



# **A stranger in my homeland**

**The politics of belonging among young people  
with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden**

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Doctoral Thesis at Mid Sweden University

**Abstract**

Eliassi, B. **A stranger in my homeland: The politics of belonging among young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden.**

Distributor: Mid Sweden University, Department of Social Work, SE 831 25 Östersund, Sweden. ISSN: 1652-893X.

This dissertation examines how young people with Kurdish backgrounds form their identity in Sweden with regards to processes of inclusion and exclusion. It also sheds light on the ways these young people deal with ethnic discrimination and racism. Further, the study outlines the importance of these social processes for the discipline of social work and the ways social workers can work with disadvantaged and marginalized groups and endorse their struggle for social justice and full equal citizenship beyond racist and discriminatory practices. The empirical analysis is built on interviews with 28 young men and women with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden. Postcolonial theory, belonging and identity formation constitute the central conceptual framework of this study.

The young people referred to different sites in which they experienced ethnic discrimination and stigmatization. These experiences involved the labor market, mass media, housing segregation, legal system and school system. The interviewees also referred to the roles of 'ordinary' Swedes in obstructing their participation in the Swedish society through exclusionary discourses relating to Swedish identity. The interviewees' life situation in Sweden, sense of ethnic discrimination as well as disputes over identity making with other young people with Middle-Eastern background are among the most important reasons for fostering strong Kurdish nationalist sentiments, issues that are related to the ways they can exercise their citizenship rights in Sweden and how they deal with exclusionary practices in their everyday life. The study shows that the interviewees respond to and resist ethnic discrimination in a variety of ways including interpersonal debates and discussions, changing their names to Swedish names, strengthening differences between the self and the other, violence, silence and deliberately ignoring racism. They also challenged and spoke out against the gendered racism that they were subjected to in their daily lives due to the paternalist discourse of "honor-killing".

The research participants had been denied an equal place within the boundary of Swedishness partly due to a racist postcolonial discourse that valued whiteness highly. Paradoxically, some interviewees reproduced the same discourse through choosing to use it against black people, Africans, newly-arrived Kurdish immigrants ("imports"), "Gypsies" and Islam in order to claim a modern Kurdish identity as near to whiteness as possible. This indicates the multiple dimensions of racism. Those who are subjected to racism and ethnic discrimination can be discriminatory and reproduce the racist discourse. Despite unequal power relations, both dominant and minoritized subjects are all marked by the postcolonial condition in structuring subjectivities, belonging and identification.

**Keywords:** young people with Kurdish backgrounds, postcolonial theory, identity formation, belonging, citizenship, ethnic discrimination, gendered racism, Kurdish nationalism, social work, culturalization, strategies, resistance.

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Printed in Sweden 2010 by Universitetsstryckeriet, Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall.

# Contents

Acknowledgments.....	1
<b>Chapter 1</b>	
<b>The historical and political framework of the study .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction.....	5
The main aim and research questions of the study .....	10
Migration and structural inequalities in Sweden .....	14
Youth identity, culturalization and social work .....	17
Kurdish experiences of otherness and resistance in the Middle East .....	30
The organization of the dissertation.....	37
<b>Chapter 2</b>	
<b>Method and Methodological Considerations.....</b>	<b>41</b>
Introduction.....	43
Constructionism and researching identity .....	43
Experience as a mediated site of knowledge.....	47
Sampling and sites .....	49
The research interview and ethical considerations .....	53
Qualitative content analysis.....	57
Researcher and research participants: representation, power relations and identity .....	60
<b>Chapter 3</b>	
<b>Theoretical Perspectives .....</b>	<b>69</b>
Introduction.....	71
Postcolonialism, intersectionality and subjectivity .....	72
Racialized immigrants, stigma and modes of resistance .....	79
Identity formation, belonging and citizenship.....	88
Nationalism, gender and ethnosexual frontiers.....	96
<b>Chapter 4</b>	
<b>Historical injustices and politics of denial and recognition .....</b>	<b>103</b>
Introduction.....	105
“In Sweden I have a two meter long Kurdish flag in my balcony” .....	105
The politics of denial and recognition in everyday life .....	110
Islam as a contested Kurdish identity .....	115
Enacting and justifying a Kurdish nationalist project.....	121
Summary .....	127

<b>Chapter 5</b>	
<b>Unequal citizenship and strategies of dealing with ethnic discrimination in Sweden .....</b>	<b>131</b>
Introduction.....	133
“If I was accepted as a Swede, why do you think that I am talking about colouring my hair and eyes?” .....	133
The power of stigmatization and belonging .....	141
The quest for positive visibility and success .....	146
The magic of return and the fleeting condition of homeliness and homeland .....	150
Unrealized promises of citizenship rights.....	156
Dealing with ethnic discrimination and racism .....	164
Summary .....	175
<b>Chapter 6</b>	
<b>Multiple belongings: Intersection of gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationalism .....</b>	<b>179</b>
Introduction.....	181
Subordinated femininities and masculinities .....	182
The stigma of “honor-killing”: Kurds in Swedish Eyes .....	185
Responding to racist representations .....	193
The “imports” and internal otherisation among young Kurds.....	198
Marriage strategies, political boundaries and racism .....	202
Summary .....	214
<b>Chapter 7</b>	
<b>Discussion and Conclusions .....</b>	<b>217</b>
Politics of belonging and challenges for social work.....	219
<b>References.....</b>	<b>239</b>

# Acknowledgments

Several people have contributed to this dissertation through their participation, knowledge, encouragement and advice. I express my deep gratitude to all the research participants that gave me the opportunity to interview them in order to carry out this study. Zor supas! Galek supas!

At the Department of Social Work in Östersund, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Masoud Kamali and my assistant supervisor Lena Sawyer. Masoud and Lena have contributed to this dissertation through their invaluable knowledge, critical insights, advice and constant encouragement. My most sincere thanks!

I would like to thank Åke Bergmark for his insightful and critical comments on several drafts of this dissertation. I am thankful to Mino Alinia who through her supportive and critical comments and discussions enriched this work. Zor supas Mino! Thanks to Majen Espvall who provided me with many useful comments at the final seminar. At the final seminar, I was also fortunate to receive many brilliant suggestions and comments from Magnus Dahlstedt (Linköping University, REMESO). Thank you Magnus for your crucial and constructive comments!

At the Department of Social Work in Östersund, I would like to thank Mona Livholts for many useful and inspiring intellectual discussions about the art of writing. Many thanks to Ulla-Britta Stenström-Jönsson for her encouragement and support. I would also thank all of my colleagues at the department for their constructive comments, kindness and support.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Annika Pudas (Mid Sweden University Library) and Agneta Brolund for their enormous support with all the books and articles that I needed to carry out this study during these years. I am grateful to Magnus Ottelid for teaching and urging me to use EndNote. Thanks Magnus! Many thanks to the two stars; Peter Öberg and Ann-Charlotte Staverfelt for their kindness and invaluable technical support.

I express my deep gratitude to Robin Biddulph for improving the language and helping me to illuminate my thoughts.

I am lucky to have a wonderful friend like Adel Feili who has contributed to this work through many discussions and constructive comments. Thanks also to my dear friends Shwan Qazi, Saman Feili and Khalid Khayati for their encouragement. Last but not least, it is hard to adequately express my gratitude to my family and relatives for the enormous support they have given me. I simply cannot find the words to thank you for your love, generosity and patience. This work is dedicated to you.



# **Chapter I**

## **The historical and political framework of the study**



## Introduction

This dissertation is concerned with the issue of belonging among young people with Kurdish backgrounds and is interested in how the past, present and future are interconnected and expressed through their social lives and identity formation in Sweden. I begin by recounting a series of autobiographical episodes which illustrate issues around the question of belonging and illuminate the political context of this study:

### *Episode 1*

I was in Stockholm in 2002 and was looking for a Kurdish-Persian bookshop in Husby (a stigmatized and marginalized housing area) but could not find the way. I asked a teenage boy if he knew where the bookshop was. He looked at me and said: "Are you pretending to be svenne with your nice svenne accent"?<sup>1</sup> The boy turned out to have a Kurdish background who urged me to act like a Kurd.

### *Episode 2*

On March 2005, I was in Stockholm at a Kurdish/Iranian New Year party, Newroz. On my way back to the bus stop with a friend of mine, we met two girls with Kurdish backgrounds who asked us if we knew when the bus would arrive. Suddenly, one of the girls asked us if we were Kurdish; we answered yes. Then she asked me from which Kurdish town I was from. I said, Kermanshah. She replied: "Well, we don't see people from Kermanshah as real Kurds. They are Persians, because they don't speak an understandable Kurdish like we do in Mahabad." Kermanshah and Mahabad are both Kurdish towns in Iranian Kurdistan.

### *Episode 3*

In 1993, I had recently arrived in Sweden as a refugee. On my way to school, a young Swedish couple, a man and a woman, stopped in front of me on their bike and looked at my face. "Go back home to your homeland, we don't want you here". I responded, naïvely but truthfully, that I didn't have a homeland and explained that Sweden had granted me a residence permit and that is why I was here in Sweden. They spat in front of me and urged me once more to leave Sweden and return back to my homeland, an imperative that I have heard many times. This event shocked me because I really expected Sweden to be a country where racism and discrimination were absent. When I told this story to

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<sup>1</sup>"Svenne" is used both to indicate an "authentic" Swede and also connotes a boring and conformist person.

my Swedish teacher (a wonderful person as it happens) and asked why this couple did not like people with black hair, she told me: "Barzoo, I am sure that people in Kurdistan treat blonde people with blue eyes in the same way, so it is natural that people act like this in Sweden when they meet dark people". In fact, I have never treated my blue-eyed relatives as less Kurdish. Conversely, they were often praised, admired but also envied for their "European" appearance, a legacy of colonialism that still persists in Kurdistan. The notion of the superiority of whiteness is still alive and kicking in Kurdistan.

#### *Episode 4*

On December 2006, I was at a night club in Östersund, a small Swedish town. While I was standing at the bar, a middle-aged Swedish woman came toward me and looked into my eyes and said: "Your bloody wog<sup>2</sup>, people like you are so pushy". I was shocked because I was accused of something that I did not know anything about, so I went to her later and told her that I wanted to speak to her. We went outside and I asked her to explain why she had called me a "bloody wog" and whether she knew that according to Swedish law it is a crime to call someone "wog", a pejorative and racist label. She said: "well, we have a lot of Negroes, Somalis and people like you in Flen (another small Swedish town) and by the way, you should be happy that we have laws in this country otherwise you would not have been in this country".

These fragmented encounters and experiences defined me as "pretending to be Swedish or mimicking a Swede", "not really Kurdish", "non-Swedish" or an "undesired foreigner", and as not belonging to Sweden and not having the right to be in Sweden. I was positioned differently by different subjects in different locations at different times. The way I interpret these experiences and the meanings that I assign to them are dependent on the political and cultural contexts I inhabit, both as a relatively young man with a Kurdish background and also as an immigrant who inhabits an academic space shaped by postcolonial theory. I believe that the young man with Kurdish background

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<sup>2</sup> "Svartsalle" (literally "black skull") or "blatte" are used as racist and differentiating labels against people from Asia, Middle East, South-America and Africa in Sweden (Lacatus, 2007; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2004a; Sawyer, 2000). Note, that the term "svartsalle" indicates otherness via differences in hair and/or skin colour. I use "wog" (used in the UK) as a possible translation of "svartsalle"/"blatte" although I am aware about the limitations, differences in the history and contexts of these derogatory slurs. The similarities can be found in their focus on skin and hair colour as signifiers of non-belonging to the dominant white group. Further, "svartsalle" or "blatte" have different meanings in different context but also by different subjects. Among some young people with immigrant backgrounds, they are appropriated (somewhat like "nigger" in English) and used to stress solidarity, struggle, belonging, friendship and common experience of not belonging to the mainstream of Swedish society.

regarded me as someone who performed an identity that did not belong to me because there is an ontological gap between "pretending" and "being". According to this young man's interpellation of me, a hailing<sup>3</sup> that is grounded in his minoritized<sup>4</sup> immigrant experiences as the other. The way the Kurdish girl described me as not being a real Kurd, illustrates the fact that no identity is free from conflicts and internal dissonance. Internal homogeneity within a social category is an ascribed illusion. But it also reminds us that claim-making, such as the girl's reference to her supposed high level of Kurdish purity and my low level of Kurdish purity is part of the internal boundaries and power relations within an identity.

The young Swedish couple asserted that I did not belong in Swedish society. Place and identity/belonging were thus combined to evoke ideas about who we are and how belongings are constructed in essentialist modes in order to limit or control crossing of identity boundaries by others. The way my benevolent teacher described this event shows that ethnic discrimination can become naturalized as it belonged to the natural order of things. The label "wog" that the woman gave me reflects the stigmatizing impact that one's appearance can have in daily life in Sweden but also reminds us about the claim-making, about who belongs and who can speak in the name of the contested identity. The racist offence by the woman had both an individual and a collective dimension. Being labelled as a wog by the woman above assigned me with, in the words of Brah, "an inferiorised collective subject" (Brah, 1996, pp. 88-89).

I did not understand then at the beginning of my life in Sweden what was so remarkable about the colour of my hair because it had been completely normal during the first 15 years of my life. If someone then had commented on my hair being black, I would have thought it very strange, but suddenly, when my family migrated to Sweden in 1993, I was put into a political context where because of my dark hair I was assigned a deviant and subordinate social status.

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<sup>3</sup> Hailing is a concept that was first coined by Louis Althusser. Hall (1996) referring to Althusser points out that subjectivity is articulated through interpellation or hailing. Hence, I will use Hall's interpretation of Althusser's hailing throughout this dissertation.

<sup>4</sup> I use minoritized instead of minority in order to underline the process of minority-making due to unequal power relations between different social groups. The issue of number is not central to my understanding of minoritized groups because the concept of minority is mediated by power (see Gunaratnam, 2003; Soydan & Williams, 1998).

I started attending secondary school in Kalmar where I soon realized that my presence in Sweden was problematic for some of the other pupils because of my immigrant background. My younger brother attended the same school. The various form of humiliation we met moved us to use violence to fight back against this discrimination. When the school staff intervened and "mediated" between us, we were informed that "we" (where the supposedly "deviant other" is not included) were now in Sweden and were not allowed to use physical violence. We were also aware that this "we" never included "us" due to our supposed deviancy and otherness. We were considered as guilty because it was assumed that we did not know the "Swedish rules" and the language of non-violence. On the contrary, the school staff neglected both the symbolic violence (e.g. calling us "wogs" but also spitting at us and mocking our imperfect use of the Swedish language) and physical violence that Swedish kids sometimes used against us.

While some of the teachers spoke about racism in the class room as a relic of the past, something that belonged to Nazis that had mass murdered Jews, many of us with immigrant backgrounds experienced racism by students with Swedish backgrounds in full view of the teachers. These teachers did not make any serious interventions to counter this racism. My parents blamed us for creating problems for them and we were told at home to ignore the mistreatment that we experienced in order to avoid contacts with Swedish social service authorities as my parents had brutal experiences with official authorities in Iran and Iraq. Daily experiences of racism and the lack of an anti-racist perspective from the school staff made us (me and my non-Swedish friends) furious, and reinforced my understanding of myself as an immigrant and not belonging to the Swedish society.

Before my immigration to Sweden, I was a Kurdish refugee in Iraq where I was subordinated and discriminated against both as a Kurd and as an Iranian Kurd due to the prevailing conflicts, not only the war between Iraq and Iran but also between the Iraqi government and Iraqi Kurds. I remember so painfully racist comments like "oh it is true that you are Kurdish", a comment that appears to be an innocent statement but for the Kurds and Iraqi Arabs, it was a comment that many Arabs used against the Kurds in order to depreciate them and label them as backward and primitive. My grandfather vividly narrated stories about his experiences in Iran and especially with regards to his Kurdish dress which was regarded as a signifier of backwardness and low status. He also underlined time after time that he resisted this discrimination by asserting his pride in his identity and his Kurdish dress.

In the refugee camp Al-Tash in Iraq, where I lived 13 years of my life, I never thought about Kurdistan or Iran as my homelands. I regarded the refugee camp as my home because it was the place where I lived my real life. In other words, it was not Iraq as a country that I considered as my homeland even though I lived there for more than a decade, but a refugee camp surrounded by barbed wire and Iraqi police checkpoints. I also remember how differently I experienced the refugee camp from the older generation. They were more preoccupied with the idea of return to the promised homeland, the village in Iranian Kurdistan where they had lived before becoming refugees. Once, I heard my uncle who is now back in the village, sing a Kurdish hymn about his difficult estrangement in "the desert of Arabs" in the refugee camp "far from the mountains of his village", where he had his soul. In contrast to my uncle, I did not yearn for that village because it was imaginary and not an experienced reality.

When my uncle and his family along with hundreds of Kurdish refugees in Iraq returned back to the Iranian Kurdistan, they were treated like foreigners by other Kurds and by the Iranian authorities. Iranian authorities obliged them to change the Kurdish names of their children and adopt Persian or Arabic names. These returnees reclaiming of their history in that village was questioned aggressively by other Kurds because they were thought to be "traitors" and "Iraqis". Hence, as this example shows, Kurdish identity is not a given and trans-historical reality but a site of contestation by different subjects who claimed Kurdishness as their property. This contestation had different outcomes due to the asymmetrical power relationships.

Back in the refugee camp in Iraq, when I climbed into the bus in February 1993, heading toward Jordan in order to take the flight to Sweden, I did not feel any anxiety about leaving the place. I was sure that I would leave it behind and never see it again, because Sweden was the place where I was to have my new home. And that is what happened, but the process has been painful and is not yet complete. Sweden differed drastically from the refugee camp and I enjoy rights here that I never dreamt of in the refugee camp. I left the explicitly authoritarian political context in Iraq and came to Sweden where my lived experiences are characterized by both inclusion and exclusion. Hence, I hold an ambiguous stance towards Sweden as a country where I encounter opportunities that enable social mobility and political freedom but also discriminatory structures and practices that remind me of my ascribed and lived immigrant status loaded with stereotypical Orientalist fantasies about my Middle-Eastern background. My own biographical memories highlight how our histories and experiences are constitutive feature of our lives, subjectivities and identifications. My daily experiences, indicate how identity, belonging and

identification are not just questions about what I think I am and where I belong but also questions about how others perceive, ascribe or hail (Hall, 1996, p. 5) me due to different political situations with different claims by different subjects, a process which is not completed and sealed-off once and for all, but rather context-sensitive to the political dynamics of different identity projects.

This dissertation will focus on how young people with Kurdish backgrounds form their identity in Sweden with regards to processes of inclusion and exclusion. The study will explore how the historical subordination of Kurds in their "former" homelands informs identity formation among Kurdish youth in Sweden. Further, it will shed light on the ways they respond to discriminatory acts in their lives through various modes of action and resistance. I will also outline the importance of these social processes for the discipline of social work and the ways social workers can work with disadvantaged and marginalized groups and endorse their struggle for social justice and full equal citizenship free of racist and discriminatory practices.

### **The main aim and research questions of the study**

During recent decades the Kurdish immigrant population has been increasing in Sweden. A Kurdish diaspora in Sweden, as in many other European countries, is nowadays a fact (see for instance Alinia, 2004; Emanuelsson, 2005; Khayati, 2008; Sheikmous, 2000; Taloyan, 2008). The purpose of this dissertation is to study the formation of the politics and strategies of belonging among young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden. This includes the politics of both inclusion and exclusion of young people with immigrant backgrounds in Swedish society, as well as Kurdish ethnic nationalism, as important factors for Kurdish youth identity formation. Since the focus of the study will be on young people's own narratives about their positions and lives in Sweden, the following particular questions will be addressed and answered:

- 1- How do young people with Kurdish backgrounds understand their positions in Swedish society?
- 2- How do these young people negotiate their identity formations with the dominant Swedish society?
- 3- What do "homeland" and "home" mean to young people with Kurdish backgrounds?

With the positions of young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden, I mean the ways that the life opportunities of an individual are influenced by social structures and institutional arrangements that provide the basis for the intersection of gender, nationality, ethnicity, class and sexuality. The young people's positions and citizenship status within the labor market, housing,

school, mass media, sport arenas, legal system and everyday encounters with dominant individuals/group, on the one hand and with other "ethnic groups" on the other, will be studied in relation to their experiences, identity formation and sense of belonging to Sweden. Further, this dissertation will focus on how young people's negotiation of their identity is influenced by their social positions, since social categories such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality or class do not have a single meaning and implication for one's social positioning and experience of (dis)advantages, privileges and subordination. The questions of home and homeland are related to the sense of belonging, citizenship and the meanings of place to an individual's identity formation within the framework of the national order of things (Malkki, 1992) created by the politics of inclusion and exclusion of nation-states.

Although structural positioning is central to identity formation, it is also important to go beyond victimization and accord attention to strategies that are used by youth to challenge and resist oppression and structural inequalities in everyday life. As hooks asserts, "those who understand the power of voice as a gesture of rebellion and resistance urge the exploited, the oppressed to speak" (hooks, 1984, p. 14). The main reason why hooks underlines the importance of voice is because she is concerned with bringing to light "subjugated knowledge" and pushing it from the margins to the centre (hooks, 1984). Bringing subjugated knowledge to the centre has also been the focus of proponents of critical social work research who argue that social research is a moral and a political activity that challenges top-down interpretation of the lives of minoritized groups and brings to light their own experiences (Humphries, 2009). Therefore it is important for social work to:

[C]hallenge the normative concerns of dominant research approaches by asking different questions and centering the interests and experiences of those most affected by social work, rather than the interests of practitioners, researchers, governments and organisations /.../ and revealing an oppositional world view that will raise different questions and different answers (Humphries, 2009, p. 312).

In this respect, the study of Kurds as a national or ethnic formation is relatively new in the European context. The formation of Kurdish identities within various European countries has recently been addressed through a number of studies in the UK (Enneli, Modood, & Bradley, 2005; Griffith, 2002; Uguris, 2004; Wahlbeck, 1999), Sweden (Alinia, 2004; Emanuelsson, 2005; Khayati, 2008; Sheikmous, 2000; Taloyan, 2008), Finland (Wahlbeck, 1999), Germany (Leggewie, 1996; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2000), the Netherlands (Kanie, 2005) and France (Mohsény, 2002). The focus of these studies has mainly been the

experiences of the “first-generation”<sup>5</sup> Kurdish migrants, and the analytical concept that is often used in these studies is diaspora with a strong focus on nationalism and the experience of political exclusion. Earlier studies about first generation Kurds in Sweden (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008) show that Kurds both enjoy political freedom as Kurds but also experience structural inequality and discrimination within for instance the labor market, housing, school and the mass media. Further, discrimination and minoritized positions in the Middle-East and Sweden are regarded as important factors in causing serious health problems among first generation Kurds in Sweden (Taloyan, 2008). Kurdish presence in Sweden has a short history which explains the lack of research about the experiences of young people with Kurdish backgrounds. Brah (1996, p. 194) points out the importance and the differences between the first generation and the subsequent generation with regards to the place of migration, due to their experiences and memories they left behind. Additionally, first generation migrants not only have to deal with the question of “dislocation” and “displacement” in order to re-orientate themselves in the new society, but they also have to inscribe themselves within new economic, political and cultural realities. The experiences of woman and men are also different and transformed due to the gender relations of the country they have left and of the country they are residing in (see also Anthias, 1998, p. 577). In this light, generation and gender will also be in focus in this study as it deals with young Kurdish men and women in Sweden in order to grasp their specific experiences and examine issues of belonging and the various ways they are negotiated. Regarding generational differences, Sernhede points out the differences between young people and their parents:

Things are different for the young. At day-care, everyone plays with everyone else, and in school, you co-operate with others who have different ethnic backgrounds. During leisure time, you are out in the streets and cultivate friendships that supersede the ethnic boundaries drawn by the parental culture. All adolescents are in the process of seeking their outer and inner selves, that is part of the identity work of modern youth. In these multiethnic areas, the constant encounters with young people from other cultures, with Swedish society and with today’s a multi faceted, global and media based youth culture, imply new points of departure are created for identification processes, which by necessity are embedded in adolescent identity work (Sernhede, 2005, p. 275).

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to acknowledge that the notions of “first” and “second” generation have often discriminatory effects on individuals who are not yet regarded as “real” members of the dominant society regardless of their place of birth or how long “they” have been living among “us”. The assumption is that these subjects are “naturalized Swedes” but not “organic” members of the dominant society.

Sernhede discusses the multitude of realities that young people with immigrant backgrounds experience. His study, which is based on specific contexts and experiences of young people living in Swedish urban residential areas, suggests the trans-ethnic nature of identity formation among young people with immigrant backgrounds. However, there are other aspects to identity formation among young people with immigrant backgrounds. Many young people with Kurdish backgrounds who are living in marginalized areas are also engaging in Kurdish identity formation and politics. This means that in parallel to the trans-ethnic nature of identity formation, there is also an ethnic/national identity formation based on specific histories and experiences. An international incident in 1999 illustrated this well. In the spring of 1999 the leader of Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan was captured and kidnapped in Kenya by Turkish agents. This act led to massive Kurdish demonstrations in Sweden and various European countries which drew unprecedented global attention (Fawcett, 2001). A large number of these demonstrators were young people with Kurdish backgrounds from all parts of Kurdish regions, who were demanding the release of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) leader, flying Kurdish flags and chanting slogans against the Turkish oppression of its Kurdish population. Many of these young people had grown up outside Kurdish areas (Sheikhmous & Wernefeldt, 1999) and many of them were not even members or engaged supporters of PKK but were motivated to participate as a result of a transnational Kurdish identity politics. Why are these young people so involved in Kurdish nationalism or identity politics despite having had little or not direct experience of oppression by authoritarian regimes in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria? Andy Curtis asks rhetorically:

Shouldn't persons who grew up in Germany, speaking German and participating in German culture be less Kurdish than those were raised in traditional Kurdistan? (Curtis, 2005, p. 3).

Van Bruinessen (2000) and Curtis (2005) claim that the young people with Kurdish backgrounds outside Kurdish areas in the Middle-East tend to be more nationalistic and more engaged in Kurdish identity and politics than their parents. This premise is interesting and suggests that more field work is needed in order to draw conclusions about whether young people with Kurdish backgrounds share the same political aspirations and identity politics and under what structural conditions this identity politics emerges.

The Kurdish population in the Middle-East is denied citizenship rights and is politically, economically and culturally subordinated within the nation-states it inhabits (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008; Vali, 2006). In Sweden, people with a Kurdish background once again find themselves in a minoritized position,

however within a different political arrangement and political discourses of inclusion and exclusion. Consequently, a central issue for this dissertation is to show how structural inequalities and constraints impinge on the identity formations and lives of the young people while also focusing on the ways they respond to their structural positions in Sweden and the Middle-East as minoritized subjects.

### **Migration and structural inequalities in Sweden**

Hundreds of thousands of Kurds have fled Kurdistan<sup>6</sup> and migrated to Western countries due, among other reasons, to violent conflicts, political persecution and compulsory transfers in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria (Sheikhmous, 2000). Episodes of injustice and oppression have been central to modern Kurdish history as well as to understandings of Kurdish political identity formation. Mass murder, ethnic cleansing, destruction of villages, chemical attacks on civilians, repressive assimilation policy, non-recognition, deceit from Western states, geopolitical manipulation, betrayal, broken promises, marginalization and expulsion characterize many Kurdish nationalistic narratives in the construction of a Kurdish identity.

The post-Cold War migration to Western European countries has come to challenge the boundaries of citizenship and evoked various discourses like multiculturalism, integration, assimilation, neo-assimilation. It has raised questions about how "new" members can be included or excluded in the political community of nation-states and within supranational organizations like the European Union (Hansen, 2009; Kofman, 1995, 2005). Additionally, the decolonization era involved population movements from former colonies to European metropolises. Postcolonial subjects are now to be found within European political spaces and they are now demanding equal rights within the political structure of European societies. If colonial powers earlier justified their domination of postcolonial subjects in the name of a supposed white racial and cultural superiority, we can witness a shift in the discourse, whereby the expansive colonial ideology has been replaced by a defensive retreat ideology (Azar, 2006; Balibar, 1991a; Fekete, 2006; Radhakrishnan, 2003; Schierup, Hansen, & Castles, 2006; Tesfahuney, 1998). Many researchers who have studied European discourses about migrants have argued that postcolonial subjects are seen as rupturing forces and threatening the national, European or Western "core" cultural values and civilization due to their presence among "us" (Asad, 2003; Azar, 2006; Balibar, 1991a; Fekete, 2006; Gullestad, 2002;

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<sup>6</sup> The term Kurdistan is not a politically neutral concept any more than any other concepts that describe political geography. I will use Kurdistan as a geographic term to describe those predominantly Kurdish inhabited areas within the nation-states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Radhakrishnan, 2003; Tesfahuney, 1998). Consequently, the living space of the "real" European subject is assumed to be besieged by culturally deviant migrants.

In this respect, Sweden, often viewed as a nationally and internationally celebrated stronghold and role model of social equality, gender equality and integration policy (Ålund, 2002; Ålund & Schierup, 1991), has become a place of refuge for an estimated 20,000-50,000 Kurds during the past four decades (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008; Taloyan, 2008; Wahlbeck, 1999). During the period 1960-1990, rhetoric about the immigration policy in Sweden has been framed in relation to equality, rights and the societal position of people with immigrant backgrounds. Despite this, there has been a discrepancy between the rhetoric and practice. Since 1975, the Swedish rhetoric regarding dealing with diversity has shifted from assimilation to multiculturalism, integration and back to assimilation (de los Reyes & Kamali, 2005; Schierup, et al., 2006; Ålund & Schierup, 1991), a political pattern that is applicable to many West European countries (see for instance Delanty, Wodak, & Jones, 2008; Fekete, 2004, 2006; Hansen, 2009; Kamali, 2008; Kundnani, 2007; Schierup, et al., 2006).

The reassertion of the assimilation ideology tends to powerfully emphasize national identity as the cure for the plural society. For example, political suggestions have in 2000s urged immigrants to learn "core Swedish values" and undergo "driving license test in Swedishness", "citizenship test", "language test", etc. Reflecting this political shift in Swedish integration policy and demands on migrants to adhere to normative Swedishness, Jonsson argues that 2006 was supposed to be the year of multiculturalism, but instead it became the year where Sweden had had enough of multiculturalism (S. Jonsson, 2008).

Recent studies show that the migrants referred to, explicitly and implicitly, in these political suggestions are mainly Muslims and Africans. They have become a signifier of otherness, difference and incommensurability, alleged to constitute threat and danger to European communities and "civilisation". Since 9/11 Muslims are not only believed to be living in a separate culture but also to have different values that stand against "our" democracy, individualism, gender equality and tolerance (see Kamali, 2008; Kundnani, 2007, p. 30). Their values and presence within European borders are regarded as undermining social and national cohesion. Real and imagined cultural and value differences are used in official discourses in drawing clear fault-lines between "us" and "them" (mainly the Muslims). The low value that postcolonial subjects from former colonies or "Third World" countries are given, is tangible and can be seen in their level and kind of participation in the domains of the labor market

(Behtoui, 2006; Hertzberg, 2003; Knocke & Hertzberg, 2000; Neergaard, 2006; Rätzzel, 2006), political representation (Dahlstedt, 2005; Lindeberg & Dahlstedt, 2002), mass media (Brune, 2005; Camäuer & Nohrstedt, 2006; Ericsson, Molina, & Ristilammi, 2002; Petersson, 2006), housing (R. Andersson, 2002; Molina, 1997), education (Gruber, 2007; Mulinari, 2007; Sawyer & Kamali, 2006), the legal system (Diesen, 2005; Sarnecki, 2006), trade unions (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2004b) and welfare institutions (Eliassi, 2006; M. Eriksson, 2006; Kamali, 2002; Pringle, 2006; Ålund, 2002). Furthermore they are subjected to everyday racism and are classified as "culturally distanced groups" which indicates the assumption of cultural barriers to their integration into the Swedish society (de los Reyes & Wingborg, 2002; Mattson & Tefshanuey, 2002; Tesfahuney, 1998).

This unequal treatment in multiple spheres of Swedish society is not only experienced by adults, but also by young people with immigrant backgrounds who were born or have spent a major part of their lives in Sweden. Even though young people in general have a vulnerable position within the contemporary Swedish labor market, many studies assert that young people with immigrant backgrounds have a thornier path to employment than young ethnic Swedes (Behtoui, 2006; Hertzberg, 2003; Knocke & Hertzberg, 2000; Rätzzel, 2006). Having said this, there are important common experiences like a sense of not belonging, social inequality and imposed stereotypes that are shared by many young people with immigrant backgrounds in different Western countries (M. Andersson, Lithman, & Sernhede, 2005; Echchaibi, 2001; Keaton, 2006; Pyke & Dang, 2003; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Ålund, 1997).

These inequalities that are experienced by people with immigrant backgrounds, often defined as "non-Europeans", are results of structural and institutional discrimination that permeate dominant Swedish institutions and affect the ways minoritized groups are viewed as deviants and inferior and become objects of integration practices in order to become like the "Us" that belongs to the dominant white Swedish identity. There have been various political programs aimed at facilitating the "integration of immigrants" into society. The starting points for these programs and lines of actions often regard "Swedes" and "immigrants" as two essentially different categories without taking into account the power relations that create the basis for domination and subordination between them. The power and the privilege of defining people with immigrant background as a "problem" that needs to be solved is also related to structural inequalities that exclude alternative voices, experiences and explanations which could articulate other ways to deal with inequality than a strong focus on cultural differences as the main reason for "failed integration" (de los Reyes & Kamali, 2005; de los Reyes & Wingborg, 2002; Lindeberg &

Dahlstedt, 2002). The Kurdish population in Sweden belongs to these structurally disadvantaged groups and it is in relation to these disadvantaged positions that this dissertation will locate itself with a focus on young men and women with a Kurdish background. It is within such structural contexts that young people with Kurdish backgrounds live their lives and form their identities and encounter various modes of inclusive and exclusive practices.

### **Youth identity, culturalization and social work**

In this section, I will focus on how, within both research and popular discourse, "culture of origin" is often used to explain the ways young people with immigrant backgrounds form their identities and is assumed to create problems for them and obstruct them from integrating into the dominant society. Within this literature, the dominant society often is represented as "modern" while minoritized groups are predominately described as "traditional". Within the binary position, the believed incompatibility between the "immigrant family" and the dominant society will also be highlighted in these culturalist discourses. I will also discuss critiques that reject this culturalist approach on the grounds that it is essentialist and maintains the unequal power relations between the dominant society and minoritized groups. Finally, this section will focus on the particular relevance of identity formation for social work in relation to minoritized groups that are subjected to various exclusionary practices and how social work engages such structural and institutional arrangements in society.

One of the most dominating theoretical approaches to research on identity formations among young people with immigrant backgrounds is the culturalist. This focuses on cultural confusion and the notion of being "trapped" between two cultures, the parents' culture and the mainstream culture (culture of the country of settlement) as well as the hierarchical power relations within families (Ahmadi, 1998; Anwar, 1998; Aronowitz, 2002; Cashmore & Troyna, 1982; Khondaker, 2007; Schlytter, 2004; Schlytter & Linell, 2009; Talbani & Hasanali, 2000; Wakil, Siddique, & Wakil, 1981; Watson, 1997; Wikan, 2002; Wong, 1997). Young people are mainly described as victims, alienated, oppressed and confused due to an assumed unbridgeable difference between the culture of their parents and the culture of their settlement country, as well as the cultural disruptions due to migration. Young people with immigrant backgrounds are often regarded as a source of social problems by both the dominant society and the ethnic community of their parents. The ethnic community is trying to keep the youth within the cultural boundary of the community while the dominant society wants to detach the youth from their "original" community and locate them within the dominant society. Young people with immigrant backgrounds are culturalized from two sides, the community who want "their" youth to

retain "too much culture of the origin" and the assimilationist approach that requires "too little culture of origin" from youth in order to achieve successful assimilation. Both perspectives claim to have a goal in common, to save the youth from delinquency and deviant behavior (see for instance Aronowitz, 2002; Khondaker, 2007; Wong, 1997). As Ålund (1991a) notes, this understanding of cultural identity "makes culture both the problem and the means to its solution" (Ålund, 1991a, p. 69).

Youth in general are often described both as a threat to society due to their allegedly subversive cultural values but also as an asset for the future of the nation and its continuity (Griffin, 2004). Young men with immigrant backgrounds are mainly represented as an anomaly and a disturbing element in the national and public spheres. When young men and particularly those with a Muslim background are discussed, metonymic devices are often used to indicate their problematic status like delinquency, gangs, violence, women-oppressor, noisy, prone to sexual violence while young women are ascribed a victim position and regarded as culturally and religiously imprisoned and *veiled*. It is implied that they need to be liberated, un-veiled and empowered. This assigned victim position is intimately linked with Orientalist fantasies (Massad, 2007; S. H. Razack, 2008; Said, 2003/1978; Yegenoglu, 1998) about Oriental women as sensual, exotic and sexually submissive<sup>7</sup>.

The culturalist approach measures often the level of "deviancy" of youth with migrant backgrounds by looking at how much their life-style and family constellations differ from normative Western middle class families. Those real or imagined differences are implicitly regarded as provoking "identity crises" among younger generations. In this culturalist view, an "identity crisis" emerges because the young people and their parents are situated within a continuum of traditionalism/collectivism and modernity/individualism, where the dominant society stands for modern values while the minoritized groups represent the pre-modern values incompatible with the modern world (Ahmadi, 1998; Schlytter, 2004; Schlytter & Linell, 2009; Wikan, 2002, 2003). Such essentialist understanding of culture as unchangeable and fixed has been articulated in the Swedish mass media in recent decades and provides the basis for many "corrective projects" in the field of social work. Young people with

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<sup>7</sup> For example, this dichotomy can be seen in films like *Jalla Jalla* (directed by Josef Fares 2000, Sweden), *Vingar av glas* (directed by Reza Bagher 2000, Sweden), *East Is East* (directed by Damien O'Donnell 1999, UK) and *Shouf Shouf Habibi* (directed by Albert Ter Heerdt 2005, the Netherlands). These movies illustrate the believed and real cultural "clashes" between traditional Eastern/Muslim cultures and modern Western life-style. On the other hand, they embody anti-racist elements like co-existence and marriage across ethnic boundaries (see Tigervall, 2003). One can find in these movies a tendency toward parody of so called non-Western cultures and their backwardness.

immigrant backgrounds are often portrayed as a problematic category which should be governed and controlled through social policy, legal and social service interventions and policing. The culturalist approach has been accepted as the most appealing conceptualization of young people with immigrant backgrounds and their families within social work practices in Sweden. The following is an illustration of this problem which shows how culturalism can consolidate the unequal power relations between the dominant group and people with immigrant background.

In January 2002, a young woman of Kurdish background, Fadime Sahindal was killed by her father. The murder was widely described as an "honor-killing". Since 2002 the notions of "honor-killing" and "honor-related" violence and "honor-culture" have dominated the Swedish and many other West European public debates. This "honor-related" oppression is believed to be collective, traditional and cultural and it is said to be found mainly in the Middle-East. Controlling the sexuality and the chastity of women through punishment and surveillance practices is central to this "honor-related" discourse where virginity holds a central means to guarantee the "honor" of the fathers, brothers and male relatives (Friedman & Ekholm Friedman, 2006; Kurkiala, 2003; Schlytter & Linell, 2009; Wikan, 2003). It has been intensively debated in different public arenas and these debates have resulted in social policies through different governmental grants in order to combat what now is known in Sweden as "vulnerable girls in strongly patriarchal families" (Hedström, 2004). Social work researchers have also been active in consolidating this understanding of "honor-related" oppression (Schlytter, 2004; Schlytter & Linell, 2009). For example, Schlytter (2004) argues that young women from the Middle-East are exposed to forced and arranged marriages and that they are in need of social work interventions to be helped. Further, she asserts that the Swedish legal system and social workers need more knowledge about "honor-culture" in order to meet these demands in an adequate way. Arranged marriages according to Schlytter (2004) represents a traditional way of marriage that is totally different from the Swedish marriage system that is based on freedom and equality. She also asks whether arranged marriages should be accepted in Sweden or not, an issue that should be of concern both for the state, the judicial system and social work practice (Schlytter, 2004, pp. 50-51).

In another study, Schlytter and Linell (2009) make a clear distinction between girls who are subjected to "honor culture" and those who are subjected to parents that abuse substance and are incapable/passive, mentally ill and authoritarian. The girls in their study were between 13-18 years who had been taken into care. The "honor-group" according to Schlytter and Linell (2009) experience conditions such as leisure time restrictions, restrictions at school,

punishment for transgressions of rules, threats of punishment to force compliance with rules, restrictions at home, forced marriage plans/genital mutilation/chastity norms. While the other groups in the study are regarded as facing *social* problems, the "honor-group" is believed to face a *cultural* problem that occurs when traditionalism clashes with modernity:

The honour-culture problems may be a result not only of differences between the modern and the honour-culture family institutions, but probably also of the clashes between them (Schlytter & Linell, 2009, pp. 8-9).

The problems of these young girls are described as "clashes" between two different systems, a modern Swedish family policy and a traditional "honor-culture" where modernity stands for individualism and freedom while traditionalism/pre-modernity is the site of collectivism and individual constraints. Consequently this "clash" "obstructs the chances for women and their children to integrate into the new society" (Schlytter & Linell, 2009, pp. 2-3). Further, the fathers of the "honor-group" are described as tyrants who abuse the daughters and sometimes even the mothers (Schlytter & Linell, 2009). What does it imply to produce research about the "others" who experience structural inequalities and have limited access to major power resources in the Swedish society? What are the implications for social work practice when culture is used to explain everything about minoritized groups and the ways they treat their children? Why is culture absent when Swedish families are studied and viewed as problematic within dominant representations of violence against women and children? Does culture only belong to minoritized groups?

Schlytter and Linell (2009) situate themselves through their research into minoritized families within the culturalist paradigm. "Inappropriate" child rearing and gender inequalities within these families are explicitly regarded in their study as a cultural problem. This kind of research reproduces the idea that Swedes are essentially different from the immigrant "others". If inappropriate child-rearing and gender inequality among minoritized groups are viewed as rooted in their cultural background, then social policy is encouraged to combat their culture. In order to solve these problems, their cultures must be tamed, governed, fought, dominated, suppressed and even eliminated. An assimilationist social policy thus becomes a disciplinary means to "normalize" what are believed to be deviant and pathologized Muslims and fathers, brothers and families with immigrant backgrounds. Following Foucault (1975), normalization is constitutive of the *dividing practices* of disciplines such as social work, which divide the world and its people into different categories according to a principle of the normal and the pathological. Moreover, these dividing

practices not only classify people into different categories but also situate them within a *hierarchy of development and degree of deviancy* (Chambon, Irving, & Epstein, 1999). Schlytter and Linell's (2009), classifications of different kinds of young women were based on the kind of families they were living in and the degree of oppression they were experiencing. Families with an "honor-culture" were ranked as the most oppressive and these families, and specifically the women in them were regarded as being most urgently in need of social policy and social work interventions. Such studies refer to "integration" only in relation to the "others" who have a migration background and are supposed to have a "different" culture. Consequently, the problem of integration is reduced to a matter of cultural deviation.

Normalization, as Foucault has insisted, is one of the central instruments of the exercise of power because it imposes homogenization on groups, and fixes differences, gaps and levels between groups (Rabinow, 1984) in order to enable interventions to adjust them to a standard that is believed to reflect the "good society". Likewise, partitioning is the role of social work and social workers (Chambon, et al., 1999). Families with immigrant backgrounds are at risk of being categorised by social workers as needing to undergo a normalization process. Consequently, and paradoxically, many social work institutions help to stigmatize families with immigrant backgrounds and reinforce their exclusion.

Using law enforcement to bring "traditional" families with immigrant background into modernity becomes an adequate option for many social workers in the context of the dominant discourse of "culturally deviant" immigrants. It shows how the homogenized masculinity that Muslim/immigrant men are assumed to represent is classified as "deviant", "undesirable" and "failed" in Sweden and ranked low in relation to the white Swedish middle-class masculinity. It is in relation to such discourses, that educating minoritized families and particularly women about gender equality, integration, and parenting have become an important line of actions enabled through different state-sponsored projects (see Larsen, 2009; Thomsson, 2003; Wright Nielsen, 2009) within the political framework of a "civilizing mission" among "backward" and "traditional" communities. In the same vein, Mulinari (2007) points out that the more families with immigrant backgrounds are constructed as "different/deviant", the more that children with immigrant background are subjected to colonial fantasies of a "civilising mission" within social institutions in Sweden. Furthermore, this culturalist approach involving "oppressive" Middle-Eastern/Muslim masculinities and "oppressed Oriental" women underpins the Orientalist discourse (Said, 2003/1978) which frames Muslims as oppressive and backward and not fitting in the modern world. And it disseminates the idea of Sweden and the West as genuine sites of "women-

friendly" political geographies in deep contrast to other political geographies, such as the "Orient" (e.g. Hirdman, 2002; Wikan, 2002). Sweden is thus portrayed as a modern society threatened by "primitive" and "traditional" masculinities untouched by the "progressive" values of modernity (e.g. Carlbom, 2003, 2009; Schlytter & Linell, 2009). Likewise, minoritized families are demonized and pathologized and when such a notion becomes dominant in the society, social policy and social work interventions are encouraged to take punitive measures against these families or to use pedagogy to teach them about gender equality. In recent years, strong critiques have been directed toward the ways that Swedish gender relations have been praised as modern/equal/women-friendly and used to construct the boundaries of Swedishness/Swedish nation in relation to the world but also the immigrant population in Sweden. The Swedish government communication (Regeringens skrivelse) on gender equality formulates the superiority of Swedish gender equality in the following way:

In Sweden, we have come far by international comparison; in fact, we have come the farthest in the world. We gladly share our experiences, we readily export our Swedish model of gender equality (Skr, 1999/2000:24, p. 6 quoted in Town 2002:157).

The term "we" in Sweden often embraces those who are defined in ethnic terms as Swedes and excludes the "immigrants" who are described as "traditional", "violent", "patriarchal" and *per se* "non-Swedish" (Town, 2002). Such ideological constructions of Swedish gender relations as an ethnic marker have become a discursive strategy to exclude women and men with immigrant backgrounds from belonging to Sweden. These ideological constructions devalue difference as deviance and reinforce the prevailing dominance of white Swedes over people with immigrant backgrounds (de los Reyes, 2002; M. Eriksson, 2006; Molina & de los Reyes, 2003; Mulinari, 2004, 2007; Ålund, 1991b). In this view, gendered racism following Essed (1991) is based on racial/ethnic oppression that is structured by racist and ethnicist ideas about the gender roles of minoritized women (as oppressed, subordinated and victim) and men (violent and women oppressor) (Essed, 1991, p. 31). Thus, this gendered racism legitimizes exclusionary practices against minoritized women and men due to their believed incompatibility with the dominant definitions of appropriate gender relations, roles, femininities and masculinities. Using gender relations as a way to draw boundaries between Westerners and people from the "Third World" has been an important tool in the justification of Western dominance through colonialism and imperialism in the name of modernity, progress, development, enlightenment, rationality (Mohanty, 2003). Therefore, there is a powerful conjunction between the imperial subject and the

subject of humanism and a close relationship between modern Western feminism and modern individual women and imperialism because:

It is in the East that Western woman was able to become a full individual, which was the goal desired and promoted by the emerging modernist ideology. Hence, for Western women it was possible to achieve the desired subject status against a devalued *cultural difference* (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 107 italics in original ).

The Swedish discourses about gender equality are also colored by the paradigm of "Us" and "Them". Swedes are presented as "equal" and immigrants as "oppressive/oppressed" within the same imperial and colonial logic that is embedded in the discourse of "integration". This intends to justify the existing hierarchical ethnic power structure in society. Moreover, a one-sided focus on minoritized groups and their gender relations as problematic disavows the gender inequalities within the dominant society and produces a notion of gender inequality as mainly an "ethnic" or "foreign" issue. The recurring depiction of "Third World" women as victims has been fiercely criticized by postcolonial feminists (e.g. Afshar, Aitken, & Franks, 2006; Afshar & Maynard, 2000; L. Ahmad, 1982; Al-Hibri, 1999; Minh-ha, 1989; Mohanty, 1988, 2003; Molina & de los Reyes, 2003; Mulinari, 2004; S. H. Razack, 2008; Spivak, 1999; Yegenoglu, 1998) who argue that the victimization of "Third World" women affirms the idea that Western women are emancipated, superior and in possession of a sovereign subject position:

The binary assumption that women in the West have choice, and that those in immigrant and Third World contexts have none, in part reflects the limits of our language in describing choice: Either one is an agent, or one is a victim. This binary also reflects historical representations of the West as the site of rugged individualism, and the East as the repository of passivity and culture. Furthermore, it reflects a legacy of feminist politics and theory that presents Third World women as bound by culture /.../ This conceptualization has bled into discourses that can deny the subjectivity of immigrant and Third World women, both in terms of feminist empowerment and in terms of their enjoyment of pleasure (Volpp, 2005, p. 45).

If gender inequality is reduced to culture, then we risk condensing the complexity of the problem and the mechanisms behind the subordinating positions that many Muslim women experience in Western countries. Because it limits the discourse (that becomes the basis for political action) and reduces it to overarching identities (culture or Islam) and excludes the flow of other

signifiers like ethnicity, race, class, sexuality and minoritized position that can give a more nuanced picture of the situation (cf. Yegenoglu, 1998). The way culturalist researchers use the concept of culture in relation to the dominant society and minoritized groups is related to unequal power relations and citizenship status.

In this light, Rosaldo (1993) argues that “the more power one has, the less culture one enjoys, and the more culture one has, the less power one wields. If “they” have an explicit monopoly on authentic culture, “we” have an unspoken one on institutional power” (Rosaldo, 1993, p. 202). Consequently, Rosaldo (1993) asserts that the visibility of minoritized groups as cultural and dominant subjects as postcultural and invisible are enabled through the interplay of culture, power and citizenship. Culture seems then to be a reality that only minoritized group experience and not applicable to dominant groups. It is in this context we can understand why cultural differences and “cultural clashes” refer so often to minoritized groups while the cultures of the dominant subjects are dissolved into invisibility. And it is also the reason why it becomes so handy for social workers in Sweden to use culture to explain why minoritized subjects use violence against women and children (Eliassi, 2006; M. Eriksson, 2006; Pringle, 2006), why they resort to forced and arranged marriages, why they choose to live in segregated areas with people of “their own”, why they refuse to integrate into “our” society, etc. Such essentialist notions of minoritized cultures assume that culture is fixed and objective in determining the actions, behavior, responses of minoritized groups beyond the political and historical situations within which they are situated (Eliassi, 2006).

Although there is no clear relationship between ethnicity and men’s violence against women and children, studies about social work in Sweden show that Swedish social workers claim that men with immigrant/Arabic/Muslim background are believed to have a cultural proclivity to be more violent against women and children. This discourse leads to pathologization of minoritized groups as violent and turning white Swedish men into an invisible category that does not run the risk of being scrutinized by social workers on suspicion of committing crimes or acts of violence against women and children. Subsequently, violence becomes associated with minoritized masculinities that are rendered visible and become targets of interrogation. This is why it becomes important to understand racism and social welfare arrangements within the context of unequal power relations between dominant and minoritized groups (M. Eriksson, 2006; Pringle, 2006), where the mass media have a powerful role in structuring a dominant discourse about Muslim men as violent, patriarchal and oppressive while representing Swedish men as possessing a desirable and inspirational form of masculinity (Pringle, 2006). In addition, the National

Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*) in Sweden suggests that social workers working within family law pay attention to the differences between the putatively "equal" Swedes and "unequal" immigrants who come from patriarchal extended family systems (M. Eriksson, 2006; Socialstyrelsen, 2003). Although culture can be an important consideration, an over-reliance on cultural explanation can distract social workers and policy makers from important structural factors such as unemployment, poverty, marginalization and exclusion (C. Williams & Soydan, 2005) and racism (Barn, 2007) in the context of unequal power relations. In the light of the culturalist approaches, the subordination of minoritized groups occurs in many interconnected contexts of unequal power relations (social work practice and research and official state documents) that reinforce the dominance of white Swedes and stigmatize minoritized groups as a "disturbing" element in the wider society who need to be governed by the state and social welfare agencies.

Hence, there is a negative nexus between culture and power, cultural visibility and invisibility, "cultural clashes" and "cultural compatibility". "Cultural clash" is a famous metaphor used in the context of immigration and social work to underline the question of cultural incompatibility of different immigrant groups with the dominant society. The concept of "cultural clash" has a central role in asserting the myth of Swedish and European identity as superior in relation to non-European identities that are perceived as being trapped in a pre-modern time with pre-modern values. As Razack puts it:

The close connection between assertions of cultural difference and racism has meant that in white societies the smallest reference to cultural differences between the European majority and Third World people (Muslims in particular) triggers an instant chain of associations (the veil, female genital mutilation, arranged marriages) that ends with the declared superiority of European culture, imagined as a homogenous composite of values including a unique commitment to democracy and human rights, and to the human rights of women in particular (S. H. Razack, 2008, p. 88).

The point Razack made above about "cultural clashes" is also reported in social work practice (Barn, 2007; Eliassi, 2006; Kamali, 1997; Pringle, 2006; C. Williams & Soydan, 2005). "Cultural clashes" are not invoked when a Dane or a German encounters a Swede, but rather when subjects that belong to other parts of the world which have been and continue to be under Western domination: the Middle-East; Latin America; Asia; Africa. Gender inequality, inappropriate child rearing, patriarchal masculinity, forced and arranged marriages, "cultural clashes" are regarded as integration problems that affect young people with immigrant/Muslim backgrounds and which trigger identity crises and

alienation (see for instance Schlytter, 2004; Schlytter & Linell, 2009; Wikan, 2002, 2003). Many researchers have showed that ideological constructions of Muslim, Asian or Middle Eastern families as a problem for Swedish society or for European societies play a significant role in legitimizing state racism and repressive immigration policies (Brah, 1992, p. 71; Fekete, 2006; Gullestad, 2006; Mulinari, 2007; S. H. Razack, 2008). Accordingly, these racist constructions and definitions of families with immigrant backgrounds “have powerful effects when translated into social policy or when they become the ‘professional common sense’ of teachers, social workers, health visitors and others working within agencies of social welfare” (Brah, 1992, p. 73). The lived experiences of these families do not bear much resemblance to the values and perspectives of the professional within agencies of social welfare that are structured by stereotypical notions (Brah, 1992), often fuelled by the mass media.

An important epistemological aspect in every research project is the formulation of research questions. Researchers who formulate a research question should reconsider the power structure they are embedded in and how it may affirm their positions as those in charge. This critical stance to social work research is based on Anti-oppressive social work that asserts that social work research should be liberating from oppression (see Murphy, Hunt, Zajicek, Norris, & Hamilton, 2009; Strier, 2007). Social work, according to Humphries (2004), needs to go beyond individualistic models and critically interrogate research that is not “simply measuring ‘what works’ but that asks critical questions about the motives behind and the ideologies that inform social policies” (Humphries, 2004, p. 105). Working with impoverished people and groups affected by reactionary policies becomes an imperative for social workers who embrace the idea of social justice and social change. This stance is useful when we consider the ways social work research in Sweden can reproduce ontologies of cultural difference between “us” and “them”. Different categories can be fixed and rendered as static thereby overlooking the broader structural context within which these categories are constructed, imbued with the effects of unequal power relations, as we saw in (Schlytter & Linell, 2009) with regard to young women with immigrant backgrounds in Sweden.

Identity formation is a social work issue that is closely related to the theoretical and professional activities of social work (see Dominelli, 2002; Kamali, 1999; Pringle, 2006; Soydan & Williams, 1998; Valtonen, 2008). Identity is a site through which relations of oppression and dominance are constituted. The concept of oppression can be understood as an umbrella for different kinds of devaluation, discrimination and belittling processes that people belonging to different social divisions (gender, class, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality) experience differently (Dominelli, 2002). Furthermore, identity is a form of

social location within a particular society that produces different positionalities and collective attributes with different material implications for those individuals and groups involved. It is essential to look at the various ways people are defined and in which way and who benefits from these definitions and ascriptions and who does not. These definitions are also related to who and why certain groups are entitled to the social resources in a society.

