

Diaspora, Identity and Return: The Kurdish Diaspora in Devon

Submitted by Shoker Abobeker to the University of Exeter
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Abstract

This research argues for a more nuanced understanding of the diverse motivations for diaspora movement and return. The study develops contemporary diaspora literature by critiquing the way that concepts of home and homeland are used, underscoring the overlooked importance of community engagement, and emphasising the role of racism and gender in return migration. Empirically, the argument draws on semi-structured interviews with 84 male and female participants from the county of Devon, located within the southwest of England, in the United Kingdom, and 32 male and female participants who have returned to south Kurdistan. Alongside contributions to extant literature about migration and diaspora, the thesis also contributes to the fields of diaspora and migration studies by shedding light on the current state of the Kurdish diaspora in particular. Since Kurds have experienced increased autonomy in recent years, the thesis takes the opportunity to reflect on the familiar themes of home, community, identity and belonging in research on diaspora when long-held dreams of autonomy are finally realised. The thesis also makes suggestions for working alongside marginalized and disadvantaged people and supporting their struggle for equal citizenship.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to:

My hero father, whom was martyred for justice, freedom and Kurdish-land.
For my late mother who sacrificed so much to raise her four sons to fight
for their homeland and for the belief and encouragement in supporting with
my journey in education.

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List of Abbreviations

AOP	Anti Oppressive Practice
ASR	Asylum Seekers and Refugees
BME	Black Minority and Ethnic
CLG	Communities and Local Government
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
IKiP	Institute Kurd in Paris
ILR	Indefinite Leave to Remain
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IRR	Institute of Race Relations
IS	Islamic State
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria
KCC	Kurdish Community Centre
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KHRP	Kurdish Human Rights Project
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NASS	National Asylum Support Services
NHS	National Health Service
PCC	Plymouth City Council
PKC	Plymouth Kurdish Community
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
SWW	Second World War
UK	United Kingdom
VOS	Voluntary Organisation Sectors

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

1. Overview, Significance and Contribution of the Study

Although a significant body of academic work exists on diasporic communities around the world, the purpose of this research on diaspora in Devon, a county in the southwest of England, United Kingdom, is to highlight the transnational dynamics of immigrants when long-anticipated dreams of political change in the homeland are finally reached. This research therefore contributes to and critiques notions of diaspora, based upon four key themes: diaspora experience; diaspora identity and belonging; community engagement; and return to the homeland, through a detailed study of the Kurdish diaspora living within the city of Plymouth and its outskirts, in the southwest of England, in the United Kingdom.

Country of origin is often implied as 'home' or 'homeland' (Figure 1.1), and it has long been recognized as the wish of many displaced individuals to return to where they came from. Although these understandings endure until today,

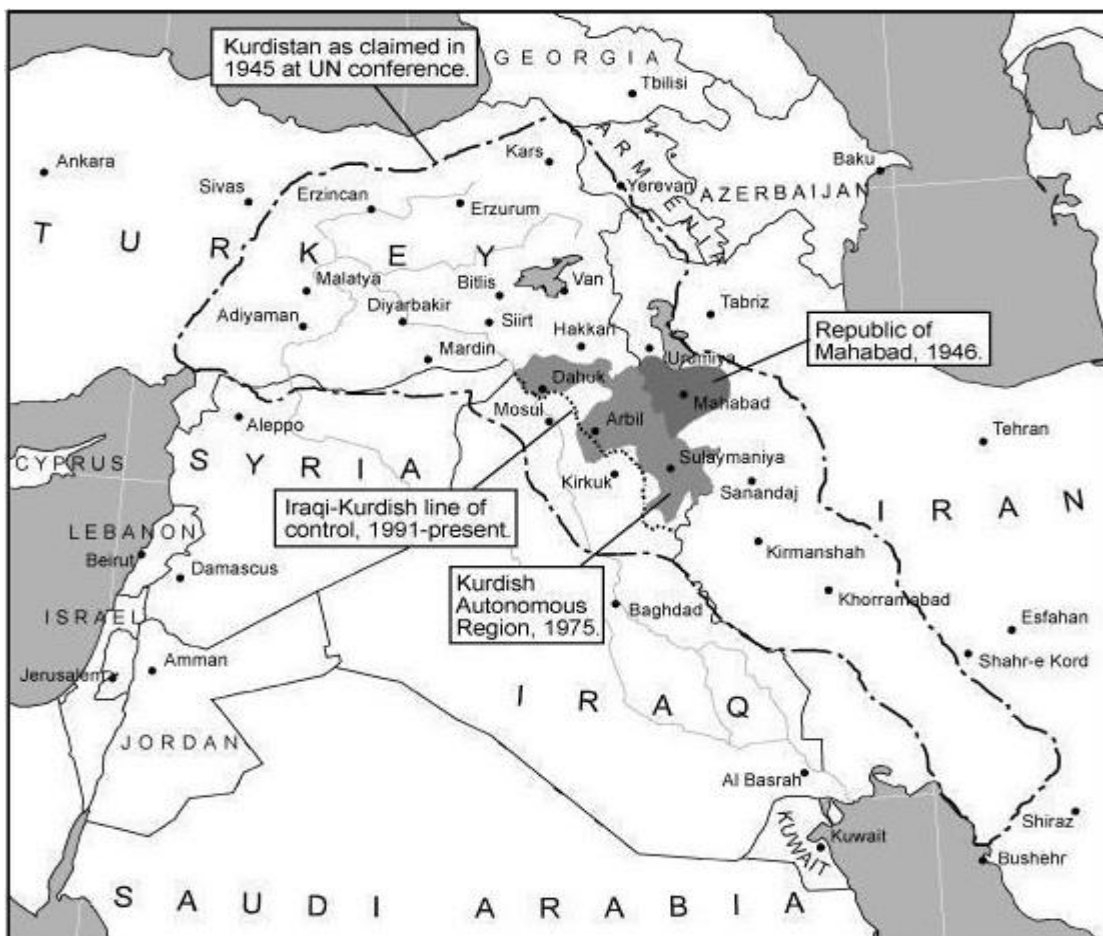


Figure 1.1 Map depicting various territorial of Kurdistan

many contemporary studies about refugees and diasporic communities challenge such static views regarding home and homeland and the connection between people and place, as these vary with the reality of exile. The reality is that with the passing of time, both the displaced person and the homeland are likely to undergo changes. These changes affect senses of 'home' and belonging, which might in turn have important consequences for the question of return. Questions such as "Where do I belong?" and "Would I still feel at home in my country of birth, or has the country I live in now become my new home?" might have gained importance.

The Kurds have been denied what Barth describes as their "basic, most general identity" (Barth 1969:13). This chapter presents a general outline of the research, which is the study of Kurdish people in Devon as well as returnees to south Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Iraq - see Figure 1.1). The research sets out to examine diasporic experiences from multiple theoretical perspectives with a vision of capturing the nature of engagement, change or movement over time in the development of diaspora in the UK. This chapter has been assembled into eight sections: 1. Overview, significance and contribution; 1.2 Global context: why are these issues important?; 1.3 The Kurdish diaspora; 1.4 Experience in Devon; 1.5 Identity and belonging; 1.6 Community engagement; 1.7 Return; 1.8 Structure of the thesis.

1.2 Global context: why are these issues important?

Contemporary debate within geopolitical and social arenas has involved arguments regarding the implications and consequences of the global phenomenon of increasing human mobility. Mobility of people raises questions regarding identity, social cohesion, integration and multiculturalism. To understand the migration and diaspora issue is to transcend social and cultural borders, taking into consideration the moral and legal responsibilities of both home and host country and the transnational diaspora. Globalisation has contributed to the development of the world in social, economic and cultural ways; it has defined the very nature of society. The way migration has occurred is of significance not only to those living within diasporic communities, but also to those as hosts. Global security is under constant scrutiny and those in diaspora are increasingly being met with suspicion. Forced migration due to

conflict and war is at its highest level since the Second World War. UNHCR's Global Trends report finds 65.3 million people were displaced from their homes by conflict and persecution at the end of 2015, compared to refugees were estimated at 16.7 million by the end of 2013, up from 15.2 million in 2011 (UNHCR, 2016). People internally displaced by conflict and violence were estimated at 33.3 million by the end of 2013, up from 26.4 million in 2011 (DMC, 2014). The war on terror and the development of ISIS is causing a global humanitarian crisis as the above figures demonstrate, so it is important to understand the experience of those in diaspora in relation to successful community cohesion and integration working in partnership with key actors to build trust to facilitate stability in the local and wider community.

The Kurdish matter has been widely debated, and has attracted significant global attention during the rise of ISIS, specifically in the region of Iraq and Syria. The reason lies in the various political events that have taken place in the region of the Middle East as well as the Kurdish diaspora's transnational activities. Since this research began in September 2012, much has happened in South Kurdistan, the political and economic situation of south Kurdistan has radically transformed, particularly following the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

This research will evaluate and assess the engagement, integration and experiences of the Kurdish diaspora in Devon, in order to understand the moving position of Kurds from "victimhood" in the country of origin to "animated residence" in Devon, incorporating the views of first and second generation Kurds. The study of the Kurdish diaspora in Devon is important, since Kurdish refugees are from a country of origin (i.e. Kurdistan) that has never formally existed. This research explores the intersections of experience in diaspora, identity and belonging, community engagement, and return which constitutes the central conceptual framework for this study. Having grown up with a fanatical Kurdish identity in diaspora, returnees move back to south Kurdistan for varying reasons. However, the majority of the interviewed participants discovered living in South Kurdistan in the long term as a challenging experience and most returnees keep transnational connections.

This study focuses on the thoughts, considerations and negotiations of Kurdish diasporian people in Devon after the fall of the Iraqi regime in 2003. The aspects evolving around the questions of if, how and when diasporian people return, stay or circulate are analysed within the context of given relationships to other diaspora members and relatives in the UK and in the homeland, together with other factors in the decision-making process. Furthermore, the varied but central role of return and experiences of returnees in relationships between family members and relatives in homeland and the UK will be discussed.

1.3 The Kurdish Diaspora

In the last few decades there has been an increased interest in the notion of diasporas among academics (Lie 1995; Brah 1996; Carter 2005). Diaspora has become a very contentious issue within the political arena. The term diaspora is derived from the ancient Greek verb meaning to “sow over” (Cohen 1997:ix). The conception of diaspora originated from the dispersal of the Jews from their

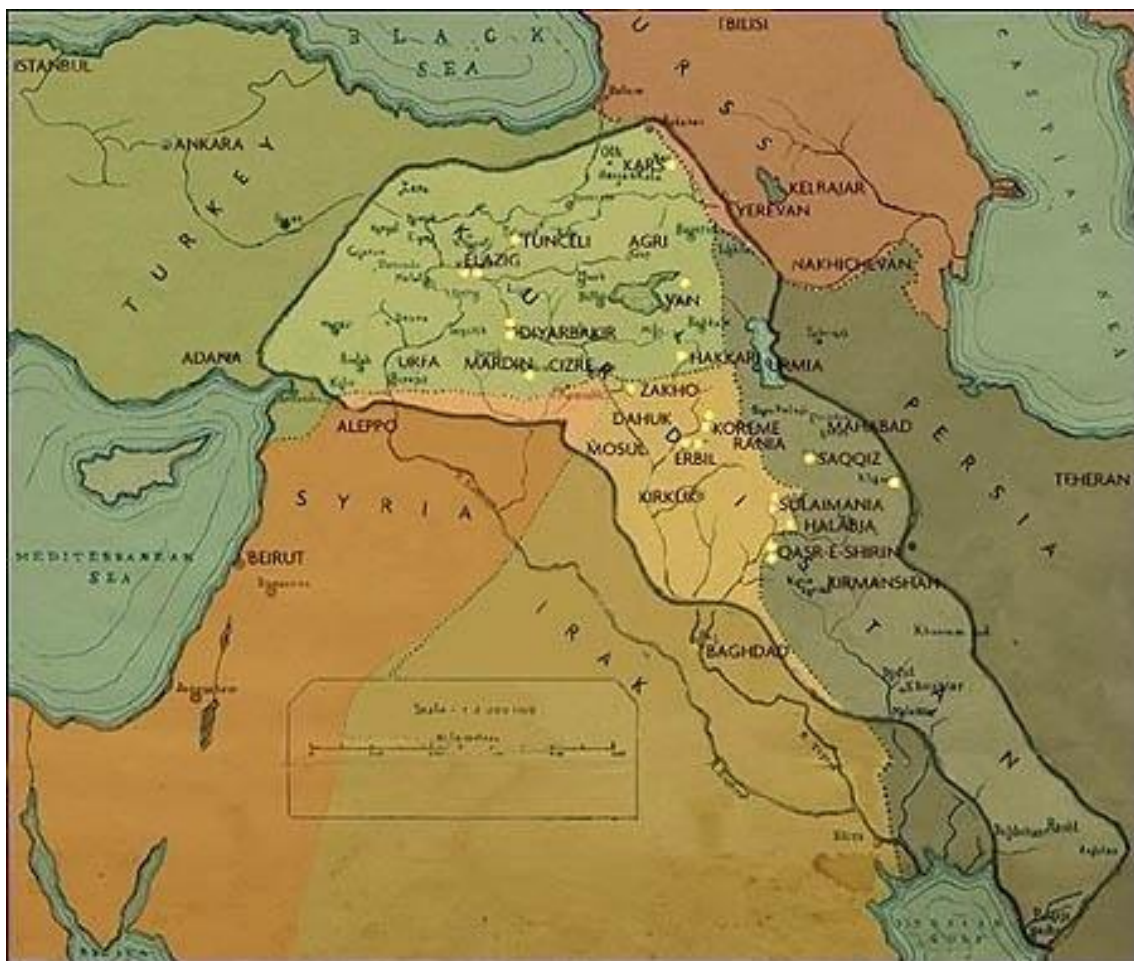


Figure 1.2 Map presented at the conference of San Francisco

Source: Kurdistanica.com

historic homeland, but in more recent history has become more commonly associated with the Kurds and other refugee communities, as well as being often used to describe various well established communities (Cohen 1997; Safran 1991; Clifford 1994). Cohen highlighted that “the Jews provide the source for most characterisations of the diasporic condition” (1997:xi). Collective action and creation of collective identities are thus central elements in the diaspora and characterises all diaspora groups. I define diaspora as a complex social process characterised on the one hand by deterritorialisation and feelings of alienation, homelessness and homesickness, and on the other hand collective action and creation of collective identity around issues of home (country) and community formation. The Kurdish identity has been the subject of several studies (Hassanpour 1995; Alinia 2004; Khayati 2008). Kurdish migration according to Sheikhmous (1990) can be traced back to the 17th and 18th Century.

After the First World War, the Kurds began to go through the different forms of migratory movements, refugees, internal displacement and migrant workers (figure 1.2). During the 1960s, many Kurds from Turkey arrived in other countries as migrant labour, particularly Germany, while a large number of Kurds fled to neighbouring countries as a result of increasing armed conflict and persecution in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1960. During the middle of the 1900's large numbers of Kurdish workers and students migrated to Europe, in contrast to



Figure 1.3 Kurdistan is not Iraq

Source: www.pkc.org.uk

previous migratory movements of Kurds, which were internal to Kurdish regions of neighbouring countries. Kurdish refugee migration to Europe, including the United Kingdom, began mainly in the 1980s as a consequence of a changed political situation in Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran.

Figure 1.3 illustrates that Kurdish people do not want to be part of Iraq. Diasporic Kurds living outside their ancestral homeland are 'allowed to vote' for the central Iraqi Parliament (Collyer 2013), however they cannot vote for a Kurdish Parliament in South Kurdistan.

1.3.1 Identity of Kurdish Diaspora

The issues of identity, home, citizenship, and belonging are particularly acute for Kurds, as many, particularly in Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, feel they have been the victims of continuous discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation for over a century (Wahlbeck 1998; Hassanpour 1995; Khayati 2008; Alinia 2004). Within Western countries, there appears to be a distinction between the first generation groups of Kurds and the second and third generation of Kurds. In spite of this, all Kurds in the UK and Western states have had to experience and still are experiencing exile and statelessness (Wahlbeck 1998; Alinia 2004).

Many diasporic Kurds, both in the United Kingdom and in other countries globally have realised that they no longer need to be Turks, Iraqi, Iranian or Syrian, as they have discovered their own Kurdish identity following their migration to other countries. The Kurds are the largest stateless ethnic group globally. Although the Kurdish community in the UK, and more broadly in the West, has a comparatively short history compared to other diasporic communities. Wahlbeck has argued that "the notion of transnationalism is not enough if one wants to describe the specific experiences of Kurdish refugees in exile [...] the concept of diaspora gives a more detailed description of this transnational community" (1998:11).

The Kurdish national identity has been studied by many Kurdish scholars, who have argued that the diasporic experience has allowed the Kurdish people in diaspora to have multiple identities rather than one based primarily on a very strong connection to their homeland (Hassanpour 1995; Wahlbeck 1998; Ahmadzadeh 2003; Alinia 2004; Khayati 2008). Several studies argue that

nationalism is a force and resource promoting national identities both in the nation state and also among nations without states (Griffiths 2002; Emanuelson 2005; Billig 1995; Sheikhmous 2000). While there has never been a state called Kurdistan, the term Kurdistan has been used since the 12th century (Van Bruinessen 1992). As McDowall suggests, today “Kurdistan exists within relatively well-defined limits in the minds of most Kurdish political group[s]” (McDowall 2004:3).

The term ‘Kurdishness’ has been used consistently among Kurdish communities and political party speeches in diaspora, as well as in Kurdistan. This identity of Kurdishness or Kurdayati has been highly developed in the diaspora. The identities of Kurdish diaspora in the UK are multi-layered identities where different religions, classes, and languages crisscross with other identities, particularly with political identity. Schmidinger states that “Kurdish national identity could be created only alongside other regional, political, sectarian, or tribal identities” (2011:23). Consequently the identity of Kurdishness or Kurdayati for Kurds in diaspora and in Kurdistan plays an important role. Transnational exchanges among the Kurds became more established after the autonomous Kurdish administration in northern Iraq in 1990 onward, while the UK, among other European countries, played a substantial role in the illustration and crystallisation of the Kurdish diaspora.

Transnational identities among the Kurdish diaspora generally do not replace nationalist ones. Sheffer 2006 argues that nationalism, in addition to ethnonationalism, can be increased throughout ethnonational diasporas;

“...one of the main arguments in favour of considering ethnonational diasporas as distinct from all other transnational entities is that the new forms of transnationalism and globalisation have by no means eliminated the perseverance, and even the strengthening, of ethnicity, nationalism, and ethnonationalism. Ethnonationalism continues to have a significant role and a considerable impact in most states and among most of “their” dispersed populations living outside the national borders. In view of this persistence of ethnonationalism and of the ethnic revival

worldwide, the diaspora phenomenon should be separated from the general phenomenon of transnationalism and from discussions of that phenomenon”(2006:126).

The UK, among other European countries, has provided a constructive environment for Kurds in diaspora in establishing and developing their cultural and social identity. As a result many Kurdish associations and projects have been established within the UK to provide a voice for Kurds in exile. The Kurdish Community Centre (KCC) in London is the oldest association and was established around 1980s to support Kurds in Britain. Soon after, almost every major city in the UK where Kurds live (Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Glasgow, Cardiff, Derby, Leeds, Plymouth, Exeter) established associations or projects to support the Kurdish community, while some of these associations have had direct influence upon Kurdish political parties. Khayati states that “the political allegiances that exist in Kurdistan have a profound influence on the political and associational organizations of the Kurds in the diaspora” (2006:10).

Many scholars have addressed significant differences between older generations who migrated as adults and younger generations, who were born or raised in diaspora. The present research outlines the changes that those generations encountered over time. Nevertheless, my research demonstrates that the need for homeland, identity and a sense of belonging are constant. In

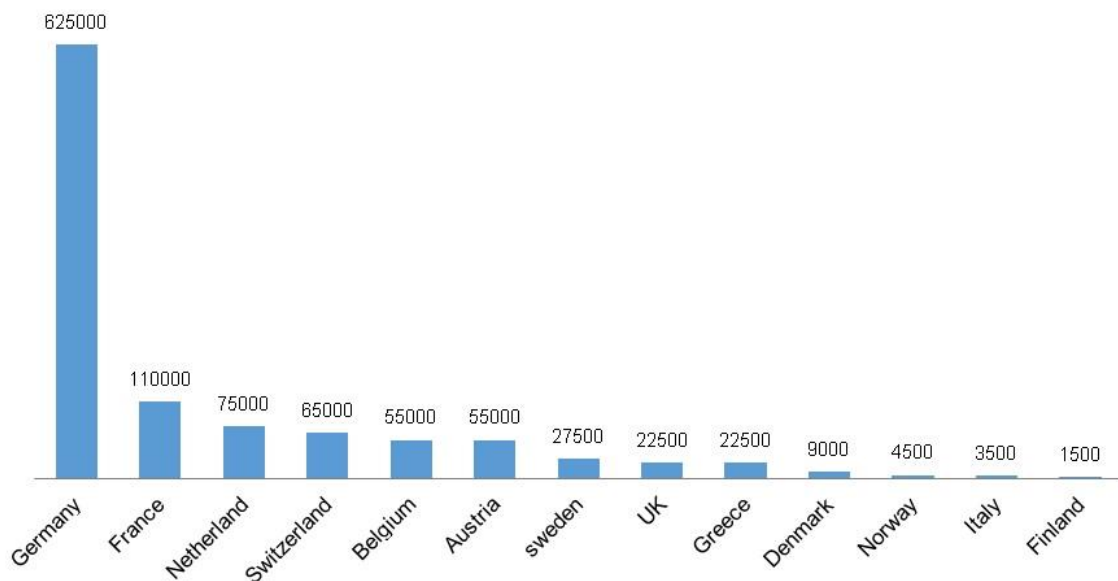


Figure 1.4 The Kurdish population in the European States Source: Institute Kurd in Paris 1995

conjunction with nationalism, it is the key context that constructs a national and collective identity among Kurds living outside of the Kurdish region.

1.3.2 The Kurdish Diaspora in the UK

The Kurdish diaspora in the UK is part of a Kurdish migration to Europe and there are a considerable number of Kurds living in the UK. The most recent UK national census (2011) and other countries in Europe did not ask for the Kurdish ethnicity. According to the Institute Kurde in Paris (IKiP), in 1995 it estimated the Kurdish population in the European states as show in the figure 1.4.

These numbers are estimated and the likelihood is that the population of Kurdish diaspora in these countries has been growing in the last two decades. The report published by the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) in 2006 stated that “an estimated 100,000 Kurds live in the UK” (KHRP 2006:1). According to Bagikhani (et al.) the “Kurdish populations in the UK could be between 130,000 and 300,000” and the Kurdish people living in “London is estimated at 60,000 to 80,000” (2010:30).

Kurdish migration to the UK boomed during the 1980s and 1990s (Baser, 2011; Akkaya, 2011), especially from Iraq as a result of conflict between the two political parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The Kurdish community in the European states are different. Germany, is considered to be the largest state for Kurdish diaspora in Europe, mainly from the Kurdish region of Turkey, while the UK and Sweden are the prominent destinations for Kurds from Iraq. The Kurds have settled across the UK and have established many organisations as well as cultural heritage projects to support the Kurdish community and build the awareness of Kurds within the wider community in the UK.

Kurdish diaspora has become a progressively significant geo-political arena for Kurdish politics. The Kurdish transnational migration has continued as a result of the oppressive policies of Syrian, Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi states against the Kurdish people (Wahlbeck 1998).

Kurdish diaspora plays an important role in cultural and political developments as well as awareness of Kurdish people around the globe. The most recent Kurdish refugees joining the exile community in the UK and European states are the Syrian Kurds. This is as a result of the consequences of the political uprising in Syria (2012), which was part of the Arab Spring in the Middle East, and due to the war with ISIS that has led refugees to join the diasporic community.

Many Kurdish people in the UK believe they will return to their homeland once Kurdistan achieves independence. The latest development in the Kurdish region of Iraq has built transnational relations between Kurds in diaspora. Safran states that “when the conditions are appropriate, they or their descendant[s] would (or should) eventually return to their ancestral home land” (1991, in Akkaya, 2011:5). The Kurdish universities and hospitals, among other departments within the Kurdistan Regional Government in north Iraq, have been welcoming the Kurdish people in diaspora to join the process of nation building in the Kurdish region of Iraq. Akkaya has highlighted that “those who have returned are mainly academics and politicians and they [occupy] positions mostly in the newly established universities and in the governmental offices” (2011:5). There is still no diaspora department within the Kurdistan Regional Government to tackle the issue of Kurdish people in diaspora. However, according to the Plymouth Kurdish Community (PKC) (2012) there has been an increase in the number of people returning to Kurdistan of Iraq since 2004, the total number of people returning from Plymouth between 2004 and 2011 is more than 600 people. Evidence from my research suggests that there will be an increase in returnees if Kurdistan becomes an independent state. Many Kurds in the UK are waiting to get British citizenship to return under the protection of UK citizenship overseas policy. The Kurds in diaspora continue to maintain the belief that the independence of Kurdistan will benefit all Kurds.

Women are making a valuable impact on their nations of origin, but also they are particularly dedicated to improving and building a life for their families and communities in the UK. Singh states that “Engagements with various organisations have given many of these women the space to expand the discourse around women’s rights through activities focused on women’s

education, health and well-being” (2010:38). As a result of that the UK and other states have created a safe space for women in diaspora to understand the rights and freedoms of women within society. Further, several organisations and projects that support Kurdish women have been established in the UK and European states, to empower the voice of Kurdish women and educate Kurdish women in diaspora and the homeland.

Diaspora studies have allowed the development of an awareness of the experiences of Kurdish diaspora immigrants. Theories of transnationalism are useful for understanding the Kurdish diaspora. As Vickerman has observed, “...transnationalism, by orienting immigrants back to their homelands, strengthens ethnicity and slows the process of assimilation” (2001:220). Transnationals maintain “identities that extend across national borders and involve participation in both their home countries and new societies of settlement” (Swigart 2001:3).

The relevance of global migration to Plymouth is the noticeable increase of migration to the South West. Black and ethnic minorities in Plymouth rose from 3% in 2001 to 6.7% in 2011, more than doubling in a decade (Ethnic groups 2001 & 2011 Census). Plymouth’s designation as a dispersal city under the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act has caused a volume of immigration that would normally take generations. Such a fast change can exacerbate community tensions. Jon Burnett’s (2011) study of how geographies of racism are changing in a wider climate of economic challenges in the UK, has shown how changing patterns of migration and settlement form increasingly varied racist responses, exacerbating national policies. Burnett’s research findings have shown that although historically Plymouth has had a comparatively small Black Minority and Ethnic (BME) population, the demography of the city has changed significantly over the past ten years, leaving particular communities isolated and vulnerable to racist attacks. The IRR News Team (2011) was critical of Burnett’s research, noting the lack of local and national political will to challenge the causes of racist attacks, arguing that the official response to racism has historically been one of denial and that of downplaying the severity of racial violence. There has been a commitment to projects aimed at fostering community cohesion and diverting focus away from racial violence in Plymouth,

however the current economic climate has forced certain key agencies providing support services to close down (ibid).

This study will contribute to the fields of diaspora and migration studies by shedding light on the current state of diaspora. It will further develop contemporary diaspora literature. This will include a critique of contemporary understandings of the experience of diaspora, identity and belonging in diaspora, development among diaspora through community engagement and finally an addition to diaspora studies via return and experiences of return. Moreover, this research examines the ways social specialists can work with marginalized and disadvantaged people and endorse their struggle for equal citizenship beyond discriminatory and racist experiences. The participants in this study confront ethnic discrimination in a range of ways including interpersonal discourses, strengthening differences among the self and the other, and deliberately ignoring racism.

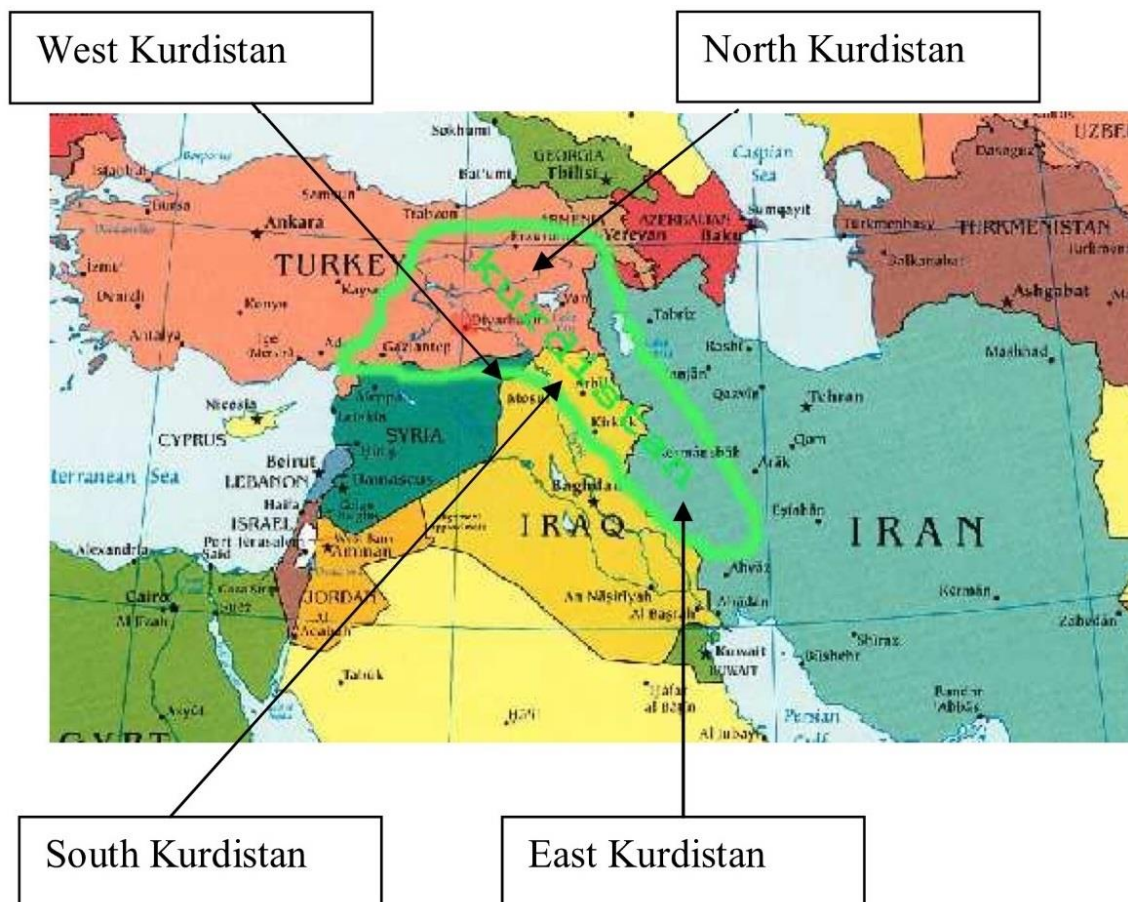


Figure 1.5 North, South, East and West of Kurdistan

Source: www.pkc.org.uk

The Kurdish question has gained momentum since the Second World War within the academic community. This study seeks to focus on the Kurdish diaspora in Devon, particularly around the ideas of return, after the establishment of greater autonomy for Kurds in south Kurdistan (see figure 1.5), as a result of the Invasion of Iraq in 2003. The contributory factors that brought Kurds to Devon were predominantly conflict within their homeland against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq, the Gulf War and the civil war between 1994-1998. These have all contributed to the departure of thousands of Kurds from Iraq to seek protection in different countries around world. The Chilcot (2016) report has pointed out that the invasion of Iraq in 2003 left chaos and a power vacuum, which was due to the lack of security and led to widespread looting and a growing insurgency. The UK is a major destination country which provides a safe and protected place for Kurds and other refugees. The city of Plymouth in Devon has been designated as a dispersal city under the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act. As a result of that designation, the largest ethnic minority living in Plymouth is Kurdish (PKC 2012). The Kurdish community in the UK has been part of the global Kurdish movement, though has faced many challenges and problems. Especially in last two decades, the number of Kurds from northern Iraq seeking asylum in the UK has increased dramatically. When talking about immigration, it is important to see who moves, when, how, where and under what circumstances (Brah 1996).

KEY THEMES

The central objective of this thesis is to contribute to the literature on diaspora, migration and community engagement in the UK. It aims to explore ethnic identity within a diaspora context and to develop our understanding of the process of diaspora return. I will now discuss each of these in more detail (see also table 1).

Themes	Critiques of existing literature and research:	Contribution of this research:
Experience	Literature does not focus sufficiently on everyday racism in places of residence in host society.	My study examines racism in Devon. It emphasises the demographic, intellectual and negative experiences of diaspora.
Identity and Belonging: i. Dream of reality ii. Home	i. Existing literature seldom discusses what happens when long anticipated dream of political change comes about. ii. The diaspora literature sometimes conflates identity and home, the diaspora literature reifies home.	i. I have studied Kurdistan during a period of increasing autonomy. This has enabled me to examine some familiar questions in the diaspora studies field – like home, identity, belonging, and engagement - from this unique perspective. ii. There are multiple forms of identity in diaspora multiple places can be called home.
Community Engagement	Existing literature does not examine the consequences of not having a community engagement policy. In particular, it does not examine this when there is a national policy that is not implemented locally.	This study examines the consequences of a lack of community engagement policy. What is the primary consequence? A lack of trust.
Return	There is not enough literature on women and children's experiences of return migration. In particular the experiences of women and children returning from western to non-western contexts and the freedoms they leave behind, is neglected in current scholarship.	I focus on women's and children's experiences, characterised by feeling forced, disappointment, and frustration.

1.4 Experience in Diaspora

The aims of Chapter Four, on experience in diaspora, are as follows:

- *To explore how the demographics of a rural county impact on diaspora experience especially in relation towards racism and discrimination.*
- *To investigate whether intercultural integration in the host country has benefits towards building and improving the relationship between diaspora people and the host population.*
- *To understand the positive and negative experiences in diaspora.*

Studies on diaspora and migration have addressed the failure to situate the experiences of new migrants and long-standing residents within the place they live and interact. These studies tend to be dynamic in nature, charting migrant and diaspora experiences through time, or by contrasting associated outcomes in different places. Literature on acculturation has dedicated itself to understanding and describing the ways in which majority attitudes towards multiculturalism impact on the acculturation strategies of migrants. This literature does not, however, focus on lived day-to-day, experiences of racism in the place of residence in the host country.

My research identifies that the demographics of the rural county of Devon has significant impact upon the experience of diasporic communities, with hidden racism. The contribution to literature is data that underpins 'day-to-day' racism, especially towards first and female generation migrants in Devon, who are more exposed to cultural differences.

Exile for some diasporian people has implied traumatic experiences; however at the same time it has given them a space and the possibilities to establish their movement and identity. Some diasporian people have faced an otherness and alienation during the ethnic cleansing, violence and other traumatic experiences in their homeland, but also feel unwelcome in a new society where they have encountered racism on a constant basis.

The data from participants demonstrates that intercultural integration in the host country has many benefits such as building and improving the relationship between the people of the host and diasporian homelands. Almost all the

participants in diaspora have experienced cultures within both societies, and acculturation toward a host culture is a reflexive process, in that it occurs in synchronicity with a partial, temporary or incremental 'deculturation' away from a native culture. Many participants in this study emphasized that cultural events and awareness are a roadmap to integration within the host society. This concurs with Vertovec's view of diaspora as a social form, as a type of consciousness, and as a way of producing cultural awareness.

My research explores the positive and negative experiences of diaspora in the rural county of Devon, which has distinctive demographic differences to other cities across the UK, such as London, Bristol and Birmingham. Challenges that are faced for members of the diaspora, include integration, cohesion, and racism. This research has identified a feeling of alienation among the Kurdish diaspora, and that "they [still] believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it" (Safran 1991:83). The experiences respondents recounted, particularly around racism and discrimination, contributed to the feeling of alienation within the host community. Further, it was found that many respondents under-reported incidents of racism and discrimination, due primarily to the lack of trust within the local community.

1.5 Identity in Diaspora

The aims of Chapter Five, about identity in diaspora, are:

- *To understand and analyse the formation of the informants' identity, and the way their identity is developed in diaspora.*
- *To investigate the impact of British culture on the informants' identity.*
- *To investigate whether the informants' have developed an in-between cultural identity or have formed identities that are part of both cultures.*

Literature on diaspora and migrants has discussed the notion of identity, belonging, and hybridity within diaspora and how they are related to notions of home, ethnic identity, and homeland. It is evident that the notions of identity differ strongly depending on connections between individuals and within groups. The concept of belonging raises the issue of an emotional attachment to a homeland, a place of origin, whether imagined or real.

My study illustrates that identity and belonging in diaspora is more than having an affiliation/attachment to a host country, it is about attaining identity status, which was denied in the homeland. Participants when asked the question 'where are you from?' responded with pride towards their ancestral homeland. The contribution to literature is important not only as a result of a connection to the past, but also to the present. It is significant as it determines who they are in their own eyes. The research indicates that identity was either important or very important and for many, identity provided a sense of rootedness and is symbolically connected to their heritage, history, culture and ancestry.

Although home and homeland has a central place within diaspora studies, I advocate a broader focus on multiple forms of identity, due to these issues being intimately related to the question of belonging. I also advocate a more critical view of home. Experiences of Kurds often make it difficult for them to feel at home in one single place, individuals often develop a sense of belonging in multiple ways in which numerous places can be called home.

Some participants in diaspora felt they had new identities in the host country that was denied to them in their homeland. This sense of identity was in relation to the community and society that participants lived in, where they could practise their own cultural beliefs and ethnic identity without fear of exclusion or reprisals, giving them a sense of belonging and ownership. However where some diasporas felt included into society and enjoyed the new opportunities that this afforded them, others felt confusions and conflicts about their identity or claimed they had a dual identity, for some this contributed to a sense of loss and exclusion from both host and homeland.

The data from participants interviewed demonstrates that belonging to place and identity are in relation to home and where the participant's family are residing. Some participants said that it was of greater significance to have the family living together, this became a home with a sense of belonging and identity to that society. A large proportion of interviewees felt they had dual identities, wanting to retain the identity of their parents or their own place of birth as well as their diaspora society. Participants had an allegiance to both host

and homeland and wanted their own children to retain a dual identity, though for some returning to homeland was not considered an option.

Identity for participants was important, it gave stability and rootedness belonging to diaspora society, and gave identity or dual identities to participants who valued the host society for being a vehicle to explore their own ethnic identity. This sense of belonging and identity is key to successful diaspora integration into the host society.

1.6 Community Engagement

The aims of Chapter Six, about community engagement, are:

- *To understand and analyse how key actors engage with diaspora groups, and how the new diaspora groups integrate and engage within the host society.*
- *To understand what kinds of policies, plans, outlines and strategies key actors/institutions have towards diaspora communities.*
- *To investigate a broader concept of the true engagement of diasporic community from the perspective of difference.*

The increased interest among researchers and policy makers in community engagement and recent literature evokes that having a voice in the community and feeling a sense of empowerment gives diaspora groups a stronger devotion to their local area. Studies in this field noted the challenges of bringing communities together. Existing literature explains that diversity and cohesion, in relation to national cohesion policies, asserting identity and challenging prejudice, can be exclusive as well as inclusive for those regarded as 'others'. What the literature lacks is analysis of the consequences of not having a community engagement policy.

Community engagement and community cohesion have become focal points for government policy. The findings of my research clearly illustrate that within local government (Plymouth) there is a lack of policy which is in line with national policy and has no clear strategic plan. The lack of such a resource has created mistrust among the diasporic community, believing that the lack of community strategy is a deterrent to community engagement. This is an important contribution to diaspora literature, as Devon is a relatively new destination and

the disparity between planning and modelling policy within Plymouth compared to other major cities is apparent. The data illustrates well-defined differences between diaspora communities which are established and new arrivals in diaspora. The attention in the media since the increased threat of terrorism since 7/7 further compounds the need for successful community engagement.

Community engagement applies to the manner by which both individuals and organisations within a community create ongoing, permanent relationships with the intention of applying a collective vision for the advantage of a community and to promote community engagement. Recent research has found that having a voice in the community and feeling a sense of empowerment gives black and ethnic minority groups a stronger devotion to their local area.

There are quite distinctive characteristic differences between new arrivals and the ethnic groups established in settled communities. The new community feels excluded from the new environment as a result of cultural differences affecting representations, while often their voice is not heard due to language barriers.

As the movement of people crossing borders in search of safety, security and increased opportunities has increased, policy makers are faced with the challenge of migration policies from a narrow vision of control to the wider vision of management. This study can be used to critically review British local and national policies and the model of community engagement that influences diaspora communities. Integration is one of the important phases of community cohesion and since 2001 community cohesion has been one of the most significant policies and has generated a range of responses from researchers, policy and practitioner communities.

A further key context in which migration in Plymouth needs to be understood is the cohesion policies of the UK government. Zetter(et al. 2006) explain diversity and cohesion, in relation to national cohesion policies, asserting identity and challenging prejudice can be exclusive as well as inclusive for those regarded as 'others'. Examples of exclusionary attitudes in this context include issues in more recent years surrounding Islamophobia, however through citizenship processes there is the possibility for 'others' to sign up to

governmental social cohesion policies. This strategic choice places them on an inside track to influence policy agendas. However, other groups are strongly opposed to Britishness conceived in terms of citizenship, arguing that cohesion is less about accommodating diversity with shared social values and aims, but more crucially about issues of justice and equality of opportunity where ethnic minorities remain disadvantaged (Zetter et al, 2006).

Diaspora groups are often described by public and private sector agencies as 'hard to reach'. However, my data shows that integration may be motivated by a desire to contribute to community cohesion policies and establish cultural connections with the place of residence. Many participants are involved within their local community to actively engage and participate within the new host society. The data shows that engagement with black and ethnic minorities is a slow process and takes time to build connections and trust amongst diaspora groups, this is compounded by the lack of localised diversity policy and training.

Limitations in understanding law and culture in their place of residence was seen by some first generation diaspora as barriers to community engagement. Many of the participants were proud of their roots but identified that changes were needed due to the different social and cultural environments if they wished to assimilate into a new host society.

This study shows there are concerns that organisations which work with diaspora groups are not genuinely committed to the importance of ethno-cultural diversity, and that new diaspora groups have often been ignored or discounted by them. Therefore, as a result groups have not had incentive to be involved in the process of community engagement, and there is a substantial distinction between Plymouth as a rural city and other major UK's cities in this regard.

1.7 Return

The aims of Chapter Seven, about return, are:

- *To investigate how the diasporian imagination and discourse about return to the ancestral homeland, and identify the reasons prohibiting return.*
- *To understand the impact and experience of return within families, particularly women and young people.*

- *To explore diasporian experiences from their homeland and difficulties in re-integrating into mainstream society.*

Literature on diaspora and migrants has extensively discussed the question of return. The concept of return has been a difficult subject, particularly for those considering the return to their ancestral homeland. Likewise, several studies have addressed the importance of temporality and circularity of return movements.

The contribution of this study to existing literature illustrates the return experiences of women and young people. It focuses on the differing experiences within traditional social stereotypical roles in return, the clash of westernised ideals from diaspora with actual experiences, and the reintegration of diaspora returnees to the ancestral homeland.

The findings of this study have identified that returnees faced many challenges in readjusting; this was especially related to family conflicts and weak interactions with the non-returnee population of the country. Male returnees had more political challenges than female returnees but it was also found that male returnees suffered less socio-cultural related adjustment problems than female returnees did.

Some diaspora returnees have emphasized the feeling of responsibility, commitment and obligation they feel towards their land of ancestry, demonstrating the need to contribute or give back to their homeland. Young people particularly often said this in light of the expertise, abilities and skills they gained while living abroad. They felt they had a greater sense of obligation and responsibility as they felt, or others perceived, they had a privileged position living in a host country with greater opportunities.

Responses from participants highlighted that the choice to return back to south Kurdistan may be motivated by a desire to contribute to the homeland's redevelopment, building foundations for Kurdistan's future independence (see chapter 7), and that it is eventually triggered by particular opportunities that emerge empowering them to do so. Many participants returned when particular

vocational opportunities arose, usually within politics, business or educational and health services. The explanation for some returnees was identified as the realisation that successful career mobility in the UK or other European countries was limited. It was felt they could not make a contribution in their diasporic place of residence, either in light of the fact that the system is well-functioning or on the grounds that their own resources are not perceived and recognized.

The idea of return is one of the main themes of the research. This study has shown how Kurds speak and think about a return to their homeland (Kurdistan), and examines what factors prevent or discourage a permanent return to their homeland. It is also important to recognise that return experiences are different within the family context. Women and children within the family unit may have very different experiences of return. Women who have lived in western countries may have to face a very different society where their liberty and freedom is restricted. Children who have been born in a diasporic country may well be westernised and find the prospect of returning to a very different culture and society a daunting prospect.

With the increase of diaspora returnees to homeland, South Kurdistan faces both challenges and opportunities in the present period of expanding stability and strength. Those returning, return with dreams and aspirations of the ideal society, demonstrated by the political frameworks and societal qualities that were present in the host country. This may result in a clash between the imagined view of Kurdistan and the realities of life in return (Christou, 2011).

