: 5). Besides this spatial dimension of diaspora, time is also an important parameter for getting hold of the term's implications. A longer period of time is necessary for the evolving of a diaspora.

Diasporas are nowadays by most scholars considered as socio-cultural and/or political processes. They are depicted as heterogeneous and de-territorialized, including a sense of multilocality, multiple identities¹⁴ and hybridity¹⁵ (Emanuelsson 2005: 46). Diasporic communities like any other community are marked by power relations along the lines of gender, class, sexuality, age, disability, beliefs, language differences or even race which have to be incorporated when analyzing diasporas (Hua 2005: 193). And they are like nations “an imagined community whose ligatures are discourse and reproduction, ideology and the reproduction of a subjectivity of belonging, all of which are fostered by larger institutional and collective practices, by stateless power” (Tölölyan 1996: 23).

Many scholars tend to understand diasporas as social movements which emphasize the people of a diaspora as social actors in a collective framework which is in a constant process of change. Steven Vertovec suggests at least three meanings which are inherent in the concept of 'diaspora': 'diaspora' as 1. a social form, 2. a type of social consciousness and 3. a mode of cultural reproduction (Vertovec & Cohen 1999: xvii). The first one means a general social form of diaspora which relates three aspects: the globally dispersed ethnic group (diaspora), the hostland context and the homeland context (Sheffer 1999: 381-395). The second one, the 'diaspora consciousness' is a special kind of awareness characterized through 'dual or paradoxical nature'. And the third one refers to the “production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena” (Vertovec & Cohen 1999: xix).

Thinking of diasporas as movements carries the idea of collective action and identity which arises around a shared political project (Alinia 2004: 114-115). This collective action or goal is most often linked to the homeland. Tölölyan describes the support of the homeland, on an economical, cultural and political level, as a decisive characteristic of diasporan communities. It is something which for instance stands in contrast to ethnic communities where such

¹⁴ Vertovec & Cohen (1999: xvi)

¹⁵ For further reading on this concept see Ulf Hannerz (1996). In his book „Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places“, he aims to describe the current discourses on cultural interconnectedness or in his words „to look at the coherence of the world in terms of interactions, relationships, and networks“ (Hannerz: 1996).

connections to the homeland are at best maintained on an individual but not community level (Tölölyan 1996: 16-17).

The consciousness of diaspora very often is expressed and becomes visible through the creation of organizations and associations. In the case of the Kurdish diaspora this seems to be of special importance due to the lack of an independent state. One of their goals is to inform the international community about the Kurdish situation of oppression and their right for independence and freedom. The past has shown that the international community can build up great pressure and achieve results within such delicate political issues. As Denise Natali points out: "Having access to legitimate forms of political expression that were denied in countries of origin, the diaspora has become the protector of the Kurdish nation at home and abroad" (Natali 2007: 196). And Erdal, one of my interviewees, explains it as follows:

„There is a saying that says, if people don't have a country then they have a lot of organizations. And I think there is something in it because Kurds don't have a country, they have no official voice, this fact creates a need for the people to express themselves, tell the world about their situation.“ (Erdal 49-52)

Lacking an official internationally accepted Kurdish voice in form of a state increases the need for Kurdish organizations. These organizations function as an important formal frame for cultural reproduction, the construction of a collective identity which is dominated by the political goal of an independent Kurdish state, and collective action and representation to the outside. It has become common sense among scholars to view diasporas as non-static, non-substantialist, ever-changing and heterogeneous. For Brubaker, diaspora stands for an idiom, a stance or a form practice and becomes as such a tool for mobilization, making claims, realizing projects, reaching authorities and appealing to loyalty (Brubaker 2005: 12). This emphasis on action and practice captures the constituting elements of diaspora as the whole concept is of little use when perceived as a homogenous community whose members will eventually return to the homeland, but rather evolves relevance and importance when seen as a dynamic movement, shaped by common interests but also by internal contradictions and conflicts.

Diaspora is often opposed to nation-state. Yet rather than an opposition the relation of these concepts would be better described with what Robin says: "Seen as a form of social organization, diasporas have predated the nation-state, lived uneasily within it and now may, in significant respects, transcend and succeed it" (Cohen 1999: 279).

The Kurdish diaspora has in the last decades been rather active in political as well as cultural work in form of organizations and publications. This development is most likely linked to the freedom of expression which can be considered a characteristic of exile for Kurds

(Emanuelsson 2005: 86). As one interviewee describes it: "For a Kurdish politician or intellectual, Sweden was a paradise because they had that freedom of speech, that freedom of thinking" (Runak 476-477).

The founders of those organizations which started to evolve in the 1970s and 80s were intellectuals and activists who had faced oppression and persecution in their home countries. The common goal of Kurdish national independence could be seen as a primary reason for the diasporic organization. However, besides the political interests it was also the preservation of Kurdish culture and identity, in form of language, literature, art, history, which were fostered in the organizational work (Emanuelsson 2005: 100ff). Besides "different parts of the same diaspora can and do have different interests, defined among other things by class, gender, generation, occupation or religion. Diasporas are rarely constituted by a single factor other than the broadest of connections to a specific homeland" (Smith 2007: 5).

5. The Kurdish Diaspora in Sweden

It is important to keep in mind that the Kurdish diaspora especially in Sweden originate from at least four different countries (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria) and thus have experienced very diverse political and social contexts. It is, however, not only the diverse national background which makes the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden a heterogeneous group but also differences in the level of education, social background, age, gender and so on. This internal diversity is often neglected within broader public discourses where very often cultural stigmatizing, homogenization and essentialization become the ruling patterns.

In Sweden a case of 'honour killing' (Fadime Sahindal) took place in a Kurdish family in 2002 where a girl was murdered by her father (Khayati 2008). Such incidents evoke anxieties about multiculturalist models and cultural difference, which have been mentioned previously in Chapter II.1. As Sabine Strasser notes, referring to the above mentioned case of Fadime Sahindal as well as the murder of Theo van Gogh (2004) and the bombings in Madrid (2004) and London (2005): „critics and advocates of multicultural perspectives alike have become concerned about the question of how the accommodation of group rights would support the dominant structures of different ethnic and religious “cultures”, discourage dissent (feminist, gay, lesbian, religious), weaken the voices of vulnerable members (women, youth, children) of minoritized groups and prevent minorities from integrating into society at large“ (Strasser 2008: 2). The case of Fadime Sahindal was considered as a proof for failed integration within Swedish society and somehow shattered the multicultural ideal of the Swedish society. It also provoked gender stereotypes of the oppressive Middle Eastern man and the oppressed Middle Eastern woman who lacks any form of freedom. Some of the students participating in

this study have found themselves in situations where they were accused with these stereotypes, as it becomes apparent in the following remark:

“No, sometimes people have their visions about how a Kurd could be. Once I had a seminar, I read philosophy and we were talking about ethics and culturalism and I wanted to say something which was connected to my Kurdish background and I just got to say that I am a Kurd and I got a question how does your sister have it. Are they oppressed or, just because I am a Kurd, and that’s not the case of course.” (Erdal 203-207)

In a country like Sweden where gender equality is high on the political agenda a case of honour killing might have caused an even stronger reaction.

Another incident that caused much uproar and affected the general reputation of Kurdish migrants in Sweden was the assassination of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme in 1986 as some theories suggested that it was related to the PKK. This accusation, however, was never confirmed and thus remained one among many suspicions (Westin&Dingu-Kyrklund 1997: 6; Khayati 2008: 188).

Such incidents can have enormous consequences for migrants in general and in this case especially for those with a Kurdish background. Public discourses of essentialization and homogenization take place in which all migrants are reduced to their ethnic culture and this culture then is almost only associated with for example “honour killing”. Those discourses force immigrants to deal with such images concerning one’s ethnic background and to position oneself to the outside. In a few interviews the external pressure of dealing with incidents that the public has linked to one’s own ethnicity has come up:

„It was two big media happenings, a father killed his daughter, it was in two cases. I think that is something I have to relate to. What people think and know about Kurds, I have to relate to that and think is it our culture or is it not. Where do I stand? How is my family?“ (Runak 313-319)

The Kurdish diaspora in Sweden seems to take on an exceptional position in European comparison. This most likely results from both, the presence of a rather large group of engaged and intellectual Kurds who have come to Sweden in the last decades of the 20th century, and the Swedish political situation which has supported and offered a fairly broad range of possibilities to sustain Kurdish culture in Sweden and has given a platform for Kurdish issues. As Van Bruinessen has pointed out, “Sweden gives all immigrant communities great facilities for teaching, publishing and broadcasting in their mother tongues. The Kurdish writers found here a much more stimulating environment for

developing Kurdish into a modern literary language than they would have found back in Turkey, even if the language had not been banned there“ (Van Bruinessen¹⁶).

The idea of ‘folkhemmet’ meaning ‘home of the people’ which was promoted in the 1930s and 40s influenced immigrant associations (Berruti et.al in Emanuelsson 2005: 91). These associations have been considered as a medium for integration. Sweden has become one of the centres for the preservation and development of the Kurdish language as poets and writers get their works published primarily through the Kurdish publishing houses in Sweden (Institut Kurde de Paris¹⁷). Moreover Kurdish language lessons are offered at school (Dibistana Kurdi¹⁸). Besides the possibility it gives to later generations of Kurdish immigrants to learn Kurdish it has also given some of the first generation immigrants a job possibility. Furthermore, a variety of Kurdish organizations have been created and supported in the last three decades as well as a Kurdish library in Stockholm which was founded in 1997 (Lindberg 2007: 4¹⁹) and Kurdish internet newspapers. This is due to the Swedish integration model „whereby different ethnic groups are allowed to make use of not only state subsidies for setting up cultural associations but also of the opportunities to send their children to lessons in their own mother tongue“ (Khayati 2008: 50). To get an idea of the biggest organizational activities of Kurds living in Sweden which I have come across various times during my research, here a short overview (the information is drawn from their websites):

*Kurdiska Riksförbundet*²⁰ is the biggest Kurdish association for Kurds living in Sweden. It was founded in 1981 and claims to be unique in assembling Kurds from all different parts of ‘Kurdistan’. On the association’s website it presents itself as non-party-political and non-religious focusing on the following topics: integration, democracy, equality, refugee supervision/support, information about Kurds and Kurdistan, work against discrimination and racism.

*Komak*²¹ is a human rights organization which aims to improve the situation of Kurdish children and youths with projects in the fields of education and democracy. It was founded in 1997 in Stockholm and has several branch offices in Europe and the Kurdish regions.

*WeKurd*²² is an organization initiated by young Kurdish students and academics. It claims to be non-party-political and non-religious. The association is divided into four working groups:

¹⁶ http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/Kurds_in_movement.htm

¹⁷ <http://www.institutkurde.org/en/language/>

¹⁸ <http://www.dibistanakurdi.com/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=1>

¹⁹ <http://bada.hb.se/handle/2320/2383?mode=full>

²⁰ www.fkks.se

²¹ <http://komak.nu/eng/>

1. research on political and social topics, 2. lobbying, 3. networking (with NGO's) and
4. Kurdish diaspora.

*Beyan – ett nytt perspektiv*²³ ('a new perspective') is an internet newspaper focusing on Kurdish topics. It was initiated by young second-generation Kurdish students and has different resorts ranging from national to international politics to health and beauty.

*Den kurdiska Rösten*²⁴ is another internet newspaper. Its aims and principles are stated on the website: It wants to inform Swedish society about Kurdish questions and incidents worldwide and stands for independence and autonomy of Kurds and for a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. Moreover they advance the view that Kurds can live in Swedish society without giving up their ethnicity and identity. They stand for an integration which is not based on Eurocentrism.

In addition several Kurdish student associations have been established which I will turn to later on.

The Kurdish New Year Festival, Newroz²⁵, is of particular importance, both in the Kurdish regions as well as in the Kurdish diaspora. Each year on the 21st of March it welcomes spring. Originally it derives from pre-islamic traditions in Iran, but in the course of time it has become the most important and shared symbol of resistance and freedom for the Kurdish people. For Kurds living in exile it has become an opportunity "to demonstrate Kurdish identity on the streets and assembly halls" (McDowall 2000: 458).

Besides these organizational activities and the yearly Newroz-celebration, the 'Kurdgalan' has been established as the annual official event for Kurds living in Sweden in 2006. The Kurdgalan is held every year in January and is organized by KRG (Kurdish Regional Government) Nordic. Around 400 invited guests attend this glamorous Gala, officially it is said that half are Swedes and the other half are Kurds. It is an event to celebrate and honour the achievements of Kurds living in Sweden. At this year's event (2009) the honours were amongst others given to a Kurdish soccer team Dalkurd, to young academics who are contributing scientifically to Kurdish issues, and to Thomas Hammarberg, who has been active as a representative for Kurdish issues in the European Commission. The Gala functions

²² <http://www.wekurd.com/>

²³ <http://www.beyan.net/>

²⁴ <http://www.kurd.se/>

²⁵ There are variations in the interpretations of its origin which have developed in the different Kurdish regions. In general it tells the myth of the cruel ruler Dehok who tried to kill two snakes, which had grown on his shoulders, by feeding them every day with the brains of two young humans. One day the hero Kawa organized a resistance which led to the freedom of the people.

as a symbol against the oppression of Kurds and a platform to speak up and is at the same time a cultural event, with Kurdish music live acts (this year the famous Kurdish singer Sivan Perwer who lives in Sweden performed), comedy and dance. It is used to promote a good relationship between Kurds and Swedes in Sweden. In this year's Gala this was especially shown by two famous comedians, Soran Ismail and David Druid, who led through the evening's program by performing the cultural contact between Kurds and Swedes in a very humorous way.



Sivan Perver performing at the Kurdgalan 2009.



Dance Performance at the Kurdgalan 2009

As Khalid Khayati states, Kurds are „members of one of the most politicized diasporas in Sweden“(Khayati 2008:234). In Sweden's 2006 general elections, 33 Kurdish candidates were applying for the Swedish parliament and the same amount was aiming towards an office in the county's councils. Furthermore there were around 70 Kurds running for municipal council offices (Khayati 2008:234). Those numbers give an idea of how Kurdish migrants are actively participating in Swedish society. Besides this local political participation there exists the long-distance political interest in Kurdish politics. In form of associations, academic exchange or internet platforms, the Kurdish diaspora maintains an active relation to the „homeland“. The sovereignty of the Kurdish autonomous zone in northern Iraq in 2005 has promoted and facilitated the transnational relations and long-distance political participation. Furthermore the establishment of a direct flight connection between Stockholm and Erbil since 2005²⁶ has added to these processes (Khayati 2008: 177). The two-sidedness of political participation has been described by Khalid Khayati as a form of “transborder citizenship” (Khayati 2008: 238).

²⁶ <http://www.cafebabel.com/eng/article/21794/schwedens-einwanderungspolitik-ebbe-oder-flut.html>

Despite the social problems concerning integration and multiculturalism, which I have outlined in Chapter II. 1. and 2., it can be said that compared to other European immigration countries, Swedish policy has put much more effort in supporting ethnic diversity and social equality by actually implementing integration policies. This has been made very clear by Khalid Khayati in his comparative study of Kurds in France and Sweden (Khayati 2008). But it is also the background of the Kurds who have migrated to Sweden which contributes to this rather exceptional situation of the diaspora in Sweden. In one of my interviews a student explained to me the situation as follows:

„From my experience they [Kurds in Sweden] are quite different from Kurds in Germany and France for example because here a lot more of the young people go to university. And they see themselves more as Kurds rather than Turkish Kurds and Iranian Kurds and stuff like that. Because I mean, I have relatives in Germany and when I talk to people there, they see themselves more as Turkish Kurds for example. I don't know if it's because they live like in a worker's city but not many people go to university [there] and have associations to the extent as we do. I mean they have associations but that's more like political ones and the same things in France. But I think the Kurdish Swedes are quite different. I think they are more like nationalistic and stuff than others. But I think that's also because the Kurds in France and Germany they are mostly either refugees or workers immigrants. I mean historically they are not political in the same way but many of the Kurdish intellectuals and academics from Kurdistan came to Sweden.“ (Leila 273-286)

In this explanation the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden is described as different to those in France or Germany due to several aspects which appear contrary: unity (in Sweden) vs fragmentation (France & Germany), political vs party-political, more nationalistic vs less nationalistic and intellectual/academic immigrants vs work immigrants. These differences have to be seen as personal impressions but they have come up in several talks during my research. In a sense these features reveal a sense of peculiarity, the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden in general and the students in the student association especially, seem to represent in European comparison.