Advocating for structural change and helping to mobilize anti-racist directions and challenging domination are constitutive to anti-oppressive social work and anti-racist social work (Dominelli, 1997, 2002; Fook, 2002, 2003; see also Juhila, 2004; Lewis, 2000; Livholts, 2001; Penketh, 2000; Quinn, 2009). Oppression is an issue for social work and social justice. Promotion of social justice can be done when the relationship between oppression and anti-oppression is identified. Understanding and identifying the social structures, processes and practices that result in oppression is an important step toward enabling social justice and advocating for the opportunities and rights of marginalized and oppressed groups (Lacroix, 2006; Moreau, 1987; Mullaly, 1997, 2002). Social work that is permeated by case work and colour-blindness not only risks neglecting structural conditions that influence not only the life conditions of the individual but also the outcome of the relationship between social workers and disadvantaged groups and individuals. The structural approach takes into account the material conditions of the individual belonging to a specific group and how these can influence his/her life chances. Besides, it is of paramount importance that social work and social services pay serious attention to research that highlights experiences of disadvantaged groups like young people with migrant backgrounds and integrate this knowledge into the practice of social work. In order to enable social justice and equality, it is the duty of social work institutions to understand under what historical, cultural, social and economic contexts discrimination and racism are legitimized, what groups discursively become objects of discriminatory practices and how resistance can be framed against discriminatory structures (Dominelli, 1997; Eliassi, 2006).

This dissertation engages with identity formation among young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden and highlights social problems such as stigmatization, structural inequalities, ethnic discrimination, racism, otherisation and gender inequality. In addition, it pays attention to the different ways racism and discrimination impinge on the life of young people with immigrant backgrounds and the way they respond to these exclusionary practices and oppression when they are denied equal citizenship within an egalitarian framework. Identity formation and the position of "others" in society is one of the major challenges to social work practice at a time of increasing racism and discrimination in Europe reinforced by culturalist

explanations as guidelines for social policies that deal with minoritized groups (de los Reyes & Kamali, 2005; Eliassi, 2006). If the goal of social work is to foster equality and challenge the subordinate positions of minoritized and marginalized groups, then it is essential to understand the processes of oppression and domination that deprive certain groups from having equal access to the power resources. In this respect, Dominelli with regard to anti-oppressive social work underlines that:

Exclusionary processes and oppressive dynamics are linked to identity formation in all its complexities. An oppressed person's sense of who he or she is affects his or her reaction to his or her situation, insofar as he or she seeks to establish control over his or her circumstances and (re)define his or her identity on his or her own terms. An individual's attempts to do so draw on their personal perceptions, their group positioning in a social hierarchy and the "naming" of their status by others, including the dominant group. Their responses range from various forms of accommodation to rejection. The connection between identity formation and oppressive or exclusionary processes is crucial to people's responses to oppression (Dominelli, 2002, p. 47).

In other words, we cannot understand the identity formation of minoritized groups if we do not take into consideration those exclusionary processes that they are subjected to in their everyday life. This includes understanding how dominant institutions and subjects frame these processes and how minoritized groups resist or develop various strategies to deal with them. These understandings are important because social work is a discipline permeated by a racist and colonial legacy. Several studies indicate there is a lack of anti-oppressive and anti-racist research, methods and practices in Sweden (Eliassi, 2006; M. Eriksson, 2006; Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2005; Kamali, 1997; Pringle, 2006). Course literature within social work that deals with minoritized groups often reproduces their subordinated position and fosters racist practices, enabled by white social workers who are trained to view the social problems of minoritized clients as a consequence of their cultural background and leave the structural inequalities and experiences intact (Dominelli, 1997). Social workers need thus to be aware of this legacy and reconsider their understanding of social work as only implying good news for those subjects who are subjected to it:

Social work is not innocent of historical abuses associated with colonial practices, especially and foremost among Aboriginal peoples. It therefore follows that we incorporate a dominant ideology that is tinged with the stain of colonialism and imperialism. Knowledge of our history allows us to make

concerned efforts to avoid its repetition in our work with others, whether on a local or a global terrain (N. Razack, 2009, pp. 11-12).

Dominelli (1997) suggests that we can trace this racist legacy with regards to the ways young people with immigrant backgrounds are conceptualized as "trapped between cultures", depicting Asian women as passive, submissive and oppressed, black women as sexually promiscuous and assigning patriarchy to Asian and black men. As a result of this, Asian and black families, cultures and communities are pathologized and punitive social work interventions are justified as legitimate (Dominelli, 1997). Challenging such processes of normalization that reinforce the prevailing structural inequalities should be the target of social work research and practices (Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2005). Besides, this colonial heritage, and the reproduction of knowledge within social work, make postcolonial theory central (Eliassi, 2006; Fejo-King & Briskman, 2009; Hammarén, 2007; Healy, 2005; Lewis, 2000; Mattsson, 2010; Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni, & Tuori, 2009; Quinn, 2009; Wikström, 2007) to understanding contemporary European societies and their encounters with people with immigrant backgrounds in the light of structural inequalities which still prevail between people who are described as "whites/Europeans" and people who are defined as "non-whites". Mulinari, et al., (2009) underline that Sweden and other Nordic countries not only see themselves as part of the Western world but also as inheritors of the values of the enlightenment. This creates a complicity with colonialism. Colonial complicity involves "processes in which (post)colonial imaginaries, practices and products are made to be part of what is understood as the "national" and "traditional" culture of the Nordic countries" (Mulinari, et al., 2009, pp. 1-2). Besides, the civilising mission that has been an important part of the European colonial dominance, is not only practiced outside of Europe but also implemented within its own welfare agencies, where the target groups are immigrants who are assumed to be culturally deviant and need instruction to become "normalized", "integrated" or "assimilated", practices that involve social work interventions and practitioners (Larsen, 2009; Mulinari, et al., 2009).

Within critical and anti-oppressive social work, the idea of opposing essentialist approaches to identities is widely held. Essentialist notions of identity can become a means to sustain the status quo and neglect the strong relationship between identity formation and the broader structural contexts that structure patterns of (in)equality among and between different groups in different ways (Allan, Briskman, & Pease, 2009; Dominelli, 2002; Dominelli, Lorenz, & Soydan, 2001; Fook, 2002). As mentioned earlier, the essentialist conceptualization tends to depict the social problems of the immigrant clients as culturally generated

and neglect the structural inequality that immigrants experience within the labor market, housing, education, the mass media, etc (Ålund, 2002).

In this light, it is worth mentioning that identity formation and cultural differences should be understood in relation to historical and political contexts. The studies of Kurdish groups' identity formations can not, therefore, be isolated from their historical experiences in their former areas of existence (Kurdistan or Kurdish regions), and the new conditions of lives in European countries. In the following, Kurdish experiences of structural inequality in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria will be discussed in relation to the nation-state building in these four countries and how Kurds have been structurally minoritized and subordinated within these nation-states.

### **Kurdish experiences of otherness and resistance in the Middle East**

In order to understand the main reasons behind forced Kurdish migration to Western countries, it is necessary to have some general knowledge about the Kurds and their identity formations within and in relation to the nation-states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, where a major part of the Kurdish population inhabit. Historical experiences of subordination and inequalities are important repertoires for the construction of belonging and identification among young people with Kurdish backgrounds. The brief overview of the experiences of Kurds within these four nation-states which follows also provides insights into diverging and converging experiences of minoritized positions in the Middle East.

The Kurds constitute the fourth largest population group in the Middle East after the Arabs, Turks and Persians. There are also small Kurdish communities in the former Soviet Union and a considerable Kurdish diaspora in Western countries. Kurdistan as the main region of the Kurdish population was divided during the 1920s between Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran as the result of the First World War. Great Britain and France played a major role in drawing these new boundaries and these boundary constructions have contributed to historical inequalities experienced by Kurds in these four states. However, Kurdistan has never been controlled by one single administration, empire or state under the same epoch. Rather, there have been independent and semi-independent Kurdish emirates within the Ottoman Empire before the birth of the modern Turkey. A Major part of the Kurdish population was Islamized during the 700s, and the majority of the Kurds are Sunni Muslims. The Kurdish population also includes Shia Muslims, Yezidis and Ahl-Haq, Jews and Christians. The Kurdish language has two major dialects, Kurmanji (Latin scripts) and Sorani (Arabic

scripts). The overall size of the Kurdish population is a matter of dispute between the governments of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria and Kurdish nationalists. While the governments in these countries attempt to minimize the number of the Kurds, or deny their existence in the case of Turkey and Syria, Kurdish nationalists tend to overestimate the number (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008; Salih, 2000; van Bruinessen, 2006). In academic studies, however, the number of Kurds is usually estimated to be between 30 and 35 million (see Alinia, 2004; Ciment, 1996; Khayati, 2008; Salih, 2000; Wahlbeck, 1999).

According to van Bruinessen (1991) the modern Kurdish identity and Kurdish nationalism have been formed as a reaction against the cultural and political dominance by Arabs, Turks and Persians in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. There are both similarities and differences with regard to the unequal treatments of the Kurds but also the kind of political rights these countries provide the Kurds as an ethnic group or a dominated group. Differences between these four countries' historical and political developments have also implied different responses from Kurdish movements, resistance and political parties. Vali (2006) argues that Kurdish identity politics are fragmented and have a transnational character because the "Kurdish case" is a political challenge for all these four countries Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria. Furthermore, he points out that one should speak of Kurdish nationalism in plural terms not as a unified movement because they don't act against a particular centre in order to create the foundation and basis for a unified Kurdish national movement. This fragmentation is rooted in Kurdish history and explains the lack of a unified Kurdish nationalist movement. Different political and ideological regimes and the political and historical specificity of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria explain why Kurdish responses to these four states' politics of denial, suppression, difference and citizenship in different part of Kurdistan takes specific forms which in turn shape different demands and agendas. Vali (2006) underlines that there is no possibility for the Kurds to achieve equal rights within the political realm of these four nation-states. For as long as the ethnicities of the sovereign state-based identities are not changed, a political status quo will fuel the persistence of political coercion and violence. The Kurdish population denied equal rights within these four nation-states can easily resort to the ideal of a Kurdish nation-state, where nation-states as a result of modernity hold a privileged place as the most desirable political community during the last two centuries. Hence, the Kurds are denied a modern political identity by four modern nation-states, a political subordination that releases the feelings of statelessness among many Kurds. The stateless person according to Vali is regarded as a:

[R]elic of past fighting against modernity, or merely as an accident of modernity fighting against history; either way, the result is the same: the stateless and his/her claims cannot be represented in or by the political and philosophical discourse of modernity, at least not as politics. In the political discourse of modernity, statelessness is conceived as a humanitarian issue, evoking compassion and mercy, on a par with famine, hunger and homelessness. This is because a consideration of statelessness as politics and the stateless as a 'political subject' immediately invokes the thorny issues of rights, which, in the political discourse of modernity, is intrinsically linked with the institution of the nation-state and national sovereignty. /.../ The identity and the claims of the stateless are denied by the modern nation-state, which turns the stateless into the historical other of modernity (Vali, 2006, p. 55).

The political situation of the Kurds within these four nation-states has been described as internal colonialism due to the unequal centre-periphery relation and unequal cultural and socio-political discrimination (Entessar, 1992, p. 6) and Kurdistan is regarded as an inter-state colony (Besikci, 1988). Despite the differences in the political structure (Islamic, secular, modernist, baathist, nationalist), political coordination between these four states to keep Kurds from attaining nationhood, and to destabilize Kurdish unity, have been the hallmark of their foreign policies. Ciment (1996) points out that the Kurds have through their modern history faced:

[O]ne incontrovertible fact of realpolitik: they have no predictable or permanent allies in the region. Because of this fact, they have often sought alliances with international powers /.../. While Kurdish leaders and their followers have sought regional and international allies for pragmatic reasons, these alliances have more often than not proved disastrous for the Kurds in the long run. Frequently, these alliances have come undone when the friendly power decided it was in its interest to drop the Kurds in favour of the regime they were opposing (Ciment, 1996, pp. 25-26).

The political reality that Ciment described above is neatly connected to the geopolitical situation of the Kurdish regions, which are integrated in and surrounded by four states which all have a Kurdish population and areas called Kurdistan. If a Kurdish region gains autonomy or independence, it will surely send signals to other non-autonomous Kurdish regions in other states regarding the possibility of not being controlled by a central government. So how do these countries differ from each other with regard to their politics toward Kurds? In the following I will give a brief historical account of the political

positions that Kurds occupy within the nation-states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Turkish politics toward Kurds have been characterized by total denial and forced assimilation since 1924. The Turkish nation-building in the beginning of 1920s adapted the Kemalist notion of Turkish national liberation, secularism and modernization. Kurdish language, school, organizations and publications were banned in 1924 as part of a Turkification process that was prompted by the emergence of the new Turkish nation-state. The Kurds were urged and obliged to become Turks and admit their pride and happiness in their adopted Turkish identity. Homogenization of Turkey became the device of a state in opposition to the diversity ideal fostered by the Ottoman Empire (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008; Sezgin & Wall, 2005; Vali, 2006, 2007; Zeydanlioglu, 2008). This Turkish nationalist domination was asserted through chauvinist slogans such as "How happy is the one who says I am a Turk" , "One Turk equals the whole world" and "One language, one people, one flag" (Zeydanlioglu, 2008, p. 162). The Turkish politics toward its Kurdish population have been described as ethnocide and linguicide, due to the assimilatory and suppressing practices exercised by the Turkish state (Hassanpour, 1999).

Drawing upon Said's (2003/1978) critique of Orientalism and patterned Orientalist representations of Muslims and Islam as "primordial", "backward", "traditional", "static" and the West as the site of modernity and progression, Zeydanlioglu (2008) shows that Turkish nationalism was appropriated with Orientalism through forced Turkification and civilization rhetoric about modernizing the presumed archaic, religious and the backward East (read Kurdish areas). This Orientalist vision with all its assimilatory practices aspired for a de-Islamization and westernization of the political subjects within the modern Turkish nation-state in order to cope with an inferiority complex among Turkish elites toward the West and to satisfy the Western gaze. However, Zeydanlioglu argues that the Turkish state has not succeeded in its homogenization project considering the intensive rise of Kurdish identity politics and armed struggle between Kurdish movement and the Turkish army (Zeydanlioglu, 2008). As a result, the Turkish media often depict Kurdish claims for rights as a "terrorist", "deviant" and "separatist", "problem" that is assumed to constitute a threat and to undermine the "indivisibility" of the sovereign Turkish state. However, in recent years, the situation of the Kurdish population and Kurdish claims for political, economic and linguistic rights have received quasi-official recognition and foreign entities like the European Union and US have been important forces in improving the situation of the Kurds in Turkey. Without these influences the Kurdish issue would have been ignored by the Turkish state and regarded only as an "internal issue". Despite this, the

Kurds are still objectified, demonized and dehumanized and seldom appear as subjects in Turkish public media, discriminatory practices that consolidate their otherness within the Turkish state (Sezgin & Wall, 2005). Turkish states and mainstream media have resorted to a strategy of suppression-silence-absence in order to deprive the Kurds of their subjectivities and deny them a voice in history. For many decades, the Kurd in dominant Turkish representations has been an unnameable subject and this denial creates a precarious situation for the Turkish state due to its unwillingness to admit that there is a Kurdish population in Turkey which is demanding its right in the name of Kurdishness (cf. Vali, 2007).

Since the beginning of the 1980s, Kurdistan's Worker Party (PKK) has been conducting an armed struggle against the Turkish state and demanded at times independence and at times autonomy and cultural rights. The Kurdish region in Turkey has been militarized by the Turkish state and many Kurdish villages have been destroyed and around 30 000 people have been killed in this war (see Zeydanlioglu, 2008). The Democratic Society Party (DTP) which has its main support in the Kurdish region has been successful in regional elections in Turkey and has mobilized political efforts to find a peaceful solution for the unequal Turkish-Kurdish relationship. DTP is accused by nationalist Turks of being the political wing of PKK, which is regarded as a "terrorist" organization. As a consequence, the DTP was banned in 2009 resulting in massive protests and arrests around Kurdish cities in Turkey. If any structural change is to occur within Turkey with regards to its relationship with the Kurds, the Turkish legal system, constitution, the Turkish military and nationalist Turkish parties would have to reconsider their notions of the Kurdish sufferings and structural inequalities that the Kurds in Turkey are experiencing due to the dominant excluding ethnicist notion of Turkishness.

Iraq, a postcolonial state, was established in 1918 by Britain, who had (and have!) a major imperial interest in this oil-rich postcolonial state. Kurdish cities were occupied by British forces during 1918-1930 and Kurdish movements resisted this occupation. Kurds were viewed by the British administrators as primitive tribesmen who were incapable of ruling themselves (Alinia, 2004; Ciment, 1996), a colonial discourse that Britain has applied to many other colonies in order to justify dominating them. The pro-British Hashemite monarchy was overthrown by the mid-1950s and the Republic of Iraq was established through a coup by the leftist General Abd al-Karim Qasim, who in the beginning was friendly in his approach to Kurds but this relationship did not last so long and ended in rivalry. In 1963, Qasim's regime was overthrown by the nationalist Baath party and the Baath regime promised Kurds autonomy and admitted the existence of a Kurdish nation and the right to cultural rights

and subsidies, which led to a peace agreement in 1970. The main dispute was still to come: this centred on the question of whether the oil-refining city of Kirkuk should be put under the Kurdish administration or not. No deal was reached on this issue, and soon, Kurdish troops and the Iraqi army were fighting each other, where Kurds gained at a beginning support from Iran, US and Israel. Saddam Hussein desperately visited Teheran and accepted Iraqi concessions from long-disputed territories if Iran withdrew its support to the Kurds. The Shah of Iran and Saddam Hussein reached an agreement during the OPEC conference in Algiers and Kurds were left alone there with no allies and Kurdish guerrilla soldiers (*Peshmerga* in Kurdish) escaped Iraq to Iran along with 150,000 civilian refugees (Ciment, 1996). The remaining Iraqi Kurds have been subjugated and oppressed by the Arab nationalists through, armed conflicts, warfare, mass execution, deportations and chemical weapons attacks. On the other hand, the Kurds enjoyed a high degree of cultural rights in marked contrast to Kurds in Turkey, Iran and Syria.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the Iraqi defeat in the Gulf War in 1991 gave the Kurds in Iraq a golden opportunity to take control over many Kurdish cities and, with the help of the United States, France and the United Kingdom, the UN established a non-fly zone in order to protect the Kurdish population from Iraqi airplanes and intrusions, although Turkish and Iranians aggression within these zones were tolerated. When Saddam Hussein was overthrown in 2003 due to the American-led invasion, Kurdish soldiers took control over almost all areas that are considered by Kurdish movements as Kurdish, including Kirkuk. Under the US occupation, Iraq has a new constitution since 2005 which gives the Kurds the right to an autonomous Kurdish region within the political geography of the Federal Iraq. The disputed areas in Iraq are still a source of disagreement between the Kurdish administration led by Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Masoud Barzani and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan of Jalal Talabani and the central government. The central Iraqi government fears that integration of these disputed areas within the present Kurdish administration can be a prelude to an independent Kurdish state. While the Kurdish administration argue that Kurdish areas have been Arabized due to the Saddam Hussein's Arabization policy in Kurdistan and Kurdish claims are inscribed in the Iraqi constitution according to article 140 where the situation of Kirkuk could be "normalized" through a referendum by the inhabitants of Kirkuk. This quest has been delayed due to disagreements between the central government and the Kurdish regional government. The Kurdish administration fears that a strong central Iraqi government can imply less Kurdish rights and power in Iraq. On the other hand, if Kurds earlier in history have claimed their rights only within the Kurdish region, the expanded Kurdish share in Iraqi politics via Kurdish officials such as Iraqi president, Jalal

Talabani, Iraqi foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari and Iraqi military chief, Babakir Zebari are remarkable changes in the anatomy of the Iraqi political structure. It is worth mentioning, that in case of Iraq and Iran, newly established governments have at the beginning always been willing to cooperate with Kurdish movements, but as soon as they have consolidated their political and military power in their states, they have resorted to authoritarian means to deal with the Kurds. The sectarian divides in Iraq can easily engender new conflicts and Kurdish officials are well aware of this fact and assert that all problems and disagreements should be solved through the Iraqi constitution.

When it comes to Iran, the history is different and Iran has a longer history of dealing with differences due to its experiences of diversity within the Persian Empire. Yet, the Kurds as the third largest population groups after the Persians and Azeris, are the main resisting force against the centralist governments in Teheran via the Shah of Iran to Ayatollah Khomeini and Khamenei (Vali, 2006). In 1941, World War II made a historical contribution to the situation of the Kurds in Iran, when Soviet and British forces occupied Iran. With the support of the Soviet Union, the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad was established and Qazi Muhammed was appointed as its president. However, the republic did not last more than a year due to lack of support from the Soviet Union. The Iranian army defeated the Republic and hanged Qazi Muhammed and other Kurdish officials in 1947 in the same square where they had proclaimed independence (Ciment, 1996; Wahlbeck, 1999).

After the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, the Kurdish movements were hoping for structural change that could improve their political situation, but soon realized that the new regime was reluctant to adhere to Kurdish demands. Concepts such as minority and nationalism was supposed to stand in stark contrast to Islam according to Khomeini, and "Islam" was limited to Shia Muslims and thus excluded those Kurds who are Sunni Muslims and Ahl-Haq from equal political participation. Hence, many Kurds are discriminated on both ethnic and religious grounds. Khomeini declared a war against the Kurdish movements which led to intense fighting between the Iranian forces and Kurdish parties, Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI) and Komala. More than 55, 000 people were killed in these clashes and 300 villages were destroyed by governmental troops (Wahlbeck, 1999). Kurdistan thus became a militarized zone with heavily mined areas, because of Iranian-Kurdish clashes and because of the Iraqi-Iran war. KDPI and Komala were both defeated and they have lost important political figures due to political assassinations by the Iranian regime. Political parties in Kurdistan have demanded an autonomous Kurdistan within the Iranian border, a demand that is rejected by the central government. Kurdish areas belong to the most

impoverished areas in Iran, obliging many Kurds to migrate to major Iranian towns to earn a living. Immigration to West European countries is also a result of this economic and political deprivation. Major Kurdish parties in Iran ask for a federal Iran similar to what the Kurds enjoy in Iraq, enabled by the Iraqi constitution.

Syria has the smallest Kurdish population among these four states and there have never been armed Kurdish struggles against the central government. Syria, also a postcolonial state, gained its independence after the withdrawal of French and British troops in 1946. When this new nation-state was in its early years, the relationships between the Kurds and Arabs were fairly good as indeed they had been during the Ottoman Empire. When this new state adopted a Pan-Arabist ideology, however, Kurds and other non-Arab populations were denied recognition. During 1961, the oppression of the Kurds by the Syrian government became pronounced and a policy of Arabization of Kurdish areas and dispersion of the Kurdish population was implemented thoroughly. When the nationalist Baath party took power, Kurds were deprived of many rights, including to education and employment. The state applied strategies of dividing and ruling the Kurds, implanting and arming Arab nationalists in the Kurdish regions to mount anti-Kurdish campaigns. Additionally, the 120,000 Kurds in Syria were classified as foreigners and deprived of Syrian citizenship (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008; Wahlbeck, 1999).

### **The organization of the dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters. In the first chapter I have dealt with a contextualization of the historical and political frameworks that inform the background of this dissertation, which deals with young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden. I have included a brief discussion of structural inequalities within different social realms in Sweden and how Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria have experienced subordination in a variety of ways dependent on the political arrangement of the states that the Kurds inhabit. I have also discussed the relationship between social welfare policies, social work and identity formation within a context of structural inequalities.

In chapter 2 I will discuss the methodological and theoretical framework that this dissertation is based on and the methods that I have used to collect data and analyze them. I also discuss the power relationship between the researcher and the research participants and the consequences of this relationship with regard to the representation of perspectives, possibilities and the limits of knowledge construction. Chapter 3 engages with the theoretical approach used in the dissertation; mainly postcolonial theory and its understanding of belonging and identity formation, the relationship between dominance,

stigmatization and subordination and the ways various modes of resistance can be framed toward discriminatory and exclusionary practices. Further, I also discuss the ways nationalism is gendered and sexualized and how men and women are given different roles and positions within the hierarchy of the nation.

Chapter 4, 5, 6 are based on the empirical material and my analysis of the interviews. More specifically, Chapter 4 examines the ways young men and women frame their discourses about the political freedom that Kurds experience in Sweden in as contrasted with Kurdish experiences in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. They relate to their own concrete experiences as Kurds within these countries but also describe a Kurdish identity politics that is based on victimhood and nationalism. I also discuss how young Kurds encounter denial of their Kurdish identity in Sweden by some young people with Turkish, Arabic and Persian background, and respond to this denial in different ways. In addition, due to the salience of nationalism as a political template for thinking about identities, several young people with Kurdish backgrounds formulate different reasons why Kurds should enact a nationalist project and a modern national Kurdish identity.

Chapter 5 engages with the promises of Swedish citizenship and the concrete experiences of the young people in relation to major societal resources such as the labor market, housing, mass media, the judicial system, schools, etc. The daily experiences of these young people show that Swedish citizenship is embedded in a discourse about whiteness that excludes those groups who are not regarded as Westerners and Christians. The position of the residential district or quarter and the structural inequality that some urban residential quarters are exposed to will be discussed in relation to the experiences of young people with immigrant backgrounds in a wider European context. The question of visibility and invisibility is discussed in relation to the ways these young men and women experience stigmatization as Kurds and as immigrants. The relationship between homeland, citizenship and exclusionary practices will be explored as will the ways that the young men and women frame various strategies to deal with exclusionary practices.

In Chapter 6, the focus is on the ways young Kurds experience gendered racism in different public spheres due to the stigmatizing associations that are made between "Kurds" and "honor-killing". This chapter shows how dominant discourses in the mass media influence their everyday life in different spaces where young women are exposed to a hermeneutics of benevolent suspicion by white Swedes due to the assumption that they run the risk of being oppressed by their parents, brothers or families. In contrast to the young women, young

men are suspected of committing crimes or acts of violence against their sisters. In relation to these suspicious acts, young women mostly talk back against dominant Swedish representations of women and men with Kurdish background as oppressive. However, not all Kurdish masculinities are praised. The research participants identified certain young men with Kurdish background as "imports" who represent according to them a "patriarchal" and "ugly" form of Kurdishness. The so called "imports" are rejected because they are, according to the young men and women, "backward" and not "modern". These "imports", the respondents feel, should undergo integration within the dominant Swedish society in order to be accepted. In the last section of this chapter, the questions of marriage and life-partners are explored, and young men and women reject the notion of forced marriage and underline their willingness to choose their life-partners without excluding their parents from their decision-making. Although they are aware of the negative representations of arranged marriages in Sweden/Europe, they regarded arranged marriage as a dominant way for getting married without devaluing it. They also construct a continuum of desirability with regards to appropriate and inappropriate marriage partners in relation to certain national or ethnic collectivities.

The final chapter concludes the dissertation by re-visiting the results and arguments of this study about the politics of belonging and the implication of this study for social work.



# **Chapter 2**

## **Method and Methodological Considerations**



## **Introduction**

This dissertation is based on a qualitative research method and uses semi-structured interviews as its main data collection technique. In the following chapter, I will discuss the theoretical and philosophical assumptions underpinning this study through specific concepts that are linked to qualitative research. These concepts are used to describe the research procedures to obtain trustworthy results in the study. Methodology is an important part of scientific studies because it informs the theoretical and philosophical background of the study, the ways the subjects are constructed in the study and how their accounts and experiences can be interpreted within the prevalent historical and political contexts in which the researcher and the research participants are situated. The relationship between the researcher and the text is an intricate case because the researcher is the tool and the subject of the representation of the interviewees or the studied subjects that will be presented to a wider audience. Therefore, it is a risky terrain with thorny edges that requires important considerations and reflections. The way we interpret the texts or accounts always carries the traces of our life histories as researchers and the scientific traditions that we belong to. It also reflects the political visions we attach importance to and the society we envisage through our writings.

In this chapter, I start with a discussion of how I understand constructionism and apply it in this dissertation when researching identity. Further, I will discuss how experience can be understood as a mediated site of knowledge. Experience is understood and interpreted in relation to the prevailing dominant discourses that enable different social locations, perspectives and visions about what kind of society we live in and envisage and how we understand ourselves in relation to surrounding individuals, collectivities and social structures. I will also provide thorough discussions of the questions of sampling, interviewing as a method for collecting material, ethical considerations in relation to minoritized subjects, content analysis as a technique to analyze the interview material and the relationship between the researcher and the research participants.

### **Constructionism and researching identity**

My approach to knowledge is inspired by social constructionism<sup>8</sup>, which asserts that the human is a site and a source of knowledge about the world. Latour (1993) points out that constructivism is disputed because it binds intimately epistemological questions with the social order. This implies that human beings make and impose history and reality on our world. Beside this, human beings

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<sup>8</sup> Constructivism and constructionism is used interchangeably in this dissertation.

are able to challenge and change the social reality although not without friction. Abbott, following W. I. Thomas's theorem, stresses that the fact that reality is socially constructed does not mean that it has less effect on our lives. On the contrary, many socially constructed phenomena have real consequences for our lives and positions in those societies we are living (Abbott, 2004). If we adopt this approach while studying ethnicity, then the differences between a constructivist and an essentialist interpretation may not be remarkable. In contrast, Nederveen Pieterse (2007) argues that we should refute this idea because the "point of constructivist analysis is to unpack ethnicity, to make its contingencies visible and to do so *through* everyday realities of ethnic politics" (Nederveen Pieterse, 2007, p. 48 ).

Most people in their daily life may hold a realist and a reified perception of reality and identities without questioning and contesting their historical nature. However, this does not mean that we should accept these naturalized social constructions and give them an absolute and a reified existence beyond our institutional, structural and daily practices. But it is more adequate to discuss and analyze these constructions within those social, political and cultural contexts that fuel their constructions, naturalness, timelessness, realness, maintenance, tensions, lives, continuities or demises (Nagel, 2003, p. 6 ). In other words, we have to look to the institutional and structural settings in which young men and women with Kurdish backgrounds formulate their perspectives and position themselves as belonging to different identity categories like "Kurds", "immigrant" "Swedish", "Muslims" or "anti-Islamic", "nationalists", "anti-nationalists" etc. Claims to such identities do not emerge in a political vacuum but are part of existing discourses through which young people position themselves and are positioned and negotiate these structural positionings in contexts of unequal power relations that assign different identities unequal political positionings and values.

In order to understand the unequal situation of contemporary migrants from the "Third world", Miles (1993) rejects race<sup>9</sup> as an analytical concept due to the

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<sup>9</sup> Race is often used by migration scholars in quotes to denote that the term race is problematic. I will avoid quotation marks around race in this study. The problematic nature of race is related to the brutal history of the so called "scientific" racism that justified killing and subordination in the name of immutable racial differences. Race is a political and social construct through which socio-economic injustices, exploitation and exclusion have been constructed. Rendering race a fixed meaning through claiming genetic and biological differences between racial groups, social change and engineering have been neglected to tackle social inequality. In many European countries the concept of ethnicity is more common which refers to differences grounded in cultural and religious traits. Although this does not mean that the term ethnicity is less problematic, because ethnic and cultural differences are often used in relation to minoritized groups in essentialist terms. The biological referent in ethnicity and culture is not totally absent, because visual markers are often a

risk of ontologization and prefers "racialization" to grasp the differentiation processes of racism that enable the social construction of certain groups as racialized and subordinated: Miles defines racialization as the:

[R]epresentational process whereby social significance is attached to certain biological (usually phenotypical) human features, on the basis on which those people possessing those characteristics are designated as a distinct social collectivity (Miles, 1989, p. 74).

Concepts such as immigrants, race, ethnicity, culture, and minority are often used in the context of migration, multiculturalism and colonialism as "problem-generating" categories for dominant groups. Although race is rejected as an objective and scientific category, it is still used in English-speaking countries along with ethnicity, ethnic minority and people from "other cultures". These concepts are constructed in a context of unequal power relations, where the dominant groups are often dissolved into invisibility while groups that are minoritized as an effect of power relations and rendered visible through signification processes that focus on certain phenotypical features, dress codes and cultural practices as visual markers of otherness. Therefore using these problematic categories and working against them in research is important in dismantling the social injustices that are justified in the name of "racial, cultural, religious and ethnic" differences. Denouncing race and replacing it with ethnicity or culture does not mean that the injustices will fade away, but it is first when the political structures are deracialized, that equality can be enhanced and universalized.

Researching race and ethnicity is inextricably linked to questions of power and knowledge in society and the social order. The way we understand race and ethnicity and the way we conceptualize these socially constructed categories have important political implications for those who participate in the study. Race and ethnicity have never been stable social categories through history. Even if subjects identify with a certain race, this identification is related to a "self-imposed choice within an externally imposed context" (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008, p. 7 ). Take for instance, the term immigrant, there are thousands of Swedish citizens who are regarded and experience themselves as immigrants and not as Swedes. As social scientists we can not ignore the fact that this identification is intimately connected to the political context of Sweden, where being an immigrant is related to repetitive styles of hailing, and as a result, an immigrant is not considered as a legitimate citizen or member of the Swedish nation-state regardless of the passport they hold. During this last decade, a

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central means to differentiate and draw the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 4).

severe critique has been raised against researchers who take the nation-state for granted and conceptualize immigrants as deviant and problematic, leading these researchers to adhere to a methodological nationalism (Lithman, 2004; Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). If we conceptualize immigrants as ontologically real, then we inscribe our research within the prevalent representations within the dominant society and reproduce social inequalities and otherness via ethnic essentialism (see Gunaratnam, 2003). The natures of identities are both relational and situated and the meanings that are assigned to identities are continuously contested on social and subjective levels due to the prevailing historical context (Gunaratnam, 2003).

What it means to be Kurdish in Sweden differs from the meanings it is assigned in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria or France. And the meanings of Kurdishness will change and be transformed as soon as subjects identified as Kurds travel and migrate to other places with other histories and political circumstances, hierarchies, forms of subordination and domination. Earlier experience of Kurdishness will be important prior to migration but they are not the only decisive force in constituting the fluid and multiple meanings of Kurdishness, because identities as lived experiences are historically situated within specific political contexts.

Echoing Radhakrishnan's "treacherous bind", Gunaratnam (2003) argues that at an epistemological and methodological level, ethnicity researchers need to work both *with* and *against* racial and ethnic categories in order to research the dynamic of social difference and challenge racism and oppression. Gunaratnam puts it succinctly when she argues that we need firstly as researchers to illustrate the heterogeneity and ambiguities within a social group "so that any individual or social group cannot be understood by reference to a single category of difference". Secondly, we need to address the "relational nature of social difference" and thirdly the need to illuminate the "systematic patterning and the specific contingency of the connections between individuals and social contexts" (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 50).

The goal of this dissertation is not to show essential characteristics of what constitutes young Kurdish people in Sweden but what I intend to analyze is how young people with Kurdish backgrounds are embedded within hierarchies and systems of domination that permeate the Swedish society and how imposed immigrant identity influences their lives with regards to a matrix of domination involving gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, etc. Although I am not claiming that all these social divisions will be included in all my analysis, depending on the context I will use the appropriate social

divisions or categories to analyze how different positions of domination and subordination are constructed.

### **Experience as a mediated site of knowledge**

Experience has always held a central position within the feminist discourse (Gunaratnam, 2003; Mohanty, 2003; Mulinari & Sandell, 1999; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1999; Stone-Mediatore, 1998). The shared experiences of women as a putative social category has been seen as a source of knowledge to address and transform those inequalities that women are experiencing as a result of their belonging to an ascribed and lived woman identity. The notion of experience has thus contributed to the authority of feminist knowledge (Skeggs, 1999). Among postmodern and poststructuralist critics, Scott (1992) has provided one of the strongest objections to the notion of experience and accused it of being positivist and empiricist because it is assumed that experience is equated with truth and raw material for claiming truth. What we consider as an experience according to her cannot be regarded as self-evident and straightforward because experience can always be contested because it has political implications.

Mohanty (1992, pp. 88-89 ) argues that experience should be understood in terms of fragmentation and discontinuity and it should be situated within historical contexts in order to enable generalizing claims on part of a collectivity regarding shared experiences. Mulinari and Sandell (1999) relate the experience of oppression and lived worlds to the prevailing social structures, a stance that has been discussed rigorously by Essed (1991) in relation to the experience of everyday racism among Black women. Essed suggests that experience should be understood in a multidimensional way and should not only be limited to personal experience but also include a broader meaning combining micro/specific events with their structural impact on how we define reality. In order to understand the experience of racism among black people. Essed distinguishes between personal experiences (direct personal exposure to racism), vicarious experiences (witnessed or reported racism against others), mediated experiences (racism directed against a larger group that one belongs to) and cognitive experiences (reported by the mass media). And memory is intimately linked to experience (Essed, 1991, p. 59). This insightful way of approaching experience allows this dissertation not only to claim knowledge limited to the life conditions of the research participants but also to other youth with Kurdish/immigrant backgrounds who share certain experiences of otherisation and social inequality. It is within the context of oppressive social structures that hooks (1994) discusses the notion of experience with regard to the "passion of experience" and "the passion of remembrance" by minoritized groups:

When I use the phrase “passion of experience”, it encompasses many feelings but particularly sufferings, for there is a particular knowledge that comes from sufferings. It is always a way of knowing that is often expressed through the body, what it knows, what has been deeply inscribed on it through experience. This complexity of experience can rarely be voiced and named from a distance. It is a privileged location, even as it is not the only or even always the most important location from which one can know (hooks, 1994, p. 91 ).

The passion of narrating experiences is important in this dissertation due to its focus on social inequality and sufferings in different political and social contexts and the ways the research participants make sense of their experiences within these contexts and give them meanings through different discourses and terminologies. Following Smith (1987) I will use the accounts of single individuals or cases from interviews with young people with Kurdish backgrounds “as a point of entry, the locus of an experiencing subject or subjects, into a larger social and economic process” (Smith, 1987, p. 157 ). I am interested in their narrative accounts in order to understand the way they understand and interpret their place in the world and how they imagine the collectivities around them. It is true , as Anthias (2002) points out, that when asking someone a question about his or her identity it “often produces a blank stare, a puzzled silence or a glib and formulaic response” (Anthias, 2002, p. 492). Such direct questions do not enable simple answers. A better way to approach this question is to let the respondents “talk about themselves, their lives and their experiences and their “identity” will emerge through their narration (Anthias, p. 492).

During my interviews with the research participants, few of them wanted to explicitly express what “they were” and they often related the (im)possible ways of representing themselves to me. None of them claimed that they were “only Kurdish” or that the case of identity was closed. They often related different situations and experiences that have made them more Kurdish or Swedish. The ways they had been treated in the Swedish society or in Kurdistan influenced the ways they interpreted their experiences. Their modes of identifying with “Kurdishness”, “Swedishness”, “immigrants”, “Muslims” were not only built upon their actual personal experiences but also built upon the experiences of other friends with Muslim and immigrant background who had experienced different social inequalities. The mass media had a significant role in structuring their beliefs about what “constituted” people who were regarded as Kurds, Muslims or immigrants. The mass media became a medium through which they also came to believe they understood what white Swedes “really” think of people with immigrant/Muslim/Kurdish background, because

the mass media was viewed as a powerful social resource that belongs to the dominant group and reflects its interests.

The role of the mass media in constituting personal experiences has been highlighted by van Dijk (1993a) who asserts that the mass media provide media users with a general model and shared social cognition ("social mind") about how to interpret situations and events related to minoritized groups. This shared representation of minoritized groups by the mass media occupies a central place in the processes of reproduction and relations of dominance and marking the differences between (positive) "Us" and (negative) "Them" (van Dijk, 1993a). The same mass media were not only capable of making them experience a stigmatized Kurdish/immigrant identity, but also enabling them to feel pride over their Kurdish identity when the media provided spaces for Kurdish young people to enter the public space of the dominant group and represent Kurdishness in more positive ways to a wider audience and leave the ghettoized self-glorification within the Kurdish communities.

Their experiences not only indicated how they made sense of their life conditions but also indicated the society they envisioned and what could be done to achieve such a society. Accordingly, experiences can both tell us what are understood as social injustices and what can be done about them in order to ameliorate their life conditions beyond structural inequalities that are structured around discourses of ethnic, religious and cultural difference. Attacking those discourses that provide the basis for subordination of certain groups was an important discursive strategy for the research participants. However, this does not mean that they all share an idea of what constitutes a just society because they positioned themselves differently and sometimes even in conflicting ways. The experiences that the research participants mediate are not fixed with single meanings but can be exposed continually to revision and transformation. The intersubjective dimension of the context (Anthias, 2002) can not be dismissed. It is important to understand who the narrator is and to whom the narratives are told, an issue that I will deal with later on regarding the relationship between the researcher and the research participants.

## **Sampling and sites**

Sampling is an important part of research procedures because:

[W]e have to select the "right" cases, groups and materials in a somehow defined way – so that we can do our study with limited resources – from a more or less infinite horizon of possible selections. And with what we select, we want to make statements that we can generalize in one way or the other – in most cases at

least beyond the research situations and beyond the four or forty people we interviewed (Flick, 2007, p. 25 ).

I have chosen to use purposeful sampling, snow ball sampling and quota sampling in order to select information-rich people/cases (Patton, 2002) for this study. Flick (2007) underlines that sampling is not only a question of selecting people to be interviewed, but also involves selection of sites where you can find such people and situations. Uniqueness and shared patterns that cut across cases are, according to Patton, other important benefits with sampling in qualitative research. Patton argues that the matter of sample size holds an ambiguous place within qualitative research. The size of the sample depends on what you want to know. Besides this, the purpose of the inquiry and the available time and resources are other important issues that should be considered when determining the sample size (Patton, 2002).

Various studies (Å. Andersson, 2003; Back, 1996; Bunar, 2001; Bäckman, 2009; Hammarén, 2007; Kamali, 1999; Lalander, 2009; Sernhede, 2002; Ålund, 1997) about identity formation of young people with immigrant backgrounds have pointed to the ways experiences are located and formed in relation to specific places and time. Due to housing segregation and the concentration of large numbers of people with immigrant backgrounds, the poorer residential quarters in major Swedish towns take a central place in these studies. In this dissertation, places via discourses of home/homeland constructions are important because they are discursively constitutive to the identity formation of these young people and the ways they attach and develop a sense of belonging to places. The question of the poorer quarters is also dealt with in this dissertation and the ways they are represented and positioned vis-à-vis the nation-state. The aim of studying research participants' experiences in particular sites is to show how systems of dividing practices (between "Swedes" and "immigrants") within different public arenas within the boundary of the contingent and naturalized nation-state influence the identity formation of young people with Kurdish backgrounds and restrict their participation in the Swedish society on unequal terms. Hence, sites in this dissertation are related to the labor market, housing, school, the mass media, the legal system and other public spaces.

The sample in this dissertation comprised 28 (15 male and 13 female) young men and women with a Kurdish background who were between 17 and 27 years old. My choice of this age group was related to the contemporary extended experiences of being young but also due to the general arbitrary definition of youth as an age-group.

The respondents placed and framed their narratives within a heteronormative social order but this does not mean that homosexuals or bisexuals do not exist among Kurds. Therefore, there is a risk that this study reproduces the hegemony of heteronormativity within the Kurdish society as a result of the absence of homosexuals or bisexuals within the sample. The question of social stigmatization is highly relevant to their absence among the respondents of this study. Furthermore, few of the young people in this study wanted to give information about their family background with regards to educational background and pointed out that the study should be limited to themselves and not their parents. Therefore, I lack adequate information about their class background. However, this does not mean that class will not appear in this study, it will be illustrated through the positioning they make in relation to other Kurds. I believe that it is not appropriate to ask a person what class background they have, but it is more suitable to let them talk about their experiences and tastes relationally in order to identify class identification and positioning.

The young people included in this study are all Swedish citizens and have lived in Sweden for a major part of their lives. The length of their residence in Sweden is significant for the aim of the study because the possibility of having knowledge of the Swedish language and personal experiences of the Swedish society is higher. Seven of the 28 research participants were born in Sweden. In order to be included in the study, it was underlined that participants' parents could have had various different reasons for migrating to Sweden. Most participants reported that their parents' migration was politically motivated but there are also a few participants who evoked humanitarian and economic reasons. The study aims to capture the variety of experiences among Kurdish youth involved in different social settings (university student organizations), political organisations, political Swedish organisations, restaurants, high schools (3 research participants), and upper secondary schools (13 research participants), and university education (12 research participants). The logic of choosing different young people with Kurdish backgrounds in different social settings is to capture various experiences with the hope of highlighting both commonality and differences. Differences make comparisons between different cases possible. The sample is geographically dispersed, with research participants from Stockholm, Göteborg, Uppsala, Östersund, Örebro and Kalmar. Furthermore, two young men who had only one Kurdish parent are also included in the sample. My pre-understanding has an important impact on the selection of the participants and the towns. I knew from my experiences that it was possible to find many people with Kurdish background in these cities. There is a big difference between the size of the cities, and therefore an avoidance of bias due to a limited focus on major cities like Stockholm or

Göteborg. Östersund is chosen due to the availability of participants and its immediate geographical accessibility.

To recruit research participants, I started with an announcement of the study on four Kurdish websites, [www.beyan.net](http://www.beyan.net), [www.komar.se](http://www.komar.se), [www.wekurd.com](http://www.wekurd.com), [www.kurd.se](http://www.kurd.se) between 2005-2006, although I received most responses via [www.beyan.net](http://www.beyan.net), because it is a website that brings together several thousand young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden. Nine research participants were recruited through [www.beyan.net](http://www.beyan.net) and 1 research participant via [www.komar.se](http://www.komar.se). I wrote in the announcement on these websites that the study was about young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden and due to the focus of the study I looked for participants with Kurdish background from Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, an approach that can be called quota sampling, since I have divided the Kurds into different sub-sets. This was one of the ways to find respondents for the study. The next stage of recruitment was done with the help of snowball sampling where the interviewees put me in contact with five more potential respondents, who I then contacted and recruited. The fourth way to recruit interviewees was through my personal networks in Östersund, where I have been living for the past eight years. In Östersund I recruited seven research participants. Kalmar is my hometown and is the place where I have grown up in Sweden, so I know most young people with Kurdish backgrounds in that town and recruited two research participants there. The fifth part of recruitment for the sample was through a friend of mine who works as a social worker in an urban quarter with a large Kurdish population and she facilitated my contact with four more members of the sample. The young people that the social workers introduced me to were not clients of social services but young people who sporadically came to a youth recreation centre.

It is worth mentioning that the young men and women in this study (see chapter 6) will speak about a category of young men with Kurdish background, labelled as "imports", referring to people who are considered "too Kurdish" and are not regarded as "integrated/modern". None of the young people with Kurdish backgrounds in this study identified with or represented themselves as "imports", therefore, the "imports" appear as the "others" who are inferiorized and rejected. This category was constructed during the interviews when the research participants constructed a continuum of desirable and undesirable Kurds in Sweden. Although this study includes young people with Kurdish backgrounds from different parts of Sweden, I am not claiming that this study includes all Kurdish experiences, instead it grasps some important part of their lives. Individuals are both unique and socially constituted. This means that they both have specific experiences but also have certain experiences that are socially

shared. The research participants mediate through their accounts both individually and socially shared experiences.

### **The research interview and ethical considerations**

I have chosen to use a semi-structured interview guide to collect data. The strength of this form of interview guide is that it asks similar questions to the respondents but at the same time gives them the option to bring in other perspectives and questions that the interview guide may have neglected. There is both a structure and non-structure in the semi-structured interview. Interviews can also be used to reach elaborated, comprehensive and detailed answers (see for instance Rapley, 2004) that are produced from the interview interaction. Interviews attempt usually to capture the individual experience of the participants, in order to understand the experience of other people in similar situations (Flick, 2007, p. 79).

The interview situation can also be understood as a construction site of knowledge (Kvale, 2007). The theoretical background of interview research is grounded in symbolic interaction where meaning-making through interaction is pertinent (Flick, 2007). There are, according to Alvesson, (2002, pp. 108-109) two major positions on interviewing; neopositivist and romanticist. Neopositivism attempts to establish a context-free truth about reality and avoids any threat, bias or influence on the interview interaction and the answers from the respondents. The romantic approach supports a warm human interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee and the goal is to establish rapport, trust and commitment. This approach is thus seen to facilitate the access of the interviewer to the inner world (meanings, ideas, feelings, intentions) of the interviewee. Hence, the interview is seen as an instrument or a tool to gain access to the respondents and their perceptions and attitudes toward their lives, beliefs and actions. I do not believe in an authentic inner world but I do believe in historically produced accounts of the self and discursive construction of reality without resorting to fixity, essentialism and permanence. My understanding of the research interview is inspired by Rapley who asserts that interviews are not about establishing truth but "how the respondents produce, sustain and negotiate specific and sometimes contradictory truth" (Rapley, 2004, p. 26).

I believe that Rapley's account goes beyond the neopositivist and the romantic version of interviewing. Rapley discusses the encountering forms of interviewing from a non-essentialist point of view and points at the power relationship, the social context and the various strategies that interviewers use to conduct a "good" interview. He asserts that there is no such thing in the interview situation as "neutrality" and "objectivity" that conform to the

positivist traditions. There are always interviewers and interviewees who are structurally positioned in domination and subordination. Their social locations often impinge on the interview process and the interactive process between the researcher and the research participants. Therefore I can not neglect the fact that I belong to a minoritized immigrant position and at the same time inhabit an academic space that provides me with privileges and benefits.

I chose the qualitative research interview as a data collection technique because it is a “uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects’ everyday world. Interviews allow the subjects to convey to others situations from their own perspective and in their own world” (Kvale, 2007, p. 11). Interviewing has many unfixed features that can come to expression during an interview. Description is an important part of the qualitative research interview, where the subjects are allowed to describe their lives and how they experience and feel and how they act. Research interviews usually aim at describing specific situations and actions. Through focusing on events and specific situations regarding the interviewee, the interviewer is enabled to “arrive at meanings on a concrete level” (Kvale, 2007, p. 12). It is important as an interviewer to show openness toward the interview because it can lead to unexpected questions and phenomena. The focus of a research interview is often directed toward particular themes and as an interviewer you lead the interviewee toward the themes in order to see how the subject understands and relates to these themes. Ambiguity and contradictory statements are not unusual in qualitative research and the way the interviewee relates to the issues during the interview. What the interviewer needs to do in these cases is to “clarify, as far as possible, whether the ambiguities and contradictory statements are due to a failure of communication in the interview situation, or whether they reflect genuine inconsistencies, ambivalence and contradictions of an interviewee’s life situation” (Kvale, 2007, p. 13). The interviewee can also change their ideas and understanding of their descriptions and meanings about the themes discussed. Because in the course of the interview, the interviewee may find new aspects of what he or she has addressed. Hence, the interview can be a mutual learning process for the interviewer and the interviewee.

The interpersonal situation of the interview and the interaction is a site of knowledge construction. The interviewer and the interviewee influence each other. A different interviewer would lead to another interaction and a different kind of knowledge (Kvale, 2007, pp. 13-14). The interviewee might gain positive experience from the interaction because as it is not so usual that people sit and listen to others and show interest in their lives, experiences and understanding regarding a topic (Kvale, 2007, p. 14). During my interviews with the young

people, several of them said they considered the interview as "therapy" and they explained that things became clearer to them regarding their identities and their views on issues like homeland and marriage. They regarded it as a "therapy" because they could discuss painful stories of belonging and non-belonging and discriminatory practices. One of the interviewees told me that maybe he should also get involved in asking people about the experiences of discrimination so that "we" could do something about it. When the interviews were finished, I did not pack my stuff and leave them with all the emotions that can be evoked during an interview. I turned off the tape-recorder and spoke with them about their feelings concerning the interview and the issues that we discussed.

There is a risk that respondents provide the interviewer with socially desirable answers in order to please or hide information that can prevent the interviewer learning something about him or her (Bradburn, 1983). The presence of the interviewer can also make the interviewee respond in a way that he or she thinks that the interviewer wants to hear. The interviewee may also want to demonstrate that they are more knowledgeable regarding the issues under discussion than they really are (Halvorsen, 1992, p. 89). Interviews have their own interpersonal and structural contexts that leave their traces on the interview situations and the ways different topics are discussed. The youth that I have interviewed come from different social backgrounds and this influenced the ways they formulated their ideas and perspectives on issues of belonging, identity and discrimination and exclusion.

The Swedish language was used consistently during the interviews with some exceptions when the respondents used occasional Kurdish words that captured their experiences. They all preferred the Swedish language because they regarded themselves more fluent in Swedish than in Kurdish. I contacted the respondents by email and telephone and informed them about the study and its focus and issues regarding anonymity and confidentiality. We made an appointment and agreed on a location to meet. The interviews were conducted in the towns where they were residing, and they were given the opportunity to choose a place that they thought was comfortable and quiet in order to conduct the interview. Many of the interviews were carried out in bookable rooms provided by the libraries in different towns. A few of the interviews were done in quiet corners of coffee shops. Sometimes we started with a cup of tea or coffee before jumping into the interview and started with a chat about something general like the weather, travelling, big town, school, etc. I also gave them some information about my background, my educational background, where I had lived and the reason behind my migration to Sweden. I used a tape-recorder and recorded all the interviews with the consent of the

interviewee, and I informed them that they could withdraw from the interview at any time if they wished to. They all said that I could contact them after the interview if I did not find clarity in their answers. The interviews were individual interviews lasting between 55 and 110 minutes, depending on the length and complexity of the respondents' answers. During an interview, various topics were discussed that were not directly of relevance. I have not transcribed all the interview material but only those parts that I judged to be directly related to the purpose of the study. All the interviews were carried out between 2006 and 2007.

Ethical issues do not occupy a marginal position within the boundary of the interview investigation but they permeate the entire research process. When it comes to ethical guidelines for social science research, common concerns regard the informed consent of the research participants, confidentiality of the research participants, consequences of their participation in the research project and the role of the researcher in this project (Kvale, 2007).

My contact with the research participants was mainly via emailing and telephone, where I informed them about the study and its aims. During the interviews, I informed them about their right to withdraw from the interview and their right to refuse to answer questions they were uncomfortable with. I have underlined for them the importance of ethical issues, such as the ethical responsibility of the researcher vis-à-vis the respondents and for what purposes the results are used in the wider society. Further, they were informed that in order to be part of this research project, they had to consent to participate. The majority of the participants accepted being given a pseudonym in order to secure their confidentiality. One of the research participants told me that what he had said in the interview was true and he was not afraid of having his real name used in the study. However, I told him that I sought a standardized mode of securing the confidentiality of the research participants and chose to give them all pseudonyms. Nevertheless, when it comes to the consequences of participating in this research project, it should be stressed that minoritized groups (where Kurds are included) have the right to be sceptical toward research because throughout history it has provided "the foundation for reports about and representation of 'the Other'. In colonial texts, research becomes an objective way of representing the dark-skinned Other to the white world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 1). Therefore, the researcher faces the danger of perpetuating existing structural inequalities and strengthening this position through inscribing the group within the prevailing dominant representations under the umbrella of research.

As Bilger and van Liempt (2009) suggest, it requires sensitivity to these issues while evaluating the benefits and the harms that a study can imply for the research participants as individuals but also as belonging to a group that occupies a "vulnerable" position in society. Hence, the accountability of the researcher in evading harmful consequences for the research participants is central to the research project. Therefore, I have often revisited my texts, interpretations and material and considered the ways it can benefit or damage the research participants at an individual level but also at a structural level. Research not only can reproduce social inequality but it can also reinforce discriminatory and punitive discourses against minoritized groups which suffer structural subordination.

### **Qualitative content analysis**

Analysing data implies some kind of transformation. When the data is collected, the challenging task for the researcher is to process the data through analytical procedures and transform it "into a clear, understandable, insightful, trustworthy and even original analysis" (Gibbs, 2007, p. 1). One important activity regarding the practicality of qualitative analysis is having awareness about the kinds of data that can be examined and the way they can be described and explained. Dannefjord (2005) argues that we should make a distinction between data and empiric. Empiric is constituted of those data that the theory points out as argument for the asserted position. Without theory the empiric becomes irrelevant and incomprehensible. Empiric should not be understood as knowledge in itself but rather as knowledge about something. It is, in principle, impossible to provide a complete explanation of a phenomenon because there are always many conceivable explanations (Dannefjord, 2005). Furthermore, the theory we use influences which aspects of reality we focus on. The analysis of data as I have experienced it does not emerge after transcribing the interview interactions into textual versions of the interaction but before doing the interview, during the interview and after the interview. It is a process that is not linear but going back and forth and around. This means that every time I have returned to the interview texts and checked my interpretations, I have found new passages that could be understood in new ways and have amended former interpretations or modified the framework of the interpretations.