This study identifies that returnees more often contrast the life they left behind in diaspora with the life in their ancestral homeland, and this disrupts returnees' fictional vision of the place of return and will make the realities of successfully reintegrating challenging and complex, as they could imagine themselves being regarded as strangers in their place of return. 'Diaspora to Diaspora', a term denoting double life experiences, has been generated with the changing geopolitical and economic situation globally. This research has highlighted the compelling need driven by commitment, responsibility, obligation or guilt for returnees to 'give back' to the homeland the skills gained in the host country with a desire to contribute towards building a better future.

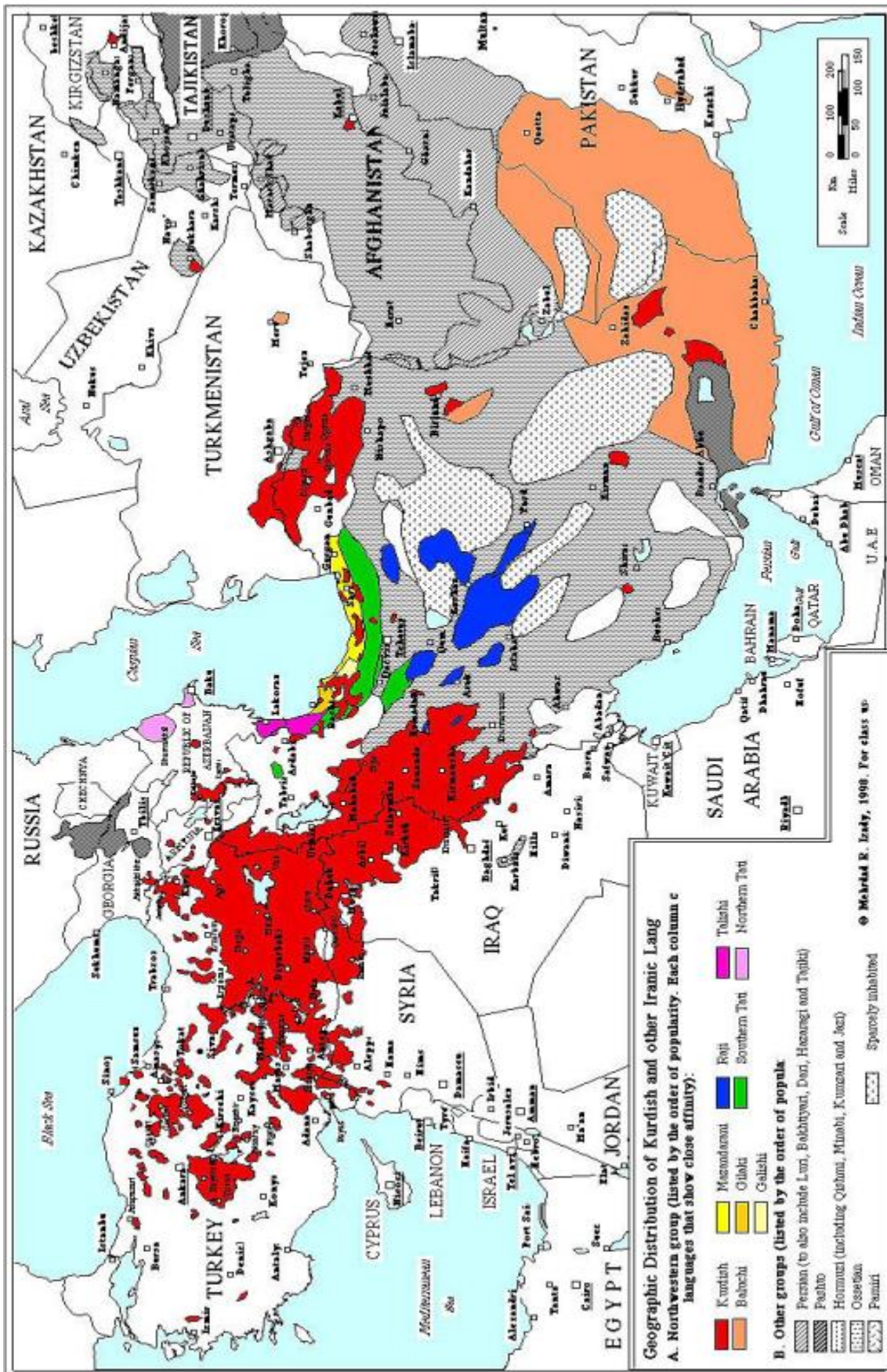


Figure 1.6 Geographic Distribution of Kurdish and other Iranian Lang

1.8 The structure of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows; Chapter Two examines the literature that contextualises the theories that underpin the diaspora study, it explores definitions of diaspora, the characteristics and typology of diaspora and how transnationalism leads to an understanding of global migration. It acknowledges a lack of literature on diasporic return experiences of women and children. This study will contribute to the diaspora fields shedding light on the current state of diaspora. It will further develop contemporary diaspora literature. This will include a critique of concepts such as home and homeland, development among diaspora through community engagement and finally an addition to diaspora study via return and experiences of return of women and children.

Chapter Three describes the methodological considerations and points of departure in the research and the methods that guided the collection of primary and secondary field data. The study is based on a qualitative research method and uses semi-structured interviews as its main data collection technique. This chapter provides the research questions and discusses the locations of the empirical study being in Plymouth in Devon and South Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Iraq). Ethical considerations are explored when undertaking a study of this nature and finally the chapter concludes with the nature of reflexivity.

Chapter Four examines the experience of Kurdish diaspora in Devo. It begins with a historical road map, tracing Kurdish diaspora to Devon and in particular to Plymouth the interexchange between diaspora and host population in both positive and negative experiences, community integration and cohesion. The chapter explores key actors and their experiences with diaspora groups and will finally explore the demographics of Devon in relation to racism.

Chapter Five examines identity and belonging. The chapter demonstrates what happens to Devon Kurdish peoples identities in diaspora and how their identity is constructed or reconstructed when encountering and interacting with another society such as the British society. It explores the notion of home, belonging

and hybridity, the Kurdish national ideology, it listens to Kurdish participant's diasporic experience and how this gives them a dual and collective identity within the host country or a sense of confusion with lost identity.

Chapter Six discusses diaspora and community engagement, defines what community engagement within Devon and in particular Plymouth means, interviews key actors involved in the process and looks at the tools used to engage with diaspora communities to build on integration and trust. It recognises that Plymouth as a city in a predominantly rural county has challenges with BME communities and integration. It looks at the Kurdish diaspora and the citizenship process. It concludes with PREVENT strategy and the positive and negative experiences prevent plays in the interrogation process.

Chapter Seven is split into two sections, Part one describes the experience of return as both positive and negative experiences, it looks at homeland attitudes towards diasporas and supposition from diasporas that skills and knowledge acquired in the host country will support to build a better Kurdistan. This chapter explores what makes diasporas want to return to homeland, the environmental factors, changes in safety and security, including the economic situation. It also examines to what extent social factors influence the desire to return, as well as the pressure of family expectation and obligation. Part two analyses the intention of return among the Kurdish diaspora, particularly in the case of independence and aspirational hopes for a better country for diaspora children. It explores the differences in attitude between first, second and third generation of diasporas and return.

Finally the thesis concludes with chapter Eight which gives an overall summary of the thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review of Diaspora

This chapter provides a critical review of literature on diaspora, and its focus upon the global movement of people. Such movement from one country to another, typically for reasons of safety and security or economics has become topical not just to academic institutions but for ordinary households who see the increasing migration crisis in Europe unfold daily as portrayed by the media. This review selectively concentrates on areas of exchanges and transactions among theorists from the late 1980s onwards. It seeks to identify the various conceptions of diaspora, and how these have evolved, within academic and policy discourses.

In understanding the field of diaspora studies the first question that must be answered is what is meant by diaspora? Over the last two decades, various understandings of diaspora have been illustrated particularly within the social sciences, from disciplines including (but not limited to) Geography, Anthropology, Political, Economic, Geopolitical, International Migration, International Relation, Sociology, Postcolonialism and Communications.

This study contributes to the existing field of diaspora studies and theoretical understandings of the concept of diaspora, applying this to the contemporary situation of the global Kurdish diaspora. This will include a critique of existing understandings of diaspora, including notions of home and homeland, development among diaspora through community engagement, and return and experiences of return. As Alinia (et al. 2014) have pointed out, the “last two decades of Kurdish history can be distinguished as a period when the Kurdish diaspora has become mobilised on a large scale. These developments relate to the importance of transnational ties among contemporary migrant communities”(53). There is increasing interest regarding the Kurdish diaspora in western academic institutions and this review will examine different theoretical approaches and how these contribute towards the field of diaspora studies.

Furthermore, this study will contribute towards the knowledge of return and the intention of return with a connection to the homeland and actual experiences of real returnees to the homeland. The imagined view of Kurdland (Kurdistan) is

constructed, and does not address the contested complexities between life in diaspora and return. Christou and King (2010) claim that returnees more often contrast the life they left behind in diaspora with the life in the homeland. This disrupts returnees fictional vision of the homeland, and makes the realities on the ground hard and complex, as they could imagine themselves or to be looked on as strangers in their place of return. Moreover, the empirical knowledge presented in this research serves to contribute further references for supporting current theoretical approaches and introduce new perspectives which addresses important dimensions of diaspora experiences, identity and belonging with a contributing emphasis on community engagement and racism within Devon, an area with little diaspora literature and how this effects the Kurdish experience of community engagement.

In its endeavour to empathise, explore and acknowledge the constructions and negotiations of Kurdish diaspora in Devon, this study develops a number of different but connected theories. Within this review, I first review existing definitions of diaspora within the literature, noting the characteristics and typology of this concept. The sections that follow in this chapter address existing discourses on diaspora that comprise the concepts of transnationalism, home/homeland, community engagement and return.

2.1 Definitions of Diaspora

The term diaspora comes from the Greek diaspeirein, meaning “dispersal or to sow”. Diaspora traditionally originated from the ancient Greek tradition of colonisation and migration. At the beginning most the concept of diaspora was coined to describe the exile of Jewish people from their historic homeland and their dispersal throughout the world, and refers to people with the same territorial origin. However, the concepts of diaspora and diasporic communities in a contemporary context are increasingly used among scholars for the definition of ethnic minorities, refugees, immigrants, alien residents and displaced communities. The contemporary understanding of diaspora within migration, religious and cultural studies, is now also used in policy, as well as being used to analyse the political, cultural and social growth as a result of displacement and movement. Since the 1990s, the concept of diaspora has been used to describe numerous established communities that experience

displacement such as the Kurdish, Palestinian, and Chinese, African diaspora, and other exiled communities (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997; Clifford 1994).

Researchers have discussed in favour of recognizing a closed set of attributes and actual conditions of diasporic existence (Cohen 1997), while others have used the concept in a broad range of human dispersal. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides a broad definition of diasporas as “members of ethnic and national communities, who have left, but maintain links with, their homelands. The term ‘diasporas’ conveys the idea of transnational populations, living in one place, while still maintaining relations with their homelands, being both ‘here’ and ‘there’” (Ionescu 2006:13). Sheffer suggests that “modern Diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong links with their countries of origin – their homelands” (1986:3). Safran maintains that diaspora is “that segment of people living outside the home land” (1991:224). Docker defines diaspora as “a sense of belonging to more than one history, to more than one time and place, to more than one past and future” (2001:vii). Cohen has also formulated five different categories of diaspora: “victim, labour, trade, imperial (which may be considered a form of trade diaspora), and cultural (not indigenous to the area from which they dispersed, i.e., Caribbean) diasporas” (1997:x, 26-29). Brah’s discussion on diaspora locates “diaspora space” in the “intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychological process” (1996:71). Cho expands upon the definition by noting that:

“...diaspora brings together communities which are not quite nation, not quite race, not quite religion, not quite homesickness, yet they still have something to do with nation, race, religion, longings for homes which may not exist. There are collectives and communities which extend across geographical spaces and historical experiences. There are vast numbers of people who exist in one place and yet feel intimately related to another” (2007:13).

More detailed definitions of diaspora, examined below, more clearly set the frameworks between diasporas and other communities such as nomads, ethnic

groups, migrants, and refugees, and implement an analytical structure to assist theoretical understandings of diaspora. Within this research, and based upon a review of the differing definitions discussed above, I define diaspora as a complex, social process characterised on the one hand by, deterritorialisation and feelings of alienation, homelessness and homesickness, and on the other hand collective action and creation of collective identity around issues of home (country) and community formation. The characteristics and typology of diaspora will be traced in the next section.

2.2 The Characteristics and Typology of Diaspora

There has been significant interest of academic researchers in debating and discussing the meanings and definitions as well as the usefulness of the notion diaspora since the early 1990s (see for example Safran 1991; Tölölyan 1991 1996, 2007; Clifford 1994; Brah 1996; Cohen 1997; Wahlbeck 2002; Vertovec 1999; Carter 2005; Brubaker 2005; Wahlbeck 2002; Tsagarousianou 2004; Ben-Rafael 2010; Mavroudi 2005). Within this chapter I examine the key arguments made by authors working in the field of diaspora studies. In particular, I draw upon the work of Safran (1991) and Cohen (1996, 1997) as a point of departure. Safran argues that:

“...the concept of diaspora [should] be applied to expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics: 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original “centre” to two or more “peripheral”, or foreign regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland – its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return – when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one

way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship” (Safran 1991:83–84).

Safran characteristics list could be used for a heuristic classification. While proposing that Jews were perfect for the definition he inferred, Safran recognized the legitimacy of the utilization of the idea of diaspora for some other dispersed groups that fail to have all of the six characteristics which has been inferred by him, this group could be acknowledged and referred to as being a diaspora. The concept of diaspora is usually conceptualised as being limited to powerless, dispersed communities. Tsagarousianou points out that “...the above list, although a useful one, is quite limited and limiting as it clearly revolves around the relationship of the diasporic group with its homeland and therefore plays down other important relationships and linkages that inform the diasporic condition” (2004:55).

In response to Safran's position, Cohen (1996, 1997) has prescribed a set of criteria with nine "common features" by accepting and adjusting some of Safran's features and including four more to the list. According to Cohen, therefore, a definition of diaspora needs to have the following common features that are suggested as:

- a) “Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
- b) Alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
- c) A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
- d) An idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
- e) The development of a return movement which gains collective approbation.
- f) A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;

- g) A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
- h) A sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement;
- i) The possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism” (Cohen 1997:180).

Cohen highlights that dispersed communities may not have all the features as “call this list quite consciously one of 'common features', to indicate that no one diaspora will manifest all features” (1996: 515).

The characteristics that Safran and Cohen recognised have a strong homeland-oriented connection with their host countries or societies. Cohen states that a diaspora’s group consciousness is maintained over time. Diasporas preserve a collective memory and identity of the past and share commonalities with similar communities in other regions, or a desire to return to homeland. Cohen points out the forced and traumatic experience at the time of dispersal. Cohen’s perception on the intention of diasporas to make their own homeland has significance to Kurds and Kurd-land. He likewise gives essentialness to transnational linkages between an individual’s parts of the diaspora community in different regions of settlement and outcomes for their victory in the host countries.

Butler's (2001) definition of diaspora incorporates several of the key characteristics discussed above, yet additionally states the importance of dispersion to two or more ‘destinations’, and that a diaspora's must comprise no less than two ‘generations’. Butler’s defining characteristics of diaspora are:

- i. “Dispersal to two or more destinations as a necessary precondition for the formation of links between the various populations in diaspora;
- ii. Relationship to an actual or imagined homeland;
- iii. A consciousness, a self awareness of the group’s identity;
- iv. Existence over at least two generation” (2001:192-3).

A typology of diaspora has therefore been built through the contributions of each of the scholars noted above, to develop ideas and definitions of diasporas and to develop the relationships between diaspora and the territory, as well as

the memories that diasporic groups have with home or homeland. However, there have been numerous categories and ideas that researchers stressed such as the home, home-land, ethnic minorities, transnational, alienation, consciousness, social and cultural, nation-states, dual and diasporic, amongst others, that are questionable within contemporary diasporas. The concept of diaspora is complex and disputed, and although an endeavour has been made to provide a typology (Cohen 1997) there is no agreed upon, singular definition. Clifford argues that, “we should be wary of constructing our working definition of a term like diaspora by recourse to an ideal type” (1994:306).

The Jews as an ideal type which was mentioned by Safran. It has been questioned by Clifford (1994), particularly in regards with his last three characteristics. Safran suggests concentrating on “diaspora’s borders on what it defines itself against” (Clifford 1994:307) in place of searching for the essential or common characteristics. Clifford likewise sees that diasporic language challenges ‘minority discourse’. He asserts that present-day diasporic discourses by diasporans are to be understood as a search for non-western models opposing the nation state concept. As Clifford describes “diasporic language appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse. Transnational connections break the binary relation of minority communities with majority societies – a dependency that structures projects of both assimilation and resistance” (1994:311).

Clifford explains that this set of qualifications for diasporas is heavily related to the Jewish diasporic experience, and does not work for other diasporic groups, or as he also explores, does not include the entire picture of the Jewish diaspora – many groups of which would not “qualify” if held to these standards. While Clifford provides many examples of these definitions not “working” for all diasporic groups, he does agree with Safran’s motivation to do so – for without definitions of diaspora, it would be difficult to draw comparisons between groups – an approach that Clifford feels is best (Clifford 1994:306).

Clifford then proposes that the best way to define diaspora might be to define what is not a diaspora – to define its borders. He especially focuses on the juxtaposition of diaspora against concepts of the “nation-state” and on the flip

side, against ideas of “indigenous” people. Clifford argues that “the term diaspora is a signifier, not basically of transnationality and development, yet of political battles to describe the nearby, as notable group, in recorded settings of dislodging” (1994:308). As he analysed the use of diasporic language in the context of “tribal” and indigenous people is especially interesting, since as he is clear to point out, “tribal societies are not diasporas; their feeling of rootedness in the area is decisively what diasporic individuals have lost” (ibid:310). Nevertheless when the discussion is about indigenous peoples who have been displaced, which is often the case, much of this language and framework used to discuss diasporas is readily applicable.

Clifford believes that the study of diasporas and diasporic consciousness is replacing the field of minority studies and he relates how many different groups are being described, or describing themselves, as diasporas. Clifford focuses on the newly emerging “explanations of diasporism from contemporary dark Britain and from hostile to Zionist Judaism” (1994:302). While again, these “new” diasporas, may not be the “perfect style” (Clifford 1994:304) since they do not have a dream of returning to their homeland, as Clifford elaborates, “decentered, parallel associations may be as significant as those framed around a teleology of origin/return. Furthermore an imparted, continuous history of relocation, enduring, acclimatization, or safety may be as paramount as the projection of a particular starting point” (Clifford 1994:306).

The anthropologist Steven Vertovec analyses three meanings connected with diaspora: “Diaspora as a Social Form, Diaspora as a Type of Consciousness and Diaspora as a Mode of Cultural Production” (1997:2). Although he uses his explanations to examine South Asian diasporas, I will focus on his broader explorations associated with ‘diaspora’, as his explanations can be extremely useful for investigating various dispersed and displaced peoples. This concept of defining diaspora is essential to Vertovec as a means to avoid, “the current over-use and under-theorization of the notion of ‘diaspora’ among academics, transnational intellectuals and ‘community leaders’ alike... [it] threatens the term’s descriptive usefulness” (Vertovec 1997:1). He believes that today’s researchers are being too cavalier in utilizing the term diaspora with an ever-

widening range of migratory (both voluntary and forced) circumstances, where it could now be applicable.

The initial and the majority common significance connected with diaspora can be through its societal type, with the emphasis on any group's intra-relationships despite dispersal, whether with regard to voluntary causes or even through pressured migration. These types of societal associations are usually cemented through connections to heritage, geography and history, and play out in political orientations and monetary strategies.

In his exploration from the first "type" associated with diaspora – diaspora as a social form – Vertovec offers a comprehensive set of commonly held understandings of what constitutes a diaspora. This first "meaning" associated with diaspora, with its list of qualifying factors, appears to be what most researchers have in mind when discussing diaspora. To give an apparent image of diasporic traits that Vertovec examines, his full list of social relationships "compiled from a range of descriptive and theoretical works" (Vertovec 1997:3), are as follows:

- a) "created as a result of voluntary or forced migration from one home location to at least two other countries;
- b) consciously maintaining collective identity, which is often importantly sustained by reference to an 'ethnic myth' of common origin, historical experience, and some kind of tie to a geographic place;
- c) institutionalizing networks of exchange and communication which transcend territorial states and creating new communal organizations in places of settlement;
- d) maintaining a variety of explicit and implicit ties with their homelands;
- e) developing solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement;
- f) inability or unwillingness to be fully accepted by 'host society' – thereby fostering feelings of alienation, or exclusion, or superiority, or other kind of 'difference'" (1997:4-5).

In addition to the list above, another diasporic social form that Vertovec discusses is the concept of a "triadic relationship" (ibid:5), a continuing

discussion that flows among the dispersed diaspora, their new country of settlement and origin “homeland” countries (ibid 1997:5), tensions of divided loyalties and “political orientations” (ibid 1997:4), migrants power pressure by individuals or associations may be important actors in the domestic politics of their countries of settlement and origin. He states that “the Jewish and Irish lobbies in the USA are obvious examples” (ibid:4), and the “economic strategies” of these transnational groups could be a significant source in international finance and commerce (ibid 1997:4). These lists are important to explore yet they could be very limiting and exclusionary and lots of the dispersed peoples of the Indian and other lately recognised diasporas would not “fit” into these definitions.

In addition to this list, another diasporic social form that Vertovec talks about is the idea of a “triadic relationship” (ibid 1997:5), an ongoing dialogue that flows between the dispersed diaspora, their new country of residence and their “homeland” countries (ibid 1997:5), tensions of divided loyalties and political orientations (ibid 1997:4), and the “economic strategies” of these transnational groups (ibid 1997:4). These lists and qualifications are important to explore yet they can be very limiting and exclusionary- many of the dispersed peoples of the Indian Ocean and other newly recognized diasporas would not “fit” into these definitions (ibid1997).

Diaspora as a type of consciousness is the second meaning of diaspora that Vertovec examines and discusses. In accordance with Vertovec, it is a kind of awareness has been created between contemporary transnational communities and communities that are “being simultaneously ‘home away from home’ or ‘here and there’ and awareness of multi locality” (1997:8). Vertovec indicated to Paul Gilroy the idea of “dual consciousness” described as being a most important or prime example of diaspora as type of consciousness, an awareness that places a “greater emphasis on describing a variety of experience, a state of mind and a sense of identity” (Vertovec 1997:8). This vision of diaspora is a lot more inclusive and beneficial in comparisons and examinations of these “non-traditional” diasporic groups.

The final and third meaning of diaspora that Vertovec discusses is the role of a mode of cultural production, which many scholars have “attributed to the notion of diaspora is usually conveyed in discussions of globalisation” (Vertovec 1997:19). In accordance with Vertovec, diaspora can “involve the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomena” (ibid). A substantial part of this final meaning focuses on the “fluidity of constructed styles and identities among diasporic people” (Vertovec 1997:19), and indicates the importance of actively regarding hybridity and new ethnicities as well as syncretism found in many diasporas. This kind of importance of hybridity to the identity formation of groups in exile is a prominent factor and may easily be applied to other diasporic peoples whose associates and effects from their “homeland” are just as important to their identity formation as the connections and influences from their adopted land. This type of influence or affect tends not to be mutually exclusive, or does not allow group identification as a diaspora. Through viewing diaspora as a mode of cultural production all of these factors might be considered.

Vertovec concludes with a call for diasporic studies that include “both structure (historical conditions) and agency (the meanings held, and practices conducted, by social actors)” (Vertovec 1997:24), that researchers could compare, examine and contextualise more, or a wider variety of, transnational and diasporic experiences without having completely watered down the term to the level of ineffectiveness.

Diasporas based on historical time have been classified by some scholars. Sheffer’s view of diaspora comprises “groups permanently residing outside their countries of origin, but maintaining contacts with people back in their homelands” (2003:1). Sheffer defines this typology in more detail, explaining the new characteristics of contemporary diaspora groups. Sheffer categorises diasporas into three phases, ‘classical’ diasporas, ‘modern’ diasporas and ‘incipient’ diasporas. He classifies diasporas into three periods, historical or “classical” diaspora “those whose origins were in antiquity or the Middle ages”; “modern” or recent diasporas are “those that have become established since the seventeenth century”; and “incipient” diasporas are “those in making” new communities to a region displaying diaspora characteristics and initial attempts

to get together as diaspora (Sheffer 2003:131). Likewise, Reis departs from the literature that features the Jewish diaspora as the prototype, and examines diaspora in the “three major historical waves that influence the diasporic process”, as classified by Sheffer, namely the classical period, associated with ancient diaspora and Greece; the modern period from 1500-1945 involves experiences of slavery and colonisation; as well as the contemporary or late-modern period starts from the end of World War II to the present day “illustrates the progressive effect of globalization on the phenomenon of diasporisation” (Reis 2004:42). Diasporic groups in the contemporary period, unlike the classical period, have various explanations behind leaving their country.

In Van Hear’s research of “new” diasporas appearing from mass migrations from the 1950s to the 1990s, he highlights:

“...not just the making of diasporas, but also a process of de-diasporisation, the un-production of diasporas in a specific place. This does not essentially explain the dissolution of a whole diaspora, rather it implies the migration of a large number of diaspora groups or members to the homeland or somewhere else” (Van Hear 1998:49-50).

Sheffer's typology takes into account a historical inquiry of diasporas without losing sight of contemporary groups that are evolving into diasporas. Van Hear's (1998) and Sheffer's (2003) methodology likewise opens the way to contemplations of agency in the diasporisation or diaspora making process. Schnapper identifies diaspora as “the condition of a geographically dispersed people who have settled in different political organisations but who maintained, in spite of dispersion, some form of unity and solidarity” (1999:225). The above reassessment of the characteristics, definitions, and classifications of diasporas further develops an explanation and examination of the concept of diaspora. Even through comprehension the parameters of diaspora permits us to make critical distinctions and illuminations between diaspora and different sorts of communities, and it promotes a comparative or metaphorical study of diaspora.

Human mobility, specifically migration, is an old phenomenon that has facilitated discussions among scholars and policy makers around the world. After 9/11 the subject of migration particularly the diaspora groups gave rise to central debates and were drawn into the protection policy agenda of security. As Freitas (2012) has highlighted:

“...the fact that diaspora groups could also ‘import’ homeland conflicts into host societies-notably when homeland conflict involves clashes among different ethnic or religious groups. In this situation, home societies might become the theatre of ethnic, religious or political struggles which they have only a very limited capacity to influence as they are actually taking place elsewhere. This transnationalisation of conflict, though not common, may eventually transform some diaspora groups in threats to host countries’ security, instead of partners in international initiatives of conflict resolution” (Freitas 2012:4).

As the result of conflict and fragile situations generally, they can affect large diaspora groups scattered among various countries. Some scholars have analysed this notion in terms of historical periods.

It is preferable not to propose an inflexible definition of diaspora, particular historical connections figure in the relative significance of each of the aforementioned components. As Clifford highlights, “the transnational connections linking diasporas need not be articulated primarily through a real or symbolic homeland.... Decentered, lateral connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. And a shared, ongoing history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance may be as important as the projection of a specific origin” (1997:249-50).

2.3 Transnationalism

Transnationalism is a connected concept within diaspora theory. Diaspora and transnationalism are important hypothetical cores for understanding the movements of global migration. Castles (2007) states that “migration research in the era of globalisation is a transnational undertaking, which requires

theoretical frameworks and analytical tools that transcend the nation-state” (352). Transnationalism is often identified as border crossing. According to Nagel (2001) “if the international signifies relationships between states or actors representing different states, then the transnational refers to linkages forged by social groups who exist seemingly in spite of the nation-state and who, through their transnational activities, undermine state sovereignty and the hegemony of national borders and ideologies”(248).

Although the term of transnationalism is the same as diaspora, through researchers, has become a watchword appropriated with the disciplines of social science. Nevertheless, Yeoh et al (2003) argues that “the field of transnational studies is still a fragmented one, and no one conceptual frame has emerged to define the shape of transnationality, or the quality and nature of the projects, relations and practices that it encompasses” (215). The development of the idea of transnationalism has been an endeavour to explore “migrants’ simultaneous embeddedness in more than one community” (Pasura 2011:145). Scholars within transnational studies have argued that “many contemporary migrants and their predecessors maintain various kinds of ties to their homelands at the same time that they are incorporated into the countries that receive them” (see for example Basch et al., 1994; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:129).

It is essential to give an analytical description of transnational studies and discuss the distinction with diaspora studies. As Faist states, “whether we talk of transnational social space, transnational social fields, transnationalism or transnational social formations in international migration systems, we usually refer to sustained ties of persons, networks and organisations across the borders across multiple nation-states, ranging from little to highly institutionalized forms” (Faist 2000:189). In the same way, Guarnizo take into account transnationalism as “the rise of a new class of immigrants, economic entrepreneurs or political activists who conduct cross-border activities on a regular basis, that lies at the core of the phenomenon that this field seeks to highlight and investigate” (Guarnizo 2003:1213). Therefore, the continued concentration of movements between cross-borders are the key characteristics of transnationalism.

The appearance and development of the idea of transnationalism has been an endeavour to explore and examine migrant's synchronous embeddedness in more than one society (Levitt 2001). Basch et al (1994) describe transnationalism "as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (7). What then is the distinction between the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism? Numerous researchers highlight diasporas as an apparent manifestation of transnational groups (Vertovec 1999). Levitt argues that "transnational communities are building blocks of potential diasporas that may or may not take shape" (Levitt 2001: 202-203). While transmigrants are essentially first generation migrants with a solid connection to their homeland, diasporas constitute the most continuing results of both voluntary and permanent settlement in a host country (Sheffer 2003).

Characteristically, diasporas have been exhibited as a set of social spheres (Safran, 1991), a mode of categorisation and typology (Cohen, 1997), and a unique social form, type of consciousness, and mode of social production (Vertovec, 1999). The notions of "homeland" and "host nation" are central characteristics in existing definitions of diaspora. Homeland implies the country of origin or the genealogical home; the nation or area from which migrants originally came, or with which they associate. The host or hostland is the country of settlement or residence. It is imperative to note that the country is not necessarily a created and recognized state or geographical territory because.... Diasporas are regularly classified as stateless or state-linked. For instance, until the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Jews were recognized as a stateless diaspora. On the other hand, in establishing the nation of Israel, they became state-linked. The Kurds are an example of a stateless diaspora – as Kurdistan, which geographically includes portions of several states, is not an independent nation state, and is not recognised by other nation states. Numerous ethno-national and secessionist diasporas fit into the stateless class (Clifford 1994; Khayati 2006).

The theoretical concept of diaspora can be summarized in a few points that describe diaspora groups around the globe. Diaspora must begin with people

forcefully or voluntarily dispersed around the globe. Based on dedication and experiences of those who had researched this field. Since the late 1980s there has been a dedicated body of research focused on understanding the actual conditions and difficulties as well as psychological effects of diaspora groups, including Jewish, African, and Armenian diasporas, amongst others.

Those dispersed around the world will not completely integrate within the culture or country where they live. Some level of connection with their homeland and culture is typically maintained, thus keeping their relationship with their homeland alive. Most people in diaspora keep alive their connections with the homeland through phone and internet communications as well as by visiting the homeland. This connection among Kurdish communities in the West has been protected, especially by the first generation. To a degree we can say that Kurdistan was not disregarded in the diaspora process. Third and finally, there must also be an entity through which the group of people can define their identity within. For Kurds in diaspora, this identity is in being Kurdish, which is different from the identity of Kurds who have remained in Kurdistan, and differs also from the identity of people in the country the migrants live among. These are the three key hypothetical diaspora points that are consistent with the Kurdish diaspora.

The concept of identity was developed in different ways by scholars in the 1960's. Brubaker and Cooper noted that the emergence of identity in social analysis and public discourse was in part due to the fragility of class politics in the United States of America in this period. This may have inspired the popularity of the notion of identity, but the conceptual clarity was ambiguous. Brubaker and Cooper indicate "the "identity" crisis [is] a crisis of overproduction and consequent devaluation of meaning [that] shows no sign of abating" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:3). Identity has been over extended to analyse the growing range of social phenomena that has gained momentum over the past decades, thus the notion may have lost its analytical value.

It could be argued that identity is the mechanism which makes sense of oneness in our social environment and gives a means of understanding in an individual's social context. As Brubaker and Cooper highlighted, "[identity is] a

sort of vital center to which we must refer to explain certain things, but without it ever having real existence” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2009:9). Identity is central to the sense of belonging, offering opportunities and limitations. Identity in part is assigned by others and the environment it is immersed in, but also self-assigned being part of a person’s individuality, with shared narratives and consciousness within collective action and solidarity adding to the sense of belonging (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000).

As I have shown, the concept of identity has many facets and the notion can be challenging to grasp, thus making it difficult as an analytical concept. The literature places a strong emphasis on identity as dialogue; that it is plural, situational, contextual, relational, in flux and temporal – all words with “no meaning “as Brubaker and Cooper (2000) would say. Undeniably the concept is “blurred but indispensable” (Brubaker and Cooper,2000:12). Expanding on this thought, Brubaker and Cooper (2010) wrote in their article “Beyond Identity” that too much or conversely too little emphasis is placed on identity, they suggest that identity could be substituted for the concept of identification, on the subject of identification they say, “It invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying. And it does not presuppose that that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve. Identification – of oneself and of others – is intrinsic to social life, “identity” in the strong sense is not” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000:14). They suggest that identification is either assigned by others or owned by oneself, self-identification is a process, opposed to identity, which they argue is a condition.

Looking at the Kurdish diaspora in Devon I would argue that identity and identification are not separate notions but work in partnership. Individuals or groups with shared narratives whether ascribed by others or self-ascribed have a commonality in identity, whether that is the strong bond of national identity, family identity, or homeland. When identity becomes so powerful then indeed it could be called a condition. Collectives and individuals can give meaning and understanding to their own and others’ identity, the action of choosing for self or

labelling of other then becomes the classification of identification. Both identity and identification become unique to the individuals or collectives in question.

The Kurdish diaspora plays a critical role in supporting community and strengthening identity especially in times of crisis. In many ways Kurdish refugees continue to be part of their old social society. Diasporic communities can operate as a diplomatic bridge during times of transition. The diaspora community can be seen as a universal tribe, sharing history, social and cultural experiences.

The UK among the other European states offers the Kurdish community substantial opportunities for establishing, conserving and developing the Kurdish culture, language and ethno-national identity in the diaspora. The establishment of a Kurdish autonomous region in Northern Iraq, particularly after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 has “drastically accelerated the process of transborder exchanges among diasporian Kurd” as a result of many direct flights between Europe and Kurdistan (Khayati 2006:11).

National identity also differs in its definition depending on who or what is defining it and for what reason (Skulte 2005, Gellner, 1983; Lijphart, 1977). Nationalism, by contrast, exists to mobilize a group (or groups) around an existing nation or draws them together to attempt to create one (Kedourie, 1960; Anderson, 1991). However, Waldinger and Fitzgerald illustrated that the character of nation-states as transnational “deprives the concept of analytic leverage, as it is meant to distinguish cross-border, non-state actors from states and to show how the two constrain and shape one another” (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004:1180). In the current analysis of national identity’s connection to nationalism and diaspora. The national identity discourses should support and elucidate the interplay between national identity and diaspora. Furthermore, Vertovec highlights six different ways to conceptualise transnationalism, as “transnationalism as a social morphology, as a type of consciousness, as a mode of cultural reproduction, as an avenue of capital, as a site of political engagement, and as a reconstruction of place or locality” (Vertovec 1999:447). Transnationalism as a type of consciousness is classified by diaspora groups’ awareness of their multiple identifications, that is, simultaneously being “here”

and “there” (Pasura 2011:146). It can be argued where diaspora groups are well integrated, a transnationalism which is predominately cultural in character can emerge. As a mode of cultural reproduction, “transnationalism is often associated with a fluidity of constructed styles, social institutions and everyday practices [...] often described in terms of [...] cultural translation and hybridity” (Vertovec 1999:451).

Receiving citizenship or naturalization within western countries represents a level of security in many Kurdish lives in diaspora. Brnic’s (2002) study identifies that nationality can be examined as two separate processes. First, an identification with a certain nation and people, and second, an administrative association to a specific state. Brnic states that these two processes are intrinsically related. However, Brnic maintains that citizenship is “not necessarily a symbol of one’s sense of national belonging. It can simply be seen as a document that relates to one’s rights and to the state’s obligation to protect, or provide for, the individual” (8). Kurds distinguish between the possession of a British passport and a national identity as English.

2.4 Home and Homeland

The concept of home that several studies stress is questionable, as the matter of home within contemporary diaspora becomes somewhat irrelevant. It is necessary to point out that there is a clear translation of ‘home’ and ‘homeland’ in Kurdish. In Kurdish home is ‘Mal’ or ‘Khano’ a dwelling where you live and ‘Neshtiman’ or ‘Welat’ refers to homeland as a country of belonging, and identity. The constriction and dynamic of the home and homeland will be imagined differently by Kurds in different situations. The portrayals of a Kurdish homeland are different from the findings of ethnographic and anthropological studies. Alinia’s (2004) study on Kurdish migrants in Sweden found that homeland meanings are multiple in a real as well as an imagined sense, and can be both idealized and associated with traumatic experiences due to conflicts and oppression from the sovereign state. In the same way, for the Kurdish diaspora in France as Khayati has pointed out, “homeland is associated with movements, war, persecution, political instability, states of emergency, atrocity, assimilation, national struggle, and nostalgia”(2008:158). Khayati and Alinia both emphasise that, in contrast to diasporic fictional narratives, the

traumatic experiences narrated by the respondents are mainly based on external factors such as war, state oppression, and persecution (Khayati 2008; Alinia 2004). In addition, Demir points out that “home has always been a central aspect of the battles diaspora engage in as they think through how to relate to both the home they have left behind and the new home in which they are settling” (2012:815). It can be described in the Kurdish diaspora connections to the home-land as a “dual-home construction” (ibid:816), and the impact of the Kurdish diaspora on the home-land is real.

Studies employing human migration theory tend to make clear distinctions regarding the pull and push factors of human migration. Several causes ‘push’ people out of their homeland, while other causes ‘pull’ people from their homeland. For example, an individual would be ‘pushed’ from their homeland due to a lack of job opportunities there, and would be ‘pulled’ to an alternative destination based on the opportunities offered there. These factors have frequently been defined as economic choices, whether on the micro or macro scale. However, as Haas has pointed out “an improved theoretical perspective on migration and development has to be able to account for the role of structure – the constraining or enabling general political, institutional, economic, social and cultural context in which migration takes place – as well as agency – the limited but real capacity of individuals to overcome constraints and potentially reshape structure” (2010:241). In addition, the connection among development and migration must also “be scrutinized as a field of struggle where different actors are involved in trying to establish their visions of development and change” (Dannecker 2009:122).

As opposed to the importance that researchers like Safran have placed on the significance for diasporic groups of keeping up solid connections and identifications with the cultures of their homeland, Hall calls attention to “the link between these communities and their ‘homeland’ or the possibility of a return to the past are much more precarious than usually thought” (Hall 1993, 355, in Tsagarousianou 2004). The concept of the home therefore is much more complex than appears to diasporas premised on the power of nostalgia would want us believe. As Brah points out;

“What is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’. On the other hand, home is also a lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day...all this, as mediated by the historically specific of everyday social relations. In other words, the varying experiences of pains and pleasures, the terrors and contentments, or the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture that marks how, for example, a cold winter night might be differently experienced sitting by a crackling fireside in a mansion compared with standing huddled around a makeshift fire on the streets of nineteenth century England” (1996,192).

The complexity of the notion of home among the diaspora communities links to an original homeland, for Brah it “is intrinsically linked with the way in which the processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It relates to the complex political and personal struggles over the social regulation of ‘belonging’” (ibid, 194). Furthermore, what is essential in diasporic ideas of home is their relationship to a variety of areas through cultural and geographical boundaries, as Fazal and Tsagarousianou point out:

“...within the frame of contemporary diasporas, the notions of ‘home’ and when a location becomes home are therefore linked with the issues related to inclusion or exclusion which tend to be subjectively experienced depending upon the circumstances. When does a location become a home? How can one distinguish between ‘feeling at home’ and staking a claim to a place as one’s own?” (2002:11).

It can be said that the depictions of a Kurdish homeland are unique in relation to the discoveries of ethnographic and anthropological examination. The research data on Kurdish diaspora has identified homeland meanings which are multiple

in real as well as an imagined sense, and could be both idealized and/or associated with traumatic experiences due to conflicts and oppression from the sovereign state (Alinia 2004).

There is, as previously mentioned large differences in the Kurdish diaspora. The Kurdish diaspora has different meanings for different categories and individuals, but common to all is that Kurdish culture and language represents resources that they can mobilize to gain a platform from which they can meet the community and create their identity, feel safe and enjoy their lives as meaningful. Kurdish family networks, relationships and the movement becomes 'home' where they can find peace, a sense of belonging, affirmation, self-respect and self-confidence. However, there are multiple forms of identity in diaspora and therefore multiple places that can be called home.

2.5 Community Engagement and Diaspora

During recent years, community engagement is being used by governments to establish a more democratic or political ground. Although there is no agreed definition by Communities and local Government (CLG) define community engagement as "the process whereby the public bodies reach out to communities to create empowerment opportunities" (2007:12). In the UK, the Metropolitan Police define community engagement as, "the proactive harnessing of the energies knowledge and skills of communities and partners not merely to identify problems but also to negotiate priorities for action and shape and deliver solutions" (M.P.A 2006-2009:5). Rogers and Robinson define community engagement as "the opportunity, capacity, and willingness of individuals to work collectively to shape public life" (Rogers and Robinson 2004:434). Community engagement can provide opportunities for marginalized residents to develop the skills and networks that can enable them to tackle social exclusion.

There is no single definition to capture the position that community engagement plays within black and ethnic minority groups in the UK. The terms 'community' and 'engagement' both have numerous meanings and definitions with academics and policy makers. For example the meaning of engagement can include how black and ethnic minority groups or the wider population can

engage with projects, activities or any strategic planning. However, this insufficiency of definition could be measured as a strength rather than a weak point, provoking local discussion as to what these terms might mean in different frameworks. Madison and Laing outline that community engagement “takes a particular form, and is context-dependent – arising for institutions from their individual histories and locations, and from their views about their strategic position” (2007:10-11).

In many community engagements there are different ways used in describing community. There are geographically defined communities, which could identify a city, number of streets or communities of interest where the members share specific features or concerns. The term of community is also defined as an informally organized social entity that is characterized by a sense of identity (White, 1982). Community also can be defined differently by researchers for the purpose of their project. It is likely to engage with groups or residents in a range of different routes but it is important to empathize which kind of engagement it is that specific residents or community groups like better and are able to use, in a way that supports citizens and communities.

The term Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities will be used in this thesis to identify the limits on those being examined in the research. As Platt emphasizes, “an ethnic group is, theoretically, one where the association with both a particular origin and specific customs is adopted by people themselves to establish a shared identity” (2007:18). However this statement shows that ethnic groups share comparable features and can be used as an identity characteristic, it is vital not to overstate these commonalities as a ‘homogenous’ group. The study is aware of the term ‘hard to reach’ when it is not to be a label to all black and ethnic minorities but the intersectionality of black and ethnic minority residence is dependent on that engagement. Nevertheless all black and ethnic minorities share an important part, in which not all white populations are included. Isajiwa (1993) has highlighted “the majority ethnic groups are those who determine the character of the society’s basic institutions, especially the male political, economic, and cultural institutions. They determine the character of the norms of society as a whole, including the legal system. Their culture becomes the culture of the total society into which the minority ethnic

group assimilate” (12). This statement illustrates how similar experiences are shared within black and ethnic minorities, and in some studies the term of ‘other’ is used toward black and ethnic minorities to identify them among communities. As a result of a lack of resources, this research will locate the black and ethnic minority in localities whose ethnic origin is not white.

Highlighting the ideological link between active participation and governance which is community oriented, King and Cruickshank review the key components of community engagement as involving:

“...continuity and sustainability of good engagement, trust and local relationships; opportunities for deliberation; the ability to deal with anger and the legacy of previous poor engagement; tailor-made opportunities for various stakeholder groups to participate; . . . facilitat[ing] joint influence over issues; mak[ing] use of community ‘hubs’ and existing communication link- ages, understand[ing] the engagement needs and aspirations of community groups and produc[ing] effective engagement networks” (2010, 3).

Community engagement is high on the UK government’s agenda and it is particularly related to the concept of ‘Big Society’, which aims “to put more power and opportunity into people’s hands” (Cabinet Office 2010).

