

Diaspora and Citizenship: Kurdish women in London

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ABSTRACT: *The paper is about the notions of Diaspora and citizenship in the case of Kurdish women from Turkey living in Britain. It begins by briefly looking at the concept of Diaspora and citizenship. It then looks at the issues of Kurdish refugees in general and Kurdish women in particular. This part of the paper is based on exploratory research that I have been involved in since 1999 that involves an investigation of social and physical spaces occupied by Kurdish people in the Diaspora. Also included are some recent interviews of Kurdish women living in London.*

The paper argues that ethnic collectivities are not homogenous groupings; rather individuals are positioned differentially within their collectivity with regard to their gender, class, culture, sexuality and other social categories. As a result, certain individuals possess more power than others within the same collectivity. Existing studies homogenizing Kurdish people are gender blind and render women invisible. Gender difference as a category is absent from the work of scholars on the issue (see: Van Bruinessen, 1978; Olson, 1996; Gunter, 1997; Kirisci and Winrow, 1997; McDowall, 1997; Barkey and Fuller, 1998).

The Notion of Diaspora

Kurdish women living in London inhabit diasporic spaces. A dramatic increase in migrations during the last two decades has led to the creation of new diasporas and large numbers of people have been deterritorialized and scattered as migrants, immigrants, refugees, guestworkers, exiles and asylum-seekers (Hall, 1990; Hall, Held and McGrew, 1992; Cohen, 1997; Smith, 2001).

As people become displaced and dislocated they are distanced from their imagined 'homeland' spatially and temporally. All of this involves construction of new identities (including transnational ones) as well as disruption and

¹ This is a shorter version of the original paper and it is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Tijen Uguris.

transformation of the existing ones (Yuval-Davis and Uguris, 1999). These experiences increase the existing ambiguity in their sense of 'belonging.' As Avtar Brah points out (1996: 182), at the heart of diaspora is the image of a journey. These multiple journeys, however, are made in order to settle down, and put roots 'elsewhere.' She further notes that historical details of these journeys are important, thus [t]he question is not simply who travels, but when, how and under what circumstances.

The circumstances of leaving determine not only the experiences in these journeys but also the circumstances of arrival and settling down (Khan, 1995 in Cohen, 1997). Upon their arrival, diasporic people are inserted into the social and legal landscape of power. Thus, the existing, newly acquired and transformed identities of individuals and collectivities position them specifically within the existing power relations. The social categories of 'identity'/'difference' (e.g., ethnicity, gender, class/status, sexuality, ability or age/generation) are in themselves categories invested with power. These power relations create and recreate multiple and relational power positionings that are central in constructions of the community at local, national and international levels (Brah, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Radcliffe, 1999; Yuval-Davis and Uguris, 1999).

Furthermore, as Sarah Radcliffe (1999: 238) points out, the social categories of difference – whether ethnicity, gender, class, culture or nation – around which people identify and live their lives are mapped out onto cityscape and specific locales. Daily routines of social groups are spatially defined. As a result, social differences and corresponding power relations acquire their own spatiality.

Cohen (1997: 172) points to the ambiguity of diasporic communities as being both insiders and outsiders; consequently, members of the diasporic collectivities utilize the existing available resources to make sense of the self in a 'foreign place.' The 'insertions' of diasporic communities in social and physical space of the host society, on the one hand, create opportunities for new kinds of interaction in the existing localities. On the other hand, tensions occur sometimes giving rise to conflicts between the host society as well as other diasporas. This is because 'configurations of power,' as Brah (1996: 183) notes, 'differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another.' Thus, according to Brah (1996:184), 'all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous, contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common "we"' (Papastergiadis, 1998: 171; Massey, Allen and Pile, 1999: 166).

Indeed, as a Diasporic community is 'inserted' in a specific context it is subjected to further differentiation leading to subsequent inclusions and exclusions. In the following discussion I will take up issues of inclusion and exclusion in diasporic space both socially and spatially.

Inclusions/Exclusions in Diaspora

Individuals have different identities and are involved in particular power relations. These multiple identities may be internally defined, externally imposed/forced or both. They are fluid, relational and constructed within a specific time and space (spatial and temporal) (Hall, 1992; Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994). A Zaza friend of mine, for example, described this succinctly as follows: *'I am a Kurd when I am with Turkish people, I am Zaza when I am with Kurdish people.'*

While displaced people move over time and across space through different socially structured discursive spaces they form and re-form the "self." These spaces may include village space, neighborhood space, metropolitan space and transnational space. All these spaces are racialized, ethnicized, gendered and classed. Individuals and collectivities occupy multiple locations in these and their experiences are always, necessarily, culturally mediated (Walzer, 1997; Uguris, 2000a; Smith, 2001).