Doing qualitative analysis often entails a creative process where the qualitative analyst seeks patterns, themes and categories and makes judgments about what part of the data is significant and meaningful for their study (Patton, 2002). Content analysis involves using written and analyzing their contents on different levels (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2006). According to Patton content analysis refers to "any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core

consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2002, p. 453 ). From the beginning it was thought that quantitatively oriented content analysis would function as an objective and neutral way to describe the content of different forms of communication (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Conversely, content analysis is used in this dissertation as a method to describe and interpret the account or the constructed ideas or objects of a society or a social group (see Berg, 2004) through focusing on certain passages that are of interest for this study related to the politics of belonging among young people with Kurdish backgrounds.

Graneheim and Lundman (2004) stress that reality can be formulated and interpreted in different ways. How we understand this reality is related to and independent of our subjective interpretations. A text can be interpreted in various ways which in turn can give it multiple meanings. Graneheim and Lundman (2004) provide a persuasive overview of concepts that build constitutive features of content analysis and discuss how they can be used and understood. One of the most important issues regarding qualitative content analysis is the question of whether one should focus more on the manifest (the obvious and the visible) content or the latent content (the underlying meaning of a text). What unites them is that they deal with interpretation, yet the interpretations "vary in depth and the level of abstraction" (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 106). I have transformed the interviews into written text and constructed units of analysis grounded in the interview data. The content of the units of analysis have been condensed while preserving the essential part of the text. It is important to stress, however, that when I quote the research participants in this dissertation, I do not use the condensed text but complete unedited passages from the interview material to illustrate different perspectives and experiences about different issues. After having condensed the units of analysis I have coded the material according to the meaning unit of the condensed text. The codes were mainly based on the empirical results. Using codes is important because they direct and define what kind of data you are analyzing, but it also helps you to organize your thoughts about the text and possible prevailing interpretations (Gibbs, 2007). Themes are core features of qualitative content analysis and allude to the latent or underlying meaning of the text (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). A theme, according to DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) emerges from the data and the themes can be explicitly or implicitly expressed by research participants, but potentially, a theme "captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole" (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p. 362 ). It is the researcher's duty to infer and extract the themes from the data. The themes are also "an iteration or recurrence of a variety of experiences that is manifested in pattern or configurations of behavior, that is, ways of thinking, feeling, or acting" (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p. 363 ).

When it comes to my usage of the themes, I have used both latent and manifest meanings of the interview texts. That is also related to the ways the research participants formulated their ideas and perspectives and positioned themselves in relation to different social discourses. Besides, in accordance with my theoretical orientation and the purpose of the dissertation, I have constructed different themes and analyzed their potential meanings. It is worth mentioning that I don't claim a singular or an essential meaning to the text that I have analyzed and constructed.

I have read through the interviews several times to attain a sense of the whole and looked after different patterns and variations among the respondents and thus constructed different themes. In order to structure the empirical results and use the theoretical framework of this dissertation to shed light on the interview texts, I have sorted the themes into different areas around the dissertation questions: how they relate to the country of "origin"; how they understand their position in the Swedish society both as women and men; how they relate to Kurdish nationalism and the question of homeland belonging; the situation of Kurds in Sweden; the positions of young Kurdish men and women in Sweden; the commonalities and differences in their lived experiences. Additionally, I have dealt with the question of representations of Kurds in Sweden and how they affect the interviewees' self-understandings. While looking into how inequality and discrimination are experienced, I also sorted the various ways the respondents had resisted and dealt with discriminatory practices. The question of maintaining and eroding boundaries of their Kurdish identities, the question of sexuality and marriage are discussed with regards to existing collective identities in their social life. The interpretation and the meanings that I have assigned to these themes do not need be the only mode of interpreting the data, but, rather, they are informed by the framework of my theoretical understanding of different concepts and social problems.

The findings and the themes that I have constructed through my conceptual framework have been discussed during different seminars with my colleagues and opponents who have read drafts of this text. In this context, the credibility of my research findings has been discussed, criticized and commented upon, providing valuable inputs. I have also presented parts of the research findings to different Kurdish youth associations in Stockholm, Örebro, Arboga and Kalmar and I have received many inspiring comments and interventions from Kurdish young people who participated in these seminars. About 150 young people with Kurdish backgrounds participated in these seminars, which included some of the interviewees. These seminars gave me several opportunities to discuss with them the limits and the strength of the interpretations with regards to experiences of young people with Kurdish

backgrounds. Some of them emailed me afterwards regarding different topics related to Kurdish identity formation in Sweden.

Whether the findings of this dissertation are or are not applicable or transferable to other settings or groups is related to the methodological background and the social location of the researcher in relation to the research subjects. The findings of the dissertation can't claim a discursive truth that is fixed and immune against malleability, especially when I deal with identity formation that is a category of practice always in process and sensitive to the dynamic of structural and political changes in society. It is noteworthy that the research participants are also young men and women whose life journeys have just started. When it comes to trustworthiness of this study or the plausibility of its interpretative modes, the evaluation can be done in relation to the procedures I have used to produce findings that are situated and marked by my theoretical and personal presence.

### **Researcher and research participants: representation, power relations and identity**

Writing as inquiry where the researchers examine their writing processes and positions, can function as a learning tool that can enable the researcher to generate knowledge about himself/herself and the study subject and topics (Colyar, 2008). Hence, writing can be viewed "as a product, process, form of invention, and instrument of self-reflection" (Colyar, 2008, p. 421 ). Besides, through writing on various topics and relating them to our life-histories, we can provide a space for negotiation of the personal and the intellectual. Personal experiences can be transformed into texts in order to frame theoretical understandings of the topics we study (Davis, 2009), as I will do in this study. The outcomes of our use of a method can not be understood in terms of neutrality, innocence or merely technicality because it has political implications. For example, writing and researching about gender, race, ethnicity, class, poverty, sexuality can not be understood as innocent projects because they are intimately related to the nature of the social order (Bonilla-Silva & Zuberi, 2008). Use of a certain method or several methods can hardly provide the researcher with a defence shield or immunity toward the influence of the researcher on the study, the interpretation and the analysis. It can become unpleasant for some researchers to reveal their beliefs, opinions and the driving forces behind the interest for the research they are involved with because of the hegemonic positivist claims about objective and value-free science that permeate large parts of the social sciences. Researchers or people are not abstractions beyond history, time and space or situated within a vacuum, but people positioned within specific political, social and cultural contexts, which in

turn influence how they experience social worlds and what they see and what they don't see. Denzin and Lincoln put it as follows:

[T]here is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of – and between – the observer and the observed. Subjects, or individuals, are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they have done and why (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21).

Continuous reflexivity by the researchers regarding their research is an important tool to approach the subject of the study and the interactive process of knowledge production. To demonstrate reflexivity, is to recognize that ones background, milieu, preferences will leave their marks on the product of the research (Gibbs, 2007, p. 91 ). But what does this approach mean to me as belonging to the same ethnic group I am studying? I adhere to the belief that my Kurdish background leaves its traces on the text. My gaze and perspective are colored by my experiences related to my Kurdish background. Writing about young people with Kurdish backgrounds obliges me to navigate between the horizons of distance and nearness. Indeed I inscribe myself in this dissertation with a situated power to appear as a historical subject that can write and speak but also with a privilege to construct other subject-positions and speak *to, for, with and about* them. To write and speak is to take a stance toward those issues under study but also a way to challenge, maintain or change existing social order and knowing. Yet, those stances one take should be well grounded in prevailing theoretical and empirical findings. It is important to bear in mind that every researcher occupies various positions within the social space that we inhabit and therefore it is important to discuss their effects and reflect on what kind of traces the subjectivity of the researcher leaves on the research process. Reflexivity is not only an activity for researchers who do not or are not allowed to belong to the mainstream society with an assumption that they are more subjective than "us", or that "we" can provide a perspective that is the horizon of all perspectives that is capable of transcending the straightjacket of subjectivism in which the "other" is trapped. "Objectivity" becomes a means to disavow social relations structured in dominance. It enables the mainstream to claim its perspective as a general human point of departure that should be aspired to and defended (cf. Radhakrishnan, 2003). Reflexivity is also a question of power relations, disputes over representation, the thorny terrain of meaning-makings and effects of the researcher's framework of interpretation on our understanding of the research participants' life-stories.

It is important to acknowledge that it is not only my ethnic background that can influence the research process and the interaction with the young men and women that I have interviewed. Gender, education, class and age, time of residence in Sweden are all factors of paramount importance. I found that it was difficult to have a linear and uniform way of conducting an interview with every single person in order to create an atmosphere of mutual trust between the researcher and the researched. Showing openness and interest in the interviewee's accounts can make it easier to receive detailed answers from the respondents. For instance, I realized that the way I reacted to how young women spoke about young men with Kurdish backgrounds influenced the way the young women gave their accounts. While the young women spoke about the differences and the prevailing inequalities within the realm of Kurdish nationalism, I was several times identified as "one of them", as they referred to "You Kurdish guys" and soon after that they added that it was not a "personal attack on me as a person but on the group young Kurdish men". I showed consistently that I appreciated their detailed accounts. My age (28 years in 2006) was another factor that influenced the interview situation and interaction. For many of them, a researcher was an older person. This became clear, when we made telephone and e-mail appointments. Despite the fact, that I gave several of them details about my clothing (like colour) they did not approach me. It took between five to ten minutes before they asked whether I was the right person and they often apologized because they were expecting a formal person with a suit and not a young man wearing jeans and sneakers. Research was understood to be a formal and serious practice that was associated with specific dress codes and ages.

At the end of each interview I asked them how my background had influenced the interview. They stressed the benefits of my background due to my insights and knowledge about Kurdish society. However, I was well aware of the possibility that my Kurdish background would make them believe we would have a shared understanding (which indeed we did in some sense as member of the same social group) and expecting me to know for instance "how it is to be a Kurd, or to live as a Kurd, or to be a young Kurdish woman or man, or what Kurdish culture is and how Kurdish parents live and think". This was evidenced in that they often hailed my Kurdish background. I encouraged them to explain what they meant by asking them questions like: How do you mean? Can you explain in more detail? I did this to encourage answers that could illuminate topics in cases where they might have assumed that due to my background I understood and therefore they left it unsaid (Rapley, 2004).

Here are some accounts that highlight the importance of my background and its effects on the interactive process of the interview<sup>10</sup>:

**Josef (M: 21):** At the beginning I was thinking whether I should say what I really think about issues that concern family or my relatives. I would not have had that anxiety if you were not Kurdish. But I felt that I could be open toward you.

In Josef's case it was not self-evident that he could open himself to "outsiders" when it came to intimate issues relating to his family or relatives and how things were going on there. As Josef indicates, my "Kurdishness" led at the beginning to anxiety about whether to share certain information or not. My Kurdish background was therefore also considered a potential obstacle and not a means of facilitating entry into his social life. Hence, being Kurdish does not mean automatically being an "insider".

Some interviewees talked positively about my Kurdish background with regard to my knowledge of the Kurds and my lived experiences as a relatively young man with Kurdish background. Further, there was an expectation from the respondents that I understood the Kurds better than non-Kurdish researchers. In contrast to Josef, many other interviewees saw my Kurdish background as helpful for facilitating the interview interaction:

**Hana (F: 18):** I did not know that you were a Kurd at the beginning. Your background influences the interview a lot. I can tell things that a Swede would not have understood in the same way. This study is despite all about young people with Kurdish backgrounds and you may recognize certain aspect of it that somebody else would not have done. I am sure that the results will be different with you as researcher than a Swedish researcher.

For Hana, our Kurdish background created a mutual understanding about the subjects we were discussing. However this is not to say that there is no need for further explanation regarding the subjects we talk about due to the prevailing social proximity between us as young people with Kurdish backgrounds: I often asked for further elaboration of answers. In the case of Hana, my real and imagined "insiderness" is equated with "knowledge" and proximity to the issues and experiences that young people with Kurdish backgrounds are dealing with in their daily life.

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<sup>10</sup> Name, gender and age are included at the beginning of every account when the interviewees are quoted.

When ethical issues are discussed in research, one consideration is the question of whether the research participants can draw any individual or structural benefits from participation in a research project. Many respondents pointed out the importance of "being heard" as a young Kurd:

**Kawa (M: 22):** It feels very good to have done this interview. I don't know if this interview will have any impact on the society but I feel that my voice can be heard.

Participation in the study was regarded as a medium to make a difference in Swedish society and having clout in its constitution. For marginalized groups, voice is often regarded as a means to subvert the structural inequality that they experience. As several researchers (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005; Dhawan, 2007; hooks, 1984; Humphries, 2009; Juhila, 2004) have indicated, the reasons why voice is given such importance is that the different answers and solutions can provide alternatives to dominant definitions of social reality and marginalized identities. For Zana, participation in this study is about resisting external imposition of negative characterization to the Kurdish group as "murderers" and "bad people":

**Zana (M: 21):** It is good that you can show the Swedes how we are and how we feel and think. We are no murderers. We are no bad people. It would have been difficult to explain if you were not Kurdish.

Zana is concerned with the stereotypical ways Kurds are represented in public spaces, which in turn influence his social experiences and self-image and imprison his subjectivity in a category filled with negative attributes. Fontana and Frey (2008) point out that for oppressed and disadvantaged groups, the interviewer can be seen as a partner in the study who can work to support the condition of the interviewee through social policies. For Kawa and Zana, I am seen as a putative representative of the Kurds and this interview is seen as a means to influence Swedish society and the prevailing public image of the Kurds in a positive way. They regard their participation as part of political efforts to generate social change.

The question of age, ethnic belonging, time of residence in Sweden and education were evoked as important aspects of the interview process. According to several of them, the "insiderness" is not solely limited to my Kurdish background but also to other social divisions that enable or complicate the interview interaction. One of the young women told me that: "your questions and my answers would have been different if you have been a 40 year old Kurdish man". The following is another illustration:

**Zara (F: 20):** I think if you had been older and had not lived in Sweden for such a long time and had not been well-educated, I would not have been so honest with regard to certain questions. The old Kurdish men think in an old-fashioned way and they would have considered me as too outspoken because I am a Kurdish girl. I would have been more careful not to give a wrong picture of myself.

It is not only my Kurdish background that is assumed to facilitate or complicate the interview but also my age. The young women in particular viewed my age as an advantage in order to discuss issues they would not have discussed in the same way with an older Kurdish person. It was also believed that my age produces different kinds of questions and receives different kind of answers from the respondents but also leads to a different result. Being young is seen as an indicator that someone is open and not old-fashioned: youth is equated with modernity whilst older age is equated with traditionalism. An older Kurdish man might have limited the scope and the form of the interview by, for example, as Zara suggested, labeling her too "outspoken" when she discussed or questioned gender relations in Kurdish society. Another interviewee, Lara mentioned that discussing issues like marriage would have been embarrassing with an older Kurdish man because as young women, they are expected to show more respect and behave in a respectful way toward older men.

I think that my own experiences as a relatively young Kurdish man provide me with important tools to approach the respondents because there is both an imagined and a real proximity due to our backgrounds. Collins (1990) asserts that the researcher should "have lived or experienced their material in some fashion" (Collins, 1990, p. 232 ) in order to make legitimate knowledge claims. But I still do believe that my social position as an academic creates a social asymmetry that can not be dismissed here. I am seen as the "successful Kurd" who has achieved a high social position in Sweden and I am double-privileged as a Kurd among the Kurds and as Kurdish-Swedish among the Swedes and other non-Kurds with immigrant background due to my privileged academic position. I realize how people react every time I say that I am writing a dissertation both by people with immigrant background and "native" Swedes. On the one hand it is seen almost as an anomaly for an immigrant to conduct such a practice but on the other hand it is also regarded as a sign of hope for many young people with immigrant backgrounds who have both experienced discrimination and are told that it is not worth trying to study at a higher level. This is a remark that I have noticed during my lectures at university but also in my daily life outside the academic setting.

The communications that occur during the interviews can never be assumed to be neutral or devoid of power relations:

**Shilan (F: 19):** I would not tell everything to a Kurdish boy. I have told certain things but I have not told everything. I can not be too open toward a Kurdish boy. You can never be too open toward them. I would not have talked in a bad way about Kurds or Kurdish girls in front of a Swede, an Arab or a Turk, but I can do that now because you are Kurdish.

It is possible that my age did have positive effects on the interview situation but that still does not mean that the interaction was on equal terms. Shilan believed that she could not be too outspoken toward me because of my gender identity. I believe that the interaction reflects both structural and personal constraints and inequalities in the Kurdish society and the Swedish society. Williams and Heikes (1993) argued that we have to consider the gendered context of the interview because research participants may want “to avoid offending or threatening the interviewer with unflattering or socially undesirable opinions and will tend to frame response in a way designed to minimize the possibility” (C. L. Williams & Heikes, 1993, p. 288 ). But Shilan thinks that she can speak in a “bad” way about the Kurds or Kurdish girls in front me, something she says that she would not have done in front of a Swedish, Arabic or Turkish researcher to avoid consolidating a negative image about the Kurds. This stance can be understood within structural and political contexts where Kurds are subordinated in the Middle East but also about her location in Sweden as a subordinated woman with Muslim background, a category associated with negative gendered attributes in Sweden. What Shilan says corresponds to her location in interconnecting social structures. In the same vein, some interviewees opposed research and journalism that tended to depict them as victims:

**Awa (F: 22):** The difference between you and a Swedish researcher is that you understand me better. I feel in some way that you don't feel sorry for me. I was interviewed by a Swedish journalist and every time she asked a question and I answered, she said: oh, dear, that is so sad and she thought that she knew how it was to be a Kurdish girl. No, she doesn't know how it is. She only hears about it.

**Sara (F: 17):** If you had been a Swedish researcher, I would have thought that you would ask me about how oppressed I am as a Kurdish girl. He would have surely a lot of prejudices about Kurds.

In the case of Awa and Sara, they expected that a Swedish researcher would have come to the interview situation with preconceptions of the Kurdish girls as oppressed and victims, something that they did not imagine that I would have in the same way. According to Awa, there is a discrepancy between "experiencing" being a Kurdish woman and "hearing" about the situations of Kurdish woman. It is noteworthy to distinguish between young Kurdish women as *a generalized object of social discourse* and young Kurdish women as *embodied historical subjects*<sup>11</sup> (see Brah, 1996, p. 139) and the same rule can also be applied to young Kurdish men. This distinction is important because it challenges homogenizing notions of Kurdishness concerning gender relations among the Kurdish population that are constituted through dominant representations and discourses about Muslim families. This critique by Awa and Sara shows that a researcher's ideological background and social location in society and the ways he or she regards racialized subjects/objects of study has important implications for the interaction between the researcher and the research participants.

Discussing intimate issues like marriage and sexuality seemed to be a challenge, especially with the girls. When I raised questions about their ideas about marriage, they started smiling or laughing. They seemed in a way embarrassed to discuss this issue. My gender and age contributed surely to that reaction. Some of the girls pointed out that they wanted to marry an educated young man with Kurdish background "like me" and not a newly-arrived young man from Kurdistan who barely spoke Swedish or understood the "modern values" prevailing in Sweden. Evidently, this gave me a privileged position but at the same time new questions about newly-arrived Kurds or what they preferred to call "imports", someone who has recently arrived in Sweden and who behaves in too "ethnic" a manner. My accounts above show that the intersectionality (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005; Mattsson, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2006) or connection of different social categories such as age, ethnicity, gender and education had an impact on my interaction with the respondents and shaped the content and the construction of their narratives. My positionality implies that my claims to any form of knowledge are also situated. The implication of the researcher's positionality is thus important and constitutive when it comes to the situated nature of *limits* and *possibilities* of knowledge production.

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<sup>11</sup> Brah discusses these issues with regards to young Pakistani women, however, her discussions can be applied to the situation of young Kurdish women in Sweden because these two groups are both defined as non-Western and categorized as Muslims and Orientals.



# **Chapter 3**

## **Theoretical Perspectives**



## Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical and conceptual framework of the dissertation. As a starting point for this discussion, I focus on the utility of postcolonial theory for understanding contemporary ethnic relations in European countries between the so called non-European immigrants and dominant European subjects and explain how Orientalist and colonial notions about postcolonial subjects still haunt Europe and shape its universalizing rhetoric about equality between all political subjects. Colonial ideologies have consequences for the relationship between minoritized groups and the ways they value themselves in relation to each other and whiteness as a normative point of comparison. Postcolonial theory can help us to understand how it can be possible for European states to use a rhetoric of equality at a formal and judicial level and assert a commitments to "fight" and "ban" racism from their public spheres, while at the same time legitimize social inequalities in terms of racial/ethnic/cultural differences (see Balibar, 2004, p. 35).

The question of belonging and identity formation will be discussed in relation to the nation-states, minoritized positions, immigration and the experiences of otherness that are engendered by exclusive nationalist policies toward migrants and particularly Muslims in Western countries. The relationship between a sense of belonging, homeland and citizenship will also be discussed within the framework of the nationalist ideology that limits the life opportunities of people with immigrant backgrounds due to exclusionary racist and nationalist discourses that define belonging, places and citizenship in ethnic and nationalist terms, that only certain individuals and groups can make claims to on the basis of their imagined shared blood, culture or ethnicity. Nationalism and racism do not always converge with each other, but when it comes to creating exclusionary practices between "Us" and "Them", their meaning and effects are overlapping and shifting. When I use racism and ethnic discrimination in this work, I mean exclusionary practices that subordinate and exclude groups on the basis of their imagined or real phenotypical, cultural, religious or ethnic differences. Racism is an ideological expression that justifies an unequal distribution of social resources but it also formulates the premises for a particular representation of reality (racist) and essentialist constructions of collective identities (as essentially different and incompatible) (see Balibar, 1991c; Miles, 1993). Similarly, within the political context of the Swedish welfare state, de los Reyes (2006) argues that racism as a social practice involves processes that differentiate, stigmatize, cast suspicion on and criminalize minoritized groups and people with immigrant background. Besides, racism legitimizes boundary drawings between (un)equal identities, rights and belongings but also how social and power resources are distributed within

welfare institutions (de los Reyes, 2006, pp. 27-28). Therefore, belonging is intimately related to processes of exclusionary discourses and practices that divide people in different categories with different power and value. Further, I discuss in this chapter how intersectionality can be used as a theoretical tool and a methodological approach to understand how different structural positions can be constructed in relation to social divisions such as gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, class, etc.

Gender and sexuality have been important strategic tools to construct the boundary of the nation. These categories become central during political conflicts that are formulated within a nationalist discourse that is preoccupied with practices of distinction, differentiation, purity and impurity, inclusion and exclusion. These issues will be studied in relation to how young people with Kurdish backgrounds construct their identities defined in (anti)nationalist terms. Nationalism has been an important strategic tool during certain historical periods to resist colonial powers and break with colonial dominance. Kurdish nationalism will therefore be discussed in relation to the subordinated positions that the Kurds experience in the Middle-East and how young people with Kurdish backgrounds use nationalism to construct their positions vis-à-vis these subordinated positions in the Middle-East and Sweden.

### **Postcolonialism, intersectionality and subjectivity**

The general theoretical point of departure of the dissertation is based on postcolonial theory and intersectionality as conceptual frameworks for understanding/analyzing/approaching how young people with Kurdish backgrounds construct their sense of belonging in Sweden in relation to dominant power structures and identities. The Kurds in the Middle East are politically situated within four states which all can be considered as postcolonial with extensive experiences of colonialism, Orientalism, colonial ideology and dominance (abuse of social power that leads to social inequality). Having minoritized positions as Kurds within these four states and migrating to Sweden involves once again occupying a minoritized position not only as Kurds but also mainly as gendered and racialized categories such as immigrants, Muslims, Middle Easterners and Orientals. It is true that Sweden has not been a colonial power like Britain or France but that does not assign Sweden an innocent position within the history of colonial domination of the "West" over the "Rest". Sweden has also benefited from this Western economic and political domination. In the same vein, Holmberg (1994) argues that Sweden did not represent Europe to the same extent as Holland, France, Britain, Russia and Spain did in their encounters with non-Europeans. Instead, Sweden adopted to a great extent the stereotypical images and beliefs about non-Europeans which have served the colonial powers. So this is to say that

Swedish beliefs about the world are not less prejudiced and charged with emotions or innocent and objective in contrast to dominant colonial powers. Indeed, Sweden has through several centuries been identified with Europe, "the West", Christianity and the white race under the era of colonialism and after that until present days (Holmberg, 1994).

Sweden has been one of the producers of colonial epistemologies and there is historical evidences which indicates that Sweden is a postcolonial state in its approach not only to its indigenous population but also in the ways post-Cold war migrants are viewed and treated as culturally different, inferior and deviant through the deployment of culturalist discourses (Alinia, 2004; Azar, 2006; Catomeris, 2004; de los Reyes, 2002; Ericsson, 2007; Ericsson, et al., 2002; C. Eriksson, Baaz, & Thörn, 1999; Ghose, 2008; Gullestad, 2006; S. Jonsson, 2005; Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, & Mulinari, 2009; Lindeberg & Dahlstedt, 2002; Lindmark, 2000; Mattson, 2001; Mattsson, 2010; Molina, 1997; Mulinari, 2007; Pred, 2000; Pringle, 2010; Sawyer, 2000; Sernhede, 2002; Tesfahuney, 1998; Thörn, 2000; Wikström, 2007). The intimate connection between whiteness and Swedish identity has only in recent years draw the interest of researchers who have begun to study how constructions of Swedishness are related to Western colonial ideologies in their relation to former colonial subjects (see for instance Sawyer, 2000).

Bonnett (1998) in his persuasive historical and geographical account of whiteness shows that many non-European white identities were erased due to an increased hegemonic European whiteness. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, being white and being European was not neatly interconnected but it was first through European colonial, imperial and national rhetorics that the idea of Europe, Christianity and whiteness became equivalent despite an absence of objective criteria that could bring together all Europeans under an umbrella of whiteness. However, these rhetorics resulted in a global and a hegemonic white European and Western identity that excluded many other pre-modern white identities in China and the Middle East, where whiteness (specific physical attributes) was praised and valued. Racial science and scientific methodology as a means to categorize, define and interpret, value and solidify difference between putative races legitimized white European superiority, and Carl von Linnaeus (1707-1778) took a leading position in this. This was the starting point for the West to constitute itself as the norm and to define the world in racial terms and legitimize the superiority of the putative European race. Whiteness was transformed to a uniquely European and Western attribute (Bonnett, 1998). The privileged status of whiteness in our world according to Treacher paves the way for "how we become human" (Treacher, 2005, p. 52) because colonial regimes transformed "whiteness into a

fetish object, a talisman of the natural whose power appeared to enable them to impose their will on the world" (Bonnett, 1998, p. 1043).

It is therefore important to bear in mind that the idea of Europe through colonial domination has been the founding moment of how difference was defined in racial terms, and categorized into visibly and hierarchically ordered forms. Research on migration in contemporary European contexts should take into consideration this colonial legacy and examine and challenge its prevalence (Goldberg, 2006; Gunaratnam, 2003; Ramji, 2009). This is why minoritized groups in several Western countries are described in term of their visibility as "visible minorities" where the dominant groups are rarely named and appear as a general human identity. Once recognized as visible, minoritized individuals and groups both subject themselves and are subjected to disciplinary and surveillance practices, where the gaze has a vital role in these practices of subordination.

Political decolonization through independence and nationalist movements in the "Third World" has not implied decolonization of minds and bodies within colonized societies and the concept of the West accordingly realizes itself as a general human condition through what Spivak calls "epistemic violence" (Radhakrishnan, 2003). This should not be misunderstood as implying that the West is a homogenous formation with no internal differences and hierarchical relationships but "the West was orchestrated as a unified effect, with telling consequences for the non-West" (Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 21). The prefix "post" in Postcolonialism and the term "decolonization" do not mean that all inequalities between "the West" and "the Rest" have ended and resulted in an equal relationship. On contrary, there are still profound unequal material and power relations between Western countries and the three continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Economic inequalities are the hallmark of the new dominance (Treacher, 2005). Colonialism was not an even process in colonized territories and societies. Colonial regimes used different discourses or epistemologies in order to rule, subordinate and justify their dominations. The outcome of these colonial ideologies had different outcomes for colonized people and postcolonial nation-states and the way these colonial discourses altered the subjectivities of the colonized people. In this respect, colonialism, Western expansion and subordination of the major part of the world implied producing mutually imbricated histories imbued with deep-seated axes of inequality (S. Ahmad, 2000; McClintock, 1992; Rattansi, 1997).

The colonial dominance over "others" was achieved both through narrative domination and physical power and enabled the emergence of specific subjectivities and perspectives through which the world was come to be

understood and seen (Said, 1993; Weegmann, 2005). In this respect, Said's conceptualization of Orientalism and the ways the Orient and the Oriental were discursively constructed through a system of representation enabled by European and Western scholars, philosophers, adventurers, authors, painters, travellers, theologians is a useful theoretical point of departure in order to understand how migrants with Middle-Eastern backgrounds are represented within European societies, and how these representations affect their material and political positions and everyday interactions with dominant European subjects. Within Orientalist representations Orientals, Arabs, Muslims, Middle Easterners (read also Kurds, Persians and Turks) are represented as backward, traditional, fanatic, plastic and despotic, a total negation of West and Europe that supposedly embodied all desirable political and cultural attributes such as modernity, liberal ideas and progression (Said, 2003/1978; Sardar, 1999).

Orientalist discourses have portrayed Muslim or Oriental women as oppressed, subjugated, erotic and sensual (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Afshar, et al., 2006; L. Ahmad, 1982; S. Ahmad, 2000; Massad, 2007; S. H. Razack, 2008; Said, 2003/1978; Sardar, 1999; Yegenoglu, 1998). Oriental women are also regarded as imperilled objects exposed to "dangerous" Muslim men, who are in need of Western interventions and rescue missions by both Western men and women. The Western subject according to Yegenoglu is an "unavoidably masculine position" (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 11) and Western women can gain access to a sovereign subject position only through inscribing themselves within the Orientalist fantasy about possessing the Oriental woman. This fantasy about rescuing and emancipating the Muslim woman is a hallmark of the "disciplining and normalizing gaze of modern colonial disciplinary power" (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 111). Muslim women and men are represented as subjects without history and contents and the core element of the colonial discourse which regarded them as prisoners of pre-historical times, cultural practices and religious "backwardness". According to this Orientalist discourse, the body of the Muslim woman should consequently be un-veiled, transparent (for the Western gaze) and modernized in order to facilitate her entry into modernity, a logic that fortifies the idea about the Western subject as superior (Yegenoglu, 1998).

Sardar (1999) has further developed Said's theorization of Orientalist representations and given mass media and popular culture a prominent role in the construction of the Orient and Muslims as others in Western fantasy (Sardar, 1999). The pertinence of Orientalism for understanding contemporary European societies is closely related to migration from Muslim countries but also to the aftermath of 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Various reports confirm the prevalence of anti-Muslim racism in

Western countries (Fekete, 2004; Goldberg, 2006; Kamali, 2008; Modood, Triandafyllidou, & Zapata-Barrero, 2006; Nederveen Pieterse, 2007; S. H. Razack, 2008; Sivanandan, 2006). Anti-Muslim racism informed by an Orientalist discourse regards Muslim presence in contemporary Europe and the veiling in Europe as major threats that supposedly make Europe less secular, less Christian, less liberal:

The figure of the Muslim has thus come to stand for the fear of violent death, the paranoia of Europe's cultural demise, of European integrity. For the fear of the death of Europe itself. The Muslim image in contemporary Europe is one of fanaticism, fundamentalism, female (women and girls') suppression, subjugation, and repression. The Muslim, in this view, foments conflict: violence, war, militancy, terrorism, cultural dissension. *He* is a traditionalist, pre-modern, in the tradition of racial historicism difficult if not impossible to modernize, at least without ceasing to be 'the Muslim'. /.../ The Muslim signals the death of European secularism, humanism, individualism, libertinism (Goldberg, 2006, p. 346).

Stereotypical images and representations of Muslims currently circulate within the realm of the mass media, popular culture, movies, books and novels. Explicit anti-Muslim racism is now accepted under the liberal umbrella of "the right to criticize every religion" around Europe, though Islam is clearly the main target. Relating back to the Orientalist discourse, while the Orient was denied a role in history, the Orientalist representations facilitate a framework through which the West was given the role of controlling the reins of human history and functioning as an immediate normative comparative framework for the "others" to understand their specific position and quality in a "human development" that is supposed to be linear. Domination was thus enabled through political control over epistemology. Representations are intimately linked to questions of subjectivity and identity and the ways we understand our positions in the world as well as to the kind of (non)recognitions we are assigned in our relations to other identities, issues that are related to unequal power relations. Hence, colonial representations do not belong to a remote past in constituting postcolonial subjectivities:

Colonialism haunts, it is not in the past but continues to be a serious presence on people's lived experience, on psychic lives, on matters of globalisation and of material relations. There is an enduring issue that centres on how subjectivity is shaped by postcolonial relations and ideologies: for none of us, whatever our heritage or current position, are outside of or immune from postcolonial relations, values and belief systems. A theoretical

challenge persists that focuses attention on how people's emotional and material investments and responsibilities in perpetuating (actively or passively) hierarchies of superiority/inferiority and structures of domination/subordination. Colonialism persists with invidious effects and this affects us all (Treacher, 2005, p. 49).

Colonialism thus has disciplinary and self-governing effects on (post)colonial subjects, structuring and intruding into their psyche, subjectivities and bodies. In this light, Fanon (2008/1952) interrogated the impact of colonialism and racism on the subjectivity of black men and women and argued that black subjects were instilled with a complex of inferiority and self-contempt with respect to white men and women. According to Fanon, the major goal of black subjects became to leave the black body and become as white as possible in order to attain an equal place among other subjects. Black men or women, according to Fanon, attempted to assert whiteness through white masks and mimicry of white behaviors and life-styles, language, etc (Fanon, 2008/1952). The discourse of whiteness is not only present in the lives of black subjects but also shapes the ways minoritized and racialized groups interact and position each other and how they use the discourse of whiteness to value each other. Whiteness therefore has important political and social implications for the ethnic relations in contemporary multi-ethnic European states and the identity formation of minoritized and racialized groups. It is, however, important to point out that not all postcolonial subjectivities are constituted in the same way: diversity is guaranteed by the complex and context-specific interplay of social divisions such as class, gender, ethnicity, religion and sexuality.

Postcolonial feminism has contributed to extending our understanding of how unequal power relations influence postcolonial subjects differently with regards to their multiple subjectivities structured through different interconnecting social divisions. Intersectionality as a theoretical tool provides a methodological perspective on how different social categories like gender, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and so forth intersect in order to "map" "geometries" of oppression(s) (Valentine, 2007). Gender as a homogenous social category is misleading if it is used in term of "global sisterhood" for the feminist struggle because it neglects specific oppression experienced by women belonging to different class, religious, racial or ethnic background (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005; Essed, 1991; Mattsson, 2010; Minh-ha, 1989; Mohanty, 2003). Black feminists (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1981) have criticized race-blind feminism and advocated a de-centring the notion of a middle-class, white, western, heterosexual woman and replacing it with a pluralizing notion of woman. This stance has been supported by Islamist feminists who reject hegemonic Western feminism as a normative comparative framework that functions as a tool for

cultural imperialism (Afshar, et al., 2006; Afshar & Maynard, 2000). In this respect, the concept of intersectionality was introduced by Crenshaw (1989) to address the different forms of oppression (gender, class and “race”) that black women experience in the USA. The concept of intersectionality has emerged due to the interplay between feminist theory, postcolonial theory and Black feminism (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005; Mattsson, 2010; Murphy, et al., 2009). So what is intersectionality and what function does it fill in analyzing the “geometries” of oppressions? Brah and Phoenix regard intersectionality as:

signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life can not be separated out into discrete and pure strands (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 76).

In other words, one can not study gender as an isolated social island without paying attention to how other social division or categories like ethnicity, race, sexuality and class intersect and produce domination, privileges, disadvantages and subordination of men and women in different ways within specific historical contexts. Nonetheless, it is difficult to integrate all social categories in the analysis one conducts because there is a selective dimension in the intersectional approach dependent on the purpose of the study and the questions the researcher poses. Additionally, Yuval-Davis (2006) emphasises that certain social divisions become more important than others in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people, and these specificities should be taken into consideration while conducting analysis.

The intersectional approach is, according to McCall (2005), not about adding a social category to another because the additive analogy misses the fact that subjectivity is not only formed due to inter-actions between gender, class, race and ethnicity but also intra-actions within these social divisions. In other words, in order to grasp the range of intersectional complexities, it is important that the methodological approach is anticategorical, intracategorical and intercategorical in order to challenge homogenous categories and show the complexity of the lived experience within a group. In other words, there must be a focus on underlining the hierarchical and relational nature of social inequality between interacting groups (McCall, 2005; see also Murphy, et al., 2009, pp. 50-51). Due to this complexity of lived experiences, intersectionality should following Anthias (2006), be understood as social process that through practices and arrangements generates specific positionalities for the social actors involved. Hence, social divisions such as class, gender and ethnicity can not be

understood as fixed identities with one essential meaning, but always constructed through processes. How, then, can we use intersectionality in empirical studies? In order to empirically research how the intersections of social categories are experienced by subjects in their daily lives, one can start with an individual, group, event, or context and see how social categories are lived and experienced. Furthermore, we can look at how research participants present themselves and others, how they identify with or distance/distinguish themselves from other groups, and the ways categories are used to construct differentiation in specific contexts. Moreover, we can direct attention toward the ways and moments where particular identities are given more importance than others due to specific contexts (McCall, 2005; Valentine, 2007).

### **Racialized immigrants, stigma and modes of resistance**

Immigrants have come to constitute the quintessential other of the nation-state that supposedly interrupts the aspiration of the nation-state to achieve its homogenization process. The concept of immigrant is not a neutral or an innocent labelling but a highly politicized concept that enables social control of "others", who are made subordinate through naming, and through the drawing of lines between "Us" and "Them", and between "natural/real/organic" members and "other members". Immigrants are constructed as not really belonging to "us", even if they share the same citizenship as "us". Any attempt to undo the concept of immigrant has to consider formal and informal criteria. The immigrant is *constituted* through the *discourse* and *lived* through the *discourse*. This will be discussed below in order to show how social inequality and dominance can be made possible through power, knowledge and representation.

Discourse, according to Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p. 258), is a social practice that is both historically and socially constituted and constitutive with regard to situations, objects of knowledge, identities, and relationships between social groups. A discourse can either contribute to strengthening the status quo or to transforming the social order. Issues of power and ideology become of paramount importance due to the social significance of discourse but also in the ways power is exercised and negotiated through discourse. The ideological effects of discourse can entail reproducing unequal power and social relations between social categories (women/men, majority/minority, etc.) and justifying these inequalities as inevitable or natural and thereby sustaining a hegemonic social order (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2008). Through discourse, we can thus understand how "immigrant", through dominant representations, becomes an object of knowledge and is assigned a materiality but also an identity that stands in contrast to the dominant identity. In Wodak's words "access to discourses and power *in* discourses" (Wodak, 2008, p. 55) enable the

dominant identity to reproduce both itself and its other(s) through practices of representation.

The discourse facilitates a reality where the concept of immigrant and the categorization of certain individuals or groups as immigrants are political tools for the subordination and otherisation by dominant subjects. Binary forms of representation are not neutral activities but powerful means to produce positionalities with unequal claims to power and resources. It is from these positionalities that certain individuals regard themselves as having more rights than others. Because they are constituted through the discourse as belonging to dominant subjects and are included in the realm of representations of "us" against "them". As van Dijk has argued, positive self-presentation and negative presentation of others through argumentative devices is constitutive to exclusionary discourses of "us" and "them", often followed by denials of racism through disclaimers such as "I am not racist or prejudiced but" (van Dijk, 1993b; Wodak, 2008). Viewed from a discourse analytical approach, racism is discursively enabled:

On the one hand, discriminatory opinions, stereotypes, prejudices and beliefs are produced and reproduced by means of discourse, and through discourse, discriminatory exclusionary practices are prepared, implemented, justified and legitimated. On the other hand, discourse offers a space in which to criticize, de-legitimize and argue against racist opinions and practices, that is, to pursue anti-racist strategies (Wodak, 2008, p. 56).

Although no identity is static or ahistorical, through practices of representation, there are always attempts to fix an unambiguous meaning to define what constitutes, for instance, a Swede or Swedishness. Attempts to fix an identity become a means to hide the historicity of the identity in question and claim its transhistorical naturalness. According to Hall (1997), representation as a producer of meanings is also about producing different subject-positions. The dominant group has the possibility of showing up in a variety of subject-positions while the otherised group is pushed into sharp binary oppositions such as "good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling-because-different/compelling-because-strange-and-exotic. And they are often required to be both things at the same time!" (Hall, 1997, p. 229). Stigma, stereotype and subjectivity are some of the consequences of these representations. Stigma, following Goffman (1986), is a question of a relationship, loaded with attributes and stereotypes. And stereotyping is a representational practice that "reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference'" (Hall, 1997, p. 258). According to Crocker et al., a stigmatized

person regards his or her social identity as “devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others” (Crocker, Major, & Steel, 1998, p. 504). Furthermore, stigmatization is understood from the perspective of the stigmatized as “dehumanization, threat, aversion and sometimes the depersonalization of others into stereotypic caricatures. Thus stigmatization is personally, interpersonally, and socially costly” (Dovidio, Major, & Crocker, 2003, p. 1).

Individuals hailed as immigrants are constituted through a stigmatizing discourse that encloses their subjectivities in binary oppositions such as burden/resource for the Swedish society. Besides, positive exceptions are supposed to confirm the pathological gendered images of the immigrants in terms of social problems as “deviants”, “criminals”, “troublemakers” “noisy”, “oppressed”, “submissive” “oppressors” “incapable”, “welfare abusers” and so on. These attributes are always discussed in relation to discursively constructed categories such as “immigrant family”, “immigrant youth”, “immigrant girls”, “immigrant boys” “immigrant women”, “immigrant men”, immigrant cultures”. The prefix “immigrant” denotes a homogenized deviancy and a stigmatized difference but also a lack of completeness compared to the dominant identity. However, not all differences are viewed as negative and not all subjects who migrate to Sweden for instance are regarded as “immigrants”. These processes of “immigrant-making” can also undergo changes due to shifting and transitory meanings that are assigned to individuals or groups, defined as “immigrants”. A Danish or French person for example is not what dominant subjects consider as “immigrant” today because the concept alludes to a Middle Easterner, an African, an Asian, a South-American, even if these putative “immigrants” have Swedish citizenship, whereas the Dane or the French hold other citizenships. Hence the concept of “immigrant” is “*simultaneously unifying and differentiating*” (Balibar, 1991b, p. 220 italics in original). This differentiation process can be understood within the framework of racist and discriminatory practices and processes that imply subordination and inferiorization of certain groups such as immigrants, Muslims, and African as culturally or racially deviant (Miles, 1993; Molina, 1997; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2004b). Racism, as a social process can take shifting and multiple forms and grounds to justify its existence as a social practice. Hence, exclusionary practices can be justified in the name of protecting and preserving one’s religion, welfare resources, nation, ethnicity, race, culture, appearance and values.

Although the concept of race is not explicitly articulated within the public sphere of Sweden or Nordic countries, the usage of cultural and religious belongings are often racially coded with regards to phenotypical traits and essentialist notions of cultural and religious practices. When it comes to people

from the Middle-East, collective negative attributes are assigned to their cultural and religious background in order to construct them as a distinct and a deviant social collectivity. Within dominant Swedish discourses, it is the cultural/religious differences that are believed to obstruct Middle-Easterners from integration into Swedish society. Although immigrants from the "Third World" are objects of suspicion by dominant discourses and imaginations (Teshahuney, 1998), men and women with Muslim/Middle-Eastern background are targeted by these discourses in far more tangible ways due to Orientalist notions of Muslim men as oppressive/terrorist/backward and Muslim women as victims and submissive. Teshahuney refers to a hermeneutics of suspicion<sup>12</sup> as "various ways by which migrants have come to be *a priori* equated with problems" (Teshahuney, 1998, p. 48). To extend the meaning of this concept, I will argue that the hermeneutics of suspicion is a gendered process that implies different consequences for men and women with immigrant backgrounds. When it comes to women with immigrant/Muslim backgrounds, I believe that the concept of *the hermeneutics of benevolent suspicion* is more adequate because they are more targeted by the discourse of a rescuing mission that defines them as "imprisoned", "disempowered" and "target of violence" by their fathers, brothers, families and communities. As a consequence of these negative collective attributions, they become objects of suspicion with questionable characters and life-histories. Cultural differences are often used to justify this rescuing mission that is based on racist definitions of cultures.

Delanty et al., (2008, p. 4) argue that ethnic discrimination and racism are not produced by the fact of difference or inequalities but are rather the results of negative generalizations of these imagined or real differences into negative attributes and their application to whole groups. Similarly Boréus (2006) points out that representing negative generalizing facts about "immigrants" regardless of their representativeness can be regarded as discrimination "because certain, negative, "facts" about groups of people are singled out from the myriad of other facts that could have been presented" (Boréus, 2006, p. 413). It is noteworthy that the "immigrant identity" has an experiential base due to the everyday interactions with, and repetitive hailing by, dominant subjects, institutions, gazes, discriminatory practices, mass media representations, etc. "Immigrant" as a concept is highly stigmatizing and is enabled by the power structure in the dominant society. I will work with and against this category in order to show the fallacies that are associated with this category but also how it

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<sup>12</sup> Hermeneutics of suspicion was coined by Paul Ricoeur. It was used by Ricoeur in a positive sense to indicate a cautious and scrutinizing stance toward reading texts (Teshahuney, 1998) in order to capture the "authentic" interpretation of a meaning through going beyond the surface-level of a text. My usage of hermeneutics of suspicion is following Teshahuney (Teshahuney, 1998, p. 48) situated within a negative discursive field related to immigrants as imagined sources of problem.

implies real consequences for those hailed as immigrants. It is also true that subjects that are hailed as immigrants can reproduce the same category or work against it. On the other hand, we can not resort to euphemistic terms like "new Swedes", and "Swedes with foreign background" which all indicate that they are Swedish but not completely Swedish as dominant subjects. The concept of immigrant is used to show how unequal power relations are enabled through hierarchized categorization by dominant subjects and institutions.

There is a risk that research solely focuses on how people are discriminated against, and does not examine the various ways and strategies that people use their agency to resist or deal with exclusionary practices such as racism, discrimination and stigmatization in the wider society. Therefore we need to strike a balance between constraints and possibilities, oppression and agency in the societies they are residing in. Sewell (1992) provided an interesting approach to the concept of agency and structure. He argued that agency was a social or a collective phenomenon. To be an agent according to Sewell:

[M]eans to be capable of exerting some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree. /.../ agents are empowered to act with and against others by structures: they have knowledge of the schemas that inform social life and have access to some measure of human and nonhuman resources. Agency arises from the actor's knowledge of schemas, which means the ability to apply them to new contexts. Or, to put the same thing the other way around, agency arises from the actor's control of resources, which means the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constituted the array. Agency is implied by the existence of structures (Sewell, 1992, p. 20).

Agency is also about having the ability to manage one's own actions with others and against others. In the context of this thesis this focuses attention particularly on individual identity projects and how these find accommodation with various collective identity projects. Individuals seeking to identify themselves as "Kurdish" or "Swedish" have to contend with various groups and group dynamics which monitor the boundaries of these identities and may obstruct individual claims on these identities. It is thus important to acknowledge that agency is exercised differently by people in different social positions (i.e. with respect to gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age) as well as what kind of access one has to different kind of resources to transform structures through action (p. 21). This understanding of agency and structure goes beyond the earlier sociological dualism of agency and structure and

underlines instead their interwoven relationship. There is agency in structure and structure in agency. In the context of unequal ethnic relations, Essed (1991) pointed out that discrimination and racism can be experienced by minoritized groups as everyday practices. Everyday racism refers to a multidimensional phenomenon that is produced through a variety of relations and situations. The everyday racism as Essed has conceptualized takes into consideration the macro and micro dimensions of the social world where discriminatory practices occur (Essed, 1991). When it comes to resistance to oppressive social relationships, there are many definitions of what constitutes an act as resistance but no single definition of what resistance means to scholars who deal with such issues. Resistance is used as “a wide variety of actions and behavior at all levels of human social life (individual, collective, and institutional)” (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 534). And resistance is regarded as progressive and enabling social change. However, I think that we can not give an essential meaning to resistance and the outcomes of resistance as progressive because they are historically and politically specific and informed. Collective resistance can be enabled through social movements, demonstrations, organization, collective strikes, armed resistance, boycotts, etc. The most common mode of resistance according to Hollander and Einwohner (2004) is material and physical where resisters use their bodies or material objects. Physical resistance involves, among other things, violence. Although violence has often been an immediate means of resistance by oppressed groups, violence has not been solely reserved for oppressed groups but has also been used by the state, police, and military against groups. Resistance can also be done through talk, use of humour, silence or breaking silence (Dhawan, 2007; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; hooks, 1984; Sawyer & Jones, 2008). When a group experiences stigmatization and subordination, talking back can become a means to undo and deconstruct the negative identities. Juhila articulates talking back as following:

Talking back is always a dialogue with culturally dominant categorizations. It would not exist without dominant meanings. /.../ I define talking back as consisting of *acts which comment and resist stigmatized identities related to culturally dominant categorizations and which have the function of presenting the difference between one's own self or group and the dominant definition*. Talking back is not characterized so much by a downright denial of the stigmatized identity as by *a subtle negotiation which calls into question dominant categorizations and evokes the possibilities of alternative identities* (Juhila, 2004, p. 263 italics in original).

Talking back thus becomes an important strategy in this study because the research participants talk about how they experience subordination and

stigmatization but also talk back, reject or modify dominant representations and provide alternative discourses, stories and perspective on their lived experiences. However, this is not to say that talking is always resistance or that silence implies acceptance of oppression. Silence can also be a strategy to subvert repeated discourses that need validation by the spoken subjects. Scott (1985) argues that powerless people do not have adequate resources or opportunities to resist the power overtly. For Scott, the question of everyday resistance (like foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, etc) is much more apt for less powerful groups, although/because "Everyday acts of resistance make no headlines" (quoted in Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, p. 539). However, it should be remembered, that resistance to and dealing with social inequality do not always need to be intentional. Resistance can be triggered by events with unintended consequences for those individuals and groups that are involved in specific social relationships.

The earlier theoretical discussion above was more concerned with general notions of resistance. However, we need to situate resistance within its specific context. This dissertation is more concerned with strategic responses by minoritized groups toward oppressive social relationship. Every form of resistance has its specific context that limits and constrains different forms of action to change or alter oppressive social situations. In the context of ethnic relations, Dominelli (2002) argues that these responses can be framed through three possible courses of action; acceptance, accommodation and rejection. Accepting an oppressive social relationship involves internalisation of dominant norms and values in order to adopt them. Using accommodating solutions imply internalizing dominant norms and values to a lesser extent; those who adapt this strategy balance a mild critique of the system and compromise with the system and those who hold power in society. The third strategy involves rejecting the system and resisting internalization of dominant norms that can be oppressive toward certain groups (Dominelli, 2002, pp. 10-12). However, it should be noted that it is not only dominated groups that internalize values that can be oppressive toward themselves. Those groups who are in a position of domination internalize values that assert their superiority as natural and normal and therefore take defensive positions when their privileged status is challenged and questioned.

Azar (2001a) points to two different forms of strategy of resistance and survival by people with immigrant background. The first one, is about becoming as Swedish as possible, a strategy that contributes to the creation and reproduction of the exclusivity and value of Swedishness. Azar argues that the problem emerges when the desire to attain an equal position as a Swedish citizen ends

up in the shadow of a fantasy about becoming an authentic Swede. This fantasy according to Azar consolidates the distance between citizenship and an inner identity. The second strategy identified by Azar is becoming as un-Swedish as possible. This strategy implies a conscious negation of an identity and its power structure that closes its gates and continuously shifts its passwords and devaluation of those who are standing outside its gates. This politics of resistance needs to be understood within its concrete political context where certain people with immigrant backgrounds reject their identification with a society in order to break with their subordination, and achieve a better self-esteem or to survive. The risk that prevails with this strategy is when group or individuals erase the historical process (discrimination and subordination) through which they have taken this subject position (becoming as un-Swedish as possible) and forget that this position is rather about a tactical identification and not a question about essential identities. If this historical process is neglected, the group unconsciously endorses the same ideology of segregation that has subordinated them (Azar, 2001a, pp. 78-80).

Even if these ideal types by Dominelli and Azar are important and sophisticated, resistance by minoritized groups can not be limited to one single strategic response but can change due to situations due to the various meanings that can be attached to those forms of resistances that are used. Besides, minoritized subjects or groups do not need to use only one form of strategy and resistance but can resort to various resistance and strategies in different times and places. Hence, we should take into consideration the dynamic of responses and resistances to discrimination. If identities are context-sensitive, contingent and dynamic and undergo transformations, then the same logic can also be applied to resistance as a dynamic mode of action and as a stance. It is important to note that resistance is not only used by oppressed groups but also by powerful groups or dominant subjects. For instance, when a Muslim family with an immigrant background moves into a predominately white Swedish neighbourhood, they may be harassed through covert and overt means and pushed to leave the area. Other examples can entail resisting Muslim practices such as building mosques or wearing the veil in public spaces. However, it should be remembered that not all resistance succeeds in bringing about changes due to deep unequal accesses to power resources in the society. There is also a risk that resistance by subordinated groups can be declared as "illegitimate" and "destructive" by state power and dominant groups due to representational practices that intend to depict the trial of strength and maintain status quo. For instance, when efforts are made in order to make one's voice heard due to a thirst for citizenship rights, there is a risk that the voices are turned into "noises" (Dikeç, 2007) by dominant representations. That is why it becomes important for subordinated groups to create alternative discourses

and discursive representations about the social inequalities they experience and formulate counter-strategies to challenge oppressive social relationships.

## **Identity formation, belonging and citizenship**

The politics of belonging is understood in this dissertation as consisting of various modes through which individual and collective identities can be socially constructed in multiple, contingent, contradictory and contested ways. Any conceptualization of belonging should consider socio-political and legal and citizenship status and historical context in order to understand the complex meaning-makings that every mode of belonging and attachment entails. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) urge scholars to go beyond identity and replace it with alternative terms such as "identification", "self-understanding", "self-identification", "external categorization", "self-representation" as more adequate concepts to deal with the dynamic, fluid and multifaceted nature of belongings, and avoid the reifying connotations of "identity". Regarding collective identity, alternative terms such as "commonality", "connectedness", "groupness" and "sense of belonging" are suggested as providing a differentiated language more capable of doing the necessary analytical work than the flat and undifferentiated concept of "identity" that often entails reifying connotations (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

Without belittling these critiques of essentialism and reification, I believe that the problem is not solely situated in the term itself but also in the way we use it, through our theoretical, empirical and interpretational frameworks. I will not, therefore, be consigning the concept of identity to the dustbin of history, but will continue to use it as a central concept in this thesis. I will, however, continue to historicize identity, identification and belonging and identify their contingency through taking into consideration those relational settings, historical and political situations that underpin collective constructions of individual and collective identities. The following theoretical discussion is concerned with the processes of belonging, citizenship and migration.

The question of belonging in relation to migration and existential and material displacement becomes a burning issue because the longing for stable emotional attachments are often articulated in national, ethnic, cultural and religious affiliations (Yuval-Davis, Kannabiran, & Vieten, 2006). Sicakkan and Lithman (2005, p. 25) distinguish between three forms of belonging that can serve as important conceptual tools in order to understand multidimensional identifications. The first one is related to the element of *being* that is sometimes categorized in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, etc. This form of belonging is often regarded as essential and to a certain extent static. The second form of belonging refers to the process of *becoming* which regards the ongoing process of identification. The third form of belonging refers to *longing* that involves wishing, willing and longing. This *longing* of belonging thus involves a subjective and affective dimension and regards the ways we take stances

toward our being and becoming. Anthias (2006) has discussed the question of belonging with regard to population movements and translocations. She relates the concept to the question of identity politics, which has become one of the most important issues in modern day life. Its importance is indicated when:

[W]e feel destabilised, when we seek for answers to the quandaries of uncertainty, disconnection, alienation and invisibility that we become obsessed with finding, even fixing, a social place that we feel at home in, or at least more at home with; where we seek for our imagined roots, for the secure haven of our group, our family, our nation write large (Anthias, 2006, p. 21).

