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DIASPORA FORMATION AMONG KURDS IN SWEDEN

Transborder citizenship and politics of belonging

Abstract

This article will argue that diasporan populations act both outwards, towards the former homeland, and inwards, towards the new homeland. The politics of belonging among diasporan Kurds in Sweden shows that engagement in one direction – towards the former homeland – does not exclude involvement in other directions – towards residing society as the new homeland or other countries. This juxtaposition that is materialised by the way of a range of political, cultural and social transnational organisations and networks in itself challenges the state-oriented idea that citizens only act within and in relation to one political space, namely the state in which they are citizens. In this respect, the concept of transborder citizenship that refers to people participating in the institutional systems and political practices of various states can further elucidate the onwards/inwards commitments of the Kurds in Sweden.

Keywords

Diaspora • transborder citizenship • politics of belonging • Kurdish diaspora • Sweden

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1 Introduction

At the end of January 2006, the former Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Nordic Representative, Taha Barwari, was the host of the first Kurdish Gala in Stockholm. The Gala, which was attended by a large audience gave Mr. Barwari an opportunity to appraise not only a group of leading Kurds who over the preceding years had been "successful in various areas of Swedish life but also native Swedes who had in one way or another taken an interest in the Kurds and publicly promoted their cause."

At this event, a number of Swedish and Kurdish celebrities and personalities were given honorary awards where an appointed jury praised the actor Gösta Ekman for "shedding light on a matter which was cast in total darkness until the 1990s and giving the Kurdish people his support when they needed it the most", the politician Fredrik Malm for "his public dedication to the Kurdish question and promoting the Kurdish people's rights in different areas with striking empathy and understanding" and the artist Darin Zanyar for his "conspicuous achievements in the domain of the pop music" and also for his ability to "introduce the Kurds on a new arena and to inspire through his success a whole new generation to take pride in their origins". At the second gala, which took place at the same place in 2009, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg was awarded for his "many years of support for the Kurds", whereas the Swedish NGO Qandil was recognised for its "reconstruction and water projects in Iraqi Kurdistan since 1992" and its long work to "raise public awareness of humanitarian issues in the Kurdish region". Correspondingly, the Kurdish football team Dalkurd FF was designated as the Kurd of the year for "breaking records in the Swedish football league", as they climbed from the 6th division to the 2nd in four years. It is worth noting that Maria Wetterstrand, the former spokesperson of the Swedish Green Party, and Katri Linna, the Swedish Ombudsman against Discrimination, were among the personalities presenting the awards to the candidates at the 2009s gala.

However, the Kurdish Galas, which won praise from several Kurdish websites and radio and TV stations, can be seen as part of a wide range of transnational organisations and networks that Kurds have created around the world, particularly in Western states. These networks and organisations function not only as substantial means of integration in those Western societies where Kurds reside but also as genuine structures of agency aiming at, in one way or another, affecting the Kurdish politics in Kurdistan,[1] not least in the direction of democracy, the promotion of human rights and peace settlement with non-violent means (Khayati 2012a: 181).

At both occasions, the former Nordic Representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Taha Barwari, stressed the "successful achievements" of the Kurds in Sweden and expressed his gratitude to "the Swedish friends of Kurdistan". His most noticeable expression "we celebrate and honor Kurdistan in Sweden, and Sweden in Kurdistan" shows a specific case of juxtaposition, where

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the supporting Swedish political context together with the diversified social composition of the Kurdish population (Khayati 2008) enable the Kurds to develop a considerable diaspora organisation and a strong sense of diasporic belonging. But also to maintain what Eva Østergaard-Nielsen (2000) calls the "dual political agenda" and what Glick Schiller (2005) describes as the manifestation of transborder citizenship, referring to people participating in the institutional systems and political practices of various states and developing relationships to more than one government. In this context, there is a formation of a multidimensional transnational social field (Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton-Blanc 1995), with a broad repertoire of ethnic and cultural associations, social and professional institutions, online and on air arrangements, networks of personalities and celebrities in various political and cultural fields not only interconnecting Sweden and Kurdistan but also crossing the boundaries of several nation-states.