The concept of multiculturalism as well as integration presupposes that immigrant relationships to the host society are problematic. These problematic relations must therefore be regulated and controlled by the state. As Wahlbeck argues:

“Multicultural policies presume that there are easy recognizable communities which have clear cultural boundaries and constitute viable ethnic communities. These policies have also played a part in the racialization and culturalization of differences between groups in society” (1999:14)

For Berry the integration of international migrants will be part of a much wider process of 'acculturation', a phenomenon that involves the cultural changes that take place when individuals, groups or even communities from other cultures come into first hand and continuous contact with a host culture (2006).

Thomas illustrated "Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) in the way it has been designed and implemented is contradictory to other key governmental priorities such as community cohesion" (2010:443). Thomas also suggested there was clear tension between preventative strategies that targeted Muslim groups for funding and community cohesion initiatives that aimed to end such community specific initiatives, and to mainstream public funding streams (Thomas 2010). As Kundnani (2015) points out;

"...over the last five years, policies have been subjected to ongoing critical scrutiny and reform [...] the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programme that seeks to stem radicalization and extremism has developed through a number of iterations in response to challenges from various constituencies. On a fundamental level, though, the legacy of policy failures in the last six years after 9/11 is well documented, there has been little attempt how the UK government responded to the events of 9/11 and the 7/7 London bombings, particularly in relation to domestic counter-terrorism policy" (8).

Cultural differences have been at the heart of people's behaviour throughout the history of global migration. Intercultural contact does not always translate into progressive and long-term social relations and can in certain circumstances reinforce prejudices and exacerbate tensions (Vertovec 2007; Clayton 2009; Amin 2002). For Berry (2006) the integration of international migrants is part of a much wider process of 'acculturation', a phenomenon that involves the cultural changes that take place when individuals, groups or even communities from other cultures come into first hand continuous contact with a host culture.

The ethnic identity among diaspora groups has become nearly everyone intermutual classifications peoples use to structure their ideas about who they

are, to take account of their behaviours and experiences, and to be aware of the world surrounding them. The difficulty around ethnic identity is also exacerbated by the fact that “ethnicity is not equally important to all people and the degree of ethnic identity and attachment differ strongly between individuals and within societies” (Hiebert, 2000:235). The terms of dual citizenship and hybridity have been used among researchers in the field of diaspora study. Hall (1992) highlights that hybridity is particularly linked to the idea of ‘new ethnicities’, and he adds, identity should be thought of as a “production” because it is an ongoing process. Gilroy (1993) uses the notion of ‘double consciousness’ to denote the hybrid and diasporic condition. Palmer (1999) suggests that “a national identity is thus a very personal concept as individual’s draw upon the differing identities available to them in order to construct their own sense of who they are and how they fit in” (314).

According to Sheyholislami “national identity is a social construct, but it has historical and ethnic roots [...] even if such roots often are invented [...] But differently, those involved in great number of cultural and political symbols and myths as ways of strengthening national ties” (2010:291). To have national identity is to possess ways of discussing the homeland and nationhood. Having recognized that discourse is a means of articulating nation, and theory is a socially constructed political unit, discourse is now focused on? the concept of identity.

Within this research, the connotations attached to the term ‘nasnamah’ in the Kurdish language will first be considered, followed by how identity is to be understood in this study. The term ‘nasnamah-i natavi’ is used in the Kurdish language in discourse on national identity. Nonetheless, just as natavi and nataviat are not directly equivalent to the nation or national in English, neither, truly speaking, is nasnamah equivalent with identity.

Hall clearly describes three main concepts in relation to his discourse on cultural identity: ‘enlightenment’, ‘sociological’, and ‘post modern’(1996: 597). Enlightenment was an ‘individualist’ conception of identity that explained that the self remained the same throughout its existence. The ‘sociological’ concept, however, was an ‘interactive’ concept that saw that the self was “formed in relation to significant others”. Finally, the ‘post modern’ concept saw the self as

“having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity” (Ibid. 597-8). In his discussions of cultural identity and the Afro Caribbean diaspora, Hall adds that “identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact [...] we should think, instead of identity as a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation” (1990:222). Rather than thinking of identity as an “already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent,” Hall thinks instead of “identity as a production which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall 1993:392). In other words identity is in a constant state of evolution and reconstruction. Hall claims to offer a “different way of thinking about cultural identity” by theorising identity “as constituted, not outside but within representation”(ibid:402).

Dwyer likewise discusses the contestation of ideas of identity and community by exposing the instance of British Muslim women. She contends that identities and communities are situated between the local and global - where another envisioned community based on gender is created. This envisioned and gendered community acts as constructors of ambivalent groups in connection to space. She clarifies that for British Muslim women Muslim groups can contribute to discourses of belonging, however in the meantime contrasts with different groups in the Muslim world act creators of contested identity based on talks of distinction (Dwyer 1999). Indeed, as Mavroudi (2010) states, concepts of community get to be challenged when those in diaspora negotiate their belonging and identity, and therefore, community can act as a unifying space, additionally as a space for tensions and constructions of distinction.

The past decades have seen a vast amount of scholarly literature on transnationalism, defined as “the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement” (Basch, Schiller, and Blanc 1994:1), immigrants have explored these cross-border connections which enable communities to build bridges between nations. The diaspora literature does not examine the consequences of not having a community engagement policy in particular it does not examine this when there is a national policy that is not implemented locally. This study will examine the

consequences of a lack of community engagement policy with the primary consideration being a lack of trust among the diaspora and host society and contribute to the existing literature.

2.6 Return and Diaspora

The strength of the concept of return as used in this study lies between the intention of return with a connection to the homeland and actual experiences of real returnees to the homeland. The teleology of an eventual return to the homeland is variable between diasporas, across time, and amongst individuals. The causes of returning diaspora are very diverse in nature and can vary from state to state and from individual returnee to another even within the same place of return. Tsuda differentiates between two primary types of diasporic returnees: (a) “first generation subjects who move back to their country of birth and (b) ethnic return migrants, or later generation descendants who return to their countries of ancestral origin after living outside their ethnic homelands for generations” (Tsuda 2009:1).

In the last century, some diasporic groups, such as Greeks, Jews and Germans opted for “purposive voluntary” return while certain other groups, “like Egyptians from Iraq and Yemenis from Saudi Arabia, were subjected to forced repatriation”(Khayati 2008:21). It has also been stated that, in some countries “like Greece, Israel, India or China, wishing to redress problems of brain drain or economic stress, have tried to encourage successful members of their diasporas to return”(Khayati 2008:21). Jennifer Skulte believes “the reasons that members of a diaspora return to their homelands – whether they themselves were born there or they are descendants of those who did – are both numerous and yet fairly easy to narrow down to one broadly generalizable reason” (Skulte 2005:4). Further, Skulte argues that “members of a diaspora return once the conditions that prompted their departure no longer exist. This is, of course, assuming that the feeling of being tied to the homeland is strong enough that individuals from the homeland did not decide to leave because they no longer want to be an integral part of the country (or nation) in the first place” (Skulte 2005:4). Consequently, for Brah (1996), return home is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. Their standard of living in their host country and what they can expect when they return to the homeland also has a

direct bearing on whether to go back or to stay put. Continuing resilient connections to the homeland frequently requires sacrifices on the part of the diaspora, such as living abroad close to their communities, and maintaining language, culture and intermarriage within the community. Mavroudi argued that “those in diaspora may dip into and use different strategies at different times and different spaces in order to better or deal with their lives, drawing on as many resources as possible and using the cross-border connections they have available to them”(2005:64).

From 1990s onwards the question of return migration was the subject of several theoretical interpretations and empirical studies that succeeded in characterising and identifying the principal mechanisms at work. Dumont and Spielvogel (2007) found four reasons for return migration, “i) failure to integrate into the host country and changes in economic situation of the home country, ii) individuals preferences for their home country; iii) the achievement of a savings objective, or iv) greater employment opportunities for individuals in their home country [...] to experience gained abroad” (178). The economic situation is important in the place of return. This study identifies that return or hope of return to the homeland is a major defining moment. Saarela and Rooth (2012) claim that return from exile might happen due to wrong decisions being made at the beginning of the process of leaving homeland. For example, individuals who leave their homeland may have had access to incorrect information regarding the destination of a host country. Therefore, Durugonul (2013) argued that reasons of returning to the homeland could be motivated by disappointment, as result of failure to obtain the economic aims offered by the host countries. In fact, Colton (1993) asserts that returnees and especially younger migrants find they are unable to reside in their ancestral homes.

The last decade has seen a return movement of diaspora to homeland due primarily to the temporary boost to the Kurdish economy in Iraq, with international companies investing in the region. This is due to various factors. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the autonomy of the Kurdistan region from central government in 2005. In addition, the open door policy created a new era for the Kurdish region as this policy invited many international companies to invest in this area. The Kurdish government believed, to grow and make the

Kurdistan economy a success they must invite international companies to invest in Kurdistan. Waladbagi (2013) indicates that living conditions and quality of life in the homeland increased encouraging a return of individuals and families from diaspora. Moreover, Coniglio (et al. 2009) argued that better skilled migrants find it optimal to return to their homeland. This study has identified that returnees who had better skills and knowledge gained in the host country, were valued and more successful in gaining highly paid and skilled work as soon as they returned back to homeland. Aitkins acknowledges the value of diasporas and says "Now we have huge shifts of knowledge, talents and skills across borders. Traditionally Diasporas were looked to for remittances and philanthropy which, is perhaps, to take a limiting view. Now Diasporas are bridges to knowledge, expertise, networks, resources and markets for their countries of origin Atkins goes on to say "what were once 'lost actors' can now become 'national assets'.

An enthusiasm for return migrations can be traced back to the 1960s. However, up to this point, it was an irregular consideration in migration studies (King, 2000). This lack of studies into return migrations is clarified in the literature through researcher's observations that the return assumes failed migrations (Cessarino, 2004). In contrast, the complexities presented by globalization and transnationalism have stirred a dynamic interest for this topic. Several researchers have compared diaspora with transnationalism (Tóllóyan, 1991). Some different researchers push that migration suggests a returning back to the country of origin. Brubaker (2005), for instance, credits three elements to diaspora which position diaspora in the typology of return migrations. Firstly, he declares the dispersion of population from the place of departure. Secondly, a genuine or an imagined connection to the homeland. And lastly, he proposes the element of 'boundary maintenance' which focuses on the significance of the homeland and the need of return. King and Christou (2011), for instance, assert that a return diaspora will probably be built up taking into account emotions and believes in connection to the homeland and return, rather than in connection to statistical records.

King and Christou (2010) make particular reference to return to the ancestral home, represented by the instance of ethnic Germans return to Germany. On

one hand, they contend that their return to the homeland is a 'misnomer' as these migrants have not been to their country of origin for quite a long time. However, on the other hand, they attribute to these returns the concept of 'counter-diaspora' and claims that the ancestral return aligns with the typology of return migration. Such approaches might likewise clarify why the focus of a few studies is on returnees' developments and contestations of identity and community in the country of origin. Moreover, Friedman (2002) argued that "roots signify emotional bonds with the physical environment but often also contain notions of local community, shared culture, and so forth" (670). The theory of roots and authentic identity played a significant role in the identity formation of participants.

Returnees' identities are frequently seen as being constructed and contested in connection to space and place, in the middle of home and homeland, and therefore, assume various strands of identity and belonging. This adjusts to Christou and King's (2010) contention: "the ambiguous view of home (Where is it? What does it mean?) signifies that homecoming is not a static state of being but a fluid process of becoming, a journey into spaces of selfhood" (644). Mavroudi on Palestinian diaspora, contends that through active strategies of politicisation, Palestinians in Athens contest diasporic identities in relation to space and place through choosing belongingness or imagined belongingness, rather than perceiving identity as a 'given' (Mavroudi 2007). It can be argued that homeland oriented politics in relation to identity or community create informal or imagined political spaces which maintain or contest identities or community by acting as factors of empowerment or disillusionment.

One route for comprehension arrangements of identity and belonging in diaspora and/or return diaspora is, as Christou emphasises, to concentrate on 'gender performativities' and 'emotional acts'. In doing so, she uncovers that Greek migrants in Denmark and returnees in Greece, in their search of identity and homeland "through place-based emotional attachments" (Christou 2011:249), arrange and challenge being and becoming in diaspora with feelings for an imagined homeland. Therefore, identities and belongings are seen as fluid and really taking shape (Hall, 1990). Such perspectives stress the incomplete character of identities and/or collective identities in general, situating

them in boundaries of space and place. These relationships between home and homeland do not just make ambiguities and complexities in connection to identity but also, can be expressed that migrants see themselves to have a place in more than one country, or even to a number of diasporic spaces. Teerling's (2011) study on British-born Cypriot returnees to Cyprus is explanatory in this sense. He goes beyond disciplinary boundaries of identity and community, of home and belonging of 'them' and 'us' and emphasizes that a 'third-cultural space of belonging' is shaped by components to which returnees feel they belong. He asserts this new 'third-cultural space of belonging is hybridized through returnees place, time, unity and experience have with their homeland societies.

Christou and King (2010) contend that returnees generally compare the life they abandoned in diaspora with the life in the homeland, and this disturbs their imagined perspective of the homeland and can make the substances on the ground difficult or, they can see themselves or be seen as 'strangers in their ethnic homeland' (Tsuda, 2003). Cohen for instance, contends how homelands promotions of an ethno-national justification for returnees are covered by economic rationalism and the selection of 'quality migrants' can make strains between the homeland and its returnees (Cohen 2009).

There has also been a trend of studies on homecomings and present connections between homelands and returnees frequently from the returnee's point of view. However, there are some contemporary studies that analyse and break down these connections from the host country's perspective. Therefore, Ben-Porat (2011) argues that;

“...return diasporas can be a product of 'homeland's needs and policies, this determines fluid relations between diaspora and 'homeland'. Therefore 'homeland' also becomes fluid by claims, reclaims or renounces the status of certain groups as its diasporas according to its changing needs and goals, thereby indicating its own fluidity” (91).

Furthermore, Sheffer indicates that the connections between the homeland and diaspora are heterogeneous, as both returnees and hosts perceive themselves as different. This heterogeneity is perpetuated through the diasporas' attitudes of preserving identity and continuity and the homeland focus on the nation's centrality when situating themselves in connection to their diaspora (Sheffer 2010). Unlike the other countries, whose prime reasons of return are dominated by political, social and economic factors, Kurdish returnee's experiences are for slightly different reasons, the most prominent factor that drove the majority of returnees to return south of Kurdistan was identified during the interviews as political and economical of the region after the invasion Iraq 2003. The Kurdish diasporas retained a keen interest in regaining independence for their homelands and from the beginning of their experience in the diaspora worked to keep this dream alive through individual and community activities.

When members of diasporas return they bring with them their experience living outside the homeland, including values, skills and relationships. Returning members of diasporas were keen to use their new knowledge and experiences gained in host nations in supporting the building of a new Kurdistan. This extended knowledge and skills base was seen by those interviewed to bring new opportunities to their returnee communities and the wider regions but it was also felt that it can also bring alienation and mistrust. Some diaspora have feelings of guilt for leaving Kurdistan in the first place and then guilt for returning either because the reality of life in the host country did not match preconceived ideas and returning has a stigma of failure or have encountered mistrust from friends and family as being 'Westernized'.

Gender plays a significant part in attitudes towards return. Christou and King's (2011) research highlighted "diasporic imaginaries and mobilities, including rootedness and rootlessness, which are experienced differently by men and women" (287). The decision to return was predominately a male decision while female returnees did so with little alternative, women who felt liberated from the social norms and gender roles expected of them from their extended families, experienced freedom in the host countries away from the patriarchal influence, the decision to return was not self-determining. However, it can be argued that there is not enough literature on women and children's experiences of return

migration. In particular the experiences of women and children returning from western to non-western societies and the freedoms they leave behind, is neglected in current scholarship.

Chapter Three: Methods

This chapter outlines the methodological premises underpinning this study, as well as a description of the methods used to study the diaspora experience of Kurdish people in Devon and returnees in south Kurdistan. As discussed in Chapter 1, this research is based upon qualitative research that has employed the use of semi-structured interviews, in which several questions emerged from engaging with the research participants.

The use of semi-structured interviews “allows people to answer more on their own terms than the standardised and more highly structured interview permits” (May 1997:129), and allow greater insights into people’s feelings, opinions, experiences and attitudes. This research focuses on qualitative analysis, an examination of how I comprehend constructionism and apply it in this study while researching identity and belonging. The rationale behind the use of this form of interviewing was explained to each interviewee, and all agreed to contribute and participate fully with the study.

The study has set out to explore how experience can be comprehended as a mediated site of knowledge and information. Experience is comprehended and interpreted in connection to the common predominant discourse that enables diverse social areas, perspectives and perceptions about what sort of society we live in and imagine, and how we comprehend ourselves in connection to surrounding people, social structures and collectivities. Furthermore, this research has implemented thorough discourses of the questions of sampling, interviewing as a method for gathering material, ethical considerations in connection to minoritized subjects, and content analysis as a method to break down the interview material and the relationship between the interviewees and researcher. In this study, constructions of place through discourses of home/homeland are centrally important, as they are discursively constitutive to identity formation of these diaspora individuals and the ways they attach and develop a sense of belonging to places.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section explains the use of sampling and discusses the key issues in data collection and analysis. The

second section describes the interview process, as well as location and empirical of study. The third section addresses the ethical considerations of this research. The fourth section is concerned with providing an understanding of how research is affected, in terms of outcomes and process, by my own position as a researcher. Finally, fifth section explains the suitability of a qualitative analysis for this research.

In using a variety of different materials and data collection techniques this study demonstrates a broad range of ideas and perspectives to help analyse the four key themes of this research. The use of the semi-structured interview technique is to have knowledge of how individual people experience and make sense of their own lives (Valentine 1997). A central benefit of semi-structured interviews is their free structure that allows not only the ability to compare the collected data, but also to look closely at the individual meaning and comprehension of the process and experiences of diaspora.

This research reflects my journey to discover exactly who I am, where I belong, and other questions that have developed due to my own diasporic experiences. My interest in these questions began at a young age, piqued by reading history books and listening to stories passed down in the oral tradition, and through speaking to the elders of many villages and the Peshmarges (Kurdish Army), recording their accounts. Later I began academic research, collating information using various methodological tools, including archival research of records from the Kurdistan community organisation, political poetry, art and other Kurdish migration research and books and journals. It is hoped that these tools will provide answers to these lifelong questions regarding homeland and identity.

3.1 Sampling and Secondary sources

This study has used self-selecting sampling methods. E-mails were sent out asking interested people within the Kurdish diaspora network if they wanted to participate in this study. Network sampling relies on lists gathered from acquaintances, while purposive sampling allows the researcher to use their decision in selecting respondents with the required experience and knowledge that would best allow them to respond to the research questions and study objectives. As participation was completely voluntary I had to rely on the

generosity and availability of the people I contacted. The process of selecting participants allowed me to capture a diversity of diaspora members and their activities, addressing gender, population, organisations, demographic and geographic locations in Devon.

According to Flick, sampling is an important part of study procedures because:

“...we 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” (Flick 2007: 25).

For this study I have decided to use purposive sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling in order to choose information and reach individual experiences. Flick (ibid) underlines that sampling is not only a question of selecting individuals to be interviewed, but also involves the selection of sites where you can find such individuals and situations. Uniqueness and shared patterns that cut across cases are, according to Patton (2002), 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 (ibid).

Other advantages of secondary sourced data include deepening the understanding of a research topic; by providing a basis of comparisons of former research this type of research is valuable for its economical aspects, saving both money and time. McCaston (2005) explains the disadvantages of secondary data:

“Secondary data helps us understand the condition or status of a group, but compared to primary data they are imperfect reflections of reality.... The person reviewing the secondary data can easily

become overwhelmed by the volume of secondary data available, if selectivity is not exercised” (7).

Further challenges of secondary data, according to McCaston, are secondary sources which may conflict with each other, and also secondary data that may be out-dated, rendering the research information inaccurate or flawed. Therefore it is necessary to analyse this type of data with great care and attention. My secondary sources have not been pre-selected. I followed the natural flow of my search, during which I drew from a range of contexts – academic sources, policy and research studies. I welcome the interpretivist aspect of secondary sourced methodology as I believe all sourced information is interpreted to a degree.

3.2 Description

This study is concerned with the ways that individuals comprehend the world by sharing their experiences to others through discourse. It is steeped in social constructionism, the precept that holds that human knowledge or importance originates from engagement with realities in the world, that is, knowledge is constructed and not simply “a disinterested reflection of reality” (Nash 1994:68). Interviews were conducted in two geographically separate locations. The first phase of face-to-face and semi-structured interviewing took place in Devon with individual Kurdish community members and key actors that work closely with diaspora communities. The second phase of interviewing was conducted in South Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Iraq) with returnees who had returned from diaspora. These interviews were conducted to explore returnees experiences related to transnational practices (see Appendix for participants table). In qualitative interviews knowledge is built up through an exchange and interaction of opinions of ideas among two individuals who discuss a topic of common interest (Kvale 1997). The use of the voice recorder was mostly accepted by the participants, with the condition that interviews would remain anonymous. Local material and articles were also investigated to contribute the essential contextual data and information needed.

Another method that was been useful for the study in data collection is the Internet. This method provided a great deal of factual information on Kurdish

issues. The internet is an effective and fast method for the global distribution of information with a variety of articles. I have also used articles and newspapers as due to the rapidly changing geopolitical situation in Kurdistan, there is often a lack of information available from other sources.

The procedure from research proposal to submission took four years. The study was designed to be carried out in two stages. Essential within the first year, the study was dedicated to discourse analysis. Both study areas were returned to throughout the study to keep them up-to-date. It was important that the study procedure was a flexible and iterative one, so that it was able to deal with such changes that took place. During the second and third years of the research contacts were made with participants to conduct interviews, as well as transcription along with sustained periods of data analysis and writing. The data is bridging research and developing a service response to case study both in Devon and Kurdistan.

Prior study has found that the majority of Kurds residing in Devon are first generation, male and female aged between eighteen and fifty years. Due to ethical considerations regarding confidentiality, I did not present the respondents more closely. To avoid the risk of identifying individuals, it has been necessary to exclude certain information, and the names of participants used in this research have been changed.

The majority of interviews were conducted in their place of work: only two were conducted in a public place (a coffee shop in the town). The majority of Kurdish interviewees were interviewed at their own homes or at the Kurdish community centre in Plymouth. Some participants were interviewed twice, as over time new questions arose that required follow-up interviews to be conducted.

Between January 2011 to June 2011 I travelled to South Kurdistan to conduct interviews with members of the Kurdish diaspora who had returned to Kurdistan. The participants presented their views on topics related to return and the experiences they have had since their return to South Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Iraq). In total thirty-three participants of diverse backgrounds were interviewed, of which twenty-three were male and ten were female. The majority

of these people stressed that returning to Kurdistan become much easier after 2004. Within this study I have sought to look beyond the meaning of return to instead discover individual's experiences, motivations and hopes while living across different states.

The benefit of semi-structured interviews also allowed me to gain a wide range of data, and at the same time to research certain subjects beyond my initial questions, while avoiding ambiguity and confusion. Qualitative research allowed my study to examine return not as an independent procedure, but rather as connected to other concepts such as belonging, transnationalism, identity and integration. Specifically, interviewee's views regarding return were analysed with reference to belonging, transnational and integration activities, which constitute the core for understanding social life. The perceptions of participants in the study allowed provided insights in to how the social world was built with the sources from an insider point of view. I was not simply watching, but rather encountering and taking an interest in specific activities and maintaining trust. The use of semi-structured interviews was therefore the most appropriate method for collecting knowledge on the Kurdish diaspora, and particularly to comprehend an individuals' link between the country of settlement and the country of origin.

Contacts with participants were made through the Kurdish diaspora network. All interviews were conducted in either English or in Kurdish, and audio recorded before being transcribed into English. On average, interviews were approximately 75 minutes long and were structured by the study themes. At the end of each interview participants were asked how they felt about participating in the research. Eight interviews were conducted with a family member present. After conducting the interviews I wrote the theoretical background based on the interview analysis. Throughout this study, a significant number of direct quotes taken from the interviews are used, allowing the voice of interviewees and their contributions to be presented clearly within the study. Transcriptions of each participant's interview were completed within five days of the interview, ensuring that the discussion was still fresh, allowing also more accurate coding of data.

During the research there were areas which did not work or hampered the study. Losing data due to technical error without a backup system was costly

and some data was lost which could not be replicated. During the translation process some of the literal meaning was lost in the data collection due to language differences or misinterpretation of vocabulary. It is clear to see in the participant's interview table below (see Figure 3.1) the disparity between gender participants. This is in part because there is a relatively small population of 3,700 Kurdish diaspora in Plymouth, which is comprised of 750 females and 2900 males (PKC, 2014), so acquiring an equal cross section of gender participants was not possible. Over the four years that this research has been undertaken there has been a steady change in the geopolitical situation in Kurdistan of Iraq, resulting in less diasporic returnees due to the economy and the current war.

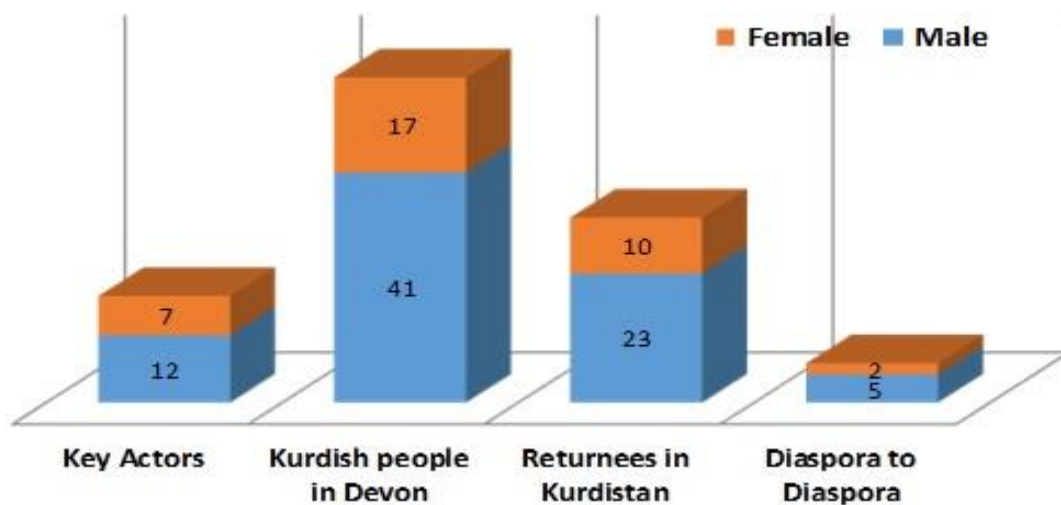


Figure 3.1 Research participant interviewees

1. Interviews with key Actors

All interviews have been conducted in Devon, related to the theme of research.

- Interviews with various key actors in Devon, (see appendix 2 for the list of organisations who participate in this study).
- Interviews with the key Kurdish people in Devon such as leader, community worker and business people.
- Interviews with other agencies that work with the Kurdish people in Devon and that includes other diaspora group.

2. Interviews with Kurdish individuals

All interviews have been conducted among the Kurdish community in Devon and related to all questions.

- Interviews 48 people in Plymouth
- Interviews 10 people in rural area

3. Interviews with returnees

This has taken place in Kurdistan of Iraq and related to the themes of return. I have conducted interviews from a broad spectrum of people from a range of professions, this has also included family members (spouse, and Children over age of 16).

3.1 Diaspora to diaspora

With the change in the security and economy situation in South Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Iraq) and the emergence of ISIS, the study interviewed 7 people in diaspora in Devon who returned to Kurdistan of Iraq but came back to Devon due to the war.

Secondary Sources

I have used a wide range of secondary resources in compiling this research. These tools have enabled me to extensively research themes which are related to the study, as shown in Figure 3.2.



Figure 3.2: Secondary sources.

The analysis of secondary data from other sources has been used to support my own research data. I have used both internal and external secondary sources, as shown in figure 3.2.

3.3 Research Questions

The Kurdish community is a particularly unique study, since this community consists of refugees from a country of origin (i.e. Kurdistan) that has never formally existed through international recognition. In this study I discuss and challenge the concept of identity, and the notion of homeland and belonging, in regards to contemporary hypotheses of diaspora and migration studies. This research was carried out in Devon, and the majority of the study in the City of Plymouth. The Kurds have been present in the UK for many years, but there was a significant arrival of Kurdish refugees to Devon beginning in early 2000. By the end of 2015, according to a Plymouth Kurdish Community (PKC 2012) report, more than 5000 Kurds were resident in Devon and Cornwall. In some areas in the UK the Kurdish communities are the largest single ethnic group. This research examines the Kurdish diaspora in this region with regard to four general themes, each of which are discussed below in greater detail: diaspora experience; identity and belonging; community engagement; and return (comprising intention of return and experience of return).

Diaspora experience

Diaspora for some diasporic people has implied traumatic experiences, however at the same time it has also given diasporic people a space and the possibilities to establish their movement. I explore evidence based on local experiences of diaspora in Devon. The sub-questions below support this analysis in addressing the main themes of experience in diaspora between the Kurds and their place of residence:

- a) Have diasporic people experienced discrimination? How has it been presented?
- b) Does intercultural awareness in the host country have benefits towards building and improving the connection between diaspora and the host society?
- c) Do diasporians feel at home in the host society? Why or why not?
- d) Has diasporian attachment to ancestral homeland changed over the years, if so how?
- e) Is it possible to be attached both to the UK and Kurdistan?
- f) Do diasporian's feel part of UK society? Why or why not?
- g) Is moving to diaspora a positive or negative experience?

Identity and belonging

In this study I analyse the identity and the concept of belonging among the Kurdish diaspora. Many scholars believe that the Kurds in diaspora have discovered the Kurdishness or Kurdayati in diasporic life (Hassanpour 1995; Ahmadzadeh 2003; Khayati 2008; Alinia 2004; Wahlbeck 1998). The Kurdish diasporic experience has allowed the Kurdish people in diaspora to have multiple identities. The sub-questions below will support me to find and analyse the main themes of identity and belonging in diaspora among the Kurds in the UK:

- h) Do diasporas believe their identity has changed since arriving in the host society?
- i) Has the concept of Kurdishness been lost while living in diaspora?
- j) Does the Kurdish diaspora community reinforce a sense of belonging?
- k) Is there a loss/gain of belonging since arriving in the diasporic Kurdish community?
- l) Does living in diaspora create dual identity?
- m) Is diaspora a positive or negative experience?

Community engagement

In order to identify the Kurdish community engagement, the following sub-questions support and analyse the main theme of community engagement:

- n) What are the contours of the Kurdish community in Devon?
- o) What route brings the Kurdish diaspora to Devon?
- p) How do diasporas engage with the host society and other diasporic groups?
- q) What models and policies are available to engage with diaspora communities?

Return

The concept of return was a central concept in the design of this research. I analyse how Kurds speak and think about return to their homeland (Kurdistan), and examine what factors prevent or discourage a permanent return to their homeland, as well as criticising the role of British and Kurdish governments for their lack of support of individuals from the UK when returning to their

homeland. I therefore examine both the intention of return and the experience of return among the Kurdish diaspora in Devon.

It is important to recognise that return experience is different within families. Women and children within the family unit may have very different experiences of return in contrast to the male heads of the household. Women who have lived in western diasporic countries may have to face a very different society where their liberty and freedom is restricted, while in contrast, children who have been born in a diasporic country may have become westernised and find the prospect of returning to a very different culture and society a daunting prospect.

Intention of return

This section is concerned with first and second generation Kurds resident in Devon, and explores the issues of returning to their homeland. It seeks to understand the reasons stopping diasporic Kurds returning to their country of origin, as well as examining how Kurds think and speak about returning to Kurdistan permanently, analysing the way in which potential dreams of returning are likely to clash with practical considerations. The following sub-questions support my study to analyse and help the main theme of return:

- i. Do returnees mourn their diasporic communities and want to return?
- ii. What are the key concerns for returnees, and what would encourage diasporas to return to their ancestral homeland?
- iii. What, if any, policies does the Kurdistan Regional Government have in place to support returnees?

Actual experience of returnees

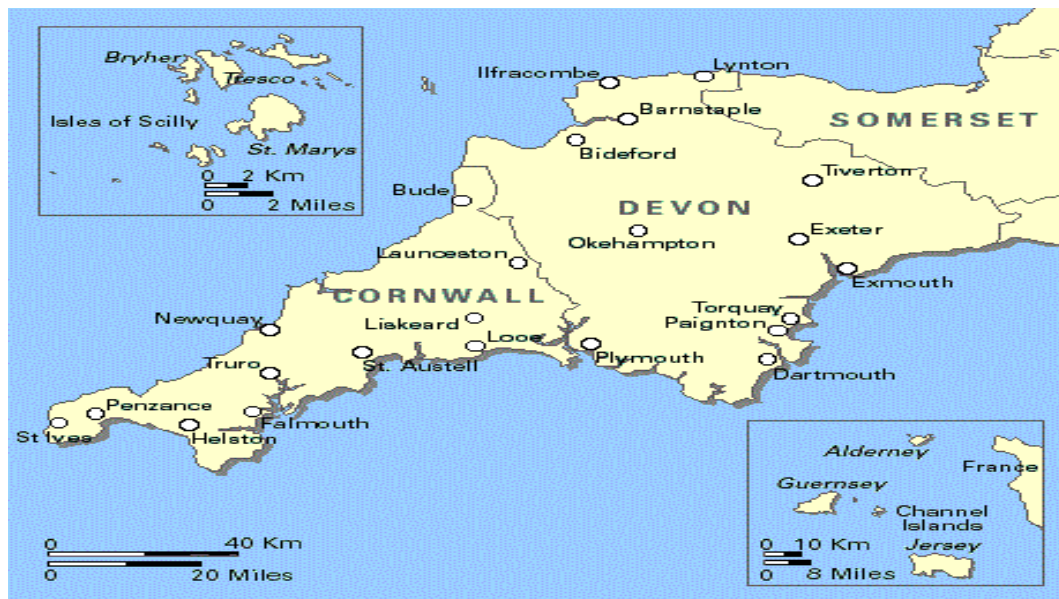
This part of the study was conducted in Kurdistan of Iraq among the permanent members of Kurdish diaspora returnees. It explored their experiences from their homeland and difficulties in re-establishing into mainstream society, the reaction of the homeland to diaspora, and whether they would consider a return to diasporic life. The questions listed below have helped to analyse the main idea of return:

- i. What are the individual experiences of returnees to ancestral diaspora homeland?
- ii. Why do diasporas return?

- iii. Has returning to homeland exceeded expectations or disappointed?
- iv. Has returning to homeland led to a loss of belonging?
- v. Since returning what difficulties have been encountered?
- vi. Does the experience of return vary according to age and gender?

3.4 Empirical research field sites

This research was conducted within two distinct geographical locations. Large sections of the study took place both in Devon, United Kingdom and South Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Iraq), in order to discover the theme of return among the Kurdish diaspora (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4).



Source: <https://www.4hotels.co.uk/uk/images/england-west.gif>

Figure 3.3 Map of Devon



Source: Kurdistan Regional Government (www.krg.org)

Figure 3.4 South Kurdistan

3.5 Ethical considerations

According to O’Leary (2010) ethics are central to practitioner research. The researcher has power over the researched, and with power comes responsibility. There is an important distinction between ethical and moral obligations. Ethical obligations include giving respondents all relevant information about the research, ensuring that no harm comes to them as well as ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. I have done my best to comply with these regulations as can be seen in the email/letters written to respondents. Furthermore, prior to conducting interviews I informed all participants about the ethical obligations. Although it has been straightforward to get ethical approval from respondents and the trustees of the organisation I worked with, I understand that often “practitioner researchers need to jump through a number of hoops before the research can start” (Fox et al. 2007:95). We live in a society where our actions are increasingly controlled and regulated and we are constantly threatened with legal action and repercussions should we not conform. For example, Gorman (cited in Campbell et al., 2007:10) argues that “society has become increasingly nervous and litigious and that research ethics is in danger of being reduced to an easy means of institutional risk rather than something intrinsically valuable to the research project.”

Nevertheless there are also moral obligations for the researcher which include conscientiousness, equity and honesty (O’Leary, 2010). For my research this meant that I constantly kept in mind the wellbeing of the participants and those who approached me informally. I contacted all interested people I had access to and invited all of them to participate in the design of the research methods. I informed people about the true nature of this research project and, most importantly, I paid special attention in involving those who might benefit from the project.

Informing of any likely consequences, confidentiality and permission are seen as the three major aspects of ethical issues in interview research (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Clarification of consent was undertaken prior to commencement of interviews with participants. Interviewees were reassured that they had the option of not answering any questions that they did not want to, and could withdraw from the research at any time. Interviews were only

conducted after consent was given. Interviewees were also informed that confidentiality of individual data under data protection would be adhered to, and the research would not reveal any data directly or indirectly about the interviewees. In writing the research, pseudonym names were given when individuals were named to ensure anonymity. I have given careful consideration to the outcomes of the study on two counts. Firstly, I was mindful of some unlawful activities that were noted as observational, particularly illegal employment, money transfers, identification, etc. I have taken this phenomenon in the information data analysis, however I did not utilize such data widely in the articles. Secondly, sympathy towards consequences is about the effect of the study on the groups involved in this research. As a general ethical direction, I have followed the guidance provided by the University Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities for social researchers.

Awareness of my own bias can be viewed as a negative aspect, however being aware of this bias has allowed me to give an honest account of my outlook on the chosen research. I did not feel it was appropriate to undergo an empirical study at this point of my development as a practitioner-researcher, as I did not feel confident in approaching potential participants with the necessary sensitivity and informed understanding. It is essential to heighten awareness for issues surrounding vulnerable people while being very much informed of the potential hardships endured and sensitive subjects that may affect a participant in a research study after taking part in interviews. Participants can suffer from post-traumatic stress when recounting their experiences of diaspora, refugee and seeking asylum. This is confirmed in research studies such as *Chance or Choice?*; this study describes how participants became visibly distressed during interviews to the extent of breaking down, crying and requesting several breaks throughout the interviews.

3.6 Reflexivity

It is impossible for people to be free from their own values, feelings, opinions and prejudices, including academic researchers. Researchers can also be biased due to their attachment to organisations and client groups, and due to their own ambitions, views and opinions. Hammersley (2000, cited in Groenewald, 2004:7) argues that “the researcher cannot be detached from

his/her own presuppositions and that the researcher should not pretend otherwise.” Associating reflexivity to a qualitative study intensifies the researcher’s alertness as to how the different aspects of their identities (such as class, race and gender) become crucial at the same time as the research process. As Alvesson and Skoldberg point out, reflexivity is a continuous awareness and attention to “the way different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical elements are woven together in the process of knowledge development, during which empirical material is constructed, interpreted and written”(2000:5).

Throughout this research my views and perceptions I have had about the study were continually challenged. At times I was questioning the study itself regarding how feasible it was to put the idea into practice. At other times I was overwhelmed with the amount of different ideas and opinions I was confronted with during the duration of the research. My own views and values were therefore tested on an almost daily basis. As Fox (et al., 2007: 186) argue, “reflexivity is about understanding how research is affected, in terms of outcomes and process, by one’s own position as a researcher”. In order to understand ourselves as a researcher “we must engage with ourselves through thinking about our own thinking” (Johnson and Duberley 2003:1279).

Reflexivity has been identified by researchers as an important tool in regards to their subject of the study and the interactive procedure of knowledge creation. To exhibit reflexivity is to identify one’s background, preferences that will leave their marks on the result of the examination (Gibbs 2007). However, what does this mean to me as coming from and belonging to the same ethnic community as I am researching? I adhere to the principle that my Kurdish background leaves its traces on the text. My outlook and perspectives are coloured by my experiences connected to my Kurdish background. Conducting research about the Kurdish diaspora community with Kurdish backgrounds obliges me to navigate among the horizons of distance and nearness. Certainly I record myself in this research with a position of power to present as a historical subject that can talk, and write, however in addition with a honour to raise other subject-positions and speak to, for, with and about them. To speak and write is to take a position towards those issues under research, but additionally an approach to

maintain, challenge, or change existing social knowing and request. However, those positions one takes should be very much grounded in prevailing hypothetical and experimental discoveries. It is essential to bear in mind that every researcher takes control of a diverse range of positions inside the social space that we inhabit and therefore it is essential to discuss the impacts and reflections about what sort of traces the subjectivity of the researcher leaves on the study process. According to Eliassi, “reflexivity is not only an activity for researchers who do not or are not allowed to belong to 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” (2010:61). Objectivity turns into a way to disavow social relations organized in dominance. It empowers the standard to claim its perspective as a general human purpose of departure that should to be aspired to and defended (Radhakrishnan 2003). Reflexivity is additionally an issue of power disagreements about representation, relations, and the thorny terrain of meaning-makings and impacts of the researcher’s structure of translation on our comprehension of the study member’s life-biographies.

My position as a practitioner-researcher and my alignment with Anti Oppressive Practice (AOP) drew me, quite naturally, to a critical approach. My methodology is based on qualitative research methods and uses semi-structured interviews as its main data collection technique as well as secondary sources. This is interpretive to the extent that my own views and opinions have naturally guided me through the participants and secondary sourced information I have gathered.

Through reflective practice during my research, I have realised my own polarities to critical perspectives when reading critical policy responses of the migrants and diaspora. My bias informed and shaped by my life experiences as well as my academic learning and caused me to pay greater attention to certain information I agreed with and lead me to give more time and consideration, as opposed to studies I came across that challenged my own beliefs and perspectives on diaspora and migration (asylum seekers and refugees) and how they are viewed and ‘dealt’ with by others i.e. through policy especially

policy regarding the migrants, asylum seeking process, communities and the media.

Being Kurdish and my positionality as community leader had significance in interviewing participants. Interviewees commented that a shared background and living experience enabled them to talk open and transparently, they felt at ease. There was an expectation of understanding concerning their issues, which would not have been available from a non-Kurdish interviewer. Interviewees felt that as a community leader I could be trusted especially with personal answers regarding issues surrounding family. Paree (29:F) said:

“Talking to you made me feel safe, I knew that as the leader of the community I could talk to you in confidence about the way I felt, especially where my family was concerned, it would not be a problem. If you were not Kurdish or the PKC leader, I don’t think I would feel confident talking.”

After each interview participants were asked, whether my background had influenced the interview, some of the participants answered that being Kurdish was a benefit as it was a point of knowledge. Nasreen (23:F) said:

“The difference between you and other researchers is that you understand me better. I feel in some way that you don’t feel sorry for me. I was interviewed by another researcher and every time he asked a question and I answered he said, ‘oh dear, that is so sad’. and he thought that he knew how it was to be a Kurd. No, he doesn’t, he is only heard about it”.

In the case of Nasreen she acknowledged that a non-Kurdish researcher arrived at the interview with preconceptions of Kurds as oppressed victims, Nasreen felt that there were no preconceived ideas emanating from myself as I was a Kurd.

3.7 Qualitative analysis

Writing the literature review for this research, especially the recent research on diaspora as well as the migration, geography and political history of Kurdistan, the research used a mixed method of basic qualitative analyses. Qualitative

analysis has been defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998,11) as a “nonmathematical process of interpretation that is carried out to discover concepts and relationships in raw data and to organise these into a theoretical explanatory scheme.” Also, this research embraces an experimental qualitative research approach; in types of ethnological examination. “Ethnography is a way of understanding social life in relational and holistic terms” (Gillespie 1995:54). Qualitative research becomes a choice based on the fact that the research questions require deep insight and understanding of the participatory subjects of the research (Robson and Foster 1989).

The methodology is qualitative as it is based on interviews, communication and interpretation, it is subjective and value based (Sarantakos 1998). Although I have counted the people who have participated in this study and created a table of how many people said what, the main methods of data collection and analysis of this research are qualitative as they focused on what individuals have communicated to me. The majority of the research used in this study is content analysis looking for patterns when analysing the data. However, it also fits into a grounded theory approach: this can be described as a “study of what people actually say” (Fox et al., 2007:14). Furthermore, Fox et al. (ibid) argue that grounded theory operates almost in a reverse fashion from traditional research as it does not begin with a hypothesis but with the data collection. After the first data is analysed it can then be used as a theory for further data. This fits with this studies’ approach as I have tried to be as open as possible in order to get an objective view of what people have said. I have used various methods in this research for data collection, including interviews and observation, and I have analysed the data extracting key points from the text, which I have sorted into different categories.

The Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) (O’Leary 2010) cannot be put into just one or two of the many approaches that have been developed. O’Leary (2010) describes QDA as a critical and reflexive process that generally involves identifying biases, noting impressions, reducing, organising and coding, searching for patterns and interconnections, mapping and building themes, building and verifying theories and drawing conclusions. Furthermore O’Leary argues that the researcher does not have to adopt one particular approach and

that “it is possible to draw insights from various strategies in a bid to evolve an approach that best circles between your data and your own research agenda” (ibid:269). This is exactly what I have done during my research.