The question of "where do I belong?" is engendered by a feeling and awareness about a wide range of spaces, places, locales and identities, to which we do not or cannot belong to (Anthias, 2006). Even if these issues affect everybody's life, migrants experience the problem of where to belong and "not knowing where one belongs" in a significantly different way, because their modes of belonging are often seriously challenged and questioned (Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2008; Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2008, p. 95) by dominant subjects who assert discourses of ethnic purity as the hallmark of belonging. It is part of social life that everybody is asked and interrogated about their identities through questions like "where are you from?" which is a relatively innocent question "yet not all subjects have equal difficulty answering" it (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 115), and migrants doubtlessly belong to the category of those who may respond in a fuzzy way due to uncertainty and ambivalences towards their identities. According to Anthias (2006), belonging involves a number of dimensions. The affective dimension related to social bonds and ties is an important part of belonging. Belonging can be activated strongly when we experience a sense of exclusion from a society or a collective identity. The concept of belonging captures the variation of the dialogical, oppositional and contradictory positionalities that are produced as the result of the interplay of social divisions such as gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialisation. Besides, any conceptualization of belonging must take into consideration materialist aspects of identity formations. As Fraser (2005) underlines, there is an important relationship between recognition and social status and their effects on people's material position in a society. Fraser asserts that not having one's belonging recognized implies a subordinated social status because one is not considered equal in social interaction. The denial of belonging creates a subordinated cultural, economic, political position in a society (Fraser, 2005).

This leads us to the concept of citizenship which is often discussed as the most adequate means to endorse cultural, social, economic and political equality that is experienced differently with regards to gender, class, sexuality, race and ethnicity. Citizenship can be understood as a medium of political belonging that regulates a firm relationship between individuals, social collectivities, the civil society and the state. A famous definition of citizenship is provided by Marshall as “a status bestowed on those who are *full* members of a community” (T. H. Marshall, 1950, p. 14 italics added). The outcomes and implications of citizenship status are intimately related to the ways the boundary of a *community* is defined, because communities and collectivities are, according to Yuval-Davis (1997b), not natural but ideological and material constructions.

Brubaker (1992) provides two examples to illustrate how the notion of citizenship is structured in two different ways in Germany and France. The German notion of citizenship is defined in ethnic terms and is based on blood-based criteria (*jus sanguinis*, “the right of blood”), while the French<sup>13</sup> model is regarded as the ideal example of a liberal and republican civic citizenship (*jus soli*, “the right of soil”) (Brubaker, 1992). Consequently, these two definitions have implications for the ways immigrants are given or denied citizenship rights. Although citizenship is often understood in terms of political and social inclusion, its backside is the exclusion of people who are considered as not qualifying for membership and equal status within the realm of social resources and welfare state arrangements. Being a formal citizen in a Western country has national and global benefits. Today, those countries which are members of the European Union provide their citizens with passports that give them the right to move around the globe without significant restrictions, while “Third World” citizens are denied the same right and their attempts to move and migrate to European countries are “criminalized” and legally constrained (Teshfahoney, 1998). Holding a formal citizenship via access to a passport as a metonymic marker of ones nationality does not imply attaining full citizenship rights and this is particularly experienced by minoritized groups from the “Third World” within Europe.

In this regard, Schierup (2003) argues that a major part of European debates about migration and citizenship has focused on the *formal citizenship* that is

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<sup>13</sup> Despite the different morphologies, modes of constitution, and historical traces between the citizenship models in France and Germany, we can find in France names for “français de souche” (“real” French) and “français naturalisé” (“naturalized” French) which indicates ethnicization of the French citizenship and reveals its particular universalism. The ethnic elements are also found in the civic definitions of the citizenship. According to McCrone and Kiely (2000), the ethnic way of being French is implicit in its civic identity and deviation from this French way of being is rarely tolerated where wearing the *hijab* (veil) is a telling example.

provided by the legal system in order to become a citizen and has neglected the centrality of the *substantial citizenship* that involves the actual conditions and possibilities of exercising one's rights and duties as a full citizen. Ethnic discrimination, racism and poverty are given as important obstacles to the attainment of full citizenship (Schierup, 2003). The distinction between formal citizens and substantial citizens can be understood in relation to the ways that the relationship between the individual and the community is regarded. Those individuals who are substantial citizens are regarded and regard themselves as "original" citizens of the community while people with immigrant backgrounds are viewed as "guests" or even as "intruders". Being defined as an "original" citizen is based on an assumption that the individual is organically positioned vis-à-vis citizenship (S. H. Razack, 2008). In this vein, Gullestad (2002) points out that in the context of immigration, the host/guest metaphor is used to indicate an unequal power relation with unequal access to rights and clout in the country of settlement (often described as the "host society"). The "original" citizen is viewed as the host while the immigrant is given the status of a guest. Although assigning someone the status of guest can be well intentioned, it has vital consequences for the distribution of power between the guest and the host, and naturalizes the ethnic boundary between them. The guest is not only expected to be grateful for the hospitality but also should be aware of not provoking the host by his or her difference:

Given the everyday interpretations of the rights and duties involved, a host has the right to control the resources of the home, to decide on the rules of the visit, and, accordingly, to 'put their foot down' when the guest does not conform (Gullestad, 2002, p. 54).

Hence, in this context, we often hear demands on assimilation policies against people who are regarded as showing considerable cultural differences with regard to dress, gender relations, child-rearing, etc. It is argued that immigrants are "here" as "guests" and that they should conform rather than contest, criticize or oppose the order of the "host" society and the dominant group (e.g. Wikan, 2002). Consequently, the right to claim-making in the name of the community or the nation is ethnicized and certain groups are expected to forfeit this right. Claim-making is partly dependent on one's status as either "original" citizen or as "guest" citizen. Belonging is not merely about attaining citizenship, but also about developing emotional and social bonds with places that are constructed as sites of identifications and membership (Anthias, 2006, p. 21). In this regard, the question of "feeling at home" and homeland become important aspects of belonging, where homeland is often loaded with a "poetic

and imaginative force" (Str ath, 2008, p. 26). The question of home is strongly linked with the:

[W]ay in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of "belonging" (Brah, 1996, p. 192).

Furthermore, Brah asserts that there is a tension in the discourses about "home" and critique of fixed origin among migrants. Besides, there is a difference between a homing desire and a desire for a homeland because there is no guarantee that every group of migrants retains an ideology of return (Brah, 1996). Hannerz argues that people think about home when they are "away". "Away" as a contrastive concept can involve travel, tourism, migration, pilgrimage, escape, exile, diaspora (Hannerz, 2002). This "away" is problematic when it comes to young men and women with immigrant backgrounds who may have never been "away" in the same sense as their parents through migration and translocations. Their understandings of this "away" as "home or homeland" are prompted through processes of exclusion that motivate resorting to imaginative ideas of home, roots, origin, homeland and belonging that can be found elsewhere than the political space they currently inhabit. We live in a world structured by what Malkki (1992) called the national order of things' where the nation-state is perceived as a natural entity with an ancient past despite its very modern and recent history. Malkki points out that there is a powerful belief among people that intimately links people with places, by implication, territorialization of identity in terms of "culture" (to cultivate), "homeland" and "origin". Migrants or refugees are often described as "displaced" and "uprooted" and there is therefore a strong commonsense assumption that people are "rooted" in specific places. And being "rooted" in a place is understood as being "naturally" linked to that place and "displacement"/ "uprootedness" is often viewed as a form of pathology but also a moral question (Malkki, 1992). Consequently, we are thrown into a world of narratives that deals with "origin", "realness", "authentic", "roots", "essence" but also a search for a home, in order to present a coherent, primordial, stable and transhistorical identity.

If Malkki earlier indicated the prevalence of a national order of things, Soysal (1994, 2002) has enthusiastically declared a post-national membership in Europe among migrants that challenges the boundaries and the limits of national citizenship. The claims of migrants regarding social, cultural and political rights according to Soysal no longer need to be embedded in the nation-state, because migrants can resort to universal human rights discourses and claim their rights

within, for instance, the legal system of European Union. Besides, Soysal directs forceful critique toward diaspora studies that makes according to her diaspora formation to an inevitable project when people have left their place of "origin". This belief tends to ignore the historical contingency of nation-state, identity and community as well as giving them a natural place in our world (Soysal, 1994, 2002).

It is also true as Wahlbeck (1999) notes, that former ways of conceptualizing ethnicity, nationalism and migration have been challenged by the intensive processes of globalization. New technological developments have facilitated new transnational, global and "deterritorialized" social relations (Wahlbeck, 1999). However, this does not mean that we can declare farewell to the nation-state as a locus of power and dismiss its prominent role in structuring the lives of its population. The border of the nation-state is not wiped out of history and replaced with a borderless and cosmopolitan world. Contemporary Western European countries are experiencing a reassertion of national identity, national security, national values, core cultural values in order to cope with the divided loyalties of migrants (Fekete, 2004; Kofman, 2005) and particularly Muslims. Besides, the *supra*-national EU project did not turn out to be a project imbued with post-nationalism that dissolved the nation-state. Rather, it has, through current harmonization policies paved the ground for a *supernationalist* union (Hansen, 2009). This European and Western ethnonationalism reminds the "Other(s)", Muslims, Black people, Middle Easterners that Europe is a club for Christian and white people: "Your sojourn is temporary, so don't grow too comfortable" (Goldberg, 2006, p. 347) and this is not a novel problem, this is the tradition of Western racism that still haunts Europe and excludes people historically categorized as non-Europeans (Bonilla-Silva, 2000). So declarations of a normative post-national Europe and of de-nationalized global relations are premature. Besides, how can we declare a post-national Europe when we witness anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant right wing parties in Europe gaining access to the political power of the nation-state and asking for an end to immigration from non-European/Western countries? Does a post-national order entail an end to nationalism, when nationalism is alive and kicking in every corner of Europe? As Favell (2006) has pointed out, there is a strong relationship between nation-state sovereignty and state-promoted integration. Besides, nation-states in Europe are not ready to relinquish their power with regards to nationalizing policies and practices that are related to culture, education, language, etc. In addition, immigrants, according to Favell (2006), "have played a crucial symbolic part in the self-reaffirmation of nation-states, who might otherwise have been thought to face an inevitable period of national decline in the face of globalization (Favell, 2006, p. 52).

It is also in this context that we can understand the rise of diaspora nationalism and long-distance nationalism (Anderson, 1998) that entail involvement in the so called homeland politic, a nationalism that is not anchored in the alleged territory of the diasporic group. Koser and Lutz (1998) point out that the intense diaspora nationalism and the involvement of people with immigrant backgrounds in the country of "origin" can be understood in combination with contemporary racist and nationalist discourses in European countries about defending territory, home and space against migrants. The increased production of cultural and political boundaries of many Western countries have made migrants aware of the reality that they are either not desired or can not be fully accepted in the countries where they are currently living. As Demmers put it, "Since new diasporas do not want to stake everything on an increasingly risky future in a single nation, they maintain close relationships with their ancestral homelands" (Demmers, 2002, p. 88). According to Clifford, diasporic groups' experiences of suffering generate various survival skills relating to the ability to accommodate to different situations. Diaspora consciousness attempts to make "the best of a bad situation" (Clifford, 1994, p. 312) and this can be related to coping with discrimination, inequality and estrangement. This means that we can not dismiss the present political and economic context within which the migrants inhabit and assume that diasporic projects are only a reflection of a collective suffering from the past caused solely by other forces. Past experiences in the country of "origin" are of paramount importance but they can not be detached from contemporary political and economic experiences of diasporic groups and the meanings that can be attached to their past experiences in order to make sense of the present political positions that migrants inhabit.

Consequently, the concept of belonging provides useful theoretical foundations for analyzing the collective identifications and belongings of Kurdish youth with regard to the situated nature of the claims and collective attributions they articulate in different contexts. This means that belonging or identification are not given once and for all with an unambiguous meaning, but rather are constituted through the dynamics of historical challenges, political situations and political interests and priorities. Moreover, I argue that identity formation whether it is ethnic, religious, cultural, national or gender-based consists of narratives that are reproduced daily through those societal discourses transmitted by institutions, family, friendship circles, symbols, language, schools, sports, mass media, books, newspaper, etc. Consequently, identity formation entails both imagination and practices. We hail and we are hailed, we perform and narrate identities (we speak identities and tell identities but are also told how to perform identities). Approaching the concept of identity in this way indicates that no one can grasp an identity once and for all. It is too complex to be defined in terms of a single essence. Identity is not just out there,

waiting to be discovered but is something that people construct, maintain, change, reify or even reject. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to essentialist and constructionist notions of identity performed and uttered by individuals and groups and to analyze the mechanisms behind these constructions in relation to the political context within which they are situated. Human beings lack a stable and transhistorical coherent primordial identity. If this were not the case, there would be no need to speak about identity, fight for it and seek recognition. However, there are various efforts to represent identities in primordial and essentialistic terms. Yet, hooks (1994) notes that the essentialist notion of identity can be a liberating and mobilizing force and a tool to assist subordinated groups to demand their rights:

[A] totalizing critique of "subjectivity", "essence", "identity" can seem very threatening to marginalized groups, for whom it has been an active gesture of political resistance to name one's identity as part of a struggle to challenge domination (hooks, 1994, p. 78).

The essentialist notion of identity can be a progressive idea for subordinated groups but the problem is when some powerful members of a group attempt to sustain or even perpetuate this *contingent* essentialist understanding of identity or culture to maintain oppressive structures or exclusionary practices among the group. What hooks pointed out above is a form of identity politics by subordinated/collective identities to gain access to power that recognizes collective sufferings. The emergence of identity politics as a struggle should be understood in relation to those oppressive and dominating structures that shape the lives of oppressed or exploited groups. This subordinated position "gives purpose and meaning to this struggle" (hooks, 1994, pp. 88-89). Erikson et al., (1999) with reference to Paul Gilroy maintain that we should distinguish between ontological essentialism which represents identities as essentially distinctive (often used in racist discourses) and "strategic essentialism" (coined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak) that subordinated groups can use to mobilize and present themselves, often in simplistic terms despite strong internal differences, to achieve political goals through, for instance, the nationalism that has dominated our political scene for almost two hundred years. Without delving into lengthy accounts of essentialism, the discourse of "essence" or "essentialism" has no meaning outside of history, but is rather a response to changing history and political circumstances. Besides, every essentialisation is strategic and essentialism is not only a strategy used by subordinated groups. Recourse to essentialism aims at gaining control over history in search of specific goals (Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 17).

In this light, nationalism often resorts to essentialist claims about identity and belonging. Moreover, nationalism as the voice of a master identity is legitimized for instance by the United Nations which evokes the right of nations to self-determination. We therefore have international institutions which back up the idea of nation-building. Following Gellner (1983), nations, like states, are not a necessity but a contingency. It is not an inherent attribute of humanity to have a nation. However at the present historical conjuncture nations are represented as if it was just such and inherent attribute. Radhakrishnan (1993) asserted that nationalism has been discredited both theoretically and epistemologically through academic endeavours and asks whether the political need for nationalism can coexist with the intellectual deconstruction of nationalism. Referring to the Palestinian people, he pointed out that it was easy "For the rest of the world both to enjoy nationalism and at the same time to spout a deconstructive rhetoric about nationalism in the face of Palestinian homelessness" which he described as "downright perfidious and unconscionable" (Radhakrishnan, 1993, p. 757). Many oppressed and subordinated ethnic groups use the morphology of nationalism as a means to challenge and resist the nationalism of dominant identities in order to create historical space for recognition and representation of their own identities. hooks (1994) with regard to the usage of essentialism and identity politics by marginalized groups pointed out that employing essentialism to dominate institutional settings was an attempt to assert subjectivity that was a "part of controlling apparatus in structures of domination" (hooks, 1994, p. 81).

It is not an easy task to overcome and liberate humankind from nation-thinking due to its distinctive social structure and resistance both from those who are on the top of the national hierarchy and those who are subordinated by nation-thinking. The construction of collective identity can thus be expressed and narrated differently according to the different prevailing historical contexts. Each identity project has a different point of departure. In the following section, the relationship between nation, gender and sexuality will be explored as important inter-related sites of identity formation.

### **Nationalism, gender and ethnosexual frontiers**

Nationalism is a particularly potent form of identification and hailing. Nationalism lays claim to deep horizontal comradeship between the members of the nation regardless of gender, class or age. Nations are imagined communities since their putative members will never be able to know each other on a personal level or hear of each other. However, this will not prevent them from the feeling that they belong to the same community thanks to national mass media and education and other institutions that back up, reproduce and strengthen the idea of nationhood. The community of nation is

imagined as real and it has strong emotional and symbolic effects on its putative members. The sense of belonging to the nation can be a motivating force that can even make people prepared to die for it. Nationalism has more in common with kinship and religion than with ideologies such as liberalism or fascism (Anderson, 1991, p. 5). However, it is important to bear in mind that nations can not be understood as completed. On the contrary nations are often contested, and characterized by tensions and conflicts. Imagined nations take materialized form in contradictory and contingent ways (Pettman, 1998). It is nationalism that invents nations and not the other way around (Gellner, 1983).

Anderson (1991) in a sympathetic critique of Gellner asserted that nationalism did not *invent* but made it possible for nations to be *imagined* in different ways. Furthermore, nations do not need a specific territory in term of a nation-state to be imagined. What the creation of a nation-state provides is the political authority to fulfil the nationalist discourse about the existence of the nation. Kandiyoti (1991) argues that nationalism as a modern project presents itself as a force that transforms traditional identities and underlines a new identity that is seen to reflect authentic cultural values derived from an allegedly communal past. Nations tend thus to look both forward to modernity and progress and backward to an alleged golden age (McClintock, 1993). Nationalism, according to Pettman (1998), asks for a privileged position as "the master identity" since it competes and interacts with other identities. It is through history that the national identity gets formed and brought into existence (Seth, 1992).

The pasts that nationalist narratives often represent are always sites of contestation that involve conflict over representations (Hodgkin & Radstone, 2009a). Vali emphasises that that there is "No ideology that needs history so much as nationalism" because "History is indispensable to its romantic narrative, essentialist conceptual structure and apocalyptic claim to truth" (quoted in Hodgkin & Radstone, 2009b). And history writings in nationalism often resort to individual and collective memory to explain the days that supposedly made our present but also the challenges that hinder the nation from securing its future. As such, the past is a project for present political challenges, interests and priorities. National memory constitutes an important part of the nation's discursively constructed history, recalling Renan's remark about the national memory "griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort" (Renan, 1990, p. 19). But it is important to note that nationalism is varied and often contradictory:

Like all complex historical movements, nationalism is not a monolithic phenomenon to be deemed entirely good or entirely bad; nationalism is a contradictory discourse and its internal

contradictions need to be unpacked in their historical specificity. The historical agency of nationalism has been sometimes hegemonic though often merely dominant, sometimes emancipatory though often repressive, sometimes progressive though often traditional and reactionary (Radhakrishnan, 1996, pp. 191-192).

In this respect, women have an ambiguous relationship with nationalism. Notwithstanding the egalitarian claim of nationalism regarding its putative members, women are often given specific roles and expected to reproduce the nation biologically, symbolically and culturally (Chatterjee, 1989; Mayer, 2000b; Mostov, 1995; Nagel, 1998; Pettman, 1998; Radcliffe, 1996; Radhakrishnan, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997a; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). The boundary of the nation and the collectivity is assumed to be intimately associated with women's bodies. The nationalist claim about horizontal comradeship has been rejected by numerous scholars as androcentric because it reflects a masculine project (Enloe, 1989; Mayer, 2000a; Nagel, 1998). Nationalism is thus a site of a "virile fraternity" (Parker, Russo, & Yaeger, 1992, p. 6) and a struggle between "competing masculinities" (Bracewell, 2000, p. 572). Pettman puts it as follows:

Women also function as symbols of difference and markers of the boundaries of national and other political communities – hence the significance attached to women's clothing, and associations, especially their relations with "other" men. Their symbolic significance and construction as national dependents or possessions can make them especially vulnerable to policing by in-group men, and to violence directed towards them as a mean of "getting at" their men (Pettman, 1998, p. 158).

Radcliffe (1996) suggests that one should consider the different representations of different women within national narratives and belonging. The national discourse produces different notions about women who are seen to embody appropriate behaviors that are believed to benefit the nation in contrast to women who are considered and represented as "anti-national". There are also women that are not given space within the representation and narratives of the nation. Consequently, Radcliffe calls for attention to "the complex gendered spatialities of the nation, and the multiple ways in which the 'national' (in all its dimensions) constitutes gendered subjectivities and practices" (Radcliffe, p. 19). Despite promises of better times and equality in the future within the realm of assumed horizontal comradeship of nationalism, historical evidence from different "Third World" countries shows, according to Jayawardena, that male politicians pulled women out of their traditional domestic sphere and consciously mobilised them in the national struggle and as soon as the national

liberation was achieved they were pushed back to their “accustomed place” (Jayawardena, 1986, p. 259).

This should not be taken to mean, however, that Western nationalism has not been touched by the androcentric and masculinist premises and practices (see Nagel, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1997a). Anti-nationalist feminist critiques have been countered by feminist scholars who favour feminist nationalism (West et al., 1997, West 2005) or nationalist feminism (Herr, 2003). These scholars agree that nationalisms through history have subordinated women, however differently, but they maintain that women can be both involved in national liberation and at the same time fight to change the patriarchal and male order. This discourse converges well with Brubaker’s (2004) argument that one can not essentialize the nationalist discourses and reduce them to one single meaning because they are independent of our languages and the way we assign them meanings and make claims in their names. If nationalism is defined once for all as a male project, then we do not need as researchers to historicize the nation and its modes of constitution due to the teleology that nationalism implies bad news for women and good news for male domination. However, the feminist critique of nationalism has not emerged from nowhere. Feminist conceptualizations of women’s positions within nationalist narratives and practices show a high level of resonance with lived experiences of women within different nationalist struggles in the West and the “Third World” with devastating outcomes for those women who did not act in accordance with the nationalist discourse and were branded disloyal for crossing the gendered and sexualized boundaries of the nation.

Masculinity, manhood and nationhood are also intimately connected creating a “gender gap” when it comes to the goals and agendas of men and women regarding the nation. Militarized and sexualized languages are a part of nationalism that effects both men and women in different ways (Mayer, 2000a; Mostov, 1995; Nagel, 1998; Pryke, 1998). When the nation is under threat or danger, the invader and colonizer are often labelled as a male heterosexual rapist. This is why women’s sexuality is controlled by both men and women. Elder women are often given the task of policing and transmitting so-called appropriate cultural values of the collectivity to the younger generation (Yuval-Davis, 1997a). Nagel (2003, p. 8) refers to sexuality as a practice where sexual tastes, partners and activities are culturally defined. Sexuality is thus a domain where “pleasure *and* physiology, fantasy *and* anatomy” (Bristow, 1997, p. 1) intersect. But it is also a domain of restriction, repression, danger and agency (p. 1). Sexuality is not only a private issue but a domain of contestation between different political and ideological arrangements (Vance, 2007) and nationalism

as an ideology and practice regards the sexuality of its putative members as central to demarcation of the nation's boundaries.

Mosse (1982) pointed out that sexuality was part of the history of nationalism in two ways. It helped to control sexuality and underpin societal notions about the normal but it also offered a means to tame its members and their sexual attitudes into respectability. One of the most rigorous conceptualizations of respectability is provided by Skeggs (1999) in relation to class structures. She defined respectability as "one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class. It informs how we speak, who we speak to, how we classify others ... how we know who we are (or are not)" (Skeggs, 1999, p. 1). Besides behavior and appearance are important social markers of respectable femininity that needs to be performed and confirmed publicly. Performing respectability takes different forms according to class, "race", age and national context (Skeggs, 1999). Consequently, the notion of respectability needs to be studied in its concrete historical situation and in relation to dominant regulatory discourses and the ways it might impinge on structuring the subjectivities of different gendered national subjects.

Following Butler (1999), performativity also involves a form of agency in constructing gendered subjectivities. "Doing" specific forms of femininity implies repetitions of acts regulated by dominant discourses. Gender identities are not given but situated within specific historical and political discourses with their own regulatory practices. The existence of gender is closely related to the ways subjects reiterate gendered performances. However, this conceptualization allows subjects (like lesbians, bisexuals and male homosexuals) whose experiences diverge from the normative heterosexuality to disrupt the performativity of these reiterations (Butler, 1999) and challenge the ontological status of these naturalized identities. Women and men who do not perform a heterosexual femininity and masculinity that converges with the nationalist discourse, occupy a liminal space, which implies that they supposedly threaten or destroy the structure and hierarchies of the nation. In this respect, women who do not adhere to the nationalist ideology can also disrupt these reiterations and perform a respectable femininity that stands in contrast to the dominant discourse, which can lead to exclusionary responses from the community they belong to. As discussed above, the boundary of the nation is gendered and sexualized. Even if these boundaries are under surveillance and social control, there are always transgressions that challenge the naturalness of these symbolic boundaries. It is in this context that Nagel has developed the concept of ethnosexual frontiers, by which she means:

[T]he borderlands on either side of ethnic divides; they skirt the edges of ethnic communities; they constitute symbolic and physical sensual spaces where sexual imaginings and sexual contact occur between different racial, ethnic, and national groups (Nagel, 2003, p. 14).

Hence, ethnosexual refers to the ways sexuality and ethnicity intersect and interact but also the ways they define and are dependent on each other with regard to their meanings and power. These frontiers become important sites to regulate and entertain boundary-maintenance. However, they also provide possibilities to disrupt the discourses that define them as sacred or fixed. Ultimately, if we want to understand how a nation is constructed we have to examine gendered and sexualized discourses and how they limit and constrain equal participation in the life of the nation.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Historical injustices and politics of denial and recognition**



## **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on how young Kurdish men and women articulate their identifications, claims and collective attributions with reference to the political position of the Kurds in the Middle East and how this affects their everyday identity politics in Sweden. As will be shown, young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden contrast the political freedom that Kurds experience in Sweden to that in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria and make use of in their identity formation. The narratives of belonging are divided into different themes in order to highlight the dynamic aspect of identifications with the past, present and future. This chapter also addresses and highlights the ways the respondents experience their Kurdish identity being denied to them, and the absence of a Kurdish nation-state and the ways they respond to it. It also addresses the way that the respondents make use of history in order to construct a unique Kurdish history and identity in relation to Islam and other social collectivities. In sum, this chapter engages with issues related to Kurdish identity formation such as denial of recognition, history, Islam, nationalism, anti-nationalism, resistance and individual/collective sufferings.

### **“In Sweden I have a two meter long Kurdish flag in my balcony”**

In this section I will highlight the meanings the respondents attribute to the Kurdish identity in their regions of origin in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria and their country of settlement, Sweden. The policies of the four Middle Eastern countries towards the Kurdish population have much in common as well as some significant differences (see chapter 1). This is also reflected in the accounts of the research participants, whose experiences are crucial for understanding the social dynamics of the collective identity as well as individual narratives of belonging. The research participants speak in this chapter about the ways they have experienced their Kurdish identity in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria and contrast it to the present political situation of the Kurds in Sweden. The research participants talk about individual and collective sufferings in the Middle-East and about the meanings of these experiences for their identity formation. One of the research participants relates his personal experiences to frame a discourse that indicates the collective sufferings of the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey:

**Karwan (M: 24):** Kurds and Kurdistan mean everything to me. That is why I have ended up here in Sweden. We Kurds have experienced a lot of difficulty and oppression and I have not come to Sweden to become Swedish but to continue being Kurdish. It is true. You can not forget your origin and where you are from. We

have experienced a lot of Anfal campaigns in Iraq by the Arabs and when we fled to Turkey, during our stay in the refugee camp there, we were assaulted and poisoned by the Turks. /.../ You take this with you from your childhood.

The passion of experience and the passion of remembrance with regard to suffering (see also hooks, 1994) characterize Karwan's accounts of Kurdish experiences in Iraq and Turkey. He believes that his personal experiences of ethnic discrimination in Iraq and Turkey reflect the "collective" suffering of the Kurdish population in these countries. As Karwan put it above, oppression was the main reason why Kurds are in Sweden and also why they should *continue to be* Kurdish.

Being Kurdish is considered by Karwan to be synonymous with the suffering and oppression that Kurds as a collectivity were exposed to by Arabic and Turkish authorities in Iraq and Turkey. It is this victim-based discourse of Kurdish identity that is evoked as the motivating force behind why "you can not forget your origin", as Karwan puts it. In the nationalist discourse, to rephrase Renan's account of national memory, grievances are seen as more valuable than victory in imposing duties and mobilizing a common effort (Renan, 1990). Ethnic groups like the Kurds who have been subjected to oppression in their "former" home-countries and live in exile may have a strong need to sustain their ethnic identity. In such instances, assimilation is regarded as a threat to their political aspirations as an ethnic group especially the goal of establishing a nation-state. Within this ethnic discourse of "continuing to be Kurdish", assimilation is perceived as a victory for the hostile and repressive elements in those four states. In contrast to Karwan, who has personally experienced ethnic discrimination and oppression in Iraq and Turkey, Alan refers to the structural differences between Turkey and Sweden regarding political freedom and identity formation:

**Alan (M: 23):** I have a two meter long Kurdish flag in my balcony in Sweden and I would not have been able to have that in Turkey regardless of what formal laws they have about human rights. What I appreciate with Sweden is the freedom I have. I have been in Turkey several times and there you are used to hush-hush and you have to be silent when the gendarmes come. I was not allowed to say that I am Kurdish because my relative forewarned me about this. I was supposed to say that I was Swedish. You learn automatically what it implies to be a Kurd in Turkey.

Alan like many of the research participants praised Sweden for granting Kurds a degree of political freedom that is rare in the countries prior to migration. As

Alan points out above, Kurds are deprived of their subjectivity and have to remain unmentionable<sup>14</sup> as Kurds in Turkey where there are institutional gazes and practices that enforce. Being Kurdish is effectively a political "crime" in Turkey. It is in to the context of this criminalization of Kurdish identity in Turkey that Sweden is appreciated for the political freedom and democracy that it provides for Kurds. Alan emphasises the differences between Turkey and Sweden by referring to the Kurdish flag in his balcony and the hush-hush to show how Kurdish identity is rendered invisible and silent in Turkey while it can be openly expressed in Sweden. Some of the research participants also referred to the Turkish state as engaging in burning down Kurdish villages and suppressing Kurdish identity, causing Kurds to flee to Europe or to fight the Turkish army.

These findings from my respondents are echoed in several studies of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe (Alinia, 2004; Enneli, et al., 2005; Griffith, 2002; Khayati, 2008; Wahlbeck, 1999) where West European countries often provide a degree of political recognition for Kurds that is rare in the countries of settlement prior to migration. Most of my research participants considered Sweden as democratic in contrast to what they or their parents had experienced previously. If we cast the net wider, Sweden has a supportive role in Kurdish identity politics. For instance, Kurdish literature production has in recent decades increased remarkably due to diasporic activities of the Kurds in Sweden partly as a result of financial support from the Swedish state (Ahmadzadeh, 2003; Tayfun, 1998). Sweden has thus become home to many Kurdish intellectuals, authors and artists.

The gratitude towards Sweden for the favourable political circumstances that Kurds experience here can be understood within the framework of a Swedish multiculturalism that facilitates the creation of ethnic community associations through state funding. Ålund and Schierup (1991) criticised Swedish multicultural policies for paving the way for ethnic absolutism and culturalism and diminished the possibility of successful integration. I agree with Ålund and Schierup (1991) that ethnic enclaves can easily be encouraged by Swedish multiculturalism, which strengthens ethnic boundaries. On the other hand, it has created outstanding grounds for ethnic Kurdish mobilization because it gives the Kurds recognition in term of their ethnicity something that they have been denied in their countries of "origin". Swedish multicultural policies both strengthen ethnic Kurdish identity and, indirectly, promote ethnic Kurdish nationalism.

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<sup>14</sup> During 2009, the Turkish parliament discussed the political situation of the Kurds in Turkey. In these parliamentary debates, Kurds were not longer unmentionable but recognized indirectly as political subjects. However, this does not mean that the "Kurdish case" is solved.

This strong emphasis on Kurdish ethnicity is also related to the earlier historical experiences of the Kurds in the Middle East where they have been subjugated to different forms of oppression. The lack of a Kurdish nation-state and embassies in Sweden to protect Kurdish interests (whatever they might be) can also be a reason why certain Kurds organize themselves through associations and try to compensate for the problem of statelessness by functioning as official mouthpieces of Kurdish interests and subjects. As we saw in the earlier two examples of Alan and Karwan, Kurdish experiences in Turkey and Iraq are depicted in terms of oppression and subordination. Blend, who is a Kurdish refugee from Iranian Kurdistan confirmed that it was not easy to be Kurdish in Iraq, where he lived in a refugee camp for 15 years:

**Blend (M: 24):** It is Sweden that has helped me to come here. They helped me to leave Iraq where Arabs were not so kind to us. When we worked among them, we earned little money. They could without any reason take our stuff or even beat us. They could kill you for money or for nothing. This is why Sweden is very important for me.

Blend was thus frustrated by the harsh circumstances and collective sufferings that Iranian Kurds experienced as refugees in Iraq and how they were subordinated by the dominant (Arab) population. He also mentioned that many Kurds were killed because of their Kurdish identity and the law did not protect them. These experiences show how domination and oppression can give rise to ethnic mobilization and consciousness that create a rupture between "Us" Kurds and "Them" Arabs. Blend also refers to the way Kurdish bodies were effectively outlawed due to lack of state interventions to eradicate this arbitrary ethnic discrimination that Iranian Kurds experienced in Iraq. Following Agamben's (1998) conceptualization of *homo sacer*<sup>15</sup>, we can make the argument that Kurdish lives in Iraq were depicted as a low valued form of life that was depoliticized. The depoliticized life form that the Kurds represented in Blend's accounts is in stark contrast to the politicized lives that sovereign Iraqi or the Arabic citizen enjoyed.

While Blend experienced Iraq as a dangerous place for Kurds and Kurdish refugees, Zagros underlined that his experiences in Iran were very positive. As a Kurdish refugee from Iraq, Zagros fled with his family to Iran due to the atrocities committed by Saddam Hussein against the Kurds in Iraq. He pointed

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<sup>15</sup> The notion of *homo sacer* was used in ancient Roman law to describe people that were exiled and excluded from the Roman law. Killing such people were not considered as a crime (Agamben, 1998).

out that he had not been as conscious of his Kurdishness in Iran as he has been in Sweden:

**Zagros (M: 27):** Before I came to Sweden, I did not feel so much about my Kurdishness. In Iran, I was a Kurdish refugee from Iraq but my Kurdish identity was not very important for me there. Nobody told me that I was different. /.../ In Sweden, I become more Kurdish because I was regarded as different because of my black hair and my culture.

In the case of Zagros, there are no accounts of oppression and violence as a Kurdish refugee in Iran. As I argued in chapter 1, Iranian history is a history of multiculturalism and it is significantly easier to live with difference in Iran than in Iraq which has been dominated by an Arabic nationalism that has resulted in mass murder campaigns against the Kurds. This explains also why Kurds do not position themselves in an oppositional way towards Iranians. According to Zagros, his awareness of his Kurdishness is related to the ways he has been treated as different due to his appearance and cultural background, a discourse that tends to exclude certain groups within the boundary of Swedishness. This process of otherisation that problematizes and stigmatizes certain differences leads to an ethnicization of Kurdish identity. Sweden not only provides political space for ethnic Kurdish identity to flourish but it also strengthens its prevalence through exclusionary practices, an issue that I will deal with in chapter 5. When it comes to Syria, Rezan points out that Sweden is as an important experience for the Kurds because Kurds are not silenced politically and they are well-organized and have a good relationship with Swedish political parties which advocate for the Kurdish issue. Although Rezan admits that Syria has denied more than a hundred thousand Kurds Syrian citizenship, she did not experience tense relationships between Kurds and Arabs when she visited Syria:

**Rezan (F: 26):** I have been in Western Kurdistan (Syria) several times and the region where major parts of the population is Kurdish, I did not experience that I was oppressed. There is a good relationship between Syrians and Kurds. I have realized that there are more conflicts here in Sweden than in my town in Western Kurdistan. You hear a lot of rubbish about Kurds from Arabs here in Sweden, something that you do not hear so much about down there.

Rezan shows through the account above that just because the state has a problematic relationship with its Kurdish population, it does not always lead to conflictual relationships between Kurds and Arabs in Syria. This is an

interesting case because Syria and Iraq have shared the same political ideology based on Pan-Arabic nationalism (Baath ideology) but the ways they have treated their minoritized populations seem to differ. The Syrian model is based on repressive assimilations policies known as a forced Arabization process while Iraq has recognized the Kurds as an ethnic group and given them cultural rights but at the same time subjected them to mass murder campaigns and chemical attacks. The relationship between Kurds and Arabs according to Rezan has been politicized and tense in the Swedish context. And it is in this context that antagonism between Kurds and Arabs has intensified due to practices of non-recognition and oppression that Kurds are subjected to and the resistance young Kurds make to this belittling process, an issue that will I engage with in the following section.

In sum, Syria and Iran did not have the same oppressive role as Turkey and Iraq in the formation of informants' Kurdish identities and discourses based on collective suffering, suppression and non-recognition. Iran and Syria were described as relatively safe places and this converges well with earlier discussions that I have made in the first chapter that Kurds historically are more conciliatory and ambivalent toward Persians than Arabs and Turks (see also Ciment, 1996). Although Sweden was praised by the research participants as a site where Kurds could enjoy political freedom and support from the Swedish state, some of them reported becoming more conscious of their Kurdish identity in Sweden than in Syria or Iran. This ethnicization of identity can be understood in relation to the subordinated positions of the Kurds in Sweden as immigrants but also due to the political mobilizations of Kurds in Sweden as a distinct ethnic group.

### **The politics of denial and recognition in everyday life**

Earlier sections explored the ways the research participants experienced their Kurdish identity in the Middle-East and compared these experiences with the Swedish context, in which they enjoyed political freedom but also became more consciously Kurdish. In this section, the focus will be on how the Swedish context informs Kurdish identification. The question of asserting a homogenous Kurdish identity is regarded as crucial when this identity is challenged by young people with Turkish, Arabic, Iranian and Swedish backgrounds in Sweden. As we see below, experiences of the denial of Kurdish identity are central to the ways they assert their Kurdishness. Challenges to the existence of or right to a Kurdish identity bring together *many Kurdish identities* from different parts under *an umbrella of monolithic Kurdishness* that is experienced as oppressed. Below is an illustration concerning one interviewee's experience of her peers' refusal to recognize any Kurdish identity and the way she responded to it:

**Shilan (F: 19):** When Arabs and Turks try to push you down because of my Kurdishness. There was an Iranian guy in our class during gymnasium who tried to push us down when we said that we were Kurds from Kurdistan. We were three Kurdish girls and a Kurdish guy and we jumped on him and wanted to show him that he had not any chance against us. It was only discussions and no violence involved. He harassed us for not having a homeland. He said that we lied about our country and we have nothing. He said that Kurds from Rojhelat (Eastern Kurdistan) are Iranian, Kurds from Bashur (Southern Kurdistan) are Iraqis and so on. There is of course Kurds and Kurdistan.

Shilan tells not only about the experience of Kurdish youth but also about everyday life in an ethnically plural society. She also refers to the everyday identity making projects among young people with Kurdish backgrounds in creating a process of "Us" when their identities are contested, devalued and denied. This includes making distinctions between other young people who have their own countries, homelands, and national collectivities. This "we-ness" does not converge in a political vacuum but in a context of denial that strengthens the boundaries between those who have a "natural" homeland and those who lack but aspire to have a homeland. The rejection of Kurdish identity and Kurdistan is grounded in the fact that Kurds lack political authority over the regions that Shilan and her friends claim as Kurdish. In order to resist domination, they resort to alternative terminology to name different Kurdish regions in terms of south, north, west and east is a strategy of resistance to subvert and dismantle the sovereignty of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria and describe their present political authority over Kurdish regions as illegitimate. This discourse deconstructs the political geography of these four nation-states and reconstructs a divided Kurdistan. It is in relation to oppressive discourses that Shilan and her friends formulate an essentialist Kurdish identity whose goal is to break with domination (see hooks, 1994; Radhakrishnan, 2003). The following is another illustration of this:

**Goran (M: 20):** If someone calls me Turk or Arab, I get irritated like hell. I have met a lot of people and I have said to them that I am from Kurdistan and they say: where the hell is Kurdistan? But it is our duty to teach them about that. Another Swedish guy I know once told me that all immigrants, like Arabs, Turks and Kurds are the same shit. It does not matter. I smiled at him and went to him and said: If you repeat that another time, I will break you to pieces. He thought that I was a Turk and I told him to never call me again a Turk because I am Kurdish.

Although some young people with Swedish backgrounds insult all immigrant groups and consider them to be "the same shit", Kurdishness remained central to his reaction and anger. For these Swedes, immigrants, whether they are Kurds, Arabs, Turks or Persian, are clumped into a homogenous racialized category such as "immigrants", "wogs" or "Turks". While for Goran, it is of paramount importance to teach Swedes that "he is not the same shit (read immigrant)" but Kurdish. Although he rejects the idea that all immigrants share a common identity, his main concern is to make the Swede define him as Kurdish. "Turk" is often used in racist Swedish discourse as a derogatory slur which positions dark-skinned people from the Middle East as alien to Sweden and Europeans, while in a Turkish context, Turkish identity has been imposed forcefully on Kurds (who were regarded for several decades as "mountain Turks") and therefore it denotes for many Kurds in both the Swedish and the Turkish contexts to be labeled a Turk is to be subjected to a strategy of domination and inferiorization. Although Goran did not use violence and intimidation to resist the denial of his Kurdish identity, he saw it as an option. In contrast to Goran, Karwan has used violence several times to resist certain young people with Arabic and Turkish backgrounds who have devalued his Kurdish identity:

**Karwan (M: 24):** I have had a difficult time with Arabs and Turks and I have 13 records in my criminal register because of different fights that I have had with Arabs and Turks about Kurds. /.../ This is something they have done to us for a long time, they have tortured and chased us away from our homeland. My fighting with them (Turks and Arabs) starts with their question about where I am from. And I say am Kurdish. And they start saying: "There are no Kurds, you are Turks and there are no Kurds and you are like Gypsies". But what the hell, there are 30 million Kurds. At the end, you get very tired at this. First, they have chased you away from your homeland and they do not accept us as Kurds down there and then they come to Sweden and still insist that they do not recognize and accept us.

Young people with a Kurdish background are labelled "Gypsies", a people without a homeland by young people with Arabic and Turkish backgrounds who deny the very existence of Kurds. In this racist discourse, "Gypsies" is a measure of deviance and abnormality, of not having a homeland (a stable location or place of identity) and an institutionalized collective identity. Reading Karwan's account shows that the conflict is rooted in a relationship that is permeated by denial of recognition and by a belittling process that evokes violent reaction from Karwan. The suppression of Kurdish identity has permeated Karwan's life in Iraq, Turkey and now in Sweden and has

engendered violent responses by him to confront this oppression. Use of violence was not limited to the young men with Kurdish backgrounds but some of the young women also told of regular conflicts with young people with Turkish backgrounds in Sweden. Such examples indicate that many of the young people with Kurdish backgrounds are subjected to external pressures from other immigrant groups, such as Turks, to make and defend their Kurdish identity:

**Leyla (F: 18):** I have realized that no matter how much I try with them, I can not be in accord with them. When I meet them it feels like meeting an eternal provocation. They know that you are a Kurd. They try to provoke you for being Kurdish. It feels like that they want to humiliate you and you get irritated at them all the time. When I went to secondary school and I was one of the few Kurds at that school. I was harassed by the Turks for three years and they even called me a PKK-whore. These guys were older than me and I fought with them. They threatened me and my little sister. They were fascist Turks.

Denial of recognition, harassment and humiliation seem to produce a frustrated and sensitive Kurdish identity constantly in struggle. Leyla, in her account, equates Turkishness with provocation of Kurdish identity. Leyla also tells a story of how resistance toward this denial is equated with being a "whore" by some young Turkish people. Daily harassments and otherisation engender a defensive Kurdish identity. Rezan illustrates this with another example of how a defensive Kurdish identity can be fostered:

**Rezan (F: 26):** Usually Iranians, Arabs and Turks tell me: "you do not have a homeland". At the beginning I did not care so much about that but with the passage of the time you get tired of it when you hear it over and over again and then you take it personally. You have to defend yourself.

As Rezan points out above, repetitive assertions by young Iranians, Arabs and Turks about Kurds as not possessing a homeland generates a defensive and reactive Kurdish identity and positionality that denounces claims by dominant subjects that assign Kurds a stigmatized and inferiorized position. This means that even "uncommitted" Kurds can be drawn into this identity politics when they encounter denial and devaluation of Kurdish identity. However, the empirical material does not only show conflict in the relationship between Kurdish youth and other young people with Middle-Eastern backgrounds. There are also examples of harmonious relationships between Kurds, Arabs and Turks:

**Hazhar (M: 26):** Many of my friends are foreigners like Iranians, Kurds and Arabs. I don't think that they are so satisfied with what happens with Kurds in their homelands. We can not go around and fight with each other. They respect my identity and I respect theirs. They know that the regimes in their homelands are not so good.

When there is recognition by the dominant subjects of the denied and degraded status of Kurdish identity within the political structures of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iran, this opens other possibilities for relationships. The subordinated position of the Kurds can be negotiated without resorting to acts of violence and hatred.

Several of the young interviewees reported resisting verbally and with violence in the face of the subordination and inferiorization of Kurdish identity. It is worth noting that this sensitivity toward the denial of Kurdish identity that respondents in this study show is not reported in other studies of first generation Kurdish migrants within the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden (Alinia, 2004; Khayati, 2008). This sensitivity can be related to their identity project in the Swedish context. The situation of Kurdish youth does not differ in a significant way from Iranian, Turkish or Arabic youth when it comes to their position within the social structure of the Swedish society because they are all regarded and defined as young people with immigrant backgrounds from the Middle East. However, there is difference rooted in unequal and sometimes brutal power relations between Kurds and other minoritized groups in relation to experiences of dominant nationalities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. This historical awareness among the Kurdish youth is crucial to the way they react and respond to the denial of Kurdish identity in Sweden.

The denial and oppression of Kurdish identity has not occurred in Middle East but as shown above in the narratives, is also experienced in Sweden and creates the basis for politicized social relationships between Kurds and these other groups. hooks (1994) argues that identity politics can be understood as a position from which one can criticize dominant structures and give meaning to the collective struggle. Briefly put, the accounts above interweave issues of suffering, oppression, denial and recognition at the heart of the agenda of Kurdish identity politics. These issues are discursively constructed as justifying and giving meaning to their violent struggle to assert a Kurdish subjectivity. The politics of denial, as we saw above, prepare the ground for a reactive Kurdish identity that often occupies a subaltern positionality with claims and knowledge that can easily be rejected by dominant subjects. As Radhakrishnan notes:

If identities are denied the legitimacy of their own truths (both in their own eyes and through the eye of the “others”), they are bound to languish within their histories of inferiority, deprived of their relational objective status vis-à-vis the objective conditions, of other identities (Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 19).

The lack of Kurdish representation or recognition for Kurds as a nation is a reported reality within the boundaries of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, whose dominant overarching nationalism have not succeeded in persuading most of the Kurdish population to identify with them. Conversely, Kurdish nationalism has flourished due to these hegemonic national identities that suppress in the name of an overarching national identity the great diversity of languages, histories and cultures that exist within their boundaries. Kurds have remained ghettoized and culturally, economically and politically subordinated within their specific and regional spaces as a result of these exclusive nationalisms. This political subordination has constructed a Kurdish politics of identity that is in constant search for a Kurdish national identity. Kurdish nationalism seems to offer a framework to construct a narrative of a unique Kurdish identity that needs to be restored through “going” back to history and ones “origin”.

### **Islam as a contested Kurdish identity**

This section explores how the respondents discursively construct and assert a unique Kurdish national or ethnic identity through contesting Islam as a Kurdish identity. The political context, Sweden, in which they formulate their discourses about Islam, has effects on the way they reject or defend Islam as a Kurdish identity or as an identity that goes beyond ethnic/national belonging. A politics of negation based on negating Islam is the dominant discourse here, although there are counter-discourses that find Islam as cutting through different ethnic boundaries. The accounts provided by the research participants powerfully relate to a discourse of returning back to the “authentic origin” of Kurdishness as a positive source of identification and cultural values. One of the interviewees, Selma provides some arguments as to why Kurds should undergo a de-islamization process:

**Selma (F: 19):** Why should we Kurds be Muslims? I know there are Kurds who are Muslims and I have my opinion about Islam. So many bad things had been done to Kurds in the name of Islam. /.../ Saddam Killed Kurds in the name of Islam.

Selma assigns Islam a negative role in the history of the Kurds. She refers to the ways Islam has been used to oppress Kurds. During the 1980s, Saddam Hussein used the Koran to suppress the "infidel" population of Kurdistan through the Anfal campaign which resulted in mass murder of Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan and widespread destruction in the Kurdish region. An anti-Islamic discourse is thus regarded by Selma as legitimate in relation to the ways that Islam has been constructed as a negation of Kurdishness in the political struggle between Arabs and Kurds. Although Kurds have an important role in the history of Islam, Another interviewee hails Zoroastrism as the "authentic" Kurdish religion and criticizes one of the greatest Muslim warriors (who had a Kurdish background) for not doing anything for the Kurds:

**Soran (M: 19):** I am not Muslim because Islam is not from the beginning the religion of the Kurds. Our religion was Zoroastrism. I am very proud of my Kurdish identity. I did a school project about Saladin and the Crusaders and presented it to my class and teacher. The situation of the Kurds was much better during his time. He was a great worrier if not one of the greatest through history and he treated Christians with respect. He ruled Egypt and a large part of the Middle East. I feel proud about him but I also get mad at him because he did not do anything for Kurdistan and Kurds.

The ambivalence of Kurdish nationalists, as it is expressed by Soran above toward Saladin (1138-1193) and his notorious achievements is one of the most powerful discursive constructs of Kurdish nationalism. It is used to denounce Islam on the basis of Kurdish identity politics. In my experience, Kurdish nationalists often acknowledge the grandeur of Saladin but show aversion toward him due to his lack of nationalistic interest by in furthering the interests of Kurds and Kurdistan. This stance neglects the fact that nationalism was not the overarching ideology of that time but is actually a recent and modern phenomenon. Saladin did not fight the Crusaders in the name of Kurds or Kurdistan but his struggle was justified in the name of an Islamic unity that was transcended ethnic differences and stretched across the vast geographies of contemporary nation-states in the Middle-East. Soran's positioning of himself in opposition to Islam and his conflicted positionality in relation to Saladin can be understood within two situated political frameworks, a Kurdish nationalist ideology and a dominant Western<sup>16</sup> aversive attitude toward Islam as a threatening and undesired religion in the West.

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<sup>16</sup> In dominant Western discourses and seminal writing about Islam, Saladin is provided a privileged space as in the work of Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy* where Saladin is the only Muslim who was allowed a space among other non-Christian heroes. For instance, Lönnroth (2005) argues in the daily Swedish newspaper, Svenska Dagbladet, that it could be an eye-opener for

A Kurdish nationalism that bases its discourse on anti-Islamic discourse is well-placed to gain political support in Western countries. In many European countries, we can witness an aggressive anti-Muslim racism and politics promoted by Orientalist stereotyping of Islam and Muslims (see for instance Fekete, 2004, 2006; Kamali, 2008; Kundnani, 2007; S. H. Razack, 2008). It is within such a contextual framework that we can understand why rejecting Islam as an identity or a belief is compelling for some young Kurds. Although Saladin becomes intimately associated with desirable virtues both in terms of masculinity and humanism in Kurdish representations as the only leader who could defeat the Crusaders, an achievement that Arabs would supposedly not have achieved without Saladin. This politics of negation is supported by another research interviewee, who idealises the originality of Kurdish culture beyond and against Islam and Islamic influences. For Hana, Kurdishness is religion:

**Hana (F: 18):** Two many foreign traditions have entered our culture, a culture that I see as one of the most beautiful cultures. Too much religion has entered our culture and much of our Kurdish culture is fading away. I understand that we have been obliged by Iranian, Iraqi and Turkish governments to assimilate, but now we have a golden opportunity in Sweden to take back our old culture. I think we should adhere to our culture. Many Kurds become uncomfortable with me when I say that I am not Muslim. I am a Kurd and from Kurdistan. Kurdishness is my religion.

Hana is preoccupied with authentication of Kurdish culture and identity and she wants to rewind the tape of history to the original moment of Kurdish history, a moment that is understood in relationship to Islam and the Arabization of Kurdish culture. The politics of negation that Hana suggests is based on an assumption that Kurds can return to a form of immaculate order before Islam. She suggests that Kurds in Sweden can make a jump to an immaculate order after Islam (cf. Azar, 2001b, p. 90). Hana wants to clarify the boundaries of "Kurdishness" and Islam and politicize as much as possible the antagonism between the Kurds and Islam. Sweden as a political space is seen in the account of Hana as providing a golden possibility for Kurds to reclaim "the beautiful Kurdish culture" that has been suppressed due to assimilatory and coercive policies of the Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi governments. The beautiful Kurdish culture is a euphemism for "a pure and an authentic Kurdish culture". Hana's responses reflect a nationalist ideology. A modern project that presents itself as restoring the authentic cultural values that have their roots in an

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Westerners that the foremost hero of the Arabs, despite all bitter fights and suicide-bombers, neither was an Arab or an Islamic fundamentalist but a broad-minded and an enlightened Kurd as Saladin.

allegedly communal past (Kandioyti, 1991). As Anderson (1991) notes, nationalism has more in common with religion and kinship than with ideologies like liberalism and fascism. In that respect it is not surprising that Hana regards Kurdishness or Kurdish nationalism as a religion. Hana aims to make claims on Kurdish loyalty, and Kurdish solidarity through articulating a nationalist narrative that benefits the Kurdish people and moves them toward a golden era (see Brubaker, 2004).

This involves reinterpreting history and culture and redefining Kurdish identity and changing the present identificational patterns of Kurds. Hana narrates an oppositional discourse toward Arabs and Turks, through her experiences and encounters with the putative members and representative of these identities. She identifies herself more with Iranians because of common traditions, language and cultural heritage. She also relates to an ancient common past of Kurds and Iranians in which Arabs and Turks are the oppressors and undesired others. This purist, glorifying, romantic and nostalgic nationalist discourse about the past is not only something many Kurds employ, but is also used by Iranian intellectuals who have constructed Arabs as imaginary enemies and the supposed demolishers of Iranian culture, civilization and traditions (see for instance Ahmadzadeh, 2003; Bouroujerdi, 1996).

With regards to "undesired" cultural influences by Arabs and Islam, gender relations among Kurds and Iranians were often assumed by some informants to be influenced in a negative way by Arabs and Islam. In this vein, rejecting an Islamic identity is about detaching the Kurdish identity from the "honor-killing" discourse in the Swedish context:

**Awa (F: 22):** The first time we discussed honor-killing was in the classroom. The teacher started speaking about honor-killing because they knew that I was Kurdish. I told them that it did not have to do with the Kurds but with religion and Islam. Kurds have not been Muslim from beginning but Zoroastrians. It is not a good image and one does not become happy to hear that about that when they think it is Kurdish.

Awa blames Islam for causing so called "honor-killing" and points out that Islam is not a Kurdish religion. The anti-Islamic discourse that Awa chooses should be understood within an Orientalist framework that equates Islam with gender oppression. This is a notion that is deeply rooted in European discourses about Muslims and Islam (L. Ahmad, 1982; S. H. Razack, 2008; Yegenoglu, 1998). The position of Awa reflects essentialist attempts in order to distil the Kurdish culture and remove so called "deviant cultural elements"

that are assumed to have their roots in Arabic and Islamic culture. The "authentic" Kurdish culture is assumed to be separate and distinct from Arabic and Islamic influences. Among Kurdish intellectual, leftists and nationalists, Islam is often assumed to embody negative values such as patriarchy and to constitute a significant source of Kurdish "backwardness" (see for instance Ahmadzadeh, 2003). Hence, they often evoke Zoroastrism as a Kurdish religion which is assumed to be a heaven of refuge for the equality between men and women. Blaming Arabs for these cultural practices or influences also serves a nationalistic purpose that is of major significance for the Kurdish diaspora. Kurdish nationalists are well-aware that a direct association between Kurds and "honor-killing" would severely damage the Kurdish nationalist aspirations and lobbying in Western countries. The idea that Kurds are forced to become Muslims is, according to Shilan, a common understanding among her friends. Besides, Shilan points out, that there is an anti-Islamic sentiment among young Kurds who call for rejection of Islam as part of Kurdish identity, a stance that Shilan rejects:

**Shilan (F: 19):** Most of my Kurdish friends think that Kurdistan comes before Islam and the Kurds have been forced by the Arabs to convert to Islam. We are supposed to not believe in Islam but in Zoroastrism. On Viva Kurdistan (a website for Kurdish youth around the world based in Sweden), they speak all the time about Kurds and Islam. There have been discussions whether we should not burn the Koran. I don't agree with them because I don't feel that I have been forced to become a Muslim.