Now I want to turn the attention to the students who stand at the centre of my research.

6. Specific context: Students with a Kurdish migration background

The second-generation youth with Kurdish background constitutes, like their parents, an internally diverse and heterogeneous group. Concerning their Kurdish background there are those who themselves keep distance from it and aim towards being a „full Swede“ till those who are actively engaged in Kurdish issues and put their Kurdish background at the centre of their life. This difference has been mentioned several times during my interviews. In between there are various ways and practices of relating to one's ethnic background. It can be seen

within an understanding of identity as something composed of many different parts and aspects. I have included a discussion of the rather complex idea of identity later on (Chapter III. 5.) but for now we keep two aspects in mind: 1. identity is constructed through self-ascription and ascription by others (Barth 1969; Eriksen 1993) and 2. ethnicity is just one little part of a person's identity (Sen 2006). To make it more concrete, on the one side we decide ourselves which relevance we give to our ethnic background (self-ascription) but on the other side it is also the ethnic ascription by others which determines how present our ethnicity becomes in our lives. In public discourse it seems very obvious to me that ethnicity of minorities and immigrants is emphasized whereas ethnicity of the majority is marginalized.

Besides the ethnic affiliation, gender, level of education, family background, social surrounding and so forth play crucial roles in the process of constructing identities. To some extent there is a tendency that children of educated parents are more likely to aim towards higher education than those from socially lower and less educated classes. According to the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu it is due to the different up-bringsings and family surrounding which influence our later possibilities in life. Yet it is crucial to keep in mind that this is not pure determinism as there always is a choice (Grenfell & James 1998: 21). The diasporic experience can even bring up further dynamics. I would argue that due to the movement of migrants from one national and political context to another (in this case Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria to Sweden), the social status of people might change. As one student describes in an interview:

„Many friends of the family in our surroundings were finished with studying engineering. And it was very very hard for them to get jobs. Even now 15 years after one of our friends is done with his engineering studies - he is actually civil engineer – in 15 years he hasn't got a job so far. He has been driving a taxi.“
(Sozan 33-40)

The social status of immigrants in the host society often differs drastically from the status they acquired in their home country. In the diasporic community the social status of the homeland, however, can remain of high value and can effect the person's status in the diasporic community, as I was told in talks.

The parents of the students participating in this study have very diverse educational backgrounds. Except for one, all mothers haven't been to university. Around three of those haven't gone much to school at all. Three of the fathers haven't been to university, the rest has studied. The subjects have been either in the technical fields, economy or social sciences. Yet, nobody works as an engineer in Sweden. They have become for example teachers or social workers.

Another factor which influences the development of a child is the social surrounding. Hence the housing segregation which I have mentioned before plays an important role not only for first generation migrants but also for the second-generation. Depending on the living area, children are sent to the respective schools. Therefore schools in housing areas with a high concentration of immigrants also show a high percentage of immigrants' children. As it often requires a lot of personal strength to move beyond one's own social surrounding, there is a risk of ghettoization. One of my interviewees mentioned her little brother who was very smart and good at school (he attended school in a district in Stockholm where mostly 'Swedes' lived) but who was being pushed into this stereotype of Middle Eastern gangster boy. She said she was afraid that he would adapt this picture which the others had of him.

Among the educated second-generation Kurdish youth there has been an organization and engagement towards their Kurdish background in form of a variety of different student associations or online newspapers. The largest Kurdish student association in Sweden is KSF (Kurdistan Studentförbund i Sverige). It was founded in 1999 and counts around 1600 members. Yet the term 'student' is understood here more in the sense of high school students as they constitute the majority of the association's members. The student associations I have looked at aim towards students at university level.

III. Students in two Kurdish Student Associations

1. KSAF & Zanin – Eleven Students

"I always wanted to do something to get to know my background better."(Ferhat 73)

Having in mind the main migration flows of Kurds to Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s the founding years of the two student associations fit with the second-generation migrants to start with university. KSAF was founded in 2002, Zanin in 2005. The first one is aiming towards students of all universities in Stockholm and surrounding area, whereas Zanin is dedicated to only students of the technical university in Stockholm (Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan). Zanin was created in addition to KSAF in order to provide a more specific network for students in the technical fields. One of my interviewee who has worked in the board of Zanin for several years described the difference to me:

„Zanin is more you know an engineering society. It's for KTH students and it was because of that, that we started Zanin, because KSAF was already an association at this time. They were two years old I think. But we believed that

Zanin could do other things which are more important for KTH students or engineering students. This is what we thought in the beginning.“ (Diyar 111-116)

KSAF also exists in Uppsala, Linköping & Norrköping as well as in Örebro. Although they all do have the same name (KSAF), these associations have so far worked independently. Since the start of 2009 the separate associations have worked towards an umbrella association under which they would all be united. This has happened now on the 12th September 2009, as I was told via Mail. In addition to the local boards, there has been created an extra board now which is solely responsible for keeping contact between the different local KSAF-associations and create relations to other national and also international student associations.



KSAF-Seminar, Stockholm University 15.02.09

KSAF has experienced ups and downs in its existence (regarding the number of members, activities and the budget) but has in the last year gained an up-rise in terms of members and activities. They are counting around eighty to ninety members. Zanin has around fifty members. The primary aims of KSAF and Zanin are to engage Kurdish students in their educational path and provide an academic as well as a cultural platform for social interaction, professional networking and reciprocal support especially for those who are studying. This happens in form of academic seminars by KSAF on Kurdish issues, often held by Kurdish academics living in Sweden.



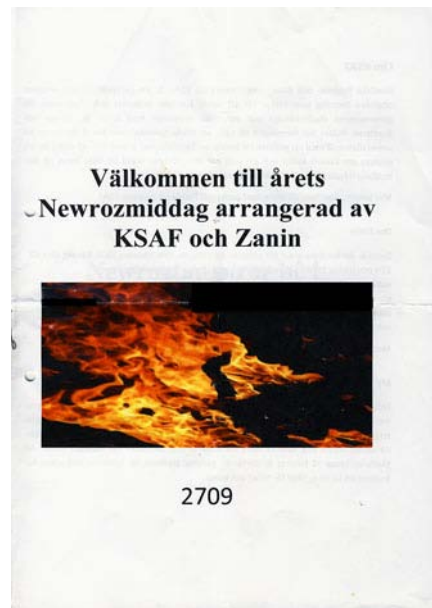
KSAF-Seminar, Stockholm University, 08.02.09

Such seminars are an open forum and thus reflect the associations' (especially KSAF) aim to spread knowledge about Kurds and Kurdish questions to a broader public. Numerous members are also writing for Kurdish internet newspapers. Moreover, KSAF and Zanin have organized homework assistance for high school students.

„Oh, I've known of them since I went to high school, because when I went to high school the student association here at the university, KSAF, and the one at KTH, Zanin, they had a thing called Läkshjälp, where they helped high school students

with their homework. So I went there and it's like, I got to know people that studied there. So it was quite a natural thing to continue." (Leila 38-42)

Parties, dinners and common sport activities are possibilities to gather and get to know each other in the free time. Although they work independently in terms of their organization structures, KSAF and Zanin join forces for many events such as the Newroz celebration, which they organize for their members.



Newroz-Leaflet from the Newroz celebration which took place on 19th March 2009
("Welcome to this year's Newroz-Dinner organized by KSAF and Zanin")

At this year's Newroz celebration a university pub was rented. The members from both associations were invited and could bring friends for an extra payment. A Kurdish buffet was provided and a live music act had been organized. A significant number of people came in traditional Kurdish dresses. Between 7 and 8 pm people arrived and mingled. Then the buffet was ready and people started eating, gathering in groups at different tables. In form of a Tombola a flight to Arbil was conferred. The girl who won the prize was new in the association. I had spoken to her at the beginning of the event when only few people had just arrived. She seemed rather shy not knowing many people and uncertain yet eager about what the evening would bring. She slowly started to mingle with the people and the fact that it was her who won the tombola's first prize appeared to me like a complete initiation ritual. Although it was coincidence, winning the prize signified in a way the full process of becoming part of this group of students. The evening continued with a speech held both, in Swedish as well as in Kurdish, about the meaning of Newroz. Then music was played and nearly all

people danced at some point of the evening. The final happening was the Newroz-fire which constitutes a central Newroz-ritual. It was lighted in front of the party hall and a number of people jumped over it as it is tradition at Newroz-celebrations.



KSAF-Party, Stockholm University Pub 23.01.09

The members of both associations are mostly Turkish and Iraqi Kurds. However, there are also some whose parents are from the other Kurdish regions in Iran or Syria. It is thus important for them to acknowledge cultural aspects of different parts for example by playing music at the parties from the Turkish as well as the Iraqi part of the Kurdish region.

The impression I got during my research was that becoming member of a Kurdish student association has been directly linked to the search for one's own identity. The need and wish of sharing similar experiences (e.g. feeling 'in-between', stereotypes of Kurds, parents who have experienced oppression and persecution) or thoughts is an important component for the cohesion of the associations' members. Especially girls mentioned that they were interested to find out how other second-generation Kurds in Sweden thought. One girl's view of Kurds had been rather negative and she had distanced herself from her Kurdish background. However, by the time she became a student, she wanted to find out if there

were any Kurds like her with a similar way of thinking. She found them in one of the associations.

„I tried to find something, because I have always been negative towards all Kurdish people and Kurdish thoughts and how people think about different stuff, you know religious stuff. And I was thinking maybe there are people who aren't like that and that made me start thinking, to get to know people and hang out.“
(Lana 62-68)

She continues to identify the reasons for the different thoughts and opinions:

„Because most of them they grew up here, so they have the same opinion as me. So it was like, my parents are very old and their friends are very old, so I just met people in the 50s 60s. And they are much older than me and they have like strange thoughts. But when I met new people in KSAF, Zanin, the people were the same age as me, and I realized, it's a generation change I think also.“
(Lana 83-87)

The associations' members form a peer group of their own, bringing up new dynamics and relations in dealing with their background, which differ from those of their parents (so called first-generation migrants). In this process of group formation boundaries are constructed through elements that are shared by the members and those which differentiate them from 'Others': They all (only very few of the associations' members do not have a Kurdish background) have a Kurdish family background which they are interested in, they have at least partly grown up in Sweden, they have the same education level and most of them want to improve the Kurdish situation in the diaspora as well as in the homeland of their parents.

It has been striking that the majority of my informants haven't had any Kurdish friends of their own age before starting university. Through their parents they were in contact primarily with their parents' diaspora friends (first generation Kurdish immigrants). The diasporic Kurdish community of their parents caused ambivalent feelings. Some expressed a feeling of being always observed and judged by the community about what they did and how they behaved. In a way this is part of the struggle of being "in-between" described earlier (e.g. going out late has been mentioned by girls) and it is a struggle different to the one of the parents. Out of this difference the students' need to create their own networks, activities and platforms has evolved. Through university and the engagement in the association they have gained a friends circle of second-generation Kurdish students.

„Yes I am in the board. Actually it's something very new for me because this last six months is the first time I hang out with Kurds. I didn't have Kurdish friends before so it's very new and exciting for me.“ (Furat 34-36)

Swedish is the common language spoken at the association's gatherings as it is understood by most members. Only a fairly small group of members, those Kurdish students who have come to Sweden recently for their studies, does not speak Swedish. One student who had been in Sweden for fourteen months and did not speak Swedish expressed his resentment about this situation. He felt excluded in a way, as he could not attend seminars and presentations. I came across this kind of frustration as well on the online blog on one of the student association websites. Besides Swedish, the Kurdish language is also present at the association's gatherings. On the discrepancies evolving here and the particular meaning of language in the Kurdish context I will comment further down and in Chapter III. 5.

KSAF and Zanin put emphasis on being non-religious and non-party political associations. This does not mean that people who are religious or position themselves towards a certain political party are excluded, yet these positions have to be kept as personal preferences. Moreover it does not mean that the associations are not political, in fact this is nearly impossible as one interviewee explains to me:

„Political yes, but not party-political. The independence of the association is very fundamental. And yes of course it's pretty hard to not be political as a Kurdish association, I think.“ (Erdal 54-57)

It is an aspiration to go beyond the political and religious fragmentations often so present in the Kurdish communities (diaspora and homeland). On an individual level there seems to be as well a clear tendency of being non-religious and non-party-political.

Both associations have not been and refuse to become bounded to a certain political party although one has already received offers in terms of collaboration and financial support.

One can say that it is an active strategy to distance from the internal Kurdish fragmentation in order to come a step closer of putting the idea of a unified Kurdistan into practice.

„One of the meanings of the KSAF is to unite Kurdish youth from all over Kurdistan and not to have fractions of parties, like one party from the east of Kurdistan, we don't want that. We want to unite everybody, so we can fight for all our goal of an independent Kurdistan.“ (Azad 75-78)

When asking about internal discussions concerning the different Kurdish regions, most students replied that political discussions did take place, yet no serious conflicts did evolve.

„Actually not much conflicts but many discussions. Because none of us in the board is party-political active so you don't sympathize with any parties. So not any conflicts but many interesting discussions.“ (Furat 75-77)

Despite numerous representations of the association as being non-party political bounded, the collaboration with the Jewish student organization Judstud and an Armenian student association or the participation in the Kurdgalan, organized by the KRG (Kurdish Regional Government) Nordic can be seen as indirect political statements. As mentioned earlier it is often indispensable to collaborate with Kurdish political parties in order to become active. This of course is much more the case for organizations and activities in the Kurdish regions than those in the diaspora.

Four elements have been present and reappearing through all my interviews when speaking of the engagement in the student association: the importance of education, networking, unity and the necessity of putting light on Kurdish questions in the Swedish public. I consider these elements as important hints of how the students position themselves in the realm of their association activities and distinguish themselves from others. After a short introduction of my interview partners I will thus consider these aspects in more detail.

2. Informants – Biographical Notes

For this study I conducted 13 interviews, two with young academics who are already working but are still active in associations/newspapers and the rest with students. My student interviewees are between 21 and 29 years old. Four were born in Sweden, the others with one exception were born in the Kurdish regions. Two of them have double citizenship (Swedish & Iraqi), one has the Iraqi citizenship, and the rest has the Swedish citizenship. They come from a variety of different study fields ranging from technical subjects to economy, law and social sciences. This shows the various individual interests and approaches of my interviewees which of course have become apparent in the different answers and point of views during my interviews. Hence when reading my empirical data, keep in mind that the answers are influenced and shaped by their intellectual education. Especially in the case of those students studying social sciences there is a knowledge and awareness of the meaning of certain words and concepts. This knowledge of course has had an impact on certain answers to some interview questions.

Their social background, in terms of their family, friends and social environment in which they have grown up (e.g. housing area) constitutes an important part of the contextual setting. Due to the anonymity of my interviewees I cannot introduce to you in detail the background of each of the student participating in this study. Yet I will mention now and then certain aspects of their background, which seem relevant to me for contextualizing some of the quotations.

All my interviewees conveyed a strong bonding within their families. It is the family who is the direct relation to the Kurdish background. However, the ways in which the relation is shaped differ. Some parents for example, do continue speaking Kurdish with their children, while others encourage them to speak Swedish. In some families, Kurdish issues and politics were a more present topic than in others. It has been striking that almost all of my interviewees' parents are political refugees. They have come to Sweden because they were persecuted, oppressed or even tortured in their home country due to their Kurdish political activism. It is not surprising that such a background, on the small family level as well as the larger diaspora level, adds to a politically interested and engaged second-generation and respectively politicized diaspora. Around half of my interviewees are studying political science as a main or minor subject. The importance of politics visible in my study supports Khayatis statement about Kurds being one of the most politicized diasporas in Sweden.