As a result of their multiple identities individuals become part of collectivities, which are social constructs with no fixed boundaries. Constructions of collective identities inescapably involve processes of inclusion and exclusion, i.e., processes which create "otherness." Boundaries, structures and norms of collectivities are ever shifting and the result of constant processes of struggles and negotiations. The notion of 'the community,' however, inherently assumes collectivities as homogenous and overlooks the conflicting interests among their members (Young, 1990; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993; Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994; Hill, 1994; Massey, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1994, 1997; Assiter, 1996; Brah, 1996; Charles and Hintjens, 1998; Smith, 2001).

All ethnic groups are characterized by a notion of 'community' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993: 8) which again implies that these ethnic communities are homogenous. Implicit in notions of multi-culturalism is the stereotypical view of what a community is and what constitutes a 'typical' member of a community. Equal opportunity policies assume that the interests of all the oppressed and disadvantaged are automatically shared and reconciled – as if everyone is disadvantaged at the same level. They do not see the existing conflicting interests within these communities.

Sheila Allen (1998) notes that particularly in conflict situations, ethnicity linked to nationalism can override all other identities. Nevertheless, as Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) underlines, both notions are gendered, attributing different roles to men and women. '[T]he diasporic imagined community,' on the other hand, as Brah (1996: 183) underpins, 'is far from fixed or pre-given. It is

constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life: in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively.' Moreover, "diasporic community" is differently imagined under different historical circumstances.'

Gill Valentine (1999: 47-8) refers to Edward Said's (1978) work, which argues that 'just as we make our histories, so too we make our own geographies.' She notes that '[t]he notion of imaginative geography' is also found in the work of Benedict Anderson, which 'carries some overtones of Said's imaginative geography, in that he too is concerned with how we imagine space and its boundaries, how we imagine whose space it is, and how we construct "self" and "other".' Therefore, a diasporic community is a transnational community. Through the everyday interaction of individuals and collectivities new diasporic networks are created and the existing ones are evolved.

Space/Place and The community'

Space is not a passive container but constitutive of identities and 'differences'. Space and place are not merely buildings and roads, i.e., physical. Instead they are the outcomes of social relations. Social space in general and diasporic social space in particular consists of complex relations of power that create multiple power positionings for both individuals and collectivities. In the course of interactions with each other we socially construct these spaces, imagine and give meaning to them. These constructs are constantly contested, negotiated and influenced by power relations. Thus, our relationship to place is determined by our location on the social map of these power relations (Massey, 1993, 1994; Massey and Jess, 1995; Duncan, 1996; Yuval-Davis and Uguris, 1999; Soja, 2000; Uguris, 2000b).

Refugees' access to space is subject to a number of racist barriers ranging from immigration control to preventing them from settling in certain residential areas and racial harassment by neighbors. In certain neighborhoods of London, for example, the white majority has been predominant, while racialized minorities are excluded. Hegemonic ideology involving differential power relations includes particular groups of people while excluding others. In other words, a particular area becomes a 'white neighborhood' only in so far as ethnic minorities are excluded, left outside. As Zygmunt Bauman (1991: 2) argues, 'invariably such operation of inclusion/exclusion is an act of violence perpetrated upon the world, and requires the support of a certain amount of coercion.' Thus, ethnic minorities are excluded from these neighborhoods by the coercion embedded in the dominant ideology (Uguris, 1999).

All of the above mentioned processes are highly gendered. Differences between women and men with regard to their social location are reflected in the

spatial. They have differential access to public space. What is more, space is contested, territorialized and occupied as a result of unfolding social relations within them involving conflicting interests and differences of power (Massey and Jess, 1995; Massey, Allen and Pile, 1999; McDowell, 1999b).

The community is often perceived in relation to a place. Rodman (1993: 135), for instance, links community to place and claims that community 'grows out of and [is] expressed in the experience of place.' Massey (1994: 153), on the other hand, suggests that persistent identification of place with 'community' in fact is a misidentification. 'Communities can exist without being in the same place - i.e., networks of people/friends with similar interests, major religious, ethnic or political communities.' Although I agree with Massey's assertion, I also think that even among those communities there is often a reference to a specific place, which is constructed among the members of these communities - however symbolic it might be. This might be a 'holy place' (e.g., temple) or a 'holy land' for religious communities, former or future imagined 'homeland' for some ethnic/religious communities, or even a virtual space - cyberspace.