With this background, the focus of this article is the outwards/inwards transnational activities that diasporan Kurds assume towards both former and new homeland. The article departs from the following questions: (1) What is the nature of the transnational networks and organisations that Kurds create in Sweden? and (2) What importance does the Swedish political context have on the transnational exchanges that Kurds maintain in Sweden?

With regard to these questions, we will argue in this article that politics of belonging among diasporan Kurds in Sweden is founded on far-reaching transnational organisations and networks and a multidimensional homeland orientation that enable them to act not only outwards – towards their former homeland – but also inwards – towards their new homeland. Additionally, we will pay particular attentions to the Swedish context where a politically and socially diversified and heterogeneous Kurdish diaspora drives considerable advantages from a propitious political environment in order to create and consolidate its diasporic organisations and networks. Considered as a "centre of gravity" for the Kurdish diaspora (see Ahmadzadeh 2003; Bruinessen 1999, 2000; Khayati 2012b), Sweden is – as was indicated above – a seat of a broad range of cultural associations, social and professional institutions, youth and women associations, online and on air arrangements, networks of personalities and celebrities that Kurds have developed in the course of last 30 years.

As noted above, the notion of transborder citizenship can particularly serve as a useful tool of analysis for elucidating the politics of belonging among the Kurds based on those onwards/inwards activities they undertake in Sweden. Even though it tends to appear as a normative model rather than a theoretical approach, transborder citizenship refers, however, to those diasporic people who live their lives across the borders of two or more nation-states and participate in the legal and institutional system and political practices of these various states. In other words, the notion of transborder citizenship goes beyond a purely legal and juridical definition of citizenship, and even beyond the idea of dual citizenship, with the objective of claiming for migrant and refugee groups the right to be social and cultural citizens of various states (Glick Schiller 2005; Glick Schiller & Fouron 2001). For that reason, the concept of transborder citizenship forms a contrast to the nation-centred form of attachment – also described in terms of methodological nationalism; a perspective that ignores or underestimates the social phenomena and social problems that do not fit into the state-centred model of membership (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002: 308, see also Khayati 2011a). Moreover, the concept of transborder citizenship can provide the notion of diaspora with a more modulated and agency-related perspective as it challenges the perception of "victim diaspora" (Khayati 2008) and consequently suggest a form of knowledge asserting to see how certain diasporan *elites* have a consciousness that they can reconstitute their simultaneous embeddedness and mobilise their potential within the frame of extended political, cultural and socio-economic spaces that transcend the boundaries of nation-states (Rosenau 1990, 1994).

This article is based on fieldwork among Kurds in Sweden including conversations and interviews with 22 people (mainly celebrities, political debaters, journalists, politicians, association leaders, writers, artists, young activists and association members) carried out during 2010–2012. These people were chosen due to their prominent position in the Kurdish diaspora, with the possibility of influencing the political and cultural life of both former and new homelands. Stockholm, which has been considered as one of the most important loci for Kurds in Sweden (Bruinessen 1999; Khayati 2008), constitutes the major investigation field for this study. Transnational activities among the Kurds in other Swedish cities such as Uppsala, Linköping, Gothenburg and Örebro have also been incorporated in this work in proportion to the position they maintain within the Kurdish diaspora.

Additionally, a cyber-investigation was carried out, focusing on the ways in which computer-mediated communication enables geographically distant individuals to come together to occupy new social spaces online and to define their own realities (Carter 2005). This investigation was carried out mostly through visiting a range of websites and chat rooms such as *Facebook*, *Yahoo Messenger* and above all *Paltalk*.[2] Paltalk is regularly used by Kurds as a platform for political, cultural and religious debates that generally concerns Kurdish politics in Kurdistan but also the lives of Kurds in diaspora. At *Paltalk*, where the Kurds are among the most established communities in the category "Ethnic Groups", we have visited online various Kurdish chat rooms. Usually, Kurds, above all those in diaspora, have access to a large number of chat rooms that they use as platforms for amusement, social intercourse or political and organisational activities (see also Toivanen & Kivisto 2014).