As mentioned before a lot of the students did not have any Kurdish friends of their own age when growing up. They grew up primarily with "Swedish" friends. Thus it was mainly their family and their parents' friends who connected them to their Kurdish background. However, no matter how present Kurdish elements were in their social environment, all my informants have developed an interest for their Kurdish background at the latest now which has led to their engagement in a Kurdish student association.

Having pointed out earlier the issue of housing segregation in Swedish cities it seems paradox that apparently all of the students haven't had Kurdish friends when growing up. While in fact some haven't grown up in Kurdish neighbourhoods, there is another explanation to this paradox which has to be kept in mind: What or who does a person define as 'friendship' or friends? Friends in this specific context are understood as being chosen deliberately. Therefore, I would say, 'friendship' reflects a sense of individualism and independence as it implies an individual choice of who one's friends are. Then 'family friends' signify another category and are not counted here as their 'own friends'.

The parents of my interview partners come from different parts of „Kurdistan“ most were either from the Turkish part or the Iraqi part. There seemed to exist a grading among the students concerning the different districts and towns in the Kurdish regions. The more Kurdish history and resistance the place had the better. This internal hierarchy has also become apparent in the language skills. Some of the students know Kurdish very well while others do not, which in some situations can have an effect on the social status within the

group. The majority of the students spoke Kurmanji but there were also several speaking Sorani²⁷.

As I have formulated in my research questions, I was interested what stands behind their aim towards higher education. What influences this decision and what dreams and wishes are involved in this decision. The active participation within a Kurdish student association made me wonder how educational ambitions are related to their ethnic background.

I want to thoroughly depict now the thoughts, ideas, experiences and feelings of the eleven participants in this study which draw a picture of a group of second-generation Kurdish students here in Stockholm. I will begin with comments and thoughts on how the students I have interviewed position themselves in the broader context of the diaspora: opinions about the Kurdish diaspora in general and in Sweden in particular as well as their special role as the educated second-generation will be described. Then I will continue to foster my research question by presenting their thoughts, experiences and ideas first about their studies and future wishes and second about identity and home. In the conclusionary part which follows I will point towards links and correlations between those two broad fields of investigation.

3. 'We' – Students of KSAF and Zanin position themselves

The reasons why my interviewees decided to become members of KSAF or Zanin have been addressed in the latter chapter and are expressed through the associations' goals and aims as well. Let us have a closer look on how the reasons and values have been articulated.

(III.3.) Unity

“We want to unite everybody under one flag so to speak.”(Azad 69)

The idea of *unity* has been a reappearing feature all through my research. It is closely linked to the collective political goal of Kurdish self-determination and freedom from oppression – aims which are present throughout all Kurdish diasporic organizational work and engagement (Ammann 1997: 221). To move beyond the national borders separating the Kurds and to unite Kurds from all different Kurdish regions is considered a necessary precondition in the fight for independence.

²⁷ There is no standardized Kurdish language. Instead there exists a variety of different dialects, Kurmanji and Sorani constituting the main ones. Kurmanji is spoken in the northern Kurdish regions (Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, northern Iraq, northern Iran and former Sowjet Union) whereas Sorani is spoken in the southern Kurdish regions (Iraq e.g. around Arbil, Sulaimaniya, Kirkuk, and Iran e.g. around Mahabad, Sanandadsch). (Strohmeier & Yalçin-Heckmann 2000:31)

In general the unification of Kurds seems to be only possible in the diaspora as the social and political situation in and between the Kurdish regions is very much shaped by fragmentations, internal conflicts (linguistic, ethnic, religious), power relations and nonetheless the nation-state borders (van Bruinessen 1997). The shared social space in the diaspora offers the possibility to bring together Kurds from various national contexts. According to Birgit Ammann the possibility for Kurds living in exile to communicate across boundaries of national, linguistic and other cultural borders has led to a revival of the ethnic-cultural variations on the one side and a homogenization of Kurdish culture on the other side (1997: 237).

The Kurdish diaspora in Sweden is shaped by both, the boundary towards the majority society in Sweden as well as towards the Kurds living in the 'homeland'.

„We are Kurds living in Sweden. We do not look like Swedes, we don't speak only Swedish, and we're Kurdish, so of course we feel related, actually in another way that they do in Kurdistan, because in Kurdistan, the Kurds from different parts don't get to interact with each other. But here we feel unity. We feel unified because we do get to interact with each other. And since we all call ourselves Kurds, I think we come a different kind of Kurd in exile than in Kurdistan.“ (Sozan 241-247)

The look and the language are mentioned here as obvious differences between the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden and the Swedish majority society. Concerning the Kurdish diaspora and Kurds residing in the home regions the idea of unity appears as the decisive difference. The fact that the internal fragmentation among Kurds is very often presumed in the diaspora, too, is not addressed here. Denise Natali, a scholar who is currently teaching at the Department of Politics in Arbil (Kurdistan) and who has worked on Kurdish Politics and Nationalism, states: “the distinct historical trajectories that shaped Kurdish identity formation remain salient component of the diasporic condition. Organizations and social networks are often formed according to homeland parties, regional-specific membership, and towns or villages in different parts of Kurdistan, which can diminish interaction with Kurds from outside these localities” (Natali 2007: 197). In contrast to this observation, the students participating in this study do see the ability of the Kurdish diaspora, at least in Sweden, to create a Kurdish unity and use it for the Kurdish cause.

„I think we feel more of a need those who live in the West and so on to get together and do something for the Kurdish cause than it is for the people in Kurdistan I think. Because there we have more fractions of people belonging to parties which are rivals to other parties instead of focusing on the main issue.“ (Azad 379-382)

One the other hand, the idea of unification often still remains a wish which has only partly been fulfilled. The first generation migrants are most likely more involved in this fragmented

situation through their experiences and participation in the society of the homeland and have to position themselves in the diasporic community as well.

„I think there is a need of a unified organization for Kurds in Sweden who represents everyone. Now we are very fragmentized because of party reasons, religious reasons of what part of Kurdistan you are from. So that's very sad. ...It's better for students, for the adults it's very bad but the students. There is still a fragmentation. They are aiming towards it [unification] but still there is a lot of students in Sweden, Kurds, who actively don't want to be a part of the KSAF because they think that it's not via any party or something and they say that this is important.“ (Erdal 148-158)

To a certain extent sympathizing with a political party can still be seen as a common feature among Kurds, both in the homeland as well as in the diaspora which explains the many associations which are affiliated to a Kurdish political party. For the members of Zanin and KSAF, however, fragmentation (in terms of political party, place of origin or language) has been something which they repeatedly emphasize to work against. I would conclude from my observations that this official and conscious aim can now and then become relativised in certain situations.

(III.3.) Education

“The main goal of the association is to make the Kurdish cause more academic.”
(Derin, in the board of KSAF 85-86)

The educated diaspora is considered to play a key role for the future of Kurds and the Kurdish regions. It is those who are in the position to add to the development of the Kurdish regions, to the living standards of Kurds residing in the home regions and last but not least to the mobilization of the international community for realizing an independent state called „Kurdistan“.

„I find it very important for Kurds right now to study and be able to contribute with their knowledge and their resources to Kurdistan. Because I think that the young people and the educated people are the future of the Kurds. (75-77) Because Kurdistan has through the times been a warzone, they haven't had the opportunities to focus on education. Therefore I think that countries such as Sweden that are more developed in their educational plan, I believe that Kurdish students who are studying here, have a lot to contribute when they go back to Kurdistan, when they are finished with their education.“ (Sozan 98-103)

The expectation of Kurds living in Sweden to contribute with their education to the Kurdish situation is expressed here. It is the privilege to have free access to education which is

adding to a feeling of expectations and loyalty. Moreover the political situation of 'Kurdistan' as a "warzone" is considered a barrier for developing an educational plan.

The brain-drain effect may also be linked to a feeling of obligation. As many educated people and intellectuals leave the homeland the capacity of building up a solid basis for the creation of a nation-state is withdrawn.

„You know Kurdistan is like a bleeding thing because the good thing comes out most of the time and the people in Kurdistan they get a lot of problems because they don't have enough educated people“ (189-191), Diyar says.

Considering Kurdistan as a 'bleeding thing' is a metaphoric description of the brain drain effect but it also evokes associations of pain and slow suffering. "Kurdistan" needs educated people in order to stop 'bleeding' and come fully alive. At this point the Kurdish diaspora comes into play which is regarded as the most fruitful source of recruiting educated people to contribute to the national project. As I mentioned earlier in my theoretical elaborations on *diaspora*, a collective political goal is a common characteristic of diasporas – in the Kurdish diaspora this is without doubt the case.

When it comes to political goals there are always opponents and sympathizers. Kurds still are in most parts in a status of oppression by the surrounding countries, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In search for sympathizers or allies it is not surprising that the Kurdish diaspora has come across the Jews. There are various analogies between the two, a history of oppression, genocide, the goal of a nation-state and an influential diaspora. Furthermore the struggle has taken and is taking place in the Middle Eastern context with most of the countries in the Middle East as opponents or to put it in the word of one of my interviewee "enemies". The fact that KSAF has a collaboration with the Jewish student association in Stockholm can be seen as a clear symbol of sympathy with each other. I have asked my informants about the reasons behind it. As one informant explained to me, the reason for this collaboration lies in the fact that „they“ have suffered as „we“ have and that "they" have the same enemies as "we" do. One interviewee brings it to the point as follows:

„If you see it like really political, the Israeli Jews are almost the only friends that Kurdistan has in the region and the same if you flip it. Around Israel, not many countries want to be their friends you know, so it's like give and share relations.“
(Ferhat 109-111)

In addition to the question of 'friends' and 'enemies' the Jewish diaspora also functions as a role model and a significant orientation for the ideal of an educated diaspora. Diyar elaborates on the importance and the power of an educated diaspora by referring to the Jewish example:

„You're helping Kurds to build up a base, an economical base. And that's very important because if you look at the Jewish model: you have about 20 Million Jews all around the world and you have about 2-3 Million in Israel, and those people couldn't be there without the 16 other Million outside Israel [the diaspora is indispensable for the existence of Israel]. And if you look at them, they control the power positions, the economical power positions and this is how they win. I believe that the Kurdish question is also quite similar to the Jewish question because all the decisions that affect us come from outside Kurdistan, not from inside Kurdistan. So even if they try as hard as they can inside Kurdistan, if they don't have support outside it won't work. And the Kurdish question as I told you, it is in a better position internationally thanks to the Kurds outside Kurdistan. It's not because of the Kurds inside Kurdistan.“ (Diyar 146-156)

The above comparison of Kurds with the Jews depicts the latter as a clear role model for Kurds. They are considered as a proof that success in the fight for independence is possible and that it all depends on two parameters: an active diaspora and the control of power positions. In fact the diaspora is indispensable for being recognized internationally as an independent country. The people residing in the homeland can try as hard as they can but it will not work without external help. Having this view in mind it becomes coherent how being part of the diaspora, striving for higher education and aiming towards success, can become ultimately linked to a feeling of loyalty and responsibility for one's 'own people' and the 'homeland'. The collaboration with Judstud could be seen as a political position. Although some students said that it could have been any other student association as well this does not seem the case. According to the talks I had, the people who started this collaboration did have these political reasons in mind.

(III.3.) Network

“The main goal was to create a network for Kurds, students and those who were finished academics.” (Diyar, was in the board of Zanin 89-90)

Networking has been one of the primary motivators for many of my interviewees to become member in one of the student associations. It has become common sense that contacts are vital in achieving something in terms of career. In order to create even more efficient networks Diyar explains how useful and valuable an association for KTH students is:

„Our goals are not political and we, who started this society, believe that too many Kurds work with the Kurdish issue, the political issue. We need other people who work with other things because if you have a network with only engineers, imagine what you can do when you need them to build a country or to change the education system for example. We have a lot of skills, which we can

only use through the society [association]. This is how we thought we could help Kurdistan.“ (Diyar 129-135)

But the relevance of networking is not only considered in the context of building up a state but is also perceived on a personal career level. Zanin has created an “Alumni” group for young professionals. Those people can function as a link between the students and the job market.

“Alumn assembles those who are finished and work or do other things. And those can come to our activities and get to know each other and create a bigger network for students and for them. If they, for example, start a company and they need good people or clever people, it's easier for us to say, 'ok this guy is good because we know each other'. And we know who is studying and what - in different areas - this is also a help.” (Diyar 97-101)

The building of networks has proved to be one the most effective ways to achieve bigger goals. It is, however, an explicitly local network in the Swedish framework which is created here. This network functions as a platform of reciprocal support may it be by helping each other with the studies or in terms of finding a job. One student describes how he found a job through networking:

„I think we [people in the board of KSAF] are trying to make [encourage] people to create a network with each other so in the future they can help each other out. Well, I can take myself for an example. I have a friend who knows someone who works at the bank and they offered me a job because of this network thing. Yes I got in contact and I got a job. And it's something that I want to create, networking and trying to create some unity among Kurdish students.“ (Derin 95-105)

Having addressed the question of transnational networks in my interviews, it has turned out that for all the students participating in this study this plays hardly any role in terms of career networking. However, there have been efforts to create networks on an international level. During 2007/2008 there was a project in KSAF called IKSAN (International Kurdish Student Association Network). It was basically an e-mail list aiming to map student associations worldwide and to get in touch with them for coordinating collective actions against repressive events in the Kurdish regions. The project was encouraged through especially one member of KSAF and when he left, the project was left aside as well. As one student describes it:

“The problem with Kurdish associations is that most of them are run by a few very active persons and they mostly become a personal project for those. Once they get bored or hit an obstacle, the association either dies out, or becomes inactive or is split in two parts.” (Derin)

I would argue that in general transnational networking is more present among first generation migrants who build up organizations and networks across borders. It is most likely related to the fact that first generation migrants do know a lot more people (friends and family) from their home country and those have migrated themselves but have spread across different countries. Yet, this assumption would need further investigations. One interviewee mentioned the possible usefulness of transnational networks and explained how they work for him:

„Yes, of course if I go and work in Germany or Holland or London I will use my contacts, they will help me a lot. I wouldn't be able to do as much as I do, because they have already a network of persons they know and when I go there, automatically the same network will become mine, too. And things like that you know. This network has taken them maybe ten years to create and this is how it works. “ (Diyar 716-720)

Building up networks requires longer periods of time in which a basis of trust, reliability, loyalty etc. is created. But it is often only a few individuals who function like a key to bigger networks.

In this section I have given an idea of predominant aspects which appeared in my interviews and talks about the student's engagement in the associations and how they position themselves as a group to the outside. Before moving on to the more individual level with a focus on the meaning of education, I want to comment on the role of gender in the context of this study.