Islam is seen by some, as Shilan suggests, as a foreign cultural property of Arabs and an imposed religion, in contrast to the putative native, primordial and natural religion of Zoroastrism. Certain Kurdish demands for burning the Koran seek to construct and strengthen the antagonism between Kurds and Arabs, a position that Shilan rejects. For Shilan, Kurdishness and Islam do not need to contradict each other. This was not the only example of the research participants regarding Islam as part of a Kurdish identity formation. Zana, for instance:

**Zana (M: 21):** I am more a Muslim than a Kurd or a Turk and that is the most important thing for me. All Muslims are brothers. My mother is religious and my father is not so religious. I consider myself as a Muslim and I feel very good about going to the mosque. In a mosque you can find a black guy, an Arab and everybody is nice toward each other. Everybody is equal there. There is no such thing among us as an Iranian, Turk or Kurd. Everybody is equal. /.../ I am against PKK but I am also against

Turkish nationalists. /.../ Indeed there are no difference between Kurds and Turks. But it is politics and it is the members of the Turkish government who see differences. I don't see any differences. The whole conflict begins with Attatürk when he forbade the Kurdish language and identity. But before that, it was the Ottoman Empire, there were not such things as Turks and Kurds, because they were ottomans. For instance, I never say Kurdistan because it is politic for me, because it is like regarding Kurdistan as an own state. I say that I am from Turkey but in this place where I live, most of the Kurds, they say that they are Kurds from Kurdistan.

For Zana, a Muslim identity is an identity that is both trans-ethnic and cosmopolitan. It is an identity where Kurds, Arabs, Turks and Iranians can come together under the common umbrella of Islam. Islam can thus be regarded as a crosscutting and bonding identity that reconciles Kurdish and Turkish identities. This is the reason why Zana resorts to Islam and the mosque where he finds that the ethnic schism is not so common. Islam is assumed in his account to be a religion where race and skin color do not matter because everybody is considered equal. This is a conscious choice by Zana to adapt a Muslim identity due to his parents' background. His narration suggests that through his Muslim identity, he can reconcile the "ambivalence" of his Turkish and Kurdish background without the need to choose between them. He regards the tense social relationship between Kurds and Turks as a political construction. Zana does not focus on differences but on the similarities between the Kurds and Turks and accuses PKK and Turkish nationalists of intensifying the conflict between these two groups. He also refers to the historical root of this conflict which begins with Kemal Attatürk (the father of the Turks who is regarded as the founder of modern Turkey) who banned the Kurdish language and identity. Before the establishment of Turkey as a nation-state, there was a common identity as Ottomans and citizens of the Ottoman Empire. His historical references are historical accounts of solidarity between these two groups and the possibility of harmonious trans-ethnic social relationships. While other respondents earlier referred to the past and history in order to discursively construct a distinct Kurdish identity, Zana regards the past and history as a possibility to learn from and downplay the issue of Turkishness and Kurdishness as essentially different identities. Islam is evoked by him as a solution to overcome the political conflicts that have prevailed during recent decades.

Most of the informants, however, represent Islam as an obstacle and a rupturing force that obstructs Kurdish aspirations for nationhood. According to this anti-Islamic discourse, rejection of Islam entails cutting off social, cultural

and emotional bonds with Arabs but also people who embrace Islamic culture. Islam is regarded as a negation of the modern Kurdish identity. Once again, as in the previous section about Kurdish sufferings, discursive accounts of the past provide a unique space for nationalist claims to a history and a religion that existed prior to Islam which is assumed to be an essential and authentic Kurdish property. This historical space is almost regarded as an intact fossilized culture waiting for its owner to reclaim it through subverting its substitute, namely Islam. Of course, many Muslims in the world are non-Arabs. However, for several informants rejecting Islam includes rejecting Arabs and their cultural dominance in the Kurdish society. The research participants made different use of the past and history to counter present political challenges, antagonisms and conflicts based on discourses that aim to construct a unique Kurdish identity beyond Islam. In contrast to this essentialist "Kurdification" process, some research participants regarded Islam as a means to solve the conflicts that are grounded in modern constructions of national and ethnic identities. In the next section, creating a modern national identity is related to a discourse of Kurdish struggles about attaining a Kurdish nation-state in which "Kurdishness" can be realized and lived.

### **Enacting and justifying a Kurdish nationalist project**

In this section, the respondents' talk about a Kurdish identity will be situated within a nationalistic framework. The research participants raise different issues and reasons why there should be a Kurdish national identity and why a Kurdish nation-state is of paramount importance in their lives. They use issues of collective suffering, the fight for independence, national identity, national pride, international visibility, distancing from inferiorized, stigmatized and stateless people as arguments and discursive strategies to justify Kurdish nationalism and support for a Kurdish nation-state. Furthermore, in response to political divisions among Kurds in Sweden, some of the research participants call for a unified Kurdish nationalism. One of the interviewees argues that having a national Kurdish identity and a Kurdish nation-state is related to the sufferings, atrocities, crimes, chemical weapons, that Kurds have been subjected to by the regime of Saddam Hussein:

**Soran (M: 19):** My Kurdish identity is very important for me because I don't want the Kurds to be forgotten and that is why I continue to call myself a Kurd and my parents fled Kurdistan because they were Kurdish and that was the main reason for their flight. I don't want that reason to die out. /.../ I regard Kurdistan as a state. I don't think about Iraq, Iran or Turkey but Kurdistan. I know that is divided but I still see it as a united country even if they do not recognize our homeland. Often, people ask me where I

am from and I tell them that I am Kurd. Then they ask you what part and if you say from Iraq, then you become an Iraqi in their eyes. I don't see it in that way and I tell them that the province of Jämtland was Norwegian from the beginning, then you must be Norwegian and not Swedish.

For Soran it becomes important to rename the present political geography of Iraq and replace it with Kurdistan and Kurds as its political subjects. According to Soran, the mediated experiences of his parents - Kurds who have been exposed to oppression, suffering, forced migration and subordination - are important argumentative strategies to justify Kurdish claims to a national identity. Besides, Soran politicizes sacrifices made in the name of "Kurds" or "Kurdistan" and uses these as sources of political justification for a Kurdish nation-state. Further, as Soran indicates with reference to Jämtland and its past and present status, nation-states are not natural entities but can be transformed and drastically reformulated with new meanings and political constellations. Another interviewee points out the importance of history in determining the fate of the Kurds within the present nation-states in Middle-East:

**Rezan (F: 26):** It is important to know where you come from, where you belong and where you have your history, especially we Kurds are oppressed and we do not have our own state. I think it is important to know who you are and where you come from because we fight for Kurdish independence and therefore we should know our history and situation.

As Rezan argues above, knowing Kurdish history and origins is related to Kurdish struggles about gaining independence and freedom from oppression. Oppression, lack of a nation-state and the experience of statelessness strengthens the rhetoric of knowing ones roots and origin. As Vali (2003) reminds us, history writing and the question of origin are central to the nationalist project. Because discursive construction of the origin is related to how the present political situation is experienced. In order to gain legitimacy, it is important to construct history as linear in the sense that a coherent Kurdish identity can be found that connects the political challenges, sufferings, victories, interests and priorities of the past to the struggles for a coherent shared identity in the present. Some interviewees linked the idea of having an own nation-state to the emotion of pride and recognition by other nations:

**Hazhar (M: 26):** As a Kurd, I have never had a Kurdish pride because we have not had an independent state and that also means that we have not had a national identity as Kurds. We don't have our own state, but I know that I am Kurdish. We have a lot of

history behind us but we have not been able to become a nation among other nations and participate in sport tournaments like the Olympic Games and feel pride over our Kurdish identity. I would have appreciated it if we could have had our own state in one of those four states (Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria). I don't want Kurdistan to be a part of another country. I want Kurdistan to be a state in its own right. I don't want to still be hearing that we are fighting for our own state. We are living in 2007 and we still dream about an own country. Many people have died and many people have struggled and fought for a Kurdistan.

Identity and representation are understood in relation to shame and pride with a focus on the achievements, victories, defeats and underachievement. It is within this context we can understand Hazhar's account. His reference to history is an argumentative device that legitimizes nationhood and nation-state building. Sport tournaments, like the Olympic Games that Hazhar refers to are "peaceful" battlefields for nations to conduct their struggles for representing national "virtues" but also confirming and strengthening national feelings through defeating other nations. It is not rare for sports journalism to use military and violent metaphors to describe victory and defeat in sporting events (see Billig, 1995). Absence of Kurdish national identity within these fields, as Hazhar notes, deepens the invisibility of the Kurds in the world. The question of pride and nation-state are intimately interconnected by several research participants.

Distancing oneself from other inferiorized groups is another discursive strategy that is used by some interviewees in order to present Kurds as worthy of having a nation-state where "good" values, beliefs and culture - defined as Kurdish - can be lived and experienced. This discursive strategy is also related to a fear of being discriminated against for not having a nation-state:

**Josef (M: 21):** It is important for the Kurds and for us to have something that we can associate with. We have our culture, history that extends itself further back in history than many other groups. We will never be accepted as a people by the international community if we don't have a state, a Kurdistan, where we can live our values and beliefs and culture. Then we can show the world what we are. I don't want to be associated with a vagrant people like Gypsies because that is so disparaging. A people who steal and rob and are tramping around and have no state. I don't want to be associated with a people like them because we Kurds have good values. Just look how people look at Gypsies because they don't have a state and a homeland, and I am sure that has an effect on their lives. I don't want people to understand Kurds in a negative

way. We also want to participate in the World Cup, when it comes to soccer and other sport tournaments because it sends positive signals to people around you.

A Kurdish national identity, as Josef suggests, has not been a source of pride because it has not been recognized by other nations and especially because it lacks a state which would be the vehicle for achieving that recognition. The lack of a Kurdish nation-state is discursively turned into a stigma. The question of the antiquity of the Kurdish culture and history is once again raised as an important "heritage" to conduct a struggle over. These historical arguments are used to justify present political concerns of what Josef regards as Kurdish aspiration for nationhood and an independent nation-state. Josef's historical arguments should be understood within the discursive representations of the Kurds as an ancient people to justify and legitimate his political concern. He thinks that a Kurdish state would strengthen his self-esteem. Josef doesn't refer to nations or ethnic groups that are in possession of nation-states but he considers "Gypsies" (Romanians) and their negative experiences (whether real or as he imagines them) as an apt example of the consequences of not having a nation-state and homeland. According to Josef people look down on "Gypsies" because they are regarded as thieves, as a vagrant people without a homeland and as people without good values. Josef thus creates a discourse in which "good values" belong only to groups who have a nation-state. This reference to "Gypsies" creates a discourse about people without a state or a homeland as something beyond the moral and political order. And this is another argument for justification of a Kurdish nation-state so the Kurds can be inscribed in the alleged normative order of humanity which involves, among other things, possession of a nation-state (see Vali, 2006). This racist discourse that Josef raises with regard to Romanians is an important intervention in challenging the world order of nation-states. The mobility of Romanians challenges the political boundaries of nation-states and creates a rupture between identity and territory, that nation-states attempt to construct as natural bonds.

If Hazhar (with a background in Iranian Kurdistan) and Josef (with a background in Turkish Kurdistan) did not express so much pride over their Kurdish identities. Another interviewee contrasts the Turkish denial of a Kurdish identity with the Kurdish Regional Government in Northern Iraq which functions as a nation-state in organizing the lives of its population with its own flag, army and institutions:

**Karwan (M: 21):** The place I visit when I go back, is not Iraq, it is Kurdistan. /.../ It feels very good. You feel that it is an independent state. When I went back to my homeland, I travelled through

Turkey to Kurdistan. Before I passed the Turkish border, I saw at a distance a big Kurdish flag. What a wonderful feeling. All the border police there speak Kurdish and "Welcome to Kurdistan" is written in Kurdish. It is not often you see that. It felt great to enter Kurdistan. Because when you are at the Turkish border, the Turks make your life a hell before they let you into Kurdistan and they find many excuses to check your passport and question where you are going to. When they check the passport, it takes almost three hours, and then they do not care about you. They go and take a coffee while they check your passport. And they do this because you are Kurdish. When you enter Kurdistan, they take your passport and say "Sit down", and invite you to drink a cup of tea with them.

Karwan's account of his visit to Kurdistan is a powerful romantic nationalistic discourse. This discourse is raised due to specific experiences of maltreatment by Turkish police officers. Contrasting the situation of the Kurds in Turkey with the Kurds of Iraq shows that nationalism can gain justification when it can undo suffering and domination but also involve a shift in power where the historically dominant Arabs in Iraq can be replaced by Kurdish institutions. Kurdish symbols and language are seen in his account as a sign of recognition of the Kurdish identity in contrast to the Turkish side which is characterized by denial of Kurdish identity. The Turkish-Iraqi border, as Hazhar's narration suggests, is a juncture where the political landscapes of denial and recognition of Kurdish identities collide. It is a political landscape where the Turkish state has attempted, through what Vali (2007) calls a strategy of suppression-silence-absence, in order to strip the Kurds of their subjectivity, turning them into beings with no voice in history. Hence, the Turkish state finds itself challenged by a Kurdish regional government on the other side of the Turkish border that nurtures a Kurdish identity and language. The interviewees not only referred to the inequalities in the Middle-East to justify support for a Kurdish nation-state but they also urged Kurds to put aside their differences in Sweden in favour of a unified Kurdish nationalism:

**Hana (F: 18):** I am thinking about all these Kurdish organizations and associations in Sweden that are connected to specific political Kurdish parties. These include also Kurdish student organizations. I have been a member in these organizations. If you don't like their party politics or do not share their values, they will exclude you from their associations. These associations should be Kurdish and not based on party politics. I am a member of the Swedish Social democratic Youth Union (SSU, Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Ungdomsförbundet) but I think we Kurds should have one organization that does not serve political parties because these

political parties create division among us. When we meet, we should not meet as members of a political party but as Kurds. This division obstructs us from achieving a nation. I try to mobilize the Kurds within SSU and create a national network for the Kurds who are member within SSU and these Kurds are welcome regardless from which part of Kurdistan they are. We have Social Democratic values but we focus on the Kurds. We even have Swedes in our network. We want to unite the Kurds around an independent Kurdistan.

Here Hana criticized Kurdish identity politics as a result of different Kurdish political parties that prioritize according to her, party-politics rather than Kurdish nationalism. She also formulates a strategy where Kurds should be more nationalistic in their political aspirations in order to attain nationhood. Hana is concerned with creating a Kurdish association where you can find “a deep horizontal comradeship” (Anderson, 1991, p. 7) among the Kurds regardless of their political background. While Hana denounces the “non-nationalist” spirit and practices of the Kurdish associations in Sweden, she resorts to SSU to gain support and recognition for the Kurdish case. Hana speaks about party politics with the power to prevent the Kurds from achieving a nation-state and independence. Nationalist ideology often entails putting aside differences within the group in favour of the nation and, in this case, the struggle for establishment of an independent Kurdish nation-state. Some of the interviewees noted that their parents had been active in different Kurdish parties in their struggles for Kurdistan. There seems to be efforts among young nationalist Kurds to change the identificational patterns of young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden and downplay the issues of differences across different parties and stress “Kurdishness” as the uniting bond between different Kurdish subjects:

**Zagros (M: 27):** I don't participate in all demonstrations organized by the Kurds based on different Kurdish political parties. I participate in demonstrations when, for instance, Turkey wants to invade Southern Kurdistan. Because that generally has to do with the Kurds and Kurdistan and not something that only concerns a Kurdish party. /.../ My father is more involved in a Kurdish political party but I don't like that because that creates divisions among the Kurds. The most important thing is my Kurdishness and not Islam or party politics.

Zagros describes what he thinks should constitute the boundary of Kurdish identity politics and why collective mobilizations should be enacted through Kurdish nationalism which should have a reconciliatory force. His participation in Kurdish politics assigns Kurdish nationalism a place above other political

identities that are based on party politics and Islam. It is argued by scholars of Kurdish nationalism (see for instance Vali, 2006) that there are Kurdish nationalists but that there are not nationalist Kurdish parties, even if they claim to be nationalist. It is within this discourse that the Network of Young Kurds<sup>17</sup> was established in Sweden in 2008 to bring together twelve different Kurdish organizations and associations that have the Kurdish issue as a politically crosscutting commonality. Kurdish identity politics is both consolidated and fragmented both in Kurdistan and outside Kurdistan. At a rhetorical level, these political parties claim their struggle to be nationalist, but when it comes to practice, there are many inconsistencies. One of the main issues concerns whether Kurdish demonstrators should wave the Kurdish flag or the flags of specific Kurdish parties. The youth seem to break with their parents' loyalties toward Kurdish political parties and underline the importance of a national Kurdish movement over party politics. According to nationalists, the Kurdish flag should be at the foreground of the demonstration to show the unity of the Kurds and to hide any differences and possible confusions by banning party symbols. Hence, this identity politics based on nationalism evokes unity and commonality of Kurdish experiences of injustices and sufferings and suppresses differences and internal divisions. At the same time, it shows that no identity politics is a completed project but often needs to reproduce itself through different discursive strategies.

To recap this section, a variety of discursive strategies were used by informants in order to justify support for a Kurdish nation-state. These included evoking collective suffering, lack of pride due to not having a nation-state, international visibility and recognition, historical origin of the Kurds, the stigma of statelessness within the international order of nation-states and the desire to distance Kurds from inferiorized groups like Romanians

## **Summary**

The construction of Kurdish identity politics is enunciated in two specific ways. The first way is through reference to personal and collective experiences of oppression and the denial of Kurdish identity in Sweden. The second is through narratives which refer to Kurds in Iran and Syria and this stresses harmonious relationships. When it comes to the discourse of oppression and victimhood, it is not mainly based on personal experiences but on a belief that the research

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<sup>17</sup> Their goal is (1) to urge the International community and the Swedish Parliament to recognise the Anfal campaign as a genocide of the Kurds, (2) that the anniversary of Halabja, 16 March be declared as an international day for the commemoration of the victims of chemical weapons of mass destruction, (3) that the Federal Government of Iraq recognises the former Baath regime's crimes committed against Kurds and but also declare an official apology to the Kurdish people and other minority groups in Iraqi Kurdistan (Beyan.net, 2008).

participants as Kurdish subjects automatically embody collective sufferings and make them their own experience. The otherisation of Arabs, Turks and Iranians take different forms. While Arabs and Turks are often regarded as oppressors and invaders of the Kurdish territory and identity, several respondents related to Iranians in a way that emphasized common cultural, linguistic and religious heritage. However, aligning themselves with the Iranians does not prevent the respondents from asserting and constructing a unique and specific Kurdish identity. A Kurdish identity is constructed in a retrospective way, asserting a pure past of glory where Arabs and Turks are regarded as "demolishers" of Kurdish identity. Anti-Islamic rhetoric is directed toward the Arabs where Islam is identified as the religion of the "invaders", something that Kurds, according to the respondents, should get rid of in order to go back to their "pure" origin. The political space in Sweden is assumed to provide good possibilities for implementing this. A discourse of Kurdish origins is underlined as one of the main justifications sources for a Kurdish independent state. A sense of oppression and victimhood also reinforces the idea of an essentialist Kurdish history where Kurds discursively enjoy political harmony in the past. This is implicitly contrasted to the present political situation of the Kurds in the Middle-East and even in Sweden. Having a nation-state is described as a way to gain pride and respect from other nations which would include recognition and representation within different international fora such as sporting events. Some interviewees saw parallels with "Gypsies" as a stateless and a stigmatized group. This was something negative that they wanted to avoid. When it comes to their social relationships with Arabic, Turkish and Iranian youth in Sweden, the question of Kurdishness becomes of paramount importance for the respondents, especially when they encounter denials of Kurdish identity in their social relationships with Arabic, Turkish and Iranian youth in Sweden. Violence and verbal resistance are used as a means to react to this denial. Alternative terms like South Kurdistan, North Kurdistan, West Kurdistan and East Kurdistan are used to deconstruct the present nation-states in the Middle-East and construct a unitary Kurdish identity, notwithstanding one that has been fragmented as a result of nation-state building in the Middle East after the First World War.

Personal experiences of sufferings, injustices and suppression can not be counted as the main reason behind the strong nationalist sentiments among young people with Kurdish backgrounds. Many of these young people are either born in Sweden or migrated to Sweden at a very young age. Their life situation in Sweden, sense of discrimination as well as disputes over identity making with other young people with immigrant backgrounds are among the most important reasons that they have developed strong nationalist sentiments.

These issues are related to the ways they can exercise their citizenship rights in Sweden and how they deal with exclusionary practices in their everyday life.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Unequal citizenship and strategies of dealing with ethnic discrimination in Sweden**



## **Introduction**

In the previous chapter the major focus was on the strategies by young people with Kurdish backgrounds in defending and creating an exclusive Kurdish identity in relation, and in partial and conflictual relationships with other immigrant groups in Sweden. In this chapter, the positions which these young men and women speak from involve a wide range of identificational positionalities such as immigrants, Kurds, women, men, non-whites, "wogs", Middle-Easterners, Muslims, "black people" and unaccepted Swedes. The issues that are dealt with in this chapter concern the construction of various positionalities as outcomes of structural processes and how relations of dominance and subordination are constructed as a result of discriminatory practices in Sweden.

The complexity of identity making in relation to the dominant society and its institutional arrangements will also be discussed. Citizenship and belonging are intimately related and the respondents discuss in this chapter how they experience Swedish citizenship and the resistance they encounter in exercising full citizenship rights. The mass media, labor market, legal system, school, and housing emerged as important sites in the young people's narratives. Everyday encounters with dominant white Swedes are described as crucial in shaping the Kurdish youths' citizenship rights. The relationship between belonging, stigmatization, and negative and positive visibility in the public space are also discussed. In particular, the role of the Swedish mass media in framing public images is discussed. Full citizenship rights are also about rights to claim-making and identification to places that are defined as home and homelands. In this respect, the research participants speak about Sweden and Kurdistan as places and homelands but also about the obstacles that ethnic discrimination engenders from claiming Sweden as a homeland, and the role that these obstacles play in stimulating the respondents to seek other places that are believed to be their essential site of belonging.

This chapter does not only deal with the experiences of otherness and ethnic discrimination in the life of these young women and men but also highlights the various modes of resistances and strategies that they enact in their everyday life to deal with ethnic discrimination.

### **"If I was accepted as a Swede, why do you think that I am talking about colouring my hair and eyes?"**

In this section, the research participants speak about their experiences of Swedish citizenship and the ways they are obstructed from exercising full citizenship rights which they formally and legally possess but are informally

denied. It is in this context that the question of formal citizenship and substantial citizenship will be explored.

This theme engages with the ways the boundaries of Swedishness and Swedish citizenship are constituted. Asking those groups that are targeted by exclusionary practices is an apt way to gain insights about the practices of exclusion and inclusion that are related to citizenship. Citizenship rights are not only legal rights but they also inform us about how belonging to a collectivity is constructed. Further, the section examines the criteria that are used to name and define who "real" Swedes and "real" immigrants are and the consequences of these definitions for the everyday life of the respondents.

The responses in this chapter also provide insights into the mechanisms that create a sense of belonging and non-belonging to Swedish society. An awareness of not being a Swede was shared by the majority of interviewees in this study. Alan illustrates this:

**Alan (M: 23):** If you become Swedish, you can come a long way in your life and career in the society. /.../ My awareness of not being a Swede is part of my daily life and you can not avoid it because it is your daily life.

Alan points out that being defined, named and recognized as a Swede involves a good starting point for exercising ones citizenship rights and life opportunities. Not being recognized as Swedish implies negative consequences for the outcomes of ones position in a society that is structured in unequal power relations between the dominant Swedish position and the subordinated immigrant position. Being defined as an immigrant implies a subordinated social status because one is not recognized as equal in social interaction (see Fraser, 2005) with the dominant members of the society, who constitute the "crucial audience" (Kiely, Bechhofer, & McCrone, 2005, p. 170), Hence, lack of full recognition has real consequences for the interviewees' social and material lives due to the exclusionary practices that they encounter in their daily lives. Many interviewees talk about an exclusive Swedish identity and say that nothing will change this bitter reality, not even if one changes ones visible attributes:

**Blend (M: 24):** I have Swedish citizenship but I don't feel that I am Swedish. Even if I colour my hair blond, they will not accept me as a Swede. Even, if I change my eye colour, they will not accept me as a Swede. Even, if I colour whole my body, they know that I am not Swedish. I am a Kurd and they realize immediately that I am not Swedish through my accent. /.../ You don't become Swedish

through Swedish citizenship. If I was accepted as a Swede, why do you think I am talking about colouring my hair and eyes, it is because I am not accepted and want to be accepted. They look at you in a bad way. They look down on you.

Experiences of discrimination involve identification of and awareness about different visual markers that one has or lacks and the possibility or the impossibility of attaining them. Having Swedish citizenship or a passport certainly has benefits but in contrast to this formal belonging the respondents encounter informal exclusion in everyday life. Blend refers to the way his belonging to Swedishness is rejected by dominant Swedes who set up different thresholds to exclude people who do not fulfil the criteria like having the "right" skin colour, hair color, eye color, accent. Blend's experiences indicate that there is a collision and an inconsistency between the formal criteria for citizenship, the informal criteria about who belongs and who does not belong to a Swedish identity. The quotes above show that the sense of belonging is intimately related to processes of inclusion and exclusion (Anthias, 2006; Jones & Krzyżanowski, 2008; Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2008; Lithman, 2004). Although there is a will to be accepted as a Swede, Blend seems to have lost hope of gaining access to an equal citizenship in Swedish society. Throughout the interviews the young women and men expressed their frustration about how exclusive the Swedish identity is in every-day interactions. The exclusionary experiences are for many of the young people with Kurdish backgrounds based on daily life experiences. They live in a society which confronts them with non-belonging. This is a strong and uncomfortable feeling that is experienced in several ways and on different occasions. Ala points out how she is insulted and how her claim to Swedish identity is contested and rejected by a young Swedish girl:

**Ala (F: 17):** Once I came home from a soccer game and a blonde girl called me "bloody wog" and said that I should go back home because I don't belong here and I am an immigrant. I told her that just because you are blonde, you should not think that you own this country. She told me that we are taking over Sweden. This has happened several times.

In Ala's experience, being blonde seems to be a central criterion defining how Swedishness and belonging to Sweden is constituted. Besides, immigration is viewed as an occupation and immigrants are defined as intruders who challenge the boundary of Swedishness. Ala not only rejects this claim but she also makes claims to Sweden and does not accept the "immigrant position". She does not accept that she should not have a say in Sweden and its modes of constitution. Consequently, immigration challenges the boundaries of national

identities and citizenship and makes it urgent to redefine the boundary of a nation-state that is composed of new groups. Even those young people with Kurdish backgrounds who are born in Sweden and do not feel that they have other collective identities than Swedish talk about non-acceptance:

**Soran (M: 19):** I feel Swedish and I am Swedish if I am allowed to say that. /.../ Because people become suspicious when I say that I am Swedish as though I have said something wrong. And if I say Swedish, they always ask "but from beginning". What beginning? I was born here in Sweden. But they see me only as "Swedish on paper" ("papperssvensk") and not as "Swedish Swedish" ("svensksvensk").

Having a Swedish passport or citizenship was therefore not regarded as tantamount to being accepted as a Swede. Soran points out that despite a sense of belonging to the Swedish identity, his Swedishness becomes an object of suspicion and his ownership of this identity is questioned. The distinction above evokes ideas about who can be considered an authentic Swede (an inherited Swedishness) and who can be considered only "Swedish on paper" (an acquired Swedishness). The ideas about inheriting membership and belonging to a collective identity prevent formal citizenship from functioning as a proxy for everyday belonging. The limits of formal citizenship according to Azar (2001a) are that "it competes in practice, with other boundary distinguishing ideologies and nationalistic discourses that understand Swedishness as something inner and exclusive, separated from formal citizenship" (Azar, 2001a, p. 60 my translation from Swedish)

Some of the interviewees expressed their ambivalence toward claiming Swedish identity because they feared both rejection and exposure to ridicule from both Swedes and immigrants. Despite the fact that Alan was born in Sweden and has never been to Kurdistan, his claim-making to a Swedish identity is challenged because his Kurdish background is assumed to be his "real" or "original" identity. Consequently, even when Alan claims Sweden as a place of birth, it is not regarded as a powerful argument to justify his right to a Swedish identity. The construction of the Swedish identity is carried out and stipulated on a daily basis through an interrogating technique that demands answers to specific questions: "Where are you from?" "from beginning" or "originally". This "originally" is regarded almost as "the very biggest thing of all" (Maxey, 2006, p. 12). "Where are you from?" is consequently no innocent question for migrants because it often denotes issues of questioned belonging and fantasies about "other places" as ones original place of belonging. As Alan indicates above the reiteration of a question about your "origin" is often a disciplining device to determine and make distinctions between those who belong to "Us

here" and those who belong to "them there". It also legitimizes the unequal relationship between dominant groups and dominated groups through the right of interrogation of ones "origin" and "background". There are many problems involved in the discriminatory understanding of the Swedish citizenship.

As we saw in the narratives of the interviewees, both ethnic and civic citizenship (see Brubaker, 1992) are deployed in Sweden where the young people can acquire Swedish citizenship and at the same time encounter essentialist and ethnic based definitions of Swedishness where appearance and place of "origin" are conditions for acceptance as a "real" Swede. Blood bonds seem to be the defining marker of Swedishness although Sweden often claims itself to be a civic state with a civic citizenship policy in contrast to states like Germany that mainly base its citizenship policies on blood-based definitions (*jus sanguinis*, "the right of blood").

In contrast to Alan, who was born in Sweden, some interviewees who migrated to Sweden at a young age, talked about a "journey" from a more comfortable initial contact with the Swedish society as a welcoming and exciting society to a harsh reality of otherisation and ethnic exclusion:

**Rezan (F: 26):** When I came to Sweden, it was so exciting, a new country with a new language. I learned the Swedish language very fast and I really did not feel at the beginning that I did not belong to Swedish society. But it was during secondary school that I started feeling and thinking about not belonging to Sweden when I received comments from my classmates: "you bloody Turk" ("jävla turk"), "you bloody wog" ("jävla svartskalle"). That influenced me negatively and I thought why can they not just accept me? /.../ when I questioned them, they told me that I could go back to my homeland if I was so oppressed here and that I should go back if I don't adapt to Swedish society.

Rezan's experiences indicate that a sense of non-belonging does not occur in a political vacuum but it is related to exclusionary practices that define the insider and outsider within the political boundary of the nation-state. Exclusionary practices are informed by the way Rezan is called a "Turk" (read "immigrant" and "non-Swedish") and the way she has been exposed to racist taunts. Even when she has questioned these exclusionary practices, she is urged to leave Sweden or accept her subordinated immigrant position. This unequal relationship can be best understood through the guest/host metaphor, where the immigrants are regarded as guests who should show gratitude toward the hospitality of the host society and should not criticize the order of the "host"

society through bringing to attention through his or her difference (Gullestad, 2002).

When Rezan questioned the racism and the unequal treatment she was exposed to, the dominant members of the "host" society "put their foot down" and urged her to leave Sweden or stay but on unequal and subordinated terms. The dominant members of the "host" society regard themselves as organic and natural members of society whose authority and sovereignty should not be questioned by people in the category defined as immigrants. As a result, an "inherited" or "organic" citizenship is often related to unequal power relations that demarcate the boundaries of an identity and provides an authoritative position to make more powerful claims in the name of that identity.

There was a consensus among the interviewees that "immigrant" is a racialized position, that means a dark-skinned and a dark-haired person who is not European:

**Alan (M: 23):** I feel that I am different because of my appearance and culture and I am more visible. It would have been more acceptable if I was a fair European. For instance, a Polish guy, he does not look like an immigrant. /.../ There are ideas about a Nordic brotherhood and the Poles are not far from that. Your skin color and accent influence the way you get treated. It has to do with race biology. You become Swedish when you look like a Swede. And if you are geographically close to Sweden, I think it is much easier to be accepted as a Swede.

Alan refers to immigrants in term of visibility, cultural and geographical distance but also race biology as important criteria for a person to be accepted as a Swede. He suggests that whiteness is crucial in constituting the boundary of the Swedish and European identity. The concept of race is still useful to understand how differences are constructed and how imagined racial differences still justify subordination of dark-skinned people. Although Alan was born in Sweden, he does not consider himself as a Swede because his appearance is regarded as an obstacle by people who do not recognize him as an equal member of Swedish society. Cultural differences have been used widely within the Swedish integration policies (Mattson, 2001; Tesfahuney, 1998) to describe why dark-skinned immigrants from the "Third world" and particularly from the Middle-East and Africa are not integrated but rather, to differing extents, socially excluded. Imagined and real cultural differences are thus constructed as obstacles used to explain why certain groups succeed or fail in integrating into Swedish society. When such ideological construction of differences gains support in public spaces like the labor market, housing, mass

media, school system, legal system, a continuum of desirability is constructed in which the dominant group constitutes the normative point of comparison (see Dominelli, 2002) through which different values and power are assigned to groups depending on how "culturally" near or remote they are. This continuum of desirability has serious material consequences. The darker complexion the immigrants have, the greater the possibility and the risk of discrimination within, for instance, the labor market and legal system (de los Reyes & Wingborg, 2002; Lange, 2000). Certain appearances as in the case of Middle Easterners and Muslims have become a signifier of otherness and difference that is alleged to constitute a threat to European communities. Although the color of the skin and other visible attributes are considered crucial for people to either be part of an exclusive Swedishness or to be excluded from that, there are other properties, which determine how migrants are treated. They say that one's place of birth or former nationality and spatial belonging provide better or worse chances for non-Swedes to be welcomed by Swedes. Some of the young men pointed out that they have "passed" as Italians or Spanish but as soon as they admitted that they were Kurdish, the encounters turned negative and Kurdishness was equated with being a "wog". This means that looking like a Southern-European can provide acceptance as long as people don't know of your Kurdish background. In this light, Johan argues that immigration to Sweden does not automatically imply that you will be hailed as an immigrant especially if you have a West European background. He also claims that the relationship between Swedes and immigrants reminds him of a relationship between white and black subjects:

**Johan (M: 21):** For me immigrant does not mean who comes from outside of Sweden. There are people who have come from outside of Sweden, from Scandinavian countries or from Spain, Italy, Germany and France. I don't think people call them immigrants. Those who are regarded as immigrants are people from the Middle East, Africa and Asia. I tell people sometimes that I am Spanish and they buy it and treat you so much better. When you think of an immigrant, you think of a black guy or a dark-skinned person. /.../ I met a Kurdish man some days ago while I was with a Swedish friend. And this Kurdish man started speaking Arabic with me. And my Swedish friend told him: "Hey you, now we are in Sweden, we speak Swedish in this country". The Kurdish man got angry and told the Swedish guy: "If I had spoken French or English, you would not have said that or cared so much about that". I agree with the Kurdish man because the Swedish guy indeed wanted to say that non-Europeans are not so welcome in Sweden.

Johan refers consistently to appearance as an important if not the essential boundary marker for "Swedishness", and in which "Middle-Eastern" or "African" appearances do not fit. He suggests that understandings of Swedishness are neatly constructed through social and phenotypical attributions of *being* white, Western/European and these orthodox definitions of Swedishness reflect a racist discourse that does not make it easy for these young men and women to claim Swedishness. Assigning Arabs or non-Europeans negative attributes as the young man with Swedish background did in Johan's account, is ideologically informed and can not be situated within an objective hierarchical system of differences. This arbitrary construction of certain differences in term of their desirability and nearness to "us" (hence, acceptance and welcoming) and undesirable differences that is different and remote from us (hence rejection, aversion and non-acceptance) are used as thresholds to include and exclude people within the boundary of Swedishness. When a group's difference is represented as negative and when this representation is backed up by power resources, the group will both risk stigmatization and racism.

As Johan's account shows, technically everyone who moves to Sweden can be defined as an immigrant, but in the popular understanding of an immigrant, it is the image of a non-European that emerges when one thinks of an immigrant. Consequently, the concept of immigrant is used in the same manner as the notion of race to mark the multitude of otherness in relation to the white identity represented by the Swedish identity. This is not to say that whiteness is a homogenous category or that its members are imbued with horizontal comradeship. However, as Johan above shows, we can undo the binary politics of the "Swede" and the "immigrant", between "insiders" and "outsiders" through showing that not all "immigrants" are exteriorized and excluded from the Swedish society and its societal privileges, but being "immigrant" is a historically contingent category in Sweden that includes certain political subjects, that are strongly limited to people who are not regarded as Europeans (see Bonilla-Silva, 2000; Goldberg, 2006).

The notions of Swedish citizenship that were discussed in this section by the research participants show that Swedish citizenship is constructed in everyday life in relation to discourses about appearance, whiteness, place of "origin", "Europeanness", accent, cultural nearness or distance, "Swedish on paper" and "Swedish Swedish". According to the informants, those who are perceived as "Swedish Swedish" regard themselves as the ones who define the boundary of the Swedish citizenship but also the ones who assess who qualifies as a Swede and who is an immigrant. Belonging and exclusionary practices were intimately interwoven and experiences of exclusionary practices powerfully affected the

research participants' sense of belonging to Swedish society. Claiming Sweden as the place of birth did not imply acceptance as a Swede for those young people who were born in Sweden. Consequently, you can be born in Sweden and be rejected as a Swedish citizen in everyday life even if you formally and legally uphold such as status. On the other hand, Europeans who do not share a Swedish citizenship or were not born in Sweden escape labels such as immigrant but qualify for access to a Swedish citizenship due to a discourse of racial and cultural nearness. The differences and distances that non-Europeans are assumed to represent are related to the ways stigmatization impinges on the process of inclusion, difference making and belonging, issues that the next theme will engage with.

### **The power of stigmatization and belonging**

This theme engages with the ways immigrants are constructed as a homogenous category loaded with negative collective attributes. Immigrants are thus constructed in relation to the dominant group, white Swedes who have both access to the discourse and power in the discourse in constructing this category and assessing its value. In the following, the experiences of stigmatization will be discussed in relation to the mass media, the urban residential quarters, labor market, school system and representation of Islam and Middle-Easterners. The following quote by Hazhar indicates how the "immigrant identity" is associated with negative generalizations and stereotypes:

**Hazhar (M: 26):** I remember when I was watching *Efterlyst* ("Wanted" a Swedish program that deals with crimes that occur in Sweden) with some Swedish friends and one of my Swedish friends told me: "To be honest, I don't mean anything bad, 90 percent of all crimes are committed by immigrants". And then he added: "but you are not a criminal like them". It is true that there are some immigrants who commit crimes. But it is so annoying and ugly when they say that it is immigrants who commit crimes. /.../ I don't think one should say immigrant. Damn it we live in this society too. They point out people and give them a brand that they can never get rid of. These people should be seen as part of the society and should be seen as Swedes. If I commit a crime, I don't want to hear that I as a criminal have an immigrant background. It is so annoying and you hear it all the time and it is immigrants who commit crimes. When I hear these things I just want to sink down in my shoes and disappear.

Hazhar describes how dominant discourses about immigrants as criminals are reproduced by the Swedish mass media. The mass media not only construct

boundaries between "Swedes" and "immigrants" but also assign these categories different values in which the immigrants are devalued and subordinated. As Hazhar discusses above, he was in this encounter not regarded as a "criminal" but as a good exception while other putative "immigrants" were assigned a general negative category loaded with undesirable attributes such as delinquency. To be named as an immigrant implies an assumed embodiment of human qualities that differs from the dominant identity. When a person with an immigrant background commits a crime, the background becomes the foreground in explaining the reason behind the crime. It is this ideological construction of immigrants as delinquents that Hazhar criticizes, where negative stereotypes encircle the individual subjectivities and reduce the person in the words of Goffman "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (1986, p. 3). Hence, the collective stigmatization of immigrants not only assumes self-consistency but it also deprives them from showing traces of their individual identities "with narratable life histories" (Said, 2003/1978, p. 229).

The role of the mass media in reinforcing racism and racist images of people with immigrant backgrounds (Brune, 2005; Dahlstedt, 2005; Petersson, 2006) as an imagined criminal collectivity was asserted by several interviewees. van Dijk (1993a) points out that the mass media reflect the interests of the dominant group and the elites and provide the dominant group with ethnic models in which minoritized groups are also pathologized. Crime is one of the most frequent topics in the news about immigrants and this explains why stereotypical models and social representations about immigrants as delinquents gain such plausibility, acceptability and generalizability (see also Ericsson, 2007; Ericsson, et al., 2002; van Dijk, 1993a). The Mass media has turned immigrants into objects of suspicion. If Hazhar wanted to "sink in his shoes" in order to escape stigmatization, another young woman in this study blamed, in a very frustrated manner, those Kurds who commit crimes and do not consider the fact that their individual actions are often interpreted in collective terms. Their actions result in negative visibility in the public sphere where the Kurdish group has to explain itself in front of the dominant society. She suggests that immigrants do not act as individuals but "advertise" through their actions for other individuals and groups defined as immigrants. It is not only individuals defined as immigrants that are associated with criminality but also geographical spaces that are inhabited by immigrants, such as particular urban quarters. Hemen pointed to existing negative images of the marginalized and stigmatized residential area where he is living:

**Hemen (M: 22):** I am Swedish but nobody regards me as a Swede. And when you live in a quarter people think that all wogs are

criminals and drug dealers. /.../ It is very calm here but there have been problems but not everybody is involved in that. Those people who are involved in criminal activities do not get the support they need, like jobs and so on.

Hemen refers to the quarter as a racialized site imbued with negative images and representations in the Swedish society. He also refers to certain structural inequalities like unemployment as motivating criminal activities and he does not use people's "immigrant background" to explain why they commit crimes. Certain residential areas are stigmatized as territorially racialized political spaces inhabited by putatively deviant cultural groups (Islamists, oppressive gender relations, unemployment, criminality, poor housings, insufficient people, etc). These are held to stand in the way of cultural harmony and homogenization within the realm of the nation-states in European countries. This is reinforced in Sweden by both journalists and scholars (e.g. Carlbom, 2009; Ranstorp & Dos Santos, 2009; Åberg, 2009). Localization of crime to certain residential areas not only magnifies the racialization of crime but it also reinforces surveillance practices in stigmatized urban areas (cf. Ericsson, et al., 2002; Goldberg, 1993, p. 52). In the same vein, Dikeç (2007) chooses to label the urban residential districts or the *Banlieues*<sup>18</sup> (in French) as the "badlands" where these "badlands" through dominant representations (mass media and politicians) are depicted as sites of alterity, insecurity and deprivation but also as threats to security, social order and peace (Dikeç, 2007, p. 8). These stigmatizing representations tend to reinforce the social, economic and political disadvantages that the populations of these stigmatized areas experience and reduce their life chances in the dominant society. The resistance and the revolts that have occurred in several urban quarters in Europe (France, UK, Sweden, etc) during the last years show how inequality can engender violent resistance by young people with immigrant backgrounds who are pushed into stereotypical representations by the dominant society (Dikeç, 2007; Goldberg, 2006; Nederveen Pieterse, 2007; Valtonen, 2008). Many of these young people claim that they are harassed by Swedish police officers who express racist comments about them as "negro", "ape" and "wog" as for instance in the residential area of Rosengård in Malmö in 2009, in events that were recorded

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<sup>18</sup> Although banlieue literally has a similar meaning to suburb or residential area, it carries many negative connotations in European countries and evokes ideas of excluded places: 'Ban' comes from the earliest medieval times, when it meant both the power of command and the power of exclusion as part of the power of command. Banned [*Banni*], banishment [*banissement*], *banlieue* – all these terms have the same origin; they refer to places of exclusion. Clearly, *banlieues* have already existed independently from terms to designate them, they have made and often managed their own history, they have not simply been excluded places, but their existence does nevertheless express this will to create on the outskirts of the city places that do not belong to the system (quoted in Dikeç, 2007, p. 7).

and broadcast by Swedish mass media. Despite the evidence that discrimination is institutionalized and general, cases of discrimination are often reduced to individual exceptions by police authorities and the mass media where the individual police officers need to work with "core values" in order to undo their racist beliefs. The roots of the problem are thus to be found in the individual and not the wider structural context that provides ideological basis for discrimination (see Dikeç, 2007; Kamali, 2008). Additionally the stressful working conditions of police officers are often offered as an argument that is used to justify these racist slurs and mitigate their dangers.

Some of the interviewees said that the negative attitudes and prejudices which exist in society against immigrants influence their chances of getting job in the labor market:

**Kani (F: 20):** I think it is especially difficult for immigrants to find jobs because people have prejudices against immigrants. They think that immigrants do not work so well and that can be the reason why they choose a Swede before an immigrant, when they apply for the same job.

Kani regards prejudices as an obstacle to equal opportunity within the Swedish labor market. She also regards belittling processes and prejudiced evaluations of immigrants as potential reasons why they are denied jobs and regarded as insufficient. Such stereotypes do not emerge in a political vacuum but are just one of many means to sustain and justify the unequal socio-economic positions that prevail in any given society.

This discourse of "deficient" immigrants was not evoked only in relation to the labor market but also reported in the relationship between teachers and students with immigrant background. While Kani earlier referred to general ideas about immigrants within the Swedish labor market, Selma provides her own experience to indicate discriminatory attitudes toward immigrants by school teachers:

**Selma (F: 19):** The teachers get surprised all the time when they see that I am good at school. Their image is that I should not have good notes and knowledge.

Selma refers to her teacher who expects underachievement and poor school results because of her immigrant background. This is a result of the prejudices about migrants as an insufficient and incompetent category of people who lack competence in comparison with the dominant group in Sweden. This belittling process that immigrants are exposed to seems to justify why they are also

denied an equal social position in the Swedish society. With regard to the Swedish school system, several studies indicate that discriminatory practices and beliefs among teachers reproduce the unequal power relations between Swedes and people with immigrant background (see for instance de los Reyes & Wingborg, 2002; Gruber, 2007; Sawyer & Kamali, 2006). This discriminatory attitude that Selma experienced is rooted in a belief that "immigrant background" can explain why students with immigrant background encounter difficulties in school. Gruber (2007) argues that ethnicity is a central category for the social organization of the school and ethnicity is used to construct differences among students, who are categorized as Swedes and immigrants. Those students who have an immigrant background and are successful in their schoolwork are identified by teachers to a lesser extent as immigrants. Consequently, failure in schoolwork is ethnicized and is assumed to be a quality of students with an immigrant background.

Several research participants referred to the strong stigmatization that Muslims experience in Sweden. According to them, people with Muslim and Middle-Eastern background are associated with violence and terrorism:

**Karwan (M: 24):** They can ask you questions like, do you have a bomb on you? It seems to them (Swedes) that every person from the Middle East is carrying a bomb.

**Goran (M: 20):** In school, they have sometimes called me a terrorist. Therefore I wrote an essay about how Swedes perceived Muslims and 17 people out of the 20 I asked about their images of Muslims answered that they think about suicide bombers.

When Muslims and Islam are represented to the wider Western public collective negative attributions loaded with stereotypical associations to terrorism and violence become central elements of representational practices. In Western Europe, we find political parties mobilizing anti-Muslim racism through demonizing Islam as a source of evil that can pave the ground for the demise of Europe. If many representational practices regarding immigrants involve negative facts generalized to the whole group, while ignoring the positive and neutral aspects of the lives of the migrants, it is not so surprising that not only dominant subjects but also the migrant population themselves hold a negative image about the migrant identity. Representations produce subject positions and the position that is assigned to migrants is limited extensively to a world of negative and undesirable collective attributes.

This section has shown how the subjectivities of the interviewees are stereotyped, fixed and essentialized due to their immigrant background in

relation to issues like criminality, certain residential locations as sites of delinquency, violence, drug dealing, insufficiency/lack of competence within the labor market and school, etc. It also shows how stigmatization takes place in different situations and entails a devalued status for people who are categorized as migrants, obstructing them from equal participation in society. The interviewees are well aware that these images are anchored in the dominant representations that represent them in terms of deviancy. Negative visibility has thus significant consequences for the ways our self-understanding and identities are formed. In the next section we will examine the positive role that the mass media can have in relation to stigmatized and minoritized groups such as the Kurdish population in Sweden.

### **The quest for positive visibility and success**

Visibility and invisibility, presence and absence are important elements of practices of representations that produce different subject positions and identities. Visibility is an important part of public self-representation and self-assessment. For dominated and stigmatized groups, positive visibility becomes possible when they are given the chance to formulate their identities in different forms beyond stereotypical caricatures and therefore to influence the path of their public images. As always, it is important to note that representations are also related to who speaks in the name of an identity and what work it does in relation to the dominant society and the groups that are hailed through collective attributions, images and symbols.

The presence of the Kurdish population in Sweden has received attention in four major ways. The first mode of visibility includes the representations of Kurds as victims and as the largest imagined nation in the world without a nation-state surrounded by four authoritarian countries. The second way Kurds have been visible followed the murder of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. Here Kurds were targeted during the investigation of the murder by both the Swedish media and Säpo, the Swedish Security Service. Thirdly, the murder of a young woman with Kurdish background Fadime Sahindal by her father in 2002, widely labelled as an "honor-killing". The fourth way that Kurds have been highly visible is through successes<sup>19</sup> as authors, artists, stand-up comedians, politicians, journalists and debaters (Forsström & Runarsdotter, 2006). These four modes of visibility have been constitutive to the Kurdish self-representation in Swedish public spheres.

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<sup>19</sup> I have personally been interviewed by the Swedish Public Radio (SR) which arranged a program about why young Kurdish men and women have "suddenly" become so visible within public arenas. Several Swedish newspapers have written on this subject in a celebratory mode.

In this study, two public images of Kurds were evoked by the research participants as central to representations of the Kurds in Sweden, the first one focused on the Kurdish identity as a site of gender oppression and related Kurdishness to "honor-killing" or "honor-related violence", an issue that I will deal with extensively in chapter 6. The second public image related to the positive visibility of some well-known young Kurdish women and men in public spheres in Sweden. These famous Kurds are regarded as role models by a major part of the informants:

**Sara (F: 17):** I think that these famous Kurds like stand-up comedians Özz Nujen, Shan Atci and the pop star Darin are important for us because they present us in a good way than for instance the case of the murder of Fadime Sahindal which created a lot of negative images of Kurds in Sweden. I think these famous Kurds influence the way Swedes treat us. If they hear bad things about us, then they will act in a prejudiced and negative way toward us. They give us hope that we can succeed as Kurds.

All identities tend to evaluate themselves in term of desirable and undesirable collective attributes. Evaluation is always in relation to surrounding identities, dependent on political contexts and relations of domination and subordination that play a role in determining the meanings that are assigned to these evaluations. Thus, deploying a positive evaluation of Kurdish identity is related to the negative practices of representations that deny Kurds their diverse subjectivities and reduce their visibility to areas that are intimately related to social problems such as "honor-killing". According to Sara, the positive visibility of successful young Kurds in Sweden has influenced the public image of the Kurds positively and these public personalities have become role models who create the basis for optimism among young Kurds in Sweden. Besides, Kurdishness is detached through these representations from negative publicity. Kurds are thus no longer exiles in the politics of representation but are constituted as subjects at the heart of the Swedish public arenas, where they speak about Kurdishness, Kurdistan and Kurdish identity to the wider Swedish audience and underline their strong link to Sweden as an important locus of Kurdish-Swedish relations. The Mass media has an important role in structuring different beliefs and images about certain groups. This has often been negative, but it can also enhance the possibility of a group to gain recognition and acceptance. The positive representation becomes a part of the self-image of the youth. The positive figures in the public space were viewed as compensation for the negative representation of Kurds and provide the youths with an "ethnic pride" and recognition:

**Hana (F: 18):** It is like getting an adrenalin kick when I see them and I want to scream loudly and declare that they are Kurds when I am with my Swedish friends, but I don't do that because my Swedish friends point it out themselves and it feels great to be recognized.

As Hana indicates, the positive visibility of the Kurds in the Swedish mass media directly influences her social relationship with members of the dominant groups. In Hana's case, the external recognition that her Swedish friends provide her has an impact on her self-image as a young Kurdish woman. Some interviewees report that stand-up comedians with Kurdish backgrounds make them feel better and not like victims any more:

**Evin (F: 20):** The stand-up comedian Özz Nujen makes it fun to be a Kurd. It is no longer about a victim position and a sobbing Kurd.

As we saw in chapter 4, Kurdishness was often equated with collective suffering and victimhood, something that is challenged by the stand-up comedian Özz Nujen who both makes fun of Kurdish experiences and their struggle for an independent Kurdistan. At the same time he also justifies this struggle through humoristic references to the Turkish state that suppresses the Kurds and denies them a Kurdish identity. An important aspect of this positive visibility of Kurds within public arenas is an assumed privileged position for the Kurds in the national ranking of immigrant groups in Sweden (see Anagnostou, 2003). The research participants tend to script the Kurdish identity around notions of success and achievement and assume the idea of a uniform success among Kurds in Sweden, which is a hasty conflation because discrimination and racism affect them to the same extent as other migrant groups from the Middle East, that some of the research participants evoke as envying Kurdish successes in Sweden:

**Karwan (M: 24):** Stockholm Live is a great show and I am so happy that two of the guys that run the show are Kurds (Özz and Shan). It feels good that they say that they are Kurds. They stand for their identity. Many Arabs and Turks hate that. I have spoken with many Arabs and Turks about famous Kurds in Sweden. They say that Darin (pop star) is gay. But I tell them that we Kurds are happy that he is a Kurdish gay and not a Turk.

This illustrates the strong nationalist sentiments that are embedded in many stories about the ways of being recognized as a Kurd. When it comes to Karwan, the question of recognition and denial once again becomes an important issue, where the Kurdish presence via Darin Zanyar is reduced

discursively to a subordinated form of masculinity (i.e. in the presentation of Darin as gay) by certain people with Arabic and Turkish background.

The question of oppression against Kurds and the lack of a Kurdish state were evoked as a reason why the success of Kurds in Sweden is important:

**Hiwa (M: 25):** Kurds have in recent years succeeded and these famous Kurds are important positive role models for young Kurds. The existence and identity of the Kurds has always been questioned and therefore, they develop a personality with a strong will to succeed.

**Rezan (F: 26):** We Kurds have no state and we are oppressed. It is good that they can show everybody that we also can achieve good things, that we can become authors, journalists and politicians.

The accounts above ethnicize the notion of success and achievement as an underlying quality that Kurds inherit but are not allowed to express due to oppressive structures. At the same time, discrimination and oppression are described as productive in the sense that they equip subordinated subjects with a fighting spirit and propel them to succeed. Positive Kurdish visibility is evoked in encounters with dominant subjects that constitute the normative national order in the Middle East, namely Arabs, Persians and Turks. In Rezan's account, the importance of a Kurdish presence in different public arenas may secure a variety of positions that challenge simplistic notions of Kurdishness and subjectivity. A multitude of Kurdish presences enables a nuanced representation of the Kurds constituted by various subject positions. For subordinated groups like Kurds it becomes essential to their politics of representation to engender social transformation through exteriorizing their subjugated knowledge into a universal objectivity, a *fait accompli*, something that Arabs, Persians and Turks have achieved through gaining access to sovereign nation-states but also through silencing and pre-empting the knowledge and claims of Kurds as invalid (cf. Radhakrishnan, 2003).

The informants suggest that positive visibility also holds a central place in constituting self-understanding and the self-image. The success of some young men and women with Kurdish backgrounds is regarded as important to individual strategies to provide alternative neutral and positive images of themselves as Kurds. The respondents reported that positive visibility has a central impact on the way they are treated by Swedish society and in countering structural discrimination. It increases their competition value when they are associated with positive qualities. Besides, this positive visibility was viewed as particularly important due to the statelessness of the Kurds and the

lack of external recognition of their political situation. In the next theme, the issues of place, homeland, belonging and discrimination will be explored.