Along with a range of Kurdish websites that publish and circulate information about Kurds, a number of Facebook platforms such as *Facebook Kurds in the whole World* with more than 18,000 members, *Generation for Kurdistan's Independence* with 3,500 members, *Social movement* and *My sweet Kurdistan* have been visited. Among these platforms, there are also a good number of community sites, individual blogs that systematically provide their readers not only with articles on different subjects but also with fresh news about various political and cultural events that concern the daily lives of Kurds. Visiting these websites enabled us to stay informed not only about political development in Kurdistan but also about those transnational and diasporic activities of Kurds in various countries.

In the analysis, the main findings of the fieldwork, the interviews and the cyber-investigation are summarised. The focus of the analysis is more on those main features in the material representing experiences and actions on the collective and organisational level than experiences and actions at the individual level. In doing so, we emphasise the *positive* aspects of the Kurdish diasporic organisation in Sweden, manifested *inter alia* in the form of political manifestations, associations and national associations, youth and student organisations, activities on air and online activities, such as radio and satellite television broadcasts, Internet sites and other cyber-forum created by the Kurds in Sweden. Moreover, we highlight a number of influential Kurdish personalities who occupy important positions in the centre of the Swedish public life. The quantity of activities that diasporan Kurds undertake in Sweden links the Kurds not only in Sweden and Kurdistan but also in several other states.

2 The context of the Kurdish diaspora – Sweden as a gravity centre

The experience of exile has been part and parcel of the history of Kurdish nationalism. According to Bruinessen (2000: 4), there is a close connection between exile and nationalism. Forced displacement and population movement in Kurdish societies have brought about the partial transformation of Kurdish political identity as part of the Kurdish nationalist movement became deterritorialised and transnational (Bruinessen 1999, 2000).

In their new places, a large number of them have maintained or rediscovered a sense of Kurdish identity and have organised themselves in various institutions and networks. Along with their political mobilisation, the Kurds have made use of new means of communication in diaspora, which has enabled them to become (re) oriented towards Kurdistan and their states of origin (Bruinessen 2000: 4). For instance, film production and radio broadcasts in the Kurdish language are considered as an effective way for Kurds in exile to preserve and develop their Kurdish identity. Many Kurdish authors and intellectuals have contributed to the production of a substantial number of Kurdish books, journals and other publications. They are published in Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, but above all in Sweden, where the enterprise has been generously supported (Bruinessen 1999: 9). The Kurmanji[3] literature, for example, is said to have experienced a renaissance in exile (Ahmadzadeh 2003; Bruinessen 2000). In this respect, Sweden has played an important role. The Kurdish Institute of Paris, which was founded with the support of France's Mitterrand government by Kurdish intellectuals living in different European countries, pioneers attempts to develop a standard for Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji) and organised a number of "conferences and a journal that published lists of agreed upon terms for objects and concepts in various spheres of life" (Bruinessen 1999: 9). To reinforce the Kurdish language, culture and literature, similar institutes were established by Kurdish intellectuals in Brussels (1989), Berlin (1994), Moscow (1996) and Washington DC (1997) as well as a well-endowed Kurdish library in Stockholm (1997), each serving a different clientele and promoting a distinct type of activity (Bruinessen 1999: 9).

Diasporan Kurds in Sweden – whose number is estimated to be between 60,000 and 70,000 – display a high level of cultural, political and social diversity. They come from all parts of Kurdistan, have a highly differentiated social background and engage in various skilled occupations in Swedish society. At present, Sweden is the only western country where the most advanced diasporic cultural activities take place among the Kurds. A significant number of authors, novelists, poets, politicians, political leaders, intellectuals, scholars, artists, musicians, singers and journalists have successively arrived in Sweden since the 1970s (Khayati 2008). Accordingly, the number of Kurdish writers in Sweden has clearly surpassed the number who remained in Kurdistan (Ahmadzadeh 2003). According to Hjertén (1994), the presence of such a Kurdish intelligentsia on the Swedish soil has created a specific situation where Sweden willy-nilly is now an extended Kurdistan.