The role of gender

As I have described in the method chapter it has been much easier to find male interview partners than females who showed more reluctance to give an interview as well as during the talk. I have not been able to get an answer to this matter, yet, I want to draw the attention here more towards the stories I was told, which reveal that gender can play a role in everyday-situations. Although these stories were only told to me by females they address both genders. For the male part, it is mainly the image of the 'bad Middle Eastern guy' which has come up. One woman described the public associations which relate to Kurdish girls and boys:

„‘Oh you are Kurdish and you have four brothers’ - they are just joking but I don't know. It was some years ago a big issue about honour. Girls were murdered because they were having boyfriends and stuff. A lot of people said, ‘oh you are

Kurd and you have *several* brothers', they had prejudice thoughts. Maybe it's fun to laugh a little bit but I don't like that. They have a picture of how Kurdish boys are and how Kurdish girls are and it's frustrating. But most of the people aren't like that. It's very few people who are like that." (Leila 264-270)

And another informant talks about the difficult situation of her younger brother who adopts to this picture the outside is projecting on him:

"My brother who is born here in Stockholm why is he from Kurdistan or from *Iraq/Iran/Syria/Turkey*? He is from Stockholm, he is born here and he is supposed to come from another country where he has been just one time when he was 13 years and one month like a visitor? Of course he will and he has to find out who is he...he is immigrant and all that negative associations that immigrant guys have and that's really not good." (Runak 251-255)

Runak refers to an image here, immigrant guys seem to have in the Swedish public, which is shaped very much by negative associations. And she describes this situation in more detail at another point:

"My brother goes to a Gymnasium school here in the inner city where rich people are. It's more ethnic Swedish. I think it is something that my brother maybe feels like he is connected with suburb, and he is connected with rap music and gangsters maybe. He is connected with associations which aren't good for him. And maybe if he doesn't have other alternatives to identify with and be accepted maybe he will internalize that because he will be known in that way. I think that this makes my brother maybe say 'oh I am Kurd'. [...] I would like to have that people could be Kurds but are very natural part of Sweden. I don't know if that's possible but that would be very good." (Runak 497-506)

What Runak tells in this story is an experience of being reduced to one's ethnic background once you have an immigrant background. In order to cope with the ascription by the outside and keep a sense of self-determination you put emphasis on your ethnic background yourself, following in a way the principle 'offence is the best defence'.

The public image of the 'bad Middle Eastern guy' bears upon the image of the 'oppressed woman'. Besides this opinion and picture from the outside there are also actual gender-related issues experienced by some of the female students. I have heard very different stories about it. One told me for example that she did not have any restrictions as a girl, while others did face boundaries in their childhood and certain social expectations due to being a girl. Those restrictions, however, never occurred in the educational path.

„I think I am very euro(pean), I am very open-minded, very liberal. And a lot of Kurds are not so liberal when it comes to how girls should be you know, who she meets and what she does so that makes me like that [grrr]. [...] I didn't like that girls are not good girls if they meet boys and I became angry especially, when I was a teenager because I didn't think that it was fair. A girl can be so much more." (Lana 70-76)

Gender roles do play an important role and have been addressed indirectly by almost all my interviewees at one point. In the educational context and within the students associations, however, gender inequalities did not appear to me. It was more in terms of Kurdish or Swedish society that gender inequality had been experienced.

In the Kurdish context it appeared relevant on vacations, visiting the family still residing in the homeland. One student, for instance, told me about the uncomfortable situations she found herself in when some of her family members back 'home' showed a lack of understanding for her non-married status. In her descriptions, the social norms concerning marriage and partnership appeared as burdens, and especially the challenge for a young Kurdish woman in Sweden to fulfill both social expectations, the Swedish and the Kurdish one.

One student also described to me her ambivalent feeling concerning a future husband:

„If I will marry sometime, maybe it's a difference if it is a Swedish guy and if it is a Kurdish guy for who I will become in some way.“ (Runak 49)

Due to these stories one can say that gender does play an important role and marriage does become an issue at the age of those students. The parties and activities can also be seen as a way to meet possible future husbands/-wives, as I was told in an informal talk.

Let me now move on to the more individual level of their studies in order to get insight what studying and education actually means for the second-generation Kurdish youth of KSAF and Zanin.

4. Education

(III.4.) Study Motivation

“It was never a question. I just saw it as a natural step in my life to continue studying.”
(Derin 24-25)

Access to education in general is not self-evident and has been difficult or impossible for many Kurds in their home regions. In this respect, the country of settlement can offer new possibilities. Sweden, as the national context of this study, has a system of free education access. “Tuition at higher education institutions in Sweden is free of charge”²⁸. Additionally the Swedish state offers a *study finance* (grant and loan) in order to cover the living

²⁸ <http://www.hsv.se/highereducationinsweden/funding/tuitionfees.4.28afa2dc11bdc557480002436.html>

expenses as well as the costs for study material during the time of study.²⁹ In international comparison this appears rather exceptional. Free education access means that no matter which social class a person comes from or which gender, sex, or religion etc. he/she has, he or she has the opportunity to gain education. In the context of immigrants, this again can have an especial relevance for the second-generation as their parents might have experienced a completely different system in their homeland. Moreover gender equality is a product of modern times. As one girl points out:

“For that time it was strange for girls to study. So my mum still studied until she was fifteen, sixteen, until she got married in a small town. And she is 62 so it was in the 1950s.” (Lana 32-33)

The reasons behind the decision to go to university were often hard for my interviewees to specify as they described it as something “natural”. Perceiving something as natural implies that it has been self-evident ever since. As it is commonly agreed upon, that the strive for higher education is not only due to an individual decision or wish but is influenced by social conditions and social surrounding, I tried to go deeper to find out about the actual meaning of ‘natural’ in this context. It has become clear in their elaborations that going to university results not only from an individual wish or drive but is incorporated into a wider set of social expectations and family’s tradition.

„I mean, they’ve always been very supportive and my family is quite open. We talk about everything and of course I’ve asked them for advice and things like that but it was my own decision. But they’ve always given me advice and try to help me to work on my own path.“ (Leila 23-26)

It is either the educational and intellectual tradition within a family or the low educational background of the family which constitute the background of their chosen university path. Two quotations demonstrate those two main but diverse motivations:

„It would be out of question not going to university coming from my family, because from both sides of my family, the only ones who were not educated were my father’s mother and my mother’s mother, both my grandmothers. From my grandfathers to all my aunts and uncles they are educated and so are their kids. So among our family it is kind of tradition to study at university, it is out of question not to. So it has always been something really natural for me to do. It was a natural step after finishing highschool.“ (Sozan 9-15)

²⁹ „Everyone below the age of fifty-four has the right to apply for student finance for a maximum of 240 weeks. Student finance comprises a grant and a loan. The student loan must be repaid on a monthly basis before the loan recipient reaches the age of sixty. The size of the monthly payment is determined by the size of the debt and the interest rate. The amount is also adjusted to the recipient’s income and ability to pay.“
(<http://www.hsv.se/highereducationinsweden/funding/studentfinance.4.28afa2dc11bdcdc557480002422.html>)

Higher education as a family tradition has been incorporated by the immigrant's children as indispensable part of life. Among the students who are part of my study being educated is clearly equated with gaining a university degree.

„I think for me it's been always something like a mandatory thing to be educated. And I think it's something I got from my parents. Unfortunately they never got the chance to do that, so they always pushed me and made me realize how important and good it is. And I am very glad that I am studying.“ (Furat 20-23)

The free access to education seems to be considered as a high value and a privilege among immigrant parents who have never had the chance to attend school or university in their home country. The reasons behind it most often lie in the social and economical status of their family which determines whether they go to school or university or not. Hence, they do not take it for granted but see it as a great chance life offers to their children. It is the idea that if you get the opportunity to be educated, you have to take it, it is not optional anymore. One interviewee whose parents had been rather poor told me what her parents said to her concerning education:

„...‘you should know, we didn't have the chance because our situation was different. We were poor and we had like this and that situation but you, obviously you can go to university and you have the resources, you have the time’...“

With this reasoning studying was not a question anymore for this student. It was self-evident. This point of view seemed to be conveyed from parents with low education background to their children.

What social implications does education have? What role does it play in society and how does it effect the position of individuals in society? Considering these questions is necessary in order to understand and grasp the broader context of education and studying within my research. To better describe some mechanisms that evolve around education, I have chosen Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *knowledge*, *cultural capital* and *field* which have been widely used in social science research on education.

According to Bourdieu's approach *knowledge* is a cultural capital. Capital is in the words of Pierre Bourdieu 'accumulated work', either in material or incorporated form (Bourdieu 1992: 49). In his theoretical work he uses the word *capital* "to describe the social products of a field or system of relations through which individuals carry out social intercourse" (Grenfell & James 1998: 18). These products are of different kind for example thoughts or actions. Bourdieu considers knowledge as such a product. As Grenfell and James have put it,

referring to Bourdieu (1990 b), there are consequences to knowledge which can be identified: knowledge gives you social prestige, power and economic positioning (Grenfell & James 1998: 22). It affects a person's social status within a society or community. Knowledge cannot be taken away, like land, property or rights. Once you have it, you can use it without having the fear that it could be withdrawn. In an interview one student said to me:

„ My mum always says that knowledge, education is a weapon.“ (Nalin 447-448)

It is a symbolic capital which gives a person a certain standing in society. And it gives that person the possibility to convert it into another form of capital. Bourdieu distinguishes between three main forms of capital: *economic capital*, which refers to the material or money wealth, *social capital* as a result of a network of lasting social relations and *cultural capital* which is the product of education, in other words the 'academic market' (Bourdieu 1992: 49-80). Once you gain a certain type of knowledge within the 'academic market' in form of a university degree, you will most likely be able to convert it into economic capital. What has to be kept in mind at this point is that knowledge is understood here in relation to the specific *field* of education, "a structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level" (Grenfell & James 1998: 16). It is thus a certain social system governed by principles defining what education means. Knowledge is only powerful and valuable in society when it is recognized as legitimate. Therefore knowledge only becomes a capital which effects the social relations of people when it is gained in the structural setting of the educational system: "[...] agents possess power in proportion to their symbolic capital, i.e. in proportion to the recognition they receive from a group" (Bourdieu 1991 in Grenfell & James 1998: 23).

The participants of my study in fact seem to consider educated people primarily as those who are studying at university or have gained a university degree. The students do gain cultural capital through their studies which effects the social capital and in some cases might also influence the economic capital. The social capital could be seen in the context of networking which I have described earlier on. The fact that they create a network through their associations gives them a certain social capital. This can be helpful, for example when searching a job.

As I have outlined further up, all my interviewees without exception have explained their decision to go to university as something which was never a question. While none of my interviewees referred to the friends' circle or teachers as an influence in their decision to continue studying, the family did have a significant impact. Social expectations and the high

value of education within their families added to this perception. The high value of education was, however, not necessarily transferred through an educational tradition within the family but was rather pushed forward with the view that education improves the quality of life as it opens up further perspectives and opportunities.

Bourdieu has pointed to the fact that people do not enter fields like education with the same configurations of capital since these configurations are acquired through family conditions or upbringing. Yet, as Grenfell and James note, it is important not to stick to the determinism of this argument but to remember that there is always an individual choice. In other words education is not only a setting where social inequalities are reproduced but as well operates through individual's strategic positioning (Grenfell & James 1998: 21-22).

It can be said that it is the combination between both, the free access to education in Sweden (in this case university), as well as the social surrounding of especially the family who push their children to take advantage of those opportunities of free education access. Or to put it in other words, the Swedish political model and the social background of their families have an impact on their decisions to strive for higher education.

(III.4.) Success

“I want to achieve something that I can be proud of.” (Leila: 114)

The social expectations are not necessarily bound to certain disciplines as it has been the case especially in the Middle Eastern context. It has been shown before that in Middle Eastern countries it is often only a natural scientist, a doctor, an engineer, an economist or a lawyer, who are considered as educated and primarily successful people. Yet, as Derin states, this pattern seems to be at least partly blown apart in the diasporic context of Kurds in Sweden.

„I think it's a Middle Eastern thing. You become a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer, that's the consensus from the Middle East. Everyone wants to be that and that's what being successful is. But in Sweden you can be successful in doing anything really and I think that those three things are more and more becoming not so important.“ (Derin 284-288)

In contrast to the Middle East, Sweden is appreciated as a place where success is not tied to a certain profession. The subjects studied by my interviewees cover a broad range of fields: technical subjects, law, economy, social sciences, journalism, languages. Although success remains to be of high importance, it can be achieved in anything, ranging from artists to

journalists to economists or lawyers. I would assume the reason for it lies in the number of Kurds in Sweden who have become successful in a variety of different fields, and can thus function as role models within different professions.

„We are quite many Kurds in Sweden and actually, I think a lot of them have made successful careers in whatever they want to do. So Kurds have quite a few role models, and so I think this is a really good thing. I don't think that other ethnic groups have that so. I think Kurds have set an example and we are like, we try to do our best in everything, and we try to also be a part of the society and not only to build a society on the other side. So we try to interact with the Swedes, but not so that we forget who we are and so on.“ (Azad 245-251)

Asking directly about role models, most students could not think of a specific one. Only one student named two authors and journalists, while another one referred to her older brother as a kind of role model. Higher education is seen as a tool for integration and participation in Swedish society. In addition, the success of Kurds in Sweden, often ultimately linked to education, influences the standing of the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden. Educated and successful Kurds constitute important triggers for being proud to belong to the Kurdish community in Sweden.

Kurds in Sweden are an especially political active and participative ethnic group in comparison to Kurds in other European countries. Migrants who are educated and integrate themselves into Swedish society, but at the same time do not lose connection to their cultural heritage, are considered of high value. The pride to be part of a diasporic group which is said to fulfill those criteria has become visible in various talks. All through my research my informants have shown a pride for being part of the Kurdish people as many of them have been successful in what they do. In order to keep this level of educated Kurds in Sweden the second-generation is trying to encourage each other. This is also a major goal of the student associations and provides an important organizational framework for encouraging the second-generation Kurdish youth in Sweden to continue studying.

„Well, I wanted to do something and try to help other younger Kurds, encourage them and get them to understand the importance of education. I think maybe that's my biggest goal with me being member of them.“ (Furat 58-60)

The engagement in the associations is embedded into a wider set of responsibilities to preserve and improve the reputation and the value of the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden. One aspect here is also to make Kurdish questions and information and news about Kurds more public by writing in online newspapers for example. “I want to put light to the Kurdish questions for the Swedes”, (Erdal 338) one guy explained to me.

The majority of the students I have interviewed had already clear ideas about what jobs they want to do after finishing university.

(III.4.) Future career

“...that’s my dream.” (Nalin, Erdal, Leila)

The future career plans play a crucial role in the students’ lives. They are very clear and highly ambitious about their career wishes and professional path. In their answers about future career it became apparent that gaining success is both personal, and the wish to contribute to a better world in the most general sense and to the Kurdish cause in a more specific sense.

„My visions are like helping people instead of making money the big issue. I want to do something where I can make a change. Money comes, money goes ... something that can either be historical or can make an impact in ones’ person’s life.“ (Ferhat 123-126)

This wish for a change or humanitarian approach results also from the parents’ stories of oppression and persecution due to their ethnic background.

“It is probably in an unconscious way. Because obviously, when you have like your mum talking how difficult it was for her to go to *a country in the Middle East*, and to hear, that they were actually sitting on the street and waiting for people *from that country* to come and tell them ,you Kurd come clean my place’. Like the treatment they got there. And to see and hear about the poverty, to hear about the situation how it was for them and the treatment they got just because they were Kurds. And again, my mum she had a lot of experiences in the *Middle Eastern country* so that’s why I want to change that. I want to enlighten people. And that’s why I feel, although I am not stuck in the tradition part, I want to be part of actually making people realize that Kurdish people are just as nice and well-educated as everyone else.“ (Nalin 568-577)

Stories from the parents are in general key elements for second-generation immigrants in creating their own image of a ‘home country’ and their ethnic background. They constitute an essential point of reference. In this specific context these stories, described in the quotation above, enhance the desire to enlighten people and to contribute to a change in the Kurdish question. The strong family bonding depicted by the participants of this study make such stories even more alive and may evoke emotional reactions. To some extent, the second-generation seems to face the challenge of dissolving the parents’ life experiences.

Another way of dealing with the parents' stories and images of the homeland would be to contribute to the development of the Kurdish regions by building up a company for example or working within diplomatic fields. On the other hand there also is an awareness of the opportunities for starting a career in Sweden and a feeling of a social bonding to Sweden. In contrast to the Kurdish regions, Sweden is a politically, socially and economically stable society. It has been striking that networks for future career do play a role, however not on a transnational but on a national level. Here the Kurdish diaspora can function as an important source based on reciprocal solidarity and loyalty which guarantees support. In Bourdieu's terms it would be the symbolic capitals (social and cultural) which come into play. The *social* represents the network of social contacts and the *cultural* signifies the knowledge of other languages. In her interpretation of Bourdieu, Claire Kramsch has described this capital brought in by outsiders and immigrants as "a knowledge of other languages, other cultures, and a capacity to imagine other worlds" (Kramsch 2008: 41).