### **The magic of return and the fleeting condition of homeliness and homeland**

I climbed into the bus and closed my eyes to avoid seeing the country which was no longer mine. Starting that morning, I had gradually come to realize that a country is more than earth and houses. A country is faces, feet anchored in the earth, memories, childhood fragrances, a field of dreams, a destiny leading to a treasure buried at the foot of the mountain. Where will I find this country? (Ben Jelloun, 1993, p. 254).

Ben Jelloun's romantic passage above characterizes what Stråth calls the "poetic and imaginative force" (Stråth, 2008, p. 26) of the contested and loaded concept of homeland, which is often used as a synonym for belonging and identity. Within nationalist discourses, when this poetic imagination is translated into political projects, sharp demarcation of "Us" and "Them" is at a convenient distance (Stråth, 2008, p. 26). Any question about home and homeland can be understood within the framework of various ideologies that are concerned with social exclusion and inclusion. Further, any construction of home(s) and homeland(s) is an existential question about where we belong and with which individuals we can construct a group identity and with which places we can and are allowed to develop social, political and emotional identifications. Home and homeland hold a central place within diaspora studies because these issues are intimately related to the question of belonging and citizenship (Alinia, 2004; Brah, 1996; Maxey, 2006). What do home and homeland mean to these young men and women who were either born in Sweden or came to Sweden at young ages and how does this affect their sense of belonging? Blend provides an illustration that was shared by many of the interviewees:

**Blend (M: 24):** I have been discriminated against and I have heard several Swedes telling me: "wog, go back home to your homeland, what are you doing here?" This is not good. This is why you feel lonely in Sweden. This is why you feel you are not Swedish.

As Blend indicated above, homeland is regarded as an important marker of belonging and functions as a device to include and exclude people. "Wogs" are viewed as not belonging to the homeland of Swedes. The question of discrimination was often evoked when the interviewees described their ideas about homeland and why Kurdistan for some of them was the only self-evident

homeland. As Blend indicates, he was addressed by a discriminatory imperative "Go back home to your homeland!" and that has made his sense of belonging to Sweden ambiguous. This imperative has an essentialist point of departure that has a belief in an idea that the Kurd *only* should feel at home in Kurdistan because it is the *only real* place that can provide the Kurd a peaceful life where all equations about where we belong and not belong will be solved. Ala illustrates that one does not need solely belong to one single political space but can be attached to both Kurdistan and Sweden:

**Ala (F: 17):** Homeland means a place where you belong, a place where you should be and it is the place where you belong to whatever happens. /.../ Kurdistan is my first homeland and Sweden is my second homeland. I may buy a house in Kurdistan but I can not forget Sweden in my thoughts. Despite everything, I have grown up in Sweden.

For Ala, claiming both Kurdistan and Sweden as her homelands was regarded as a realistic understanding of where she had social, emotional and political bonds. Few of the interviewees resorted to a Manichean logic and negated Sweden categorically as their homeland, despite the exclusionary practices that they had experienced. Instead, many of the interviewed indicated that there were no natural links between a people and a place. Experiences of migration often make it difficult to feel at home in one single place, because people develop a sense of belonging in multiple ways in which numerous places can be called home. These are experiences that challenge the ideological boundaries of the nation-state, loyalty and citizenship, because the idea of loyalty to a single nation-state, citizenship and belonging is interrupted by the migrant who claims allegiance to different places as sites of belonging and identity formation.

Some interviewees also made a distinction, suggesting that Kurdistan was an imaginary homeland, while Sweden was the place where they had their concrete experiences and lives. Lara represents this position:

**Lara (F: 18):** I have no memories from Kurdistan and I have all my friends, memories and experiences here in Sweden, so Sweden is my homeland and Kurdistan is more a vague place that I hear about.

This remark by Lara is important because it indicates that there are not natural or essential bonds between her and Kurdistan just because she has a Kurdish background or Kurdish parents. The bonds we have with certain places are socially constructed. Adapting a constructionist approach to home and homeland implies that we regard our identifications with places and collective

identities as historical, changeable and transitory due to those political ideologies and situations that dominate the society where we live and the ways they impinge on our personal and collective histories and experiences.

The following quotes illustrate the transitory aspects of home and "origin" and point to the political potential of the constructivist approach:

**Awa (F: 22):** When I travelled to Kurdistan some years ago, I felt: Hell, I don't have anything here. It feels like another country. It does not mean that I don't want to go back but you get confused. First, you go down and think: I am going to live here. But as soon I was there, I felt that I could not live there. I can not live there but I can not forget it either.

Awa's return to Kurdistan indicates that a sense of belonging to a homeland undergoes transformation and new meanings can be assigned to places that are described as homeland. Being confused, not having anything, whether living there or not living there, forgetting and remembering become important aspects of her ambiguous relationship to Sweden and Kurdistan. While the research participants in chapter 4 evoked ideas of unity among Kurds, Nalin illustrates that being a Kurd does not imply that she will be automatically accepted in Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurdish identities turned out to mean different things to her and to those who rejected her claims to Kurdistan as her homeland:

**Nalin (F: 20):** I am from Eastern Kurdistan (Iranian Kurdistan) and I visited Southern Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan) and I can tell you that I did not feel that it belonged to me. I was not respected as I expected to be. I was treated differently. I see Southern Kurdistan as mine because I am Kurd and I am from Kurdistan. But the Kurds from South, they looked at me "as the Kurd from the other side, the Iranian Kurdistan". The Kurds called me Iranian and I felt what the hell. It feels that Kurds from the South have got their share and do not care about other parts of Kurdistan.

In Nalin's case, the idea of a "united Kurdistan" turned out to be a delusion and a discourse without a concrete anchorage in the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq. The place and the collective identity that Nalin assumed that would provide her with a sense of belonging turned out to be exclusive and only apparently only available to Iraqi Kurds. A putative unitary Kurdish identity becomes contested by other Kurds holding privileged positions within different geographies and national orders. This account gives witness to the internal divisions among Kurds from different parts of the Kurdish regions within Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria and also reveals the fragmented and

complex nature of Kurdish identities. There is no single identity that is internally coherent and homogenous.

Although Hiwa had never been in Kurdistan, his brother had told him stories about it and given him an image that equated Kurdistan to a paradise that should be experienced. Hiwa tells us of his experiences when he visited Kurdistan for the first time:

**Hiwa (M: 25):** I had never been to Kurdistan before and my older brother often told me that Kurdistan was so green but when I visited Kurdistan and saw that it was a rather dry place compared to Sweden. But my brother insisted and he told me that "I swear that if Kurdistan was not occupied by the Turks it would have been a paradise".

The myth of lost "origin" as a lost paradise made both Hiwa and his brother yearn for a magical return to Kurdistan in order to restore the paradise, the place where they are told to be at and the place they think that they should be at. The myth of "roots" and returning is thus constituted in a complex interaction between internal and external forces that interlink a specific identity with a specific spatiality, where one is assumed to settle down and be at. Arriving in Kurdistan is often imbued with excitement and can at the beginning be felt, following Kundera (2002, p. 5), as "the great magic of the return". Contrary to this assumed magical return, the interviewees found that things were not what they had expected, neither the nature nor the people. Everything had lost its "authenticity", something that supposedly existed prior to migration. This assumed authenticity was a fabrication of an ahistorical memory about a remote era. Places are both real and imagined and undergo transformations. This lack of knowledge about the reality of the places reflects the nature of nostalgia or aptly put by Kundera as "the pain of ignorance" (2002, p. 6). An un-magical return demystified for some of the interviewees the nostalgic fabrication of Kurdistan where they thought they would be in a comfortable heaven and find a sense of belonging they lacked in Sweden. In other words, this homing desire (Brah, 1996) is closely related to their life experiences in Sweden and its uncertain status as their homeland. For some immigrants the memory and the past are the imagined homelands but when arriving in this imagined homeland, Kurdistan, many of them realize that "the past is a foreign country" (quoted in Maxey 2006:6). Some of the interviewees noted that they both felt like strangers and were treated like strangers:

**Leyla (F: 19):** I was back in Kurdistan and I heard many Kurds telling each other: "look, there comes the Swede". I felt like a stranger in my own homeland. They could see that I was not brought up in Kurdistan.

It was after returning (for those who had lived there) or visiting (for those who were not born there) the imagined homeland, Kurdistan, the place where they expected to belong and feel at home, that they realized that Kurdistan was no longer the self-evident home but another place they felt obliged to belong to. The ambiguity toward this imagined homeland becomes more complex for Leyla when she encountered resistance from some Kurds in Kurdistan who did not hail her as a "real" Kurd but as a Swede or even foreigner, which reveals the complexity of processes of belonging. It becomes obvious that in the case of Leyla who was born in Sweden, that she could not obtain an equal place either in the place of her birth (Sweden) nor in the place of what is referred to by her as her "origin", Kurdistan. Her identity project is shuttled between different places and identities due to the liminal space they occupy relating to their experiences and positions. The word "returning" is of course misleading for those young people who were born in Sweden because they had never left Kurdistan. The notion of "returning" is used in racist discourses that urge migrants to return back to their "original places", but it can also be embraced by migrants in order to find an alternative strategy to deal with being denied a sense of belonging by the dominant subjects. Referring to the British-Pakistani author Hanif Kureishi and the way he interrogates the issue of home and homeland with regards to British youth with migrant backgrounds, Gikandi notes that:

Kureishi's journey to Karachi is not...to real places encountered before but a sojourn in an imaginary place ... conjured simultaneously by notions of ancestry and English racist discourse .... Karachi is not the source of any kind of trauma, because it has not been experienced before ... it is the symbol of an imaginary repressed that must be encountered if a nonalienated identity is to be secured (Quoted in Maxey, 2006, p. 16).

In other words, the alternative strategy to alienation for certain youth with migrant backgrounds is to "authenticate" themselves as *sine qua non* in their relationships with the dominant national order. Even if authentication of where we belong can be a useful strategy against exclusive structures, the danger of a Manichean logic is that the dominant society can blame the young people for not willing to be a part of "us" leading them to build their own ghettos (see Radhakrishnan, 1996). One response to the poison of essentialism is when young people resort willingly or reluctantly to a world of narratives that deals

with "origin", "realness", "authentic", "roots" and "essence" in order to authenticate themselves and to compensate for the experience of rejection by the dominant society. Paradoxically though, this strategy reproduces the same logic of exclusion and the assumed naturalness of Swedishness that some young people attempt to fight. It does not provide any epistemological rupture to challenge essentialism and redefine Swedishness as a transparent category of belonging beyond identity riddles.

In highlighting this paradox, I don't propose a stance that blindly neglects the "difference between dominant and subaltern claims" (Clifford, 1994, p. 307). The problem with essentialism is that it cannot guarantee that the liberated group will not resort to exclusionary practices against people who do not fit in the national, ethnic or religious imaginations of the liberated group. The status quo is clearly not the solution to this dilemma. Rather it there is a need for new epistemological morphologies that do not organize members in terms of essentialist notions of belonging but point out and politicize the deficiencies and the injustices of the dominating group in social terms whether the oppression is based on economic, cultural, ethnic or religious affiliations.

The notions of homeland and belonging are closely related. The research participants evoked racism as an obstacle to them claiming Sweden as their homeland. This was especially in the context of racist challenges that urged them to leave Sweden and go back to their "original" place of belonging. In contrast to essentialist notions of homeland and belonging, it was not regarded as an anomaly for respondents to claim both Sweden and Kurdistan as homelands, even if they encountered resistance to their claims. Memory was often evoked as an important experience related to homeland and sense of belonging. It was in this context, that some of the research participants viewed Kurdistan as an imaginary homeland and Sweden as their concrete homeland. Several of the interviewees have returned or visited Kurdistan and they often told stories of alienation and a sense of not belonging accompanied by a demystification of the paradise that Kurdistan was believed to be. These journeys to Kurdistan have to be understood in relation to racist discourses against immigrants who claim Sweden as their homelands. Racism stimulates a feeling among these youth to view Sweden as an uncertain homeland. The uncertain status of Sweden as a homeland that can not provide them with full citizenship is reported in other public arenas like the labor market, legal system, school system, housing, leisure, etc. The next section will deal with patterned experiences of ethnic discrimination and racism within these societal realms.

## Unrealized promises of citizenship rights

This theme examines how youth relate to their experiences of social inequality based mainly on their immigrant backgrounds. The experiences are not only based on direct personal experiences but also involve general references to immigrants as a category that is targeted by ethnic discrimination. The research participants refer to their consciousness of the prevalence of ethnic discrimination that prevents them from attaining equal citizenship and puts them in an ambiguous relationship with Swedish society. Further, the unfulfilled promises of citizenship will be explored with regards to the ways they are treated within the labor market, housing, leisure, police authorities but also everyday encounters with "normal" Swedes. A particular focus will be on the labor market, which the research participants regarded as an important site of inequality. The major argument that I have attempted to outline is the strong relationship between belonging and the ways citizens are given the opportunity to exercise their substantial citizenship rights. One of the interviewees provides an example of how racism and ethnic discrimination encourage minoritized groups to think in terms of "Swedes" against "immigrants":

**Karwan (M: 24):** Once I was with my friend here in town and we were involved in a fight with some Swedish guys. The whole town came to their rescue, women, young people, old people and the retired people were gathered around us and they started calling us wogs and they called the police. The police came and took us to custody and the police seemed not willing to listen to us and hear our history and they forgot everything we had told them. That was so sour. We were young and we were thinking what is going on. Is the whole of Sweden against us? No one should have the right to do that like they did to us, gathering around us and calling us wogs. They think that we are all criminals and we are always out fighting.

What Karwan tries to show is that the social inequality he and his friends experience had a racialized basis in which immigrants are regarded as undesired and problematic and treated in unfair ways by the dominant society. Being defined as a "wog" or an immigrant as Karwan discussed above entails a social status equated with subordination and an otherness perpetuated through discriminatory practices by both "normal" Swedes and also institutionally empowered subjects like police officers. It is in relation to these discriminatory events, that a sense of social exclusion and a denied belonging emerge, because the events provide us with crucial knowledge about how "Swedes" and "immigrants" are positioned differently with unequal structural and individual outcomes. Young men with immigrant backgrounds are often represented in relation to delinquency and "riots". It is such dominant representation in the

Swedish society that makes Karwan declare that young men with immigrant background are believed to have a proclivity to crime and violence but also why they are treated in a discriminatory way. Regardless of their actions, they are guilty by association. Gender, masculinity and ethnicity are important bases of this discriminatory representation of young men with immigrant backgrounds (see for instance Bredström, 2003) who are regarded as representing an undesired masculinity by the Swedish mass media and some scholars (Carlbom, 2009; Åberg, 2009). Karwan's experience also shows how mistrust can be established between the minoritized group and the dominant groups where the police officers are regarded as representing the interests of the dominant group (Diesen, 2005; Sarnecki, 2006). Although Karwan and his friends have told their stories to the police officers, their voices and perspectives are ignored and forgotten. The unwillingness of the police officers to listen, hear and remember shows how the possibility of a just conversation is impossible when the powerful one decides whether to listen or ignore. This account by Karwan indicates how structural inequality is established when the actions of social institutions and "normal" Swedes converge with each other and ethnic inequality can be reinforced. Although Sweden claims to be a democratic state with democratic institutions, the Swedish labor market has become a site of deep structural discrimination. Alan provides an example of this structural inequality within the labor market:

**Alan (M: 23):** I remember once in 2004 when I applied for a job. One of the members of the board at the company told me that "we have a lot of you in our company". I told him: do you mean blacks? He said, "yes, we have two Iranians". I told him that he must be joking. I was shocked and destroyed. Racism is often lying under the surface.

Racism diminishes one's access to important social resources like a job, as Alan indicated above and the "numbers" of the employees with immigrant backgrounds are used to exclude other "wogs" from these resources. In the company that Alan refers to, "two Iranians" are both used to protect them against accusation of discrimination but also as a strategy to exclude other "blacks" or "wogs" from these opportunities. The "two Iranians" can function as an "ethnic alibi" to represent the company as non-discriminatory and enable a discriminatory gate-keeping to social resources like employment. This example shows how racism can also find strategies to justify its discourses and practices but also reject accusation of racism. Ethnic discrimination such as that which Alan refers to not only has economic and political consequences but also has difficult emotional and psychological implications (Taloyan, 2008) for those who are targeted by it.

Members of the dominant group are often privileged by the social structures that reflect their interests. One of the interviewees, Kawa, points out how Swedes are remarkably privileged when it comes to finding jobs. He compares himself to his Swedish girlfriend to show how the national order of employment works:

**Kawa (M: 22):** I worked at a Kebab Shop and I left that job. /.../ I did not get any other jobs after that. I started looking for jobs at Statoil and gas stations and even there I could not get a job or even come to an interview. My girlfriend who worked at the same kebab shop for a while quit at the same time as me and she is Swedish. She applied for a job and after two weeks, she got the job. She is still attending college and I finished college a while ago.

Kawa attempts to outline how discrimination is patterned and how access to employment is obstructed or facilitated dependent on one's positionality as an immigrant or as a Swede. Comparing his experiences and education to his Swedish girlfriend shows how the inconsistencies of the rhetoric of social equality, citizenship and meritocracy frame and limit his life opportunities. Although he and his girlfriend are both Swedish citizens, it is only one of them who has an advantaged position and can exercise their citizenship rights. Some of the interviewees pointed out that it is thanks to social networks that you can get a proper job and those of them who had found a job had done so through friends with Swedish backgrounds. Those who lack good social networks find it difficult to get employed:

**Leyla (F: 19):** I can tell you that if you don't have contacts, it is difficult for you to find a job. I have applied for a job at Liseberg (an entertainment setting in Gothenburg) for the last three years. I have sent them my application. And I know a Swedish classmate who knows the staff manager, and she sends in her application two weeks after the due date. I was rejected for the job and this girl who has no merits or experiences from an earlier job gets the job. I know this girl personally. If she got the job because she was Swedish, I understand them because it is despite everything Sweden and their country. They have the right to give priority to their people.

Leyla seems to see the Swedish labor market as an arena of nationalism where Swedes choose their "own people" before an immigrant and one should accept it because it is "their" country. Having contacts or a network makes it easier to find a job. This contact network can be understood as social capital that can translate your merits, work experience and education into suitable jobs. In the case of Leyla's friend, her social capital is consisted of her ascribed

"Swedishness" and her social network (i.e. she knew the staff manager). According to Behtoui (2006), the disparity that young people with immigrant backgrounds experience in the Swedish labor market is strongly related to structural inequality and lack of appropriate networks which decrease the chances of employment. This structural inequality is further reinforced in a labor market where companies prefer to make use of informal recruitment channels. Behtoui (2006) depicts a gloomy picture of the relationship between high education as an indicator of social capital or cultural capital and the increased chances to be employed for young people with immigrant backgrounds in Sweden. He asserts that people with immigrant background coming from *outside* Northwest Europe and North America are strongly disadvantaged in comparison to groups coming from northwest Europe and North America when it comes to the probability of being employed regardless of gender, education, etc. Consequently, social capital is not only a positive for those who have it, but it can also deprive other people who do not have it from gaining an equal access to the resources of the wider society (Behtoui, 2006). This disparity within the Swedish labor market shows how white Northwest Europeans and North Americans are hierarchized following a colonial ideology where whiteness is the most privileged marker of belonging while Leyla's background (Kurdish and Middle-Eastern) is not highly valued and is therefore a disadvantage in this context. Some interviewees report that even when they have a proper education they will not have the same chance because of their immigrant backgrounds:

**Hemin (M: 22):** You surely can get an education in Sweden but after the education it becomes very difficult for you to get a job as a "wog". /.../ There is so much racism that is quite here in Sweden. They treat you differently depending on whether your name is Svensson or Mohammad.

The vulnerability of immigrants because of exposure to racism and subordination can have a discouraging effect on certain young people with immigrant backgrounds to invest in education and to believe that education will not lead to employment. This ethnically divided labor market can lead to the belief that education does not imply a better chance to get employment. This can lead to a vicious cycle where refraining from the investment in education may perpetuate structural inequality and the oppressed groups are then blamed for their subordinated position as "insufficient" (i.e. lacking education). Experience or awareness of ethnic discrimination can have a tangible impact on study motivation. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have asserted, the educational system is one of the most important sites in which symbolic power and unequal material relations are reproduced. It is not a coincidence that

Hemin chooses two names "Svensson" and "Mohammad" to portray the asymmetrical power relationship between putative Swedes and immigrants, where Mohammad (a Muslim or a Middle-Easterner) becomes a metonymic sign of otherness and non-belonging to the Swedish society while Svensson becomes the one who sets the rules for defining the in-group and out-group in Sweden. Although education is important, due to the nature of the contemporary ethnically divided labor market and its informal recruitment channels, education will not provide an immediate ticket to the labor market (see Behtoui, 2006; Knocke & Hertzberg, 2000; Rätzzel, 2006; Schierup & Urban, 2007).

Experiences of ethnic discrimination were not regarded by several of the research participants as individual but rather as family issues because it affected them all of the family members. Ethnic discrimination not only reinforced the solidarity bonds in the family but it also enabled trans-ethnic solidarity bonds with other young people with immigrant backgrounds. Hazhar illustrates this position:

**Hazhar (M: 26):** My friends, they are not only Kurds, but Arabs, Iranians, Bosnians and Somalis. We have certain common experiences. Our parents may have experienced discrimination in contrast to Daniel's (a putative Swede) parents. My parents have been discriminated against and my parents are really not the type of person who just wants to sit down at home and wait to get their money from the social service. They have always tried to work. Even if they have tried to work, they have been denied. They have also attended different courses related to their jobs and have heard people say that they don't like foreigners in their working place.

The trans-ethnic nature of Hazhar's friendship circle is a resort where he can find a space based on common experiences of discrimination as a result of their shared stigmatized immigrant identity (M. Andersson, 2005; Sernhede, 2002; Ålund, 1997). Young people with immigrant backgrounds, as Hazhar suggests, come together under the umbrella of their subordinated identity and build trans-ethnic solidarity. Appeals for justice and aversion toward discrimination seem to overcome differences and enable unity against inequality, as Hazhar indicates. It is not only their own experiences that bring them together but also their parents' experiences of ethnic discrimination. Hazhar refers to dominant discourses in Swedish society that regard immigrants as a burden who abuse the Swedish welfare system. We can sum up their situation as a dilemma: if they don't work, they are regarded as a burden or as welfare abusers; if they do work, they are not wanted at their workplaces and are discriminated against. Hazhar's example indicates how discrimination is

discursively constructed based on different argumentative devices in order to justify exclusionary practices. Immigrant backgrounds are constructed both as the reason why immigrants abuse the system but also why they are not welcome at "Swedish" workplaces.

This structural inequality was not limited to an ethnically divided labor market, but also involved the housing segregation that ethnic discrimination enables. Several of the respondents referred to the experiences of their friends and mass media reports about ethnic discrimination within the housing market. Kani provides an example:

**Kani (F: 20):** When it comes to flats to rent, I have not applied for my own flat but I have heard from a friend who has been standing in a housing queue for several years but has not found any flat that his Swedish friend who applied for housing some years after him, was given a flat.

Kani compares earlier examples of the ethnically divided labor market to how a Swede and an immigrant are treated when they apply for a flat to rent. Everybody is given the right to stand in a housing queue but everybody is not treated equally. Swedishness and Swedish names are the "right passwords" to attaining a privileged access to the housing market. Hammarstedt and Ahmad (2007) show in their study that people who have an Arabic/Muslim name are systematically discriminated against by landlords. Three fictive names were used in their study; Erik Johansson, Maria Andersson and Mohammed Rashid. They applied for 500 apartments in which the names Erik and Maria were highly advantaged in contrast to Mohammed who was both ignored and refused opportunities to view apartments by the landlords. This structural discrimination is also confirmed by other studies that indicate that the Swedish housing market reflect a colonial legacy where people from the "Third World" are to be found in the most vulnerable urban areas and spatially disadvantaged in relation to the white Swedish population (R. Andersson, 2002; Molina, 1997).

This ethnic discrimination is not only experienced in the realms of the labor and housing markets but also experienced in other symbolical ways such as the gaze as an everyday objectification by dominant white Swedish subjects: Soran illustrates an experience that was common among the research participants:

**Soran (M: 19):** I was born here in Sweden and during these years almost every time I have been outside my home, I have met people looking askance at me. The case is not that they come and tell you that you are not Swedish but you can see it in their gazes. Some days ago, I was at the swimming pool with my girlfriend who is

Swedish. I told her that an old lady was looking at me a lot. My girlfriend told me that maybe the old lady conceives me as cute. I told her that those gazes were not a question about a flirt but they are saying that I don't belong here. My girlfriend thought that was something that happened only this time and I told her that this has happened to me all the times and not so many people know about that. /.../ They don't know it and they try to forget it. They really don't want to see what is going on. I think Swedes see immigrants as a problem and they think that it is becoming another country because Sweden is not anymore the blonde country with blue eyes. They are worried about immigration.

The way people gaze at him, and racist taunts are the discriminatory practices that have made Soran aware of his problematic presence in Swedish society. His appearance is defined as non-Swedish and makes him visible to the eye of putative Swedes. Heru (2003) asserts that "we can understand gazing or looking as a particular activity that is privileged by the dominant group in society and to be uncomfortable and objectifying for those upon whom they gaze" (Heru, 2003, p. 112). Soran's understanding of his belonging and social position in Sweden is developed and maintained in great part through the gazes of the putative Swedes. Soran's interpretation of the old lady's gaze was mediated through his earlier experiences of the *power of the gazes* and the *gazes of power* in the Swedish society which identify, distinguish, supervise, discipline and discriminate against those subjects that are given the position of immigrant. His discussion with his Swedish girlfriend illustrates how their different social positions in the Swedish society convey different meanings (flirt or discrimination) to the elderly woman's gaze. Soran also indicates that putative Swedes neglect these practices and do not take these excluding gazes seriously as an act of domination.

Several of the interviewees pointed out that one does not need to directly experience racism to feel that one does not belong to Sweden. Soran shows how his awareness about discrimination structures his subjectivity:

**Soran (M: 19):** When I stand in the queue waiting to enter a nightclub, I always think about the possibility of not being allowed to enter because I am not Swedish. I have experienced this in Stockholm. /.../ Just because I did not look like a Swede should not mean that I should not enter the nightclub. I don't mean that I am Swedish now and therefore I should come in. Everybody is paying the same price. It is not written on these nightclubs (with an ironic voice) "No black people or dark-skinned people are allowed to enter here". It is not written on these nightclub doors which skin

color is allowed to enter but what ages. That is what makes you sad and frustrated.

One does not need to be directly targeted by racism to experience racism and feel the breath of racism in the society. It can also be experienced through a consciousness about belonging to a subordinated group due to one's appearance, religion or ethnic background being subjected to discrimination. Everybody is allowed to stand in the queue but everybody is not allowed to enter the nightclub. In other words, this universal right may give the feeling of an equal society at a superficial level, but the gatekeeper turns it into a particularistic society where certain individuals qualify for admission due to their backgrounds while others are rejected. Despite the inequality here, if migrants claim their right to admission, they risk being labelled as "noisy" in search of a fight and trouble. Their acts are easily interpreted in ways that re-inscribe them within the prevalent dominant representations of young men with immigrant background as "problematic", "criminals" and "violent". Soran shows how certain public spaces such as spaces of leisure become sites for ethnic discrimination, in which dark-skinned people are not welcome.

The queue system that Soran refers to can be used to illustrate the discrepancy and unrealized promises of Swedish citizenship, where certain individuals on the basis of their imagined or real ethnic belonging are discriminated or favoured, although they formally share the same citizenship. While in Sweden, numerous political declarations have been made about levelling out social, economic and political inequalities between Swedes and immigrants, recent developments in Swedish integration rhetoric have amounted to a reassertion of the national Swedish identity through requiring immigrants to learn the national language in order to be integrated or to be granted citizenship (see for instance Hansen, 2009; Kofman, 2005). In this light, Rezan argues that immigrants are subjected to pressures by the state to show that they are willing to integrate:

**Rezan (F: 26):** I can adapt myself and I am fluent in the Swedish language, that everybody complains about when they speak about integration and the importance of the Swedish language for successful integration. Integration for me is when I adapt myself to the Swedish society, the society must also adapt itself to us. It is us who all the time must adapt to the Swedish society and it is us who all the time must exert ourselves. It must be a mutual process.

Rezan criticizes the discourse about the integration of immigrants in Sweden for its simplistic approach where knowledge of the Swedish language implies a successful integration without paying attention to other factors such as ethnic

discrimination and racism that have constituted her subjectivity in Sweden. Integration policy according to her has focused strongly on the immigrants and the need for them to adapt to Swedish society. She maintains that integration is an issue that should involve adaptation by Swedish society to immigration.

If Swedes occupy a subject position and immigrants are assigned an object position, then we can not speak about integration as a mutual process but as an unequally arranged system of domination and subordination. This inequality, as Rezan indicates, has to do with the power and the privilege of defining the subject and object of integration but also who constructs the discourse and its framework (de los Reyes & Kamali, 2005). Rezan seems to require more effort by the dominant society to make the issue of integration not solely limited to people with immigrant backgrounds but also a political issue that concerns Swedish society. This mutual process as it is often underlined in the context of integration of immigrants, should go beyond the idea that the dominant society is the "host" and does not need to adapt while it is the task of immigrants as "guests" to assimilate into Swedish society. The unequal power relations that permeate this assumed "mutual" process will also have unequal outcomes for those who are involved in this relationship, in which immigrants are forced to struggle against discriminatory fences that the society has established to obstruct equal accesses to social resources.

The research participants' accounts refer to various arenas like everyday life in the street, how their parents are treated, how police officers treat them and how they are denied employment. They also refer to their awareness about being targets of ethnic discrimination with regard to the housing market. Further, the gaze as an act of daily domination by dominant white subjects was stressed by the research participants. They refer to different arguments and warrants used by dominant subjects about how immigrants are represented as a burden to social welfare, as a threatening and a criminal element in the Swedish society. All this exclusionary treatment informs the painful complexity of being denied full belonging to a Swedish identity. Their experiences paint a picture of an ethnically divided society in which white Swedes and Europeans hold the most privileged positions in the Swedish society. This section dealt with the experiences of ethnic discrimination, the next will focus on how the respondents dealt with discriminatory acts by members of the dominant group.

### **Dealing with ethnic discrimination and racism**

The research participants have experienced various forms of ethnic discrimination and racism in the Swedish society and despite their identification with Sweden it has strongly influenced their sense of not belonging or only partially or insecurely belonging in Swedish society. This

section deals with strategies and responses that the research participants use in their social life when they encounter exclusionary practices and the ways they resist and accommodate them. Since the research participants in this dissertation discussed their resistance toward ethnic discrimination mainly through individual efforts, I will mainly pay attention to the everyday acts and modes of resistance in dealing with discriminatory acts.

One of the respondents argued that discrimination can stimulate a reactive Kurdish identity or a denial of Kurdish identity:

**Kawa (M: 22):** One aspect of discrimination is when people get tired of discrimination and they get tired of their identity and they don't want to be Kurds anymore and change their name to a Swedish or a more acceptable name. My sister has changed her name because she was obliged to turn away from her origin and culture.

Discrimination can be dealt with through different strategies. "Becoming" Swedish through rejecting or denying Kurdishness was evoked as an important strategy. Discrimination can also strengthen ethnic identity and engender an "exaggerated" self-ethnicization, "you become more Kurdish than you need to be" as Kawa put it. Both negation of the dominant identity and the minoritized identity can be regarded as strategies to cope with subordination. These strategies emerge in a context where the youth experience their "difference" as being negatively assessed by the dominant society and its assimilationist practices. In order to escape stigmatizing differences like "un-Swedish" names, changing ones name can become a useful strategy in order to gain some acceptance. The denial of ones identity is done in favor of a Swedish identity that embodies privileges and facilitates easier access to social resources in the society. As practices of representation often reflect the interests of dominant subjects, Swedishness has the possibility to be realized as an identity to aspire to in contrast to the "deviant" and "undesirable" identities that supposedly belong to migrants. Internalization of self-contempt and denial/rejection of ones identity can also be an effect of practices of representation that portray ones identity in devaluing terms. As Kawa indicates above with regard to her sister, ethnic discrimination obliged her to make herself more "intelligible" to the dominant society, in order to find a job.

Rejecting the dominant identity and searching for one's "roots" and going back to one's "origin" are understood by Johan to be a result of a painful social life surrounded by discriminatory "steel doors":

**Johan (M: 21):** Maybe at the end you come to a turning-point and say: I am Kurdish. Because they have built steel doors and you are fed up with going around them. It is a barrier that you have to find a way to jump over. That is why I changed my name to overcome that barrier. To be Swedish for me is to have equal terms for everybody and treating everyone equally regardless of their background. The problem is lack of that equality.

As Johan puts it above, discrimination can pave the ground for a *reactive* Kurdish identity, where you assert and invest in your Kurdishness in a stronger way to deal with discrimination. As shown in previous sections, going back to ones "origin" or "roots" can become a powerful strategy to construct an alternative source of identification and belonging in order to avoid alienation. This reactive identity is a result of a proactive identity that excludes certain subjects as undesired and denies them an equal position within its boundary. Johan's notion of Swedishness is related to the issue of equality and equal opportunity provided by a universal civic citizenship. Further, he does not resort to the metaphysical and abstract imagination about Swedishness that is intimately connected to a certain ethnicity based on whiteness and Europeaness, in which many people from the "Third World" are excluded, although they hold Swedish citizenship. In this case, Johan is striving for an equal citizenship that enhances equality.

Other important means of resistance can be violence and non-violence to oppose exclusionary practices:

**Hazhar (M: 26):** There are many covert racists. You notice that everywhere. I have felt offended several times when they have said ugly things to me. If someone offends me in a racist way I challenge the person and I have used violence several times. Now, I don't want to confront it anymore because I don't want to sink to their level. That makes me stronger.

Violence can be used as a means and a demonstration of strength to challenge racism. As we see in the case of Hazhar, he assigns violence different meanings in different stages of his life, where violence can function as a sign of strength but also weakness. The racist position that discriminates against him reflects a weak and low expression of a person's quality, according to Hazhar. If Hazhar has stopped using violence and adapted a strategy of non-violence to assert his strength and value, Soran regards aggression as an important tool when Swedes humiliate him in different ways. He refers to different social settings where violence becomes a tool to resist discrimination and "defeat" the discriminating subjects:

**Soran (M: 19):** I react very aggressively toward discrimination. I was very aggressive when I was young and if someone looked at me or talked to me in a bad way, I used violence and I fought with them. When I came to this town they called me "a Turk in a tin" (*turk i burk*) and I reacted badly and I fought to prove that I had courage and that I could stand up against all of them. All immigrants experience this stuff. When I have played soccer in my team, I heard many racist comments like "go back home to your homeland", "wog" and oddly enough, they even call me negro (a laughter and points at his face: Soran has light-brown hair with green eyes). They call you for everything possible. /.../ Once one guy called me "bloody wog" during a soccer game, I hit him in his face with my skull. His eyebrows were splintered. They suspended me from playing soccer for 4 months. My coach could not do anything. Words do not matter to them. It is what you do. Just look at what racism Samuel Eto'o is experiencing everyday in the Spanish league. The person who acts against the words, is the one who will be punished.

When it comes to Soran, his responses to racism and discrimination at the beginning have been through physical strength and violence in order to gain a respectable position in the eyes of the people who have discriminated against him. Soran understands these racist taunts against him like "wog", "go back to your homeland" and "negro" within a broader European context, referring to the Spanish League where the Cameroonian former Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o has been targeted by racist taunts from Real Zaragoza supporters<sup>20</sup>. Soran stresses that words like racist taunts used against him were not seen as punishable actions. As Soran indicates, the source of the problem is not discussed but it is the person who reacts against racial inequality through violence who is punished. Consequently words are not understood as a social action with a power to structure our world and our place in it but also to humiliate and dominate. The racist slur, "negro" is possibly referred to an absolute form of non-Swedishness with regard to the skin color (see Sawyer, 2000). Mindful of Said's (2003/1978) analysis of the political distance that is created by different categorizations and labels with regards to Europe, the West and the Orient, we can understand these racist slurs "negro" and "wog" within the imaginative geography and history of Swedishness, as a means to

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<sup>20</sup> Eto'o stressed after that game: "If we experience this in football it means our society is rotten and that means we're in a dangerous situation. I am treated first and foremost as a footballer, as Samuel Eto'o, but away from the cameras a black man is suffering from racism and nobody cares. That's the problem. I think the media tried to shoot me down (in the past) as if I was making too much of it, but the whole time I was just expressing how I was feeling (BBC, 2007). Eto'o got so furious during this match that he wanted to leave the pitch in protest but was stopped by his coach and mates.

dramatize the difference between what is near and what is distant in order to name and feel it (Said, 2003/1978, p. 55).

Using racist slurs like "wog" or "negro" against minoritized subjects is a performative act of symbolic violence and a strategy of inferiorization and domination that not only humiliates and denigrates the minoritized subject at an individual level but also reproduces the everyday otherisation of the minoritized subjects as not belonging to the dominant society and turning them into objects of structural domination by dominant subjects. Hence, counter-violence and individual resistance against discriminatory acts can be understood as products of the same power and the structural violence that target the minoritized subjects. Certain forms of violence are not rendered visible, like the practice of the gaze, while other forms of violence such as physical violence become stigmatized and criminalized. The meanings that are assigned to the derogatory slur "wog" ("blatte" or "svartskalle") differ with regards to the context of its usage. For instance, many young people with who regard themselves as immigrants use these labels in everyday interactions with each other but many of them would not accept a dominant subject, in this case, a Swede, using the same label while hailing them. Among young people with immigrant backgrounds, they often use such labelling to negotiate a shared identity (R. Jonsson, 2007) and not all dominant subjects are challenged or labelled as "racists" when they use "wog" if the usage is used to denote trans-ethnic friendship. The dominant subjects in Sweden are hailed by some youths with migrant backgrounds in a derogatory way as "svenne".

The danger that here is that if we adopt a blind liberal approach and equate "wog" with "svenne", then we depoliticize the political distance and inequalities that are the hallmark of this relationship. This political divide can not be eliminated through a trans-ideological humanism in which all labelling is viewed as equal without considering the power relations that assign the labellers different values and resources (see Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 62). In this light, the idea of the so called "reverse discrimination/racism" by immigrants against white Swedes is politically flawed because it detaches the concept of racism from power structures that assign certain groups a privileged status and positionality vis-à-vis otherised and subordinated groups.

As we have seen there are different and difficult political distances between those who are defined as Swedes and those who are treated as immigrants. The former have access to central social resources to assert their dominance over the immigrant population and can not claim an inclusive universal and undivided "we" with equal positionalities in the national order.

Among some research participants, there was a belief that use of violence was an illegitimate source of resistance against ethnic discrimination. However, notwithstanding the “illegitimacy” of violence, some young men asserted that using violence is not about lacking good arguments to resist ethnic discrimination:

**Johan (M: 21):** When I have used violence, it is not about lack of arguments and you don't have anything more to counter the person who discriminates you. You get irritated because they press the right buttons. If someone wants to make me pissed-off, they should say: “bloody wog”.

In public representations, violence as a means to resist discrimination or oppose inequality is often rejected and regarded as destructive. The starting point of this discourse is situated within the framework of the nation-state that regards the state as having a rightful monopoly over violence in order to assert or reassert social order and its hegemony. If young people with immigrant backgrounds use violence to assert their subjectivities, their actions are often represented as a rupturing force that challenge the social order and stimulate division in society (see for instance Carlbom, 2009; Åberg, 2009). For instance, the revolts and the violence in the European urban quarters by young people with immigrant backgrounds are often portrayed as destructive. These modes of resistance are also represented by certain mass media and scholars as an external import by Islamic groups which lead these young people astray and use them as a tool to carry out their political agenda. Such representations deprive these young people of their subjectivities in understanding the inequalities that permeate their lives in the socially, economically and politically deprived urban quarters. For dominant subjects it may be difficult or impossible to understand why young people with immigrant backgrounds throw stones at “innocent” police officers who guarantee the social order and safety in our society. These youth use violence because it is a mode of resistance to assert their subjectivity through rejecting the same society that claims equality but practices inequality within different societal areas, as I have shown in this chapter. Besides, these young people are aware that violence makes big headlines in the public space, whereas other everyday “constructive” modes of resistance are often made invisible. According to Johan, there is a limit to how much one can be constructive in this dialogue and it is beyond the limit of arguments that violence appears as a subverting means to confront discrimination. Hence, using violence against racist practices should not be understood within a narrow interpretative framework that equates violence with “irrational masculinity” and “verbally insufficient” youth (cf. Gruber, 2007). Ethnic discrimination seems to reinforce violent resistance by some

young men with immigrant background who attempt to assert their strength and non-compliance with discriminatory acts.

Not all of the young men regarded physical violence as a means to respond to exclusionary practices. Alan provides an example in which he has dealt with otherisation and ethnic discrimination in different ways:

**Alan (M: 23):** I have been hunted by racist with axes. But I was good at running every time the racists came. With time you become hardened. /.../ It was very tough during secondary school because there were only Swedes. We felt harassed and one was expected to make jokes about ones background and nationality and to accept being called Turk or wog, in order to be accepted by the Swedes. There were two Arabs that came to our school and they were harassed during their first week. The problem was that they entered the school with wrong attitude. They showed themselves more as immigrants and non-Swedish. I was driving a moped and I lived a Swedish country life in contrast to them. Otherwise you feel excluded. /.../ I remember when I was doing military service (in Sweden) and it was during Newroz (New Year for Kurds and Iranians). I was not given time off to celebrate it with my family because I was not seen as having enough good reasons. Then I realized that a Swedish guy got permission because his mother had her birthday. I felt discriminated against and I was pissed-off and I was so mad that I tore the Swedish flag on my bag with my knife, but I regretted that.

Dealing with discrimination and non-acceptance can be done in many ways as Alan mentions. It can be done through letting Swedes making fun of him as a "Turk", negotiating and imitating a life-style that was regarded as Swedish and avoid acting in a way that seemed inappropriate and "un-Swedish" in the eyes of Swedes. Tearing the Swedish flag with a knife was a frustrated response against the unequal treatment he received during military service, where nationalist discourse dominates and loyalty to the nation as its member and its protector is a keystone. It was an act of rejecting a symbol representing a collective identity that did not provide him an equal place.

The issue of having a different name was viewed by many research participants as a reason why they were subjected to ethnic discrimination while applying for jobs, and why they often felt at risk of such discrimination. Changing one's name or modifying one's names to a Swedish one were regarded as an important strategy to mitigate discrimination. Kawa has modified his own name in order to sound Swedish and he blames discrimination for making people change their identities. Kawa refers to his sister below and the way she

checked out if the employer denied her an opportunity to be interviewed because of her immigrant background.

**Kawa (M: 22):** My sister once called to a place that had a vacant post and she told them that she was interested in the post that they had advertised and she wanted to come to an interview. They told her that the post had been filled by another person. Of course they say that if her name is Baxan Ahmad. My sister suspected that the reason why she was denied an interview depended on her background. She called back again and changed her voice and her name to a Swedish name. They replied: "That is so nice that she is interested and she could come to the interview".

Prejudice and discrimination, according to Kawa, create problems for immigrants and lead them to be aggressive and paranoid, but also make them change or modify their names in order to be accepted. In the worst cases they might deny their identity (Räthzel, 2006). Through his narratives, Kawa highlights which subjects experience discrimination and what form of means and agency they use in order *to work with* or *against* the discriminatory structures. Kawa is aware that unequal and often discriminatory practices against people with immigrant backgrounds can result in a paranoid mentality where one sees every act as discrimination even if it might not be so. But Kawa points out that this paranoia is the result of unfavourable treatment. His sister's negative experience about the advertised post is an apt example, whether her anxiety was rooted in paranoia or an awareness of her disadvantaged position in the Swedish society. Kawa is aware that his discourse creates a distinction between two putative groups, Swedes and immigrants, a binary opposition he rejects. Yet, he directs his attention more toward prejudices and ethnic discrimination and rejects an anti-Swedish rhetoric.

Changing one's name or modifying/"Swedifying" one's name not only confirms the authority of the discriminatory structures but also sustains and legitimizes its power. Renaming is done to promote acceptance and intelligibility to the dominant Swedish society. Working with or against these exclusionary structures (Sewell, 1992) ought to be understood in relation to what kind of knowledge they have about the schemas that inform their understanding about what kind of access they have to human and non-human resources in Swedish society. It is within this context we can understand the rise of agency through changing name, denying identity, using violence and aggression or the spirit of combating discrimination through peaceful means.

Another research participant shows how having "un-Swedish" names can be used to position people in an unequal social relationship vis-à-vis the dominant society:

**Johan (M: 21):** It is so positive that I don't have any accent and speak Swedish so well. I would rather make a telephone call or send an email than meet an authority person face to face. It is during these situations I feel that I can derive advantage from my fluency in the Swedish language. Every time I meet them face to face, the encounter becomes different and you get turned down. You change your name because you want to get a gentle tone from the authorities. I changed my name one year ago. I feel like a new person, reborn. I feel that it is very positive and I recommend all immigrants to change their names. Life becomes so much easier. Everybody looks at you in a new way. It is better to adapt and have a name like Josef and be pitch-dark than live in Sweden for 30 years and have a name like Mohammad. /.../ Now when I call different places that are related to my work, everybody is so nice time: "hi Johan, what can I help you with?" they become very nice toward you and they start joking with you. Everything comes loose. Now when I call them I don't need these embarrassing silences either at the beginning of the conversation or at the end of it. They don't ask you longer if Ahmad is spelled with a K when it is A H M A D.

Johan's strategies are not chosen in a social or a political vacuum but they are a reflection of an agency derived from social structures that represent his background and appearance as "problematic" and "deviant". Johan avoids as much as possible meeting authorities, and representatives of organizations such as insurance companies face to face in order to sustain his accepted and advantaged position as a person due to his Swedish name and his fluent Swedish. His lack of belonging in Swedish society due to discriminatory practices prompts different strategies in order to fit in a collective identity and enjoy an equal position within it.

However, this strategy by Johan is not appreciated by certain young people with immigrant backgrounds:

**Johan (M: 21):** There are some immigrants who think that it is a bad thing to change my name. There was an immigrant guy and he came out from the shop and he shouted loudly with a mocking voice: "Hi Johan, or was not your name Ahmad? Then he comes there with broken Swedish and tells me that it is embarrassing to change my name. Then I ask him why. "He said that is a question

of pride and honor. You lose status and pride when you do that". He told me even that I should be embarrassed because I had changed my name. Changing one's name costs 1100 SEK but it gives you so many benefits.

The strategy of changing name as a means to work with the exclusive social structure is rejected by some other young people with immigrant backgrounds. If Johan attempted to become as Swedish as possible, certain young people with immigrant backgrounds underlined their difference from the Swedish identity as much as possible. The rejection of Johan's strategy can be understood within the framework of resistance to discriminatory practices. Johan regards changing his name as a means to enjoy benefits in his social relations while the other young people with immigrant backgrounds considered keep their original names as a sign of pride and self-esteem in relation to the society and its discrimination. In this case, the resistance is defined through strengthening the difference between dominated groups and dominant subjects (Azar, 2001a).

The practice of changing one's name has a specific place within the struggle against racism and discrimination. Among famous African-American figures like the boxer Muhammad Ali and the freedom fighter Malcolm X, resisting white racism in US was done partly through changing their Christian/white names and adopting Islamic names and Islam as an identity of resistance. This resistance is mostly defined through rejecting and negating the symbols and identification markers of an oppressive identity that did not give black subjects an equal place. Islam has been a source of resistance and a nodal point for discriminated groups to resort to despite their differences. It is within this context that the dominant societies in Europe express their anxieties about young men who are recruited to groups that mobilize themselves under the umbrella of Islam (see Goldberg, 2006; Nederveen Pieterse, 2007).

Selma admits that she accommodates to the Swedish society from a minoritized position:

**Selma (F: 19):** I have a minority appearance and it gives me worse points of departure. Then it is up to me to work from this minority position.

What Selma indicates in the above quote is that having a minoritized position does not imply having the same point of departure in realizing one's goals due to the structural position she occupies as a minoritized subject. While she criticizes the system as oppressive, she also compromises with this disadvantaged position. Accommodating to this oppressive social relationship

(Dominelli, 2002) is a strategy used by Selma to survive and make the best of her situation.

While Selma spoke of finding accommodation within an oppressive social relationship, Ala regards discussion and debates as important forums to challenge racist discourses. Besides, she refuses to let her teacher represent her when defending herself. She does not refer to a common Swedish identity in order to be accepted but rather a common human identity:

**Ala (F: 17):** I have two racists in my class. They comment on my background all the time. I am getting used to it. /.../ I usually sit down and speak to them and tell them that I am a human being and that I am equal to them. Just because I live in their country does not mean that they should push me down. I tell them that if they lived in my country, I would not have discriminated against them. I knock them with words and use no violence and I don't want the teacher to get involved in this because I don't want them to believe that I am weak just because I am an immigrant girl.

In Ala's case, she refers to her commonality with the racists as a human beings. Besides, she makes it clear that it does not need to be a natural practice to discriminate against a person who comes from another country. For Ala, it is of paramount importance to reject a victim position subjected to the pity of the dominant subjects. She does not allow it to be assumed that she needs their help to assert her subjectivity as a young woman with an immigrant background. She rejects the notion that she can not represent herself but needs the dominant subject to represent her. Besides, she uses words here as means to resist and challenge discrimination but also in defeating and "knocking" those who discriminate against her. Having Discussions and arguments were regarded as important resources to resist racism with.

Unlike Ala, Arivan deals with discrimination by ignoring those people who discriminate against him:

**Arivan (M: 26):** I have been discriminated against many times when I have been denied entrance to night clubs. I don't do anything when I am discriminated against. Why should I lose my energy on someone who has prejudices?

For Arivan, ignoring discrimination and showing apathy toward those people who discriminate against him is seen as an apt way to deal with them. Opposing discrimination is a hurtful and an emotional investment due to the humiliation that follows discriminatory acts. When racist and discriminatory

acts are prevalent in society, one becomes aware of the fact that racism is a part of daily life and that it can affect one. Therefore, when it occurs, Arivan is prepared mentally to deal with it through ignoring it. Arivan's calmness should not be interpreted as meaning that Arivan accepts discrimination, but it should be seen as one of the ways to deal with discriminatory practices.

In this section, I have explored how discrimination was challenged and dealt with by the research participants. Different situations can engender different strategies and there are gendered ways of dealing with discrimination. It is important to remember that even when these young men and women formulate their strategies of resistance and deal with discrimination, they are aware of dominant discourses that distinguish between young women as victims/oppressed (by their families) and young men as perpetrators of violence and a public danger. Changing one's name, denying one's "origin", finding accommodation with discriminatory practices and using words to resist discrimination are strategies that young women made use of. The young men mentioned the use of violence as an important strategy to assert their subjectivity in the face of discriminatory and racist practices that they were exposed to by dominant subjects. However, for some of them avoiding the usage of violence was also regarded as a strength, this included even those young men who had earlier used violence in their lives to fight discrimination.

Although some of the research participants referred to denial of Kurdishness and adapting Swedish names, some of them rejected the notion of complying with an essentialist Swedishness and asserted their ethnic identity as a means to resist discriminatory discourses and practices that rendered their "differences" stigmatizing effects. Being proud of having black hair or having a Kurdish name were viewed as important modes of resistance to reject the assimilationist ideology that endorsed whiteness and demeaned people who were not regarded as having "European" appearances. Ignoring discrimination was also seen as an important strategy. One thing that brings these youth together is their sense of social injustice as a result of the abuse of power by dominant subjects. It is also in relation to this abuse that resistance and responses to discrimination are enacted.

## **Summary**

The majority of the research participants are aware of their positions as immigrants from the Middle East in the racialised hierarchies of Swedish society and the devalued social status of their immigrant identity. According to the research participants, as a result of dominant representations, to be immigrant was perceived to be devalued as a whole human being, problematic, criminal, a burden, a trouble-maker and exploitative. Having an immigrant,

Muslim and a non-white background reinforced their understanding of their non-belonging to the Swedish society. Racists slurs, discriminatory patterns in the labor market, on the street, in school, controlling gazes and consciousness about being a target of racism fuelled their beliefs that they are not accepted as equal members of the Swedish society, whether they had Swedish citizenship or not. Citizenship was not regarded as giving immunity against ethnic discrimination. The experiences of the young Kurdish men and women indicate that it is one thing to have a Swedish citizenship and quite another thing to be a "real" Swede, which was linked to whiteness and essentialist notions of culture, identity and religion.

Given that to be an immigrant is to be positioned as not belonging to Sweden, it was important for the research participant's self-image to have role models with Kurdish backgrounds in Swedish public spaces who could represent the Kurds in a nuanced way beyond stereotypes. Young successful artists, journalists, politicians, authors and stand-up comedians with Kurdish backgrounds were regarded as producing a positive image of Kurdishness among young people with Kurdish backgrounds. These role models were viewed as showing the way and sending signals to Kurdish youth that they could succeed if they work hard enough. This positive visibility of Kurds was also described as positively influencing the interpersonal relationships with dominant Swedish subjects.

Homeland and home were discussed in relation to belonging and many of them reported that they could not claim Sweden as a place that they belonged to even if they wished to. Kurdistan was both considered as the real and the imagined homeland of the Kurds, where some of them have returned or visited for the first time to experience "homecoming" and the feeling of being at home. However, several of them found that Kurdistan did not give them the feeling of homeliness that they lacked in Sweden due to its uncertain status as their homeland. In Kurdish regions, they were not treated as "real" Kurds and were more accepted as Swedes than Kurds. Their claims to places as sites of belonging were contested while there and produced contradictory positionality (neither here nor there, but also both) toward Sweden and Kurdish regions. Discriminatory acts and imperatives like "go back to your homeland" reinforced the idea of Sweden as an exclusive locus of identity for ethnically defined Swedes. Discrimination leads to an ethnicized self-identification when the sense of belonging to the Swedish society is discouraged due to exclusionary practices. The youth respond to and in various ways find accommodation with discrimination. They assert their agency within the social structures by resisting and dealing with ethnic discrimination in the following ways: changing or "Swedifying" (försvenskning) their names; using violence

(limited to the young men); non-violence; interpersonal debates; ignoring discrimination; opposing it through discussion.

This chapter dealt with the experiences of ethnic discrimination and racism in the Swedish society and how the youth framed their resistance and responses to exclusionary practices. In the next chapter, I will examine how gendered racism impinges on the life of young people with Kurdish backgrounds and also explore how Kurdish youth construct internal and external boundaries in defining their Kurdish identities vis-à-vis other collective identities in the Swedish society when it comes to issues of marriage and sexuality and nationalism.



## **Chapter 6**

### **Multiple belongings: Intersection of gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationalism**



## Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore how young Kurdish women and men speak about themselves both as generalized objects of social discourse in Swedish society and as embodied historical subjects with specific experiences that challenge stereotypical notions of Kurdish women and men as homogenous categories. The Orientalist discourse has had a remarkable impact in Swedish society and influences the ways Muslim migrants are treated, debated and otherised in public arenas and in everyday encounters with dominant subjects. The focus of this chapter is to show how dominant social discourse turns Kurds/Muslims/Orientalists into a generalized object and how these discourses influence the everyday life of the young women and men with Kurdish backgrounds in the Swedish society. This chapter not only highlights the various ways Kurdish families are devalued and stigmatized but focuses on argumentative strategies that young Kurdish men and women use to talk back against prevailing and culturally dominant categorizations of Kurdish families, Kurdish girls and Kurdish fathers and brothers. In relation to the discourse of "honor-killing", young Kurdish women and men feel targeted and turned into objects of suspicion, though in differently gendered ways. While young Kurdish men view themselves as stigmatized as "woman-oppressors" and "violent", young Kurdish women are targeted by a hermeneutics of *benevolent* suspicion that is caring and wondering what kind of life they are allowed to conduct within their families. This chapter problematizes the ways violence against women is depicted in Sweden/Western countries when the perpetrator and the victim have a "Third World" background. The discursive division that is constructed between the West and the "Orientals" is based on a dichotomy between a Western individualism/modernity and a despotic Oriental collectivism/traditionalism. Modernity is associated with a sovereign subject position that women with Western backgrounds are assumed to have attained in contrast to Oriental women who are assumed to be trapped in the cage of traditionalism that encircles their subjectivity. In this light, Western fantasies about "liberating" Oriental women from their culture, oppressive families and men are framed in order to facilitate their entrance into modernity.