As indicated above, Sweden accommodates a significant proportion of immigrants organised in associations. Prior to 2005, there were more than 50 national immigrant organisations and more than 1,000 local associations throughout the country, which benefit from a relatively liberal integration policy. The principal objectives of Swedish policy with regard to immigrant associations are said to be preserving immigrants' culture and identity, organising educational courses and activities for refugees and immigrants and encouraging them to take part in the process of integration and political decision-making (see Khayati 2008). Over the years, Sweden has built up an allowance system that has made it possible for immigrants and refugees to develop a significant associational life in the country (Borevi 2002; Khayati 2008). The immigrant associations that are created on cultural and ethnic lines receive various subsidies from the state and municipalities. Alongside cultural and ethnic associations, a range of religious institutions obtains their share of allowances directly from the state. In addition to official aid, the Islamic associations finance some of their activities from the support that they receive not only from diverse donors but also from some Islamic states in the Middle East (Berruti et al. 2002).

The tradition of helping immigrant associations stems from the popular movements (*folkrörelser*) that characterised most of Sweden's history in the 20th century. As an important and inherent feature of the nation-making process in Sweden, the popular movements actively contributed to the construction of the Swedish "home of the people" (*folkhemmet*). The standard social movement was the trade union movement, which was inspired by the ideology of Swedish social democracy. During the construction of the welfare state, these movements were an effective means for achieving ideological integration, political socialisation and popular mobilisation. Since 1975, they have also been considered as useful tools for the inclusion of immigrants into the Swedish society (see Ålund & Schierup 1991; Mulinari & Neergaard 2004).

As far as the Kurds are concerned, they found a favourable environment for creating and developing their social, ethno-cultural and professional associations. According to Minoo Alinia (1994), along with everyday racism and social exclusion, diasporan Kurds associate Sweden with democracy and political freedom providing them with opportunities to create transnational networks. However, groups of Kurdish youth, women, handicapped, writers, musicians, teachers and so on have since the 1980s made use of this advantageous milieu for promoting their particular interests. However, giving shelter to a number of Kurdish TV channels and local radios, three major umbrella organisations for cultural activities, three publication centres and a large number of web users, Sweden plays a considerable role in the crystallisation of the Kurdish diaspora.

3 The multidimensional homeland orientation

In Sweden, there are many Kurds who show commitment to the former homeland's politics. Among diasporan Kurds in Sweden there is, in other words, a strong element of homeland orientation, which is manifested in a variety of transnational practices. As Brubaker (2005) has outlined, orientation to a real or imagined "homeland" appears as "an authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty" for diasporan populations.

Generally, the Kurdish diaspora displays a strong political profile that is maintained for instance by celebrating various festivals and honouring of a number of memorial days. In this context, the honouring of the Anfal[4] and Halabja,[5] and the celebration of Newroz[6] festival are among those salient activities that are uphold annually by thousands of Kurds in Sweden and in other countries. The mass demonstrations that took place in relation to the arrest of the Kurdish PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan on 15 February 1999 is another illustrative example of the Kurdish engagement vis-à-vis their former homeland's politics. In this connection, large-scale protests were conducted in a number of EU countries, which in several cases, turned into violence. In Stockholm, up to 15,000 people demonstrated, a considerable figure

that should be related to the total Kurdish population in Sweden, which at that time was estimated to be 35,000 (Khayati 2008).

In addition to these street protests, the Kurds exhibit other forms of political mobilisation in Sweden. For instance, the massive participation of diasporan Kurds in the Iraqi elections, which took place in the end of 2005, is a further indication of how they "politicise" the transnational social fields between several Western societies when it was time to vote for their preferred political platform, *the Kurdistan Alliance*. The preliminary unofficial results, which were communicated by the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq, showed that the Kurdistan Alliance in Sweden had obtained more than 10,000 votes for a total of 18,000 Iraqi voters (Khayati 2008).

The participation of diasporan Kurds in this election can be perceived as a further indication of the fact to see how exiled Kurds can use their political rights in the European countries in order to influence the politics of the former homelands. In this context, the density of transnational contacts between not only Sweden and Iraqi Kurdistan but also in other European states was considerable as the polling stations were set up in only a few countries and localities. This did not deter the Kurds, who wanted to go to the ballots *en masse* and by all transport means from neighbouring countries or other remote areas in the Scandinavian countries. In Scandinavia, Sweden was the only host country, with voters coming in from Finland, Denmark and Norway (Khayati 2008).

