

Abstract

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

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

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

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

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

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