Other themes that will be addressed are how young people with Kurdish backgrounds subordinate certain groups of Kurds defined as "imports" as undesirable through referring to colonial terminologies like civilisation, modernity, progress and integration. The last part of the chapter deals with how young people with Kurdish backgrounds negotiate, maintain, and transgress the real and imagined boundaries of Kurdish identities in relation to their choice of life-partner and in sexual relations with Kurds and non-Kurds. This part shows how boundaries are constructed, reconstructed and challenged

in a multiethnic society within a nationalist and postcolonial framework that assigns different groups unequal positionalities within a continuum of desirability as potential life-partners.

### **Subordinated femininities and masculinities**

In the previous chapter, it was argued that many young men with immigrant backgrounds were viewed in dominant representations as “criminals” and “troublesome”. In this theme, the research participants talk about the ways gender and ethnicity intersect in producing undesired and stereotypical models of subordinated immigrant masculinities and femininities, as diametrically opposed to allegedly equal Swedish femininities and masculinities. This theme examines the ways young Kurdish women and men articulate themselves in the light of dominant representations and how they assess these representations. Dominant discourses not only shape the way we understand ourselves but also shape the way we understand others. This is evident in the way young Kurdish women understand how young Kurdish men and women are treated in Swedish society: Evin and Kawa formulate this experience in the following way:

**Evin (F: 20):** It is really very easy for me to be a Kurdish girl. As a Kurdish girl you are seen by Swedish society as oppressed by Kurdish society and that makes it easier for you to impress Swedes when you succeed. /.../ They don't expect so much from you as Kurdish girls because Swedes think that we are expected to get married, have some children and become housewives. This is the way they have treated me. They don't think that I go home and study intensively for a test in order to get an A and achieve a high education for my future. As a Kurdish guy, there is so much pressure on them. It is something that can be applied to other immigrant guys too. There are so many prejudices against them and they are often seen as the violators of the law. They are not seen as individuals and they are regarded as women-oppressors who hate women.

The representation of women with Kurdish backgrounds as victims and subordinate, can sometimes, according to Evin, make life easier for her. Because she can be “empowered in the wider society where discourses of ‘rescuing’ vulnerable and oppressed female members of diasporic community run rife” (Virinder, Raminder, & Hutnyk, 2005, p. 52). This “rescuing” discourse with its “missionary” task becomes possible when society identifies and distinguishes between the alleged oppressors (immigrant men) and the victims (immigrant women) within dominant Swedish/European representations (see for instance de los Reyes, 2002; Essed, 1991; Mulinari, 2004, 2007). Evin’s experiences

indicate that women with immigrant backgrounds undergo a belittling process by dominant subjects who according to Evin, do not expect immigrant women to be able to do things that dominant Swedish women can, like determining their future through higher education. This sovereign subject position is assumed to be a property of femininity that belongs to the dominant Swedish society and is in deep contrast to the believed femininity of Evin which is reduced to the realm of marriage, children and the role of housewife.

Consequently, young women with immigrant backgrounds are expected to take gender roles as oppressed, victimized and subordinated, a gendered racism (Essed, 1991) that reinforces the racialized boundary between the dominant femininity and the subordinated femininity of minoritized groups. In contrast to young women with immigrant backgrounds, Evin points out that young men with Kurdish/immigrant backgrounds are given negative and threatening collective attributes like violators of the law and women-oppressor, gender positions that are regarded as undesirable model of masculinity. In relation to these gender positions, men and women belonging to the dominant society can uphold a privileged position to assess and degrade the minoritized cultures and identities and draw exclusionary boundaries between "Us" and "Them". They can also formulate different strategies to deal with men and women with Kurdish/immigrant backgrounds. Dominant society often presents women with immigrant backgrounds as a subordinated group who are in dire need of help while men with immigrant background are in need of surveillance in order to "protect" women from their assaults. The accounts above show that discriminatory practices target young men and women with immigrant background differently when gender and ethnicity intersect.

If women with Muslim background perform a femininity that does not converge with dominant Western notions of heterosexual femininity, then the risk of discrimination is high, particularly if the women veil themselves in a Western context:

**Shilan (F: 19):** I have always wanted to wear a veil. But it is difficult to wear a veil when you apply for a job. I have started thinking about how it influences my life when I apply for a job. They think that we are all terrorists when we wear veils. It may be easier in Sweden if you wear a short skirt than a veil. /.../ There are so many demands upon us in Sweden about how to dress. Sometimes, I feel that it could be easier to be in Kurdistan when it comes to the way I could dress and wear the veil. Many of my friends often ask me why I don't wear a short skirt.

In contrast to Evin's experiences, it is not self-evident in the case of Shilan that she will be "empowered" by the dominant society if she chooses to wear the veil because that performativity of gender identity is often represented as the antithesis of Western gender identity. The veil has come to indicate the oppressed gender identities of immigrant women from non-Western countries who supposedly need Western interventions to be unveiled. Lack of compliance with the heteronormative gender identity in Sweden can imply negative treatment like discrimination for women who choose to wear a veil. Many studies indicate that Muslim women who wear the veil are discriminated against at different levels in Europe, structurally and interpersonally (Afshar, et al., 2006; Goldberg, 2006; Keaton, 2006). As Goldberg (2006) has noted, the presence of the veil within European boundaries is regarded as a threatening cultural symbol that undermines Europe and its Christian basis.

Besides as Shilan argues above, veiling is equated with "terrorism", a cultural practice that is devalued and undesired in dominant discourses. There is no singular way of understanding the function of the veil because it has been used in different ways under different historical contexts. As Shilan indicates, there is pressure from her friendship circle which devalues her way of dressing. Their demands and questions impel her into a stressful situation and causes her to think about the appropriateness of her femininity and looking for other places (Kurdistan) to assign legitimacy for her modes of dressing. When young women do not adhere to the latest fashions, they risk being stigmatized by the dominant discourse that polices the way the female body can be represented. Yegenoglu asserts that "the power exercised upon bodies by veiling is no more cruel or barbaric than the control, supervision, training, and constraining of bodies by other practices, such as bras, stiletto heels, corsets, cosmetics, and so on" (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 116). This stance provided by Yegenoglu suggests that the veiled body is as much marked as the unveiled body, however differently. Yegenoglu notes that:

[T]he presumption of the naturalness of not-to-be-veiled has come to secure the truth of bodies and is used as the universal norm to yield Muslim woman as a knowable and comprehensible entity for the West. In other words, it is the naturalness and truth of the unveiled body which legitimates and endorses colonial feminist sentiments and certitude in the necessity of interventionist action against Muslim women's veiling (Yegenoglu, 1998, p. 115).

Unveiled bodies can not be regarded as a universal and natural norm through which a normative mode of femininity can be constituted. Discrimination and social isolation can become the fate of those who perform other subordinated

forms of femininity than those that are regulated by the dominant notions of sanctioned femininity. In this light, we can understand why veiling is regarded as a rupturing force in Western societies and those women who wear veils risk being targeted by discriminatory practices. But this also shows that it is not easy to perform different femininities as is often argued often by proponents of Western liberalism (e.g. Wikan, 2002) who suggest that the individual should be the author of their own fate and not subjected to structural constraints. However, it is important to acknowledge, that all choices are subjected to different structural, political, economic, religious and cultural constraints. Mainstream Western understanding of veiling is essentialist because it fixes the meaning of the veil as only a marker of gender oppression that should be undone through unveiling, in which the West regards itself as having a key role in its implementation.

### **The stigma of "honor-killing": Kurds in Swedish Eyes**

In this section, the focus will be on how the discourse of "honor-killing", "honor-related" violence and "honor-culture" has effected the life of young Kurdish women and men in Sweden. The murders of Fadime Sahindal and Pela Atrushi, two Swedish citizens with Kurdish backgrounds have become symbols for this discourse. Explanations of the murder of Fadime Sahindal were predominately related to "Kurdish culture", "Islam" and "traditional Kurdish culture versus modern Swedish culture", so were firmly within the realm of the "cultural clashes" discourse. Fadime Sahindal was regarded as a "martyr" who sacrificed her life for the Swedish gender values (e.g. Hirdman, 2002). She was believed in the Swedish mass media to have been murdered because of her wish to become Swedish and leave her "archaic" Kurdish identity. The dichotomization of Swedes and Kurds as two essentially homogenous and different social categories characterized the Swedish public debate conducted by the mass media. However, one should remember that there were counter-discourses to the culturalist explanations of violence against women (Alinia, 2004; Bredström, 2003; de los Reyes, 2003; Grip, 2002; Mulinari, 2004; Reimers, 2007; Strand Runsten, 2006; Towns, 2002). The debate regarding "honor-killing" in Sweden involved many writers, politicians, debaters, feminists and self-appointed experts (both Kurds and non-Kurds) in Kurdish or Middle-Eastern cultures.

"Honor-killing" was primarily considered a "strange" phenomenon and it evoked a moral panic in Sweden and Europe. It was through the social representations of its origins, forms, location, contents, and mechanisms that the Swedish public became acquainted with it. Mulinari (2004) pointed out that the debate around the so called "honor-killing" became structured along well-defined lines. The framing and language of the debates made it clear that

"honor-killing" was assumed to be a cultural property of Kurds, Muslims or Arabs. It was within this discourse and its rule-system that speakers were allowed to offer their views and statements on this phenomenon, and it was through this discourse that people could come to an understanding about "honor-killing" (Mulinari, 2004). From the moment an official discourse about "honor-killing" was established, the practices and interventions were structured within this discourse.

This section examines the various ways this discourse can be experienced by young women and men with Kurdish background in their everyday life. It examines how young people with Kurdish backgrounds problematize the way this discourse is circulating in Swedish society through the mass media and how it affects them when they encounter members of the dominant society. The research participants often expressed frustration and anger against the ways the Kurds were represented but also the ways it affected them in their everyday life. One of the participants underlined the stigmatizing implications of this discourse and how it has created a division between Swedish and Kurdish masculinities:

**Hemin (M: 22):** The first thing I think about regarding images of Kurds in Sweden, is honor-killing, that Kurds kill their daughters. That is the first thing I think about. It has happened to me that Swedes have asked me why Kurds commit such crimes and relate all negative things to the Kurds. Just because an idiot kills his daughter, it does not mean that every Kurd will follow in his footsteps.

Hemin is concerned with the ways violence against women is represented in Swedish society when the perpetrator and/or the victim have another background than Swedish. Swedish men are often assigned collective invisibility in contrast to the strong negative visibility of men with immigrant background when violence against women is debated within dominant narratives and representations. Violence against women is thus ethnicized as strongly limited to minoritized groups. Such ethnicization of violence against women strengthens the moral and political boundaries between the dominant group and the minoritized group. As Hemin indicates, the "honor-killing" discourse has constructed the Kurdish identity negatively and turned the Kurds into questionable characters and objects of suspicion. Kurds are assumed to have insider knowledge "honor-related" violence, which is assumed to be common among Kurds. Hemin criticizes the way "honor-killing" is generalized to the whole Kurdish population and Kurdish culture is abstracted from all other considerations that can be of relevance when a man commits a crime

against a woman. While Hemin criticized the way negative collective attributions were assigned to the Kurds in Sweden, Hana pointed out that "honor-killing" was regarded as a cultural property belonging to Kurds, Middle-Easterners and Muslims:

**Hana (F: 18):** Once, I was going out with some of my Swedish friend to see a movie and one of them asked me if my father was not going to hit me if I go with them. I was shocked and it is very common to get these comments whether I can date a guy because I have a Kurdish background. I tell them that I can date guys and my father accepts that. /.../ In my class at college, when we have discussed honor-killing, certain people blame Islam for honor-killing, others blame Kurdish culture, and some students spoke about Middle Eastern mentality which led to a tendency to kill. I believe that it has to do what kind of family you have and is not something that lies in a Kurdish culture. It felt shocking to be accused of having a culture that kills while I was a Kurd and I did not share these experiences of oppression. But they told me that I was unique.

Hana with her Kurdish background is expected to conform to a dominant discourse that equates Kurdishness with gender oppression. The discourse asserts its hegemonic prevalence through reiterations in social spaces like the cinema or in the classroom, such as Hana refers to. Hana mentions her classroom as a place where Kurds, Muslims and Middle Easterners were depicted as potential explanatory sources of these crimes. In other words, Middle-Eastern cultures are represented as embodying criminal elements. Culture is assumed to be the explanatory force behind gender violence when men with Kurdish or Middle-Eastern backgrounds are involved. This critique raises an important issue that is related to the power of representation.

A Swedish person who commits a crime is normally not regarded as representing a member of a wider group. By contrast, the actions of a person belonging to a minoritized group risk damaging the collective face of a group. In this respect, a Kurdish or a Muslim man is assumed to kill or batter his wife or daughter because he is a Kurd or a Muslim. While a Swedish man is believed to batter or kill his wife because he is a man. This discourse represents Swedes only as *men* constituted outside culture and ethnicity when they act. The Kurds or the Muslims on the other hand are people whose actions and justifications are guided and supposedly rooted in their culture, religion or ethnic belonging. In a contemporary Swedish and wider European context, when violence against women is discussed, gender is often placed in opposition to ethnicity, culture, race, etc. The dominant group is assumed to have a relatively

developed sense of gender awareness and sensitivity, while the minoritized groups are framed as existing within the realm of cultural traditions that allegedly oppress or kill women.

According to Razack (2008) when gender is used to explain the violence or the murder that men belonging to the dominant group commit, the crime or oppressive practices against women are viewed to be products of individualized deviancy and criminality. Consequently, Muslims or Middle-Easterners are viewed "to be stuck in pre-modernity while Westerners have progressed as fully rational subjects with the capacity to choose moral actions, even if the choice is a bad one" (S. H. Razack, 2008, p. 128). Even when Hana provides positive experiences of her family and father, she is regarded as an exception that confirms the rule about Kurdish men and families being oppressive. However, this experience by Hana was one among numerous examples from the young women in this study who stressed that they were viewed as stereotypical caricatures with little power to influence the culturally dominant categorization of Kurds as oppressive men and submissive women.

Many interviewees such as Zara and Nalin blamed the Swedish mass media for fuelling negative images of the Kurds as "honor-killers". Grip (2002) pointed out in her study of how four major Swedish newspapers reported on the discourse of "honor-killing", that the immigrant and the Kurds were portrayed as collective, traditional and oppressive while Swedes were assigned adjectives as modern, free individuals living in conditions of equality. Several studies indicate that the debate about "honor-killing" strengthened the boundary between "us" and "them" (Grip, 2002; Reimers, 2007; Strand Runsten, 2006). According to Zara, the Swedish mass media have denied Kurds their diverse subjectivities and imposed a homogenous Kurdish culture on them, where Kurdish women represented as subject to "honor-related" violence by Kurdish men. Zara brings to mind the power of the mass media and its impact on structuring our thoughts and beliefs about the world and transmitting stereotypical images about a group to the wider population. She also acknowledges that the discourse is so powerful that responding and rejecting these images through her own experience as a Kurdish girl do not seem to help because she is already judged before she responds.

According to several research participants Kurdish women have become objects of fixation and fascination due to the interrogating aspects of this discourse. Nalin points out the way that the "honor-killing" discourse engenders a defensive Kurdish identity:

**Nalin (F: 20):** Every time, I read a newspaper, I get the feeling that Kurds kill their children because of their Kurdishness. Every time, we had a discussion in school, people were around me and asking "I want to speak to you, do you have any brother who wants to kill you? No, my father and brother are no murderers. It is like accusing all Swedes of being alcoholics. They put you in a situation that you want to defend at any cost and explain that Kurds are not like this and that, and that this is not our culture or religion. It was the mistake of the mass media and some Kurds who were there and said that "we" do this.

Nalin asserts that this negative and stigmatizing image of the Kurds makes her defend the Kurdish identity at any cost because she is regarded as a possible victim of "honor-related" violence through all the questions she receives about her relationship with her family. Her understanding of this discourse is that Kurdish identity or culture embodies many ascribed negative attributes where Kurdishness becomes equated with gender violence in particular and gender oppression in general. The mass media is once again criticised by research participants for its stereotypical representations of the Kurds as a collectivity of "honor-killers". In the case of Nalin, it is important to note the vital role of the mass media in constituting identities and assigning various collective attributes. She also directs criticism towards those Kurds who represent "honor-killing" as a Kurdish property when they speak in the name of a "we" and fuel the stereotypes and inscribe the Kurds within the dominant representations. In other words, when people with Kurdish backgrounds or Middle-Eastern backgrounds are invited to speak, they are often expected to assert their otherness when they are present and to legitimize the dominance of the dominant subjects. Even if the discourse claims to be about the "others", it tells more about "us" and our "superiority" as dominant subjects than those subjects who are perceived as oppressed (cf. de Leeuw & van Wichelen, 2005). The confirmation by the other of "our" superiority is essential to this discourse, because it confirms the deficiency of the other. Several interviewees such as Nalin pointed out that Kurdish fathers and brothers are *a priori* equated with gendered violence, while young women with Kurdish backgrounds are ascribed a victim position. The hermeneutics of suspicion that is informed by the discourse of "honor-killing" legitimizes scrutiny of the lives of Kurdish subjects justified by the need to prevent gendered violence and oppression.

This benevolent hermeneutics of suspicion was widely experienced by the young women interviewed. It is not only the mass media that was structurally involved in portraying Kurds stereotypically and stigmatizing them. In the following example it is a school teacher who young women and their relationship with their fathers:

**Kani (F: 20):** After the murder of Fadime, we were supposed to go on a class trip and my teacher asked me: Are you sure that you want to go with us? Are you sure that your father will not get mad with you?" I find it very strange that they think that all Kurds are like that. It is rubbish. I feel sorry about my family because they are very open. My parents have also heard these stories and they find it so annoying that people think like that about them.

The case of Kani shows how a benevolent question by her teacher strengthens the structural aspect of the stigma. Both she as an individual and the diversity of Kurdish experience in general are reduced a stereotypical caricature. According to Hiwa, the discourse about "honor-killing" has damaged the Kurdish population and their "statelessness" is strongly related to this negative image. Additionally, he explains how this suspicion engenders a defensive Kurdish identity. In contrast to the young women interviewed, young Kurdish men were understood as oppressive against their sisters.

**Hiwa (M: 25):** I know that the debate around honor-killing has influenced the Kurds negatively. I have discussed this issue with many friends and people I don't know. They ask me: "how do you see that? Are you like that?" This image of the Kurds builds a form of suspiciousness against us. That made many Kurds to stand up and say that we are not like this and that. /.../ You become obliged to take part in the discussion and protect Kurds. There is violence against women but that is not only something exclusive to Kurds in society.

This image has created, according to Hiwa a climate of suspicion toward Kurds in Sweden. What Hiwa asserts as problematic is when the labelling "honor", "culture" and "Kurds" become all interweaved and presented to the Swedish public simultaneously to make a sense of this problematic. This representation of the so called "honor-related" violence make the Kurds prove that he or she is innocent or that he/she does not belong to those people or families who have committed such a crime.

Several of the young women noted that their presence in public spaces was often regarded with suspicion by dominant subjects who evoked a discourse of oppressive Kurdish fathers waiting somewhere to hurt or kill their daughters. Leyla refers to the way she is interrogated about the way her family treats her:

**Leyla (F: 19):** Several times in town people have come to me and asked me if I have the same situation as Fadime at home. I told them that I did not have the same situation and then they say: "that is so good that your father is not like that".

Fadime Sahindal's experience has led to a culturally dominant categorization of Kurdish women as victims of "honor-killing". They are viewed as constantly vulnerable within their own families. In the case of Ala, she was looked upon in a compassionate way after the death of Fadime:

**Ala (F: 17):** After the death of Fadime, I did not dare to go out because of those compassionate gazes that I got. You could easily read in their eyes: "oh poor girl, you must have a tough time with your family". I just wanted to batter them in the face and tell them. "Hey you, we do all not have the same situation".

Ala avoided public spaces after the murder of Fadime because of the benevolent gazes from some Swedes through which they expressed what they thought was their understanding about the difficulty Ala was experiencing in her family. Her frustration at this led Ala to absent herself from public space, a strategy to avoid discrimination and escape stigmatization. The discourse has thus succeeded in marking and stigmatizing certain bodies and rendering them in need of support and "empowerment" by the dominant subjects. This discursive field of negativity as a result of the "honor-killing" discourse has concrete social implications for young Kurdish women's social relationship with the dominant society. Sara was asked several times by friends whether her father allowed her to go out and have fun with her friends. She pointed out that "young Swedish men do not dare to approach Kurdish girls because they think that Kurdish girls are so oppressed that nobody can speak to them". Such narratives were not exceptional and show that a social distance has been created between the dominant subjects and young women with Kurdish backgrounds due to the discourse of "honor-killing".

This benevolent, protective attitude toward young Kurdish women was not limited to people within their circle of friends, but also included unwelcome attentions from unknown people belonging to the dominant Swedish society. Sara and Awa provide two examples:

**Sara (F: 17):** I was once at a supermarket with my sister and father. While my father was looking for some things to buy, an old Swedish man came to me and my sister and told us: "You know that I can help you if your father threatens you". I told the old man that he was an idiot and has not the right to speak about my father like that. My father has never threatened me. They think that my father decides everything.

Some of the young women said that their presence in public spaces was perceived as problematic and dangerous by Swedes:

**Awa (F: 22):** When I was on a boat trip with two of my Kurdish girlfriends there were three Swedish guys there. They were very athletic with big muscles. We told them that we were Kurds. One of them said: "Soon we will have an honor-killing here and your fathers are surely waiting for you". These guys started asking: "What are you doing here? Can you be here? Should you be here?"

The accounts by Sara and Awa indicate the omnipresent nature of the "honor-killing" discourse. Their fathers are viewed as violent and the Kurdish women as endangered and assumed to be in need of protection and interventions from dominant subjects. This is a position that the young Kurdish women reject completely but is nevertheless present in their lives. Further, Sara and Awa's experiences show how two different kinds of masculinity are constructed. The Kurdish masculinity is portrayed as violent, oppressive and murderous while the dominant Swedish masculinity is regarded as protective, caring and benevolent. Swedish masculinity stands prepared to "help" minoritized women who are alleged to be in need of protection by the dominant society. Following Mulinari (2007) we can note that the more that young Kurdish women are portrayed as "different" and "deviant" in dominant representations, the more they are exposed to a "rescue operation" by dominant subjects. In contrast to these dominant representations, the research participants presented themselves as a diverse and heterogeneous category of people who took a variety of subject positions and challenged essentialist notions of Kurdish masculinities and families as sites of oppression and inequality.

The young women pointed out that they do not share the same experiences as Fadime Sahindal and Pela Atrushi and described their mothers and fathers as supportive. While Zara pointed out that Swedes are surprised when she tells them that it is her father who encourages her to continue studying and to secure her future through education, Ala was told by her father not to get married before finishing her education so she did not need to be dependent on her future husband. For Hana, it was important to undo the idea that Kurdish families are like "prisons" for young Kurdish women. In the same vein, Kani spoke about a harmonious relationship with her brother who had also helped her to find a job and with whom she usually goes out and has fun.

When it came to the young men, it was important for them to challenge the idea that they wanted to oppress women or their sisters. Goran argued that he hated male dominance because he was brought up in family where he and his sister were regarded as equal. Soran told a similar story about his sister who has a Swedish boyfriend and noted ironically that she is alive and nobody is threatening to kill her. Alan stressed that "I have a little sister and my family is

very liberal and I really hope that my sister does not feel that she will be oppressed when she grows up because she is Kurdish". These experiences were cited to resist the pathologization of their families in order to challenge the otherness of Muslim immigrants and their families as tribal and incompatible with modern European family structures, which are putatively based on freedom, individuality and democratic relationships between parents and their children (Friedman & Ekholm Friedman, 2006; Hedström, 2004; Kurkiala, 2003; Schlytter, 2004; Schlytter & Linell, 2009; Wikan, 2003).

In the above accounts Kurdish men and brothers as unitary subjects are deconstructed and detached from collective attributes such as being authoritarian and women-oppressors. Both young men and women attempted to subvert and deconstruct ideas about Kurdish fathers and brothers as oppressive by illustrating with examples from their own and others' lived experiences that Kurdish girls do enjoy freedom within their families and have harmonious relationships with their parents and brothers. Furthermore, these counter-discourses undermine the social silencing of the existence of diverse Kurdish experiences and gender relations within the Kurdish community. These experiences are also efforts to fill in the gap within the realm of the distorted or partial representations of Kurdish or Middle Eastern masculinities through providing unheard, ignored or/and silenced voices of young Kurdish women.

This section has examined the various ways that the young Kurdish women and men were turned into objects of suspicion in a specifically gendered way. Besides, it showed that young women and men undid and challenged the discourse of "honor-killing" which turned them into a suspicious and questionable social category, where young women are regarded as having a vulnerable life situation due to the alleged danger their fathers and brothers expose them to. The next section examines how young Kurdish women formulate different strategies and modes of resistance to deal with the discourse of "honor-killing".

### **Responding to racist representations**

The previous section focused on the way young Kurdish women and men experienced the effect of the "honor-killing" discourse in their everyday life that reduced their subjectivities to a binary position as victims or oppressors. The research participants also asserted that Fadime Sahindal's fate has come to stand for young Kurdish women as a homogenous collectivity suffering "honor-related" violence. In the following section, young women with Kurdish

backgrounds respond to these distorted representations and deconstruct this Kurdish identity charged with negative attributes. The strategies they use involve undoing the binary of "Swedishness" and "Kurdishness", using silence as a practice of resistance, hiding Kurdish identity in order to escape stigmatization, evoking a discourse of ordinariness and asking for public spaces that give a nuanced image of women with Kurdish backgrounds. In this respect, Hana argues that violence against women is not a uniquely Kurdish or an immigrant phenomenon, but that it happens in Swedish families too:

**Hana (F: 18):** Violence against women can also occur in a Swedish family. When I am with my Swedish friends, I tell them many times that this phenomenon is not an immigrant phenomenon because it can also occur in a Swedish family. There are many Swedes who commit crimes against women. I have female Swedish friends who can not date guys who are immigrants or Muslims.

Hana talks back to the dominant cultural categorization through referring to violence against women as a universal phenomenon not limited to a certain ethnicity or racialized groups such as immigrants or Kurds. Hana evokes experiences from her friendship circle where Swedish girls are not allowed or are discouraged by their families from dating immigrant or Muslim men in order to show that everything is not so harmonious and free from conflict in Swedish families. The actual situations of Swedish girls are, in Hana's account, often similar to the situations that young women with immigrant backgrounds are alleged to face. Hence, Hana undoes this binary position and provides a discourse where violence, oppression and constraints do not need to be the exclusive province of racialized groups but also prevail in the gender relations among dominant subjects.

Responding to or contradicting this binarism does not always involve speech as a mode of resistance. Resistance can also be expressed through silence. When the discourse of "honor-killing" was so powerful in the classroom, Shilan used her silence and to disrupt its repetition:

**Shilan (F: 19):** It was like living in a nightmare in my class when Fadime was murdered. It was always such a pity about these Kurdish girls. My teacher came almost everyday and took with him newspapers and discussed them. He spoke a lot of rubbish about Kurds. The teacher enters the room and says: "Guess what we got in the newspaper today?" Everybody answer in the classroom: "honor-killing". I did not dare to do anything against it because I was the only immigrant girl in the class. Keeping silent was the best strategy. It was so annoying to see images of Fadime

everywhere. I am sure that all Kurds were ashamed of their identity.

Asking the students in the classroom about what could be the dominating news was understood by Shilan as a personal attack on her, because she was the only girl with a Kurdish and immigrant background in her class. She admits that this image made her feel ashamed of her Kurdish identity. She chose not to speak but to keep silent in the classroom due to the presence of a hegemonic discourse and conversations that pointed out the Kurds and her as a problematic group. Her refusal to participate in the discourse was a strategy to avoid consolidating stereotypical notions of Kurdishness. If she had spoken, she might have been obliged to speak in the name of the many "others" as their "authentic" voice, because when minoritized subjects appear in public spaces, they will often be impelled to manage the burden of the representations of their group and assert their specialness and difference from dominant subjects, which in turn confirms the binarisms that the discourse intends to achieve.

Shilan's refusal to speak is a rupture in the reproduction of the binaries between dominant subjects and minoritized groups. In this regard, Dhawan (2007) argues that while speech can reflect the presence of power and violence, silence can function as strategy of resistance and non-violence. Thus, silence becomes a practice of confrontation, a counter-discourse. Silence can contribute to variation and a rupture in the recurrence of a certain discourse. Dhawan (2007) asserts that people can be silenced and made invisible but people can also refuse to participate in discourses for strategic reasons. Since dominant discourses often need counter-discourses in order to repeat themselves and strengthen their hegemonic position, silence can also challenge the "monologue" of the dominating discourse and make the emergence of the invisible and the unsaid possible (Dhawan, 2007). Listening, here, is seen as a subversive activity in the case of Shilan because her position as one of the putative "honor-related" victims challenges the authority of the discourse but does not provide experiences from within the Kurdish group to legitimize its order.

Awa maintains that the discourse about "honor-killing" has obliged many young Kurdish girls to hide their Kurdish identities in their social relations:

**Awa (F: 22):** Do you understand how difficult it is to be a Kurdish girl? Certain Kurdish girls have learned to hide their Kurdish identity. They lie about their identity and do want to avoid discussions. They [people with Swedish backgrounds] think that the father is waiting in some corner with his gun and that honor-

killing is everywhere. Then, they feel such pity for you and I hate it when they feel sorry for me. I don't want to be a poor girl.

Awa argues that presenting yourself as a Kurdish girl obliges you to participate in the discourse and this is one of the main reasons why some Kurdish girls in her circle of friends avoid disclosing their Kurdish background due to the fear of victimization. Kurdishness becomes a devalued identity loaded with negative attributes and stereotypes. Awa rejects the compassionate approach of certain Swedish people who view her as a poor Kurdish girl, because it objectifies her and turns her into a victim, a position that she rejects. Hiding one's Kurdish identity has a gendered dimension. It is a strategy that is mostly limited to the young Kurdish women. Once again then, we see how young Kurdish women become objects of pity and are systemically belittled in their social relationship with the dominant society.

In order to challenge this totalizing discourse, Lara provides a discourse of her ordinariness as a Kurdish girl to her classmates and teacher to encounter the negative collective attributes that are assigned to her Kurdish identity:

**Lara (F: 18):** I think that the murder of Fadime is the reason that the Swedes have so many prejudices against us. Swedes think that Kurdish girls are just sitting at home and they can not do anything. But we also go to school, train, go out and drink coffee with our friends. Fadime was a Kurd and we discussed her situation in the classroom. I can tell you that it was not so nice to be Kurdish and hear that. So I did a school project about that and told them that this does not need to be the case for every Kurdish girl. I did that school project because there were so many Swedish girls who asked me: why do you Kurdish girls have such a situation? Everything they asked was negative.

Lara does not problematize the power resources of the dominant discourses that have ascribed negative collective attributes to young Kurdish men and women. She blames the "murder of Fadime" as the main reason for the prejudices of the dominant Swedish society. However, she chose to write an essay and present it to her class and teacher in order to provide an alternative cultural image of the Kurds. She deconstructs the Kurdish identity and shows the possibility of the emergence of different positionalities within the same identity. She refers to social activities of Kurdish girls she knows, such as going to school, training, going out and drinking coffee with friends. This alternative cultural image of ordinariness is directed toward a discourse that asserts that Kurdish girls are only sitting at home and doing nothing. The social activities that Lara referred to are what Juhila (2004, p. 271) calls "the rhetoric of the

ordinary or identity politics". These are employed in order to challenge the ascribed characteristics and behavior that the mainstream population may hold about her as a young Kurdish woman.

Selma argues that not all Swedes have a negative image of the Kurds but she thinks that there should be a possibility to discuss violence and oppression against women within the Kurdish community without resorting to a stereotypical portrayal:

**Selma (F: 19):** I don't feel oppressed as a Kurdish girl and I would never let that happen to me. The mass media image of Kurds and immigrant girls is an image that I have not experienced in my daily life. On the other hand, one can not say that there is not oppression against women. Every Kurdish family does not have a uniform line of action. It is so wrong when the mass media depicts it so stereotypically. This makes many Kurds so furious at Swedish society even if we have oppression of women in our Kurdish society. It is better to recognize that there are problems against women among Kurds but I understand that they feel targeted by the mass media's image. For instance, my father was irritated because he felt targeted despite the fact that he has absolutely not brought us up in the oppressive way that the mass media says characterizes immigrants and Kurds. If he is not targeted personally, he becomes targeted indirectly because he is also Kurdish. He says that he does not want to be branded in this way. The Kurdish reaction is natural. Imagine if the mass media went out and said that all Swedes batter their women.

Selma rejects her position as an oppressed woman with a Kurdish background and would not allow such a position, a statement that counter-acts the image of Kurdish, immigrant or "Third World" women as passive, and without the agency to stand up for their rights. Although she acknowledges that there is oppression against women within Kurdish society, she challenges the stereotypical mass media reporting about Kurds. But this does not mean for her that we should avoid any debates that address the question of problems that Kurdish women are or may be experiencing. This is a position that provides both space for a nuanced, caricature-free portrayal of the Kurdish community and in that context is willing to debate the nature and extent of oppressive experiences within the Kurdish community. Further, Selma's reference to her father shows that the discourse of "honor-killing" is a totalizing discourse that suppresses the diversity and enhances racist stereotypes of minoritized groups.

In this section I have explored the various ways young Kurdish women articulated their strategies to respond to and deal with the devaluing effect of

the "honor-killing" discourse. The young women rejected binary oppositions between "Swedes" and "Kurds" as two mutually exclusive categories, where Swedishness is equated with freedom for women and Kurdishness as a site of oppressive and restricting structures for women. They also pointed out that silence can also be a way to deal with the powerful group because it implies a variation in their "monologue" about the lives of minoritized groups. Denying one's Kurdishness in public spaces was also a strategy to deal with the victimization that young women were exposed to. Representing oneself to the dominant group as an ordinary Kurdish girl was also viewed as an important strategy to nuance the stereotypical images of the Kurdish community. In the next theme, Kurdishness will be deconstructed and reconstructed when the young Kurdish men and women draw internal boundaries between "desired" and "undesired" Kurds. This boundary drawing is also related to external pressures and imposed characteristics of the Kurds and immigrants as pre-modern and "backward".

### **The "imports" and internal otherisation among young Kurds**

If earlier parts of this study have dealt with the various ways young Kurdish men and women have been *externally* otherised, subordinated and differentiated from other collective identities and the ways they have responded to these dominant categorizations, this theme will deal with the ways Kurdish youth construct internal otherisation and boundaries between "integrated" and "unintegrated" young Kurdish men in Sweden. During my interviews with the respondents, the word "import" was often used and followed by laughter as a way to classify and solidify a gendered notion of undesired ethnic Kurdishness that was represented by and identified through certain Kurdish men and women who had recently immigrated to Sweden and had a distinct mode of aesthetic, appearance and behavior, diametrical to those who were regarded as integrated Kurdish youth.

It is worth mentioning that the Kurdish youth in earlier chapters were assertive when they spoke about the pride and stigma they felt toward their Kurdish identity and the trials that Kurdish people had undergone in different historical periods of oppression and struggle. In the Swedish context, the young men and women tended to deconstruct essentialist ideas about their experiences as immigrants that they thought were loaded with many negative attributes that implied negative consequences for their social life. The "imports" were portrayed as "backward" Kurds who had not been touched by civilisation, modernity and progressive ideas. Sweden was equated with modernity and progressive ideas about life-styles and most of the respondents identified themselves with Sweden in this respect.

The "imports" are constructed, subordinated, talked to and rejected as "unrespectable/undesired" romantic and marriage partners. When Kani thinks of "imports", she thinks of certain bodies, certain masculinities, and certain language usage that can be found in some places in Göteborg:

**Kani (F: 20):** Imports are those new Kurdish guys in Sweden who are standing in the big shopping centres in Göteborg. They just stand there and speak with girls. They have tight jeans, white shirts, very tight clothes. They pluck their eyebrows too much. Their hair is full of hair jelly. They usually comment on the bodies of the girls in Kurdish like "oh, you have lovely legs". They are not my type. I usually make jokes about them and if some of my friends behave in a weird way, I usually call them import.

For Ala, the "imports" are not only aesthetically "ugly" but they represent a group who are not able to integrate into the Swedish society:

**Ala (F: 17):** Those Kurdish guys with white shoes, *dihati/gondi* (country bumpkins), tight jeans, disgusting perfume, ugly hair style. It happens that they approach me and I just want to vomit. I tell them to go and get a life. /.../ The imports think that the Kurds who are integrated in the Swedish society have lost their Kurdish identity. I tell them in Kurdish that they should go and learn Swedish, and learn how to dress themselves and behave like normal people. /.../ I really don't like these guys.

"Imports" are represented by Awa as exhibiting a certain kind of Kurdishness that has not seen so much of the world and tends to exploit girls:

**Awa (F: 22):** Imported Kurds are those Kurds who have recently come to Sweden from Kurdistan. They have not seen anything before and as soon as they get the chance with a girl, they try to take advantage of you in every way. If I say no to them, they will go around and tell their friends that they have fucked me. "I have done this and done that to her". /.../ They usually have a white or flowery shirt, tight jeans and white leather shoes. As soon I see them, I laugh or smile. I am a nice person and as soon as they say hello to you and you give them some air, they go and boast about knowing me.

For Shilan, the "imports" need to transform in order to be accepted by her as marriage partners:

**Shilan (F: 19):** I can not marry an import, if he does not start studying at university and changing style and behavior. They

behave like little kids and they want to show that they are popular. But they all work as pizza bakers. I think that they believe that we don't want to be Kurdish but that is not true. I just don't want to be the sort of Kurd who is like them.

It is interesting to contrast this attitude and classification with the ways the research participants experienced their return to Kurdistan where they were not seen as "authentic" Kurds and understood more as *foreign* Kurds who were culturally "disoriented" or "misplaced". In the Swedish context, these young people with Kurdish backgrounds position themselves as different with claims and attributes that produce the Kurdishness in Sweden as more desirable and modern than that in Kurdistan because the Kurds in Sweden are thought to be embedded in a modern Western state like Sweden with modern cultural values. In other words, the young people with Kurdish backgrounds claim nearness to Swedishness and reject certain types of Kurdishness represented by the attitude, behavior and dress style of the Kurdish "imports" who are assumed to be trapped in pre-modernity. Thus, they reproduce and use the very same hierarchies of modernity that mark them in Sweden as "others" The Swedish context becomes a sphere where putative authentic and traditional Kurdish youth encounter putative modern and civilized Kurdish youth. These classifications that occur through the encounters of these two putative categories are closely related to the beliefs about how far and near the Kurdish subjects are socially positioned toward the Swedish society but it is also about positioning oneself within a continuum of desirability. The "imports" in this study represent a putative category that emerges through the narrative accounts of the respondents who don't consider themselves as "imports".

The problem of representation is central to this section because the talk about the putative "imports" is negative. However I contend that this talk is important to the young men and women's own identity construction and the way they position themselves. The putative category of imports is ascribed mainly to certain young men representing an undesirable sexualized and patriarchal Kurdish masculinity, but at the same these "imports" are described as plucking their eyebrows and having tight cloths; activities and attributes that are traditionally associated with femininity. They perform the wrong kind of masculinity according to the young Kurdish women who describe them and reject them as undesirable partners. As we see, patriarchal masculinity and femininity are both inscribed on their bodies when they are identified and categorized. The question of class becomes obvious where Shilan advised them to leave the "pizza-baker" status for "university studies" in order to become desirable partners. Learning the Swedish language is another marker for the social mobility that the young Kurdish women advise them to attain in order to

become equal co-ethnics. Class, gender, (hetero)sexuality and ethnicity intersect in the construction and subordination of this putative category, the "imports".

Awareness of a racialized and stigmatized Kurdish identity in Sweden can explain the emergence of these derogatory slurs that Kurdish youth and other racialised groups use to draw social boundaries and stress their differences and similarities as well as to position themselves as "Swedes" and "assimilated/integrated". Further, this implies distancing themselves from other "undesired" and "unintegrated" people with immigrant backgrounds who have a different way of dressing, behaving and speaking Swedish (often "broken"). There is a feeling of obligation from these young people with Kurdish backgrounds to escape labels and culturally dominant categorizations like imports or dark slimy immigrants and perform alternative identities through their speech, behaviour and dress. For instance, Johan pointed out that the "imports" are like "animals" and "barbarians" that have supposedly destroyed the "market" for them ("integrated" young Kurds and immigrants) when it comes to dating and meeting Swedish girls because of the way they act (pawing and sexist comments) in nightclubs, strengthening the already existing stereotypical representations of young people with immigrant backgrounds. Therefore, Johan avoids mixing with young people with immigrant backgrounds when he goes out because he thinks that his "immigrant appearance" signals a positive visibility. If he is the only person with an immigrant background among his Swedish friends, it improves his chances of getting in touch with Swedish girls as the "exotic other". This was a stance that was put forward by several of the young men who reported feeling ashamed for their "culture" every time they saw "imports" behaving like "country bumpkins" in public spheres (both Swedish and Kurdish parties), because their actions would reflect badly on "all Kurds", as Zanyar put it. However, the collective attributes that the "imports" are ascribed do not need to be permanent. Border crossing is possible and advocated by the respondents. Many of the respondents pointed out that in order to leave the "import" status one needed to change one's behavior and dress style as well as improving one's command of Swedish.

Consequently, the "import" identity is something beyond essentialist notions about different types of Kurdishness. It is a diasporic invention that tends to re-define Kurdishness in other terms with regards to class, behavior, aesthetics and the degree of nearness to mainstream society. It is important to note that this discourse about "imports" indicates that we are all part of a postcolonial condition. The research participants reproduce modern/tradition dichotomies, as a way to position themselves as higher and better than the "imports". It is also an evolutionary discourse since it is possible and desired that people cross

the boundaries of "traditional" identities and adopt a "modern" identity. The question of boundary drawings will also be the topic of the next section, in which young Kurdish men and women negotiate the issues of marriage and sexuality across different ethnic boundaries.

### **Marriage strategies, political boundaries and racism**

The question of boundary is central and constitutive to all identities. The boundary is one of the central issues in conceptualization of diaspora identities through practicing endogamy and avoiding assimilation into mainstream society (Brubaker, 2005; Cohen, 2008; Deniz, 1999; Tölöyan, 1991). This section will deal with the different ways Kurdish youth negotiate the boundaries of their Kurdish identity with regards to sexuality and marriage in Sweden. The section concerns the various ways young Kurdish women and men maintain, strengthen, challenge and cross ethno-sexual frontiers (Nagel, 2003). As we will see below, different discourses will be evoked when different potential life-partners belonging to different ethnic groups are discussed, accepted or rejected. Several of the respondents regarded homogamy or endogamy as self-evident. When they spoke about individuals they wanted to marry they expected to choose someone on the basis of similar social characteristics like education (class), and ethnicity, which are common ways of choosing a life-partner in our whether in Kurdistan or in Sweden. However, I believe that migration and the social context can transform the pattern of marriage and selection of partner that prevailed prior to migration.

One of the main groups named by both the young women and the men as a significant social category when they draw the ethno-sexual frontiers was blacks and Africans. Josef describes how he rejects black girls as marriage partners but accepts them as sexual partners:

**Josef (M: 21):** Yesterday I dated an African girl and we had dinner and went to cinema. But I would not appreciate it if I saw Kurdish girls with black guys. /.../ I can not marry a black girl because it is not socially accepted by my parents. Most Muslims have a negative image of Africans and black people. I would not feel the same away if they dated Swedish guys.

Shilan was shocked when black people and Africans were discussed as marriage partners. And she described how having "mulatto" kids would be degrading to her identity. For Awa, it was inconceivable to think of black people as marriage partners:

**Shilan (F: 19):** Oh my god, I would never be able to marry a black or an African guy. I'd rather marry an Arab than an African. It is impossible because I don't want mulatto kids. I would rather marry a blond guy than a black guy because we don't have anything in common.

**Awa (F: 22):** I cannot imagine a marriage with a Somali or a black guy. I have not even thought about them in such a way.

According to Johan, white Swedes regard "wogs" from the Middle-East as more desirable than black people. And in rejecting them as marriage partners for himself and his sister, he positions himself as similar to white Swedes:

**Johan (M: 21):** I can never marry a negro. To be a negro for me is to be of less value than a wog [*svartskalle*]. I have spoken to many Swedes about their daughters and black guys. They usually say that if their daughters come home with a guy who is a wog. They will be irritated but if the guy is black, it is not incomprehensible.

The discourse of whiteness was present in several of the narrative accounts of the respondents. Before moving to the ways Kurdish youth perceive black people and Africans, I will relate the discussion to myself and my own experiences of the discourse of whiteness within the Kurdish community and the aversion and the devalued status that phenotypic darkness or blackness of *skin* entail in the Kurdish community.

Before moving to Sweden, I thought of myself as a white person because that was the label I was assigned by my social surroundings. Even if Africans and black people were not present among the people I lived with, they had a symbolic absent presence to define the metaphorical aspects of whiteness and blackness. My mother urged me many times not to go out in the sun in order to avoid becoming dark and she even used soap to wash the sunburn that I had in order to uphold the visibility of my whiteness. Whiteness was thus a metonymic sign of being pure and beautiful. Darkness was a negative attribute that I thought that I should avoid. I realized and I felt the power and privileges of being assigned a white identity and position in the Kurdish context because of the positive way I was treated by people. There was a widespread idea in my community that Kurds, Persians and Germans belonged to the same race, the Aryan race. This became explicit during an event that is indelibly inscribed in my memory. I was 12 years old in 1990 while watching the final soccer game of the World Cup in Italy between Argentina and West Germany. I really wanted Argentina to win that game due to my admiration of the great Argentinean soccer player Diego Armando Maradona but I was told by my relatives and

other Kurds that we should support Germany because we were both Aryans and Indo-Europeans, an idea that I really disliked but accepted as true at that time. Moving to Sweden implied moving from a white identity to a racialised "wog" identity. It meant becoming non-white. The historical context and the prominent place of Sweden in the imaginary geography of European and Western whiteness excluded and downgraded my ascribed and lived white status to an ascribed and lived "wog" identity.

The research participants are well aware that they have a racialised and a subordinated status in Sweden. Being a so called wog in Sweden already denotes the idea of blackness (e.g. hair and skin color) as a marker of not belonging to the Swedish society. The notion of whiteness as a desirable component of identity still exists in the Middle East and Kurdistan. This is evidenced in the responses of the research participants who ascribed whiteness positive attributes and rejected blackness as a devalued signifier of identity. For instance, Josef illustrates his aversion toward black people through referring to a wider geography in order to understand the racist attitude toward black people. He admits his ethno-sexual adventure through which he undertakes "expeditions" across different ethnic boundaries in order to experience "recreational, casual, or "exotic" sexual encounters" (Nagel, 2003, p. 14). However, he also acknowledged that after his sexual encounter with the black girl, he will return back to the Kurdish community. On the other hand, he expresses his aversion to Kurdish girls transgressing the ethno-sexual frontiers with black guys. I will come back to these double standards later on with regards to sexuality and nationalism. The respondents referred mainly to Africans coming from Sub-Saharan Africa and not Northern Africa. Soran suggested that Swedes show more acceptance toward people from the Middle East than to people from Africa because they feel so remote for Swedes. He argued that black Africans were the most discriminated against group in Sweden. The question of the remoteness of Africa is an indirect assertion of the nearness of Kurds to Sweden, a discourse that paves the way for discrimination and valorisation of different collective identities. On the other hand, Hemin stressed how much he hated blacks and Africans and even asserted that black people are more racist than white people, (the latter being the category to which he supposedly belonged). Besides, he argued that compared to a Swede, he is a "wog" but to an African he is a white person. This stance was also shared by John who claimed more nearness to Swedish identity than to a black African one.

As we see, the respondents used a grade of racial hierarchy where Swedes are graded highest and black people are at the bottom of this racial hierarchy. In all the narratives above, the family, the ethnic community, the Middle East, and

the Swedish society are brought in to explain why black people and Africans are assigned the most rejected position “within the realm of possibilities” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 417) of marriage partners but also the ways they are otherised and given the position of the absolute other. It is regarded as a form of anomaly to even think about them as potential life partners. Several of the young men and women pointed out that they did not mind being good friends with black people but did not see them as potential life-partners.

The perspective and the colonial/postcolonial subjectivity that myself and the informants in this study reproduce is rooted in the Western colonial ideology that still haunts us and permeates our world however unevenly and differently. Here whiteness is privileged and powerful in structuring our subjectivities. It produces dominant hierarchies of superiority/ inferiority and structures of domination/subordination, where different putative races are placed unequally in power relations (see Treacher, 2005, p. 51). In other words, the discourse of whiteness has structured the pattern of identifications among young Kurds who attempt to represent Kurdishness as an identity closer to the white, which in the context of this discourse is assumed to be the more human identity.

Yet, this view of black people and sub-Saharan Africans as undesirable was not shared by all the informants. For example, in contrast to the racist stances, both Selma and Nalin pointed out that their parents would not mind if they married a black person as long as they were happy. In the case of Selma, a black person or a Latin American was a more desirable life-partner than a Turk or an Arab, because they were regarded as political enemies. Nalin also referred to her sister who did not want to marry Africans but African Americans because they were less dark than people from Africa and more handsome. This again indicated a continuum of desirability that assigned different black subjects different positionalities as desired or undesired. African Americans are culturally more visible in the global culture productions which make them more attractive and desirable than people from Africa who are mostly represented in a discursive field associated with negativity through AIDS, poverty, war, etc (see Tesfahuney, 1998).

If black people are rejected by several of the research participants due to the use of a discourse of whiteness, the interviewees related to white Swedes in term of ambiguity. An assumed or real cultural incompatibility was described as the main reason why they might avoid marriage with Swedes, but also why they prefer marriage with Kurds in Sweden and not in Kurdistan. However, there are also voices that described the possibility of crossing ethnic boundaries between white Swedes and Kurds. Soran points out that he and his sister have

Swedish partners. At the same time he notes that some Swedes and Kurds are skeptical toward the endurance of such relationships:

**Soran (M: 19):** My sister has a boyfriend who is Swedish and my parents respect her choice. My girlfriend is Swedish and my parents do not mind that and they like her a lot. I think that many Swedes and Kurds hold a false image of us because they think that I am with this girl for a short time and later on, I will go back to Kurdistan and marry a Kurdish girl there. I love my girlfriend and as long as I love her, I will be with her. /.../ My parents would definitely like me to marry a Kurdish girl but they will accept my choice if I marry a non-Kurdish girl.

Zanyar refers to other Kurds whose marriage with Swedish women have not endured, in order to justify why he intends to choose a Kurdish life-partner:

**Zanyar (M: 17):** She must be Kurdish. It is just like that. I know five Kurdish guys who married Swedish girls and none of them succeeded in their relationship. They can not agree on everything and they get tired of each other. If you marry a Kurdish girl, the relationship between the guy and the girl becomes serious and they do not take it for granted.

Sara also suggests that marriage with non-Kurds will result in divorce:

**Sara (F: 17):** I really understand why certain Kurdish parents do not let their children to marry a non-Kurd or Swedes. I don't think that the relationships outside your group can last. It ends in divorce.

It should be noticed that it is not only a question of how Kurds show reluctance toward inter-ethnic relationships but according to my male respondents they have been told by Swedes that they just exploit Swedish girls sexually and then dump them. Sara likewise reported that her Swedish female friends have told her that Kurdish guys just take Swedish girls and give nothing back. Soran (a pseudonym) who has a Kurdish name close to a Swedish name referred to his first encounter with the parents of the Swedish girl he has been dating now for the last two years. His account reminded me of what Sidney Poitier (John) experienced as a black man in the movie *Guess Who's coming to dinner* (1967, directed by Stanley Kramer) due to the shocked expression on the faces of the white girl's parents, when Sidney Poitier (John) was intending to ask for their approval of his marriage with their daughters. Soran became so afraid of her parents that he wanted to leave the house and asked the girl if it was such a good idea to stay and asked why she had not told them that he was Kurdish in

order to prepare them mentally for his arrival. While laughing at this experience, he argued that from beginning he thought that it was only Kurds who were conservative and showed aversion toward "mixed-relationships" and that all Swedes were liberal. Johan also told of a similar experience when he was invited to his girlfriend's home for dinner. On that occasion her grandfather told Johan: "Welcome to Sweden Johan, here in Sweden we don't beat our women, so I warn you". Through a phrase, the grandfather evoked ideas about stereotypical Middle Easterners as women-oppressors and also reminded Johan about his foreign status and about not belonging to Swedish society. Soran argued that maybe Kurds and Swedes regard his relationship with the Swedish girl as an ethno-sexual adventure (Nagel, 2003) and when this adventure is ended, he will chose to marry a Kurdish woman, a judgment that he challenges and rejects.

The possibility of ethno-sexual settlement (Nagel, 2003) was favoured mostly by the young men who pointed out that they could imagine themselves establishing families with any non-Kurdish partners except black people and Africans. According to Kani, this pattern can be explained by the more accepting attitudes toward men crossing the sexual boundaries of the ethnic identity and their possibility to navigate though different ethnic frontiers without being moralized and excluded from the Kurdish community. The young Kurdish men were more positive toward having enduring relationships with young Swedish women than the Kurdish girls with Swedish men and many of them had been or were involved in such relationships. Rezan, Hiwa, Karwan, and Hana all pointed out that they have relatives and family members (mainly men but also women) who have married Swedes, Croatians, Poles and Danes and had children with them, a pattern that shows that Europeans are given a privileged position by certain Kurds within the continuum of potential and desirable life-partners. It also shows that crossing and erosion of ethno-sexual boundaries that take specific forms prevail within the Kurdish communities.

Informants evoked a discourse of imagined and real cultural difference between Swedes and Kurds regarding issues related to the importance of family and children. For Sara and Zanyar, the divorce culture is prominent in Sweden and according to them one should not get married if they have divorce in their minds as an option. According to several of the respondents, one of the strategies that parents and relative use to discourage marriage between Kurds and Swedes is through warning their children against marrying Swedes, due to an assumed but powerful belief that marriages between men with immigrant backgrounds and Swedish women are doomed to fail. They referred to the experiences of people that they know who have immigrant backgrounds and

have failed in establishing longstanding marriages with Swedes. Reported experiences of failed marriages are combined with and fuelled by stereotypical and homogenizing notions of Swedes as a collective group who are perceived as not taking marriage as a serious project. Rezan argues that when a Kurdish couple fails in their marriage and divorces, the parents never use ethnic identity to explain the divorce. In other words, failures in marriages between Kurds are explained by individual qualities while the reasons for unsuccessful marriages between Kurds and Swedes are explained and justified by reference to collective cultural and ethnic differences.

This understanding of cultural incommensurability between Kurds and Swedes can be understood as an attempt to define identity, culture and belonging in term of coherence, continuity and stability. In other words, it is in a relationship between a couple of the "same" kind that it is assumed that one can find this coherent, continuous, consistent and stable marriage and family building. This assumption is used to encourage people to stick to their "own kind". Migration can imply such a change in the lives of certain migrants that crystallizing identity and cultural values can become a compelling strategy for the parents, the community and their children to maintain and strengthen the ethnic boundary (see Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p. 5). We should thus understand this ethnic closure, authentication and reification of cultural values as a social phenomenon or as a social process that may be deployed to deal with political and cultural challenges.

All 28 respondents in this study rejected the idea of forced marriage and regarded their choice of life-partners as a personal issue. At the same time they also felt that parents should not be excluded from the individual's decision. Josef and Shilan referred to two young Kurdish women and men they knew who had not adhered to their parents' choices of spouse for them. Both were described as now living in a social exile without any contact with their families. The social exile in their cases was described as a public punishment for their disobedience. While forced marriages were rejected by the informants, arranged marriages were seen an acceptable mode of getting married. These young people do not define arranged marriages as a practice where parents have *the ultimate power* over who they should marry or not marry, but a practice where the young people and their parents discuss the appropriateness of possible life-partners. The parents and the family were understood by the young Kurds as given and permanent while love was something fleeting and therefore it was seen as a good idea to listen to their parents and not blindly follow the hegemonic love ideology that is so persistent.