The last general election that was held in Iraqi Kurdistan, on 25 July 2009, is another example of how diasporan Kurds in Sweden exerts influence over the political processes in their former societies. In many Western states, a range of communication platforms (associations, political networks and associations, Internet sites, chat and discussion forums, etc.) were established to – as many Kurds put it – promote active and effective participation in the electoral process and equally to support certain political forces in the election. Results from fieldwork as well as interviews indicate a significant support in Sweden for the oppositional group, *Change list* (Lîstî Goran), a reform-oriented political movement, which in its election manifesto sharply criticised the two dominant Kurdish parties – the PDK and the PUK – for their alleged "corrupt and non-democratic methods". Lîst Goran obtained 25% of the votes, which was in part a result of the support from Swedish Kurds (Khayati 2011a).

As the examples above illustrate, the Kurds in Sweden demonstrate a well-established participation in a number of political processes that cross the boundaries of several states, with Sweden as a major loci. The transnational activities among the Kurds express not only a collective identity and commitment to the former homeland but also a strong source of empathy and solidarity with the Kurds in other residing countries (Cohen 1997) as diasporic identities emerge at the intersection of the nation states and globalisation (Wahlbeck 1999). In this respect, the Kurdish diasporic identity appears as a result of both the collective memory from the former homeland and the transnational relations that the Kurds maintain in their residing society (Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton-Blanc 1995; Vertovec & Cohen 1999). However, diasporic belonging among Kurds in Sweden is not limited by the narrow confines of the nation-state and its institution of citizenship. Diasporan Kurds in Sweden have created a wide range of transnational institutions and networks.

4 Transnational organisation

Kurds in Sweden come from the Kurdish areas in the states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria as well as other countries with Kurdish populations. As was indicated earlier, they have different backgrounds and a relatively high average level of education. Their heterogeneous social composition, together with the Swedish political context, which according to some scholars has been favourable to the Kurdish culture and identity (Bruinessen 1999; Khayati 2008), has contributed to the emergence of a greater range of transnational activities among Swedish Kurds than among those Kurds residing in other EU countries (Bruinessen 1999). State association support has been crucial to the preservation and strengthening of the Kurdish language, culture and identity or in other words for the establishment of a strong disasporic consciousness that Kurds display in Sweden. At the national level, there are three Kurdish umbrella organisations, with different political profile. The Kurdish National Association in Sweden, with 42 affiliated clubs and 8,500 members, was created in 1981 and is the oldest and probably largest Kurdish organisation in the country. Another Kurdish umbrella organisation is Kurdish Council in Sweden, founded in 1994, an organisation with more than 20 different compounds. The Kurdish Union in Sweden, the third largest union organisation, was formed in the early 2000s. This association, which has its operation fields both at local and national levels, is a seat for 25 associations around the country (see Emanuelsson 2005; Khayati 2008).

The common characteristic of these associations is that they operate simultaneously on two different but correlated activity fields. In the first place, they follow the course of events in different parts of Kurdistan and endeavour to reach a level of political mobilisation that enables them to promote the so-called "politics of homeland". For instance, celebrating *Newroz* and other Kurdish cultural events, promoting Kurdish publishing and broadcasting, organising political demonstrations, creating mixed (Swedish–Kurdish) political and social networks and platforms, carrying out diplomatic visits, attracting the attention of national and local media, and so forth, are among those activities that constitute the performance domains of the Kurdish associations in Sweden. Simultaneously, they claim that they participate also in the political and social processes of the host country: a claim that they try to legitimise more often than not through maintaining an anti-racist and integrationist discourse and working for the good of the Kurdish people in Sweden. This "dual agenda" (Østergaard-Nielsen 2000) is a manifestation of the far-reaching transborder citizenship practices (Glick Schiller 2005) among the Swedish Kurds, addressing life issues in both sending and recipient countries and as a result connecting Sweden with various Kurdish populations in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. To a large extent, the mixed agenda that Kurdish transborder citizens maintain in Sweden can be comparable with the life conditions of Kurdish refugee groups in the United Kingdom and Finland, where they create their associations and informal networks to use them not only as a supplementary resource to solve the problems arising from incomplete integration in their new societies but also as real platforms for mobilisation, largely oriented towards their societies of origin (Wahlbeck 1999).