Indeed, as Cohen (1997) notes 'In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artifacts and through a shared imagination.' Deterritorialization or distancing from the imagined 'homeland' that a person experiences plays a central part in the experiences of a diasporic community.

Smith (2001: 152) claims that a 'most familiar response to deterritorialization, particularly among exiles and refugees, is the desire to reterritorialize.' He further argues that 'the noire side of this political imaginary is a "politics of return" that expresses an individual or collective desire to recapture or reterritorialize a "homeland" perceived to be lost.' The more positive side of 'politics of return,' he maintains, 'is exemplified in the creation of ethnic neighborhoods. In these social spaces, selected elements of the past are recaptured in the place-making, spatial practices of new immigrants and refugees.' Cohen (1997) too argues that some political projects promote the desire to return or 'reterritorialize' as a collective response to displacement and deterritorialization. Nonetheless, it is also important to note that 'not all diasporas sustain an ideology of "return"' (Brah, 1996: 180). Hence, Brah (1996) highlights a distinction between a 'homing desire' and 'desire for a homeland.'

Those 'ethnic neighborhoods' emerging as a result of the insertion of the diasporic communities in the social and physical space of the host society, may involve segregation of some of these communities. Commenting on residential segregation of racialized minorities, Iris M. Young (2000) points out that residential segregation is a source of serious injustices as well as social divisions that hinder political communication. Democratic societies, she claims, make too

little effort to challenge and alter the situation. Young further argues the wrongs of segregation do not consist in group clustering. Rather, segregation is wrong because by restricting choice (e.g., housing) it violates a principle of equal opportunity. Moreover, it produces and reinforces unjust privileges and disadvantages. 'The primary wrong of segregation,' according to Young (2000: 216) 'is that it excludes some people or groups of people from benefits that others have.'

Citizenship and Participation

The notion of citizenship that incorporates a number of different elements is 'an essentially contested concept' (Lister, 1997: 13). According to the British sociologist T.H. Marshall (1950: 84), 'citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed.' In this way, citizenship is related to the increasingly contested concept of 'the community' rather than 'the state.' Included in Marshall's classic concept of citizenship are not only formal political rights, but also civil and social rights (Phillips, 1993; Lister, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1997).

The notion of the 'community' in the definition of citizenship – as in T.H. Marshall's (1950) definition – evokes a strong sense of belonging and of national identity that can be provided by citizenship. As Yuval-Davis (1997) highlights, defining citizenship as a 'full member of community' implies that people are often members in more than one community, sub-, supra- and cross-states. Indeed, today citizenship needs to be seen as a multi-layered construct (Yuval-Davis, 1997) in which people participate in different ways and to different extents in the different layers of communities in which they are members – local, ethnic, regional, trans-national – and in the case of diasporic communities, also the homeland communities (Yuval-Davis and Uguris, 1999). Thus, it is important to understand the relationship between 'the community' and the state and how this affects people's citizenship.

The notion of 'citizenship' is closely connected to the notions of equality and democracy. It is a concept not only constructed differently in different societies, but it also changes its meaning within the same state and society over time (Mouffe, 1992: 25). Exploring the notion of citizenship can shed light on some of the main issues, which relate to the complex relationships between individuals, collectivities and the welfare state, as well as the ways ethnic and gender relations influence and are influenced by them. Rights and duties are notions closely linked to the notion of citizenship and, as Yuval-Davis (1997) points out, the overall concept of citizenship sums up the relationship between the

individual, society and the state.

Recent discussions on democracy note the existence of differences between individuals such as ethnicity, gender, and class and call for recognition of group differences. Some propose an institutionalization of group differences so that the disadvantaged and marginalized groups are provided with opportunities and mechanisms to express and exercise their differences and influence policy formation processes. However, such arguments remain problematic because they are based on essential social categories and boundaries (Eisenstein, 1984; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990; Young, 1990; Phillips, 1993).

