

Abstract

Diaspora global politics

Kurdish transnational networks and accommodation of nationalism

English text

Author: Ann-Catrin Emanuelsson

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Department of Peace and Development Research, Göteborg University

Box 700, SE 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden.

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This thesis is concerned with diasporas as increasingly significant 'transnational' actors in emerging 'global politics', representing changes in the nature and form of political organisation beyond nation states. Diasporas have witnessed the increased interest of scholars from several disciplines. Whilst they maintain that the new approach on migrants and refugees provides insights into overlooked aspects, they point out conceptual and analytical confusion and the need for more studies and increased theorisation. On the one hand, diasporas are increasingly regarded as 'transnational communities' with propensity for multiple identities and a sense of multi-locality; they are engaged in various types of activities and interactions across borders, connecting them to two or more societies simultaneously. On the other hand, specifically when political ideas and activities are concerned, diasporas are often still characterised as nationalist actors using cross-border means to strengthen the nation state system; sometimes they are even described in sharp contrast to transnational cosmopolitan social movements.

This thesis takes the form of a case-study in order to provide insights into diversity and specific contextual matters but also identify possibilities for further theorisation by providing a 'good example'. The case of the Kurds appeared to encompass many issues of interest contributing to broadening the understanding of diasporas/transnational communities within the complexity of transformations 'between' as well as 'within' nation states. Over the last decade, certain changes occurred in their region of origin; the Kurdish issue were internationalised, the Kurds were increasingly recognised as Kurds and the major Kurdish movements declared non-secessionist ambitions. Whilst some attention was paid to Kurdish refugees and the Kurdish diaspora in this context, to some degree the findings by researchers presented varied and divergent conclusions. On the whole, the complexity of the case comprised of many issues which would benefit from further elaboration.

Methodologically, the thesis is based on 'data' from texts/documents and loosely structures interviews. It studies two organisations in Germany, one in France, one in Belgium, two in Britain, two in Sweden and one in the United States, countries hosting major Kurdish communities from Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Five of the organisations were established between 1978 and 1985, whereas four were established in the 1990s making it possible to analyse the important changes and practices between 1978 and 2002.

The result shows that in the 1990s, the Kurdish diaspora organisations not only increased their transnational networks, but also entered a process going from exile politics and the goal of outright Kurdish independence to successively accommodating ideas concerned with 'universal' human rights, cultural and political pluralism and post-sovereignty whether they focused on the region of origin or settlement/asylum. The thesis challenges perspectives confined to portray diasporas as exclusive nationalists concerned with exile politics. It supports propositions suggesting that migrants and refugees should increasingly be regarded as 'diasporas' or 'transnational communities' with propensities to absorb global/transnational ideas and processes.

Key words: Kurdish diaspora, transnationalism, globalisation, global politics, nationalism, migration, refugees, integration.