Although the career wishes of most students did show some connection to their Kurdish background, there were others who fully distinguished between career wishes and interest in their Kurdish background. Among those who did show a connection, however, the ways of how to connect to one's ethnic background differed. The following three statements reveal the variety of answers that have come up.

„I want to work for like the foreign ministry or embassy or some sort of humanitarian organizations, like Red Cross or UN. That's my dream. That's where I am heading, that's my aims.“ (Nalin 550-553)

„I would like to start my career in economics in Sweden and later on maybe in ten years, fifteen years, five years I don't know, go back to Kurdistan and do something there.“ (Derin 171-173)

“I would like to have a job like a project manager, a very international job.” (Lana 123-124)

Despite the variations of career wishes, they are all very explicit and show an aspiration for success in their own field of study. Working internationally has turned out to be the dream of over half of the students, especially those interested in politics. Yet, Sweden remains nonetheless an appreciated place to start a career (e.g. *Swedish* foreign ministry).

Last but not least these wishes are a reflection of personal preferences as well as sometimes family traditions (in the case of educated families).

The student associations KSAF and Zanin assemble young students who share an ambitious commitment towards their education. In this chapter I have painted a picture of the broader

context in which their study motivation is embedded and tried to depict common and repeating patterns as well as divergence. For a better understanding what role higher education plays for the Kurdish students I have applied Bourdieu's theoretical concept of *capital*.

It has turned out that for those students participating in this study, education very often it was related to their Kurdish background. This relation appeared on different levels: on a broader collective level where the importance of education was emphasized for the Kurdish diaspora in general, on a family level where the family context did influence the decision to go to university, and on an individual level which became apparent through their personal commitment, effort and ambitions within their studies.

In the following chapter I will turn towards questions of belonging, home and identity which constitute the second part of my research aim. Those questions have often evoked rather ambiguous and uncertain answers.

5. Belonging - Home - Identity

(III.5.) Identity and Ethnicity

From a scientific point of view the concept of identity has to be thought of in its complexity and ambivalence. It is in fact a very problematic concept. Some scholars argue that it has become a melting pot losing its analytical value. "Rather than stirring all self-understandings based on race, religion, ethnicity, and so on into the great conceptual melting pot of 'identity', we would do better to use a more differentiated analytical language" (Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 20).

The anthropologists Baumann and Gingrich (eds.) argue in their book "Grammars of Identity" for a 'weak' rather than essentialist notion of identity/alterity, the two (identity and alterity) constituting one another. Both, sameness as well as difference, are part of personal and collective identities (Baumann & Gingrich, 2004). "These identities are multidimensional and contradictory, and they include power-related, dialogical ascriptions by selves and others which are processually configured enacted and transformed by cognition, language, imagination, emotion, body and (additional form of) agency" (Gingrich 2004: 6).

When speaking of identity we try to grasp how individuals place themselves within the social world. The way one perceives him-/herself in relation to others is, however, embedded into complex and changing processes which the concept of identity can easily fail to comprehend.

As an anthropologist I am interested in the process in which feelings of membership and attachment are shaped. There is no final product such as a fixed identity. For describing those attachments and memberships which are at the core of interest also in this study, Jones and Krzyzanowski argue that the idea of *belonging* would be more suitable (Jones & Krzyzanowski 2008).

I have also found the idea of 'belonging' empirical and analytical value as it implies in my point of view more the features of change, fluidity, contest, contradiction and does not like 'identity', run the risk to appear as an exclusive entity. This might also be due to the grammatical form of the two words, *belonging* is a gerund form, describing a state of a person, whereas identity is a noun, something one possesses or is.

Jones and Krzyzanowski suggest to think identity as still relevant in its relation to belonging. "'Identity' refers to the ways in which people link their complex range of belonging into an 'ideal-type' situation, in which all the multiple differences are incorporated into a collective identity, which can be seen as a proxy of infinitely complicated belongings" (Jones & Krzyzanowski 2008: 50). What seems to me the risk here is to lose sight of the people's own use of the word.

My interview partners have often referred to the search of one's 'identity' and use the term themselves. Therefore I consider the term relevant for my study. But one has to be aware of the focus which is set in the particular context of my study. Although not explicitly stated it is often the *ethnic* identity which is referred to. So I would say that it is not always the multiple differences which are incorporated into a collective identity as Jones and Krzyzanowski have stated, but that there also can be individual identities. These individual identities incorporate a variety of belongings and are emphasized differently depending on the situations (e.g. in some situations it may be the ethnic belonging, in others it may be the belonging to a political or a dance group which is relevant).

Baumann and Gingrich remind us to pay attention to agency and the specific context. "Without attention to context and 'opportunity structures', after all, a deification of an abstract power of agency can only lead to unrealistic beliefs in agency regardless of structures" (Baumann&Gingrich 2004: 199).

Student associations like KSAF and Zanin offer the space for a collective creation and evolvment of new images and ideas about home and belonging – aspects which are directly interlinked ('Where do I *belong*?'). These images are created in the reciprocal exchange of its members in form of talks at free time activities, seminars or social gatherings.

Becoming a member of a Kurdish student association can be often read as a search for one's belonging or identity. So it has partly been stated by my informants. In this context however primarily the ethnic identity is meant. Although the associations are open to all students who have interest in topics related to Kurds, the majority of members among other aspects (being student, age group etc.) shares a Kurdish background. The Kurdish student associations in my study could be thus considered as both, an academic group as well as an ethnic group. I would even argue that sharing the same ethnic background is more important and powerful in shaping those associations and bonding its members while education more or less functions as a frame for communication and achievements, constituting a cultural capital. Due to this impression I had during my research and because ethnicity did play a relevant role in all my interviews, I want to discuss this concept first from a theoretical point of view, before moving on to my empirical data.

When talking about forms of collective identities within a group let us keep in mind that besides sharing certain opinions, thoughts, experiences and aims, groups are at the same time composed of individuals who do have their own opinions and vita and who are social actors. Staying aware of the internal diversity and heterogeneity of groups is important to understand its dynamics and not lose sight of the individual.

In his famous book "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries", Frederik Barth develops three central statements: 1. ethnicity is a form of social organization; 2. the critical focus for investigation becomes the ethnic boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff it encloses; 3. the critical feature of ethnic groups is the characteristic of self-ascription and ascription by others (Barth 1969: 9-38). Ethnicity is not a static entity but on the contrary is flexible, changeable and shaped by the interaction of people and the consciousness of difference. "Ethnicity like culture is something people experience, learn, use, 'do' in daily life, within which they construct an ongoing sense of themselves and an understanding of the fellows" (Jenkins 1997: 14). Ethnic identity is socially constructed and not naturally given. It is negotiated in the social interaction of people. And ethnicity is above all a matter of choice, too – the will to belong to a group. The relevance of ethnicity can vary in social situations and "it is often up to the agents themselves to decide upon its significances" (1993: 32), the anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen notes, who has given a very beneficial survey of anthropological studies on ethnicity and who has further developed the arguments of Frederik Barth.

In practice ethnicity is often closely linked to ancestry, common origin and history. The aspect of continuity over a long period of time constitutes a decisive criterion of ethnic

identities. According to Roosens the 'stuff' inside the boundary cannot be reduced to being a product of boundary formation. Instead "this identity originates from genealogy 'before' it has anything to do with boundaries" (Roosens 1994: 87). This view of the genealogical dimension as a significant precondition in constructing one's ethnic identity is, however, contested. Although, most scholars might agree that some notion of shared ancestry and origin is a universal element in ethnic ideologies, it stays unclear how many generations one should follow back to determine one's own present ethnic identity. Eriksen has stated in this respect, that the past in fact is a result of present-day constructions (Eriksen 1993).

The family constitutes most often a key figure in ethnic recruitment, yet, at the same time it is also a space where cultural difference and contest takes place (Vermeulen & Govers 1994: 15). This becomes clearly visible in generational comparison among immigrants. Roosens stresses that for the second-generation immigrants who have been born, raised and educated in their parents' host country the connection to their family of their home country and the culture of origin has been weakened. As a reaction, they create an ethnic boundary that is in a way counter-cultural to their parents' immigration country. "Paradoxically, these youngsters, and more particularly their emerging leaders, voice and stress their 'own culture', 'identity', 'cultural identity' and 'ethnic' or 'national identity' in a much more marked way than their parents" (Roosens 1994: 97).

In my point of view this is one possible reaction. Another one would be to abandon any kind of connection to the parents' cultural, ethnic and national origin. Some students, participating in this study have mentioned this pattern. I would assume that possible reasons could be negative experiences of immigrants' children within their families or the diasporic group which are then connected to their ethnic background. Most often, however, it is something in between an exclusive identification with ethnicity on the one side, and a refusal of ethnicity on the other side. Then, there is no clear system of contrasts in ethnic relations, something which Eriksen has called *ethnic anomalies*, being 'neither-nor' or 'both and' (Eriksen 1993: 62). He figures four features which have reoccurred in research on second and third generation immigrants: 1. a clear 'acculturation' in terms of values and general orientation; 2. a situational switch between 'Swedish' and 'Kurdish' identity (in the case of this study); 3. a tension between these individuals and their parents; 4. boundaries preventing full assimilation might be both internally and externally constructed. (Eriksen 1993: 138)

Starting from the point, that ethnic identity is constructed, relational and situational, it becomes of central interest *how* it is constructed (internal and external factors), in *relation to whom* it is constructed, and how the *situation* looks like in which this process takes place. I

have addressed this topic at different times in my interviews by asking for example, what is seen as 'Kurdish' or 'Swedish', what is perceived as valuable or problematic in Swedish and Kurdish society and in the Kurdish diaspora, paying attention to the use of 'Us' and 'Them', or asking about 'home'.

(III.5.) What means Kurdish? – Comments on religion, culture and ethnicity

„I think there are different aspects of Kurdish culture...“
(Sozan 224)

„I wouldn't say I feel 100 % Swedish. But then at the same time, when I am in Kurdistan, I wouldn't say I feel 100% Kurdish. But that doesn't have to be in a negative way that is just how I feel myself. I don't feel like 100% of anything, I am more like a mix.“
Leila (177-180)

What actually is „Kurdish“ or „Swedish“? And what makes us think in those categories, in this case „Kurdish“ and „Swedish“? To see which thoughts, ideas and social actions are seen as 'Kurdish', constitutes a key in approaching these questions. As discussed earlier the term culture has become a present term of our time. Although in broader public discourses it is often still used in an essentialist way, most scholars would agree with Gerd Baumann that “culture exists only insofar as it is performed, and even then its ontological status is that of a pointedly analytical abstraction” (Baumann 1996: 11).

Words like “real”, “fully”, or “100 %” have reappeared in this research when talking about belonging and ethnicity. This calculation of different degrees of ethnicity subsumes that ethnicity is something one possesses or is born with. During my field research I have noticed several times jokes about how much percent one is Kurdish or Swedish. The quotation at the start of this chapter conveys a feeling of mixture, being neither 100% Kurdish nor 100% Swedish. A guy whose mother is from Sweden and father is from the Kurdish region stated several times that he sees himself as a hundred percent Kurdish and a hundred percent Swedish. I was astonished by this numeral calculation of ethnicity and he explained to me that feeling a hundred percent of both was important to him since he did not want to emphasize either his Kurdish or Swedish background. Other comments have been made about couples where in some cases both partners had a Kurdish background, whereas in other cases students with a Kurdish background had a girl-/boyfriend from Sweden. The jokes cruised around future children who then would be either a hundred percent Kurdish or not. Although such comments are made on a humorous level it shows that in everyday-discourses ethnicity is often still connected to biological means. Consequently this idea of different degrees of ethnicity can produce internal hierarchical structures. In an informal talk

for example, I was told by a student with Kurdish background that she always said she was directly from Kirkuk even though she was from the surrounding area. This town carries a high reputation among Kurds due to the historical key position in the fight for independence³⁰.

In my interviews the students themselves raised the question of what actually is said to be 'Kurdish culture'. Their thoughts depict a rather differentiated and situational understanding of culture.

„Well, I think that the question about Kurdish culture is very interesting because I don't know what Kurdish culture might be. I don't believe that there is any genuine Kurdish culture. I think the thing that separates for example, a Kurd from a Turk, is the language and the place where the people live. But I mean considering the food, the music, it's not the same, but it's very connected to each other. And I think that the language is the key to the Kurdish identity. So my father hasn't given me some kind of Kurdish culture at home. I experienced myself by learning the language.“ (Erdal 233-239).

The place and the Kurdish language are named here as the most significant characteristics of Kurds in the context of the surrounding states and societies. Personally, Erdal mentions the Kurdish language as decisive criterion for discovering his ethnic identity.

Language has appeared as a relevant feature in the diasporic Kurdish context in general (Ammann 1997: 231). The importance of Kurdish language can be understood as a way of distinguishing from 'others' (especially Arabs, Turks, Iranians) but also as a carrier of the history of oppression. Until 1991 Kurdish was prohibited by the Turkish government (Gürbey 1997: 121). It is therefore not surprising that the use of Kurdish language constitutes an essential aspect and a political statement in representing one's ethnic background. In Sweden, Kurds have been free to express themselves in their mother tongue and the Swedish political framework offers second-generation immigrants the possibility to attend language lessons in their mother tongue, two hours a week.

During all my research, language has appeared relevant in various situations. It seems to acquire a key position among second-generation Kurds in Sweden who are engaged in their Kurdish background. At the different activities of the associations where I met my informants, it was both, Swedish and Kurdish which were spoken. The knowledge of the Kurdish language seems to affect the social status of the single members of the association's group. Language tends to signify one part of 'Kurdishness'. This can cause social hierarchies as it

³⁰ Although Kirkuk has a mixed population of Arabs and Kurds, this city was meant to become the capital of an autonomous region at the beginning of the 1970s. Due to the oil fields in this area the Iraqi government prevented this plan (Strohmeier & Yalçın-Heckmann: 2000: 130). Through the oil fields, however, this city has remained of special geo-political importance.

has been recognized in other studies before (Ammann 1997: 231) and is as well described by one of my informants:

„Certain people, the really patriotic people, if you tell them you don't know any Kurdish, you don't talk Kurdish, they would go like 'well, you are not Kurd'. There's some kind of ignorance when it comes to what you are. Because you can be Kurd and still not knowing the language.“ (Nalin 191-195).

Language plays an important role when it comes to ethnic belonging and group formation. It is a very concrete medium of inclusion and exclusion. I want to point out two characteristics of the Kurdish context regarding language. One is the internal diversity of Kurdish language in form of different dialects, the main being Sorani (spoken in northern Iraq) and Kurmanji (spoken in southern Turkey). This implies internal difficulties of understanding each other and can thus be seen as another challenge in the struggle for a united Kurdistan. The second one is the prohibition of Kurdish language in many parts of the home regions which has functioned as an explicit instrument of oppression. I would say that language forms a very delicate and important topic in the construction of Kurdish identity and group belonging among the students of this study as well.

Religion - the majority of the students' families have been Sunni Muslims - has a very marginal role among the second-generation Kurds I have interviewed. Except for one, all of my interview partners attached no importance to religion in their own as well as in their family lives. For them 'Kurdishness' - something which is constructed in social interaction - was primarily connected to the ethnic belonging.

Many spoke of themselves as atheists and the reason for being non-religious was drawn in most cases from the family.

„When it comes to my family we're a bunch of atheists which is maybe not that normal in Kurdistan. My grandparents I would say, were a bit religious. But still, for being in Kurdistan, they were very open-minded in their religiosity because they were educated. They got education early and they experienced a lot so it was normal, and it was natural for them to be religious but maybe on the paper. And my parents or their siblings are not religious at all. But still we stick together, and we are there for each other and no one feels left out. So maybe religion has something to do with it from the beginning, but concerning us, not really.“ (Sozan 213-221).