Some scholars link the notion of citizenship to participation in the polity arguing that social and political participation is the most significant defining and central characteristic of citizenship (Turner, 1986; Jayasuriya, 1991). David Held (1987) also argues that participation of people in the community in which they live is central to the idea of citizenship. Those groups that so far have been excluded from full membership strive for membership and enjoyment of all social benefits. Likewise, Dahrendorf (in Held, 1987) asserts that citizenship is not a legal status that is something people are given once and for all. Instead it is a social process, the nucleus of a forceful development. Furthermore, Jayasuriya (1991: 38) maintains participation is not just about the political community, but also about all aspects of being a member of a society. Referring to Parson's concept of 'rights enabling participation,' Jayasuriya underlines the fundamental distinction between 'rights per se, and rights which provide conditions for effective participation in a variety of social domains.'

Lister (1997: 43) underpins that whether the focus is nation-state or the community, or particular groups within the localities, processes of inclusion and exclusion are simultaneously at work, both at legal and sociological levels, through different modes of citizenship. 'Formal citizenship (e.g., to have a passport) signifies the legal status of membership of a state whereas 'substantive' citizenship is about having rights and duties within a state. Women's participation in formal politics is hampered by unequal distribution of power. The sexual division of labor, such as caring responsibilities of women at home, combined with the problems of using public space, as well as the way politics is constructed (e.g., mainly for men), act as a strong obstacle to their participation. Thus, the private and public divide underpins women's exclusion from decision-making at the macro level and from full citizenship. Racial discrimination, harassment and violence, as well as racialized access to public space, on the other hand, impair the substantive citizenship of racialized minorities.

As Yuval-Davis (1997) argues, welfare rights, as well as political rights of citizens, are affected not only by the formal and informal practices within a specific state, but also in relation to other states. Immigrants, for instance, may be

denied certain social rights that are enjoyed by other members of the society. A conditional right to enter and remain in the country often means immigrants have no access to welfare benefits, which most adversely affect immigrant women who are often the major caregivers of their relatives. Moreover, in some European Union (EU) countries, refugee women cannot claim child benefit for children they have left behind. As Kofman (1999: 136) notes, today European states 'are more than ever discriminating between the legal and undocumented, the deserving and the undeserving, the established and recent arrivals.' The existing debates and struggles regarding citizenship, Yuval-Davis (1997: 74) underpins, have centered around a more basic right – that is, the right to enter, or once having entered, the right to remain in a specific country. However, boundary construction, according to ethnic and racial divisions, involves inclusions/exclusions which are the main arenas of struggle concerning citizenship. Marshallian theories of citizenship altogether. A number of clauses of state legislations, such as the 'freedom of movement within the European community,' are ideological, often racist, constructions of boundaries for they allow unrestricted immigration to some, while blocking it altogether to others with implications for the Kurdish community in diaspora living in Britain, which I take up in the next section.

Kurdish People in Europe

Turkish diaspora (as *gastarbeiter*, migrants and refugees) is the largest in Europe. There are around 3.5 million people from Turkey living in Europe. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of Kurdish refugees in Europe since the late 80s as a result of the armed conflict between the Turkish army and Kurdish guerrillas in the southeast. The area has been governed by emergency rules since 1987. So far, more than 3 million people in the region have been displaced by the military. Depopulation of this region and evacuations led to the dislocation of Kurds. Thus, Kurdish diaspora is scattered mainly in Europe where some 700,000 of them live (Chaliand, 1993; McDowall, 1996; Whalbeck, 1996, 1998; Mojab, 1999).

Kurdish people in the diaspora complain of the continued and widespread abuse of human rights by the Turkish state. A strong and constant tension exists between Turks and Kurds, particularly in Germany. Indeed, on the one hand, the Kurds in Europe together with the Turks experience stigmatization and racism (Senocak, cited in K. Robins, 1996: 67). On the other hand, the Turkish state whose repression led to the displacement of the Kurds in the first place attempts to influence the European governments to put pressure on refugees who denounce the abuse of human rights, demand self-determination of Kurds and express their

Kurdish identity (P. Robins, 1996; Gunter, 1997; Barkey and Fuller, 1998).

Despite their differences, Turkish and Kurdish communities are often seen as homogeneous in the existing studies (see for instance Basgoz and Farniss 1985; Sen, 1990), but Kurdish people are not homogeneous. They are divided by their countries of origin (e.g., Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria), tribe and region, gender, class, sexuality, religion (Alevis, Sunnis and Yezidis), language (e.g., Kurmanji, Zaza/Dimili, Sorani and Gorani), as well as ideology. Kurds are divided among the European Union countries not only as a nation, but also as extended families which has implications in terms of citizenship. They 'belong' to a community that extends beyond the borders of their country of residency. When their problems of entry and residency have been resolved, a number of other questions that concern them remain unaddressed such as the rules of their country of origin. Indeed, as dislocated Kurdish people become refugees in Western Europe their actions remain restricted for they have left their families behind. Political developments in their country of origin continue to affect them which calls for their continued participation in the polity. What is more, as diasporic people they are part of highly complex processes in and through which the collective 'we' is constructed. Different constructions of the 'we' lead to the 'empowerment'/'disempowerment' of different individuals and groupings.