Choosing a Kurdish life-partner implied, according to several of the respondents, the possibility of retaining the Kurdish language, cultural values and food and also functioned as a means to facilitate communication with the parents. Only Shilan and Zana regarded religion and the Muslim identity of the potential life-partner as an important precondition for marriage. Cultural preferences were thus important to their decisions about choosing a Kurdish partner. However this does not mean that they would blindly choose a Kurdish life-partner just because he or she is Kurdish, but the appropriateness of the life-partner was negotiated with regards to cultural preferences, the degree of integration into Swedish society and education, as we saw how the young women and men related to the "imports" in the previous theme. Endogamy in this respect became a means to reproduce Kurdishness with a history in Sweden. The majority of the young people in this study were advised by their parents to marry a Kurdish life-partner and many of them adhered to their parents' suggestion. Most of the young Kurds reported not wanting to go to Kurdistan and marry a Kurdish girl there because there was thought to be a large gap between their life-style and cultural values. This partly reflects a postcolonial discourse that creates a division between so called "modern Kurds" and "traditional Kurds". Both the young women and men asserted that it could be a difficult and stressful project to help their life-partners to integrate in Sweden, therefore it was thought to be more practical and pragmatic to marry a partner with Kurdish background who already knew the language and the culture of the mainstream society.

Both young women and men regarded dating as imperative before getting married. They also pointed out that they would involve their parents when the relationship was regarded as serious by both partners. Knowing the person before the marriage was seen as self-evident, even if it was done in secret. The way these young men and women described arranged marriage diverged from dominant discourses in the West that depict arranged marriages as oppressive and equate them with forced marriages in contrast to the love ideology of Western societies where the individual is supposed to be the only author of his/her fate. Zara argued that the reason why many Kurds show resistance to marriages with other collective groups is because they have experienced so much oppression and Kurdistan has always been a place of war and conflicts. Many parents have lost their homelands and they don't want to lose their families, culture and children here in this new country.

It is within this context that the question of imagined and real enemies like Arabs, Persians and Turks are discussed with reference to marriage and sexual encounters. Leyla asserts that avoiding sexual relationship and establishing getting married to the "enemies" has to do with a national struggle and also

respect for those who have suffered at the hands of these real and imagined enemies:

**Leyla (F: 19):** I stopped having contact with a girlfriend of mine who married an Arab. I think it is humiliating that a Kurdish girl is fucked by an Arab because it makes me think about those many brave Kurdish women who were raped by Arabs in Iraq. Many Kurdish women in Kurdistan jumped from the mountains in order not to be raped by Arabs and here we are in Sweden and open up our legs voluntarily for them. /.../ my brother has a Swedish girlfriend and my uncle is married with a Chilean. They are not our enemies even if they are from other cultures.

In the same vein, Alan situates his arguments in relation to the political conflict that justifies politicized boundary drawing in opposition to Arabs, Turks and Iranians:

**Alan (M: 23):** I can never imagine myself with a Turkish, Iranian or an Arabic girl. This is not only because they have a different identity. Imagine if you were Iranian and you have a certain interest for your homeland Iran. And as an Iranian, you don't want Iran to be divided and give some part of it to the Kurds. The problem lies essentially in this conflict.

Nalin and her family accept Persians, Arabs and Turks as boyfriends but reject them as potential marriage partners:

**Nalin (F: 20):** I think it makes life easier if my life-partner is Kurdish. I had a boyfriend who was not Kurdish and it was difficult. I want to speak Kurdish with my husband. My father does not want me to marry Persians, Turks and Arabs. I don't want that either. My mother usually says that it is not so good to cook lentils with chickpeas. You may have them as boyfriends but not to build a family with.

According to Nagel (2003) ethnic ideologies often contain negative stereotypes of outsiders and especially if they are regarded as enemies. Awa argues that she avoids Arabs and Turks because she thinks that they want to exploit her sexually due to her Kurdish background. It is important to point out that in the informants' narratives, it is never a question of women who exploit men but mainly an issue about protecting "our" women from "their" men. Women are often depicted as a vulnerable group in need of protection and surveillance from what Nagel (2003) calls "intimate intersections and forbidden frontiers". The accounts above reflect nationalist double standards of nationalism and

feminist nationalism with regard to sexuality. Hana and Rezan pointed out that they could imagine themselves marrying Persian men because Persians are culturally near to the Kurds in contrast to Turks and Arabs. The idea of the cultural and linguistic proximity between Kurds and the Persians produces an ambivalent and dialogical positionality toward Persians (see chapter 4). While Nalin admits that she can imagine herself having a sexual adventure with Persians, Turks and Arabs, she also acknowledges that she rejects them as marriage partners due to the assumed incompatibility and her parents' attitude toward these groups as imagined or real enemies. Leyla's account reflects the dominant nationalist discourse where women become a symbolic marker of the Kurdish identity and avoiding sexual encounters with these putative enemies should be an imperative, according to her. The negative historical experiences of many Kurdish women in Iraq under the leadership of Saddam Hussein becomes a historical justification for Leyla's hostile attitude toward Arabs.

Significantly, Leyla contrasts two different kinds of Kurdish femininities to each other where one is prepared to give her life for the nation through her sexual fidelity and not allowing ethnosexual invaders to penetrate, colonize, dominate, enslave and rape her *Kurdish* body while others dismiss such historical events and engage without restraint in sexual intercourse with the putative enemies. Leyla's discourse evokes ideas about "the sexualized and gendered nature of patriotism, treason, betrayal /.../. (Nagel, 2000, p. 108). But it also indicates how "national", (those who stay to their Kurdish identity) and "anti-national" (those who challenge its sexualized and gendered boundaries and sleep with the "enemy") femininities are discursively constructed.

This discourse becomes a device to discipline Kurdish bodies to evade "transgressing" and "betraying" Kurdish identity and evokes loyalty to Kurdishness as an imperative. Nationalism thus entails a double standard, where "our" women are urged to not have sex with the men of the enemy while our men can, during conflicts, rape and sexually enslave "their women, without having their heads shaved or being tattooed or paraded around the town" (Nagel, 2000, p. 109). Consequently, through nationalism women not only became the national symbol but they are also given the task of sustaining the respectability of the nation through their constrained sexual behavior. Mostov (1995) argues that giving women this role as symbols of national virtue and purity puts them into a vulnerable position due to the risk of "contamination". Women occupy a two-fold position within the nationalist ideology, as embodying the homeland but also as a potential stranger within it (Mostov, 1995). The respondents above assign marriage with imagined or real enemies a political significance because of the liberation struggle conducted by different Kurdish armed and political groups. Establishing a Kurdish state following

Josef above is the ideological justification for avoiding certain groups as marriage partners. It should be noted that he does not mind marriages to other groups than Arabs, Turks and Iranians. Selma argues that it is not good to establish relationships with these "enemies" and that this rule should equally apply to both Kurdish men and women:

**Selma (F: 19):** Kurdish guys tend to intervene in their sisters' or Kurdish girls' choices when they choose life-partners. Especially when it comes to establishing partnership with "the enemy", it becomes a sensitive issue. Personally, I believe that we should avoid such relationships as much as we can. /.../ When we Kurds are in war with certain groups we should avoid relationships with them. In the case of the Kurds, it has to do with assimilation and avoiding assimilation. But I am against those men who use this to control women. There are certain Kurdish guys who speak about being in war with the enemy through being with Persian girls. This is a way they justify their actions. When Kurdish guys want to marry a Kurdish girl, they don't want the girl to have had many partners and especially no Persian boyfriend. But the Kurdish guys do not have the same rule for themselves.

Selma displays in her accounts what some feminist scholars would call feminist nationalism (Herr, 2003; West, 1997) where women are involved in the national liberation but at the same time fighting for changing the patriarchal and male order. Selma regards the Kurdish national struggle as legitimate but at the same time, she rejects masculinist claims by certain young Kurdish men who represent themselves as ethno-sexual invaders by sleeping with women of the putative enemies and urge young Kurdish women to stay away from the men of the putative enemies. If nationalism presents itself as a community of horizontal comradeship, then it should, according to Selma, also anchor that ideology in practices that give both men and women equal responsibilities and rights.

Sexual intercourse with the women of the so-called enemies is regarded here as an aspect of national warfare and the body of the woman become a nationalized site of struggle between different masculinities which present themselves as protector/defenders or invaders and contaminators (see Alonso, 1994, p. 386). Of course, homosexual intercourse is also a weapon of war in a heterosexual power context, for men to penetrate each other as an act of vilification and subordination. These competitive masculine acts that Selma refers to, are an expression of an inferiority complex by putative Kurdish ethno-sexual invaders who attempt to take revenge on subordinated and inferiorized Kurdish masculinity with regards to their assumed incapability of creating a

Kurdish nation-state in contrast to Arabs, Turks and Persians. Besides, these putative Kurdish ethno-sexual invaders want to escape an effeminate conception of Kurdish masculinity and perform a supposed heroic masculinity through sleeping with the women of the enemies.

In this respect, masculine nationalist discourse assigns women a vulnerable position within the nation, a discourse that turns them into sexualized victims of the nationalist practices. Selma challenges the notion of the Kurdish nationalist ideology and nation with prescribed goals, gender roles and practices and provides alternative claims and demands in order to challenge the position of women as subordinate in the nationalist discourse of certain young Kurdish men. She articulates the possibility of an alternative involvement by Kurdish women in the national liberation struggle. She also challenges the double-standard of masculine nationalism where women are regarded as a symbolic object and a national property, and where men decide with whom they should share. This stance by Selma was not discussed by the young men when they discussed politicization of the ethno-sexual boundaries except by Josef who asserted that young Kurdish women choose Turkish marriage partners without considering the conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish state. Finally, surveillance and protection of women as symbolic "objects" becomes even more fraught when there is a national or an ethnic conflict where the transgression of the ethno-sexual boundaries are politicized and instituted as social taboos for women.

In sum, young Kurdish men and women referred to different discourses that rejected certain groups as potential life-partners in particular black Africans, Arabs and Turks while having a more ambiguous stance toward Persians, Swedes and Europeans. Claiming nearness to whiteness was a dominant discourse that intended to situate Kurdish identity in a favourable position vis-à-vis the white Swedish identity. In this light, avoiding black life-partners was regarded as an important strategy to mark and clarify their ethnic identity as near whiteness. When it comes to Arabs, Turks and Persians, they were mainly regarded as political enemies within a nationalist paradigm about avoiding sleeping with the "enemies". Within the nationalist discourse, women were regarded as liminal subjects who should avoid enemies as life-partners. Some of the young women argued that Kurdish nationalism should be detached from a masculine perspective that assigned Kurdish women and men different rights and duties within a national hierarchy. Arranged marriages were understood as a practice in which both the youth and the parents negotiated the appropriateness of the life-partners. Marriage was both regarded as an individual issue but also an issue that should be of concern for the parents who could give advice about marriage and the road to establishing a family. None of

the research participants described themselves as experiencing any form of imposed or forced marriage. Ethnicity, education, heterosexuality and knowledge of the Swedish language were regarded as important criteria for establishing a relationship with a person that could lead to a marriage.

### **Summary**

The research participants believe that the image of the Kurds as perpetrators or victims of "honor-related" violence has become so consolidated that it influences them in their social relations with the dominant society. Mass media and teachers were regarded as being structurally active in stigmatizing young Kurdish women as victims and Kurdish men as oppressive. Stigmatization also included interpersonal relations where both friends and strangers questioned the young men and women as to whether they were potential victims or perpetrators of honor-related violence. The female respondents mentioned a variety of public spaces, including the supermarket, the street, at school, at the cinema, or on a boat trip that the respondents where they had been asked whether they should be in those public places given the perceived danger from their families and particularly their fathers and brothers.

Although both young Kurdish men and women were turned into objects of suspicion, the young women were subjected to the hermeneutics of benevolent suspicion. The compassionate gazes and questions from Swedes reduced them to the role of victims. This stigmatized situation had made them willingly or reluctantly participate in the discourse and to provide their understanding and experiences to appease the curiosity of the members of the dominant society about what kind of life these young people are conducting and experiencing in their families. The respondents resist the mainstream generalizations of the Kurds as assumed perpetrators and victims of "honor-related" violence.

The research participants' challenges to dominant cultural categorization cannot be equated with a denial of violence and oppression against women within the Kurdish community but rather as a resistance to the identity prison that stigmatization creates. The research participants have used a variety of strategies and arguments to counter this dominant cultural categorization. They have argued that violence against women is a universal phenomenon, highlighted the diversity within Kurdish society, remained silent in the classroom to avoid becoming complicit in the hegemonic discourse and challenged assumptions about Third World women as passive receivers of gender inequality by asserting their agency. Young Kurdish women represented themselves as a diverse and heterogeneous category. Several of them challenged unitary conceptualizations of their families and the Kurdish community and tried to deconstruct the authoritarian and oppressive

masculinities that Kurdish fathers and brothers are associated with. They also reported the prevalence of gendered racism where young Kurdish men and women were treated differently in the Swedish society due to prevailing beliefs about Kurdish women as victims of what were assumed to be oppressive oriental masculinity and culture.

In this chapter, I also discussed how young Kurdish women and men internally subordinated and otherised certain young Kurdish men who were labelled "imports" and identified through their behavior, aesthetic preferences and the limited degree of integration into Swedish society and limited knowledge of Swedish language. The respondents have created a social boundary between putative integrated and unintegrated young Kurds in Sweden. For the young Kurdish girls, these "imports" were undesirable as romantic and marriage partners because they had the "wrong" masculinity, which they represented and performed through their behavior and aesthetic. Young Kurdish men avoided them because they were considered a threat to their chances of getting in touch with Swedish girls, and also because of the cultural shame they felt when putative imports appeared in public spheres and acted in ways that the respondents called likened to "country-bumpkin" behavior. Consequently, class, gender, heterosexuality and ethnicity intersected in the subordination of this category of so called young Kurdish "imports". However, boundary crossing was possible and desirable. The respondents made it clear that there were possibilities for these "imports" to leave the "import" status if they changed their behavior and the way they presented themselves, and especially if they underwent university studies and improved their Swedish language. This supportive attitude towards these "imports" crossing boundaries can be understood in relation to the representation of the Kurds in Sweden, where young "integrated" Kurds attempt to escape derogatory slurs and unequal treatment in the Swedish society due but are often thwarted in this by the prevailing homogenizing racialization.

The last section in this chapter dealt with ethno-sexual frontiers and marriage strategies. Young men and women with Kurdish backgrounds maintained, crossed and reinforced their ethnic boundaries in different ways. For instance, several of the respondents pointed out that cultural preferences were important when choosing a marriage partner. Further, marriage was regarded as an individual decision but also a family affair where parents should be involved. While totally rejecting forced marriage, they defined arranged marriage not as a marriage where parents decide *everything* but an arrangement where they involve their parents when the relationship between the couple has become so serious that they intended to arrange a marriage. Asking for the daughter's hand was regarded as a beautiful Kurdish cultural gesture by a major part of

the respondents. Dating was seen as precondition to marriage. Several of the young Kurdish men did not want to go to Kurdistan and marry a Kurdish girl because it was seen to cause problems in terms of integration and cultural gaps that have emerged due to the different places of settlement that they have grown in. Accordingly, they reproduced a postcolonial discourse about Sweden as "modern" and Kurdistan as "traditional".

When it comes to marriage partners outside the Kurdish community, black people and Africans were otherised, subordinated and rejected as potential life-partners by several interviewees. The racist views about Africans held by several of the young Kurds are rooted in the Western colonial ideology where whiteness is ascribed positive and privileged attributes, an identity that several young Kurds felt near to and identified with. They differentiated themselves from blacks/Africans and positioned themselves in a favourable position within the continuum of desirability in relation to white Swedish European and Western identities. When it comes to Swedes as potential life-partners, the young Kurdish men were more ambivalent. While some of them indicated an assumed incompatibility between Kurdish culture and Swedish culture, some young Kurdish men showed a positive attitude towards the idea of marrying Swedish women, a stance that was not found among the young Kurdish women. Marriage with Arabs, Turks and to a certain extent with Persians was given a political significance and interpreted mainly in terms of Kurdish nationalism. Within this nationalist discourse, Kurdish women were regarded as an exclusive symbolic object that (wo)men should not share with these putative or real enemies. In this nationalist discourse it was also important to protect women from intimate intersections and forbidden frontiers with these three nationalities. Fidelity to the Kurdish nation was stressed by some of the young Kurdish women. Whereas affirming the Kurdish nationalist struggle, some of the young Kurdish women rejected the discourse of some young Kurdish men who sought to be ethno-sexual invaders having sex with Arabic, Persian and Turkish women but warning Kurdish women from having such relationships with men of these "enemies". These putative ethno-sexual invaders justified their actions as revenging the subordinated positionality that Kurds occupy within the nation-states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. By this means, these young men attempt to masculinize a supposedly emasculated Kurdish identity in the Middle East through sexual relations with Persian, Turkish and Arabic girls as means of national warfare.

# **Chapter 7**

## **Discussion and Conclusions**



## **Politics of belonging and challenges for social work**

What do the findings of this dissertation tell us about the politics of belonging among young people with Kurdish backgrounds in Sweden? Many of the respondents argued that holding Swedish citizenship did not guarantee acceptance as Swedish because Swedishness was constructed in every-day life in essentialist terms. In these terms appearance, name, culture and history were evoked as essential markers of the Swedish identity. The research participants' experiences of an exclusive Swedishness have significant impact on their understanding of their everyday lives and identity formation in Sweden. Terms like "Swedish on paper" and "Swedish Swedish" were recalled while speaking about Swedishness as inherited and acquired. An inherited ethnic Swedishness was given an authoritarian position with the power to set the boundary of the Swedish identity toward those people who were regarded only as "Swedish on paper". It is in this context, certain subjects are defined as "natural" and "real" members of the "host" society while otherized subjects are ascribed a citizenship status as "guests" unequally positioned with insufficient power resources to change the basis of this unequal Swedish identity formation. In this respect, the immigrants or the "guest" citizens are urged by white Swedes to leave if they are not satisfied with the social order of thing in the Swedish society. Critical comments about the dominant society are regarded as a transgression of the unwritten rules that regulates the relationship between a "guest" and a "host".

These definitions of different types of Swedishness have significant implications in different social interactions where one's access to societal resources can be limited due to exclusionary practices. The research participants referred to different sites in which they experienced ethnic discrimination, stigmatization and belittling practices. These experiences involved the ethnically divided labor market, mass media, housing segregation, legal system, school system and teachers. The research participants also referred to the roles of "ordinary" Swedes in obstructing their equal participation in the Swedish society through exclusionary discourses about claim-makings to a Swedish identity. For the research participants, to be defined as an immigrant, a "wog", a Muslim and Middle-Eastern was often viewed by the white dominant subjects as implying negative collective attributions that were used as justifications for ethnic discrimination.

An important argument in this study is that domination and resistance are intimately interrelated. In this light the young women and men asserted their agency in various ways. Different strategies were used to work with and against exclusionary structures. Young people with Kurdish backgrounds have

resisted and contradicted discriminatory patterns that devalue their background and exclude them from social resources in Swedish society. Using violence, non-violence, silence, changing and modifying their names to Swedish ones, strengthening differences between the self and the other and ignoring racism have been some of the strategies that the youth have used to resist or to deal with discrimination. Responding in different situations to dominant subjects was an important aspect of their responses to discriminatory representations of Kurds, where they deconstructed negative attributes to Kurdish identity and showed the possibility of different positionalities and experiences that could not be reduced to simple stereotypical caricature. Besides, they showed that the relationships between Kurdish families and women with Kurdish backgrounds do not need to be based on negativity, countering these negative stereotypes with positive stories about Kurdish masculinities and particularly about their fathers as supportive figures in their lives. Beyond this, the young women also rejected the victim position that they are often given in their daily life and everyday encounters with dominant subjects.

However, this does not mean that the female research participants deny that there is patriarchy within the Kurdish community. Their deconstruction of Kurdish families was directed at the stereotypical representations which overlooked the diversity of "Kurdishness". The research participants criticized exclusionary practices not only for not accepting them as Swedish but also for the stigmatizing position that a migrant identity implies. The de-individualizing collectivizing stigmatization were regarded as an obstacle in their self-representation while encountering dominant subjects in their everyday lives. These stereotypes often function as a means to justify exclusionary practices and sustain the dualism of "us" and "them". Due to the imprisoning impact of dominant negative representations of Kurds as immigrants, stateless and strongly associated with "honor-related" violence, many of the research participants regarded ethnic success via positive visibility in Swedish public spheres as an important element in providing nuances to counter the prevailing stereotypical images of Kurds.

This quest for positive visibility can also be understood in relation to dominant discourses in the Middle-East that inferiorize, ghettoize and even refuse altogether to recognise Kurdish identities. Several of the research participants pointed out that these processes of otherisation are not limited to the Middle-East but also haunt them in Sweden in their everyday encounter with some young people with Arabic, Turkish and Persian backgrounds who reject the Kurdish identity. Refusals to recognize the validity of Kurdish national identity only serve to strengthen ethnic Kurdish nationalism fostering a reactive and

defensive identity among those young people who encounter these discriminatory practices.

Verbal and physical resistance were both used to counter devaluation of the Kurdish identity. Alternative terminologies like South Kurdistan (to refer to the Kurdish area of Iraq), North Kurdistan (Turkey), Eastern Kurdistan (Iran) and Western Kurdistan (Syria) were used in order to deconstruct the present political geography of the Kurdish regions that are under the political authority of these four nation-states. Kurdish nationalism was also expressed through a politics of negation that rejected Islam as constitutive to Kurdishness. In contrast to this nationalist stance, however, some of the research participants considered Islam as a potential identity that could bridge the divisions that nationalism had created between Kurds, Arabs, Turks and Persians/Iranians. For some respondents, Islam was not antithetical to Kurdishness but was an important part of it. Both those who claimed an anti-Islamic and pro-Islamic stance resorted to history and the past to justify their positions with respect to Islam as a Kurdish identity. In contrast to these two polarized stances, a few of the research participants viewed Islam as a religion that people should be free to follow and to identify with or not as they chose.

In the light of the anti-Islamic rhetoric, Kurdish nationalism was appropriated along with an Orientalist/postcolonial discourse in the Swedish/Western context that downgraded Islam as an oppressive religion that Kurds should reject. Kurdish nationalism and the struggle for a Kurdish nation-state were also evoked in relation to the statelessness of the Kurdish people as a stigma in a world order permeated by nation-statism. Besides, statelessness was referred to as a deviation from an alleged normative order of humanity. In this context, the "Gypsies" were viewed as an example of what might happen to a group of people who lack a nation-state and experience stigmatization and discrimination in every part of the world. Attaining a nation-state with a national Kurdish identity was considered as central to a positive visibility and external recognition as a valid group with claims to its own history and knowledge. International sport tournaments were named as important sites where Kurdishness lacked representation and external recognition. Collective sufferings and political subordination in the Middle-East were also used as arguments to justify Kurdish claims to an independent nation-state. In relation to this sense of statelessness, a discourse of knowing one's origin, suffering, sacrifices and history was evoked as legitimizing nation-state building.

Although the research participants asserted their Kurdish identity, their positionalities showed that there is no homogenous notion of Kurdishness. This became evident when they discussed the boundaries of modern versus

traditional Kurdishness, in which class, gender, heterosexuality and ethnicity were significant intersecting categories in subordinating a category of Kurdishness defined as "imports". The young men and women pointed out these "imports" as representing a "backward" form of Kurdishness represented mainly by young men who were viewed as "traditional" "slimy", "sexist" and belonging to a lower class. Swedishness in this context was referred to as the norm that defined the boundary of the "modern" and the "traditional". The young women referred to the "imports" as "undesirable" potential marriage partners as long as they stayed in their "import" position. Regarding the "imports", the research participants formulated an evolutionary discourse in which the "imports" were urged to transform their "traditional" identity and become more "modern". When it comes to marriage with other collectivities, the young men and women evoked a favourable positionality toward Swedes as potential marriage partners. At the same time, marriage with Swedes was viewed as a "risky" project because of the high degree of divorce among Swedish couples, whilst the research participants believed that marriage should be seen as a "serious" and "permanent" project. Several of the respondents referred to near relatives and friends who had married partners with Swedish and European backgrounds. Young men were more positive to marriage with women with Swedish backgrounds than the young women to men with Swedish backgrounds. The reason for this difference relates to the ways that gendered ethnic boundaries are crossed and negotiated. None of the young women or men in this study reported being exposed to forced marriages and referred to choice of spouse as an individual issue but one where they would include their parents who could have their opinions and provide advice.

Other collectivities that were evoked with regard to marriage were black people, Arabs, Turks and Persians. Black people were mainly rejected because of the racial hierarchy according to a postcolonial discourse where whiteness was the most praised identity position and to which the young Kurdish men and women identified strongly. The idea of Arabs, Turks and to a lesser extent Persians as partners was rejected because they were viewed as traditional political enemies of the Kurdish people. This indicates that the political conflict in the Middle-East still affects the social lives of young men and women outside the Kurdish regions in the Middle-East.

The research participants were also aware that blackness was regarded a marginal position within the continuum of desirable identities in both Swedish society and the Middle East. This explains why black subjects were not imagined as potential marriage partners. While the research participants underlined that they were denied an equal place within the boundary of Swedishness due to a racist postcolonial discourse that graded whiteness

highest, they reproduced paradoxically the same discourse through choosing to use it against black people, sub-Saharan Africans, "imports" "Gypsies" and Islam in order to claim a modern Kurdish identity near to whiteness. This shows that racism and anti-racism can be combined in the same discourse and articulated in a contradictory and ambiguous way. On the one hand, the research participants articulated an anti-racist discourse and asked for racial equality in the Swedish society, on the other hand, they used the same racist discourse to subordinate certain racialized groups and positioned themselves near to the white identity. These examples show that both dominant and minoritized subjects are marked by the postcolonial condition in structuring subjectivities, belonging and identification.

The question of home and homeland was discussed in relation to discrimination and belonging. Feeling at home was regarded as not being discriminated against. Several of the research participants had visited Kurdistan for the first time and some of them had returned after several years of living in Sweden. An idealized image of the imaginary homeland, Kurdistan was widely held but after visiting Kurdistan several research participants pointed out that their "returning" functioned to demystify this idealized and lost paradise, Kurdistan. These journeys can be understood with regards to their experiences of not being accepted as Swedes and the uncertainty of Sweden as their homelands. Authentication of home and homeland is a social process that is situated in political contexts and structures but it is also a relational process where the dominant society constitutes a crucial audience. It is necessary that citizenship and belonging are detached from ethnicist notions of Swedishness because this is the main reason why young people with Kurdish backgrounds feel rejected.

In contrast to this homing desire which looked to origins in Kurdistan to provide a sense of belonging and home, a few of the research participants already, even before visiting, considered Kurdistan as their imaginary homeland while Sweden was the concrete place where they had their lives and future. Migration often creates a rift between the notions of specific places and specific belongings, a naturalized relationship constituted through a discourse that informs subjects how to understand their identities and places in the world. Places are culturally constructed through the meanings that are attributed to them and these meanings are subjected to transformation due to the priorities and interests of those subjects that claim their essential intimacy with these places, which are called home and homeland.

Human beings do not need to identify with one single place, but a variety of places with different meanings in different stages of ones life. Therefore we can

speak about multiple belongings and multiple spatial identities. The alternative can barely be the notion of non-place identity (see for instance Hanauer, 2008), where places as important sites of identity construction are rejected. It is easy for individuals to adhere to this perspective, whose identity and claim to place of belonging are rarely challenged. Resorting to a deconstructive rhetoric about place and belonging/non-place identity in the face of the migrants and at the same time enjoying its privileges is nothing but a treacherous elitist project that neglects the painful struggle for recognition and acceptance that migrants are engaging with. Cosmopolitanism is an illustrative example (see Hansen, 2009). If many migrants experience a difficulty in giving a straightforward answer to the question "where are you from?", young people with Kurdish backgrounds find further difficulty in answering this question since their identities are significantly contested, ambiguous, denied and devalued both in the Middle-East and in Sweden. These processes of exclusionary practice reinforce a reactive Kurdish identity based on ethnic notions of belonging. Being Kurdish then becomes as exclusionary as being Swedish in its definition, although differently positioned in relation to national and international power structures where Kurds experience a minoritized position.

In the light of experiences of ethnic discrimination, it is of paramount importance to reformulate the basis of Swedish identity formation so that it can be inclusive and equal with regards to differences. Consequently, is there an inclusive Swedish identity which enables a person to say that "I am Swedish" and not "I am a real Swede"? The ethnic elements that are so prevalent in the civic definitions of the nation-states can not provide enough guarantees for an equal and inclusive citizenship, as long as they are not detached from the current politics of identity formation. Is the nation-state inherently an exclusive entity, reserved for one people, one culture, and one language or can nation-state also be a category of practice like belonging that can be transformed in relation to the historical changes and challenges that a society encounters? Can we historicize the aspirations of a collectivity without resorting to the nation as the only way? We need an innovative political and epistemological morphology to create social structures that are not racist and exclusionary. The starting point for this important and urgent task is redefining and accommodating Swedish society to the constellation of the plural reality that it is facing without reducing social groups to sealed-off entities and going beyond essentialist and ahistorical notions of "core Swedish values" that stipulate conditions for belonging and exclusion. The first step toward this process of inclusive citizenship is changing, renaming and generating new narratives of "Us" as dominant subjects and providing a democratic space where the definition of "Us" is more inclusive and flexible (e.g. Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2005).

The ways we define the boundaries of ethnicities make the ground for the ways we understand multiculturalism. Identifying how the boundaries of the nation or the dominant group are constructed enables us to decompose those group boundaries and show the possibilities of new drawings of group boundaries that are not exclusive and rigid but more flexible and responsive to the changes and the dynamics of the population and the political balance in our societies. This process entails that citizenship should be renegotiated. The boundaries around citizenship can be redrawn in order to decompose hierarchies based on essentialist notions of identity, differences and the ways the group has come about (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004, p. 45). But we need also to decolonize those ideologies and ideas that are embedded in European social structures that close the door entirely or partly in the faces of non-white immigrants.

As long as the dominant subjects have the key to the power resources and are not ready to relinquish their privileged position, the rhetoric of equality turns into an empty signifier and an obstacle in challenging the perpetuation of inequality through a universalism that is particularistic, where all are Swedes but certain Swedes are more equal than others. Equality is also related to equal representation, recognition and visibility in the public space where the dominant subjects do not always enunciate the discourse about the "others" and invite them in and show that the dominant subjects aspire to equality through letting the "other" speak, but on "our" terms. The "others" can not be reduced to one single "authentic" voice through representations that essentialize their appearance and visibility in the public spaces. There should be spaces for polyvocality in order to enable diverse understanding of the reality that is often depicted in dichotomous ways as a result of imprisoning representational practices. Further, the present normative discourses about equality and justice in Sweden have to be deconstructed and reformulated where the "others" are included in its definition and constitution. If dominant subjects do not question their privileges, privileges that have been naturalized to the point of invisibility, it will be a hard task to alter the discriminatory structures of the society that represents itself as anti-racist in rhetoric but is racist in its practices.

The idea of integration as a mutual process challenges the idea that it is the dominant subjects who have access to power in discourses regarding the migrants. It is also the dominant subjects who decide the extent to which migrants can be included or excluded in the Swedish society. Reducing the notion of integration to a mutual process where everybody has an equal role to play, not only hides inequality but it also naturalizes the privileges that dominant subjects are enjoying. This romantic notion of integration as a mutual process depoliticizes the political distance between Swedes and migrants as two

equal partners in a project without considering the power dimension that constitutes our realities and positionalities. Furthermore, Swedish integration policy requires cultural adjustments from migrants in order for them to be accepted. When Sweden is discussed by different political parties as a multicultural society, the term "multi" often includes the others and leaves the dominant subjects unmarked by the notion of "multi". The political arrangement of integration is also done by dominant subjects who articulate the rules of the game under the name of a trans-ideological humanism where everybody is hailed as equal in a society that is structured by dominance (see Hall, 1980; Radhakrishnan, 2003). This is why integration policy tends to objectify migrants as a homogenous group whose cultural identity is under scrutiny and surveillance by dominant subjects with the intention of avoiding supposed "cultural clashes" between migrants and Swedes, a discourse that is proudly held by political parties in Europe who oppose immigration from the Middle-Eastern countries. The neo-racism that is prevalent in contemporary European countries attempts to argue that if everybody stayed in their "original" places, discrimination and racism would be absent. Limiting immigration from for instance the Middle East and Africa is seen a form of social intervention to eradicate racism. Hence, racist policies and discourses are used to claim anti-racism.

Relating back to the question of integration, in recent years, Peralta (2005) has noted that, immigrants who have traditionally been the object of political actions and study objects of academics, have gradually adopted subject positions in formulating their own history alongside and as part of the history of Sweden (Peralta, 2005). It is within this position I have situated myself in this study, challenging the assumption that "we" can not represent ourselves but need to be represented by white dominant subjects. This subject position of immigrants has met resistance by dominant subjects who more or less argue that immigrants complain too much about racism and discrimination in a country which is renowned for its democracy and integration policy. In that light, the debate around multi-culturalism and integration can best be understood in the context of the politics of representation. It shows how the dominant regime (involving politicians, journalists and scholars) determines what Radhakrishnan calls "the perspectival legitimacy of representation" (Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 33) and has the power to reject and devalue alternative perspectives and representations of the multicultural society as illegitimate, when the Others participate in formulating its premises and routes. According to Radhakrishnan (2003), as long as the dominant regime or culture don't render its narratives to be retold from the perspective of the others, the possibility of equality will be denied. The dominant subjects will shore up their privileges and others will be politically neglected:

Rather than pose the issue in dialogic and relational terms, the unilateral dominant mandate on behalf of multiculturalism fixes the many as the object of a paternalistic benevolent representation. The "multi-" continues to carry the mark of alterity within a dominant model that refuses possibilities of reciprocity and mutual narrativization (Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 33).

This critique by Radhakrishnan is highly relevant with regards to the ways young women with Kurdish backgrounds experienced themselves as objects of paternalistic benevolent representations in the Swedish society, which influenced the ways they were treated in their everyday life. Young men with Kurdish backgrounds were suspected of being violent and behaving oppressively towards women. The female research participants found that the dominant subjects, mass media and teachers viewed them as potential victims of "honor-related" oppression by their parents, families, brothers and relatives. Paternalism and benevolence were intimately linked when this victim position was constructed. The young women responded to these negative images and representations, and emphasised how the presence of these representations was intimately linked to the powerful subject positions that dominant subjects enjoy. This discourse shows how power works; it can both construct subject positions mainly described as "victim" and at the same time formulate a discourse about the need for power and its institutions to intervene and "liberate" the brown Muslim women from the brown Muslim men. These negative representations of the others influence the practices of social work since social workers are not neutral and "objective" practitioners of social work.

The case of the "honor-killing" discourse which was frequently referred to by the young people interviewed in this study, is one interesting illustration. Those who were assumed to have certain experiences and positions were given opportunities to participate in the debate. However, this would mean reproducing the discourse, the object of the discourse, and the subjects of the discourse. Those women with immigrant backgrounds who were invited to be visible and audible were assumed to speak as the true representatives of the "honor-culture". The culturalist discourse is thus canalized through these women whose experience and knowledge are seen as indisputable and who are assumed to represent the majority of young women from the so called "honor-cultures". Conferences, seminars and television debates usually invite the *current* and *previous* victims of so called "honor-related" violence in order to legitimate a culturalist definition of the problem and the politics of saving the "brown" women from acts of violence of the "brown" man that is believed to be rooted in supposedly archaic Oriental culture. The beneficiaries of this perspective are those groups and individuals who want to maintain or perpetuate certain cultural interpretations that can be oppressive against other

members of the community. The essentialistic interpretations of "honor-killing" have influenced many aspects of social work in Sweden. Many social work authorities have engaged academics and practitioners, including police authorities, who uncritically accepted or actively supported the idea of "cultural clashes" and immigrants' "cultural deficiency" in their work with "others". Men with Muslim backgrounds have been framed as potential "honor-killers", while women with Muslim backgrounds are viewed as victims of "honor-killing". Representations of cultures or certain cultural practices as the authentic property of a community by journalists, politicians or academics belonging to the dominant society or the community in question can benefit those political forces in society that attempt to confirm and consolidate the idea of "Us" and "Them" as two essentially different kinds of people thereby denying the existence of reciprocal and intermingled histories. This is a discourse that converges well with the differentialist racism, which focuses on "unassimilable foreigners" (often portrayed as non-Europeans) and "the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions" (Balibar, 1991a, p. 21).

A possible solution to this unbalanced and polarized debate is not to silence the debate regarding the existing oppression within a group but to allow different discourses and experiences to be expressed within the public sphere by members of that group in order to avoid stigmatization and discrimination. The problem is that certain minoritized subjects are rendered visible and appear as speaking subjects but many other minoritized subjects are exiled from the politics of representation. Their specific experiences, problem formulations and solutions if accessed would be able to diversify the way the problem can be constructed and understood. Following the Orientalist discourse and postcolonial representation of others in the public sphere, Oriental men are often portrayed as violent and despotic and therefore in need of being "tamed" through surveillance and gaze, while Oriental women are in need of liberation and have to be "released". If Oriental women reject this liberation discourse, then it is assumed to be a form of "false consciousness" and "brainwashing" that pre-empts their willingness to aspire to the "freedom" and the subjectivity that sovereign Western subjects have access to (cf. de Leeuw & van Wichelen, 2005).

Social work should be aware of the problematic and oppressive reality which haunts many families and young people with immigrant backgrounds and include critical knowledge in their daily practices. In Sweden, the epistemic violence is enabled through integration projects for women with immigrant backgrounds who are assumed to be in need of liberation, while the Western subject occupies an adult position vis-à-vis women with immigrant

backgrounds who are in a state of infancy and in need of orientation to the realm of modernity and freedom. This was discussed by the young women in this study who experienced such paternalistic understandings of women with Kurdish/immigrant background as otherizing strategies of the dominant society. The dominant perspective broadcast by the Swedish mass media presents women with immigrant background as immature individuals in need of "empowerment" by dominant subjects. They are not seen as "complete" human beings as long as they are living in the others' culture.

For example, Wright Nielsen (2009) shows how the concept of empowerment is used in practice within the framework of an integration project organized for women with refugee or immigrant backgrounds in a Swedish municipality. Wright Nielsen (2009) argues that the concept of empowerment within social work is often "caught up in a dichotomous universe of empowerment vs. Paternalism, liberation vs. Force, oppression vs. Emancipation" (Wright Nielsen, 2009, p. 216). According to Wright Nielsen, the cultural background of these women is thoroughly problematized within the framework of the project and the main aim of the project is to interfere in the subjectivities of the women through empowerment work that is equated with saving the women from their culture that is represented as deviating from a Swedish norm. Such an understanding of empowerment:

[R]educes the social inequalities experienced by the women to an essentially cultural problem that can not be related to the other inequality producing power structures in society. /.../ the problematization of the women creates the women as subjects with certain characteristics. Through this problematization, the Swedish self-perception and identity as emancipated and modern women, is created. In this way empowerment contributes to produce a norm of Swedishness (Wright Nielsen, 2009, p. 217).

Hence, integration is understood following the culturalist paradigm as an evolutionary process which minoritized groups should undergo in order to enter the realm of modernity and claim an equal subject position. Consequently, the minoritized groups are urged to undertake the path of modernity in order that their culture can be integrated. The dominant subjects are assumed to have the tools and knowledge to instruct them within this modernity paradigm. While integration is often associated with inclusion and viewed as a political goal to dissolve the prevailing hierarchy in the society, the culturalist approach preserves the ethnic/racial/cultural hierarchy through discourses about a unified national culture in deep contrast to the immigrant population (S. H. Razack, 2008). When Muslims or other immigrant groups are assigned pre-modern or "backward" attributes by dominant white Europeans, punitive

interventions against them are regarded as justified and necessary in order to "modernize" their values for example regarding how to bring up children and how to establish democratic relationships with "their" women.

In this vein, Yegenoglu (1998) points out that the Western subject is represented by a masculine position. If the subject is a Western woman, the only way to gain access to the universal Western subject position is through a fantasy about possessing the Oriental or the Muslim women (Yegenoglu, 1998). Furthermore, according to Razack (2008), the body of the Muslim woman is often used to articulate the superiority of Europe and its gender relations. It is in relation to this racialized body that Western subjects claim feminism while practicing racism against Muslim immigrants in the West (S. H. Razack, 2008). Swedish integration policy contains a problematic understanding of the culture of the others and it is within this discourse, different policies and activities related to integration are formulated and carried on, in order to facilitate a process of transformation and de-culturalization of the others (see Larsen, 2009; Thomsson, 2003; Wright Nielsen, 2009). Minoritized subjects are also part of the definition of these policies and activities. The oppression of young women and men with immigrant backgrounds is thus assumed to be confined to their families and cultures of their "original" homelands. Attention is drawn away from the political context of Swedish society which is assumed to have nothing or little to do with their subordinated position. It is evident that the main target group of the Swedish "integration" policy is Muslims who inhabit urban quarters with social problems; these are the places that are assumed to be the real sites of "honor-related" oppression. Hence, these quarters are marked as pathologized urban areas consisting of pathologized non-Swedish subjects that have to be tamed and taught how to deal with women (e.g. Carlbom, 2009).

The basic assumption of dominant integration debates in Sweden is that Muslim immigrants who have imported a deviant cultural order blighted by gender inequality into a society where harmonious gender relations prevail. Gender practices or identities are used to draw the boundary between "Us" and "Them", between the "desirable" and the "undesirable". These dividing practices are also central to social work practice where different hierarchies are constructed with regards to different kinds of client groups that are targets of social work interventions. Clients with immigrant backgrounds belong to those groups that are viewed as less desirable and worthy within the Swedish service institutions (see Eliassi, 2006, p. 273; Kamali, 1997; Wikström, 2007). Without denying the existence of patriarchal violence enacted in the name of culture, it is known that many of "culturally competent" organizations, by generalizing and essentializing the concept of "immigrant culture" as incompatible with "Swedish culture", reproduce stereotypes and prejudices about minoritized

groups. Such organizations receive the active support of the Swedish power structures, such as political parties and government. Social work should be aware of the mechanisms of otherisation and subordination of many people with immigrant background in Sweden. It should not passively follow the cultural essentialist imperatives from the government or the political leadership of municipal authorities in their daily practices. Social workers must be able to critically interrogate the ideological basis behind many state-supported projects, in order to be the agents of change and to act in solidarity with disadvantaged groups and individuals.

Young men with immigrant backgrounds belong to those minoritized groups which are highly demonized and stigmatized. Surveillance of young men with immigrant backgrounds who resist everyday racism and institutional racism is not a solution to the problem of racism. On the contrary, it helps reinforce the structural discrimination against minoritized groups. Violence as a means of resistance becomes possible when there is lack of democratic spaces to canalize the pain of frustration and powerlessness in a society structured by racism and ethnic dominance. Violence makes big headlines and captures the attention of the dominant society. Use of violence by young men with immigrant background is understood in dominant representations within a narrow interpretive framework as an expression of pathologized forms of masculinity (e.g. Carlbom, 2009; Åberg, 2009) where their voices for equal citizenship are understood as "noises" and "disrupting" forces (Dikeç, 2007). Young men in this study asserted that they used violence because they experienced ethnic discrimination and they refused to comply with a subordinated "wog" position.

We can understand this resistance toward ethnic discrimination following Connell (1995) as a "protest masculinity" which exhibits exaggerated forms of potency and hypermasculinity. This "protest masculinity" in the case of young men with immigrant backgrounds is relational and mainly targets the masculinity of the dominant group and its discriminatory practices against young men with immigrant backgrounds. "Protest masculinity" is thus a strategy in challenging subordination that emerges due to ethnic discrimination, marginalization and structural inequalities that shape the subjectivities of young men with immigrant backgrounds (Poynting, Noble, & Tabar, 1999). This link between ethnicity and masculinity on the one hand and recognizing and challenging structural inequalities, on the other hand, is of paramount importance for social policy makers and social workers who are involved in critical social work practices with men (Pease, 2009). It is essential to undo pathologizing discourses that present young men with immigrant backgrounds as a "threat" to national social cohesion. Otherwise in policy terms, this distracts from goals of structural equality and emphasizes law and

order, social control and paternalistic responses (cf. Fejo-King & Briskman, 2009). Turning these youngsters into pathologized clients of social work agencies is not a solution. Social workers should be engaged in social change and improving the structural context in which disadvantaged and minoritized groups are able to realize their goals and aspirations as equal members of society. It is politically repugnant for a dominant society to enact racist policy and at the same time to stigmatize the ways minoritized groups arrange their lives in relation to their subordinated positions. Making the lives of minoritized families transparent to the gazes of the dominant institutions is an important premise for dominant subjects to assert their domination. This is why it is considerably easier for white Swedish social workers to knock at the door of families with immigrant backgrounds and control their child-rearing than for them to knock at the door of middle-class Swedish families and do the same thing. Swedish social workers discursively construct reports about "inadequate" child-rearing that families with immigrant background provide their children and often suggest Swedish families as the main safe alternative to these pathologized families (Eliassi, 2006; Kamali, 2002).

It is unheard of for social authorities and social workers to use Muslim families as a "family home" for placing youth with Swedish backgrounds. This prejudiced pattern of placement indicates that Muslim families are understood to be inappropriate places for young people to grow up in. Hence, class, ethnicity and religion become important considerations when social workers assess their interventions and plan sanctions against families who do not adhere to the routines and the rule systems of social services. Punitive practices have become a hallmark of social work. Especially in the context of resource constraints, efforts and practices of a service-oriented social work have become limited; a relationship imbued with suspicion marks the interaction between social worker and client. Demonizing and pathologizing Muslim families in Sweden as dysfunctional and deviant from a normative Swedish Middle class family obstructs a process of dialogical relationships, contestation of perspectives and mutual narrativisation of prevailing social problems and possible solutions.

This study has demonstrated that young people with immigrant backgrounds are well aware of the culturalist discourse and representation of families with immigrant backgrounds. This was also discussed by the research participants. In order to gain access and support from social services, they might be propelled to frame a discourse that converges with the stereotypical and homogenizing notions that social work institutions hold in Sweden about families with immigrant background. In reality, not all rebellions against parental authority by young men and women with Muslim backgrounds can be

understood within the discourse of so called "honor-related" oppression that has become the framework for Swedish social services to analyse situations and formulate interventions concerning placements of young women and men with Muslim backgrounds. It is a discriminatory discourse that is strongly objected to by the young women and men with Kurdish backgrounds who participated in this study.

Muslim parents have the right in the same way as white Swedish families to set limits and outline rules for their children. Social workers should approach them with a willingness to support their parental authority in a society where they are structurally undervalued and undermined. However, this is not to say that social workers should blindly neglect oppressive forms of parenting. All families with Muslim backgrounds can not be gauged by the same yardstick and the diverse variety of family forms among Muslims can not be reduced to negative stereotypes in assessing, planning and determining interventions. Turning the middle class Swedish family into a universal form of family constellation is another means, following Dominelli (1997), to impose cultural imperialism on families who do not adhere to this norm. In addition, white stereotypes of minoritized families are often based on racist notions of white cultural supremacy that permeate the societal social relations in contemporary European societies.

This color line between white Europeans and non-whites also determines to a great extent life opportunities within political, social and economic arenas (S. Ahmad, 2000; Treacher, 2005). This was emphasised frequently by the research participants in this study who referred to whiteness and Europeanness as sites of privileges that excluded them from claiming an equal place within the Swedish society. At the same time, some of the informants also reproduced hierarchies of race as well as modernity as a way to position themselves nearer to white Swedishness. These experiences indicate the usefulness of postcolonial perspectives for social work in identifying racist structures and the ways they impinge on the social relations and subjectivities of dominant and dominated groups in ethnically divided European/Western societies but also in finding anti-racist strategies in social work to deal with such social injustices. This does not mean, as Lewis (2000) reminds us, that ethnicity or race should be the only major axis of differentiation, but it is of paramount importance to also include social categories such as gender, class and sexuality in mapping different experiences and identifications. This approach by Lewis can be defined as an intersectional approach that has been advocated in recent years by certain social work and welfare researchers (Fahlgren & Sawyer, 2005; Mattsson, 2010; Mulinari, et al., 2009; Murphy, et al., 2009) in proposing social and public policy changes but also including intersectional approaches in social work education

and social work practices in order to understand and respond to different experiences of individuals and groups.

One of the urgent actions that should be taken to help reducing the oppressive practices of social work is improved education. Many current social workers are highly influenced by the idea of "cultural clashes". The Institute of Social Work Education should include recent research and findings about the oppressive, as well as emancipatory role of social work in a globalized world. Such educational initiatives can be organized as short-term courses for social workers who are already working at social offices, as well as long-term education for new social workers. If changes are to occur, we need to decolonize the basis of the racist epistemology within the discipline of social work through critical text books that highlight and formulate new routes of action and strategies to deal with racism. An adequate strategy needs to look at those discriminatory practices that are daily reproduced by dominant subjects and dominant institutions and thereby undo those naturalized privileges that have discriminatory effects on minoritized groups and individuals. As long as social workers continue to not take into consideration those wide-reaching inequalities, ethnic discrimination, racism and stigmatization that migrants experience in Sweden, social justice and equality will not be enhanced. Consciousness of social injustice and inequality is important but it not sufficient when anti-racist policies are not anchored in the practical and institutional work of the social workers.

Further, social workers should also reconsider their social location as service providers within dominant social institutions that take white Swedishness as the normative point of departure for their service provision. In this regard, Fook (2005) points out that social workers should assess the lenses through which they analyze the social problems of those groups they work with. Interrogating the basis of these dominant lenses is crucial to critical social work practice. In the same vein, writing from a critical social work perspective, Quinn (2009) argues that it is because of institutional racism that policies, practices and institutions of the dominant society function for the advantage of one or some groups. Besides, it is within such institutional frameworks that the world-views, beliefs, and values of the dominant group are established as the normative point of comparison to which *other* values and meanings are constructed as inferior, pathological and deviant (Quinn, 2009). Working adequately with minoritized groups can not be achieved solely by resorting to cultural competency as if the problem of their interactions was solely rooted in the culture of the client and the social worker. This stance neglects the wider societal context where relations of domination and subordination are constructed. Further, as Kamali (2002) and Dominelli (1997) have noted, the

notion of cultural competency assumes a homogenized notion of the cultural background of minoritized clients, but it also leads to a ghettoized social work profession, where white Swedish social workers abdicate their responsibility in taking actions to endorse the lives of minoritized clients. It is worth mentioning that many social workers with immigrant backgrounds are also engaged in this cultural inferiorization of people with immigrant backgrounds (Kamali, 2002). This should be a matter of constant critical investigation in social work research and practice.

Social work in Sweden is permeated by a culturalist discourse about young people and families with immigrant backgrounds. This discourse frames their cultural background as inferior and assigns them deviant qualities. The culturalist approach is preoccupied mainly with culture of the "origin" and excludes the broader political, cultural, economic and social contexts that these youth are situated within in the dominant society. Focusing solely on "culture" as explaining the despair they experience not only maintains exclusionary practices in the dominant society but also limits their life opportunities and underpins the structural inequalities that these youth experience within the labor market, school system, housings, mass media, legal system etc. Identity formation is consequently a dynamic social process that is sensitive to prevailing structural constraints, inequalities and opportunities. Therefore, social work research should pay attention to those structural inequalities that generate difficulties for young people with immigrant backgrounds to attain full and equal citizenship in the society where they are living. Social work can contribute to form and mobilize anti-oppressive forces in the society in order to alter oppressive structural inequalities.

Today, one of the central tasks of social work in Sweden is to challenge dualistic categories like "Swedes" and "immigrants" that are assigned different power and values and reproduced by mass media, politicians and researchers. Similarly, Pringle (2006) suggests that there is a great need to change the discourses about ethnicity within Swedish welfare agencies and among welfare researchers and policy makers. The notion that Swedish welfare system is a *just* entity and does not practice racism should be challenged, otherwise, social workers will continue to reproduce the prevailing unequal social relations (Pringle, 2006). Social workers should also take into consideration the ideological basis of constructions of certain immigrant groups in terms of cultural deviancy and inappropriateness and link these constructions to the ways they experience structural inequalities. It is knowledge about these structural inequalities that can enrich the practices of the social worker in formulating strategies to counter ethnic discrimination and racism and not pocket-sized handbooks for dealing with cultural differences and neglecting the

historicity of how cultures are made in broader political and economic contexts. Challenging essentialist approaches to identity formation is a useful strategy to adapt in social work practice in order to enable social change and equality. Resorting to essentialist notions about minoritized clients tend to perpetuate the structural inequality that mark the lives of minoritized subjects, whose identities are not understood in the political context they inhabit and affect the ways identities are formed.

Flood and Pease (2005) assert that it is difficult for dominant subjects to recognize their privileges because they are normalized, naturalized and rendered invisible in the society. It becomes regarded as self-evident for some members of society to enjoy these privileges. Examining these naturalized privileges is an important strategy to show how dominant subjects have attained their privileged positions and how they can be undone. Drawing upon the subordinated experiences of minoritized groups is essential to undoing these privileges because they reveal how inequalities pattern everyday life and how those inequalities diminish people's possibilities to participate equally in different societal arenas (Flood & Pease, 2005). However, it should not be forgotten that there are even people with immigrant backgrounds who are intentionally or unintentionally strongly engaged in the reproduction of racial prejudices, structural discrimination and the privileged positions of the dominant group. Some of those participating in this study categorically valued white Swedishness as more desirable than certain groups with immigrant background like black people, Africans, "Gypsies" and "imports". Hence, the exclusiveness of Swedish identity is also reproduced by some of the subjects that are subjected to discriminatory practices. Social workers need also to consider inter-ethnic conflicts and relationships and work against essentialization on the part of minoritized and marginalized groups.

It is important as Humphries (2004) puts it, that social work has a central role in defining the boundaries of the welfare state. Many people with immigrant background are clients of social welfare services that have shifted their concern from welfare to a position of authoritarianism, a culture of blaming the victim, and emphasis generally on control, restriction, surveillance, exclusion and enforcement. The role of social work has become more repressive through implementing in an uncritical way reactionary social policies that are degrading for those subjects that are targeted by these social policies. Humphries wonders if it is surprising that social workers are despised and feared by people that they intend to help. Further through their implementation of reactionary social policies, social workers become part of the problem rather than a solution. However, this does not mean that social work needs to be an arm of oppression. As a moral and a political activity, it can position itself in relation to social

justice and social change and challenge the sources of inequality (Humphries, 2004).

An important site of oppression that the research participants referred to was the mass media and its role in mediating the image of the others. The members of the mass media have been reluctant to discuss publicly their own role in the reproduction of racism in society and often view their representations of the "multicultural" society as "anti-racist", "liberal" and "objective" (van Dijk, 1993a). In this study, the mass media was mainly regarded as maintaining and reinforcing pathologizing images of men and women with immigrant backgrounds as culturally "deviant" and "backward". In this regard, it is important for social workers to critically interrogate the ways they receive and interpret such pathologized images of minoritized groups but also how their practices are influenced by such images. This is also a matter of concern for social work researchers and the ways mass media influences research projects and formation of social policy. This is an important issue that should be taken into account seriously by social work researchers whose research projects may reproduce the structural inequalities that breed oppression regardless of the benevolent nature of their goals and intentions with the research project or social work interventions. Social workers do not necessarily need to be passive receivers of mass media images but can intervene in the debates and challenge the "truthfulness" of reporting about minoritized groups and the ways it can reproduce and endorse a negative image of these groups. Social workers can also adopt a reflexive and critical approach to their role in implementing and integrating culturalist social policy into social work practices while working with families with immigrant backgrounds.

In sum, the experiences of young men and women with Kurdish backgrounds in this study indicate that issues of social justice and equality in relation to social work need to be reassessed. The research participants' narratives highlight the importance and relevance of social workers understanding the complicated processes of identity formation in a postcolonial context such as Sweden. Critical social work provides important theoretical perspectives and directions and asserts the importance of commitment to work towards social justice and equality for oppressed groups, and working alongside these groups. Critical social work should involve itself in analysing the power relations and dominant assumptions and beliefs that oppress and marginalize certain groups (Allan, 2009). In the light of rising ethnic discrimination and anti-Muslim racism in Europe, critical social work has a crucial role in fighting structural inequalities and otherization processes that permeate the wider society. This is a perspective that is remarkably absent within Swedish social work education and practice.



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