Religion was often associated with narrow-mindedness but also with social responsibility. I would think the controversial reputation of religion, or more specifically the Islam, in the West is adding to this picture. Another aspect which is most likely to play a role here is the clear line, Kurds want to draw between themselves on the one side, and Arabs, Turks and

Persians, who have suppressed them, on the other side. As for the majority they all follow the Islam as their religion it does not constitute a differentiating feature signifying the boundary between them. So religion is being considered ambivalent. One student, for example, told me how religion has been used to justify oppression of Kurds.

„Well, religion has always been secondary for Kurds. Well, not always but nowadays because religion hasn't helped us any way. We have been oppressed and no religion has helped us. And in Iran we have been oppressed in the name of God. It's not so important for Kurds.“ (Erdal 250-253).

Despite the present view that religion is of no particular importance for Kurds and despite the fact that the vast majority of my informants were describing themselves as non-religious or atheists, it is common-sense that religion does constitute a relevant fragment of „Kurdishness“, in general.

„For a lot of people it is religion, but for me and my family I don't think it's religion.“ (Lana 318)

The *family* not only acts as an important connection in terms of transferring knowledge, values and norms, but is also seen in its social configuration and relations as typical “Kurdish”: „I see like Kurdish culture as a type of a family culture“, Leila says. (350) The way of social interaction has been described as significantly different from the way it is practiced in Swedish society.

The family constitutes a significant point of reference to the ethnic background (Shavarini 2004: 84). The degree, however, to which the second-generation children adapt their parents' involvement in Kurdish issues, differs. Although all my interviewees are members of a Kurdish student association now, they have told different stories from their childhood. Some have dealt with their Kurdish background while growing up, by gaining knowledge about Kurdish history, learning the Kurdish language, attending Kurdish dance classes, whereas others have rejected any kind of activities related to Kurds until starting university. In addition to the family it is also the fact that most of the students did not have many Kurdish friends of their own age group when growing up. The media and visits in the home country have shaped the connection to the Kurdish background, aspects I will outline later on.

I have addressed language, religion and family in my interviews. Kurdish language plays an important role among the students, which became very obvious at the activities I attended, as well. Yet despite this importance of language there has come up another most shared aspect in constructing ‘Kurdish identity’. Another element has emerged when talking about shared aspects among Kurds: the *political identity*.

In my elaborations so far (e.g. associations' goals, 'Kurdishness') it has become visible that in the realm of Kurdish issues *politics* cannot be left aside. It constitutes an indispensable aspect of Kurdish culture, I was told. In contrast to religion, politics concerned every Kurd. I got the impression that being Kurd is per se political and thus a shared aspect by all Kurds.

„There are different aspects of Kurdish culture. There is one culture that I would think they have in common and all the persons in Kurdistan and that is maybe the political culture. Because politics, war and independence have been something, it has been something vital and something big in the life of all the Kurds living in the different parts of Kurdistan. They want to separate from the oppressors, so I think along the way a political kind of culture, a political identity has been created for all the Kurds living there. That is one side, and we call it 'Kurdaity' in Kurdish, it is Kurdaity. And I would say a lot has to do with the struggle.“ (Sozan 224-232)

The struggle for self-determination connects the Kurds living in the home regions with the Kurdish diaspora. The involvement of diasporas in homeland politics has been a long-existing phenomenon. In the case of the Kurdish diaspora this phenomenon of “transnational nationalism” - making “nationalist politics transnational through identification and participation at a distance” (Humphrey 1999: 55) - has evolved only around the turn of the 21st century.

In several talks it was explained to me that the Kurds residing in the Kurdish regions have to position themselves politically by sympathizing with a certain political party. Although this is not necessary in the diaspora, it is still often the case. And once you have shown a party-political membership it is hard to strip this membership off again. Such a political straitjacket can cause political skepticism.

„I have a little bit difficulties with everything that's political, like either you have to be this politics or this.“ (Lana 332-333)

Despite this student's skepticism, my interviewees have generally shown a political interest and engagement. Needless to say this interest is connected to the fact that almost all their parents have come to Sweden as political refugees. And it also becomes visible in their choice of subjects, they study.

Even though the subjects of study differ, nearly half of the students have at least started with political science. Their interest for politics has besides their family background most likely grown out of their Kurdish background. The majority of the students, however, has changed to either law, economics or technical subjects like engineering, later on, some keeping political science as their minor subject. At some points in the interviews it was mentioned that this decision was due to considering politics as being closely connected to corruption, another reason mentioned was the wish to gain hard skills which offer clear professional options for the future.

There is a lucid and outspoken political interest among all students participating in this study but often, this is combined with the wish to acquire skills to actually do something for the Kurdish people. However, some of my interviewees have commented rather ambivalent on the profession as politicians although they have a political interest:

„I don't like politics, because politics to me it's corruption, it's just a game. That's why it feels, I don't want to go into politics. I want to work for like the foreign ministry or embassy or some sort of humanitarian organizations, like Red Cross or UN, that's my dream, that's where I am heading, that's my aims.“ (Nalin 550-553)

Linking Kurdish politics with corruption follows partly from individual experiences such as internships but has also been exemplified to me through the political contests present in the Kurdish questions. The party-political fragmentation and the political struggles over power distribution are predominant and are of no help for improving the people's situation in the Kurdish regions.

„Because as I see it right now, a political party or a government or those in power, they should be in the favour of and an apparatus or a tool for the people to lead their own faiths and to develop a country. But that is not the case. I believe that right now that is the case in Kurdistan because politics and private life is so mixed up right now and money making is so important.“ (Sozan 543-548)

On the one side, improving this political situation can become a motivating factor for studying political science. On the other side, becoming a politician in a system of corruption and personified politics, has significant consequences for one's private life. In one interview, the differences between a politician's life in Sweden and in the Middle East were explained to me.

„I studied political science because I've always had this interest in Kurdish questions and I wanted to help somehow. On the other hand, I just didn't want to become like all politicians, because it's not easy. It's not like in Sweden. If you work for a party in Kurdistan or you work for Kurdish questions, when they know you, you can't just live a normal life. You have to protect yourself somehow. And you won't be able to go out as you want and you will get enemies and friends, it's not like in Sweden. Because in Sweden you're much more free. If you've been a prime minister, five years after you finish or one year after you finish, no one even thinks about you. It's not like that in the Middle East. This is maybe one of the reasons that who becomes a president or prime minister, they stay that way until they die, most of the times. And I don't like this. You know, I want to do things and help the Kurdish question but at the same time I want to have a normal life, too. So because of that I chose a *technical subject*.“ (Diyar 25-37)

In this statement, the differences between politics in Sweden and the Middle East are addressed. The individual freedom is mentioned as one decisive difference between Swedish society and societies in the Middle East, which the Kurds are part of.

Having described politics as an indispensable part of Kurdish identity I want to turn now to the more specific question of nationalism.

(III.5.) Kurdish nationalism – why is it relevant?

“We don’t have that motherstate in some way. We are not in majority in the system, nowhere in the world. And I think that is like, isn’t this, it’s unfair, it is a feeling because it’s unfair”
(Runak 430)

The collective political goal of an independent Kurdish nation-state is expressed through a nationalism which constitutes a central feature of the diasporic social space (Ammann 1997: 221). It is closely connected to ethnicity. According to Richard Jenkins nationalism in fact is an ideology of ethnic identification. “In the contemporary world, one of the most important ideological manifestations of ethnicity is nationalism, conventionally defined as the expression and organization of political claims to territory and self-determination” (Jenkins 1997: 124). In the Kurdish context, nationalism becomes especially present due to the missing home-country. I was being told that if there was an independent nation-state, feelings of nationalism would decrease.

„You know because of the problem we have, we don’t have an independent country, the Kurdish identity is becoming more important. If you had an independent country, I am sure that it wouldn’t be like today. We wouldn’t care so much about it. But until we receive a country, this will increase, especially outside.“ (Diyar 666-670)

The occurrence of nationalism entails the wish to belong to the majority population in one state, being able to show the home country to others on the map and/or having the possibility to return to a home country. The national question, having an “independent country”, is closely linked here to the “Kurdish identity”. It refers to an ideological meaning of nation-state which says that political boundaries should be coterminous with cultural boundaries. Nationalism is challenged on the one side, to legitimize the power structure (political level) and on the other side, to meet the needs of the population (Eriksen 1993: 108-109). Yet this is after all an ideology: In reality this is often not the case. There are too many examples of nation-states that consist of ethnic plurality or where national boundaries in fact cut through cultural boundaries as it is in the case of Kurds. At least this is the way it is often presented

by those Kurds aiming towards a unified “Kurdistan” of all parts. When it comes to the common political goal of independence, the multi-religiousness of Kurdish people for example is put aside. The people in question perceive the national borders dividing the Kurdish regions, as an act of violence which can result in a national movement aiming again towards the fulfillment of the ideological meaning of a nation-state for their own cultural group. “The cultural egalitarianism preached by nationalism in most of its manifestations can inspire counter-reactions in situations where a segment of the population does not consider itself to be part of the nation” (Eriksen 1993: 109). There are very concrete experiences of discrimination involved in this movement. Runak has explained to me her experience of this situation very clear:

„I am in some way an outsider in Europe and Kurds are under oppression in Turkey, Syria and Iran, so maybe one Kurdish state is very good. Maybe, it's the solution, because I will not be discriminated with my brown hair, my haircolour or because of my name. [...] Because I am not accepted in Turkey, I am not accepted in Sweden, I am not accepted in America, not in Germany, not in South Africa and not in India. I always will be a minority everywhere. [...] So maybe it is better, that my people have a territory, too. It's like you have families living in a house. And if states are houses, Kurds are some visitors or guests in one house. You are not a member of that family, in that state. You are in the periphery in some way. I think Kurds have a little other situation than Turks and Arabs and other immigrants. We don't have that motherland, we don't have that mother-state in some way, we are not in majority in the system, nowhere in the world and I think that is unfair.” (Runak 418-434)

The longing for a home country is embedded into the wish for freedom of oppression. It is the wish for a territory that is ruled by Kurds and accepted by the international community as an independent state. Those elements push forward and become the ruling triggers within the nationalistic aims of the diaspora.

It is also the romanticized picture of the Kurdish homeland which facilitates nationalistic feelings.

„For me I feel more nationalistic here than I would have if I had been living in Kurdistan. I think I am more nationalistic now. And for me personally it's part of this romantic picture that I have of Kurdistan.“ (Derin 369-371)

A romantic picture is created through imaginations. In the diasporic context the geographical distance from the homeland, or in the case of second-generation immigrants their parents' homeland, lives very much in images but also is built on actual experience. The students in this research, however, have due to the specific context (place, time, political situation etc.) different types of these experiences. Some have spent their early childhood in a Kurdish region, others have been there for vacations and some haven't been there at all. It is also

self-evident that memories from vacations differ enormously from memories of war and persecution. The fact that a lot of the parents have come as political refugees and cannot go back plays another important role. Several questions evolve here: How do those imaginations as well as experiences of the homeland look like? Where do they come from and how do they differ? Let us take a look at how the students in this study depicted their often very multifaceted image of “Kurdistan”.

(III.5.) The imagined homeland vs the experienced homeland

“You always idolize a country when living in exile in another way than living in the country.” (Sozan 252-253)

“I wish I had more memories.” (Runak 79)

Before taking a closer look at the homeland images it is necessary to deal with the question of what is actually meant by “Kurdistan”. In my interviews it has become obvious that it depends on what the question is. Ideologically and morally spoken, ‘Kurdistan’ is generally considered as the whole area, including all four regions. But concerning concrete stories and experiences “Kurdistan” has been mostly referred to as the certain region where their parents come from. For initiating and realizing a project or a company, the autonomous region in northern Iraq was by some students considered the most realistic area. This multifaceted understanding of ‘Kurdistan’ is expressed here:

„Well, when I talk about going back and do something for Kurds, I have the autonomous region in mind, because that is where you can actually do things. But when I refer to Kurdistan, I refer to Kurdistan as a whole. But when it comes to certain things, I have a special part in mind for doing certain kinds of projects because that’s where you have the opportunity to do them and fulfill them. [...] When I say Kurdistan out of both, political and moral reasons I refer to a big Kurdistan, but the societies are different because they have been cut off each other, they have put borders between people, so they haven’t been influenced in the same kind of way. “ (Sozan 467-475)

Especially the second-generation migrants rely very much on the imagination of the parents’ homeland. The imaginations about the homeland are mostly shaped by the family, sometimes friends, the diasporic community and the media. Through means of global communication, such as radio, satellite television and Internet, pictures and information can be easily accessed and exchanged. “Identity in the diaspora can be much more closely

linked with and influenced by, actual life events in the homeland and vice-versa” (Humphrey 1999: 56).

In contrast to the media, the parents’ stories bear an historical aspect in them and can be rather different to the actual experiences the children might make when going there on vacation. As Runak describes it:

„And I was back there [...]. I don’t know what I wanted to see and I don’t know what I was imagining but it wasn’t fun, it wasn’t good [...]. It’s not the same thing to be in reality there and to just read about it and just hear about it and just [hear] memories that my parents have from there. My father for example, he can just relate personally to Kurdistan that time he was there.“ (Runak 103-111)

The differences between imaginations constructed through parents’ stories, literature or media, and actual experiences can cause disappointment. Runak has explained to me these differences she noticed several years ago when she went back to the Kurdish part where her family is from. She didn’t have much to share with the girls of her generation, she says, and to her it seemed that they didn’t talk very much about being ‘Kurdish’ – something which is emphasized in the diaspora. According to Runak this is mostly due to the surrounding people: in Sweden, Kurds are a minority and are being defined by the majority as ‘others’, as ‘Kurds’ or ‘immigrants’. In the Kurdish village she visited, however, all people were Kurds, so being Kurdish was ‘natural’ and thus nothing which needed to be emphasized. In various parts of my interviews the importance of how you are seen or defined by ‘others’ or in Frederik Barth’s words ‘the ascription by others’ has a strong influence on feelings of belonging.

As the everyday-life takes place in Sweden the imaginations of the homeland are much more present than actual experiences. A characteristic of these imaginations is to romanticize everything connected to the parents’ homeland.

„I have some memories from there. Most of them are happy memories of course. But I know that it was very...I mean for a 10-year old to move from Nintendo, soccer and having TV all the time, back there to 45 degrees, no electricity, no one to play with, I couldn’t speak the language. So I know it was hard. And I often told my mother and father I wanted to go back to Sweden, all my sisters and brothers did that. But now afterwards, 10 years later, I see those as happy and fun memories. I have blocked out the sad ones the boring ones. And I think it’s partly because I have this romantic view of how Kurdistan is but I know that it’s not like that. No, it’s very tough and its poverty is broad. I often see the romantic and funny and happy part of Kurdistan. But if I give myself a minute to think I know the problems there, the deep problems, social, economic, political, religious. Every kind of problem you could think of, we have it down there. But in

Sweden, and I think this is true for every young Kurd in Sweden, we have a romantic picture of how it is down there. We think that if we [the Kurds] will be left alone, everything will be fine but it's not like that." (Derin 207-223)

Derin has spent his early childhood in the Kurdish homeland and can draw back to very concrete every-day experiences (in contrast to experiences from vacation) of that time.

There is a gap between reality and the image the second-generation of the Kurdish diaspora seems to have or to be able to hold on to. However, there is also an awareness of this gap, so that in a sense it would become a conscious romantization, or maybe a situational romantization. Situational in the sense that there is in contrast to the romantic image an awareness and a critique about certain social and political conditions in the Kurdish regions. The poverty of the people, the problematic infrastructural and economical situation as well as the corruptive moments within politics have been mentioned as parts of the Kurdish societies.

„In southern Kurdistan, well it's very corrupt in the region there. It's very much like if they [the people] have some friends or family, they try to give them jobs without having them the knowledge for doing the work. And they're more interested in building five star-hotels than building roads and giving electricity to the people and running water and so on." (Azad 340-344)

On the other hand the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq is considered as an important step forward to the goal of an independent state. It is thus perceived as a sign of hope.