As a result of their differences in interests and values, these groupings have different experiences of the same events and situations. However, as stated earlier, existing studies and subsequently the state policies often do not question these divisions; they tend to homogenize these communities and overlook the different experiences of men and women, of different social classes and ethnicities.

Kurdish Refugees in London: Gendered Exclusions

Britain has multi-culturalist policies, which have been developed in order to facilitate the processes of settlement by immigrants and refugees arriving from its former colonies in the post-war period such as the Caribbean, India and Pakistan. For a number of reasons, however, multi-culturalist policies fail to respond to the needs of Kurds in Britain, for example: a) They do not come from a former British colony, nor from countries within the EU; b) They are defined as citizens of Turkey. While this might be the case, they are an oppressed minority and subject to discrimination in the country of origin; c) The fact that they are oppressed minorities in their countries of origin makes them vulnerable to political 'terrorism.' Existing policies fail to respond to the needs of the Kurds

(Yuval-Davis and Uguris, 1999).²

Nonetheless, all of these experiences are highly gendered as well as spatial. The differences between social locations of Kurdish women and men affect their experiences in their use of physical space. The economic, social, cultural and political activities of Kurds impose a particular spatiality. In other words, these activities define the space they occupy.

When Kurdish refugees are dislocated they become physically attached to a new place – the places of destination. They often remain emotionally attached to their place of origin, e.g., ‘homeland,’ which is reflected in the names they choose for their businesses, such as Diyarbakir Restaurant, Harran Restaurant, Antepililer, Gaziantep Restaurant, Elbistan Social Club, Cema Café Gallery. These spaces that diasporic Kurdish communities create reflect their fractured, multiple, fluid, newly created and transformed identities. Cema means ‘our house’ in the Zaza language. As a café/gallery and art house it was called ‘our house’ in order to make people feel at home. Indeed, as a café/ gallery run by a lesbian, Zaza woman, Cema provided an inclusive space with regard to ethnicity, culture, gender, age/generation and sexuality. It highlighted on the one hand, the conflicts that exist within the Kurdish diasporic community that amount to homophobia; on the other hand, it depicts the highly heterogeneous social locations of Kurdish people in terms of gender, class/status, culture, sexuality as well as ideological location and values.

Kurdish people may also express their attachment to the ‘homeland’ by sending letters and money to the loved ones that they left behind, and through music and rituals. Their places of destination are generally urban areas such as London. This is in stark contrast to their ‘homeland’ as many Kurds come from rural areas. There are striking differences between the landscape of their

² In Britain, the number of Kurdish refugees from Turkey has increased sharply particularly since 1989. According to the Refugee Council, by 2001 the number of Kurds living in the UK had reached 60,000 and 70,000, two-thirds of whom are recent arrivals from Turkey. The problems of the Kurds in the UK are more connected to housing and welfare issues as well as individual and institutional racisms. Indeed, a recent Council of Europe survey of prejudice across the continent showed that racism against asylum seekers and refugees is ‘particularly acute’ in Britain. The council’s European commission against racism and intolerance is the second in almost as many weeks to single Britain out for its xenophobic and intolerant attitude towards refugees. There is also a concern about the growing health problems of Kurdish refugees including the psychological trauma of torture, and separation from family. These problems are exacerbated even further through the ‘dispersal policy’ of the government, which puts them into further isolation by severing their contact with the familial and cultural support network, thus relegating them to the margins of the society. These refugees often refuse to be dispersed for they fear being sent to a remote council estate where there would be inadequate facilities and they would be at risk from racist attack (The Refugee Council, 1995; Whalbeck, 1996, 1998).

homeland and the cityscape of their destination. A large part of Turkish Kurdistan is mountainous and crossed by several large rivers. The southern part of the area is covered by snow for about half of the year. The areas they settle as refugees, on the other hand, are highly urbanized involving spatial forms of sophisticated technologies. Some of them, such as London, play a significant role in global processes and are thus defined as 'world cities' or 'global cities' that connect the geographical areas in which diasporic people are scattered. The importance of these cities lies more in their global, rather than in their national roles. These cities become even more ethnically diverse and culturally hybrid as a result of the arrival of the refugees who reshape the social and physical space of the urban areas where they have settled, such as the north and north-east London Boroughs of Haringey, Islington and Hackney.³