3.8 Conclusion

Methodology is an essential section of scientific study as it informs the theoretical background of the research, the ways the subjects are constructed in the study, and how their accounts and experiences can be translated inside the prevalent political and historical circumstances in which the contributors in the study and the researcher are positioned. Scientists are influenced towards different methodologies by different epistemologies and models of human nature. The connection between the scientist and the content is an intricate case in the light of the fact that 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 people. Methodological theories are full of inconsistencies and contradictions mainly because they are far from being clear-cut or “defined in such a way as to be able to differentiate between and across them on the basis of a fixed set of principles and procedures” (Goulding 1999:862). However, researchers who undertake a study must ensure that their chosen “methods are carefully selected and carefully and conscientiously applied” (Wallendorf and Brucks 1993:355). Research methodology is a generic term for the mixture of techniques used to analyse specific circumstances and methods are personal techniques to collect data and analysis. Figure 3.5 demonstrates some research processes (Source: Adapted from Crotty 1998).

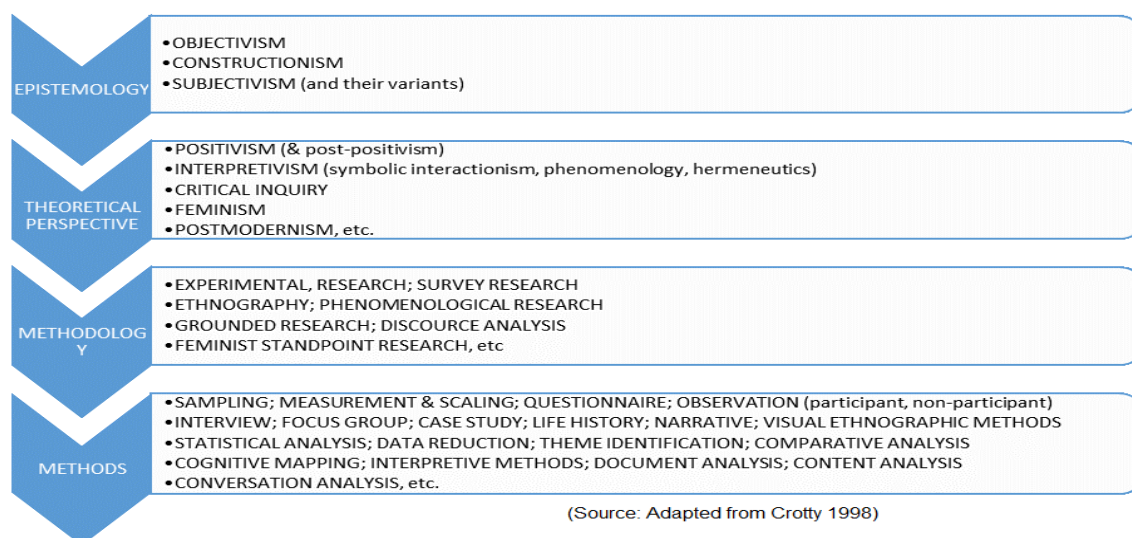


Figure 3.5 The Research Process

Eventually, the methodology explores the degree to which environmental pressures and individual attributions impact the procedures, and results of diaspora groups. Additionally, it builds up to what extent would the attempt at incorporating the forerunners and outcomes of diaspora individuals assist with defining a demonstrative diagram that would, in turn, help in creating focused procedures in the advancement and assessment of diaspora groups/individuals. The route incorporates an investigation of the part of diaspora associations in the formation of a diaspora group infrastructure, including ethics and the procedure of cultural identity recreation.

Stressing a qualitative strategy in the gathering of information and data gives the chance to discover results through interviews and includes quantitative techniques i.e. statistics and measurements, will allow to back up the participants arguments. Constructivism and interpretivism will be the principle epistemologies. Interpretivism concentrates on a more human methodology of researching and there are no limits between the researcher and researched. As argued by Burrell and Morgan “all social scientists approach their subjects via explicit or implicit assumptions about the nature of the social world and the way in which it may be investigated” (Burrell and Morgan 1979:1). This associates with (i) ontology of the phenomenon under investigation whether the reality being studied is external to the individual or a product of individual consciousness and, (ii) epistemological assumptions “about how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this knowledge to fellow human beings” (Burrell and Morgan 1979:1).

This study has chosen to use qualitative research interviews as a data collection technique due to their “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, 2007:11). Interviewing has many unfixed features that can come to expression during an interview. It is very important as a researcher to show openness towards the interview process as it can lead to unexpected questions and phenomena. The focus of a research interview is often directed toward particular themes and as a researcher you

lead the interviewee towards the themes in order to see how the subject understands and connects to study themes.

Doing qualitative analysis often entails a creative process where the qualitative analyst seeks patterns, themes and categories and makes judgements about what part of the data is significant and meaningful for their study (Patton, 2002). Content analysis involves using written statements and analysing their contents on different levels (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 (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.

Chapter Four: Experience of Kurdish Diaspora in Devon

The number of people fleeing their homes to escape repressive regimes, war and poverty globally is the highest it has been since the Second World War. The United Kingdom (UK) has witnessed a marked rise in the number migrant arrivals, often the last destination for many arriving in the UK. The public view in the UK has shown that many have the opinion that new migration is having a major impact on settled residents in affected locations. Kurdish migrants have been living in the UK for many years, but there a large number of Kurdish refugees to Devon and Cornwall began arriving from early 2000. According to the Plymouth Kurdish Community (PKC) 2012 report, there are more than 5000 Kurds resident in Devon and Cornwall. In some areas the Kurdish communities are the largest ethnic singular groups. The Black and Minority Ethnic population, which includes the Kurdish community, in Plymouth rose from 3% in 2001 to 6.7% in 2011, and therefore has more than doubled since the 2001 census. The census data suggests that Plymouth has at least 43 main languages spoken in the city, and that Kurdish, Chinese and Polish are the top three (Ethnic groups 2001 & 2011 Census). Compared to other places in the UK, Devon does not have a significant ethnic minority population. Many of the immigrants in Devon previously lived in areas of the world that suffered civil war, famine, natural disasters, and other catastrophic events, causing them to flee their country of origin with little or no preparation. The evidence shows that many Kurdish immigrants had direct experience with war, government oppression, imprisonment and torture, as well as Anfal in their country of origin. Anfal was the genocide of the Kurdish people in south of Kurdistan (North Iraq) led by the Ba'athist Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, between the 1970 to 1990. These experiences have created psychological issues within the immigrant population that are most commonly associated with a sense of fear, loss, and powerlessness. People have always migrated to other countries for reasons that range from the life threatening to the life enhancing.

International migrants are expected to live lives that are not fragmented from British culture, and to attach and integrate themselves to the core values of the local area and nation by learning to communicate in English and by understanding the British way of the life (McGhee 2006). For refugees and other

groups wishing to become citizens for whom the terms of their 'leave to remain' in the UK are the prerogative of the state (Sales 2007), the 'clear sense of citizenship' stressed by the UK government's cohesion agenda has manifested itself through a set of bureaucratic processes that requires them to demonstrate an understanding of the UK, the obligations and duties that will be attached to 'citizenship' (Osler 2009), and a commitment to Britain (McGhee 2006).

This chapter will set out to test these claims through a review of the evidence relating to local experiences of Kurdish people in Devon, promoting community relations and cultural norms and values. The process of negotiation associated with everyday encounters within the space of the Kurdish community is an uncertain process and the outcomes can sometimes be problematic; evidence of practical conviviality can exist alongside evidence of limitations, difficulties and tensions. This chapter explores community relations between the Kurdish diaspora in Devon and the host population. It will begin with historical overview of the Kurdish diaspora to Devon, and in considering positive and negative attitudes regarding the migration from both the host population and the Kurdish people's perspective. The chapter will focus on intercultural and cultural experiences spanning across the generations of Kurds and key individuals that work closely with diaspora groups in the host society, and then finally explore the demographics of Devon in relation to racism.

4.1 Kurdish pathways to Plymouth

The exile of the Kurdish people is understood as "an increasingly important dimension of Kurdish history and particularly of the advance of Kurdish national solidarity" (McDowall 2004:455). For Alinia, the Kurdish population are classified as a "non-state nation" or "Proto-nation". Both of these terms represent groups that operate in a manner normally associated with a nation state (Alinia 2004). Kurdish diaspora has spread into many countries, though predominantly to western countries. The United Kingdom (UK) is one of the European countries that have received Kurdish refugees for many years. It is difficult to find accurate statistics about when and how many Kurds have fled to the UK, and even current numbers are impossible to find, because of their statelessness. However, this study will focus on the Kurdish diaspora in Devon, particularly in Plymouth. Since the year 2000 the city of Plymouth became a home for many

Kurds. According to Plymouth City Council (PCC) commissioning plan for the Plymouth domestic abuse partnership (2012), "The largest BME communities are Kurdish Iraqi, 3000; Polish speaking migrant workers, 2700; Indian, 2500; Chinese, 2000; Russian speaking migrant workers, 1500 and Black African, 1,000" (PCC 2012:6).

Many first generation Kurds have managed to integrate into British society; many have taken jobs within the area of their professions as well as establishing small businesses in the service industry area such as restaurants, barbers, takeaways, mini market owners, hand car wash operators, as well as self-employed occupations including taxi drivers and builders. For almost all the Kurds who arrived between 2000 and 2001, they have experienced a new life within a new society with significant cultural differences. Ali mentions that:

"I came to Plymouth in the year 2000. We were about fifteen Kurds in the bus coming from London and we had never met each other before, but it was organised by National Asylum Support Services (NASS), who was supporting us during our asylum process. We didn't choose Plymouth and when I first arrived it was night time, the next day I went to find the shopping centre and I followed the map the man from NASS gave to us, it was very difficult to find. All of us inside the bus were split into different areas of the city and then more Kurds arrived, I think around 300 people we met each other sometimes in college activities and the city centre. It was very hard at that time because the majority of us couldn't speak English, and the city didn't have any other black people like us, but nowadays it is much easier for asylum seekers because they will get contact and information from other BME people that have been here a long time" (Ali 44:M).

Ali confirms that coming from a different cultural background to a new society has been very difficult. He describes the process of being a new arrival in the UK as self-learning, and as the diasporic community has grown it is has become easier for the new arrivals with support among the diaspora community

and other support agencies. Wahlbeck finds that Kurdish associations can be useful resources for refugees in order to solve new problems they face in the country of settlement (Wahlbeck 1999). Ali also describes that new arrivals to the city receive greater advocacy, particularly from the diaspora community, as well as support from different Black and Ethnic Minority organisations and businesses as points of contact, than the first arrivals in the city. However, Kurdish diaspora can be split into four groups; (i) Asylum seekers like Ali with no choice of destination, where the host destination was determined by NASS (Gill 2016), the numbers of diaspora within this group have increased dramatically within the last twenty years; (ii) Kurdish diaspora from other parts of the UK and European countries; (iii) groups of diaspora joining spouses and family members; (iv) second and third generation that were born in the UK. Rizgar arrived in Plymouth as part of first generation and he explains his route to Plymouth:

“I was in Kent when I arrived in the UK but after two weeks in a bed and breakfast which was provided by UKBA people. I was told that I needed to wait until my name was put on a list to remove me from here to a permanent address in one of the cities in the UK. The list came and next to my name was Plymouth City. My journey to Plymouth started from that day, I did not know anyone in Plymouth and it was a Friday. I arrived here in the late afternoon didn't know anywhere and the officer from the housing provider collected me from the bus and took me to my new address and gave me a map of Plymouth and told me where I could meet other Kurdish refugees and a post office to collect my support. It was very difficult for the first two weeks but after meeting other Kurdish people and building relationships with them, as well as attending college things became easier. After two years we set up a Kurdish organisation to be the voice of Kurds and advocacy for the refugees and asylum seekers and promote cultural awareness training to wider communities in Devon and Cornwall” (Rizgar 46:M).

Almost all the experiences among the first generation that arrived in Plymouth between the years 2000 to 2002 are similar: Rizgar, like Ali, went to an unknown destination with the decision made by NASS. Ali explains how his experience of arrival challenged him to advocate and support new arrivals in the city. Recognising the needs of the Kurds and the establishment of a Kurdish community was institutional among the Kurds in diaspora after a period of time. Rizgar mentioned supporting and advocacy, this can also be seen as a path for the Kurds in Plymouth to feel connected to the community, as well as promoting cultural awareness programmes to educate others about the Kurds and integrate with the new society. For Berry, integration of migrants will be a part of much wider process of 'acculturation' (Berry 2006). Kurdish people in diaspora have received opportunities that they did not have in their country of origin; Kurdish institutions play a significant role in the (re)production of Kurdish culture and identity.

Many of the respondents admit that they met Kurds from other parts of Kurdistan during their escape, and while in diaspora. Kani discussed her routes to Plymouth as a female Kurd:

"I was the first Kurdish woman that arrived in Plymouth and for about seven months it was very hard for me because there were no other Kurdish women to associate with. During my escape to Britain, and in Plymouth for the first time, I came across other Kurds from different parts of Kurdistan with different dialogues. Now I have friends from different parts of Kurdistan as well as English people. I become an advisory person at the Kurdish community to advise other Kurdish families about the life and we do lots of cultural activities. It is much easier to have women advising women, I know this from my own experience" (Kani 28:F).

In diaspora, Kurdish people have the opportunity to meet other Kurdish people from different areas of Kurdistan of Iraq, allowing them to establish social and political networks. Kani feels her experiences have been shaped by being the only woman, learning from her experiences she wants to support other female

diaspora in her position by advocating. Her experience, she believes, supports many first generation married women in diaspora who remain reliant upon their husbands for support and networks. Kani considers the community organisation as social advocacy and belonging to all Kurds. According to Cohen the “community is that entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediately than the abstraction we call society” (1985:15). Therefore, their present migratory state certainly represents a distinct experience shared among these specific clusters of populace, which allows them to rebuild their community on the basis of that identity. Kurdish diaspora in Devon have been supported by the Plymouth Kurdish Community (PKC), a charitable organisation that facilitates the needs of the community and individuals. PKC was established by Kurds in diaspora to support integration in the new host community, but also to maintain Kurdish cultural heritage, maintaining and sustaining identity. Several cultural exhibitions are organised by the Kurdish community who wish to ensure that second and third generation Kurds cherish their rich cultural heritage. Many participants see cultural awareness as an important cultural connection to Kurdistan, enabling them to link with what they call real forms of Kurdish heritage/culture. The relationship between diaspora people and culture has been an important process; diaspora organisations are playing a significant cultural, and increasingly politicized, awareness both in the UK and globally. Many diaspora groups are often involved in activities to increase public awareness about the culture, history and homeland conflict.

The Kurdish community in Devon, particularly Plymouth, mostly originate from South Kurdistan (North of Iraq). The first wave of eight Kurdish families arrived in Devon in the 1980s as students, and have increased after the War in Iraq, with significant numbers of Kurds arriving as asylum seekers to the UK. Plymouth has been a destination for many Kurds since the year 2000, the figures below from the annual PKC report show the increased number of Kurdish people living in Plymouth, this data has been collected and updated by PKC youth workers and volunteers every two years (see Figure 4.1).

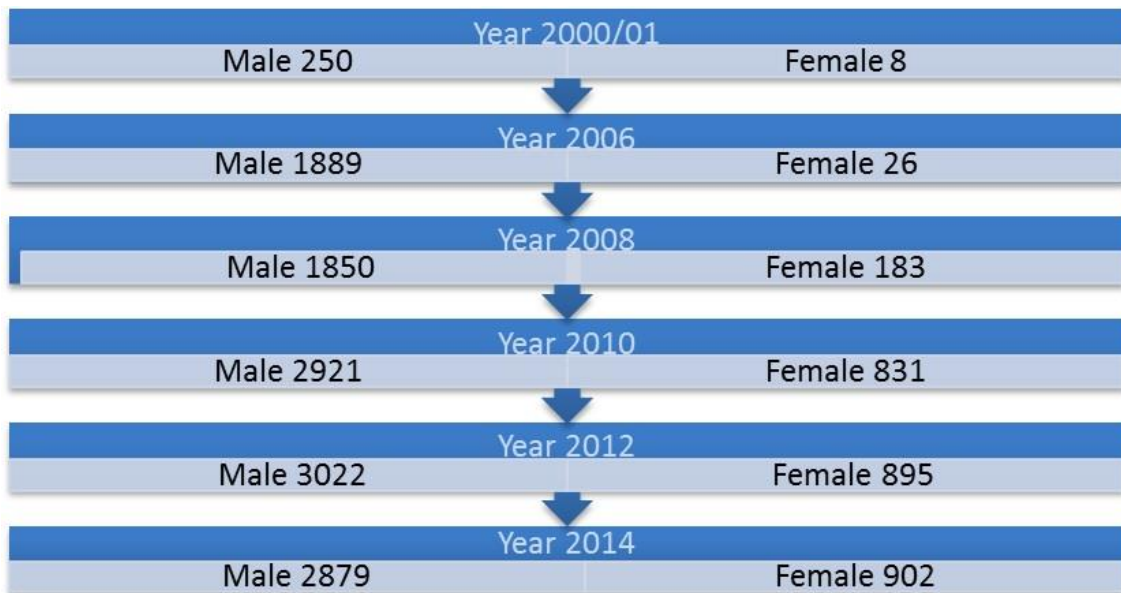


Figure 4.1: Population of Kurdish Diaspora in Plymouth

The increase in the numbers of Kurdish people in Plymouth includes reunions of spouses and diasporas from other UK and European cities. Many Kurdish people come from double diaspora never visiting their homeland. Hersh explains about his double diaspora life:

“...this is the second time I have escaped for safety, the first time my family fled to Iran and I was born in Iran and grew up there, but it was very hard to live somewhere like Iran without freedom. When I came to Plymouth it was a new life and it felt like I was born again, but I miss my family very much. It was very hard especially not speaking English to explain why I am here, when people ask me what is my story” (Hersh 30:M).

For many Kurds, the ‘doubleness’ of diaspora life, experiencing different cultures and societies before arriving in a new host country, made the transition into a new culture less challenging. Hersh illustrated that living with double diaspora made him integrate with others in a much smoother way and with a greater understanding of different cultures. Many participants feel the language of the host country is important. Hersh, for example, wanted to explain his roots and Kurdish history, culture and geographic land of the Kurds to other people. It was difficult to define Kurdistan as a country and Kurdish nation to other people

in Devon without speaking the same language, communicating Kurdishness to others was a vital part of a participants' identity in diaspora. There are many Kurds who are involved in activities which are closely linked to solidarity with the Kurdish movements and Kurdistan. Omar explained that:

“...there are several ways we can support the Kurdish situations. Many Kurdish start working with English and other diaspora groups in Plymouth and they can tell people about the story of Kurds back in Kurdistan. After our arrival in Plymouth we feel protected and do lots of activities which we couldn't do in Kurdistan” (Omar 48:M).

The Kurdish diaspora is seen as advantageous to the Kurdish situation in Kurdistan. Many participants feel strongly about raising awareness of Kurdishness to a wider community. Omar feels it is important to explain Kurdishness to a wider community and enter into dialogue with questions such as 'who are the Kurds' and 'where is Kurdistan'? Omar recounts the activities that they couldn't do in their homeland that they can now carry out protected in diaspora. It was hard for many participants to discuss their memories before their departure from Kurdistan. Many participants feel that Kurdistan and national identity were born in exile. The Kurdish diaspora has played a part in supporting what many Kurds call the 'Kurdish movement' to an independent state. Political activity is very important to Kurdish people in diaspora.

Omar and many other participants feel they were forced to Plymouth as a destination city, as they had no choice in their dispersal process by the UK government. Nick Gill, in his examination of Polish migrants in the UK, highlights the notion of choice, or not having a choice, as being an interplay between agency and power. In his example, the choice to integrate into mainstream society is situated within the context of opportunities and constraints. Thus, decision-making, even when confined by social mechanisms, is an indicator that power and agency in various forms have been activated (Gill, 2010). Many first generation Kurds in Devon felt they were disempowered, as choices and decisions were made on their behalf by people in power.

4.1.1. Positive and negative attitudes towards and within Kurdish diaspora

In the previous section on the history of Kurds in Devon, the study has examined the route maps of the Kurdish diaspora to Devon. This section will look at the positive and negative experiences among the Kurdish members and wider community. In order to better understand the relationship between the diaspora and place of settlement and explore the attitudes and perceptions towards the diaspora engagement, the research has analysed the opinions of a number of relevant actors to the role of Kurdish diaspora. These key actors included MPs, police, councillors, and leaders in local organisations who were in contact with diaspora communities, as well as considering the positive and negative experiences of individuals from the Kurdish diaspora.

A number of studies have questioned the failure of academic analysis to situate the experiences of new migrants and long-standing residents within the places they live and interact (White 2011; Glick et al 2009; Robinson et al 2007; Kesten et al 2011; IPPR 2007). These studies tend to be dynamic in nature, charting migrant/diaspora experiences through time or contrasting associated outcomes in different places. The negative perceptions associated with immigration and diaspora has increased in the last decade due to economic and political situations. Many first generation Kurdish diaspora experienced difficulties due to cultural differences, having arrived within the geographical place of an almost entirely white environment. As Mr Qader, the Secretary of the Plymouth Kurdish Community, said:

“...when we arrived in Plymouth there were not many Asylum seekers and Refugees and there were not many BME communities living in this area, but Kurdish people stayed here and started to integrate within the English society [...] It was very difficult for the first couple of years due to cultural differences but Kurds have been fighting for almost all their life to get freedom for Kurdistan. So I think that’s why Kurdish people wouldn’t move out because of racism or any cultural differences as we believe we can let people know more about the Kurds and Kurdistan” (Qader 39:M).

As the quote above shows, it can be argued that the first generation Kurds who arrived in this area are under pressure – due to cultural differences and language barriers – to communicate with the wider community. Integration is accepted following the culturalist paradigm as a developmental route, which minoritised groups could encounter and enter the area of modernity and get hold of equally subject positions. The involvement of the first generation, like the above interviewee, cannot be characterised as negative, as it depends very much on the circumstances in which the engagement occurs. Qader’s description illustrates the Kurds’ fight to secure their life after arriving in the UK. Even with cultural and racial differences, this is typically not enough to make them return to their homeland. Qader believes that it will be much easier to start educating the wider community about the Kurds as well as educating Kurdish people to integrate with a new society. Interviewers suggest that the negative attitude towards Kurds has increased as more Kurdish asylum seekers have arrived in the area. As Hewa explained:

“...one Sunday me and two other Kurdish friends were sitting in the city centre talking about our arrival, we had only been in the city nearly a month, a group of English young men came up to us and told us ‘F**king P**ki, go back to your country’. I told them we are not from Pakistan and all of them laughed and went, so at that time it was very hard to understand why they were laughing at us but now after many years I understand why they laughed” (Hewa 32:M).

Exile for Kurds has implied traumatic experiences; however at the same time it has given them a space and the possibilities to establish their movement and identity. Many Kurds have faced an otherness and alienation during the ethnic cleansing, violence, and other traumatic experiences inside their own land by different regimes (such as the Baath Party in Iraq), and many feel unwelcomed into a new society where they have encountered racism on a consistent basis. Hewa and his friends did not understand the racist comments towards them, and in response Hewa tried clarifying that they were Kurdish and not Pakistani, but it has taken a considerable amount of time to understand the racist

comments. Negative attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees as well as other BME groups in this area have increased within the last decade. The study has shown there exists within some Plymouth and Devon residents a belief that diaspora groups were prone to negative traits of being unfriendly, unlawful and violent. The residents' experiences come into account through the media or direct engagement with one individual compared to many. As Safeen told me about his first English friend in Plymouth:

“I was at college when I met group a of English students and after while one of them told me that his family said never trust asylum seekers and the our government shouldn't support these people but after meeting you my opinions has changed toward migrants” (Safeen 23:M).

There is a cultural misunderstanding with incorrect and misleading information about asylum seekers and migrants. The media misperception has increased negativity towards new diasporas from ethnic minorities that are settling into western society. Safeen's friend's negativity toward asylum seekers was informed by his family without any interaction with people from diaspora or migrants. Analysing the white elites role in the reproduction of ethnic and racial inequalities in Western countries in all sections of society, and particularly mass-media in their texts and speeches, often formulate stereotypical and prejudiced ideas about minorities, defining ethnic relations and legitimising ethnic discrimination. Van Dijk emphasizes the influential role of mass-media in the maintenance and legitimising of the white groups' dominance in Western societies through the “production of everyday racism” (1993:83). Public opinion and policy making are often closely interrelated with the discursive construction of refugees or immigrants as a problem. Within the last general election in the UK in May 2015, there was a focus upon the migration policies of European countries, as well as the problematics of migrants. Immigration has therefore been a central and contentious political issue within the UK, with a focus upon the social and political problems it is perceived to create. Negative attitudes towards immigrants have increased in recent years due to downturns in the economy, concerns over safety and security, and the rise of terrorist attacks globally. As Hoshyar explained:

“...we get negative comments or racism by English people every day sometimes, but what hurts me much more is when I get negative comments by other migrant refugees and other ethnic groups born here or who have been here longer” (Hoshyar 38:M).

Hoshyar and other participants felt hurt when they received negative comments from other black and ethnic minority people. Diaspora individuals believe the various negative attitudes increase, rather than decrease, the problems of integration and engagement. The situation has deteriorated, and has been precipitated by acts of terrorism after the London bombings in 2005 and the act of terror on September 11, 2001 in the United States. Muslim communities in particular have experienced changing attitudes towards them. Hoshyar recounts his experience of exposure to discrimination and negative attitudes on a daily basis. Like Hoshyar, Yassien has experienced many negative interactions with people where discrimination occurs. Yassien said:

“...at work many times I have been told by different people I am not English and what am doing here, but one day I was told by a black woman ‘where ever we go we see these people’ and I could see her two English friends were embarrassed and told her go and sit down we’ll bring the coffee for you, they apologised for what she said. I was so irritated and frustrated to hear negative comments from a black woman” (Yassien 23:M).

Yassien pointed out that receiving negative comments from other black ethnic minorities is more hurtful than from English people. Many participants understood why some English people ask them about their country of origin due to the lack of cultural diversity in the local community. The ‘acculturation’ that Berry (1990) discusses, appears on both sides as very important requirements for life and living. The process of acculturation involves many changes in the abilities, attitudes and behaviours of the individual. A number of respondents stated the importance of respect and acceptance of all different cultures,

religions, and nationalities. Generally it could be argued that there are differences between cities and regions in the UK regarding cultural awareness, such as between the cities of Bristol and Plymouth, which are both in the southwest of England, where there is a significant cultural difference and the majority population of people living in Plymouth areas are white. The negative attitudes towards migrant/diaspora communities have risen in recent years. Shilan explained:

“I think as women we get more negative comments because some of us wear the Hijab to cover over heads as part of our Muslim religion but when you visit anywhere in Plymouth people look at you very differently and some time you get bad comments [...] I went to my GP with my friend [and] the receptionist told us to sit at the waiting area and another three English women were waiting there and one of them told the other to be careful in case they got bombed and said lets go to the other waiting area” (Shilan 29:F).

According to Shilan, women in her experience receive more negative comments than men due to cultural and religious dress, and the misunderstanding of Islam with the wearing of the Hijab. Many female participants have different experiences and negative attitudes from local people and sometimes these have become violent. One of the participants told me, for example, that she was slapped by an English man in a public car park. Two weeks after the incident the Plymouth Herald published the news on 20th March 2015 in which the Police were appealing for witnesses. A Kurdish women was slapped in the face in a racially aggravated assault in Colin Campbell Court car park.

The negative attitude toward migrants in many places around the UK has arisen due to social, economic and political situations. The southwest, particularly the counties of Devon and Cornwall, have small BME communities. This lack of diversity is a contributing cause of negative attitudes, because of the lack of a BME community. The political and social situation, as well as the requirement to conform to the joint European refugee policies by the UK government, and the securitisation of migration, have contributed to the further restriction to obtaining

asylum in the United Kingdom and other European states. When elites and politicians emphasise that migrants or asylum seekers and refugees are a threat, this subsequently has an effect on both policy making and public attitude. Ni Laoire (2000) argues that there exists a need to understand this phenomenon in contingent and contextual circumstances. The contradictory result is that, on the one hand, the state considers immigration as a problem and at the same time tries to prevent and oppose discrimination and racism against asylum seekers, refugees and all immigrants. The Kurdish people in Britain meet a contradictory mixture of everyday discrimination, racism and exclusion as immigrants, together with democracy and certain social and civil rights as residents of the country. The immigrants are particularly exposed to exclusion and discrimination in many western societies. Karen who works closely with the refugee and diaspora community in Devon said:

“When the group first started there was a reluctance to take part, this was more than the usual shyness and awkwardness of a new group, some of the group had negative experiences within the local community which led to insecurity and a lack of confidence, people just wanted to fade into the background”
(Karen, community worker).

Karen explains that the negative attitudes of the local community impacted some members of the drama group (Reach Community Drama) so inhibiting them to take part. Feelings of low self-esteem and a lack of confidence are underpinned by detrimental attitudes towards the diaspora community, creating a divide between the diasporic and local communities.

4.1.2 Positive experiences

From a historical perspective, the UK has a long history of being a multicultural society, but it is only in the last two decades that Plymouth has come to view itself as being intercultural, with the arrival of many different ethnic groups. The following section provides an analysis of the positive attitudes of both Kurdish and local residents within Plymouth, Devon. These are couched in two ways: specifically in relation to geographical areas, and broadly in relation to the UK. Many participants highlighted the positive relationships between Kurds and local

residents at the time that are still evident in diasporic spaces. The key actors' reflections of having a larger Kurdish/migrant population residing in their area, as Peter explained:

“...it's great to welcome many asylum seekers and migrants from all around the world to our city. These people or groups are bringing something new to our society such as different culture and food. It is also more important for community cohesion to evidence different communities and people coming together” (Peter community leader).

Peter viewed migrants as bringing benefits to society, and that by welcoming them to the city, and outlining the importance of the relationship to community cohesion, Community cohesion is a policy project that will play out for years to come, as there will be many issues that will bring influences to bear on the process and the levels of success achieved. These will include a strong desire for communities to retain their traditional values and cultures that were identified as bringing about segregated and parallel lives in local areas (Temple and Moran 2005), and extremist politicking will seek to influence agendas (McGhee 2005). According to Temple and Moran (2005), community cohesion will rest upon the ability of people from different communities to come together to share the same spaces and the same facilities; it will also rest upon the ability of all communities being able to articulate and have their concerns and issues heard (Robinson and Reeve 2006). However, community cohesion has been criticised as an agenda that will serve to erase decades of separate cultural development in favour of a policy that will force ethnic minorities to develop a greater acceptance of core British values (Kundnani 2002).

With regards to positive attitudes towards Kurdish people in Plymouth, Jonathon reflected his own personal experiences of migrants in Plymouth:

“I work with many different groups in the city. The Kurds I come in contact with were lovely people and they always want people to know about the great Kurdistan and

culture. They always welcome you if you are attending any Kurdish activities or celebrations” (Jonathon, community worker).

Jonathon’s positive experiences were based upon the interaction of hospitality by the Kurdish community to local residents emerging out of banal, unplanned spaces of encounters. Awareness of the Kurds was important, and using hospitality as a tool of engagement towards local residents promoted and supported social inclusion. The Kurdish diaspora are using tools of engagement to show awareness of Kurdistan and the Kurdish nation. As Bahar Baser highlighted, “the diaspora is a result of, and also a part of, the Kurdish movement and it has managed to transform the nation-building efforts into a transnational issue” (Baser 2011:26). The Kurds and Kurdishness were little known by local residents, and so as a result of that, the members of the Kurdish community in Devon have raised the profile of Kurdish culture and people. Jacky told me that:

“...when I was an outreach worker for the college I had many Kurds in my project. I learned something new about the Kurds every session they were so proud of their Kurdish culture and wanted to share their experiences. They supported each other, their life experiences were played out in the team building exercises, I know the other learners admired the way they just got on with things. I am still in contact with some of them” (Jacky, community worker).

Jacky’s interaction with the Kurdish community, and their willingness to openly engage with her and the rest of the group, facilitated cultural experiences. These attributes are underpinned by the social, historical and geographical nature of many first generation Kurds growing up within mountain areas with a long, deep-rooted history of passing Kurdish cultural traditions on. Due to the Kurds’ transnational condition and their dispersion between Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria, their attachments to places are highly ambivalent, multiple and complex. The team building skills observed will have been important for the

Kurds before their Plymouth experience, working together towards a Kurdish national identity and keeping the notion of homeland alive. The majority of the participants admitted they met each other for the first time during their escape and in their diaspora host community in Plymouth. Team building activities, and any outreach challenges, bring the Kurds together to identify and establish an idea of a Kurdish nation as well as to build social networks.

The Kurdish diaspora in Devon and the rest of the UK have been organised around political diaspora parties. Political involvement in diaspora parties may carry a different meaning for second and third generations than it does for first generations, who in contrast might be more interested in homeland politics. Van Bruinessen (2000) has found that a younger generation shows even more interest in Kurdish identity than the first generation, due to feelings of marginalisation and of the otherness in the UK (discussed further in Chapter Seven).

Diaspora associations and other local agencies can be considered in providing platforms that enable Kurdish people to take part in cultural events and political endeavours, and to foster their sense of Kurdishness through participation in different projects. The positive experiences towards local community groups and people encountered were precipitated from support received when arriving or having access to services via projects. Rizgar explained that:

“It is great to see some local people help us to integrate with English society and some organisations help the Kurds. Kurdish people become a new nation to many local people and when they listen about our stories, they provide support, which we found great, people were listening to our needs [...] we help each other more, any new Kurds or in fact any nationality who come here, we help them to settle to a new life” (Rizgar 46:M).

Rizgar explains that support from local people and organisations was abundant and appreciated, enabling them to ease their way into the UK life and society. An example of this is shown in Figure 4.2, Wahlbeck (2005), who conducted



Figure 4.2 Community Integration Project

research on the Kurdish diaspora in the UK and Finland, has suggested that Kurdish in diaspora support each other into new western societies. It could be argued that the Kurdish diaspora has not just provided support to Kurdish people but also to other diaspora groups and communities. Such a notion of need was couched solely in relation to culturalisation and shortages of BME groups in Devon. Rizgar recounts that involvement in storytelling and local cultural events was considered a learning process for the local community as well as second and third generation Kurds. Identifying selfhood as Kurdish evidently meant having a diasporic past and being part of a transnational diaspora community. In this matter, feelings of diasporic consciousness were interpreted into concrete actions, mainly among those who were active in diaspora life. Diasporic consciousness was narrated in close connection with the historical background of the Kurdish diaspora movements and together with an awareness of the political implications of what it means to be Kurdish. Graeme, who has invited the local Kurdish community to provide awareness of the Kurds and Kurdistan to local schools each year, said:

“...at community cohesion week with schools, I always invite the Kurdish community to provide awareness of ‘who are the Kurds?’ and other general issues regarding the Kurds and Kurdistan. I think it’s important for local school students to understand the differences between the Kurds and other nations in the Middle East. To be honest they are very lovely and hard working people. It’s great to know and hear the stories of being different” (Graeme: Police officer).

Graeme feels it is important to educate and present awareness of the Kurds and Kurdish culture to local schools. His positive contribution towards the Kurds can be valued as an understanding of the partnership and connections with Kurds in the place of settlement. Almost all the key actors and participants in this study identify the Kurds as ‘hard working’ and ‘lovely people’, which helps support and build confidence among the Kurds to be involved and undertake more by taking key contributions to their place of settlement. In the south west of England particularly in Plymouth, where a large and visible Kurdish population exists, in terms of both numbers and service responses, positive impacts were also couched in terms of the Kurdish diaspora making the place of settlement more intercultural and multicultural. The process of awareness of ‘who are the Kurds?’ presented to schools, was not just for the students to benefit from the multicultural or culturalization environment in which they are growing up but to be spread across the wider local communities. Many key actors reflected upon their encounters with Kurdish peoples noting an experience in which they had ‘learned something.’

4.2. Intercultural within the host society

Cultural differences have been at the heart of people’s behaviour throughout the history of global politics and immigration. Intercultural contact does not always translate into progressive and long-term social relations, and can in certain circumstances reinforce prejudices and exacerbate tensions (Vertovec 2007; Clayton 2009; Amin 2002). For Berry (2006) the integration of migrants will be part of a much wider process of ‘acculturation’, a phenomenon that involves the

cultural changes that take place when individuals, groups, or communities from other cultures, have continued contact with a host culture.

In general, the nation building process of the Kurds is related to the nation building processes in the Middle East: the countries governing the Kurds have given rise to different forms of exclusion of Kurds within them. One of the most important results of this exclusion has been the migratory movement of the Kurds which has formed the Kurdish diaspora. Almost all the participants in diaspora have experienced cultures within both societies. Acculturation toward a host culture is a reflexive process in that it occurs in synchronicity with a partial, temporary or incremental 'deculturation' away from a native culture. According to Eliot, modern migration has transplanted a mixture of social, religious, economic, or political determinations, and migrants have taken with them only one part of the their original culture and the new culture. Moreover, in such situations cultural sympathy, as well as cultural clashes, will likely emerge (Eliot 1949:63-4).

Interculturalism and integration in the host country has many benefits in the Kurdish context, such as building and improving the relationship between the people of the host country and the Kurds. Integration in the immigration context takes the strategy of acculturation, which means that immigrants make regular contact with existing populations in the host country and maintain their original cultural identity. The Kurdish people in diaspora have found these opportunities of intercultural and educated the younger generations about the Kurdish culture and host. Intercultural and integration can be regarded as the connection of groups and individuals to a societal oneness through a recognition and acceptance of cultural differences. Nasreen explains how she had pride at sharing her Kurdish heritage at a cultural exhibition in Plymouth (figure 4.3):

“It was good to talk and show to people about our Kurdish heritage, lots of people came to the exhibition, they were really interested to find out more about Kurdish life and culture [...] it is important for future generations to know about Kurdish culture and heritage so that it won't be lost

because the future generation are engaged with both societies” (Nasreen 23:F).



Figure 4.3 Kurdish Heritage Exhibition in Plymouth

The above statement illustrates the importance of educating people about the Kurdish culture and interlinking both cultures, and Nasreen realises the importance of culturalization.

As Sam and Barry (2010) have highlighted, there are three characteristics of acculturation that include the changes that take place in acculturation, how numbers of people acculturate, and how well they modify after acculturation. These characteristics mean that more people acculturate, and adapt in a better way (ibid). For the first generation of Kurds and new arrivals the culture of the homeland or the country of origin is real. Here I utilise an adaptation of Barry and Sam's acculturation framework to assess the relationship between a majority and a minority in a culturally plural society (Barry and Sam 1997). The theory of acculturation was developed to outline the changes that take place in cultural patterns for either group when two differentiated cultural groups come into contact (Berry 2005). Nasreen mentions in the above statement that Kurds engage both in their own cultural heritage and the host society culture. It has normally been used to express the changes in diaspora culture following the diasporic way to a very different context. Sam and Barry (2010) establish that groups or individuals who acculturate are those groups or individuals who adapt themselves to one more cultures. Berry (1990) described acculturation as "the process by which individual change both by being influenced by contact with another culture and by being participants in the general acculturative changes underway in their own culture" (235). It means that 'acculturation' will be the connection that exists between communally held requirements for life and living. Berry's work on acculturation has been of significant importance in many ways. It shows how we classify acculturation attitudes and orientations, categorise acculturating groups, and most importantly how we imagine acculturation process and outcomes. The three features Berry identifies are: 1) acculturation dimensions and orientations; 2) a framework for the study of acculturation processes; and 3) types of acculturating groups. The first one is the investigation of identity conflict to immigrants, showing an alternative approach to conceptualizing orientations to heritage and contact cultures. The second is about the motivation for ethno-cultural continuity between acculturating individuals and acculturating groups. The last one extends theories of acculturation and intercultural relations to an atypical domain (Ward, 2008).

Acculturation is the process of cultural change that occurs when individuals from different cultures come together (Gibson, 2001). The Kurdish people who live inside the country of origin (the land of Kurdistan) have been pushed by several regimes that have influenced the culture and rules. For many decades the Kurdish people have been living with a different culture. Some cultural differences that exist between people are easy to see, such as language, dress, and traditions, but there are also significant variations in the way societies organize themselves, in the ways they interact with their environment, and also in their conception of morality.

In the UK, the second and third generation of diaspora have moved into an acculturation process, and the Home Office immigration and asylum policy around community cohesion has been criticised. Separate cultural developments in favour of the policy will force ethnic minorities to develop a greater acceptance of core British values and migrants. Further, diaspora people are expected not to live lives that are fragmented away from mainstream British culture, but to integrate themselves to the core values of the state by understanding the British way of life (McGhee 2006). Cultural diversity is the variety of human societies or cultures in a specific region, or in the world as a whole (UNESCO, 2001). In contradiction to the concept of assimilation, acculturation consists of the overtaking of some elements of the other culture. The process of acculturation also involves many changes in the values, attitudes, abilities and behaviours of the individual. This overtaking of cultural aspects can appear on both sides on the existing group as well as the migrant. After arriving here in Devon, Renas explained:

“...before arriving here, I didn't want to mix with other people from other cultures or religions because back home in Kurdistan, Iraqi or Turks or Iranian attitudes toward us as Kurds was not good. They did not respect our culture and history, but here in Britain you can see they do lots of cultural activities and sometimes you learn about other community groups culture not only British. So I attended many other cultural venues and I think it's

important to be part of a city cultural project and bring us all together as one culture” (Renas 37:M).

Cultural affiliations could provide a way to be connected and construct feelings of belonging in relation to a transnational cultural community. Renas’ attitudes altered after living in the UK, and he valued the link with other cultures. However, diaspora and immigration has affected modern Britain in a number of ways. According to the report on the impacts of migration on social cohesion and integration:

“...the impacts of immigration have been felt in areas ranging from jobs, education and housing through to language, diet and the arts. The combined social, economic, political and cultural implication of immigration has frequently been assessed as a whole and also in their discrete parts” (2012:11).

Psychological research on acculturation has focused on ways in which majority attitudes towards multiculturalism impact on the acculturation strategies of migrants. The most widely cited model of acculturation has been developed by Berry (1997, 2005, 2008, 2011). According to Berry’s model, when migrants enter a new cultural environment they are faced with two questions: a) whether they wish to maintain their affiliation with the culture of their country of origin, and b) whether they wish to forge relations with the dominant culture of the society they are entering.

According to Berry (1997), depending on how migrants respond to these two issues, they are said to employ one of four acculturation strategies: ‘assimilation’ referred to a situation which involved the loss of a minority culture with the adoption of a majority culture; ‘separation’ refers to maintaining one’s heritage culture without adopting elements from the dominant culture; ‘marginalisation’ referred to the situation where there was a loss of a minority culture but with no compensating gain or investment in the majority culture; finally, ‘integration’, which is for Berry the most efficient strategy in terms of adaptation outcomes, refers to forging or maintaining relations with both one’s

country of origin and with the dominant culture (ibid). Aree explains his feelings about leaving his Kurdish culture and moving to Devon:

“I felt really alone it took me a long time to fit in, I made a decision that I had to be part of my local community, what really helped was volunteering and getting a job mixing with the local community not just the Kurdish one” (Aree 29:M).

Aree made a conscious effort to change things and tried to assimilate into the local community, however this was not the case for all of the respondents. Bewar tells of his resistance to integrate into the host community, preferring to remain with his peers in the Kurdish community in efforts to keep his culture alive, Bewar made the decision to adopt separation:

“I don’t want to mix with people who are not from my culture, they do not understand our ways and values, and the Kurdish community is good here, we all know each other and trust each other, I know where to go for help, I know where I belong. Some of my friends have mixed, but I think they have changed, become too westernised and don’t participate with Kurdish culture, which I don’t want to happen to me” (Bewar 25:M).

Bewar mentions that he wanted to be more attached to Kurdish culture and society. He understands some people formed a “multifaced sense of belonging” (Elissi 2013:52). In contrast being in-contact with only one culture is dependent on the individual’s self-esteem and confidence. It is worth mentioning that from my own experiences many Kurdish people have an interconnection to both or more societies and cultures.

Assimilation and integration are the two orientation processes of acceptance that immigrants or diaspora groups may choose. To assimilate with the dominant group, sometimes the minority tries to change the characteristics of their culture completely (Tajfel, 1985). The people who feel more similar

culturally to the host society preferred assimilation due to the orientation which has a correlation with high self-esteem. Acculturation, assimilation and integration from the informants' point of view have different dimensions. Kurds' successful integration into British society has made them at certain periods assimilate into the new culture. If the cultural distance is greater, Kurds prefer integration, another strategy that allows Kurds to feel accepted and still keep their original culture. When Kurds prefer to maintain only their original culture, they endorse the separation strategy. According to Berry (et al., 1987; 1989) separation is positively related to acculturative stress. The immigrants who choose marginalization may experience a feeling of loss of identity, high levels of alienation and anxiety. It is argued that the integration of the people will be part of a much wider process of 'acculturation', a phenomenon that involves the cultural changes that take place when groups, individuals or even communities from other cultures come into first hand and continuous contact with a host culture. Consequently the relocation in British society and the dislocation from the place of origin has established a cultural mix.