In 1995, the first Kurdish satellite television station (MED-TV) was created in exile. Today, the Kurds have access to a variety of radio and satellite television stations, which according to Amir Hassanpour (1998) emerge as a reaction to the prevailing majority censorship in the countries where Kurds are exposed to discrimination. For Martin van Bruinessen (1999: 10), on air activities among the Kurds is an indication of competition between two nation-builders, the Republic of Turkey and the Kurdish movement. For many Kurds, the competition between these two "nation-builders" is exceedingly asymmetric, as the Kurdish side has access to limited

resources, whereas the Turkish side has a set of large economic enterprises, national institutions and hundreds of TV stations at its disposal (Khayati 2008). However, Sweden is today the centre of three Kurdish satellite television stations (AsoSat, Komalah TV and Newroz TV), which broadcast a wide range of different programmes towards Kurds worldwide. Along with hundreds of Kurdish websites and Internet forums, these TV stations function as transnational devices for nation-building and the creation of a Kurdish "imagined community". The growing use of Internet among the Kurds is derived mainly from initiatives taken by many dedicated individuals who live in different western states (Bruinessen 2000), including Sweden. As was indicated above, the first Kurdish library that was inaugurated in the presence of the then Social Democrat Minister of Culture, Marita Ulvskog, offers visitors from different age categories thousands of books and manuscripts in a variety of languages.

5 Generations of the Kurdish diaspora

One question that we have seen come to the fore in the discussion about diaspora is the question of generation, how a diasporic community is maintained over generations (Cohen 1995). The question of generation and the politics of belonging among younger diaspora members have also been central in the Kurdish diaspora. This is not least shown by the Kurdish–Swedish scholar Barzoo Eliassi (2010), in his study of identity formation among young Kurds in Sweden. As part of the "best organised diaspora" in Western Europe (Eliassi 2011: 1), young Kurds in Sweden, according to Eliassi (2010), articulate not only their identifications, diasporic claims and collective attributions but also create their own diasporic networks and organisations.

The Kurdish youth, who to a certain extent also dislike the legacy of the dominant Kurdish political movements in the diaspora, have criticised the Kurdish umbrella organisations in different contexts – not least within their own ranks – for giving too little space to the youth in the diaspora. As a reaction to this deficiency, young Kurds in Sweden have created their own organisations in order to, as a young Kurdish leader puts it, "solve the problem of young people's under-representation by coming forward and manage our part of the societal duties in their our ways" (Khayati 2008: 233f).

Among such Kurdish youth organisations, one can in the first place mention the Kurdistan Student Union in Sweden (SEF). This organisation, which was founded in 2004 on the initiative of a number of Kurdish students, has been behind a number of cross-border projects. These include among others a youth centre (Baba Gurgur) in Iraqi Kurdistan, a project realised with the help of the Swedish Social Democratic Student Association. *WeKurd* is another organisation that has been created mainly by second-generation Kurdish youths in Sweden, from all parts of Kurdistan. This association paid special attention to the Swedish elections of 17 September 2006, particularly by establishing a sort of "electoral register" for all Kurdish candidates who stood in the Swedish local, regional and national elections. Moreover, within the frame of its election project, *WeKurd* has sent questionnaires to all Swedish political parties, asking them how they perceive the Kurdish question and its various aspects. These youth associations have included an anti-racist and integrationist discourse in their programmes, urging both Kurds and Swedes to work for integration. Furthermore, the Association of Kurdish Students and Academics, the Association of Children's Friends of Kurdistan, the Association for Kurdistan's Environment and the Association of Kurdistan's Hope are examples of other Kurdish formations that also operate within the frame of a "transnational social field", showing the practice of transborder citizenship in various forms.

Furthermore, one can refer to the rapidly growing Kurdish Student and Academic Association (KSAF), created by hundreds of Kurdish students at Swedish universities. KSAF organisations are now established in *inter alia* Linköping, Stockholm, Uppsala, Örebro and Gothenburg. Since 2009, these student associations are affiliated to a joint nationwide student federation, Kurdish Student and Academic Federation (KSA). KSAF associations organise extensive cultural activities focusing on Kurds and Sweden. Another important arena is the Young Kurds Networks in Sweden, a forum for dozens of Kurdish youth organisations. Moreover, Kurdish youth have today access to a number of social media platforms that focus on the Kurdish question. For instance, the Generation for Kurdistan's Independence is an influential Facebook-media that provides forum discussion for a membership of 3,500 people.