Indeed, as the Refugee Council suggested (Lipman, 2001), one of the reasons the dispersal policy⁴ is failing in Britain is that the targeted areas lack appropriate community support and that it is based on the false assumption that the host population will help newcomers access services. As Daoud Zaaroura director of North East Refugee Service, highlights: *'the level of support is not there. They are totally isolated, not allowed visitors, to consume certain foods, or to smoke. There is no money to socialize or mix with the outside world. They don't have the means to integrate into the community.'* He further stresses that *'it will end in social disaster if there is no extra support'* (Lipman, 2001).

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³ These boroughs where Kurdish people settle are areas where familial, 'hometown,' tribal and cultural networks as well as networking around faith (as in the case of Alevis) and labor markets exist. Family and friendship networks also serve as a resource for learning skills (i.e., use of sewing machines in the garment industry). These neighborhoods often provide institutional frameworks and support networks such as local authorities, hospitals, health-centers providing multi-lingual interpretation and advocacy services (e.g., Kurdish, Turkish and English). Moreover, art and cultural events are organized with the active participation of the local communities and their organizations. In these neighborhoods there also exists a 'migration industry' comprising lawyers (e.g., specialized in immigration and asylum law), travel agents, Turkish banks, shops selling 'ethnic videos,' CDs, cassettes, local cinemas and theatres showing films and plays in Turkish and Kurdish, organizing annual art and film festivals, gift shops, furniture shops, kuyumcu (shops selling traditional jewelry that have symbolic value in rituals), groceries and social clubs (Cohen, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 2000; Uguris, forthcoming).

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Nonetheless, all of these experiences are highly gendered as well as spatial. The differences between social locations of Kurdish women and men affect their experiences in their use of physical space. The economic, social, cultural and political activities of Kurds impose a particular spatiality. In other words, these activities define the space they occupy.

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courses provided on the Internet as well as by cultural centers and community associations.

A diasporic community is a transnational community. Spaces that Turkish-Kurds living in the diaspora form close links to are multiple (Anthias, 2000, Yuval-Davis; 2000, Uguris, forthcoming):

- the 'homeland' – e.g., Turkey, village, small town
- country of destination – e.g., Britain: London
- those countries that their families/collectivities are scattered in – e.g., Germany, France, Sweden, Holland, Austria, Switzerland, Italy
- urban centers in the 'homeland.' As dislocated people they may have migrated within their 'homeland' before departing it altogether, which they may have close links to – e.g., Istanbul, Izmir, Adana.

Hevi is a 39-year-old Kurdish woman who lives in a local Kurdish Housing Association in Hackney where Turkish-Kurds are concentrated. Thus, her neighbors are Iranian and Iraqi Kurds with whom she has a good relationship. However, she feels excluded from the Turkish-Kurdish community as a result of her sexual orientation. She says: *'I feel "belonging" and at the same time "not belonging" to the Turkish-Kurdish community.'*

Some Kurds change their names from Turkish to Kurdish as they begin their new lives in diaspora. Their newly constructed or transformed identities relate to their individual and collective narratives. Degrees of attachment to their communities are also very much dependent on these narratives and their positioning with regard to gender, sexual and class relations and subsequent power positionings.

However, as mentioned earlier, Kurdish people in Britain experience social and political exclusion. As the findings of my recent fieldwork have demonstrated, in Britain, minority ethnic groups are absent in decision-making processes (Uguris, 1999). Turkish and Kurdish migrants are not represented sufficiently in the workforce of the local councils, even in those wards where they form a large minority despite the equal opportunities policies of these authorities.

Exclusion of these communities in decision-making processes implies, on the one hand, the lack of influence by these groups to shape decisions that concern their everyday lives. On the other hand, it means that a large amount of information is left out of policy-making processes (Uguris, 2000a). It highlights the existing barrier to contribution to the majority's 'knowledge, culture and

society' (Dascal, 2000).

However, the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act of 1993 not only restricted the entry of asylum seekers into the UK, but also made it more difficult to obtain a refugee status. When women are given exceptional leave to remain they have no right to family unification, which can result in traumatic experiences for both children and their mothers.