4.2.1 Cultural awareness

The involvement in cultural and social activities has significantly contributed to the preponderance of Kurds in diaspora networks. The meaning that the Kurds associate with diaspora agrees with Vertovec's argument of diaspora as a social form, as a type of consciousness, and as a way of producing cultural awareness. Delivering training to other agencies and groups in Devon, specifically within Plymouth, the majority of the participants believe that the demographic of the city has changed since 2000, and it now has a more diverse population, while more broadly Britain has become a multicultural society. It is important with the challenges that communities all work together and support one another to be and do the best that Kurds are able. The growing interest in cultural differences has been raised within organisations and schools in Plymouth and Devon. Omar explained:

“...we provide cultural awareness training to some schools every year as part of international week. It is very important to teach children in our area to understand about differences and sometime I think our children need

cultural education as well [...] Staff from organisations that work with immigrants need cultural differences training so they can deal with their issues in a much better way” (Omar M:48).

Omar highlights the important merging of cultural and political differences in the education system and wider communities; he sees it as a crucial aspect in the educating of the Kurdish cause, but also a two way learning process with diaspora communities learning from the local host (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4 Kurdish Supplementary School

The cultural awareness events may serve to solidify connections to BME or Diaspora groups, particular notions of what it means to be different, and the need for the continuing existence and cultural awareness of Kurdish principles. Nevertheless, they may be present to strengthen constructions of consciousness and affiliations with fellow Kurds in Plymouth. The above statement highlights the significance of teaching children to be aware of different cultures whilst living in the host society. In addition it is important to educate Kurdish children from the diaspora about their parent’s cultural background. In recent years geographers and other scholars have

acknowledged the importance of teaching children in diaspora about their culture, homeland and national identity. Elizabeth Mavroudi (2007) acknowledges the importance of teaching Palestinian children in diaspora on how to be Palestinians, for practical purposes of identity continuation and survival.

Many participants see Kurdish cultural events such as 'Newroz' (the Kurdish New Year celebrated on March the 21st) as an important cultural connection to the Kurdish diaspora, enabling the host society to engage with genuine forms of Kurdishness. Every year on 21 March, Kurdish people in all parts of Kurdistan as well as those who live in diaspora, gather together to show their solidarity and joy, as well as their patriotism, and in highlighting their need for freedom and democracy. Hoshyar points out the importance of Newroz events (see Figure 4.5):

“Newroz is not only a celebration; it is part of our life. It is important for us to celebrate as part of our history and culture, at the same time we want to educate our younger generation and host communities about our rich culture. More than 2000 people attend the Newroz celebrations in Plymouth every year, it's not all Kurds but other people from different local groups attend. Cultural activity is part of our integration programme” (Hoshyar M:38).



Figure 4.5 Kurdish Cultural Event

Cultural integration in the diaspora context takes the strategy of acculturation, which means that individuals from diaspora makes regular contact with the members of diaspora in the host society and maintain their original cultural identity as well. The above statement by Hoshyar highlights that the cultural event is a road map to integration within the host society. Hoshyar also mentioned that it is important to educate the younger generation of Kurds to follow and understand their cultural heritage. Rubin (2011) has argued that “social integration refers to the social connection and interactions with other people in terms of quantity and quality (498). The integration projects in Plymouth have many benefits such as developing and improving the relationship between diaspora groups and people from the host country. How individuals acculturate and how well they adapt in the acculturation process, following Sam and Berry’s (2010) features that the more people acculturate, the better they adapt. Cultural awareness is one of the integration concepts that are obvious in the narratives of some informants as a first step in the host society.

4.2.2 Land of Opportunity

Every Kurdish participant who was interviewed couched Britain as a land of possibility. Britain has been the home to many other diaspora groups. Many studies conducted on immigrants, diasporas, and Kurds have outlined western states as places of opportunity (McDowall 1992, Sheffer 1995, Hassanpour 1995, Ahmedzadeh 2003, Eliassi 2013, Alinia and Eliassi 2014). The first generations and new arrivals of Kurds can be seen as “individuals with limited choices deciding to enter into something larger than their immediate cultures” through migration (Malcomsom 1998:235).

Many respondents interviewed said that they saw Europe and particularly the UK as a land of opportunity, a place of safety and security, that offered a good standard of living, employment opportunities, and an education system that was enviable. The civil unrest caused by the Saddam regime impacted on many Kurdish people; they felt their independence was denied to them in their homeland. The first generation of respondents fled Kurdistan to escape Saddam’s oppressive regime, where homes were destroyed and land and property taken away. Some respondents left Iraq quickly and entered Europe seeking asylum (Figure 4.6). Rezan explains why he left Iraq and wanted to live in Europe:

“Everything was taken away from me in Kurdistan, I saw my house burnt, I had to go to Iran with nothing, I was a refugee there. I knew that if I wanted to have a better life I would have to go to Europe, I know it meant leaving my family and friends but I had to do it my parents were very supportive of me even though my mother was so upset, but they said I had a better chance there with more opportunities” (Rezan 36:M).



Figure 4.6 Europe's Refugee Crisis

This was a recurring theme with many of the respondents, having a desire to have a better life, a life somewhere which would empower Kurdish people to be Kurdish and to have a positive identity in safety.

There was a dichotomy of diaspora experience in Plymouth with both positive and negative outcomes. Some respondents viewed their experience as a catalyst for change to a better life with opportunities that were denied to them in their host land. Social media was influential in enabling many to view western countries as places to go temporarily until an independent Kurdistan was established a “promised land”. Paree tells of the hard decision she had to make to leave Kurdistan:

“I did not want to leave my village but it was not safe for us, my father went to prison, Saddam’s army was cruel we had no life, we could not breath. I would watch TV programmes on satellite and Europe looked safe, people had no wars, no troubles likes us. I did what my family wanted, it was only for a short time until I could go back, and life is good here I am happy and safe, but I am still waiting to go back to my motherland” (Paree 29:F).

Paree’s experience is common among the respondents, torn between a diasporic place of residence and homeland, the pull to return home is overridden by safety and the opportunity to be Kurdish without reprisal. For the majority interviewed most did not want to leave their homeland where the community was close knit, and people were employed.

How respondents were received in Britain and their experience did not necessarily affect their attitudes about returning to their homeland. 85% of the respondents said that they would eventually return to their homeland (South Kurdistan) when Kurdistan was a recognised state (see Chapter Seven. Despite being settled in Plymouth with job security and children in the education system, Mustafa explains why he wants to go back to Kurdistan when it is independent:

“It is every Kurds dream to go back to the land of their blood, the blood in the land and in our veins is the same. The UK has given me and my family an opportunity to understand and develop living as a Kurd but I always feel I am missing something with our life. I am very proud to be here too, they always let us as Kurds celebrate and do our cultural activities which were banned in Kurdistan” (Mustafa 35:M).

Mustafa admitted that the host society of the UK has established the opportunity for the Kurdish diaspora to play an important role of the Kurds and Kurdistan. Opportunities would be given for Kurds to be able to begin a series of new histories and experiences upon which to build lives together with the host society. During the great wave of Kurdish immigration to western countries, thousands of Kurdish people left their homeland to come and find a safe place. The society of settlement for Kurds, becomes the land of opportunities to develop the idea of Kurdishness or Kurdayati.

In the following section I show how the economic situation affects the Kurdish diaspora arriving in the area with few or no choice, and how members of the Kurdish diaspora have become involved in a variety of experiences from the place of origin to the place of settlement.

4.2.3 Plymouth: “the Kurdistan I never knew”

Some second and third generation respondents made reference that Plymouth had become a Kurdistan that they had physically not been to. This was facilitated by the democratic open environment in which they are growing up in. The city of Plymouth (Figure 4.7) with its large Kurdish population, is also a place where the respondents expressed that they had the freedom to affiliate themselves to a particular political party, to wear Kurdish traditional dress, socialise in Kurdish restaurants, and learn more about their Kurdish heritage and language with extra-curricular Kurdish schools. Kamyar, a second generation diasporic Kurd, explains how he has listened to many stories recounted from his parents about Kurdistan, and how he feels that Plymouth is his Kurdistan:

“My mom talks about the motherland (Kurdistan) all the time. She tells the stories of her village, the family, and people left there. I know life was hard especially under Saddam’s regime, and one day I hope to visit, but here in Plymouth this is my homeland, this is where I belong, where I can live out being Kurdish, where I am proud to be Kurdish British. This is my home, although sometimes I feel guilty because I don’t feel like my friends who say that Kurdistan is in their blood, Plymouth is in my blood” (Kamyar 20:M).



Figure 4.7 Plymouth City

Kamyar regards Plymouth as his home and has divided loyalties between his mother’s emotions towards Kurdistan and his recognition that his home is in fact not directly linked to his generational past. Perceived ideals of sentimentality towards homeland, visited or imagined, can cause internal conflict. Roken explains that though she was born in diaspora her father has kept the memory of homeland alive and that while she has never been to his family’s city of Erbil she does not feel homesick, as Plymouth is the Kurdistan she never knew:

“In my head I have been to Erbil but I don’t miss it, as here in Plymouth I am Kurdish. I know some people in Plymouth here are not nice, but most are ok. My father has told me the stories of the suffering at the hands of the Baath party for being Kurdish, there is none of that here, I live my Kurdish life here in peace and safety, there is so much help and support in Plymouth. Being Kurdish is

recognised even in hospital, they have leaflets with the Kurdish language” (Roken 19:F)

Roken finds the support in Plymouth instrumental in underpinning her feeling that Plymouth is her home, her Kurdistan. Plymouth city’s largest ethnic minority is Kurdish, there are many voluntary and statutory agencies that support the Kurdish community, and this interaction supports integration with the local and wider community. Some respondents said that they felt part of their community, some volunteered in local projects, others were being trained to be champions with local health organisations that signposted others to the right support. Some of the diaspora community had businesses in Plymouth and felt that they were well-respected members of the area. Bashir tells of the pride he felt when he was asked to speak at a Christian event describing what the asylum process was about:

“The local church asked if I would do a talk at the men’s breakfast club, they wanted me to explain the asylum process and what it was like being in a different country. I felt proud to do this; everyone was so polite and nice and seemed really interested in what I was talking about. They asked me lots of questions. I know when I first came to Plymouth there was some racism towards me and sometimes there is still, but now I can talk to people about being Kurdish and the persecution, people are really interested they want to find out more” (Bashir 24:M).

The feeling of belonging was important to Bashir; assimilation into the community had become a substitute for the missed extended family back in Kurdistan. Belonging, whether to a particular political party or group, helped with retaining a sense of identity of being Kurdish. As Bashir goes on to explain, so much has been taken away or denied to him that Plymouth has given him the opportunity to reclaim his life, and Plymouth is his Kurdistan:

“What I love most about here (Plymouth) is that I have got back some of what I have lost, I mean I am free to say

what I think and feel, I can meet up with my friends and we have long talks about our culture and what is going on in the world, I play football for Azadi the Kurdish football team and we play against local teams, I am feeling better about myself and living here has helped, it is now my home [...] yes I am proud to say my home” (Bashir 24:M).

The value of community involvement in giving as well as receiving support was of fundamental value. Karen, a local community drama facilitator, noticed that the more individuals gave of themselves in terms of practical and emotional support, the more they made reference that they “did not miss their country,” they no longer felt isolated but valued. This sense of being valued was also recognised by the local host community. Martin, a local shopkeeper, explains why he enjoys his Kurdish customers:

“There is a large Kurdish population here in Plymouth, I have many customers who are Kurdish, I like the way they are so family orientated and value the time spent with their family. I have been invited to customers’ houses to eat, there is one man whose wife cooks me dolmas. I always have a laugh and a joke, they are polite and respectful and look out for each other, the way it used to be here 30 years ago” (Martin: shopkeeper).

Martin’s positive interaction with his customers evidenced what I have observed during this study, that involvement and a sense of value by the host community aided community integration. New migrants are typically living in disadvantaged and deprived neighbourhoods, often characterised by poor housing, high levels of unemployment, limited service provision and poor local amenities (Robinson 2010). These places can represent an unfavourable context of reception and induce what has been referred to as acculturative stress: adverse effects, including anxiety, depression and other forms of mental health and physical problems, associated with adapting to a new cultural context (Schwartz et al., 2008). Living in close proximity to people from the same country of origin or from a shared ethnic or religious background can help limit such challenges.

Benefits are most apparent in situations where the migrant community is well established and has a good knowledge of local bureaucratic systems, resource availability and has established its own community based services and facilities (White 2011; Spicer 2008; Glick Schiller et al 2006; Williams 2006; Kesten et al 2011).

4.3 “No money in my pocket”

The majority of first generation Kurds will have experienced and witnessed harrowing and distressing situations both in their country of origin and on route to the UK. For families and children these experiences may have been particularly traumatic and shocking because of the trauma they have suffered in the homeland and during the journey to the host country. Many arrive in the UK and other European countries with limited cultural and legal knowledge and understanding, and with little or no money or financial security. It is predominantly men who arrive in diaspora first, and once settled are followed by their wives and children. Many Kurds in Plymouth and surrounding areas decided to settle here after their claim for an Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) visa was granted or British citizenship awarded. Kader, a Kurdish business man recounts how he arrived penniless. The picture below shows the first Kurdish dispersal arrivals in 2000 to Plymouth City (Figure 4.8):



Figure 4.8 Group of First Kurdish people arrived in the Plymouth

“I came to Britain with no money as a victim of war and I am sure the majority of Kurdish people coming from Kurdistan didn't have any money in their pockets, but after settling here we all started a new life working in factories or food industries, and also started small businesses together with inter-partnership of two or three people at the beginning” (Kader 47:M).

Kader believes the majority of first generation diaspora Kurds arrived here with little or no financial support when they arrived. It is important to look at the Kurdish experiences and life after settlement, as there is little research in this area. The above statement demonstrates that hard work and contribution to a new place of settlement can have an experiential background that can be traced. Kader states the terms of 'inter-partnership' initially to set up businesses, there are many small Kurdish businesses, which include restaurants, takeaways, car washes, mini-markets, hairdressers and taxi driving; the first Kurdish restaurant, café and mini-market opened in 2001 in Plymouth. Kurdish enterprises can become focal points connecting the country of settlement and Kurdistan, providing a space of multi-ethnic interaction in the everyday lives of Kurds. It is this interaction, which the proprietor of the Kurdish enterprise in Plymouth, believed he could support with the demand and increase of availability of Kurdish products. Before opening the Kurdish businesses in Plymouth the nearest sources of dedicated Kurdish products were in Bristol, Birmingham or London. Another participant told me that:

“...we are very proud of the Kurdish community here, within a very short time many Kurdish people have created successful small business and integrated within new communities. It was very hard when we first arrived here as we had no money and the majority of us couldn't speak English, but we have developed a society within a big society, and you can access lots of Kurdish businesses which has helped to create lots of jobs for local and Kurdish people” (Omar 48:M).

Omar like Kader experienced the culturalisation of differences and struggled during the time he arrived in Plymouth. The integration of migrants to a new society commenced after learning the language of the host country, starting employment, and developing new businesses. What Omar tries to show is that to successfully integrate a small society within a wider community, an exchange of labour and skills is needed, as the diaspora community increases so does the demand for Kurdish products, which benefits the whole community, not just the diaspora. Many participants feel that after receiving work permits or ILR visas in the UK they have greater opportunities to build a business or work with other local companies.

The initial settlement of the first generation of the Kurdish diaspora is a key part of the Kurdish history, building and intergrating into the local host community. The history and story of the fist generation and more recent Kurdish migrant settelment in the country needs to be told, as has their contribution to the place of residence. Amir admits that:

“...first generation and recent migrants bring a new culture as well as new experiences to the UK, I think its important for our children and other people to know about our story and how we have been adopted here and started our new life. When I arrived here in the UK I was supported by NASS with a small room to share with other people in a house, but some times you need other help and I had no money, so it was only waiting to get £26 vouchers a week from NASS, but now after settelment I set up my own business and now eleven people work for me” (Amir 39:M).

For Amir the historical importance of the first generation of diaspora to Britain is important. He argues that the first generation and recent migrants bring new contibutions and experinces such as food to the place of settlement. However, Amir illustrates that it is important to have extra support not just for accommodation and weekly food vouchers. As Perry states, “It’s not just about providing physical accommodation, sometimes there has been little attention to

the wider support needed” (2005:124). This could include, for example, isolation from key services, social networks, issues of racial tension, and high transport costs (Wilson, 2001).

The Kurdish diaspora in Devon and the UK, particularly the first generations and recent Kurdish migrants, are working in low-paid, unskilled sectors such as hand carwashes, takeaways, barbershops, and on factory floors. One of the reasons for a lack of aspiration is an educational background where a directed and guided approach is the norm, rather than empowerment to think independently. A large number of the Kurdish diaspora in Devon are predominantly male, and a small number of Kurdish women stay in the home looking after children as their husbands search for employment to improve their standard of living. Some participants felt that women in Kurdish society should take on stereotypical gender related roles, staying at home while males worked outside and brought financial support to the family. The women’s role, particularly that of married women in the Kurdish society, is often seen as the person who looks after the families finances. A large number of Kurdish women arrived in the UK as a spouse, to join their partners. Under Home Office policy these women are not entitled to any public funds. On arrival the women are faced with language barriers and cultural challenges, while the enormity of responsibility for their husbands is too much to manage. Karwan suggests that the majority of single Kurds in the diaspora work very hard to save money and bring their partners to join them:

“I work 6 days, 12 hours shifts in the factory to save money so my wife can join me here, because the role has changed [...] I was a teacher back home but because of the language and cultural differences I couldn’t continue to be a teacher and obtain the financial support I needed. I still think it is difficult for my wife to come here with the cultural differences and the amount of time it will take to learn English” (Karwan 38:M).

Karwan’s account describes working hard to save money to bring his partner to reunite with him. Karwan is aware of the difficulty his partner would face after

arriving in a new society. Many migrants like Karwan arrive to the host country with academic educational backgrounds or have worked in white collar or highly skilled jobs in the country of origin, however due to the lack of language competency and confidence they work in the low skilled sector. Kurds arriving in western countries within the last two decades are typically characterised as a less educated and a more heterogeneous group than those who came to the west before the last two decades (Wahlbeck 2001). The reason behind this was the lack of security and the economic situation of that period.

Kurdish women's experiences of exile and diaspora have been counted in the role of these processes. Ala pointed out that the role of women is to support their partners, she explained after her arrival:

“...before I married my husband he did not have lots of savings due to his spending but when I arrived here we started saving more as well as going on holiday every year. I think in general women play a great role in Kurdish society to support men” (Ala 28:F).

Ala refers to the role of women in Kurdish society as a backbone. Whilst many women primarily focus on the needs of their children and partners, new opportunities and rights have opened up for them in western countries, and to some extent they feel more at home in the UK than their partners. This dichotomy has been identified by scholars regarding the position of Kurdish women abroad and in Kurdistan (Alinia 2004). Kurdish women in diaspora in the UK are adopting the stereotypical gender role, staying within their home, and looking after their children without paid employment. However, the Kurdish women in other countries such as the USA, Germany and Sweden often work among the men to support the family (Alinia 2004).

With regards to the Kurdish diaspora in Devon particularly within the first generation arriving with limited or no money, many of them waited more than a decade to get a positive decision of ILR in the country and commence employment. Many Kurds feel a sense of belonging towards the place of residence, and with the increase of the Kurdish community there is also recognition of small businesses. As Kader illustrates:

“...the night food economy of Plymouth city is run by Kurdish people, we have nearly 43 Kurdish takeaways in Plymouth and I believe there are more than 100 delivery drivers working each night to deliver the food this will include Chinese, Indian and other restaurants that deliver the food to the public” (Kader 47:M).

The night-time economy that Kader identifies is the most important income for the Kurdish community and working with other diaspora groups such as Chinese and Indian helps to build relationships as well as understanding the needs of both communities. This demonstrates that the diaspora groups in Plymouth not only work with other cultures and organisations, but also work together to provide and build a better economic situation among them. Several studies have highlighted the connection among the diaspora groups that are strong and they understand the needs and development of each other (Alinia 2004, Wahlbeck 2001, Robinson 2002). Robinson highlights the connection between the diasporas and developments as being three pronged: first, development in the diaspora, second, development through the diaspora, and third, development by the diaspora. The first refers to the use of networks in the place of residence, which includes the formation of cultural ties, mobilisation, and ethnic businesses. The second as development through the diaspora, but referring instead to “how diasporic communities utilise their diffuse global connections beyond the locality to facilitate economic and social wellbeing.” The third applies to the ramifications of “the flows of ideas, money, and political support to the migrant’s home country” (Robinson 2002:113, 123).

Many members of the Kurdish diaspora in the UK benefit the south Kurdistan economic situation. South Kurdistan has recently undergone an economic boom, particularly between the years 2004 and 2014, with a large percentage of the population having more disposable income; this is seen through the numerous shopping malls that have sprung up all over the region selling well-known international brands. As individuals’ lifestyles are changing, so are their tastes and ideas, and there is an increased desire to try new things from the west. Some members of the diaspora have a chance to benefit by the sale of goods (particularly land, property, and business) in Kurdistan and then bringing

money to the country of settlement to develop businesses and employ local and diaspora members. However, the interview data presented in this study has indicated that most of the respondents arrived in the host country without any financial or cultural understanding. Migrations increase from complex connections between different societies, establish new connections. The mobility of people will remain a key issue in development.

4.4 The grass is always greener: difficulties of settlement in the host country

The idea of living in a different country is often different to the reality; life in Plymouth for some diasporas appeared more desirable than the life that was left behind in Kurdistan, but did not match the reality of the situation. Many participants interviewed believed that Britain was the land of hope and opportunity and did not expect some of the challenges that they encountered. Alan explains why he was excited about leaving Kurdistan and how he first found Plymouth:

“I had to leave my town, there was no other way, it was not safe for me to stay. I was sad to go but excited about going to Britain, I had seen on the TV how good things were there, it was a good place to live, there were jobs, and it was a safe place, the sort of place that was good to live in. When I first arrived in Plymouth I thought all my troubles had gone” (Alan 29:M).

Alan continues:

“I did not know that some people did not like us coming to their city, they were racist and said bad things to me, I did not think Britain would be like that it was a surprise.”

For many the idea of living in a country that is a democracy, safe from persecution, and with a secure economic environment, is an attractive prospect. Some members of the diaspora leave secure jobs and have good qualifications, but their dreams are not realised when settling in the West Country, where there is high unemployment and social and economic deprivation. This is particularly

the case in Plymouth, which is also a rural city with low populations of BME groups.

Amin explains his disappointment that despite having a degree he is working in an ice cream factory:

“I worked hard for my degree, my family was so proud of me for getting it, I have to lie to them, I don't tell them that I work in an ice-cream factory, they think I am a teacher. It makes me sad, I thought things would be easier here but they are not, most of my friends work in factories or take away. I hear people say we take jobs away. I want to be a teacher not an ice cream worker. In Kurdish we have a saying, ‘Dang deholeh Dire khosha’ [‘the grass is always greener on the other side’]” (Amin 31:M).

There is a reoccurring theme of diasporas that they believe opportunities will be greatly improved in the UK, however when they settle they feel that they don't have the same opportunities as the host country because they are immigrants; indeed the number of available white collar jobs in Plymouth is lower than in the manufacturing industry, agricultural, and hospitality sectors, this gives rise to over-qualified people doing jobs that are low-skilled. As Adel stated, “I was an engineer in Kurdistan, but in Plymouth I work in a take away, I know work is work but sometimes it makes me cross that I am not using my skills that I trained in”(Adel 39:M). The frustration of not working in meaningful employment, earning low wages and being unable to improve standards of living due to increasing costs of living in the West Country leave many participants feeling disillusioned. Sami wondered whether he had done the right thing in coming to Britain. He pointed out:

“Most of Kurdistan is safe now, I think I could go back but I have no money, I cannot save money here, life is very expensive in Plymouth and the bills keep on going up. I know I am safe here but I can't improve my situation, my friends back home have land, jobs and are doing well, I

feel that I have gone backwards, I think I thought life would be a lot different, better” (Sami 27:M).

The disappointment that Sami expressed is also the experienced of other first generation and new arrivals. Unskilled members within the diaspora who have literacy and language problems find it particularly difficult to secure employment as their skill base is very limited compared with other diasporas who are qualified and literate. The experiences of some individuals in diaspora are conflicting, wanting a change of circumstance, and then when it happens, wanting it to revert, as Omar illustrates:

“I miss Kurdistan my family and village, when I was there I thought the West had it all, people said that Europe was the place to live a land of opportunity. Now I am here I wish I was back home, with my family and village with my land, there is a saying here the grass is always greener [...] yes that’s right you wish for something and when you have it is not what you thought” (Omar 48:M).

Omar shared his feelings of missing his family and friends in Kurdistan, and that life in the UK is not what he expected. Omar went on to explain that new arrivals would be better knowing the facts and using their energy and skills in building Kurdistan:

“I tell my friends not to come here, life is not what it seems, they should stay at home and build Kurdistan, that’s what they should do” (Omar 48:M).

New diaspora arrivals In the UK are faced with high levels of homelessness, reliance on food banks, and unemployment; the UK for some of the respondents like Omar is not the utopia they believed it would be.

4.5 The 450: Supporting each other

In this section the study explores how the Kurdish diaspora supports each other. The figure of 450 was identified by participants during the research as an element of cultural rules and norms of the Kurdish community. Between 2001

and 2003 the Home Office refused many asylum seekers in the UK, due to political turmoil that occurred after the attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, as well as the War on Terror. 450 Kurdish people from Plymouth were refused asylum by the Home Office, and support was terminated from the government, resulting in homelessness for many and the inability to return to their homeland. The immigration debate in the UK cannot be understood without considering the wider global context. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 by coalition partners left the life of many refused asylum seekers in the UK on hold, without receiving any support from the government, leading many to become destitute. Usually within the Kurdish society there is a cultural respect which Kurds show supporting each other in a variety of ways. The Kurds in Plymouth have remained true to many of their traditional norms and values. Members of the Kurdish diaspora have seen an increasingly important dimension of Kurdish history, culture and solidarity to Kurds. The story of the 450 Kurds in Plymouth has been chosen as a focus for this section, as a key example of the solidarity and support of diaspora in a host country. Rizgar points out that:

“...we couldn't believe while the war was happening in Iraq, the Home Office stopped giving support to failed Kurdish asylum seekers. Myself and other individuals from the Kurdish community gave support to those who had been refused. I took seven people to stay with me at my small flat whatever I earned we shared at that time, it is part of our culture to support each other and not let them do anything bad” (Rizgar M:46).

The Kurdish diaspora practise their own cultural rules. Rizgar supported the other members of his community as part of his cultural norms and values. His support was pivotal to failed Kurdish asylum seekers. The cultural aspirations of Kurdishness bring pride to many Kurds in diaspora. When interviewed, some key actors recognised and acknowledged respect towards the Kurdish community for the support network offered to each other; Keith explains that:

“There were so many Kurdish people inside Plymouth city without any financial support as they had been refused by UKBA and in that period of time we never had any incidents of petty crime such as shoplifting that involved the Kurdish community, it is a privilege to have worked alongside the Kurdish community” (Keith Police officer).

Keith emphasizes the powerful influence of the Kurdish culture to prevent crimes and petty theft from the town centre. The cultural tradition of Kurds has been one of the strong routes for Kurds to support each other. This culture of respect is highlighted by Baroj:

“I was one of the 450 Kurdish asylum seekers that received a refusal letter from the Home Office. It was a hard time because on one hand there was the war in Iraq, we were all worried about our family and friends, and on the other hand the UK government had refused us, and many of us become homeless. We relied on other Kurdish friends as they had been granted indefinite leave to remain or had been here for many years [...] If we die we will never put our culture or people down, and I [am] so proud to be a Kurd” (Baroj 33:M).

Many participants had multiple worries due to the lack of information regarding their families back home and the war in Iraq. Despite these significant worries, support networks by the other Kurds provided hope for all of 450 people not to be homeless. Members of the Kurdish community who have been settled are marked differently even from other failed asylum seekers. The above statement identified the respect towards the Kurdish people and culture. To be a participant in supporting other Kurds with food and providing a safe place in a time of need is likely to lead to a greater identification. A certain degree of personal investment is made and an increased concern in the fate of those supported is likely to be engendered. Involvement of this kind can also lead to a greater awareness or inquisitiveness about the causes in the first place, it could be argued that the significance of the Kurdish cultural norms and humanitarian

efforts within the Kurdish Diaspora and Plymouth communities. A number of Kurds campaigned and embarked on a hunger strike to highlight their humanitarian rights in obtaining a hearing. Zakria explains:

“In 2002, myself and eight other Kurds in Plymouth went on a hunger strike outside the Plymouth Immigration Office, to obtain a hearing and acknowledgement of asylum rights. We were there for two weeks, it was important for people and the media to get our story and we tried to get people in power to listen to our situation” (Zakria 38:M).

The Kurds in diaspora and in homeland fight for their rights. Zakria explains the importance of going on a hunger strike for two weeks, to obtain a hearing and acknowledgement of asylum seekers rights, In the Kurdish context in Plymouth, supporting one’s fellow Kurd is a politicised one, which cannot be separated from other cultural and social aspects of Kurdayati.

Local agencies that work with refugees and asylum seekers from Kurdistan have identified that young people who arrive in Plymouth face challenges and require more support due to the fact they are minors. Harem arrived in Plymouth at the age of 16 years and he told me:

“I arrived in Plymouth as a young person and after four months I got the decision ‘leave to remain’. I was very happy as I can access many things which I couldn’t before. I did start part time work at the local restaurant in the town centre and attended college to develop my personal skills. But all that changed when I become 18 years old, the Home Office took away my ‘leave to remain’ and all my hopes have been turned down. It’s nearly five years that I have been supported by other Kurdish people in Plymouth and I am applying for Section Four again but don’t know whether they will accept it or not” (Harem 26:M) .

Many young Kurdish individuals arrived in the UK, like Harem, with the short-term decision of 'Leave to Remain'. During that time Harem had access to employment and education enabling him to plan for his future. His hopes for the future have been stopped by the Home Office and his life now depends on the support of other Kurdish people in Plymouth. Participants also identified many strengths exhibited by Kurdish people. These strengths include personal qualities such as being hardworking, building strong relationships, resilience, and standing up to fight for their rights. Attributes common to Kurdish cultures were also significant strengths that young people could draw on, including the value of respect, supporting each other, love and care. The ways which teen migrants from Kurdistan navigate the multiple and complex transitions encountered as part of settling in Plymouth require a support network from the Kurdish diaspora community. Immigrants all have different skills and characteristics, so any claim about them is by definition a generalisation.

4.6 Experiences of racism in Plymouth

The relevance of global migration to Plymouth has noticeably increased since the late 1990s, as asylum seekers began to be dispersed to the city under the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act (Refugees' Needs Analysis; 2005). Burnett's (2011) study investigated how geographies of racism throughout the UK have changed in a wider climate of economic challenges, finding that changing patterns of migration and settlement form increasingly varied racist responses, exacerbating national policies. Although historically Plymouth has had a comparatively small BME population, the demography of the city has changed significantly over the past ten years, leaving particular communities isolated and vulnerable to racist attacks. Drawing on Burnett's findings, the IRR (IRR News Team, 2011) has argued that the lack of a local and national political will to challenge the causes of racist attacks, and to state the official response to racism, has historically been one of denial and that of downplaying the severity of racial violence. Unfortunately the current economic climate has forced certain key support agencies, with a commitment to projects aimed at fostering community cohesion and diverting the focus away from racial violence and racism, to close down (ibid). The IRR has reported that in relation to the increase of BME's in Plymouth specifically: "There have been vicious attacks

against asylum seekers, students from BME communities, Gypsies and Travellers and workers within particular sectors such as catering and mini-cabbing” (ibid).

Valeria Ottonelli (1999, in Dower and Williams, 2002) believes the responsibility to initiate changing attitudes towards those less fortunate lies with those who are global citizens, and states that although people have varied reasons to emigrate, the main reasons are economic imbalances and disparities. Global citizens ought to give support to redistributive activities, cooperating internationally to improve living conditions for the poorest countries in the world, whilst contributing to removal of political and economic causes of immigration, by taking actions to bring their countries to adopt a more liberal immigration policy (ibid).

In terms of the research conducted on the Kurdish diaspora in Devon UK, studies have found that the first generation and recent Kurdish migrants are at risk of experiencing discrimination and prejudice similar to the wider BME population, causing difficulties in establishing new lives in the UK. Yet, typically little research has investigated Kurds in the UK, significantly less than in other countries such as Sweden and Germany with more established diaspora groups.

Experience has always held a central position within the diaspora discourse. Mohanty illustrates that experience can be understood in terms of fragmentation and discontinuity, and that it should be situated within historical contexts in order to enable generalizing claims on part of collectivity regarding shared experiences (1992:88). This day-to-day experience of racism has been experienced by many participants in Devon. Since the EU referendum on 23 June 2016, incidents of hate crime in the UK have increased by 57 percent (Yeung, 2016). Figure 4.9 shows that Plymouth City has a higher percentage of reported hate crime than other areas in the South West. The following quote illustrates the racism faced living in a Devon environment:

“...of course we face racism and I think it’s important to understand the geographic area because we live in Devon

as there is no large diverse populations. My cousin and his wife visited me here, we went to the town centre and a group of young girls said to his wife ‘look Muslims and terrorists are here’ but we didn’t report it because the police don’t do anything and we get used to day to day abuse from local people” (Saman 23:M).

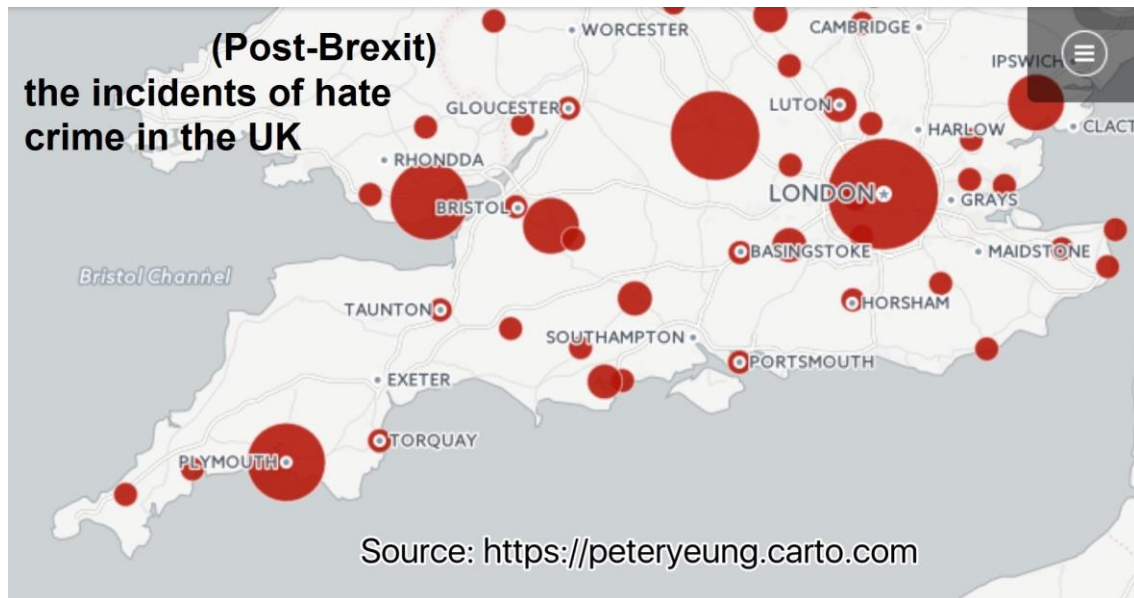


Figure 4.9 (Post-Brexit) The incidents of hate crime in the UK

The daily experience of racism voiced by Kurdish participants in Devon left some participants feeling demoralised, and was heightened by the belief that the support networks in place to prevent such incidents were of no use. Saman felt that reporting to the police was pointless because they would not intervene. He identified Devon as a place where one is more likely to experience racism than in other areas, due to current immigration. The racial geography and division of populations, created through international borders and migration controls has resulted in a political geography of race, ethnicity, colour and culture. To Marxists racism was a capitalist creation to dominate the poor powerless and make one race more superior to others; “The tenacity of racist ideas and movements, in a variety of specific historical contexts, points to the need to see racism as an ever-changing social phenomenon which recreates itself in new forms all the time” (Solomos & Back 1996:131).

While a minority of Kurds have experienced direct racist attacks or discrimination, all Kurds in Devon have been affected by the racist attitudes which many local people in the host country display. Females and older males

in particular have experienced racism. This has a profound effect on the integration and relations of the Kurds with the host community. Sheelan explained her recent experiences of racism:

“I was waiting for my friend to arrive in the bus stop. An English man just came behind me and hit me on the face, I didn’t see anything. Awhile after that the police arrived and took a statement, but I didn’t know who was the English man and the police did nothing and I was very afraid and until now I always go out with someone” (Sheelan 24:F).

The misgivings of some members of the Kurdish diaspora in Devon have also led to living a more isolated life than they would otherwise wish. Many Kurdish women in Devon avoid places where it is possible that problems might occur. Unfortunately, it is not only the Kurdish community that have received racist attacks in Devon, as other diaspora groups have faced similar experiences. This has been illustrated and widely publicised by the racist attack of a 17 year old man from the BME community in Devon who was playing football for the local Plymouth Argyle club. The racist attack resulted in the murder of the young man and sparked fear amongst the diaspora groups.

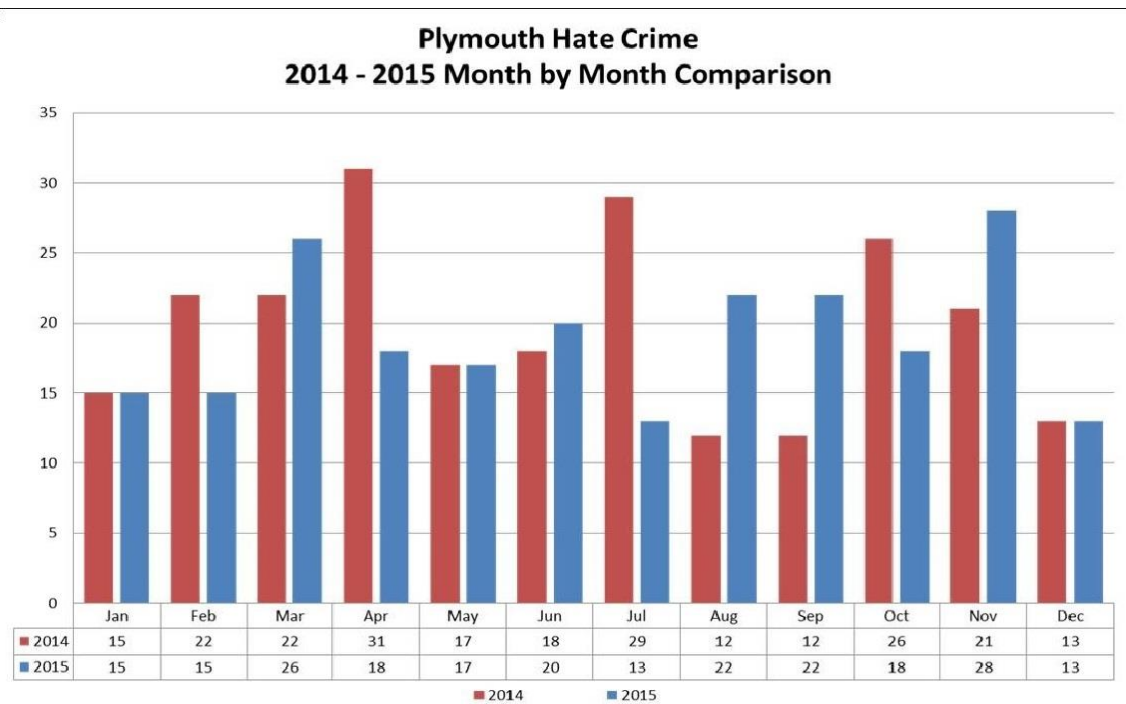


Figure 4.10 Plymouth Hate Crime

Source: Devon & Cornwall Police

Such racialised discourse has been supported by a variety of methods, and is used to exculpate great injustices, to oppress other races, and to further strengthen Britain's self-image, economics, and power as a nation. So was born the Manichean ethos, and Dubois' definition of the 'colour line' which has become the chief way of understanding and dividing the world (Malik 1996:118). Colour became important politically and socially, whereas before it had been largely irrelevant. Using black and white created an antithesis and bipolar antagonism, and racism was born. Feagin (et al., 2001) offer that, "In its fullest definition, racism is a system of oppression" (3). The underlying structural reality which is much more than an 'abstracted scholarly paradigm' (ibid:5) is the oldest system of racist oppression which was central to the internal operations of the new society.

Through an imperial and colonial past, white people have created a self-image based on a face of imperial arrogance, referred to as 'sincere fictions of the white-self'. This superiority continues today, and although forms of racism have changed a sense of elitism has not. New and developing forms of racism are emerging both in Britain and globally, articulating and deploying their ideologies through different terminologies, in an attempt to disguise them. 'Culture' and 'ethnicity' are now used as acceptable instead of 'race', although I argue that it is equally as divisive and detrimental, as it still categorises and highlights difference, creating a situation of 'them' and 'us'. Further, there is a general acceptance that like race, culture and ethnicity are invariant. Gilroy posits that, "in the bloody penumbra of the Third Reich, that innocent culture took over from raw natural hierarchy as the favoured medium through which racial differences would become apparent as common sense" (Gilroy 2004:44).

Contemporary expressions of racist ideas and practices, such as ethnic cleansing, are based on outdated racist politics. They are apparent through the rise of the extreme right and neo-fascist movements, but more subtly through mainstream politics, for example in regards to migrant communities and refugees where the issue has moved to the core of public debate. Asylum seekers are being demonised daily by the media, and some believe that politicians fixation with immigration, coupled with images of the UK being

“swamped”, has sparked a rise in racism. Sardar, writing for the Independent agrees:

“I think there is a rise in the awareness of racism and a rise in Islamophobia. Ten or fifteen years ago, society did not regard Islamophobia as racism. Every time there is an event in the world such as September 11th or the Beslan massacre, Muslims come under attack. I also think anti-immigration attitudes have led refugees to be demonised” (2005, online).

People suffer from both colour and cultural racism, and there are intrinsic values and notions that run through both discourses. They can also be in operation simultaneously, although it is easier to hide aspects of ones culture than it is skin colour. Following the Stephen Lawrence murder enquiry in 1993 in the UK, race, racism, colour and culture rose to the top of the British government’s agenda, but gradually lost importance. Social inclusion, community cohesion, diversity, and multiculturalism training was given to different agencies. The means by which the government dealt with the matter and outcomes was seen as a failed exercise Lord Ouseley later commented, the government’s response to the social uprisings in the northern towns was to introduce the concept of “community cohesion” aimed at bringing people from different backgrounds together. This is where the debate started to develop about segregation being created by Muslims choosing not to mix (Bourne 2007).

The environment in which individuals grow up in, can determine whether an individual becomes racist or not. You can also be under pressure to become racist. Increasing racism can be attributed in part to the role of the media, due to the use of stereotypical opinions about immigration, asylum seekers, immigrants, and ethnic minorities. The Western Morning News (July 2011) reported “Plymouth has seen an increase of 60 percent in ‘hate crime’ in the past five years and now suffers an estimated 50 racist or religiously aggravated incidents every day.” Burnett’s research on the new geographies of racism identified Plymouth as one of three areas in the UK experiencing high levels of racism (Burnett 2001). Racist attacks reported to police show the number of incidents increased from 224 to 359 per year between 2005 and 2010. A

number of attacks have left individuals seriously injured, and in some instances, have resulted in deaths. However the true level of racist attacks is unknown, as such attacks often go unreported. Rizgar illustrated that:

“..the number of under reporting among the BME communities and particularly the Kurds is much higher than what we hear from the authorities or Police. The Kurds received daily racist abuse by some English people and it’s complex as well as difficult to report every incident. We encourage our members to report but the Council and Police didn’t work seriously to solve the problems. Sometimes we get racism from members of authorities and police but after reporting to them they didn’t do much work and we never get any feedback. So I think people from BME communities have been ignored after reporting” (Rizag 46:M).

Many interviewees admitted that there is still a high population of diaspora in Devon that don’t want to report racism. Underreporting has been identified through this study as a complex matter; for Rizgar and other members of BME groups this is related to the theory of trust and a lack of awareness within the police and council staff. Surprisingly the first generation and many new arrivals to the area did not regard vocal racism as a major problem in their lives, compared to the experiences of discrimination and war in the places they originated from. Reporting racism was seen by some of the participants as negative, as they felt their situation was not handled with understanding, and for some this encounter was the first point of contact with the police or council. Another factor in underreporting among the new diaspora is a preference for non-contact with police or authorities due to concerns over personal situations, such as claims for asylum or spousal visas, or obtaining British citizenship. However, some participants find hidden racism and discrimination experienced even worse, as explained by Delshad:

“I think people who make the differences between us and them or cultures could be the real racists. Sometimes

people work with you as workers of interlinking but she/he have got their own agendas and put individuals in different classes [...] because of what happens in the Middle East, the racist person blames everything on your culture without understanding you as a person. Also sometimes people look at you very differently” (Delshad 29:M).