These various youth organisations, which direct their activities both toward Kurdistan and Sweden, consider themselves as *both* Swedish and Kurdish organisations, which in itself indicates the emergence of a transnational form of diasporic community among Kurds in exile. However, the discussion above shows that the Kurdish associational experience is not limited to the single act of attracting external attention to the "Kurdish issue". It is also a manifestation of the practices of transborder citizenship that Kurds from both first and second generations maintain at the intersection between Sweden and Kurdistan.

6 Kurdish presence in the Swedish public space

In a supplement "In the City – Kurds in the City" in the prominent Swedish daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* from 27th April 2006, there are many pages devoted for introducing a number of Kurdish celebrities and personalities appearing on TV and radio programmes, in the theatre, in artistic and musical shows and also in newspapers and political life in Sweden (Forsström & Runarsdotter 2006). Under the heading "Kurdish trace", the reporters Anders Forsström and Sofia Runardotter (2006) mention a range of names with Kurdish connotation, asking why so many Kurds are visible in the centre of the cultural and political life in Sweden.

According to the reporters, the Kurdish background of these personalities and their particular memory and experience of oppression is the main explanation for the "successes they have achieved". The reporters repeatedly use the appellation *svenskkurd* ("Swede-Kurd"), as a way to describe the transnational identities of these individuals. It is worth noting, however, that most of them arrived in Sweden at a very young age, many years ago, together with their asylum- or job-seeking parents. By referring to the notion of simultaneous participation, one can recognise that the performances of these Kurdish–Swedish elites occur within the frame of multilayered transnational social fields (Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton-Blanc 1995), where their adoption of a double or multiple allegiance beyond the boundaries of a single nation-state enables them to permanently define and redefine their position in Swedish society at the same time as they participate in the general politics of Kurdistan.

Previous research has described Swedish politics as stratified according to ethnic lines (Bäck & Soininen 1996; Dahlstedt 2005; Tahvilzadeh 2011). Both in terms of voting and political representation, people of foreign origin – especially those with non-European backgrounds – are marginalised (Rodrigo Blomqvist 2005;

Strömblad 2003). However, "Swedish-Kurds" do not exactly follow this pattern. Even though it is difficult to find statistics for this, the number of the Kurdish candidates at the local, regional and national elections of 2006 appears as a clear indication. There were about 33 Kurdish candidates for the Swedish Parliament, as many for the county councils, and more than 70 for the municipal councils.

The Kurdish candidate body, which mainly consisted of young people of both sexes, made frequent use of various Kurdish communication platforms, such as radio and satellite TV stations, websites and chat rooms, to launch their election campaigns. They combined a domestic integration-oriented programme with an external nationalistic one, the second one sought attention for the "Kurdish question" in general (Bak Jørgensen 2008; Khayati 2008). Even in Iraqi Kurdistan, a number of polling stations were set up to allow the "Swedish-Kurdish" visitors to vote. Today, in 2013, there are seven deputies in the Swedish Parliament with Kurdish background.

7 Conclusion

As we have seen, the Kurdish diaspora is shaped and re-shaped through a wide repertoire of transnational activities – political, social, cultural and economic – not infrequently in the virtual world, activities connecting Kurds in a variety of states and forging them in a large-scale diasporic community.

This article has shown that the political performance of the diasporan Kurds in Sweden displays the experience of living across the borders of several nation-states. Diasporan Kurds in Sweden have created several umbrella organisations for their many affiliated associations, and established access to a number of satellite TV and radio stations and hundreds of Internet sites and chat rooms. Moreover, Sweden has been the place not only for the production of a significant quantity of Kurdish literature but also for the revival of Kurdish culture and the Kurdish language (above all the Kurmanji dialect) (Bruinessen 1999, 2000). During their more than two decades in Sweden, Kurds have engaged in an abundance of diverse social, political and cultural activities. Along with Kurdish access to the cyberspace, these activities have been used as platforms for identity-making and nation-building, which have enabled the Kurds to challenge the existing geographic, political and cultural constraints in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Furthermore, diasporan Kurds in Sweden sustain a range of other activities, such as diplomatic contacts, political demonstrations, electoral campaigns, commemoration and celebration of specific national days, arrangement of festivals, music production, publication of newspapers and reviews, money remittances and so forth, which create considerable opportunities for preserving and developing the Kurdish identity. It is through such civilian performances – even if they are to a certain extent elitist – that diasporan Kurds in Sweden demonstrate that transborder citizenship is a strong social force across several state borders. As was demonstrated previously, many Kurdish cultural and political personalities in Sweden effectively make use of the available transnational social fields in order to endorse not only their own political and cultural agendas but also to demonstrate that the social, cultural and political intersection between Sweden and Kurdistan is more of a reality now than ever before.