Dicle, a 36-year-old Kurdish woman described to me how her five year old son refused to call her 'mother.' *'He kept calling me "woman," for several months,'* she sighed. *'I was hurt so much. I told him I was his mother and would like him to call me "mum." He refused. I begged him, I cried.'* One day Dicle's son told her the following:

When I was in the village with my grandmother, a woman came up to me and said "I'm going to take you to England where your mother is. We will travel together, but meanwhile you must call me "mum." She took me to Istanbul. Then another woman came up to me and said she'd take me to my mother but meanwhile I had to call her "mum." I was taken then to Germany by this woman. In Germany yet another woman appeared who said she'd take me to my mother and asked me to call her "mum." You are the fourth woman who has asked me to call her "mother." How can I know that you are my real mother?

Dicle was heartbroken when she heard her son's story.

I then showed my son a picture when he was a baby and I was holding him. My parents were also present in this picture' she said. 'I told him that I was his real mother and that no other woman was going to come and take him away from me. He then stopped calling me "woman" and started calling me "mum."

Boundaries that Kurdish women experience in Turkey may transform, but they do not necessarily disappear when they arrive in Britain. For example, in April 2001 the national Turkish newspaper, *Milliyet*, reported that a doctor refused to examine a Kurdish woman since she did not speak Turkish. Language, however, albeit for different reasons, often remains a problem for Kurdish women living in diaspora as the following quotation demonstrates. Songul, a 45-year-old Kurdish woman describes her experiences as follows:

...I was sick and could not find anybody to come with me to the

GP, so I could not go to the doctor. Once I went without anybody who could interpret, and the receptionist shouted at me and I could not see the doctor. I wish I could learn English myself, but how could I with all my problems filling my head (Kansu, 1997: 31).

Indeed, for Kurdish women living in the diaspora cultural barriers exist in accessing services, which results in discrimination. For example, their unfamiliarity with the English language (despite the fact that they may be bilingual or multi-lingual) as well as the health service system, leads to unfair practices and discrimination. Sometimes Kurdish women have to get their family members to interpret for them, which often creates other problems. Thus, Berivan, a 37-year-old Kurdish woman explains her situation as follows:

I use my children to go to the doctors. It is very embarrassing. How can you talk about having pain during sexual intercourse in front of your children? Of course I can't. That is why I could not tell my GP anything for two years. I can tell this to you, or an advocate, because it is their job, I would not feel shy. To my children, never! (Kansu, 1997: 32).

Indeed, husbands, wives, children and relatives, in cases of extended families, have different experiences as a result of their different social positionings, powers and interests within the family.

Although women appreciate advocacy provision, the quality of services is also an issue. Despite their unsatisfactory experiences women cannot complain either because they are not aware of the complaint mechanism or they are afraid of losing the limited services. Gulcin, is a 38-year-old Kurdish woman. She highlights the differential power relationship that exists between women and the advocates.

Whenever I go to the doctor, the advocate tells her own opinion. She tells me not to tell that to the doctor as the doctor cannot do anything about it. It may be so, but I want her to tell the doctor what I say, not to tell me her own opinion. I cannot be insistent, what happens if I annoy her, then she won't do what I need. I don't know, I heard some advocates not making appointments and things like this, I would not risk it (Kansu, 1997: 33).

Thus, service providers need to take into consideration the fact that Kurdish women are not positioned equally within their families, collectivities and the state. For example, while teenage girls can leave their homes and go to the Social Services in case of domestic violence, Kurdish women cannot leave their violent husbands since their immigration status depends on that of their husbands.

Turkish-Kurds experience spatial exclusion as well. Concentrated in the north and east London boroughs of Hackney, Islington and Haringey, they are often unable to command space beyond the boundaries of their immediate neighborhoods. As mentioned earlier, social, political and spatial exclusions that Kurdish people experience are gendered. The exclusion of women from certain occupations means they are also spatially excluded. Women are further excluded from those spaces that are created by their own communities such as 'social clubs.'