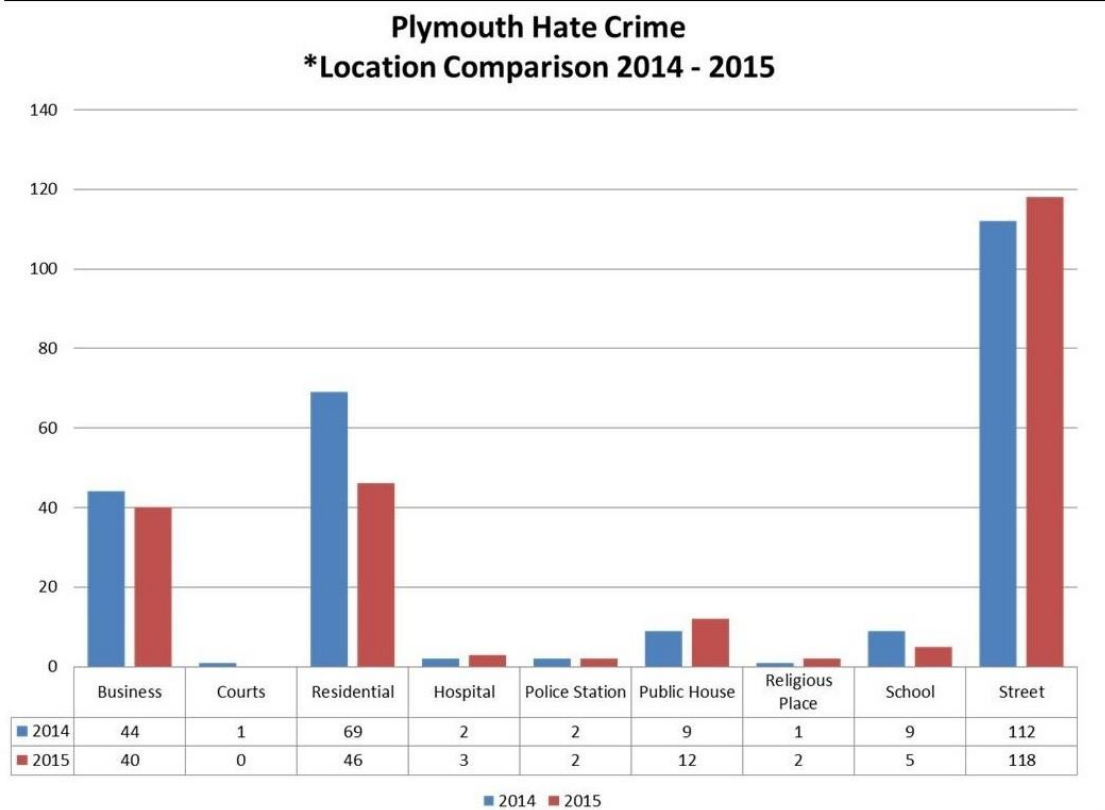


Figure 4.11 Plymouth Hate Crime

Source: Devon & Cornwall Police

The idea of hidden racism was identified by several participants. As Delshad experienced, cultural difference arose because the demographic of the city has been changed and because refugees are seen to come from war zones or poor countries and cultures. I have found that racism in Devon is more hidden and structural, rather than publically visible and involving direct or physical personal attacks. Though often hidden or subtle, such acts of racism are still a serious problem. Devon diaspora groups have experienced racism more than other diasporic groups in big cities such as London, due to the relatively small existing BME communities in this region. The experiences and problems that the Kurdish diaspora faces in Devon are not the same as other Kurdish diaspora as the result of the demographic makeup. There is a feeling of alienation among the Kurdish diaspora and “they believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and

insulated from it” (Safran 1991:83). This impression of alienation has to do both with the Kurdish diaspora’s feelings of their experiences of discrimination and racism. The hidden coherence of this cultural racism is the thought of a fixed cultural essence.

Alienation begins at an early stage of an asylum seeker’s life in the UK. It can begin for some within an educational setting; for children attending school it can be extremely important for them to be able to fit in and be accepted by their peers. In order for them to be accepted they often adopt Western clothes and mannerisms, along with the ability to be able to speak English, often colloquially. Growing up in a Western society it is possible to become completely Westernised, therefore it is necessary for younger generations to retain a sense of identity within the diaspora, and to be educated as to their history and cultural traditions. The parents of children in diaspora have an important and sometimes difficult task in ensuring that children do not forget their origins, whilst they are learning to integrate into Western society. Failure to do so could mean that children would grow up with increasing feeling of confusion and alienation. Their ability to feel comfortable within either society could be severely curtailed leading to a feeling of alienation from both societies. Adults are more able to adapt to new cultures (once the asylum process is complete), often being able to speak another language and seeking employment and housing. However, this is not always the case. Some participants suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, which caused an increased feeling of alienation and isolation within the host community. Therefore it is necessary for asylum seekers to retain a sense of who they are and where they come from in order to integrate into a new society and make valuable contributions to their new communities. In August 2005, Ipsos-MORI conducted a multiculturalism poll for the BBC suggests that, “people who come to live in Britain should adopt the values and traditions of British culture” (BBC, August 2005).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the positive and negative experiences of Kurdish diaspora in Devon, a rural county with significantly different demographics to other cities such as London, Bristol and Birmingham. It has discussed the

challenges that are faced within the diaspora, especially regarding integration, cohesion, and racism, and has identified that there is a feeling of alienation among the Kurdish diaspora and “they believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it” (Safran 1991:83). The experiences that respondents encountered particularly around racism and discrimination contributed to the feeling of alienation within the host community. However, many respondents underreported incidents of racism and discrimination, due primarily to the lack of trust of authorities within the local environment.

The contribution of the Kurdish diaspora, especially by the first generation, to the local host community, and to new arrivals, is seen by some respondents as a significant factor in successful integration. This is played out in numerous ways, impacting the local economy, and intercultural what? within the host society. Respondents acknowledged that without the foundations established by the first generation of diaspora it would have presented more challenges for cohesion and inclusion. Intercultural and integration in the host country has many benefits, such as building and improving the relationship between the people of the host and the Kurds. Integration in the immigration context takes the strategy of acculturation, which means that immigrants make regular contact with the native people in the host country and maintain their original cultural identity.

Chapter Five: Identity and Belonging of the Kurdish Diaspora in Devon

5.1 Introduction

With large-scale human movement around the world from one place to another, questions of identity have become essential in daily life. Identity is often introduced as a result of physical and social features such as nationality, race, gender, and class (Drzewiecka & Nakayama, 1998). Ethnic identity among diaspora groups can play an important role structure their ideas about who they are, to take account of their behaviours and experiences, and their awareness of the world surrounding them. The difficulty around ethnic identity is also exacerbated by the fact that “ethnicity is not equally important to all people and the degree of ethnic identity and attachment differ strongly between individuals and within societies” (Hiebert, 2000:235).

Terms such as ‘dual citizenship’ and ‘hybridity’ have been used among researchers in the field of diaspora studies. Hall highlights that hybridity is particularly linked to the idea of ‘new ethnicities’, and he adds, identity should be thought of as a “production” because it is an ongoing process (Hall 1992), whilst Gilroy uses the notion of ‘double consciousness’ to denote the hybrid and diasporic condition (Gilroy 1993). Palmer has suggested that “a national identity is thus a very personal concept as individuals draw upon the differing identities available to them in order to construct their own sense of who they are and how they fit in” (Palmer 1999: 314).

The concept of home is one that is central to many people identities and lives. Ang and Symonds underline that:

“there can be few terms so densely laden with passionately conflicting meanings than home [...] the problematic of home, displacement and belonging has acquired a new historical acuteness in the current age of massive social and economic transformations, as processes of globalisation migration and postcolonial dislocation are foregrounding the precariousness of established and seemingly anchored definitions of home, identity and security” (1997:v).

The importance of the home as space and physical symbol of connection is more significant to those living in diaspora such as the Kurds who have been displaced, often as refugees. The home can become both a comforting and challenging aspect in peoples lives. In the case of those in diaspora, one has to challenge and be aware of the home as insecure or secure space:

“It may constitute a conceptual shift from debilitation to control but at the same time become a space of unpredictability and fragile connections to the homeland, where experiences of ambivalence and confusion occur that are marked by feelings of “transience, impermanence and separation from family” (Thomas, 1997: 97).

In the process, the “home as sanctuary” may become a reality and belief that is more “ephemeral or continuously deferred” (ibid).

In this chapter I analyse the identity, belonging, and positions which first and second generation Kurds speak from regarding their experiences in relation to the home and the nation states within the diaspora. I also analyse how they are related to notions of home, belonging and hybridity. This chapter also discusses the literature on identity, ethnic identity, identity formation, homeland, and citizenship, within the framework of the national ideology and cross-border connections to Kurds in diaspora, and home as a material and domestic space in which Kurdishness is negotiated. The participants discuss the UK and Kurdistan as places and homelands, but also describe the obstacles that ethnic discrimination engenders from claiming the UK as a homeland, and the role that those obstacles play in stimulating the respondents to seek other places that are believed to be their essential site of belonging.

5.2 Identity, homeland, place and diaspora

The concepts of identity, homeland and diaspora are crucial to this research inasmuch as, scholars believe that Kurds in diaspora have discovered a sense of Kurdishness or Kurdayati through diasporic life; these ideas are central within this research (Hassanpour 1995; Ahmadzadeh 2003; Khayati 2008; Alinia 2004; Wahlbeck 1998). The Kurdish diasporic experience has allowed the

Kurdish people in diaspora to have multiple identities. The range of theories regarding the notion of place, which plays an important part in both the symbolic and physical dimensions of an identity, argue that the experience and the idea of place are socially constructed and that the perception of it changes according to time and place. Consequently, the notions of homeland and home are formulated and illustrated here through interconnecting discourses concerned with notions of place and space.

The Kurdish identity has been unfixed and shifting throughout history as a result of internal and external change. Such modifications in the political and historical framework of Kurdistan have been the major factor in this fluidity, with Kurdish identity constantly readjusting itself to the requirements of a changing context. Kedourie (1996) has highlighted that “the politics of Islam, the autonomous political structures of tradition, and the resistance of the periphery to an integrated national economy were all the components of the constitution of Kurdishness”(226). It has been argued that the exclusion and denial of a Kurdish identity is directly related to the regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, and is a political project of a modern and secular nation state, which has increased the politicization of Kurdish identity (Hassanpour 1995; Alinia 2004; Khayati 2008).

It is broadly acknowledged that language occupies a prominent place in discourses of national identity (Fishman, 2004; Edwards, 2009). According to Sheyholislami (2010), “national identity is a social construct, but it has historical and ethnic roots [...] even if such roots often are invented [...] But differently, those involved in a great number of cultural and political symbols and myths as ways of strengthening national ties” (291). To have national identity is to possess ways of discussing the homeland and nationhood. Having recognised that discourse is a means of articulating nation and theory, and is a socially constructed political unit, discourse can be seen as directly related to the concept of identity. The connotations attached to the term ‘nasnamah’ in the Kurdish language will first be considered, followed by how identity is to be understood in this study.

The term *nasnamah-i natavi* is used in the Kurdish language regarding national identity. *Natavi* and *nataviat* are not directly equivalent with nationality in English, neither, truly speaking, is *nasnamah* equivalent to identity. Hall clearly describes three main concepts in relation to his discourse on cultural identity. First, the 'Enlightenment' theme, second, the 'sociological' theme, and third, the 'post-modern' theme (Hall, 1996: 597). The enlightenment concept of the theme was an 'individualist' concept of identity that explained that the self remained the same throughout its existence. The 'sociological' concept, however, was an 'interactive' concept that saw that the self was "formed in relation to significant others" (ibid). As a final point, the 'post-modern' concept of the theme saw the self as "having no fixed, essential, or permanent identity" (ibid. 597-8). The following discussion stated by Hall in his discourses on cultural identity and the Afro Caribbean diaspora adds to the debate "identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact [...] we should think, instead of identity as a production, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation" (Hall, 1990:222).

Almost all of the participants indicated that their Kurdish identity was either important or very important. The importance was placed on Kurdish identity for several reasons. For many their Kurdish identity provided a sense of rootedness and symbolically connected participants to their heritage, history, culture and ancestors. Hires (M. 19) highlighted that "I feel I am linked to my roots by my parents, due to experiencing the strong traditions and culture values passed down for generations". Meanwhile, Aven (F. 18) who considered her Kurdish identity as highly important, felt a powerful sense of responsibility to carry on her Kurdish culture, "...by letting go, she would not only be letting go of her Kurdish culture and history but also her father and mother". Kurdish identity is however not only viewed as important as a result of its connection to the past but also the present. It is conceived as significant because it determines "who people are in their own eyes" (Breton et al. 1990:5), and provides a sense of identity. It also serves as a homogeneous tool through which one understands and discovers oneself. The significance of roots for those in diaspora is described by Thomas as "the often profound desire of those who have left a homeland behind to be in place and to be connected and rooted to

the landscape and has for most part been ignored by social analysts” (Thomas 1997:95). As pointed out by Said (M.37) “...it is important to not forget the roots we come from and what land we originally came from as well, as I think everyone needs roots and it is very important to understand where you belong”. The concept of being rooted to the land from which they originated from has become important in many discussions of Kurdishness or ‘Kurdayati’ and perceptions of identity, home and homeland. The majority of Kurdish respondents said they have visited homeland (south Kurdistan or Kurdistan of Iraq) and keep themselves aware of what is going on, and also have an idea of historical issues that led to the present state of affairs. Despite their exile, Kurdistan as a homeland and space in which to belong appears to remain an important part of their minds and hearts.

In light of the participants’ responses, it is apparent that on the whole the formation of a Kurdish identity in Plymouth corresponds with a constructionist theory. The Kurdish diaspora is dispersed around the globe in many places (such as the UK) and there are beliefs that transnational Kurdish identities will emerge with convergent and divergent experiences as a result of different political arrangements that they are embedded within (Alinia 2014). The political development and dynamics of the countries of origin impinge on the narratives of belonging, continuity, transformation and weakening of the Kurdish diaspora. Schireup (2006) has highlighted that:

“...radicalised minority cultures, networks and community building must be seen as a product of societies ongoing general transformation related to exclusion, discrimination and everyday racism directed at these groups, rather than as an expression of imported immigrant culture. Nationalism and the imagination of a national community constitute one of the powerful ideologies that appeal to exiles and diasporas, and it is also the one that has the most favourable conditions for spreading in these surroundings” (246).

While participants emphasize a strong sense of identification with the western lifestyle, some Kurds consider themselves British-Kurdish. For many interviewees this is due to their strong sense of belonging at the level of

emotional attachment, which they maintain with their homeland and place of birth.

5.3 Hybridity, belonging and home

It is necessary to point out that there is a clear translation of 'home' and 'homeland' in Kurdish. In Kurdish home is 'mal', or 'khano', a dwelling that you inhabit, and 'neshtiman' or 'welat' refers to homeland, a country of belonging, and identity. The construction and dynamic of the home and homeland is imagined differently by Kurds within different situations. Several research participants revealed that there are a number of ways in which Kurds are described, and that this is largely related to the geographical area they originate from and the links they visualize to their homeland. Kurdistan for many Kurds who lived there is homeland, though it is not a recognised state, more an ideology this is reinforced by traditional Kurdish dress, national song, and the Kurdish flag, along with stories of a Kurdish homeland. Many first generation Kurds who have lived in Kurdistan pass on to second and third generations in diaspora stories of Kurdistan and Kurdishness. As Omar describes, "I have written a little story about my home and where I belong in Kurdistan and this will remind my children who am I and to not forget the real home" (Omar M.48). Omar's book is a story in which he is trying to bring up his children with Kurdish ideals, and is an interesting symbolic and important aspect in writing about the Kurds and Kurdishness. This is seen as an important vehicle to educate and pass on to further generations the Kurdayati, not just in Plymouth, but globally to keep alive the traditions, identity, and the way of life as a Kurd. Appadurai and Breckenridge (1989), for example, state that whatever their form or trajectory, "diasporas always leave a trail of collective memory about another place and time and create new maps of desire and of attachment" (i).

The Kurdish diaspora is seen as historically important, and as a pivotal contribution in the development of National consciousness, both within the diaspora, as well as the Kurdistan region. As Candan (2008) has pointed out:

"...the Kurdish diaspora [...] in Europe plays an important cultural and political role for Kurds worldwide. Historically the Kurdish diaspora contributed pivotally to the development of a Kurdish national

consciousness, both within the diaspora as well as in the home regions” (130).

The Kurds in Plymouth use the Kurdish flag and map to symbolise and illustrate the Kurdistan they feel they belong to. Home(land), and the concept of home are fundamentally central for many people and their identity. Yassien describes home as:

“Home is where I belong and all my family are growing up and live there so it’s the land of belonging to my people. So for example, Kurdistan does not exist as country but it is the land of Kurdish people and I think it doesn’t matter where Kurdish people live in the world but they still focus on Kurdistan as homeland” (Yassien M:23).

A sense of belonging to Yassien is a place where he and his family grew up, with a strong historical tradition of land and culture that shapes belonging and identity. Yassien acknowledges that Kurdistan does not exist as a country, but the ideology of the land of his people does. This ideology is a common factor with all the interviewees, a pride in being Kurdish. In Anderson’s (1991) work, he says of community: “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (49). For the first generation diasporas this is reinforced by a displacement from family and friends. A familiar environment to a society which at first appears alien, that sense of belonging is heightened by a separation from the country of origin, from being displaced from family and friends and a familiar environment with a common culture, traditions and language. Bayan also describes her strong feelings towards home:

“Home means everything to me, home is where I belong and all my family, friends live there so I can’t forget my homeland” (Bayan 26:F).

Bayan like Yassien puts the emphasis on family and friends, a place where they collectively live, with a shared experience of memories. This is the most overriding emotion: connectivity to a people, culture, values and a belief system that they all share. The feelings for the homeland, and loss of it, are exacerbated by the lack of connections to the host country. As Bayan continued:

“I did not choose where to live in Plymouth, I do not know my neighbours, at home in my village we were always in each other’s houses, I was never lonely, I felt I belonged to one big family. Here people don’t talk to you, or sometimes they just stare and still don’t talk [...] I don’t belong here.”(Bayan 26:F)

Bayan pointed out her family and friends live in Kurdistan where there are close social connections, often where several generations live together, and certainly neighbours are known, but that this is not the case in Britain, and therefore some Kurdish diasporas do not have that feeling of closeness of belonging to their host country. This alienation from a cherished community and homeland is a common denominator with many of the participants.

Various factors impact on diasporas and their relationship with their homeland, both with positive and negative responses – such as racism and exclusion – whether diasporas were forced or coerced into leaving or their decision to leave was voluntary. Diasporas living in Devon have mixed experiences of exclusion and racism and these impact and form opinions and experiences of belonging, identity and worthiness which often underpins existing labels and feelings of alienation from their homeland. Participants who were victims of racism in Kurdistan and experienced the same in Britain had an evangelist zeal for nationalism because of their history. Their perception of a utopian homeland, or a motherland that was distinctly Kurdish as an independent state that was home. Hemen illustrates his feelings and explained:

“I have suffered so much both at home in Kurdistan by Saddam and with cruel words in Devon. I don’t have

physical violence but I suffer much in my mind, but what makes me go on is the belief that one day I will go back to Kurdistan and see my family and friends, back to my homeland where I belong” (Hemen 33:M).

Hemen claims that the memories of a double environment play a big part in the hope to return towards home or homeland. Malkki (1992) has highlighted that “people are chronically mobile and routinely displaced and invent homes and homelands in the absence of a territorial national base” (24). As these homes and homelands are invented through memories, one has to investigate the root metaphors in order to get an understanding of what these terms actually mean to the people who connect themselves to these thoughts. More precisely, metaphors of kinship and home tell something about the relationship between the rooted people and what they call home (ibid). This is also important to understand as these terms act as symbolic anchors for dispossessed people, regardless of where they are from. Each of these metaphors are only as powerful as the people make them, or as meaningful as they make them. As Ben Jelloun reflected (1993):

“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?”(255).

Strath (2008) describes the above idealistic statement of Ben Jelloun as the “poetic and imaginative force” (26) of the contested and loaded concept of homeland, which is often used as synonym for belonging and identity. Within the nationalist discourses, when this poetic imagination is translated into political projects, a sharp demarcation of “Us” and “Them” is at a convenient distance (ibid). Any question about home and homeland can be understood within the framework of various ideologies that are concerned with social exclusion and inclusion. Home and homeland hold a central place within diaspora fields, and these issues are intimately related to the question of

belonging and citizenship (Brah 1996; Alinia 2004; Demir 2012; Hall 1993; Collyer 2013; Carter 2005). Many participants considered this as an important marker of belonging, and functions as a device to include and exclude people. Experiences of Kurds often make it difficult to feel at home in one single place, due to people developing a sense of belonging in multiple ways in which numerous places can be called home.

5.4 The lost identify with both sides

The loss of identity can have a dual dimension. The Kurds in diaspora have two losses: the first loss is of an independent country, a territory which has never been recognised, a land which has been colonised by different states. This colonisation has tried to erode the identity of Kurds, however the effect of imposed states created an environment where nationalism flourished.

Kurdish diasporas are viewed from their homeland with mixed and complex emotions, often with suspicion and contradictory, misplaced beliefs. “I went to Kurdistan in 2008, everybody mentioned to us ‘ohh you are coming from Europe’, it means they don’t think we belong there” (Omar 48:M). For many participants feelings of confusion over belonging and identity were prevalent and this caused both internal and external conflicts, torn between two places of home and homeland. As Brah (1996) stated, “The concept of diaspora places the discourses of home and dispersion in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins” (193). The experience of the participants clearly showed a sense of lost identity or an uncertainty of belonging anywhere, as Ahmed explains:

“It is hard to describe my identity so I just say I am as I am, it could be British or Kurdish but I think I lost my identity in between so I could not say who I am anymore” (Ahmed 39:M).

Ahmed’s loss of identity is far from a singular one, many Diaspora Kurds spent time displaced in the Kurdish land, having spent years in exile from the Iraqi regime and living in other states. Emotionally Ahmed is uncertain about his

identity and this loss of rootedness and connection for him has caused an internal conflict. Omar points out that:

“I am not sure who I am, I mean my identity part of me is in Kurdistan, with my childhood memories, my family and friends, my village. Some nights I dream of Kurdistan and I can almost smell the air, then I wake up and feel relieved that am in Devon safe and with more opportunities, I feel I don't really belong in either place, it's hard to explain” (Omar 48:M).

Omar and Ahmed have an apparent inner conflict about identity, belonging and homeland, and this feeling of living in a 'no man's land' extended to their new home. Hall, in his work on cultural identity and diaspora, considers:

“...the history of transportation, slavery and migration can fail to understand how the rift of separation, the 'loss of identity', which has been integral to the Caribbean experience only begins to be healed when these forgotten connections are once more set in place [...] They are resources of resistance and identity, with which to confront the fragmental and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation of the West” (1999:224).

Many interviewees see living between different countries as a loss of identity. Hersh explains, “I was born outside the mother homeland (Kurdistan) and raised within a different society and culture, it makes me think about my identity and belonging more” (Hersh 30:M). Hersh attributed the reason behind his belief about the construction of his identity and belonging to the fact he grew up within a different culture and society. Being a citizen of one country does not necessarily mean that one fully belongs, and one can identify to other identities, which are still state based. Nagel and Staeheli (2004) point out that “it is possible to claim identity as a citizen of a country and to negotiate membership within the bounds of belonging, even without claiming to be of that country” (4).

It is important to understand the feeling among those participants who feel the loss of identity due to living in-between as well as not being accepted by the host society or Kurdish society in Kurdistan. As Kardo confirmed himself as a second generation Kurd in Devon, he explained that:

“I have never been in Kurdistan yet. I was born in Devon from a Kurdish family so it’s very hard for some of my friends to accept me as English, but I have been westernised so when I am with some of the old Kurdish men they look at me differently. I mean because I have got more western culture than Muslims, so they are not accepting people like me, but with the young Kurdish generation I don’t have any problems. The English people [are] also always questioning my identity, so I think I have lost or am between two identities and sometimes I don’t know who I am or where I belong, but the internet is the best place to find people in same situation” (Kardo 19:M).

Kardo expressed his view that growing up with different cultures and not being accepted by the first generation of diaspora and the host community has given him a feeling of non-identity. Identity is often imposed by society as a result of physical and social characteristics such as nationality, race, gender, and class. Integration to the western society in Kardo’s account has impacted upon his acceptance within the first generation of diaspora. Many young people from diaspora find their place of belonging via social media. The internet also affords marginalised people a place to discuss and debate amongst themselves, which facilitates the process of individual and collective identity reconstruction. Self-identity can occur through the construction of labels or semantic designations that reflect shifts in consciousness and sensitivity to the socio-political milieu. Living in-between both societies of Kurdistan and the UK was reported by some of the participants as the loss of identity. Ava explained that:

“I feel that I am in two pieces, that I belong to here and there but I struggle to identify which place I need to identify myself with. My school mates call me the Kurdish

girl, I grew up with both cultures and I have difficulties with identity choice but with my ethnic identity I don't have problem but I have mixed heritage" (Ava 18:F).

Ava aptly sums up the difficulties with personal identity. However, she identifies her ethnic identity as easier due to being born and raised with a Kurdish family with mixed heritage. Hall (1991) points out, "Identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself" (21).

5.5 Dual identity

During the process of interviewing, it became apparent that many participants had a dual identity. They recognised that they belonged to a host country as well as another homeland. Deldar, a second generation Kurd born in Britain, says:

"My identity is between two nations, so I am Kurdish-British, I was born here and have a British passport, English is my first language, however I feel proud to have a Kurdish heritage. I have a Kurdish traditional dress and take part in Kurdish festivals. I love to hear the stories from my parents, and one day I hope to visit the homeland of my people" (Deldar 21:M).

Deldar believes he has a dual identity belonging to two places, the place of his birth and the place of his parent's birth. His parents reinforce his Kurdishness by passing on traditional stories and customs, keeping alive the memory of Kurdistan, and making it tangible. Many Kurdish people in diaspora like Deldar hope to pass their Kurdish identity onto the next generation.

It is evident that the majority of the participants of this study were ambivalent about their dual hybridity, they may live in the West Country, have British citizenship, and play an active part in their local community, but they still saw Kurdistan as their homeland, and their allegiance lay there as well as Britain.

The term “Kurdish-British” has been identified among the participants to describe their identity. This dual identity is described by Ali:

“...when people ask where I am from? I say I am Kurdish-British, Kurdistan is my identity but I have a British passport and my life is here now so this is my identity too, it doesn't mean that I don't belong to Kurdistan, just I belong to Britain too” (Ali 44:M).

The identities of those in diaspora are often seen as hybrid or dual as result of the ways in which people consciously and subconsciously deal with living in between. Many participants during this research felt living in between as physically living in Devon, but their minds and lives are connected to Kurdistan. Ali of the above quote illustrated his dual identity of Kurdish-British as an important identification in response to the identity of diaspora. Holding a dual identity would create the environment for diaspora people to belong in an inclusive society. It becomes evident that some people think themselves loyal to both societies. In reality there are no limits to identifications, and in fact most people have no problems with gliding in and out of different roles in various contexts and interactions. Marr (2000) has described the United Kingdom as a “World wide web of people with different connections, sympathies and nationalities, all of who may feel attached to local as well as national communities” (162). The dual identity among the Kurds in Devon has strengthened and brought pride to the Kurdish-British, as Hewa, who come to live in the UK seventeen years ago, describes:

“I am proud to be here as Kurdish-British, I have everything here and have built up my new life and that includes my new identity as Kurdish-British. I celebrate the Kurdish culture and activities and pass on my heritage to my son who is 16 years old and proud of Kurdistan. He told me one day when he was at college he was asked about his identity, he said he was born in Devon but he belonged to Kurdistan” (Hewa 32:M).

Many participants like Hewa are proud to have a dual identity and experience the new life in diaspora. The cultural activities or educational programme that Hewa illustrates could become a strategy of the Kurds in relationships with everyday life in Devon. The second or third generation's experiences are more confronted with question of identity than those faced by the first generations. McDowall found in their study of a modern history of the Kurds, that "the second generation showed stronger interest in its origin than their migrant parents (McDowall 2004:456). Hewa's sons belief system identifies with both societies, and according to Hall (1992, 21), "cultural identity' always requires the position of a subject which a specific representation system provides, and with the addition of fantasy and desire, people articulate themselves with the position." Drawing on a sample of Kurdish migrants in Devon, they predicted and found that dual identification as both Kurdish and British was positively related to respondents. Many young Kurdish people find out that dual identity has a positive identification, as Roken identifies herself, saying:

"My identity as young Kurdish female is Kurdish-British, and I told many of my friends during college I am Kurdish-British. Even during my visit to Kurdistan I always identify myself as Kurdish-British and I think it is hard to be born and grow up here and not identify as part of this society" (Roken19:F).

Kurdish-Britishness as dual identity has been identified by many participants. Roken identifies herself with both homeland and host even on return to homeland. Diaspora people with dual identities in fact have consistently shown better adaptation to receiving, dominant societies, than those with single identities (Sam and Berry 2010). The numbers of people who identified themselves as both Kurdish and British has risen not only with second or third generations, but also with the first generation after obtaining British citizenship. The important phenomenon of dual identity among the Kurds in Devon has developed positive feelings of self-identification. As Miller recognizes, in those countries where there are 'nested nationalities', people usually hold dual-level national identities. They tend to think of themselves as belonging to both societies without experiencing 'schizophrenia' (Miller, 2000).

In the last three decades the Kurdish diaspora has played a significant role in the development of Kurdish identity, nationalism, and started to identify themselves as Kurds in the UK or countries of settlement. For that reason, Kurdish political parties have also realised the importance of the Kurdish diaspora and have started to engage more with Kurds in diaspora, particularly the second and third generations that strongly believe in the Kurdish identity or having dual identity. Hajeen, a member of a Kurdish political party, explained:

“I was eleven years old when my parents took me to a Kurdish political event and I met many political activists, many of them told me what happened to the Kurds in the mother land. When I ask them “what is your identity?”, they responded saying “Kurdish and Kurdish British” [...] [T]he story of the bombing of the city of Halabja and the thousands of people who were killed by chemical gas impacted on me greatly. From that day I become a member of the young Kurdish political party and invited other young Kurdish British to join” (Hajeen 20:F).

Hajeen’s involvement with political life started at a young age, through her parents’ influence and party activists involving her in Kurdish activities. The response to the question that Hajeen asked the activists helped her to discover her belonging to a national Kurdish group and gave her the impetus to tell other Kurdish British about the politics of Kurdistan. However, diasporic experience has allowed the Kurdish people in the diaspora to have dual identities rather than one based on a very strong reference to the homeland. The story of Halabja becomes important in defining the violence against the Kurds and how the regime used chemical gas against the Kurds.

5.6 Memory of violence

It is important to point out the different motivators behind voluntary and involuntary migration due to the political or domestic situation. All of the first generation participants in this research were involuntary diasporas; their decision to migrate to another country was forced upon them or their family

members by factors outside their control. In some cases, even the destination of migration was not known when entering as asylum seekers. Factors such as violent regimes, conflict between political parties, or tribal disputes, led participants to leave involuntarily. Therefore, the majority of the Kurdish diasporic migration to the West Country since the late 1970s has been involuntary. This has a significant impact on the diasporic community, where shared experiences of violence and exile draw people together and create an environment for nationalism to flourish. What cannot be understated is the physiological impact that this involuntary migration has had on individuals. For many diasporas, homeland was a place where human rights and freedom of choice did not prevail, so to be placed in a state which is not a voluntary decision underpins an individual's lack of control and self-worth.

Rizgar explains the dilemma he faced in making the decision to leave his homeland, family, friends, and a place of familiarity, and go to an unknown destination with a culture that was alien to him. The involuntary decision to leave occurred after his house was bombed:

“I still see it now, that dreadful day when the village was bombed my house is destroyed in front of my eyes, no one can forget it your home there and then gone [...] all those memories they can't take those away from you can they? I didn't want to leave my village but it was no longer safe. My village is safe in my heart, now it can't be bombed again. My home was destroyed in front of my eyes”
(Rizgar 46:M).

Witnessing extreme violence and living in an environment of fear and paranoia greatly affected many of the participants. The percentage of respondents with mental health problems within the diasporic community is high, the uncertainty of a new host land with a different culture and belief systems, the asylum process, and the experience of violence witnessed first-hand either to individuals or family members, are all contributory factors with lasting emotional effects. Ali describes the inability to sympathise with people when they get upset:

“My wife gets upset when I can’t comfort her. When she or anyone else cries it’s like I am dead inside, I have shed too many tears for too many people, I can’t cry anymore, that’s what war does to you it mucks your head up” (Ali 44:M).

Many interviewees referred to the brutality of the regime, and the persecution of the Kurds, which reinforces and strengthens this sense of belonging to a homeland, which was fought and blood spilt for. The loyalty for homeland where so much was witnessed created a solidarity for a shared experience of home(land) and a sense of belonging. Sharing his experience, Hoshyar recounts the day his home was destroyed and how this tragedy intensified his feelings of home:

“My home is always Kurdistan, you know why? I will never forget my hometown and many other Kurdish villages that were burned by Saddam’s army and that killed many Kurdish men. One thing I will never forget about my home was the destroying of our town in front of the children and women” (Hoshyar 38:M).

For many participants, witnessing conflict towards other Kurds has kept the memory alive of home and identity. There is a shared commonality, and within that, comfort in knowing that other people have experienced the same. This connection is a powerful tool for nationalism and keeping alive a feeling of Kurdishness, through shared suffering and persecution. It is not just the past conflicts, but also the present war with ISIS that heightens the memory of home, while the media reinforces this with coverage of the past and present conflicts. Safeen, like Hoshyar, feels passionately about her home that was destroyed in the conflict:

“I may live in the UK now but my home is in Kurdistan, and Kurdistan is in my blood. I have lived in many places and countries before arriving here, but in my mind home is

always in Kurdistan. Before 1990 many Kurdish people were killed by Saddam's army, and they destroyed and burnt many Kurdish villages, and one of them it was my village or home" (Safeen 23:M).

Many participants discuss the memories of home and the image of the home is a place deep within their psyche. Sarup (1994) explains:

"It is usually assumed that a sense of place or belonging gives a person stability. But what makes a place a home? Is it wherever your family is, where you have been brought up? [...] Where is home? Is it where our parents are buried? Is home from where you have been displaced, or where you are now?" (95).

It is clear, as Sarup writes, that home is many different things to different people. Feelings of belonging and home among the Kurdish participants are different, but for the majority of the interviewees their feelings are that they belong to Kurdistan, and that one day they will return to an independent Kurdistan, the homeland of their people. Barzan also explained that he feels as if:

"...at the moment I live in Britain, but I belong to Kurdistan, Kurdistan runs through my veins, one day I will go back there and everything will be alright... Yes, one day" (Barzan 28:M).

Extreme violence witnessed by participants creates solidarity, a shared experience of home/land that excludes other people, because they cannot relate to it. For many participants, leaving Kurdistan was a violent process of being separated from family and friends, of familiar places and going to an unknown host land, this painful process has been compared to childbirth as Saywan explains:

"Having to leave my country and being separated from my family and friends and going to a place I did not know, was

like being born, I was born to a new place and the cord cut, I was like a baby” (Saywan, 36:M).

Saywan illustrated that moving to a new place feels like a child is born and it looks like imagining the future. However, for many participants the memory of the past is kept within them and becomes part of the self-identification story.

5.7 Belonging, identity and citizenship

The perceptions of the relationships between belonging, identity and citizenship are analysed in this section in order to understand how the Kurdish diaspora in Devon may use symbolic narrative and articulations of citizenship as part of their constructions of being Kurdish. While the majority of Kurdish people interviewed for this study are British, several are in the process of applying for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) in the UK or for British citizenship, typically involving a lengthy period of waiting (in some cases as much as 8 to 10 years). This section outlines these differing and complicated categories of legal status. These legal ambiguities play a major role in the creation of feelings of ambivalence, discrimination and injustice, as well as constructions of Kurdishness, citizenship, belonging and engagement. For the majority of Kurds in Devon, it is the psychological and physical effects and consequences of non-citizenship that they often experience. This explains why many Kurds in Devon look at citizenship as a set of processes that are inclusive and would provide benefits, rights and protection for citizens in defined nation states. However, such processes can also be exclusionary for foreigners and those with complex residency statuses and feelings of home and belonging. The importance of becoming a British citizen is having the right of movement. As Joseph (1999) has highlighted regarding the importance of citizenship:

“...while there is no simple definition of what citizenship is, who can be a citizen, we are constantly impinged on as citizen subjects, operating between the legal, the cultural and the political, often in tandem, in our everyday gestures” (4).

The participants talk about their experiences in the process of getting British 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 idea engages with the ways in which the boundaries of Britishness and British citizenship are constituted, through interviewing those participants that are targeted by exclusionary practices and insights about the practices of inclusion and exclusion that are related to citizenship. Eliassi (2010) has described that “Citizenship rights are not only legal rights” but they also inform us about how “belonging to a collectively is constructed.”

The responses in this section also provide insights into the mechanisms that established a sense of belonging and non-belonging to British society. An awareness of not being British was shared by the majority of participants during this research, as Khani emphasizes:

“I’m not English and my awareness of not being English is part of my daily life and I cannot stay away from it due to day to day life. As soon as you become British, you have come [a] long way in your life and start a new career in society” (Khani 20:M).

Khani points out that being named, recognized and defined as British involves a good starting point for exercising one’s citizenship, rights and life opportunities. Not being recognized as British, implies negative consequences for the outcomes of one’s position in society, that is structured in unequal power relations between the dominant British position and subordinated immigrant position. Classification as an immigrant indicates a subordinated public position due to not being identified as fair in social interaction and a lack of recognition has real effects for participants’ social lives as result of the exclusionary procedure that they encounter in their day to day life. The majority of participants discuss an exclusive British identity, as Yassien illustrates:

“I am a British citizen now after waiting 11 years but I don’t feel that I am British because the people of this country or those living in our areas don’t accept us as British and even if I change my hair colour or have lots of tattoos on

my body, they know I'm not British. As soon as I speak they know through my accent that I come from outside the UK and when I told them I am British and I have got British citizenship, they respond by saying you are not, and they don't accept us and you feel excluded from them" (Yassien 23:M).

Holding a British passport has benefited the Kurdish immigrants in the UK, however, as opposed to this formal belonging, the respondents encountered informal exclusion in day-to-day life. Yassien points to the way his belonging to Britishness is declined by people around him, as they exclude those who have not satisfied the same criteria, or have the same accent, hair or skin colour. Yassien's experience points out that there is a clash and an inconsistency between the criteria of people that belong or do not belong to a British identity as well as the formal criteria for citizenship. The intimate processes of exclusion and inclusion are related to the sense of belonging as illustrated by the above quotes. Throughout the study, the Kurdish participants pointed out their frustration in regarding how exclusive the British identity was, this exclusivity in Britishness was a barrier in facilitating inclusiveness and integration to British society. The daily life experiences of exclusion is part of the Kurdish background in Devon and many of Kurds that live in Devon feel uncomfortable, and have had experiences with non-belonging. Several uncomfortable experiences were discussed by the participants, where they felt that their Britishness was rejected, as demonstrated in an interview with Shilan:

"One day I was at college and we were discussing about naturalisation in the UK, after the class one English girl with two others said to me, you should go back to your home, you do not belong to England you are an immigrant [...] and we cannot accept you in our class. I was very angry and told them that because I do not dress like her and don't have a white skin colour, that doesn't mean I do not belong here. I told them because you are from an English family that doesn't mean you own this country, she

then told me that immigrants were taking over our land”
(Shilan 29:F).

In Shilan’s experience, having white skin colour seems to be a central criterion defining how belonging and Britishness to Britain or the UK is constituted. Immigration is pointed to as an occupation, and people with a different skin colour, such as immigrants, are defined as intruders who challenge the boundaries of Britishness. Shilan not only refuses this belief, but also makes claims to the UK, and doesn’t accept the “immigrant positions.” Therefore, immigration obstacles, such as the boundaries of national identities and citizenship, make it necessary to redefine the boundaries of a nation state that is made up of migrant groups. However, for the Kurdish born in the UK who have strong Kurdish back grounds they do not feel that they have other collective identities than British and talk about non-acceptance. Kardo illustrates that:

“I am British and I was born here and I feel British, if I am allowed to say that. Some people become suspicious as soon as I say that I am British as though I have said something wrong. And if I say British, they always ask but where were you born? And I respond here, but then asked, I mean where were your parents originally from? So I feel that I was born here and I am British but only on paper as people do not accept me as British” (Kardo M:19).

Kardo suggests that despite a sense of belonging to the British identity, and having citizenship or a British passport, he was not regarded as British and his Britishness became an object of suspicion, and his ownership of his identity was questioned. While Kardo’s parents were born in diaspora in the UK, his comments evoke ideas about who can be considered a genuine British citizen, and those who are considered only paper citizens. The concept of inheriting membership and belonging to a collective identity prevents formal citizenship from functioning as proxy for everyday belonging. Kardo’s ambivalence toward claiming British identity was due to rejection from the people regardless of the fact that Kardo had been born in the UK and had never had been to his heritage

homeland of Kurdistan. His ethnic identity of Kurdish was accepted, but he was challenged in his claim of British identity due to his Kurdish or mixed heritage background. Therefore, even when Kardo maintained Devon as his geographical place of birth, this was not a powerful enough argument to vindicate his right to British identity.

Some participants who arrived in Devon as young children – in contrast to Kardo who was born here – were more comfortable with their initial encounters with the host society, however it was later in life in their day-to-day interactions that racial discrimination was encountered. Nareen came to the UK when she was nine years old, and has since not returned to Kurdistan. She talked about her experiences of living in Devon:

“I was born in Kurdistan and came to the UK aged nine, initially it was very exciting to come here and learn a new language. I went to school and learned English very fast and at the beginning I didn’t know I didn’t belong to British society. However, one day after my swimming lesson some of my swimming classmates told me that ‘oi you darkie f***ing Paki, go back home’. That influenced me negatively and I asked myself “Why don’t they recognize and accept me as part of here?” [...] And I asked them why? They said you can’t be British and you should go back to your homeland and you don’t belong here” (Nareen 21:F).

Nareen’s experiences provide evidence that a sense of non-belonging does develop in a political space, but is linked to exclusionary experiences that define the outsider and insider within the political boundary of the nation state. These experiences of exclusion were defined through the way Nareen was victim to racist taunts and criticisms, such as being called a ‘Paki’. At the same time, when she responded she was told to accept the reality of a subordinated position of being an immigrant or to leave the UK. The ‘guest/host’ metaphor can be understood at best as an unequal relationship, where immigrants are considered as guests who should exhibit appreciation with regard to the

generosity of the host society and should not blame or criticize the request from the 'host' community (Gullestad 2002).

5.8: "Diaspora life has brought freedom and a good environment"

Diasporic experiences in Devon are multi-layered, and therefore cannot be simply defined as either negative or positive experiences. For some respondents their identity as being recognised as Kurdish was a positive experience, but this was often against the negative experience of racism and exclusion. These experiences have to be recognised in relation to experience in homeland, because of domestic or political situations. In the UK there is a political freedom that is often denied or not recognised in Iraq, because of the prevailing paradigms. Kovan a young Kurdish businessman says of his experience of living in Plymouth:

"Living here has given me a freedom I have never had before. I have the right to speak and know I will not get into trouble, I can say things, I don't have to fear going to prison. I feel I have been born again, it's liberating" (Kovan M:23).

Many of the respondents feel they have more political freedom and knowledge since living in Devon, they feel there is no indoctrination, and that they are free to formulate and express their own ideas without fear of reprisals. They have a broader knowledge base, and sourcing information is easy and accessible. This in turn has made respondents more respectful towards others and their beliefs. Awaz discussed how education has changed the way she thinks:

"...when I was in Kurdistan, all that was important to me was being Kurdish and being recognised for this, other countries didn't really mean too much to me. I had to fight to be Kurdish, so what did it matter what others thought? But that changed when I came to the UK. I learnt so much more about other people and their identity, I had a pride in being educated to wider world issues. Someone said to

me that knowledge was power; I think they are right about that” (Awaz 29:F).

This view of recognition and empowerment in the UK was vocalised by Ashti:

“...when I arrived in Plymouth I was amazed to find that Kurdish was a recognised language. I had a translator who spoke my dialect, and the pamphlets of information I was given contained many different languages, this was a nice surprise to me. In Iraq, in Saddam’s regime, we had to be careful with our Kurdish language and heritage, but here we can be Kurdish and I can pass this on to my children safely” (Ashti 38:M).