„It's good, it's wonderful. They've basically been in an autonomous situation since the beginning of the 90s. So I mean it's great, they handle it great. Of course you can criticize it internally but if you look at the Middle East as a whole, they are handling it great, compared to other states in the Middle East." (Leila 429-432)

In a sense this discrepancy between the romantic idea of 'Kurdistan' on the one side and the internal disruptures and problems of the Kurdish societies there "at home" on the other side, seems to be incorporated into an emotional as well as a rational approach. The role of emotions in this respect has also been addressed by the Iranian film maker Hamid Naficy who speaks of the appearance of nostalgia in exile. According to him, such nostalgic imaginations can soften traumatic experiences, engender ethnic solidarity, while at the same time representing ambiguities and contradictions (Naficy 1991 in Six-Hohenbalken 2002: 300). I would say that nostalgia is not so much the case among the students participating in this study as the majority has not spent such a long time of their lives there. Instead, the emotions and imaginations are shaped mostly in the diasporic exchange, within the families

or through the media, or during vacations. The fact that Sweden is very much appreciated as a place of living is likely to play a role here, too. Moving to the original homeland is not so much a question. However, there are certain things which the students connect to the Kurdish context that they miss in Swedish society.

(III.5.) Sweden - „Kurdistan“

„I wouldn't say that there is a homogeneous Kurdish nor Swedish culture but I mean the language, the literature, people's ways of interacting with each other, social codes, social norms.“ (Sozan 183-185)

Besides family it is mainly the Swedish context which constitutes the centre of reference for the students. It is the real, actual context of everyday life as well as the place of socialization and childhood. It is in this context in which all my informants have spent most of their lifetime so far and it could be consequently said it's the place and society they know best.

I have asked them about what they especially like as well as what they miss in the Swedish society. I wanted to find out about the values that they consider important. In their answers the students have told me about the values and norms of the Swedish society in comparison to what they have been conveyed by their parents (associated with their Kurdish background). Their replies therefore do not only deliver insight into appreciated Swedish values and norms but also Kurdish ones.

Sweden has evoked very positive associations among the students. In their answers a variety of different aspects were named which added to the great value of Swedish society.

The freedom to be critical towards everything, the space for diversity, the possibility of free education and the political system which stands for equality and social justice, were among the things named by my interview partners. One described it as a very humane and peaceful country.

„I like that Sweden is not corrupt. It makes you feel very secure to be in a country where you can rely on the laws. And they have a very well going system what goes for living here. I mean the standards. It is a very human system because no one in Sweden is actually poor. No one could go to bed and feel that ,oh no I don't have enough money to eat'. It is a very good system when you think about the weak people in the society. So that is very much what I like about Sweden.“ (Sozan 292-299)

The recognition of humanity as part of Swedish society grows partly out of an awareness of very brutal moments in human history. The suffering of the Kurdish people and their

experience of genocide evokes a sensitivity among the students participating in this study. A number of my informants have a direct relation to it through their parents who have been persecuted and suffered brutal treatment due to their political activism.

In addition, Sweden is valued as a place where diversity can develop and is encouraged. As I have outlined earlier a prosperous organizational life has had the chance to evolve due to supportive Swedish policies.

„I appreciate like...it's a place where a lot of things mix I think. So you can find all kinds of food and all kinds of music and I think you can easily access whatever you want to do. I think it's a really good place to live. And although some political things I disagree with, I think it's still a good platform to organize yourself, for whatever cause you want to work for. That's a really good thing. Because in some other countries the state tries to interfere with that.“ (Azad 230-235)

The fact that the Swedish state is not interfering in the development of one's own personality, thoughts and ideas is appreciated. Being encouraged to think critical is most likely also seen in comparison to the situation in the Kurdish regions where political parties tend to be the ruling power in shaping the people's opinions and point of views. Freedom of expression has been repeatedly denied to Kurds in the home regions and is therefore a high appreciated value, for the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden.

As education in Sweden is open for everybody no matter what social class the person comes from, everybody has the chance to make something out of his/her life.

„Yes, I appreciate that I have all the possibilities lying there. It's all up to you, to make a difference and take the chance to be something, be somebody. I like that. You don't have to be like from a really, really rich family to be able to [gain] education.“ (Ferhat 156-158)

The students' statements have revealed a consciousness and an appreciation for the democratic Swedish welfare state. This appreciation mostly concerns the institutional, legal and political framework of the Swedish state, aspects which were among the values mentioned. The critique has pointed towards the private, especially the social aspects.

It has been interesting that all my female informants have commented rather critical about the very individualized character of Swedish society and the lack of social life. None of the male participants commented on the social life of Swedish society. In the following quotation a female student describes the strong social bonding within her family:

„My family we are like very tight and we talk about everything. We always eat supper together. And our relatives we love each other and we always help each

other. I think, what I have learned from my family is that family always comes first no matter what. I sometimes miss that with my Swedish friends.“ (Leila 250-254)

The individualism is, however, also perceived as a value in terms of freedom. One girl, who mentioned in our talk as well the boundaries and restrictions she faces being a Kurdish girl, perceives the character of the social life in Sweden ambivalent:

„People are not so friendly here like in Kurdistan. But at the same time here in Sweden they give you more space more respect in another way. You get a little more space. In Kurdistan everyone is getting involved and your problem is everyone's problem. So even though they are more friendly and caring, sometimes you need the space. And sometimes you need more caring. So I would like to have a little bit more caring here in Sweden. Like if somebody hits me on the street nobody cares. This kind of things I miss here.“ (Lana 237-243)

Lana considers social life important in the form of 'caring' and being 'friendly' with each other which she sometimes misses in Swedish society. But to have your own space is seen desirable as well: people mind their own business and do not get involved in the lives of others. Thus a combination between social caring and individual freedom are seen valuable here.

As has been described in one of the above comments, social life adds to a feeling of home. The question of home reveals a great deal of how ambiguous, contradictory and situational belonging can be. In the following I will line out how it is shaped by internal and external factors within various contexts and experiences.

(III.5.) Home

In theoretical debates on diaspora focus has shifted from homeland territory and 'return' towards the notion of *home*. 'Home' then is not necessarily connected to a territory anymore and does not imply return as self-evident (Alinia 2004: 123). Instead, questions such as what is 'home', how is 'home' defined or experienced by people living in diasporas become the core of interest.

Home can be conceived in different contexts and is thus neither associated with only one locality anymore nor necessarily related to a geographical locality at all. Home is besides describing a physical reality also connected to imaginations of belonging somewhere or of feeling 'to be at home' (Agnew 2005: 15). In fact the tension between living somewhere and remembering somewhere else, between "here" and "there", physical and metaphorical home, shapes the diasporic experience of individuals (Agnew 2005: 4).

The bonding to two or more places and different social, cultural and political spaces challenge questions about home and belonging. Those questions have acquired an important standing within migration studies (e.g. Appadurai 1996). In addition to the individual level of contest, the collective dimension in terms of group formation, minority politics or association life comes into sight. As Cohen and Vertovec comment, "The awareness of multi-locality also stimulates the need to conceptually connect oneself with others, both 'here' and 'there', who share the same 'routes' and 'roots'" (Vertovec & Cohen 1999: xviii).

I would say that it is often in the context of groups, or in situations of interaction between two or more persons, that questions about home and belonging are negotiated.

It is common sense that those questions are relevant to second-generation migrants but that the answers differ from the first generation. As I have described in the previous chapter the direct relation and everyday-life experience of the parents' home country is often missing. This opens up the space for the second generation of creating an own image of the homeland. This image is mostly shaped by the family and sometimes friends, the media and the diasporic community.

(III.5.) "Where do you feel at home?"

"That's a really hard question." (Leila 141)

"It's like I just choose here or there." (Runak 211)

In my interviews, the question of *home* has led to ambivalent and reluctant answers. The idea of home appears as something dynamic and is shaped by a back and forth between Sweden and the Kurdish region their parents come from. It is a back and forth between geographical localities as well as social spaces. Some of my interviewees also described home as something related to their families or friends, others named very concrete places, like the district or the house they grew up in.

„Some place where I am with my parents and with my family...that's a very difficult question. Because when I am on vacation or something and someone asks me, I would say I am Swedish. But when I get back here I never feel Swedish, because I am never going to be accepted by the Swedish as a Swedish. But I have a very strong connection with Kurdistan as well.“ (Furat 128-132)

While Sweden is connected to very concrete and real experiences, the Kurdish context often relies on shorter visits in form of vacation, childhood experiences, stories from their parents and the media. Moreover, identity appears to be situational. Depending on where you are, the feeling of belonging might change.

The feeling of belonging is shaped by how you are perceived from the outside, the 'others'. It has been extensively proved that a person's belonging is not only shaped by him-/herself but by the social surrounding as well. How do people look at you and how do groups include or exclude, become the decisive parameters here. One student speaks on this aspect:

„I feel at home in Sweden but it happens sometimes that others don't see me living here or don't think this is my home. And the same thing is true when I am in Kurdistan. They think ok he's not from here, he's from Sweden and here they think he's not from here he's from Kurdistan, so that part is true. But also I see it as a good thing to have two places to call your home.“ (Derin 238-242)

How 'the others' in terms of your social environment classify you, influences the feeling of home. Thus feeling 'at home' is closely connected to social relations, to people. Drawing back to Frederik Barth's concept of ethnic groups, it has been both the self-ascription as well as the ascription by others which make you a member of a group. Belonging, how it has been interpreted and depicted by my interviewees, is very much linked to groups of people and this again defines where you feel at home. For Kurds in the diaspora this can create a situation of feeling to belong nowhere in full means.

„The thing is I don't think they see me as real Kurdish either in some way because that's a problem. A lot of Kurds outside Kurdistan feel they don't belong anywhere in some sort, because if they go back to their own country, people look at them differently because they have been living in Europe all their life. And when they come here they aren't being seen as Swedish.“ (Furat 149-153)

I would say that it is also the fragmented situation of the Kurdish regions and the fact that there is no nation-state called Kurdistan, which add to the challenging character of the question about home. Those aspects play a role especially in direct confrontations about where one's home is.

(III.5.) 'Where do you come from?'

“It depends on the situation.” (Nalin 246)

It has been interesting that the idea of home is not necessarily identical to the answers of where one comes from. Here the students could draw back to very concrete situations and

experiences. However, the answers to my question 'Where do you come from?' revealed as well the ambiguity and the complexity of experiencing home. It was explained to me that answers to this question very much depend on the context and the person who was asking. The sensitive differences in the way people ask, whether the question results from a discriminative point of view or an interested one, can determine the answer.

„I think it's such a silly question. Because it's always like they ask you what your name is and where you come from. Of course it's something you want to know, but I don't think that it's that big of a deal to ask it as the second question when you meet someone. So when people ask me like that I say Stockholm or a *district in Stockholm* but otherwise ... I mean I would say I am from Sweden but I wouldn't say I am Swedish, if that makes sense. But at the same time I wouldn't say I am from Kurdistan, but I would say I am Kurdish.“ (Leila 170-176)

„I am Kurd from Sweden. It's a strange answer but it's true. People say I am Kurd from Iraq, Kurd from...but I say Kurd from Sweden.“ (Lana 175-176)

My interviewees distinguish between 'being Kurdish' and 'coming from Sweden'. It might be described as the difference between ethnicity and national belonging that come into play here. Even if they wanted to, most of the students describe it as impossible to just give Sweden as an answer. Due to their look (black hair), it is a very common question which they face even in Sweden, which most students consider part of their home.

„Well, of course, you have to show where you are from, that's the first thing. Take me, for example, I never can say I am from Sweden. If I say it to someone outside Sweden or inside Sweden, this causes laugh because I don't look like Swedish persons, you know. A guy asked me where I was from, I said Sweden to see how he reacts and he didn't say anything. He came back 5 min later, and asked me, where are you from actually. And in this situation, if I say I am from Sweden, no, it's not working. And I don't want to say it because I don't have a history here. Where am I from in Sweden? You can't find anything. But if I go back to Kurdistan, I can show you the village that seven generations before me came from.“ (Diyar 660-670)

There is a clear self-perception of being Kurdish and not Swedish which has been formed through the smaller social unit of the family as well as the bigger social environment of Swedish society. Moreover, having a family history somewhere can define where home is for you.

Another student explains to me that to him this question shows a differentiated interest of the person who is asking. He thus considers this question very positive:

„Well, I often get the question where I come from, but I like that. I don't like that people don't ask, because I think that if they don't ask me they just look at me as

an immigrant. I think that they are putting a value into the specific origin of the people I think.“ (Erdal 210-213)

Home and belonging are connected to different dimensions which are often intertwined: social relations like family or friends, and places such as an apartment, a house or a country. In the Kurdish context, the question about home and belonging can also enter into a political dimension. Answering the question of where one comes from with ‘Kurdistan’ entails further questions and explanations.

„My answer is that I am from East Kurdistan. But always it demands an explanation as well because not a lot of people know what East Kurdistan is so I explain to them that it is the part which Iran has occupied.“ (Sozan 266-268)

The terminology is the demonstration of a political position which is an unspoken rule in the Kurdish community. As a result East-/West-/North-/South- Kurdistan have evolved as a new terminus which is commonly used among the Kurdish diaspora. The political position is not always the prior reason for this answer, yet in some situations it is used.

„I always say I am Kurdish but it depends on who is asking me, I think. And if it's a Turk, I say I am from Kurdistan.“ (Leila 192-193)

Ethnic belonging is situational. Eriksen has among others pointed to this characteristic of ethnicity. It is up to the agents themselves to decide how significant their ethnic belonging is in different social situations. But it can only come into existence through social contact in a non-monocultural setting as there has to be someone to communicate ethnic difference to (Eriksen 1993: 18-32). The fact that a Turk is asking in the situation described above, moves this question on a political level. In other situations it can be the wish to belong to the majority society or to belong to a European country which determines the answer. The lack of a country can cause a feeling of homelessness to some extent as has been described by one of my interview partners:

„When you are outside Kurdistan everyone else has their own country to go to and you feel like a stranger everywhere, it's a feeling you have. Like when I talk with an Iranian or Arabic or Mexican or foreign people in a foreign country they always have the feeling of that they have something. You know they have their country, but as a Kurd you are an immigrant.“ (Lana 351-356)

This feeling of not belonging anywhere was yet not ostensible among my interviewees.

„Not belonging anywhere, I wouldn't put it like that, because I feel like I do belong but on two different places. And I don't feel that, oh no I am too much of a Swede for Kurdistan, and oh no I am too much of a Kurd for Sweden. I think I am just

very much in between and I feel comfortable in both my so called identities.“
(Sozan 287-290)

Being neither/nor and both at the same time has been termed by Du Bois as “double consciousness” (Du Bois 1994). It causes challenges in a world that is divided through borders, however it also carries a high potential these days. Too much focus has been set only on the problematic aspects of persons with multiple points of reference. As Sabine Strasser argues, we should not overlook the high potential of people with transnational experience, or in her words aim towards a “politics of plural participation” (Strasser 2009: 262). Although Sabine Strasser refers in her elaborations to the first generation, I would say that this potential is to a certain extent present among second generation migrants as well, as they can become mediators between different norm and value systems. Belonging describes social and emotional relations between people and it is expressed through both collective and individual actions and feelings (Strasser 2009: 31). Salman Rushdie has described the ambiguities which can evolve around multiple feelings of belonging in very colourful terms:

“But I, too, have ropes around my neck, I have them to this day, pulling me this way and that, East and West, the nooses tightening, commanding, *choose, choose*.
I buck; I snort, I whiny, I rear, I kick. Ropes, I do not choose between you. Lassoos, lariats, I choose neither of you, and both. Do you hear. I refuse to choose.” (Rushdie 1994: 211)

The ambiguity of home and belonging causes challenges in the search for one's identity. As we have heard so far, this status can also evoke feelings of not belonging anywhere. Having this in mind I wondered if this dual affiliation was considered as a value or as problematic by the second-generation Kurds of my study.