However, the experiences of the Kurds in Sweden show that practices of transborder citizenship are in a sense expressing the formation of a social movement among diasporic groups across state borders. Both Vera Eccarius-Kelly (2002) and Minoo Alinia (2004, 2007, 2008) see the Kurdish diasporic political organisation in the West European states as the manifestation of social movements beyond the boundaries of nation-states. For Alinia (2004), there are individual needs and actions within a given diaspora that together with social processes and social arrangements bring about the formation of diasporic identities. The influential Kurdish personalities habitually occupying a prominent position in the diaspora are the manifestation of transborder citizens, emerging out of these social movements, where their position is continuously shaped and recreated. In this respect, transborder citizens who participate in social organisations consider themselves as legitimate representatives of their members, publicly presenting a unified front, pushing for the recognition of their agenda, developing connections with allied actors and seeking new political opportunities for achieving acceptance (Eccarius-Kelly 2002).

The Kurdish case in Sweden further shows that diasporic populations act both outwards, towards the former homeland, and inwards, towards the new homeland. As a result, engagement in one direction – towards the former homeland – does not exclude involvement in other directions – towards Sweden as the new homeland or other countries. This in itself challenges the nation-oriented idea – in the research community as well as in society at large – that citizens only act within and in relation to one political space, namely the state in which they are citizens – a notion that is problematic in a number of respects. Commitments in other directions have previously been regarded as an obstacle or even a threat to the inclusion and participation in the residing society's social, political, economic and cultural life, which is obviously problematic in itself, in a world where people no longer "belong" to just one particular space (see Dahlstedt 2007).

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Notes

1. The word "Kurdistan" that is expressively and abundantly used by diasporan Kurds does not directly allude to the existence of a nation-state or a political sovereign entity that is in control of a sovereign territorial unit. In the context of diaspora, "Kurdistan"

or the Kurdish "homeland" can rather be perceived as an identity reference where "Kurdishness" or belonging to a Kurdish nation is socially, politically and culturally constructed and sharpened mostly in opposition to "Persianness", "Turkishness" and "Arabicness". By paraphrasing Avtar Brah (1996), one can also say that Kurdistan is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination or an experience of locality, evoking various negative and positive sentiments and memories that are mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations.

2. Paltalk is an online chat service for voice and video chatting, with more than four million registered users. Categorised chat rooms are also offered, the most popular being those devoted to culture, politics, economy, music and religion, where people play music and sing songs (source: http://en.wikipedia.org, 2007-02-12).
3. Kurmanji or North Kurdish is the largest dialect of the Kurdish languages, which is spoken by the majority of Kurdish people in Turkey and Syria and by important number of people in Iraq and Iran. Kurmanji is also spoken by those Kurds living in a number of ancient Soviet Republics.
4. Genocidal campaigns on the part of Iraqi regime against the Kurdish people in 1987–1988, which resulted in the killing of more than 180,000 people.
5. The reference is to the Kurdish locality Halabja, which was the target of a brutal gas attack, ordered by the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein in 1988. This attack, which resulted in the deaths of more than 5,000 people, is for the Kurds an event that will forever constitute the climax of the entire Kurdish tragedy. It is commemorated every year by thousands of Kurds both in Kurdistan and in the diaspora.
6. *Newroz* is the Kurdish New Year, which is celebrated on 21st March. More than a simple cultural event, it has been used by Kurds as a political manifestation over the years. For more knowledge see Wahlbeck, Ö 1999 Kurdish diasporas: a comparative study of kurdish refugee communities. London: Macmillan, pp. 159–174.

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