Human rights and having a voice in the UK are major factors in respondents’ positive attitudes towards British society. Opportunities to access education and other resources underpin respondents’ acceptance of tolerance towards other nationals, while living in a positive open society encourages inclusion and belonging. Ali says:

“I find it hard to understand that I was not recognised as Kurdish in Iraq but here I am, I am encouraged to be Kurdish I feel very proud to be British Kurdish my language and identity is recognised here it” (Ali 44:M).

For some respondents who settled in Plymouth, they could not read or write in their own language, but access to a Kurdish education in Plymouth has encouraged and broadened the second generation to retain their identity. Banaz a first generation Kurdish migrant explains that passing and retaining Kurdish identity to her children is important in keeping her links and belonging alive to homeland:

“I cannot read or write in Kurdish, but I speak in Kurdish to my children all the time. I am so very proud that my children are learning to read and write they are doing so

much more than I could ever dream of, they are keeping alive our Kurdish identity” (Banaz 33:F).

Living in a democratic state outside their homeland has created an environment that positively facilitates the ideology of a utopian state. Outside the homeland, Kurdishness is allowed to grow and evolve in a way that was difficult in Kurdistan. Political activities, aided by social media and freedom of speech, have increased the sense of identity and belonging for many. Hazem explains his excitement of the Kurdish state outside Kurdistan:

“I loved Kurdistan, it’s in my blood, but when I was there I could not be Kurdish, in Saddam’s regime we were not allowed [to be Kurdish], it was as if we were invisible, that we did not exist. But here it is different, I have meet many Kurds and we are very visible, we are recognised, here we have identity, we can openly gather for the Nawroz festival, we can talk politics and talk openly and freely. There is much on the social network, I feel more Kurdish here than I did in Kurdistan, one day I hope it will be like that back home” (Hazem 27:M).

Hazem and other participants point out the denials of Kurdish rights inside their own homeland by the regime denying the Kurdish people political and cultural freedom. The freedom of Kurds outside the Homeland has been recognised by many interviewees, and the lives of diaspora has made a significant impact on Kurds, providing transnational links as well as opening access to the modern world. Scholars have considered a “centre of gravity” for the Kurdish diaspora (Khayati 2012b, Bruinessen 2000, Ahmadzadeh 2003), and as Ahmadzadeh has highlighted:

“Kurdish nationalism, both cultural and political having faced much harassment in Kurdistan, has found a golden situation in the diaspora from which to narrate its identity and construct a Kurdish imagined community” (Ahmadzadeh 2003:164).

Diaspora becomes a home to many Kurdish cultural and political activities that did not take place in Kurdistan. Living in the UK has made respondents more conscious about their human and political rights. During the research, many participants expressed that in diaspora there were more opportunities to access different resources, and believed that their political knowledge and awareness had advanced. Many in diaspora had therefore engaged with the greater opportunities to organise, learn, study and express themselves. Participants also acknowledged that they had learned to be more tolerant, open-minded, and patient towards other nationalities and their rights.

5.9 Kurdish national identity

In this section, I reflect upon participants' discussion of Kurdish identity situated within a nationalistic framework. The interviews provide different concerns and reasons why there should be a Kurdish national identity and why a Kurdish nation-state is of predominant importance in the interviewees lives. They draw upon issues of collective suffering, the fight for independence, national identity, national pride, international visibility, distancing from inferiority, stigmatisation, 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 amongst Kurds in the UK and other western states, some research participants called for a unified Kurdish nationalism. One interviewee argued that having a national Kurdish identity and a Kurdish nation-state is related to the suffering, atrocities, crimes, and chemical weapons, that Kurds have been subjected to by the regime of Saddam Hussein. Karokh said:

“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. 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 Turkey, Syria, Iraq, or Iran, 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 a Kurd. Then they ask

you what part, and if you say from North Iraq, then you become an Iraqi in their eyes” (Karokh 22:M).

For Karokh, it became important to rename the present state of Iraq and replace it with Kurdistan, with Kurds as its political subjects. According to Karokh, the 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. Further, Karokh politicised sacrifices made in the name of 'Kurds' or 'Kurdistan', and used these as sources of political justification for a Kurdish nation-state. Another interviewee pointed out the importance of history in determining the fate of the Kurds within the present nation-states in the Middle-East:

“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” (Befreen 32:F).

Befreen’s statement highlights that knowing Kurdish history and origins is related to Kurdish struggles about gaining independence and freedom from oppression. Oppression, a lack of a nation-state, and the experience of statelessness strengthens the rhetoric of knowing one’s roots and origins. As Vali (2003) reminds us, history, and the question of origin, is 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. Several participants connected the idea of having an own nation-state to the feelings of pride and recognition by other states and nations:

“...the Kurdish people all around the globe want to have a Kurdish state. Some of us as Kurds have never had a

Kurdish pride, the reasons behind that are not having an independent Kurdistan. I know I am Kurdish and from Kurdistan and it is a dream of all Kurds to have an independent state and not be part of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. The Kurdish people around the world are still fighting to have a recognized state and so many Kurdish people died and struggled for Kurdistan [...] we as Kurds have lots of history behind us but still we are not able to become a nation to participate in the Olympics or the World Cup, and feel proud of a Kurdish identity. We want Kurdistan to be a state in its own right" (Rizgar 46:M).

Rizgar suggests representation and identity are understood in links to pride and shame, with a focus on the defeats, victories, achievements and under-achievements. His understanding of history is a challengeable tool that legitimizes the nation-state and nation-hood building. Rizgar refers to sporting events such as the Olympic games and the World Cup as peaceful battlefields for nations to conduct their struggles for representing national virtues, but also recognising and strengthening national feelings through defeating other nations. As Rizgar points out, the invisibility of the Kurds in the world and recognition of Kurdistan as a state for all Kurdish people are important because of a shared sense of nationality.

Some respondents deliberately separated themselves from other minority groups believing that separating oneself would be a good way of justifying a cause for a nation-state. This nation-state would uphold the culture and belief system that was the essence of being Kurdish. This fear, of discrimination and alienation, and for not having a nation-state, leads to separation and marginalisation. The emergence of a Kurdish national identity as a collective phenomenon has been a subject of debate in the spheres of both scholarship and politics. Denying Kurds a national identity and character as a people means delegitimizing their claims to a Kurdish state. Saywan, a Kurdish businessman, describes his emotions:

“Kurdistan is an important place for all the Kurds and it is the place that all of us can associate with, as we have very rich history, culture and land that extends our-self more back in history than other people or groups. The people from the global community don’t accept to have a Kurdistan as a Kurdish state, where we can live our culture, beliefs and values. We don’t want people around the world to think negatively about the Kurds, we want to show the rest of the international community how great the Kurds are. During the decades the Kurdistan Regional Government has been seen as a golden opportunity for the economic partnerships around many countries, due to the rich oil industry. I don’t want people to see us with no state and looked on as Kurdish as people without a land, as people don’t like other people if they don’t have a state or homeland. It is very important for all the Kurds, it doesn’t matter what you do but always remember the Kurdishness and show the positive signals of Kurds to the rest of the community in Devon” (Saywan 36:M).

The international community has not recognized Kurdistan and the Kurdish national identity, and as Saywan argued, not having a state that could be a vehicle for achieving that recognition, creates a loss of pride. The economics of the oil industry within the Kurdistan regional government (KRG) have been identified by participants as a potential mechanism towards the independence of Kurdistan in northern Iraq. The role of western countries in a partnership will further support the Kurds for an independent Kurdistan. As President Barack Obama highlighted, Kurdistan is an “island of decency the Kurds have built”. Saywan’s account the positive signals of Kurds are important to show the rest of the community and helps to build a cultural awareness of Kurds.

Some respondents did not have pride in their Kurdish national identity because of a lack of recognition by other countries of Kurdistan as a state. Being labelled as stateless reinforced feelings of besmirchment. The historical context of Kurdistan and the Kurdish people with a rich heritage has been used to argue

the legitimacy for the existence of a state. This historical claim is used to justify the present politically-held ideas of a nation-state, and being recognised would give a sense of pride. Ibrahim says:

“If Kurdistan was recognised as a state, and not just part of Iraq, I would be filled with pride. To be recognised properly, to have a Kurdish passport, that would be the best. People look down on you if you don’t have a passport, you are viewed as a criminal, it’s wrong. They think there must be something wrong with you and that is why you don’t have a passport, it’s like living in a sort of non-world” (Ibrahim 30:M).

Ibrahim continued that it is important to mix with groups that are not marginalised. He explains that belonging to a recognised nation-state gives a certain respect, and with that, a recognition of fitting in:

“I know it’s wrong but I am careful who I mix with, I mean I am already labelled as someone with no homeland. When people ask where you from, and I say Kurdistan, they say “Where is that?”, I tell them it’s in North Iraq. Some people think you are a terrorist, it’s hard, they don’t understand or have never heard of the struggle of the Kurds and our history” (Ibrahim 30:M).

Ibrahim describes the importance of the perception from other people of not having a homeland, and the implications from the lack of understanding of other people, who assume that people from Iraq – not knowing where Kurdistan is – are therefore terrorists. The participants’ answers to the question of ‘Where are you from?’ have been responded to with pride for Kurdistan. This sense of national pride is seen when respondents explain their sheer delight of seeing the Kurdish flag after crossing over the border into the region administered by the Kurdish regional government, the nearest thing to a nation state. Layla says:

“The first time I went from here to Kurdistan and I saw the flag flying on the border between Kurdistan and Turkey it was a recognition of my belonging” (Layla 23:F).

For many Kurdish living around the globe, the flag of Kurdistan has been recognized as a symbol of Kurdish national identity. As Layla discussed, during the journey to Kurdistan through Turkey she saw the Kurdish flag flying on the border and recognised the homeland where she belonged. This belonging and affiliation with something tangible is also seen in combination with the various Kurdish political parties. However, the second generation of diasporas see these as more of a divisive hindrance than of helping with the established argument for an independent state. The energy put into maintaining the various different political parties can be seen as a negative response, where once a political party was part of an identity, especially where there is no recognised state. Some respondents believed that political parties should actively encourage unity towards a collective independent state and not focus on their individual agendas. Rekan reflected upon his father’s involvement in a political party as going against his beliefs:

“My father was so proud to be part of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. All that was talked about was politics and the right party to belong to, but I see it very differently, I want to be part of an Independent Kurdistan. I sometimes think that people from outside must think, how can they possibly be independent when their own political parties don’t agree, I think they are right” (Rekan 20:M).

Rekan identified the proudness of Kurdish belonging to a political party that defined the right of the Kurdish people inside the homeland and across the globe. Many respondents saw their past and present persecution as Kurds as a common factor for their identity. The historical persecution from other countries bordering Kurdistan in the Middle East made them more united, especially outside of their homeland. The UK and Europe are considered as a safe place to exchange views without fear of imprisonment or persecution, which creates an environment where greater nationalism can evolve and develop. Hajeen

indirectly stressed the political significance of Kurdish people in Plymouth being politicised toward the national identity:

“I have met many Kurdish people in Plymouth and the one thing we all have in common is that our families have fought and suffered so much hatred and abuse just because we want our own country. All of us have lost family and friends in the brutal regime, but here we can talk about it, this is a good country and our identity is recognised and that makes us feel proud. But there are many other countries who do not recognise us and would still hurt us if they could, and that makes our national identity strong and solid” (Hajeen 20:F).

Nationalism and identity are therefore paramount in underpinning an individual's values. Where there is not a recognition of an independent state, there is a collaboration of thought and feeling from a shared historical perspective, and changing values and ideals from the second generation diaspora unite individuals far from their homeland. The Kurdish national identity has become stronger in diaspora, and national and ethnic identities have become very central in this process.

The support for a Kurdish nation-state was justified in order to inform a range of discursive strategies that were used. These included global visibility, a lack of pride due to not having a nation-state, evoking collective suffering and recognition, as well as the historical origins of Kurdistan and the Kurdish people. The question of Kurdishness has become incredibly important among the participants, particularly when they encountered denials of Kurdish identity in their day-to-day social relationships with other Middle Eastern people in the UK. Individual experiences of injustice, repression, and suffering cannot be counted as the main reason behind the strong nationalist sentiments among the Kurdish people.

5.10 Individual and Collective Identity

The fundamental expectation of a collective identity, as Eder has highlighted, is that “collective identities are narrative constructions which permit the control of the boundaries of a network of actors” (Eder 2009:428). The social construction of collective identities gives answers to the questions of “who do I belong to?” and “who do we belong to?” (ibid:432). Collective and individual identities are important to physiological and social well-being. The effects of collective identity formation can vary greatly. Perceiving oneself primarily as a member of group can be appropriate in one situation, problematic in a different situation, and even dangerous in a third. In addition, collective identities create a psychological sense of people’s needs through concrete social interactions.

Eder claims that the construction of identity sometimes does not imply a return to a psychological notion of a sense of identity; rather, social relations imply the shared meanings or ‘narrative bond’ that people share together in some social relations and not all of them which create being part of a particular ‘we’ (Eder 2009:431). Collective identity comes into being when the members of a collective perceive themselves primarily as members of this collective, so that a depersonalisation of both perception and behaviour occurs. Therefore, Eder characterises collective identity as a “metaphor for specific types of social relations” (ibid). It is possible to find a number of points of contact within the concept of “collective identity”. That is these narratives are produced and reproduced in social relations in a dynamic way, in ongoing social communication. Collective identities are therefore based on the categorisation carried out in the course of the perception of the social world, by means of which individuals allot themselves a particular place in the world. A better use of the term collective identities is required in this study, since the social relations among people shape the construction of identity, and this illustrates the macro-theoretical argument that “The more a human society is differentiated, the more it needs a collective identity” (Eder 2009: 430). This assumption demonstrates that the indirect social relations vary with collective identities and the network that links people shapes the structure of identity, in which collective identity could be multiple and not unitary (ibid).

One can best illustrate the process of collective identity formation with the help of a conflict situation. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) point out that “identity is a

very rich concept” (8), however there are many key uses to it. The first use is that identity, whether ‘collective or individual’, is ‘self-understanding rather than ‘self-interest’. The second use concerns identity in a collective phenomenon that refers to sameness among a group, which is perceived objectively “(sameness in itself) or subjectively (experienced, felt, perceived sameness)” (7). The third use is to understand identity (collective or individual) as a deep and valued concept rather than superficial and fleeting. The fourth key use is understanding the collective identity as groupness, process, and interactive development of the collective self-understanding. The fifth and the last use is that identity represents the multiple, fragmented, unstable nature of the self (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:6-8). In this section I take into account some of these key uses, however my attention is specifically on the first use. For some respondents their collective identity was valued. The appreciation of Kurdishness as distinctness was formed by their experiences in Kurdistan and Devon. As Awat says:

“When I am in my village back in Kurdistan I am part of a much bigger community, I know I am Kurdish, I belong, this makes me feel good. When I come back to Plymouth it sometimes can be hard, but I have a place in my local community and I belong here too, they are different but a part of me belongs in both places” (Awat 31:M).

Shared experience gives a collective identity, and for many first generation Kurds who fled brutal regimes and dictatorships the shared experience of pain and hardship brought a bond that is hard to understand unless experienced. Mala explains:

“When you have seen blood spilt for your homeland and you share with others the pain of loss you have something in common that other people can’t understand, you have a common identity” (Mala 23:M).

Mala talks about the shared emotional attachment that is shared with other people who have witnessed, or been party to, situations so abhorrent that

unless experienced cannot be empathised with, bringing a commonalty to a collective, a victim, the homeless, or marginalised and displaced groups.

The rise of nationalism and allegiance to different political parties within second generation Kurds living in diaspora, provides a different perspective on collective identity. For some respondents living in diaspora has meant easier access to engage and follow different groups and political parties. Social media has provided an international platform for political parties to be heard from and viewed by diasporic Kurds who have heard stories sometimes romanticised by family members. Bashir came to the UK aged 9 with his parents and says:

“I belong to KDP I am proud to be a member, I might live in Plymouth but one day I will go to the homeland of my parents, my homeland. A lot of my friends belong to the KDP, that’s what we have in common it keeps us united” (Bashir 24:M).

Bashir sees belonging to a political party as a shared collective identity, it is something he shares with his family and friends, though being detached from his perceived homeland.

For many respondents being part of the Kurdish community in Plymouth brought a shared collective identity of being diasporic and living in a host country. The community in Plymouth is close-knit, where a Kurdish school has been established to keep alive the Kurdish language, culture and belief system. Shilan explains why it is so important to keep alive the traditions and Kurdishness in the Plymouth community;

“It is important that our children know they are Kurdish, that they do not lose the ways of homeland and all our traditions that are passed down, our children go to schools in Plymouth but they also share the Kurdish school, this is good, this is what we all share” (Shilan 29:F).

Shilan places importance upon Kurdayati and its traditions within the local community. Belonging is more than just a geographical place, but a belonging

to customs and a certain way of life, which is shared with their neighbours in their community.

Due to the individual's need for a social identity, the life of social groups always leads to the formation of collective identities, which can be understood as a subjective feeling of belonging, or as a community formation. Identity comes into being and changes as a consequence of individuals' interpretations of their own behaviour which entails a reflexive concept of identity. Anthias highlighted that "ethnicity is a highly contested term: sometimes denoting a sense of belonging to an ethnic group; sometimes meaning shared cultural ingredients; sometimes being depicted as a social place structured by the existence of ethnic hierarchies, and so on" (Anthias 2002:497). Furthermore, ethnic identity is constructed through social organisations and a shared culture.

When it comes to self-identity in collective identity issues, it contains crucial processes that can be distinguished in terms of boundaries of sameness and otherness because the self is embedded in the collective idioms and draws defining features from them. In addition, the boundaries of sameness and differences and hierarchical social positions are produced and reproduced in interactions with the narrative structures around them (Anthias 2002: 497, 500). Therefore, collective identities are the boundaries that construct an individual's sameness or otherness. Anthias claims that, "however, narrative accounts by actors are often the most accessible for social researchers who are interested in the way individuals understand and interpret their place in the world and are of particular interest to scholars of collective imagining around belonging" (ibid:498).

Referring to Anthias' claims, social researchers and scholars are among those people who are most interested in analysing the way individuals position themselves in the social world through narratives. Social identity is understood to mean "those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging" (Tajfel and Turner 1986:16). This means that we can speak of 'collective identity' whenever a certain social identity is of overriding importance for the members of a collective, as Barzan explained:

“My self-identity is my name but part of the very large tribe in Kurdistan, we as Kurds have many tribes and sometimes we from Plymouth need to remind our children to know who we are, and where we come from. And I think being a member of large Kurdish club we all have the same dream of an independence for Kurdistan” (Barzan 28:M).

Barzan accepts being part of the larger community and categorises himself from the rest of society. The process of Kurdish collective identity is to value the group more highly, and this approach has more connections between individual identity and collective identity. The tribal society that Barzan refers is more like a reminder of the past within the Kurdish society. The dream of an independent Kurdistan has from childhood informed many participants during this research. This childhood could be applied to what Hall describes as an “organic community” (Hall 1997:46), a community that existed in childhood and is left behind now. Kani is similarly from the second generation and was born in London and married to a Kurdish man and moved to Devon. She identifies herself as:

“I always identify myself as a Kurd I was born within a Kurdish family and grew up with a very strong Kurdish culture. We celebrate Kurdish Newroz every year and that will serve as a reminder to the other Kurds and local people to understand who we are as Kurds, but I also celebrate Christmas as I feel that I share a sense and belonging to British culture and integrate with British Society and I am very familiar with British society” (Kani 28:F).

Kani shares a sense of collective identity with British society that she is familiar with and resides in, she identifies her belonging to British society through her knowledge of being born here. Her identification is related to her ethnic group although the environment around her is British. What Kani feels about being

Kurdish is more related to her Kurdish-born parents and learning Kurdish norms and values, with cultural elements such as the celebration of Newroz that binds her to her Kurdish identity.

5.11 Kurdishness as a religion

Some respondents interviewed expressed strong opinions on Kurdishness as a religion, and opposed Islam, regarding it as an enforced religion from the Arabs which took away the 'authentic origin' of Kurdish identity and imposed a uniformed Islamic identification with the stereotypical religious and cultural values associated with it.

This section considers the identity of Kurdishness as a religion in itself and the opposing stances of Islam as being both positive and negative indicators of being Kurdish. It asks whether Kurdishness transcends religious, national or ethnic belonging, or whether Kurdishness is grafted to one of the former. Has Kurdishness lost its 'authentic origin', or is there a resurgence in a new belief of fundamental roots including religion as being the 'real Kurdish'? Bafreen one of the participants explains why she feels that Kurds should undergo a de-Islamisation process:

“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 and now ISIS in the name of Islam is killing the Kurds”
(Bafreen 32:F).

Bafreen believes that Islam has not been kind to the Kurds, it is a vehicle which is and has been used to persecute and put down the Kurds and their identity. This can be seen in the current situation in Iraq with ISIS acting as an Islamic state, continuing to brutalise Kurds. Historically the Kurds have been persecuted in the name of Islam, and even the Koran has been used to justify suppressing the “infidel” which resulted in mass genocide with huge populations of Kurds being murdered by Saddam Hussein in the 1980s. Bafreen believes

that Islam has played such a negative part in Kurdish life that she feels justified in alienating herself from Islam.

Participants with a nationalist view-point believe that going back to the authentic Kurdish religion of Zoroastrism is going back to the roots of Kurdishness, and is viewing the Kurdish question holistically. Participants with a strong nationalist belief consider Kurdishness a religion; this was stronger than any religious identity. Awat explains:

“Zoroastrism is my religion not Islam, people here have not heard of Zoroastrism and think because I am Kurdish I should be a Muslim. I tell them that the founding religion of Kurds is Zoroastrism, it is the beginning of the Kurds, I am very proud of my heritage. The Kurds have suffered much at the hands of people saying they are acting as Muslims, that’s not my heritage. My heritage is strong and I am proud of our Kurdish heroes like Saladin, he fought and ruled a large part of the Middle East. It makes me cross that people see him in history as a Muslim fighter against the Crusades and not a Kurdish fighter” (Awat 31:M).

Awat and Bafreen are not in the minority in distancing themselves from the Islamic religion. Many of the participants living in Diaspora were secretive about their Muslim religion but for different reasons. Since 9/11 many Muslims have been scared to be openly seen as Muslim, as they fear racist attacks and discrimination, often resulting in isolation, and does not support the process of integration. PREVENT strategies have tried to support the security of Kurds and other Muslims in the West Country but since the 7/7 bombing in Exeter with Nicki Riley there has been a significant decrease in numbers going to the Mosque. Many young Kurds feel threatened especially with the increasing anti-Islamic stance taken in Western countries and the stereotyping of Muslims and Islamic politics. Warina recounts a journey she took on a bus not long after the 7/7 bombing:

“I was catching the bus to town wearing the traditional Islamic dress. As soon as I got on everyone stared at me, I heard one woman say how bad it was, that I could be a suicide bomber. This really upset me and made me feel scared. I thought Britain was supposed to be a free country, sometimes it feels like I am in Iraq again, I don't feel free to show who I am” (Warina 32:F).

For Warina this feeling of not being free and the correlation between Iraq and Britain reinforces feelings of alienation, and ironically where she fears being free to express herself through her religion being a Muslim gives her a sense of identity and belonging as well as her Kurdishness. Warina goes on to explain why being Muslim gives her a sense of uniformed identity:

“Everyone in the mosque are my brothers and sisters, we are all the same, we may be from different countries but we are all one, we are Muslims.”

Warina feels a collective identity with her religion, but most of the interviewees did not express this, they saw Islam as another form of suppression against their Kurdish identity and long held aspirations for nationhood. Rejecting Islam for some respondents meant rejecting Arabs and their cultural dominance, and acknowledging an authentic Kurdish culture. Kamyar describes how his Kurdishness is his religion:

“I am not Muslim, I am Kurdish. I live, eat, and breath being Kurdish, my religion is the honour of being Kurdish, of my motherland, of one day going home, this is my belief and religion”(Kamyar 20:M).

Distancing themselves from Islam for some meant a modern pro-western outlook that was culturally acceptable and inclusive in a Western country that had anti-Islamic sympathies. Some Kurdish nationalists saw the harmful labelling that being associated with Islam could bring to the Kurdish nationalists. Bafreen said, “Some British people think that Kurdish families take part in

honour killings, I don't understand why they think this. It is not so, you see one case in the news and everyone is labelled the same. This is not how we like to be presented, this is not Kurdish" (Bafreen 32:F).

It is clear for some that Islam is a way of unifying people regardless of ethnic origin and crossing social backgrounds enabling individuals to have a collective identity, while others feel that Islam is an organised religion that is used to suppress the Kurdish identity and removes true authentic Kurdishness. The demands of being a Kurdish Muslim in an increasing anti-Islamic western culture where two different identities are present is a challenge to Kurdish diasporas.

5.12 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated what has happened to Devon's Kurdish peoples' identities in diaspora and how their identity is constructed or reconstructed when encountering and interacting with another society such as the British society. Their life experience is analysed through their views and perspectives about Devon as a place of living and British society in context. The research shows how Kurdish people in Devon identify and understand themselves in relation to the society and community they live within. The participants illustrate that maintaining their Kurdish identity, as well as the informants, in one way or another, all attempt to integrate with British society. Stuart Hall points out that:

“...identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process” (Hall 1994:392).

The term identity has been used in a number of ways to refer to a number of concepts (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). The individual's identity changes when encountering a society that is completely different from their country of origin, the “nature of the individual depends upon the society in which he or she lives” (Burke and Stete 2009:4). As a consequence, the first generations of Kurds who arrived at a young age and grew up in diaspora lived between two different

societies, and are “confronted with two motherlands” (Jodeyr 2003). The evidence suggests that many participants feel in-between with dual identities. I call this group margin dwellers: individuals who feel marginalised and not belonging to one particular group or place. However, here I have also been able to show that it is important not to believe identity as something fixed. Identity should be looked at as something that is discursively constructed that it is fluid and transient. The connotation of this research lies in the fact that it displays identity as changeable, fluid and not fixed, and that this change results from the interaction with people from another culture.

The key infrastructure of ethnic identity is the genuineness that “it is generally acquired at birth” (Horowitz 1965:113). Nevertheless Horowitz does believe that this conceptualisation of ethnic identity is more of a “putative ascription” than an absolute one. It is true that ethnic identity can be changed through linguistic, intermarriage or religious conversion, nevertheless it takes time and can often take generations for that to be accomplished. Therefore, in the present analysis ethnic identity is very closely connected with the notion of ethnicity or ethnic group. The new generations that are born and reach adulthood in Britain have been of great significance in studying their identities in their diaspora community. This research shows that Kurdish people who were born or raised here have more attachment to British society compared to the first generation of Kurds. The importance of identity and belonging is paramount to an individual’s place in society, whether that is actual or perceived, having British citizenship does not automatically give access to a place in society where an individual is valued and accepted. Many of the participants interviewed encounter exclusion on a daily basis. Kani explained:

“I have been in Britain for a large majority of my life, I have a British passport, I can vote, I pay tax, but yet people still don’t consider me as British, as I was not born here and do not have an English accent. This is hurtful to me. I find it difficult to become involved with people who are outside the Kurdish community” (Kani 28:F).

This exclusion does not facilitate integration, and this is particularly the case in Devon, a rural county that has limited interaction with the BME community. Those in diaspora who live across the world as citizens (who lawfully live in the country), may be in a very difficult position as they realise the importance of cross-border connections and boundary transgressions, but at the same time are limited and interfered with by the borders protected and enforced by nation-state institutions and the coupling of citizenship with national identity.

For many first generation Kurds living in diaspora there is a dichotomy of homeland and hostland. Many respondents who have been forced to leave their homeland by threats and violence and are living in diaspora, recognise the empowerment that living in another country brings, this additionally adds to a sense of identity. For the first generation Kurds who can openly practise their customs and Kurdishness, the diasporic host gives recognition and opportunities in a secure environment that the homeland could not provide, there is a sense of shared experience in this identity.

For all humans identity is essential to a person's psychological well-being, it gives an individual a sense of purpose and a place in society. For the first generation Kurds living in diaspora in Devon, where homeland was a place of birth, or is a utopian ideal or perceived religion, the question of identity will continue across generations. As Saleh says:

“Kurdistan, my beautiful homeland where I dreamed a day of freedom, Plymouth a city that has made my dreams come true and those of my children, I will never forget my homeland or my struggles but for my children and grandchildren who knows” (Saleh 37:M).

In addition, all of the participants know they are Kurds and belong to the Kurdish ethnic group. They are proud of their Kurdish background, however the British society has great influence on their identity, and each of the interviewees share a strong collective identity with the British society.

Chapter Six: Diaspora Community Engagement

Britain has been a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and culturally diverse country for decades. The UK government is committed to promoting community engagement, and services are being delivered by a range of providers, with correspondingly diverse opportunities for user and community involvement, needs and priorities. This poses major challenges for community engagement and community cohesion agendas. There is a growing concern about how to connect these different structures of local governance, for example through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). The last two decades has seen increasing interest among researchers, practitioners and policy makers in community engagement. Community engagement applies to the manner by which individuals and organisations within a community create ongoing, permanent relationships with the intention of applying a collective vision for the advantage of a community and promoting community cohesion. Recent literature has demonstrated that having a voice in the community and feeling a sense of empowerment, gives black and ethnic minority groups a stronger devotion to their local area. Thompson (1990) argues that:

“...communities may be viewed as a system, composed of individual members and sectors that have a variety of distinct characteristics and inter-relationships, these sectors are populated by groups of individuals who represent specialised functions, activities, or interests within a community system” (cited Olodo 2008:19).

It is important for governments, and other agencies involved, when working with communities, to understand the characteristic complexities of the same or different communities in order to reach their strategic goals. There are quite distinctive characteristic differences between new arrivals and the ethnic groups established in settled communities. New arrivals can feel excluded within the new social environment as a result of cultural differences and representations, their voices being heard despite language barriers. Government policies for community engagement have typically been high profile, as have community cohesion agendas, but these have been developed in parallel. Research by the

Joseph Rowntree foundation (Blake et al. 2008) has noted the challenges of bringing communities together, examining ways of enabling new arrivals to become involved, promoting solidarity and cohesion rather than competition and conflict between newer and more established communities.

During recent years, community engagement has been used by governments to establish a more democratic or political ground, however there is no agreed definition of community engagement. Communities and local government define community engagement as “the process whereby the public bodies reach out to communities to create empowerment opportunities” (CLG 2007:12), while the Metropolitan Police define community engagement as, “the proactive harnessing of the energies knowledge and skills of communities and partners not merely to identify problems but also to negotiate priorities for action and shape and deliver solutions” (M.P.A 2006-2009:5). Rogers and Robinson define the community engagement as “the opportunity, capacity, and willingness of individuals to work collectively to shape public life” (2004:434). Community engagement can provide opportunities for marginalised residents to develop the skills and networks that can enable them to tackle social exclusion.

There is no single definition to capture the position that community engagement plays within black and ethnic minority groups in the UK. The terms ‘community’ and ‘engagement’ both have numerous meanings and definitions with academics and policy makers. For example, the definition of engagement can include how black and ethnic minority groups or other wider population engage with projects, activities or any strategic planning. However, this insufficiency of definition could be measured positively rather than negatively, provoking local discussion as to what these terms might mean in different frameworks. Maddison and Laing outline community engagement saying it, “takes a particular form, and is context-dependent – arising for institutions from their individual histories and locations, and from their view about their strategic position” (2007:10-11).

In many community engagements there are different styles describing community. There are geographically defined communities, which could identify a city, number of streets or communities of interest where the members share

specific features or concerns. The term of community is also defined as an informally organized social entity that is characterized by a sense of identity (White, 1982), while community can also be defined by researchers for the purpose of their project. It is likely to engage with groups or residents in a range of different routes but it is important to emphasise which kind of engagement it is that specific residents or community groups prefer facilitating to use them in a way that supports citizens and community.

The term Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities applied within this research is used to identify the limits on those being examined in the research. As Platt emphasises, “an ethnic group is, theoretically, one where the association with both a particular origin and specific customs is adopted by people themselves to establish a shared identity” (Platt 2007:18). However this statement shows that ethnic groups share comparable features and can be used as an identity characteristic, it is vital not to overstate these commonalities and therefore creating a homogenous group. The study is aware of the term ‘hard to reach’ which is not a label covering all black and ethnic minorities, however the intersectionality of black and ethnic minority residence is dependent on that engagement. Nevertheless all black and ethnic minorities share an important part, in which not all white populations are included. Isajiwa highlighted that:

“...the majority ethnic groups are those who determine the character of the society’s basic institutions, especially the main political, economic, and cultural institutions. They determine the character of the norms of society as a whole, including the legal system. Their culture becomes the culture of the total society into which the minority ethnic group assimilate” (Isajiwa 1993:12).

This statement illustrates how similar experiences are shared within black and ethnic minorities, and in some studies the term of ‘other’ is used toward black and ethnic minorities to identify them among the communities. As a result of lack of resources, the research will notionalise the black and ethnic minority in localities whose ethnic origin is not white.

Highlighting the ideological link between active participation and community oriented governance, King and Cruickshank review the key components of community engagement as involving:

"...continuity and sustainability of good engagement, trust and local relationships; opportunities for deliberation; the ability to deal with anger and the legacy of previous poor engagement; tailor-made opportunities for various stakeholder groups to participate; [...] facilitat[ing] joint influence over issues; mak[ing] use of community 'hubs' and existing communication link- ages, understand[ing] the engagement needs and aspirations of community groups and produc[ing] effective engagement networks (King and Cruickshank 2010, 3).

This chapter contributes to diaspora studies by examining individual diaspora experience, particularly that of new arrivals in the asylum and refuge process, how experience relates to community engagement, and what is needed for successful integration into the host society. Within the context of community engagement processes, the chapter focuses on intercultural and cultural experiences among all generations of Kurds and key actors that work closely with diaspora groups in the host society. In addition it provides insights into community engagement, tools to engage with diaspora groups, and issues with regards to integration and community cohesion, and will also explore issues of integration and trust. The final section examines the Kurdish diaspora citizenship process and the Prevent strategy, which seeks to engage with community groups to reduce the threat to the UK from terrorism by stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

6.1 Community Engagement Levels:

1. Inform:
2. Consult:
3. Involve:
4. Co-Produce:
5. Empower:

It is important to engage with black and ethnic minority communities in the early process of community engagement and strategic

development. Engagement with diverse communities, particularly with diaspora groups, has become top of the agenda for the key actors and partners in Plymouth, to involve and build the trust and confidence within these new communities. However more recently it is recognised that a professional lead is required in relation to diverse communities. This lead should support service delivery by:

- Developing a high level of knowledge concerning the specific needs of diverse communities, in particular new and changing communities where beliefs and cultural norms may change over time;
- Passing on and sharing knowledge so that organisations as a whole assimilates it and changes service delivery accordingly;
- Engaging with representative and support groups to gain knowledge concerning community needs and challenges within communities;
- Working with partners to help plan and deliver improvements to service delivery; and
- Monitoring and checking to ensure that standards are met.

Key actors from organisations must provide ongoing attention to developing and maintaining the structural capacity to engage with diaspora communities and create community engagement. Effective collaboration requires important commitments in developing and mobilizing organisational resources essential to helping with engagement activities.

(Figure 6.1)



To explore the ethnic minority communities, particularly the Kurds, and how they have engaged with community consultation, government policy development and decision making processes at local and national levels it is necessary to try to understand to what extent the local Kurdish residents are integrated with the democratic society. However, it is also apparent that there is a lack of strategy for community engagement in Plymouth towards black and minority ethnic groups, as Peter explains:

“Plymouth City Council does not have any written community engagement strategy plan in place yet. We are looking in the future to develop a city plan and [...] will include a section on community engagement” (Peter, community leader).

The above statement from Pete confirmed that there is a lack of written policy of community engagement with diaspora groups in Plymouth. The concept of community engagement towards black and ethnic minority groups or individuals is of immense importance because of our diverse communities. Community engagement has often been substituted for other previous concepts; it is sometimes difficult to see the difference between community engagement processes and previously used consultation and information processes. By looking at the year 2011 Census data it is clear that the diaspora population in Plymouth has increased dramatically.

Community engagement, as a concept, has emerged relatively recently in relation to public policy in the UK. Providing a definition of the concept is complicated by the fact that both the component terms – ‘community’ and ‘engagement’ – are themselves problematic. Community is a notoriously slippery concept, and many definitions exist in academic literature and elsewhere. Engagement, likewise, can mean a number of different things in different contexts. The concept of engagement seems to have appeared more recently in the policy vocabulary. However, other terms that can be seen as being encompassed by the concept of engagement – such as ‘participation’, ‘consultation’ and ‘partnership’ – have been around longer. The research themes are designed to help and better understand what kinds of policies,

plans, outlines and strategies of each of these key actors and institutions have towards diaspora communities in Plymouth, especially the Kurdish community. The information collated gives a broader idea on the true engagement of diaspora community from the perspective of different and widespread intuitions. Ali explains that:

“It’s very important to find out which organisations or key actors seek to engage with BME groups in Plymouth. Having a community engagement policy in place is very important. For example the council only consult with us before the end of the financial year by having a team meeting to discuss the issues among the diaspora communities” (Ali 44:M).

Many diaspora group members like Ali feel they have been engaged just for political box ticking, and he has illustrated the importance of a clear community engagement policy. Engaging with the community is more than just consulting. There are two kinds of characteristics to engagement. First, their dedication to constructing and maintaining connections with local black and ethnic minority organisations, businesses, charities and other groups in the wider population and, secondly, their dedication to increase their membership to involve local black and ethnic minority individuals. Community engagement includes (see figure24) There is a greater chance of delivering services that people need, when they are developed with communities, rather than done to communities. Community engagement is highly successful when presented in collaboration with voluntary and community sector groups.

The interview data shows there is concern that the PCC, Police, NHS, Education and other organisations working with diaspora groups, are not genuinely committed to the importance of ethno-cultural diversity and new diaspora groups that have often been ignored or discounted by local authority and other organisations in the city. As a result, these groups have little incentive to dedicate to the process of community engagement, and there is a substantial distinction between Plymouth and other major UK cities in this regard (see chapter four).

6.2 Tools to engage with diaspora communities

The UK Government has introduced a number of measures to ensure that statutory agencies involve local communities and groups in decisions that affect them. Therefore, all key actors in Plymouth including local authorities, volunteer sectors, and the police, are willing to engage with diaspora communities. During the interviews with key actors, different tools were identified to engage with diaspora communities, but it was clear by the majority of key actors that there is not a quick process to engage with diaspora communities and different methods have been used in connection with one another to reach a large amount of black and ethnic minority residents.

6.2.1 Personal direct contact

Personal direct contact with people has been identified as a tool to engage with communities, particularly the new arrival of diaspora groups into the city. Having personal contact involves professionals liaising around problems, exchanging information, building the bridge of trust, and understanding the needs of individuals or groups among the diaspora communities. Jonathan highlighted that:

“...personal contact with people is the best tool of engagement [...] to get to know people is the only way and this works across communities, community engagement depends on relationships and there are no short cuts [...] you to get to know people and they have to get to know you, you have to build trust, you have to build respect”
(Jonathan, Community worker).

Jonathan points out that having personal contact and building relationships with people in order for them to trust you to engage with organisations and with activities that are provided. Similarly, Graeme, who works in community engagement, recognises that direct contact is key to community engagement, working and engaging with all protected groups or groups at risk which include new communities in the city:

“It is effort, it is time, it’s consistency but it’s initial contact. You have to walk outside the building and you have to go and find people” (Graeme, Police officer).

This initial contact has been stated throughout the interviews in order to develop community engagement, Graeme continues:

“... you need to go to see people, to meet groups, work with groups, but I think a lot of time one-to-one conversations are also very useful with the key people from communities because you have to start somewhere and you need to be able to converse with people in order to understand the frustration and any questions that come to you. So for example, you could speak at events which might give people more awareness [...] if somebody speaks at that event a lot more people see that person, but if you want to properly engage I think they need to keep coming and speak to individuals first and then broaden how they talk to people in the community” (Graeme, Police officer).

Face to face contact with diaspora groups or individuals are a mechanism to engage with and develop trust-building relationships with BME residents, sustaining and developing over a period of time to gain confidence. When talking to diaspora organisations, the key actors were aware that personal direct contact, or the contact point from organisations such as police, NHS, Education, PCC and others, is a route to engage with diaspora communities. This research found that ‘personal contact’ was pivotal for some key actors to tackle issues that affect the understanding of different cultures. However relying on personal contact without a strategic plan could be problematic for the future of community engagement, especially when key individuals have built up relationships within the community, the dynamics can change when the position changes, and new contacts have to be established. Roya illustrated that:

“...many large organisations in Plymouth don’t have plans in place to engage with BME communities, but sometimes we see staff from those organisations that are titled BME community engagement officers, which we think is great to have contact with persons within those organisations. But when we met the officer for example, he/she didn’t know anything about the diversity of the world as they didn’t provide diversity training to the officer, so it is a lack of cultural training. Also it takes time for those people to build trust and connections with the BME communities and after some years at the job this person has left or got promotion and another person will come to the post, so whole contacts were lost” (Roya, Community leader).

A lack of community engagement strategy was identified when working with diaspora communities, and the study found relying too much on one person to do all the engagement work with diaspora communities as a negative approach to community engagement. The quote above illustrates how personal contacts may destroy and affect the community’s engagement with organisations that are willing to engage and work with the groups.

6.2.2 The right individual in the right job

During the research process it was found that large organisations in Plymouth such as the Police, Plymouth City Council, the Fire Service and other statutory organisations have a member of staff or department to engage with diversity work, in particular with new communities from diaspora communities. Another important tool that has been identified during the process of this research is the role of the individual or putting the right person in the right job. Dave from the Fire service believes that good tools to engage with communities particularly with a cultural difference among the communities are:

“...having the right individuals engaged with the community engagement for a start because you are only going to get one chance, so if you let those communities down then you tarnish

the reputation of your service or organisation, so by putting the right people in roles is very important” (Dave, Fire officer).

Dedicated officers or staff members in roles of diversity work seemed to be a continuous process of community engagement, again demonstrating the potential expanding needs of a dramatically increasing diaspora population. The study found that having a dedicated staff member with links to the diaspora community was valued as a useful tool for engagement. Ann appreciated the dedicated department or staff members from organisations such as the Police, Education, Health, Fire Service, PCC and others to work directly with diaspora communities in Plymouth she says;

“It’s very important to have the right person to work with BME communities and understand the differing needs of BME groups to prevent racism and promote respect” (Ann, community worker).

This study has clearly noted that engagement with black and ethnic minorities is a slow process and takes time; this could be as a result of a vacancy or the incorrect individual in the post. During this research it became apparent that no organisations provided diversity training in working with different cultures. The study found that there are cultural awareness training needs, particularly for those who work with diaspora communities. Graeme describes diversity needs among the staff to understand cultural differences:

“...the future development for strategic levels are officers even in departments such as domestic abuse, and child protection. While we may have people who are described as specialist in those roles they will not all deal with honour based violence, they may not have dealt with female genital mutilation, they may have done a one day course, or they may have done online training, but will that give them real knowledge of the community dynamics within the community? I don’t think it does, so more training, more mandatory training for people. So if you

become detective I think you should then have to revisit all the training and the reasons why in a more specific way, if you are working with honour based violence then you need to have training not just what you had when you first joined, which was interesting, but you haven't met anybody from another community. As soon as you have a victim in front of you, you are exposed very rapidly and you may not necessarily understand the people you are dealing with, but you may understand that the crime is wrong" (Graeme, Police officer).

Indeed without cultural training it takes time to develop the relationships and build trust within the diaspora communities. For example after losing the PCC Asylum Seekers and Refugees coordinator position and the Police diversity officer in Plymouth both organisations have struggled to engage with diverse communities, and this raises issues among the diaspora communities. The nature of the work with different cultures and ethnicities has increased due to the growing diverse population in Plymouth. Key actors provide staff members to be engaged with diaspora communities, but at the same time they don't have any diverse strategy plan to follow. As Ali and other members from diaspora communities explain, some individuals from the large organisations such as the Police come to work with BME communities for promotion: "the last decades we have seen many officers applying to work with BME groups but after a short time they have left the role and got promotion" (Ali 44:M). It can be argued that the culture of 'box ticking' has established among some key actors in this area of work, and even within most of the diaspora communities. Key actors have become aware of who is the right person to engage with. The right person has to be able to facilitate a process whereby the community does not become dependent on a particular individual, a working system enabling independence that creates an equal working partnership. Dependency on particular individuals can create a debilitating environment where a community struggles and fails in being fully inclusive and not self-reliant.

6.2.3 Social media and community engagement

Social media has become a vehicle for social engagement globally, and has the capacity to increase engagement efforts. In recent years social media such as Facebook and Twitter have significant multidirectional communication and have created the opportunities for key actors and community organisations to engage with not only diverse communities but also the wider community. In that way communities can raise issues, facilitate the exchange of ideas, and engage with society in establishing online community forums to engage with large communities. A 2012 Office for National Statistics report shows the number of households with internet access has increased by 7.1 million (23%) since 2006, which means 21 million (80%) households in the UK had internet access in 2012 (Office for National Statistics, 24/08/2012). Peter from Plymouth City Council describes:

“...social media or organisation web pages are a great means to access easy tools to provide communities with information, activities and sometimes engage with groups discussions” (Peter, community leader).