With regard to mobility, a paradoxical situation exists for the members of diasporic communities. Cohen (1997: 168-9) notes that '[m]embers of diasporas are almost by definition more mobile than people who are rooted in national spaces.' He maintains that they are certainly more prone to international mobility and change their places of work and residence more frequently. Mobility of the Turkish Kurds, however, is encumbered as a result of unfamiliarity with the English language (although they may be multi-lingual) as well as the existing sophisticated technologies of the urban environment; the underground system in London, for example, the skills to use elevators, ticket barriers, the ability to read complicated underground maps and making sense of diagrams which are particularly complicated. Many women often cannot cross the boundaries of the boroughs they live in such as Hackney. It is the women who take children to school, doctors, hospitals, and go shopping. They are usually dependent on public transport (Greed, 1994). However, they often limit journeys to the use of busses only. Hatun, for example, is a 48-year-old woman who has been living in north London since 1993. She describes how she feels in London: "In Turkey it felt like we had been living in a prison whereas here it is like an open prison."

Zore, a 35-year-old Kurdish woman, lives in Tottenham and travels to Dalston by bus for her weekly shopping. She can go to her children's school and local hospital also by taking a bus. However, Zore could not visit her sister-in-law for a number of days when she gave birth at a hospital in central London. When she took her son to an eye hospital for an appointment the hospital provided her with an interpreter. She then asked this interpreter if by any chance she could help her to find the hospital that her sister-in-law was in. The only description she could give was that there was a burger shop as you come out of the underground station. To her surprise the interpreter said 'I think I know which hospital you mean, I am going that direction myself, let me take you there.' Thus, they

traveled on the underground together. Zore recognized the place as soon as they came out of the station.

A Kurdish woman living in the diaspora in London is a member of different communities. Thus, when investigating the citizenship of a Kurdish woman who is living in the diaspora in Britain, it is important to consider her membership in the Kurdish community living in London, the relationship of the Kurdish community in Britain to the other Kurdish communities in the diaspora, particularly in Europe, as well as to the Turkish community in Britain and Europe. Also important is their relationship to other Kurdish communities (e.g. Iraqi Kurds, Iranian Kurds) – and the positioning of both the state of Britain and Turkey internationally.

Their constructions of citizenship are affected by:

- New technologies – e.g., IT, the Internet, cable, satellite and digital TV channels, mobile phones
- Trans-national and global processes, mass migrations
- Changing international political context
- The development of ideological and institutional frameworks with regards to 'human rights' (Anthias, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 2000; Uguris, forthcoming).

Kurdish women in the diaspora are subjected to at least two different sets of gender relations, namely, gender relations among their own ethnic collectivity and that of the majority in the host country. Moreover, they often continue to be subjected to the gender relations of the majority in their country of origin where they are an oppressed ethnic and religious minority. For example, Alevi Kurdish women living in London have their specific gender relations that are different from the gender relations of the majority population of Britain. These relations are also quite different from that of the Sunni people, who constitute the majority population in Turkey.

In the imagined 'homeland,' Turkish-Kurds face boundaries with regard to their gender, ethnic, cultural and class identities. As a result, they become subjected to racism and class exploitation that are experienced in gendered ways. In Britain, some of these boundaries (e.g., ethnic and cultural) are transformed rather than obliterated. Some women cross boundaries with regard to their sexual identities. As a result they may become subjected to homophobia within their community and excluded from their collectivities.

Conclusion

To conclude, the diasporic social space that Kurdish people occupy is highly heterogeneous. Differences between individuals and collectivities resulting from the intersection of class, ethnicity and gender relations are reflected in the physical space. Kurdish people living in the diaspora in Britain experience social and political exclusion. However, Kurdish women are excluded in two ways, experiencing 'belonging' and 'not belonging' at the same time. All of this relates to the multi-tiered construction of citizenship and wider issues of participation. A Kurdish woman living in the diaspora in Britain is a member of more than one community, sub-, supra- and cross-states, which has implications at local (neighborhood as well as city), national, European Union (EU), international, and global levels.

Finally, a few points need to be emphasized for consideration in future policies. Future policies and any change in the policy area should take into consideration the following:

- It is imperative for the local authorities to recognize the diversity of experiences of members of a diasporic community. Such recognition would do away with the tendency to rely on fixed and unchanging notions of 'the community,' culture and identity.
- Access to information is of crucial importance. However, often the available information is in English and this is sent to organizations with the hope that they will get through to the individual members. Individual members of a collectivity, however, occupy different places in the collectivity, and thus they do not have equal access to the information and resources available to the collectivity as a whole. Moreover, certain individuals who have more clout in a group may be acting as 'gate keepers' preventing the equal distribution of information and resources within the collectivity.
- Decision-making structures and the workforce of local boroughs where Kurdish people are concentrated become representative of their constituents. Resources are allocated, financially and time wise for example, and made available for their training needs to enable them to participate in decision-making bodies.

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