„It's both. Sometimes, it's called cultural [...] it's very difficult, but sometimes it's very valuable because you have different perspectives on things. Because it's not just, oh this is how it should be. It makes you think and act different in different situations. But sometimes it's so difficult, like sometimes it's small things. I want to go to a party and my mum says, 'oh you are 16, you should not go to a party and you should not meet boys', and I think it's very natural if I tell her where I am and ..it's very small things.“ (Lana 214-220)

Lana describes here a situation where the two norm-systems clash. She is in-between, on the one side her family surrounding and on the other side her Swedish friends' surrounding. Despite a few ambivalent aspects which were depicted in form of non-pleasant situations, it

is, however, considered a profit to have two settings, in terms of values, social codes, language, traditions etc.

„I think there has been times when I thought it's hard, for example, where I grew up. I grew up in this very Swedish society, I was the only immigrant, and the only one with black hair. And of course there have been times when I thought it was hard, but not to the extent that I wanted to be Swedish with blond hair, not to that extent. And looking forward it is valuable to me. Because I get to experience so much things that other people actually don't get to experience. So it doesn't matter if you are Swedish from Sweden or Kurdish from Kurdistan they don't get to experience the stuff I do. So I think I have to see it as a valuable thing and take advantage of it for myself.“ (Leila 195-203)

„Because I can take part in the best of the two worlds so to speak. Here I have the best education I can get, one of the best at least. I don't know, but if I would be there, I would probably be as conservative as they are.“ (Furat 179-181)

In the above statements the way of thinking is mentioned indirectly. A certain degree of narrow-mindedness and conservatism are part of the image the students seem to have of the Kurds in the Kurdish regions. The freedom of thought and expression is very much appreciated in Swedish society.

In this part I have presented the empirical data from two main angles, namely study and belonging, trying to grasp the ideas, thoughts and feelings of my eleven interviewees in the respective realms. In the following Conclusion I want to bring together the theoretical approaches, method and empirical results of this study pointing towards

IV Conclusion

The increasing velocity of migration flows is leading to rapidly changing societies. We are confronted nowadays with the challenge to answer to a more and more diversified world. In such a world, the second generation of migrants constitutes an important social group. They are socialized in multiple sets of meanings, norms and values which on the one hand make multiplicity a very 'natural' part of their life but on the other hand confront them with often one-dimensional systems of categorization which still dominate our way of thinking.

In this study I have tried to depict a group of educated second generation migrants in their negotiation with belonging and identity and to find out what role their educational ambitions play here. I have chosen a context, where a special multicultural political climate meets a

particular intellectual Kurdish diaspora in Sweden which seemed to offer a 'very good' starting point for giving space to the evolvement of a group of Kurdish second generation migrants.

And indeed, it has turned out in the course of this research that this context does play an important role for the students: The Kurdish students in Sweden can take on a very exclusive position in Kurdish diasporic comparison and they are very well aware of it. Leaving this context would signify in most cases a downward climb.

The empirical data shows that these students within the frame of higher education (university) create a group of their own, constructing their collective identity in distance to their parents (first generation), yet staying closely connected to their Kurdish background. They have developed their own thoughts, ideas and opinions and are very clear and ambitious about their future career plans. At the same time they are dealing with questions of identity and their ambiguous and contested feelings of belonging. The friendships they make through joining the association cross the organizational boundaries. Some of them meet as well outside the association's activities, like for dinners, parties or other activities.

By paying attention to the use of 'We' and 'They', the boundaries (Barth 1968) which define the students' group became obvious. Three levels evolved: 'We' was used first for the Kurdish minority in Sweden, second for the Kurdish diaspora in Europe and third for the second-generation Kurdish students. Respectively 'They' was used for the Swedish majority society, second for Kurds living in the Kurdish regions and third for the first generation Kurdish immigrants (parents). The variations in the use of 'We' and 'They' strengthen the situational approach of this study. Belonging and identity appear situational and contextual (Baumann & Gingrich) and are thus of flexible and processual character (Strasser 2009).

The line between the two associations KSAF and Zanin has appeared fluent. Many members know each other from several common events. Unity, education and networking have been emphasized by KSAF and Zanin as central goals of the association work. These goals relate to both, striving for individual success as well as contributing to the development of the Kurdish regions. To unite all Kurds, to support education among Kurds and to create networks are seen as important conditions for realizing the goal of independence. This common political goal significantly shapes the collective identity – an important trigger for organization and action in the Kurdish diasporic community in general (Ammann 1997).

Both associations repeatedly stated to be non-party-political, yet they share the feeling of Kurdish nationalism which is embedded into a 'political identity' – a characteristic of Kurdish

culture, as one interviewee called it. Apparently, it grows strong due to the missing nation-state.

According to the empirical results I would say that the aspiration for higher education is more than an individual interest. The students are influenced by three main factors: the family, their ethnic background (Kurdish), and the political context (Sweden). Education is considered of high value in all the students' families. The free education system in Sweden facilitates their decision to go to university, turning it into a very "natural" step in their lives. In the eyes of most informants it is primarily the educated diaspora which is in the position to realize an independent 'Kurdistan'. Such a view seems to imply a certain responsibility.

The ideas of home, belonging and identity evoke very ambiguous, unclear, sometimes contradictory feelings, thoughts and experiences for people living in the diaspora. Being 'at home' reflects feelings of 'here' and 'there', between living somewhere and remembering somewhere (Agnew 2005). Relating to two sets of meanings, values and norms has been described as being 'in-between', being 'both and', or in Eriksen's words *ethnic anomalies* (1993).

In the case of this study the feeling of being 'in-between' appeared relevant as well, yet it was not necessarily connected to the clear experiences of different localities (Sweden – 'Kurdistan'), as it might be the case among first generation migrants.

The relation to their Kurdish background is primarily shaped through imaginations transferred by parents' or friends' stories, the media as well as vacations and visits of the Kurdish regions (only some students can draw back to childhood-memories), whereas everyday-life has been experienced mostly in Sweden. The imaginations reflect a romantic and ideal picture of 'Kurdistan', yet, they also include an awareness of the political, social and economical difficulties and disruptions in the respective regions which stand in opposition to Sweden being perceived as a stable, democratic and socially equal system. For the students participating in this study, the value of Sweden as a country of residence is highly appreciated. Therefore the contested and multiple feelings of belonging do not so much concern a place of living but rather the relation to social groups (Kurdish diaspora, Swedish majority society and Kurds living in the home regions) and various sets of meaning.

In my opinion these second-generation migrants add further dimensions to the discourses and practices of multiculturalism and cultural diversity and they carry a potential of communicating along the lines of multiplicity of today's societies. On the other hand the Kurdish example proves that despite the increasing movement of people a clear national

point of reference (where one's own people reside) is still considered an important part in finding one's own identity. Nationalism is far from dissolving.

In order to get further insights into these complex processes and dynamics addressed in the study, more research in this area seems very important to me. A comparison between the position of Kurdish communities in different European countries would be interesting. So too would be the differing perceptions of the majority societies. Moreover, it would be illuminating to learn about the motivations of second-generation Kurdish students in Sweden who fully neglect their Kurdish background or of those second-generation Kurdish immigrants who are not studying at university. A longer-term study of the student informants could bring up many further insights as well.

Conducting this research has been a great challenge for me as a researcher. It has made me realize the difficulties and challenges of doing research in fields that are constantly re-negotiated through the social interaction of people. As I have focused primarily on the context of the informants' experiences as members of associations, I have gained insight only to one part of the students' lives. The realization that my insights are limited to one dimension of Kurdish students' lives leaves me open to re-think and the evolving developments within this important field of inquiry.

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Interviews:

Students

Diyar, Stockholm University Library, 13.12.08

Azad, Stockholm University Library, 29.01.09

Sozan, Home, 03.02.09

Leila, KTH Library, 04.02.09

Derin, Stockholm University Library, 08.02.09

Ferhat, Stockholm University Library, 11.02.09

Furat, Stockholm University Library, 11.02.09

Erdal, Stockholm University Library, 18.02.09

Nalin, Home, 20.02.09

Lana, Stockholm University Library, 25.02.09

Runak, Stockholm University Library, 04.03.09

Appendix

1. Questionnaire

Warm Up

Now in the beginning could you just tell me a little bit what you are studying, for how long etc....

Main Part

Education, Studies

1. Why did you choose this subject? (technical subject, economy.. > success?)
2. Why did you decide to go to university?
3. What role did your family play in your decision to go to university?
4. What occupation do your parents have? What education do they have?

Student Association

Could you tell me a little bit about your relation and engagement to Kurdish student associations here in Stockholm?

5. How did you come to the Kurdish student association?
6. What were the reasons for you to join this association?
7. Did you have Kurdish friends before you went to university? Yes, no > Why? What kind of school did you go to?
8. In which ways do you participate in this association? What are the activities of this association?
9. Are there any internal discussions going on in the association concerning the different parts of Kurdistan? Which part of Kurdistan do most students in the association come from?
10. How many males and females are in the board of KSAF?
11. I have heard that KSAF has a collaboration with the Jewish student association (Judstud)? What is the reason for it in your opinion?
12. Are you member of any other Kurdish organizations? If yes, which one?, Why?
13. Did such a student engagement exist before the founding of KSAF? If yes, which one?

Future career/plans

14. What ideas do you have about a later career?
15. Do you have a role model for your career?
16. Would you say that your future plans relate in any way to your Kurdish background? If yes, in which ways?
17. With whom do you speak about education or future career opportunities?
18. Does your family have any wishes for your future?
19. Do you plan to live in Sweden in the future or migrate to another country? Where, why?

- *(Not-)belonging*: stories&experiences in Swedish and Kurdish society
- What do you mean by THE Kurds?
- *Homeland*: imagined or concretized (food, smell...)?
- *Gender*
- „freedom“
- *Success*

Home, Identity

20. Where do you feel at home?
21. If somebody asks you where you are from, what is your answer?
22. Would you describe the affiliation to two countries as a value or problematic? Why?

Sweden

23. What do you like about living in Sweden?
24. What do you miss in Sweden?
25. How would you describe the situation of Kurds in Sweden?
26. How in your opinion is the relation between Kurds and other immigrant groups from those regions (Middle East) here in Sweden?
27. Have you had any specific experiences being treated as a Kurd or as an immigrant in a special way?
28. What language do you speak at home and with your Kurdish friends?
29. Where did you learn Kurdish? Is it your 1st language?

Kurdish regions

30. How is your Kurdish background present in your life? What role does religion have for you?
31. Have you been to the homeland of your parents? If yes, how often and at what age? How was your experience?
32. What do you think about the society in „Kurdistan“(What is Kurdistan for you)?
33. What is your opinion towards the political situation in „Kurdistan“?
34. Why does Kurdish nationalism become so compelling in the diaspora?
35. What role do Kurds outside the Kurdish regions play for Kurdish issues? What relevance do they have compared to the Kurds living inside those regions?
36. If there was an independent nation-state called „Kurdistan“ would you move there? If yes, why? If no, why?

Transnational Networks

37. What Kurdish contacts do you have outside Sweden? Where?
38. What role do those contacts play in your life right now?
39. Do you think those contacts/networks could have any relevance for your future career or in finding a job?

Final Part

40. background information:
 - name, date & place of birth
 - family situation: Where does your family come from originally? Both parents Kurdish?, Who of your family is here in Sweden?
41. Since when have you been living in Sweden?

Is there anything you want to add?

2. Abstract

English

Focus of this fieldstudy is on second-generation Kurdish students in Stockholm who are engaged in Kurdish student associations. The study deals with questions of belonging and identity and their interrelations to the students' high motivation for their university study/career. Of particular interest are the social interactions where identity and belonging are continuously negotiated. The research shows that the students participating in this fieldstudy construct/build a collective identity of their own in the frame of Kurdish student associations. The common political goal of an independent "Kurdistan", constitutes an important trigger in the process of group bonding. The goal is embedded into the associations' primary principles and values of unity, networking and education. In the course of the fieldstudy the strong impression arose that the multicultural political climate and the rather exceptional intellectual Kurdish diaspora in Sweden constitute an important contextual setting for the evolvement of Kurdish student associations.

Key words: migration, diaspora, multiculturalism, nationalism, integration, education, identity, ethnicity, belonging, home

Deutsch

Der Fokus dieser Feldstudie liegt auf kurdischen StudentInnen der zweiten Generation in Stockholm, die sich in einem kurdischen Studentenverein engagieren. Die Studie befasst sich mit Fragen der Zugehörigkeit und Identität und setzt diese in Bezug zur Studiumsmotivation der StudentInnen. Von besonderem Interesse sind dabei die sozialen Interaktionen, in denen Identität und Zugehörigkeiten fortlaufend ausverhandelt werden. Diese Forschung zeigt, dass die StudentInnen, die an der Studie teilgenommen haben, im Rahmen der Studentenvereine eine eigene kollektive Identität konstruieren. Das gemeinsame politische Ziel eines unabhängigen „Kurdistan“ dient dabei als wichtiger Anstoß für den Prozess des Gruppenzusammenhalts. Das Ziel ist eingebunden in die vorrangigen Grundsätze und Werte der Vereine, Einheit, Vernetzung und Bildung. Im Verlauf der Feldstudie ist der starke Eindruck entstanden, dass das multikulturelle politische Klima und die eher außergewöhnliche intellektuelle kurdische Diaspora in Schweden einen wichtigen Rahmen für die Entstehung der untersuchten kurdischen Studentenvereine bilden.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Migration, Diaspora, Multikulturalismus, Nationalismus, Integration, Bildung, Identität, Ethnizität, Zugehörigkeiten (belonging), "zu Hause" (home)

Curriculum Vitae

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Place of Birth	Munich

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2007 - 2009	European Joint Master of Social and Cultural Anthropology: 'CREOLE Cultural Differences & Transnational Processes', Vienna & Stockholm
Since Oct 2005	Arabic and Oriental Studies, University of Vienna
2004 - 2007	Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna (BA-equivalent)
Jun 2003	Abitur (A-levels), Luisengymnasium, Munich
2000 - 2001	School exchange year, SCCE Monivae College, Hamilton (Victoria), Australia
1989 – 2003	Primary School and Gymnasium in Munich

Practical experiences

22 – 24 Oct 2009	Participation in the conference <i>Progressive Muslims</i> , Berlin (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung)
22 Jul – 02 Aug 2009	Lecture at the <i>Sokrates Intensive Programme</i> , Department of Social- and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna
16 –19 Oct 2008	Participation in the conference <i>Progressive Muslims</i> , Berlin (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung)
13 – 22 Jul 2008	Participation in the <i>Sokrates Intensive Programme</i> , Department of Social- and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna
Mar 2006 – Apr 2007	Internship at the <i>Museum of Ethnology</i> , Vienna
2006	Creation of the 1st European <i>Competence and Network Centre for Innovations and Projects in Cultural and Social Anthropology</i> (member of the committee): www.masn-austria.org
03 – 06 Nov 2005	Organization of the 1 st MASN-conference: <i>Connecting Europe-Transcending Borders</i> , Ottenstein, Austria
18 – 25 Sep 2005	Participation in the <i>Mediterranean Ethnological Summer Symposium 05</i> , Piran, Slovenia
Since Jul 2005	Member of MASN (M oving A nthropology S ocial N etwork)
2001 – 2003	Participation as trainee in the school project called <i>Anti-Racism-Training</i> (trainings with young pupils)

International Experience

2008 – 2009	Stockholm; MA Program
Feb 2008	Damaskus, Syria; Language exchange (Arabic)
Jul – Aug 06	Casablanca, Morocco; Language exchange programme as a student and as a tutor (Arabic, German, English),
Dec 2003 - May 2004	Australia and South East Asia; Travels
2000 - 2001	Hamilton, Australia; School exchange

Language Skills

- English fluent
- Spanish good
- Swedish good
- Arabic basic
- French basic

Fields of Interest

- Multiculturalism, Integration, Migration
- Transnationalism, Nationalism
- Gender
- Education
- Middle East, Europe