Social media tools are a new mechanism for community engagement that includes the groups and individuals that might otherwise be hard to reach (Fine, 2006). This study identifies the importance of social media in engaging with community and individuals. Social media is used by communities in the initial stages of community engagement, and plays a significant role in developing and sustaining networks by facilitating ongoing communication and social exchange. Moreover, social media could support the building of bridges of trust among communities and organisations.

However, social media networking sites can sometimes create tensions between the communities or individuals. The freedom of social media networks increases the problems, as Chris describes, “the networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and sometimes the comments on the local press develop racial tensions and negative attitudes towards community engagement” (Chris, police officer). The use of social networking sites has significantly increased, with many organisations and individuals using sites to engage positively with

other members, however the use of social media can also be seen as a negative contribution toward community engagement, causing incitement, mistrust and hate with some communities. Like any community engagement effort, the use of social media for communication engagement will take time. It is important to understand the use of social networking sites and when it is appropriate to use specific social media to engage with communities.

6.2.4 Community hubs

Community centres, community places or community hubs are another tool used by many organizations to engage with diaspora communities as an initial point of contact. This research has found that the needs of established diaspora are different to the needs of new diaspora communities, or as described by some researchers and key actors, as new arrivals, where the needs of these communities change. The diaspora community hub is valued by all key actors as a great example of engaging with all new diaspora individuals or groups arriving into the area, and forms discussions with key actors. It is evident that using the community hub for consultation and engagement with diverse communities to insure that they have engaged with diaspora communities. It was apparent during the interview process that there are clear needs in establishing a diverse community hub in the area, which will promote the innovation and creativity between social sectors that find solutions to build and empower individuals and community groups for all people living in this area (including the wider community). Dave described the valuable role of a community hub:

“...a gathering place or community hub where diverse groups and individuals can meet and collectively work towards a more sustainable way of living and will be a much easier access for partners to engage with diverse communities, and provide those people through the community hub with some tools to go back to their communities, and also to have strands and links back so we can then support those people within their own communities with our own expert advice, so it is backed up all the time” (Dave, Fire officer).

By establishing, offering and supporting a place to build relationships, trust and a strong community identity, the hub brings together people from a wide range of backgrounds or cultures and supports the local community to discover the solutions to problems that individuals have from day to day.

Other organizations that supported BME and diaspora communities in Plymouth were forced to stop operating due to local government budget cuts and coupled with the creation of the Big Society with the start of the coalition government in 2010, which left organizations with no financial backing. Key actors value bringing diaspora communities together in one place, and this importance of community hubs is explained by Graeme:

“The community hub is important as it gives a focal point and identity for community members. It offers support for all community members who may find themselves with a variety of different needs, these could range from asylum status claims, housing and benefit issues, health and children’s services, education or volunteering opportunities, as well as support around crime and victimisation. It can also be a valuable meeting place for companionship and meeting new people” (Graeme, police officer).

While the positives are apparent regarding the value of community hubs supporting community engagement, the negatives cannot be ignored. Because there is such wide diversity within the diaspora communities, some people may find that national identity, religion, tribal or cultural differences may prevent some communities from attending or sharing the hub space or values. The relationship between other ethnic groups in large cities e.g. London, Birmingham, and Bristol, are different due to a longer established history of multiculturalism. Many diaspora groups in Plymouth are new as a result of the asylum process, and have specific needs, such as language, community hubs or places would support the needs of diaspora communities to use the hub for activities supporting integration and the promotion of community cohesion. The

effectiveness of diaspora community hubs is to provide community cohesion and improve integrative relationships within the context of supporting and sustaining existing diaspora communities.

6.3 Issues with regards to integration and community cohesion

Integration is one of the important phases of community cohesion, since 2001 community cohesion has been one of the most significant policies and has generated a range of responses from research, policy and practitioner communities. It has been argued that characteristics of community cohesion are also key to the success of the coalition government's aspirations to build the 'big society'. The 'big society' was developed to replace community cohesion by a new coalition government that effected many diaspora communities and organisations in Plymouth, as Jonathon points out:

“promote what we do as something that contributes to community well-being and after September 11th and right the way through to 2000 and up to three years ago there was a very clear agenda around community cohesion and there was some funding clearly linked to that, but you don't hear people talk about David Cameron's vision of the big society and it didn't have any funding attached to it, so I think the work we do is a real challenge and about keeping it in the public eye. Now sadly things often come up that do not help to promote it and are the draw back. As you know we are involved with preventing violent extremism so where is the real threat around terrorism [...] so often when things are going wrong, the preventative side is very difficult, and the sustainable side is very difficult to get funding for repairs or damage limitation and a response after these tragedies [...] then people sadly become aware and money for training is often there because it is seen to be directly connected to preventing a certain type of extremism from developing, so unfortunately it is often the route by which you get little bit

of funding, often not much, but the actual building work is difficult to get money for” (Jonathan, community worker).

Many voluntary organisation sectors (VOS) and small charity projects will see their funding cut by half and some may lose their entire budgets. These cuts will have a major impact on the services and staffing of the voluntary organisation sector. How local authorities will act is causing considerable concern. Councils across the UK need to invest in evidence-based intervention or preventative programmes:

“...the risk, however, is that we see an increase in slash and burn approaches to cost cutting which is rather like turning off the tap rather than fixing the leak. As a result, we may make the savings targets in the short term but we are banking up a whole load of debt further down the line” (Barnard, 2010:14).

Most at risk are the small and medium sized voluntary organisation sectors with the greatest local potency. The impacts of public expenditure cuts will limit the voluntary organisation sector’s response to the Big Society.

The independent audit of The Big Society finds that if The Big Society is to succeed it has to incorporate the more marginalised, poorer communities, ethnic minorities, and the young, to work in honest partnership with the voluntary sector. The government needs a shared "vision and strategy for delivery" with the voluntary sector, the report says, and should reform the tendering process for government contracts to remove the "implicit bias toward larger organisations, mainly in the private sector" (Rowley, 2012). A report by the Civil Exchange found that civil society organisations have been hit hard by public service cuts, particularly in deprived areas leaving them in vulnerable positions. The director of Civil Exchange, and writer of the report, Caroline Slocock, said: "It is absolutely critical that the government engages with the voluntary sector as a genuine partner. You can't drive the big society from Whitehall without engaging the voluntary sector, which has deep local connections, particularly in deprived communities" (Rowley, 2012: Online). It was estimated the voluntary sector would suffer cuts of £3.3 between 2011 and 2016 with the introduction of the 'Big Society'. This has been particularly

worrying for those working in disadvantaged areas with marginalised groups. The big society could well provide new opportunities for the charitable and voluntary sectors, but alternatively it could leave them destitute and fighting for funds. Peter illustrates that budget restraints will make a difference:

“...as part of a wider challenge to us as the Council, we have got to find £65 million over the next three years so we are not going to be able to continue to deliver the right services in the same way as we do at the moment, that is quite clear, so we are looking to see how we can transfer not only just cuts, existing services, but how can we expand the way we do business, the cooperative council approach is a very, very big part of that, so we need to work with communities as a part of our cooperate value that talks about everybody doing their bit” (Peter, community leader).

However, it was noted through key actors that there could be issues with the projects that are commissioned by local authorities and other partners in the city, such as the voluntary sector. While the quote above illustrates the role of the cooperative council, it will play the biggest part in building bridges with the networking of the communities and have cohesion, integration and partnerships working despite the cuts to the city. Available evidence suggests that diverse places with a history of migration are more likely to adapt more easily to new migrations, to be more inclusive, and to foster a positive integration experience for migrants (Netto 2011; Spicer 2008; IPPR 2007; Robinson et al 2007). Such neighbourhoods can provide access to inclusive local resources. These findings are consistent with analysis pointing to the positive impact on interethnic relations of living in a more diverse environment.

Zetter (et al 2006) explains that diversity and cohesion, in relation to national cohesion policies, and asserting identity and challenging prejudice, can be exclusive as well as inclusive for those regarded as ‘others’. Examples of exclusionary attitudes in this context are issues in more recent years around Islamophobia, however through citizenship processes there is the possibility for

'others' to sign up to governmental social cohesion policies. This strategic choice places them on an inside track to influence policy agenda, while other groups are strongly opposed to Britishness conceived in terms of citizenship, cohesion being less about accommodating diversity with shared social values and aims, but more crucially about issues of justice and equality of opportunity where ethnic minorities remain disadvantaged (ibid).

Robin Cohen (1994) revealed that following post-war Commonwealth immigration, it has become increasingly difficult for British people to uphold their territorialised identity, challenging their exclusionary attitudes towards those considered 'others'. In the identity defence frontier, a dangerous gap between perceived British powers, based on the former British Empire, the global importance of the use of English language, and British power that is imagined, leaves room for extreme hostility of Britons towards people classed as foreign (Cohen, 1994). Whittaker clarifies that state expenses, incurred by offering asylum, is as minimal as 0.425 percent according to Home Office calculations. It is noteworthy that, by Home Office calculations, asylum seekers contribute significantly more to the British economy through taxes and national insurance than what it costs to take in asylum seekers, this is calculated to be 10 per cent more than the costs incurred by offering asylum (Whittaker, 2006).

6.3.1 Integration and Trust

Integration and trust have become reoccurring themes among the key actors during the process of this study. Successful integration into any community is built on trust in the establishment and local environment. Within Plymouth, trust is a hard process for the diaspora communities due to prejudice from the local community. Plymouth, in comparison to other cities in the UK, is a relatively new destination for diaspora groups. This means that integration is not always a fluid process. Education is a key role for understanding difference and diverse faiths and cultures. Jonathan points out:

“...we will also encourage people from BME communities to get involved in schools so they can be informed, as we ask faith speakers, people from different religions and different cultures to go into local schools, because to me

religious education must also involve the local communities so the children in the schools can understand they are part of a much wider, diverse society” (Jonathan, community worker).

Providing the opportunities for individuals and diaspora groups to become cultural and faith speakers within the educational environment is part of acculturation. For migrants coming from countries with corrupt systems, there is often mistrust of institutionalized groups or organizations, which hinders the process of integration. This is shown, for example, in regards to reporting incidents of crime, especially hate crime, as there is lack of trust that the establishment will do anything once the crime has been reported. Peter explained how the city council is trying to change this perception:

“We have done a whole range of work to increase reporting, we set some targets which we have made to increase the number of reports we get on racist and other hate incidents, so those set in line after consultations with communities and then presented to local strategic partnerships, as a result of demand from communities. We work very closely with the police around areas where hot spots have emerged or where we are getting repeat incidents and we do as much as we can, to publicise the feedback we get when people do use our services and report hate crimes, we have got our 80% satisfaction rate with people who come through the service” (Peter, community leader).

Though there is work being done to encourage and support diaspora groups in reporting crime, there needs to be more positive inputs in supporting the local community, dispelling preconceived ideas and suspicions about BME groups, concerning issues such as employment and benefit fraud. This lack of knowledge is often flamed by the media, while certain organizations have negative responses to BME groups, making positive integration difficult. The way to build trust with developing communities is to build relationships, and

once they are built, maintaining them at a level where dialogue is equal and free flowing. As soon as the contact or relationship alters it can lead to mistrust and the belief that agencies or statutory bodies are merely ticking a box. Integration and trust is a two way process and though it is evident that positive work is being done to build bridges between different communities and groups, there is still a need for greater inclusion and community cohesion. However, the big society agenda appears to go much further. It relies much more on voluntarism and the replacement of publicly funded positions by local volunteers and the third sector, providing what is a much reduced service.

The concept of multiculturalism as well as integration presupposes that immigrant relationships to society are problematic. These problematic relations must therefore be regulated and controlled by the state. As Wahlbeck argues, “Multicultural policies presume that there are easily recognizable communities which have clear cultural boundaries and constitute viable ethnic communities. These policies have also played a part in the racialisation and culturalisation of differences between groups in society (Wahlbeck 1999:14). Language skills were the main obstacle for Kurdish migrants to overcome in their quest for better communications. For Berry the integration of international migrants will be part of a much wider process of ‘acculturation’, a phenomenon that involves the cultural changes that take place when individuals, groups or even communities from other cultures come into first-hand and continuous contact with a host culture (Berry 2006). Integration is a challenge for any country with a massive diaspora population, as Ibrahim reflected:

“...every day we hear from the public that there are too many immigrants arriving in their country, and I think sometimes this is due to the impact of news of immigrants through the media and politicians. So this kind of thinking will affect the process of integration but we will always deliver our cultural activities and projects” (Ibrahim 30:M).

The accounts above identify the role of some media and politicians in affecting the process of integration especially among the new diaspora groups. This remark by Ibrahim is important because it indicates that there are challenges

towards diaspora groups or individuals but they intended to contribute to the integration of diaspora communities into British society. However, the integration of culturally diverse populations into British society, especially in Devon, adds a layer of complexity to the diaspora argument and demands a higher level of cultural understanding. Additionally after the 11/7 tragedy and the War on Terror, the integration of diaspora groups, particularly Muslim groups, into the host society has become a complex and sensitive topic. Immigration to the host country may have an impact on integration and cohesion. This is identified as communities outcomes set against the societal average.

Multiculturalism illuminates the cultural pluralism through diaspora existing in every society. Multiculturalism has produced fragmented communities in which people of different cultures experience 'parallel lives', with few opportunities to integrate and a limited understanding of cultural meanings, values, and identities other than those of their own culture. Now, the notion of multiculturalism occurs within discussions on integration, diaspora and migration. Multiculturalism can be defined as "promoting tolerance and integration while allowing immigrants and ethnic groups to maintain cultural identities and customs" (Gallis, et al. 2005:12), and this research draws upon this definition. Evan explains that integration is a two way process:

"...the Kurds in Plymouth need to integrate within the local community and I understand it's very difficult as Plymouth does not have a large population of black ethnic minorities. I think it's a two way process of education, as we are teaching our local people to understand about our culture and at the same time teaching our own people to be integrated within the Plymouth society and build up the bridge of trust" (Evan 29:F).

The indication of geographical place and space has been expressed by many participants during this study, and as the above statement explains, the process of integration will be harder due to a lack of diaspora groups in Plymouth. Evan goes on to highlight the importance of a two way educational process to build up the bridge of trust towards integration. Plymouth's society has changed from

an homogenously white population within the last decade, to a more culturally, religiously and ethnically diverse society through immigration. In order to understand the integration process of the Kurdish diaspora in Devon it is important to understand the different spatial distribution of Kurds in Devon. In the section of 'No money in my pocket' (see chapter 5) the economic contributions of the Kurdish diaspora from initially arriving until now was discussed. Susan explains:

“My department has received an invitation to attend the cultural differences workshop. My colleague and I attended and we were shocked to see how many other people from different communities are living in our city. The greatest thing for me was the cultural food provided by the local the Kurdish shop and from that time onwards we invited them to our training and workshops. I think food plays a very great part of the success of integration”
(Susan, community worker).

Cultural food as Susan mentioned is part of a road map towards the integration process. The integration implies a strong sense of identification to both the original and the majority culture. Cultural food integration interacts in significant ways with how resources from diaspora groups contribute to the host society. Some diaspora groups facilitate cultural awareness activities in Devon, and have highlighted that far more needs to be done due to the lack of relations with integration and British society. The Kurdish diaspora are very concerned about the official discourse on integration. Saleh believes that:

“...the aim of the Kurdish organisation in Plymouth, and I think those around the UK, has been to build significant bridges between the Kurds and British society. As an example our organisation in Plymouth explains our culture to the rest of the community or people, as well as being representative. I think creating cultural activities and opening to the rest of society will create integration and make greater opportunities for British people to meet us

and have knowledge of the understanding of differences”
(Saleh 37:M).

Saleh’s description of how the various Kurdish diasporas organisations play a fundamental part in the initial bridge building of integration and trust to the host society. He defined organisations as representatives for diaspora groups, and how they work as mediators and cultural ambassadors to be presented to the British populations. The other role of diaspora organisations is to support their own people to build up confidence and trust with the host society. Wahlbeck identifies that Kurdish organisations could be a valuable resource for new arrivals in order to solve the difficulty they face within the country of settlement (1999). Saleh admits that organisations representing individuals get a better reception and are taken more seriously than contact with the host society. Many participants admit the role and value of the Kurdish diaspora association as a platform towards integration and trust-building as a way of organising people and projects as well as meeting the host society in a more organised manner. For Berry the integration of migrants will be part of a much wider process of ‘acculturation’, a phenomenon that involves the cultural changes that take place when groups, individuals, or even communities from other cultures come into first hand contact with a host culture (Berry 2006).

6.4 Kurdish diaspora and citizenship process

The location of the diaspora is central to understanding contemporary questions concerning citizenship, in that, local knowledge about community, settler, immigrant, race, nation-state must be engaged dialectically when talking about citizenship, sovereignty. Many first generation Kurds in Devon and new arrivals (who now have naturalized) were faced with several challenges during the process of citizenship. Citizenship is normally defined as the rights and obligations that individuals accrue as full members of a community, usually taken as being given by the nation state. As Painter and Philo have pointed out, citizenship “rests upon the construction of an identity, complete with a related package of known rights and obligations, which posits residence in a definable place or [...] territory” (1995:111).

In the UK, individuals applying for citizenship must have lived in the country lawfully for more than five years, and have a good character (no convictions for a serious crime and stay closely linked with the UK norms and values). Since 2004 all local authorities in England and Wales are required by the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2002 to arrange ceremonies on behalf of the Home Office for applicants for British nationality to make a citizenship oath and pledge. This is mandatory for all individuals aged 18 and over for British citizenship, while children under the age of 18 years are welcome to attend a ceremony, though are not required to take the oath and pledge, but may stand and do so if they wish. There are two types of ceremony that applicants can opt for. The first is a group ceremony that can be up to 40 applicants all saying the oath and pledge together as a group. The second is a private ceremony held at the registry office and is a much shorter ceremony. In November 2005, formal naturalisation tests became obligatory. A test for British citizenship was introduced by the late Labour government to address community integration and cohesion, as a minimum standard for being British, comprising a geopolitical and historical exam and language test. This could be seen as a positive way forward for community cohesion and integration, but community cohesion and integration will be needed to address equality and diversity at a much deeper structural level. Peucker pointed out that:

“...the rising debate was dominated by critical voices that accused the long-standing British multicultural policy of being too indifferent, too laissez-faire. Although the positive attitude towards cultural pluralism and diversity was not fundamentally questioned, British integration policy shifted rapidly towards greater inclusiveness and emphasis on the connecting bond of a commonly used language, shared key values and the sense of belonging to the British community (Peucker 2008:253).

Integration policy plays a more active role in supporting immigrants and calls upon them to make greater efforts to participate in society. Rizgar points out:

“I am so happy now I got my British citizenship after many years of waiting, and feel less vulnerable and I can travel

on a British passport all around the world. For me having British citizenship after being granted asylum is way forward to free life and it has open many doors in my life” (Rizgar 46:M).

Rizgar recognises his sense of rights and how this gives him a level of protection in his life after getting British citizenship, and also identifies citizenship as the key to opening many doors to his future. To the same degree, Brnic (2002) identifies that nationality can be looked at in two different ways. The first is identification of a specific individual with the nation. The other is an administrative association to a specific country. Brnic highlighted that citizenship is “not necessarily a symbol of one’s sense of national belonging. It can simply be seen as a document that relates to one’s rights and to the state’s obligation to protect, or provide for, the individual” (ibid:8). Many first generation Kurds have lived in uncertainty for a considerable amount of time before getting British citizenship. Awat provides an illustration that was shared by many Kurdish participants:

“It took nine years to have a final decision on my asylum application, I was very uncertain during this time and it was very difficult to make any plans it was like prison. I believe many people are psychologically effected because of uncertainty [...] all this time it has been very hard. A year after my Indefinite Leave to Remain, I applied for British citizenship, it took almost one year and a half, and in the end I got my British citizenship but I still feel I am Kurdish” (Awat 31:M).

The uncertainty of Awat’s future makes it difficult for him to make any plans or to start a new life in the host society. Many participants identified having Indefinite Leave to Remain as not enough to create that feeling of security. The Indefinite Leave to Remain visa consists of people who have been granted the right of residency in the UK on a permanent basis. Awat feels Kurdish after his British citizenship process. The relationships between citizenship and identity for migrants are complex due to their multiple attachments, and feelings of

belonging (Mavroudi 2008). For some Kurdish participants, citizenship could be a concern of security but not an identity. It can be argued that Kurds will apply for British citizenship as soon as they have the opportunity, however not all the participants' applications for British citizenship went smoothly. Hardi tells how he missed out on his opportunity to become a British citizen:

“...when I first came to the UK nobody told me I must have insurance for a car before driving, because back home in Kurdistan we don't have car insurance or road tax. I was stopped by police for having no insurance and I told them I didn't know about insurance and I thought I wasn't guilty. I went to the court but received penalty charges with three points. The year after that I applied for British citizenship and after nine months waiting my application has been refused due to the court appearance, and I have been told I can't apply until 2021” (Hardi 29:M).

Hardi explains that there was a misunderstanding between the country of origin and the country of settlement. He was refused due to a misunderstanding and in his knowledge of British law, driving a car without insurance; he feels an unfair decision was made due to his lack of knowledge. British naturalisation has come to be regarded as a process of characterisation and integration. In Britain, obtaining citizenship is regarded as an integration tool. The government have explicitly highlighted that “becoming naturalised should not be seen as the end of a process but rather as a good beginning” (Home Office 2003:13). Many European states have recently experienced some fundamental changes of their integration and citizenship policies. A number of respondents, including Hardi, believe that people who want to become British citizens have to work much harder and prove themselves more, in order to reach the same level as British people. Since the last decade there have been many changes to the citizenship policy in the UK, such as policies and the cost of becoming a British citizen, Nazdar tells of her experiences:

“I came to the UK on a spouse visa and after spouse visa I applied for Indefinite Leave to Remain, and year after that

I applied for British citizenship. But I have been told nowadays UKBA policy has changed and you must pass Life in the UK test and ESOL level B” (Nazdar 25:F).

Nazdar married a UK citizen, and this allowed her to apply for citizenship one year after securing ILR, with a total of three years living in the UK. However, the policy changed in July 2012: those who now enter in to the UK in the same way as Nazdar may obtain ILR through five years of residence, and are then required to live in the UK for further one year before being eligible to apply for citizenship. Several changes were introduced as a result of the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act. The applicants applying for citizenship are required to pass an English language test, followed by citizenship ceremonies and swearing the oath of allegiance to the Crown. In some cases the Home Secretary has the power to remove citizenship from people deemed to have done an act against the interests of the UK. Phil Woods, the Minister of Immigration added “that engagement in anything that offends British values or individuals who fail to integrate can be denied citizenship” (cited in page 8). Citizenship can be seen as a tool in facilitating integration but conversely the model was challenged by a number of studies that suggested poor levels of integration and a low level of BME participation in politics (Jurado 2008; Painter and Philo 1995; Heath and Roberts 2008). Jurado highlighted “the same British governments that facilitated access to citizenship gave insufficient attention to the institutional and structural barriers that hindered the effective exercise of political citizenship rights by Britain’s minority ethnic populations” (Jurado 2008:9). The majority of Kurds in Devon arrived here as asylum/refugees and later became citizens. Sania explained her experiences:

“I arrived in Dover and applied for asylum, after 11 days in Dover NASS provided me a permanent address which was in Plymouth. After one and a half years I got my Indefinite Leave to Remain but I cannot apply for British citizenship until I have lived here for five or more years, so as soon as I passed my five years, I applied and now I am British [...] to be honest all Kurdish refugees want to

become British citizens because it's the final destination to having a British passport" (Sania 29:F).

It is interesting to contrast this attitude and classification with the ways that Sania and other first generation participants experienced their various routes to get British citizenship. Soysal characterised refugees as effectively stateless persons who are granted rights as individuals, with basis of their status in host countries resting upon an appeal to human rights (Soysal 1994). When a state admits refugees they are providing them with the basic rights of citizenship. As Babacan explained, "refugees have a much stronger claim to the citizenship of receiving states when compared to economic migrants, who still retain an element of their citizenship of origin" (Babacan 2009:54). Sania feels it is the final destination to have British citizenship. Citizenship is regarded as a fundamental right of vulnerable groups like asylum seekers and refugees as well as long term planning of settlement. Levesley illustrated that, "British citizenship and the passport that symbolised and confirmed it, was permanent, meant freedom from deportation and allowed the individual and his or her family to plan for long term" (Levesley 2008:33). More over human rights should be regarded as universal.

6.5 The Prevent strategy and engagement

Britain, along with other European countries, has endorsed a community focused de-radicalisation strand as a key part of its counterterrorism strategy (Van Dongen 2010, O'Toole et al 2012). The recent attacks by members of ISIS terrorists in Paris and San Bernadino, California, have once again focused political attention on measures to prevent radicalization. After the 7th July 2005 attacks in London, Prevent has become a much stronger element of CONTEST as the government sought to deal with the risk of 'home-grown' terrorism. Prevent was conceived as a 'hearts and minds' approach aimed at 'challenging the violent extremist ideology and supporting mainstream voices' (HM Government 2008:6). This plan saw partnering to engage with Muslim people as key to tackling radicalisation. The Prevent strategy under the Labour government was widely criticized particularly in the way it merged with community cohesion (O'Toole et al 2012), and was regarded as 'failed and friendless' (Thomas 2010). The merging of community cohesion as part of the

Prevent strategy, it was argued, “had the effect of dissipating the local goals and rationale of prevent whilst securitising and undermining community cohesion” (O’Toole et al 2012:374). In addition, Prevent was viewed with suspicion by those Muslim communities with whom the government sought to partner, who tended to see it as a mechanism for the surveillance of Muslim people (O’Toole et al 2012; Birt 2009; Kundnani 2009).

The coalition government, which came to power in 2010, immediately announced a review of the Prevent strategy and publicised it on July 2011. The current government has several new objectives for Prevent, which has specified that in future, Prevent and cohesion policies will be kept separate. It also indicated “a hardening of the government’s position on how the state engages with Muslim groups by emphasising that engagement must be limited to those groups that espouse a shared commitment to core British values” (O’Toole et al 2012:374).

The 2011 Prevent strategy has three specific strategic objectives: firstly, response to the ideological challenge of terrorism and the threat we face from those who promote it; secondly, prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate advice and support; and thirdly, to work with sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation that need to be addressed. Rizgar explained:

“I think the Prevent policy has failed to stop people becoming radicalized. There is not enough engagement with Muslim groups and there are many Muslim groups which Prevent groups didn’t involve and those who are involved with prevent are seen as spying, so many Muslim people don’t want to engage with prevent and prevent risks undermining positive intercultural work on capacity building and community cohesion” (Rizgar 46:M).

Almost all of the Muslim participants’ expressed the view that there was not enough community engagement around Prevent and the fear of being accused of spying and causing damage to the reputation of those who are involved with Prevent. Rizgar mentioned that Prevent has a lack of engagement with other

Muslim groups. The relationship between prevent and other Muslim groups has been instrumental in the failures of Prevent. Tomas has illustrated that, “Preventing Violent Extremism in the way it has been designed and implemented is contradictory to other key governmental priorities such as community cohesion” (Thomas 2010:443). Thomas also suggested there was clear tension between Prevent strategies that targeted Muslim groups for funding and community cohesion initiatives that aimed to end such community specific initiatives and to mainstream public funding streams (ibid). As Kundnani point out:

“...over the last five years, policies have been subjected to ongoing critical scrutiny and reform [...] the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programme that seeks to stem radicalization and extremism has developed through a number of iterations in response to challenges from various constituencies. On a fundamental level, though, the legacy of policy failures in the last six years after 9/11 is well documented, there has been little attempt how the UK government responded to the events of 9/11 and the 7/7 London bombings, particularly in relation to domestic counter-terrorism policy” (Kundnani 2015:8).

The experience of discrimination while travelling internationally is common to Muslim respondents. Participants recounted incidents, where they were subjected to extra or intrusive checks, particularly at ports and airports. Muslim respondents reported being taken off flights; being asked to remove clothing; and being interrogated and accused of having undertaken ISIS or al-Qaeda training. Travel destinations such as Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan seemed themselves to be treated as suspect by airport officials. Mala explained encountering such treatment during his journey:

“I was planning to travel to Amsterdam for Christmas but I was stopped at Bristol airport and 8 officers interviewed me for 6 hours, I was given an apology but it was too late I missed my flight and confidence. I was a suspect due to the way I looked” (Mala 23:M)

Many participants thought that Muslims were more identifiable and therefore could not hide and were more easily harassed. For Mala the experience of being treated as a member of a 'suspect' community was shared by other Muslim respondents, and resulted in negative responses in everyday encounters from police activity and security operations at ports and airports. Mala and other participants felt marginalised, as being a Muslim meant that they were treated differently and mistrusted by a large section of society. As part of the Prevent strategy the government has focused on tackling non-violence, as violent, extremism "intervening to stop people moving from extremist groups or from extremism into terrorist related activity" (Home Office 2011:6).

The initial implementation of Prevent was criticized as it engaged with certain groups of Muslim communities and unfairly with others. As Ali points out:

"Prevent focuses on one side of the Muslim community disregarding Shia communities and other sects. The Prevent strategy was delivered by individuals that were not from the Muslim communities, there was lack of representation from these other groups it was very unbalanced" (Ali 44:M).

Ali saw the Prevent work as a failure, it did not encompass the whole community, and this in itself caused separation and disintegration within the Muslim community, leading to distrust and friction from within. The lack of representation caused alienation for some members of the Muslim diaspora group that already felt marginalised and excluded from mainstream society. Saleh expressed his feelings on Prevent in his local community, Plymouth:

"I find Prevent really confusing as it keeps changing from central government, and in this area Prevent didn't do much work with Muslim communities because large Muslim groups here are Kurds, and they are against extremist ideology and almost every one of us within the Kurdish community has lost friends or relatives on the ground fighting ISIS" (Saleh 37:M).

Saleh talks about his confusion with the Prevent strategy, which he says is being changed continually by the government, and shares the views of other participants that are against the extreme views held by extremists. The Kurds are the largest Muslim population in Plymouth, however there is a lack of knowledge within the local community about their war in Kurdistan against ISIS. More recently an article in *The Herald*, a local Plymouth newspaper, interviewed a case worker working with the local Kurdish community, and said:

“...she had heard a litany of stories about the Kurds in the city who had to endure accusations of being terrorists, while they received reports from their war-torn homeland of entire villages being destroyed, relatives killed and friends murdered” (Herald 22/12/2015).

Participants who worked with Prevent have varying feelings towards the program, as Paree explains:

“I am personally scared to tell Muslim communities about Prevent, as they will think I am part of the police and no one will trust me anymore, so I think the government needs to change or work to build more around understanding the terminology of Prevent, particularly within the Muslim groups and I don't think Muslim communities in Plymouth understand Prevent” (Paree 29:F).

Paree's feelings are common with other respondents, who are apprehensive about sharing Prevent with the wider community for fear of being distrusted and losing their standing in their local community, thus causing an irretrievable breakdown of trust between the various actors in the community. Bigo et al (2014) found that the purpose of 'counter-terrorism' in designated target areas with a specific percentage of a Muslim population has had adverse effects, generating suspicion and contributing to frustration and alienation among Muslim groups. This frustration and mistrust could marginalise vulnerable individuals who are in danger of being radicalised. The bridge between Muslim

diaspora groups and other BME communities is being overlooked by Prevent's narrow focus on Muslim communities.

6.6 Conclusion

Kurdish participants in this study show and aware of their Kurdish roots and display pride in them. However while encountering another culture, changes often occur due to the different cultural and social environment they find themselves in. Acculturation and integration from the informant's point of view have different dimensions. Many British citizens view immigration as a positive influence that enriches culture and communities. It brings diversity and a wealth of cultural experience to the UK. Integration is also a dynamic process, with vicious as well as virtuous circles. A tolerant and diverse society can more readily accommodate not only people who want to fit in but also those wish to be different.

Community cohesion has its successes, but much work needs to be done. Its success is more visible in larger cities such as London, Birmingham or Manchester with over two hundred different nationalities, because historically they have been more diverse societies. This does not mean that other cities fail, but that there are greater opportunities for employment and integration than in rural areas or smaller cities where often any type of difference is noticed and subject to undeserved criticism. As time progresses the traditions of this ever evolving and growing nation will have to adapt and grow to accommodate the diversity and differences of the many people who now, and in the future, will inhabit Britain. Without this acceptance that change cannot be good, British values will need to change with the times, and grow as part of a bigger more inclusive picture. Glick (et al 2009) argue that migrant incorporation is influenced by the positioning of the city, along a continuum of power and influence. At one extreme are 'top-scale' cities, which are identified as offering the broadest range of possibilities for migrant incorporation and connection. At the other are 'down-scale' cities that have not succeeded in restructuring, and where migrants are not highly valued and opportunities for integration are more restricted.

Some respondents deliberately separated themselves from other minority groups believing that separating oneself would be a good way of justifying a cause for a nation state. This nation state would uphold the culture and belief system that was the essence of being Kurdish. This erratic fear of discrimination and alienation in not having a nation state leads to separation and being marginalised. As Mavroudi has argued, “diasporic, migrant, and refugee populations with often complex and difficult relations to homeland-host country states [...] are at the cutting edge of contesting the relationships between community, territory, citizenship, and identity” (2010:246). No Kurds would deny that living in another society and facing new circumstances necessarily involves change and adaptation. Changes in mentality, culture and life style might be both conscious and unconscious, wanted and unwanted. Many first generation participants have skills and experience to positively contribute to the country of settlement.

This chapter has examined individual diaspora experience and the relationship of experience to community engagement, and what tools are required by the local and wider community for successful integration. It has focused on cultural and intercultural Kurdish diaspora experience and the interaction of key actors working within the diasporic community. Participants’ experience in the processing of new arrivals within the asylum and refugee process and the changes in the citizenship process. The chapter has contributed to diaspora studies where there has been a lack of literature in community engagement with new arrivals, and has focused on participant’s first-hand experience. Finally it has looked at the Prevent strategy and the obstacles in the local community to support it, to understand the complexities of differing communities, and what is key to successful community cohesion and engagement.

Chapter Seven: Return: Intention and Experiences of the Kurdish Diaspora

7.1 Introduction

Within the last two decades migration scholars in different fields have become increasingly interested in diaspora groups that have been dispersed across various countries globally, as a result of ethno-political persecution, or due to economic factors and are united by a sense of connection to, and longing for, their homeland (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997; Van Hear 1998, King and Christou 2011, Alinia and Elissi 2014). Recently, several scholars have begun to study how certain diasporic groups have been returning to their country of origin (the homeland). Braakman (2005) has highlighted that “actual return hardly ever takes place, even if individuals express a strong longing to do so” (107). Furthermore, Tsuda (2010) has classified return into two types: the first group are those of the first generation who have returned to their homeland, the second group refers to the second generation diaspora, or those that were born here after living outside of their homeland in a host country and their different experiences.

After the Gulf War in 1991, thousands of Kurds began to return to their homeland in south Kurdistan, from neighbouring countries including Iran and Turkey. However, the complexities introduced by transnationalism and globalisation provoked an active debate around the issue of return. A number of intellectuals equate diaspora with transnationalism. Other studies have argued that diaspora implies a returning to the country of departure (Tololyan 1991). Brubaker in his categorisation of diaspora, characterises three stages in diaspora return. Firstly, he emphasizes the dispersion of people from the place of departure. Secondly, a real or an imagined connection to the homeland. Thirdly, he suggests the feature of ‘boundary maintenance’, which underlines the significance of the homeland and the necessity of return (Brubaker 2005). Conversely, King and Christou (2011) argue that a return by diaspora is more likely to be developed on the diaspora’s beliefs and feelings in connection to the return, instead of in relation to statistical records. The imagined view of Kurdistan by those in diaspora, has constructed and contested complexities

between life in diaspora and return. Christou and King (2010) claim that returnees more often contrast the life they left behind in diaspora with the life in the homeland, and this disrupts returnees' fictional vision of the homeland, making realities on the ground harder and more complex than were imagined, in turn being looked upon as strangers in their place of return (Christou and King 2010).

After the collapse of the regime of Saddam in Iraq and established autonomy of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in north Iraq, thousands of Kurds living in neighbouring countries and Western countries have returned to homeland permanently.

For example, since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, more than 600 Kurdish people in Devon and Cornwall have returned to their homeland in Kurdistan of Iraq (PKC 2012). The issue of return among Kurdish in diaspora globally has suddenly become relevant, however this relevance is double-edged. On one hand, the British government, among other western countries, are putting an increasing pressure upon Kurdish asylum seekers without secure legitimate status to return to their homeland. On the other, the Kurds themselves are suddenly faced with the opportunity to travel to Kurdistan of Iraq and remain there, perhaps permanently. Direct flights now connect from many different countries to Erbil the capital of Kurdistan, and an increased number of Kurds are getting the chance to visit the homeland that they had left for a variety of reasons several years ago;

Kamal is a return diasporan who had been living in diaspora for nine years. He had heard through friends and social media that England was a good place to live, and was driven to start a new life there as he believed there were more opportunities than in Kurdistan. Kamal made the decision to return to his country of origin after nine years, as it was difficult to get a good job and the cost of living in the UK was too expensive. While in the UK, Kamal was offered a job in the family business, but acknowledged that he found it difficult assimilating into the local community. On return to Kurdistan Kamal met with similar challenges of fitting in, and at present Kamal is undecided on what to do next.

Rashid is a second-generation diasporan, who on completing university in England returned to Kurdistan to teach English as a second language at a university. Currently he is happy living in Kurdistan, and says that he has no plans at present to return to the UK. Rashid has become involved in local politics and is using his skill base not only at the university, but also to help children at the local school.

Kawa is a diasporan who had returned to the UK where he had lived for 22 years. He returned to Kurdistan as the cost of living in the UK prohibited him having the standard of living that he would like. Kawa lived for four years in Kurdistan, but the change in security and economic environment there forced him to return to diaspora life.

The concept of return is the primary focus of this chapter, and here I explore how Kurds speak and think about a return to their homeland (Kurdistan), examining what factors prevent or discourage a permanent return to their homeland. It also provides a critical view of the British and Kurdish governments' role in not supporting individuals to return to their homeland. This chapter examines and analyses the drivers for the intention of return and the experience of return among the Kurds, considering both the positive and negative outcomes for the diaspora returnees.

It is also necessary to highlight that return experiences are different for families, in contrast to individual experiences. Women and children within the family unit may have very different experiences of return (Figure 7.1). Women who have lived in western diasporic countries may have to face a very different society where their liberty and freedom is restricted, while children who have been born in a diasporic country may have become westernised and find the prospect of returning to a very different culture and society a daunting prospect. This chapter will focus on the intention of return and actual experiences of returnees, considering social, cultural economic and historic factors.



Figure 7.1 Kurdish Region

The actual experiences of returnees have been recorded while in the south of Kurdistan (Kurdistan of Iraq) with permanent members of the Kurdish diaspora returnees. It will explore their experiences in their homeland and difficulties in re-establishing into mainstream society, the reaction of the homeland to diaspora and whether they would consider a return to diasporic life.

The intention of return takes place among first and second generation Kurds resident in Devon, to explore the issues of returning to their homeland, and to understand the reasons preventing them returning to their country of origin. I also examine how Kurds think and speak about returning to Kurdistan permanently, analysing the way in which potential dreams of returning are likely to clash with practical considerations.

7.2 Why do diasporic people want to return?

The notion of return was an underlying theme for diaspora participants. Though the reasons were varying, the belief that one day Kurdistan would be an independent state was a driver. The desire for return may not be an immediate wish but a hope for the future or future generations. Return diaspora has been identified as a product of the homeland.

7.2.1 Economic drivers and development

The respondents interviewed had differing reasons for returning to Kurdistan, especially those of the first generation as opposed to those of second or third generation. Many of the diaspora returnees found it difficult to integrate into a society that was so different from their own. The lack of friends and support from family, led some respondents to have physiological problems and depression, and often felt excluded. Whether this was exclusion from their diasporic community – where individuals had experienced racism and inequality – or an imagined exclusion that emanated from within, such exclusion created boundaries leading to isolation and alienation from the host countries' communities, ultimately preventing the ability for successful integration. For some respondents it was easier to have an imagined exclusion, than trying to assimilate into the local host community. These perceptions of alienation and isolation heightened the desire to return to their country of origin. Rebin explains why his loneliness in Devon made him ill and why that motivated him to return home:

“I felt so alone in Plymouth, it is a large place and it was difficult to meet new people. I really miss my family and friends in Kurdistan, it made me ill. It was like a big black hole over my life, I hated it. I went to the doctor and he said I had depression and gave me tablets and said I could speak to someone. I wanted to speak to my family. They said “come home, you will be better,” so that is what I did” (Rebin 26:M).

Rebin felt that he could not cope with the depression and the mental pressure; he needed to have a support network. Other pressures that were experienced included economic concerns. With recession in the UK, and broadly throughout Europe between 2008 and 2013, it was harder finding employment, particularly meaningful employment. Some respondents interviewed felt there was greater opportunity in their homeland, as the economic situation had greatly improved due in large discovery of oil in Kurdistan since 2004. The choice of employment was wider and varied and this was an attractive motivator. Examining the case

of returnees after a period of time, I found that people searched for the best of both the host- and home-land. Rashid a second generation diaspora explains:

“The only work I can get is in a car wash or takeaway, don’t get me wrong I am a worker, but in Kurdistan I could do so much more, make a real difference to society, have self-respect, make my parents hold up their heads with pride. I am working at a Kurdistan University using my qualification, it feels good [...] back in the UK everything is so expensive, you have to pay for everything, you never have any money” (Rashid 22:M).

This is a sentiment shared with Tara who tells of her frustration of never having enough money to pay bills, which in turn leads to feelings of despair:

“I dread the post coming, I have so many bills to pay, I can’t cope any more, all I do is work and never have enough money for things. It makes me feel sad and it messes with my head. I am going back to Kurdistan, my brother is sending the airfare because I have no money for that. I am going to work in the family business” (Tara 32:F).

The economic theme has been particularly identified by second and third generation, as well as some first generation diasporas, who have succeed in higher levels of education in western countries and returned to get well paid employment in Kurdistan. Cohen (2009) contends how homeland promotions of ethno-national justification for returnees covered by economic rationalism and the selection of ‘quality migrants’ can cause strains between the homeland and its returnees. Neyaz explained that:

“After I finished my masters in the UK, I was invited to a Kurdish meeting in London and I met a representative of the Kurdistan regional government. She told me there are many opportunities for young Kurdish people like me to go

and work in our homeland. I have returned to Kurdistan and work as director at one of Kurdistan's universities. When I went for the job interview I was told Kurdistan is under massive development and it would not look like the UK life. It is like a dream come true to return and be part of Kurdistan's development" (Neyaz 29:M).

Neyaz pointed out an important issue, that many participants would like to return and be part of Kurdish development. It can be argued that Neyaz and the other participants are a significant group of talented individuals with a high level of human capital, which constitutes one of the major factors in promoting 'brain drain' in growth and development of the region's economy.

The recession in the UK and Europe saw a rise in self-returnees to Kurdistan. Many UK diasporas felt that life was too expensive in Britain, that the employment opportunities were limited, and generally the quality of life would be better in Kurdistan. This was often underpinned by visits back to the country of origin, where respondents felt reassured about safety, and could see for themselves that economic growth brought a new prosperity to the country. Kazem pointed out:

"After the invasion of 2004 and the fall of Saddam and the Baath party, I returned to Kurdistan for several visits. I was surprised at how much it had changed and the opportunities available for diasporas there. There was a real need for people who were qualified and could speak and understand English well, not just in the commerce and industry sector, but the political scene as well. I knew I had more of a chance of making something of my life in Kurdistan, and the UK has become so expensive, I have not regretted my decision at all about returning" (Kazem 35:M).

UK diasporans who felt frustrated by the lack of professional opportunities available to them in the UK, found the opportunity to professionally thrive in

Kurdistan, especially those who had a British education and could speak English well. Sarvin, when asked why he returned, replied:

“It is an easy answer. The reason I returned back to Kurdistan, was job security and prospects, I have a job in an Educational department that I would never have got in England. Executive and professional jobs are easier to attain in Kurdistan than back in the UK, there are not as many people applying for the same positions, the job pool is larger. As soon as I finished my teacher training in England I saw jobs advertised in Kurdish schools, there is a high demand for teachers who have trained in the UK, as the UK is considered to have the best education system in the world. As more international businesses are based in Kurdistan, educational establishments are looking for Kurdish people who have trained in the west” (Sarvin 27:F).

Returnees felt a sense of worth, that in returning they were contributing to their country of origin. Others felt guilty for leaving their family and Kurdistan, and saw returning with skills and knowledge as a way of atoning for their ‘desertion’, as Kadir said:

“I felt guilty leaving my family and my homeland in a time when they needed people to help in building the region, I felt I had deserted my homeland, but I know I can make a difference there, my education will bring skills needed especially in the banking system” (Kadir 30:M).

Some respondents felt that there was too much pressure in the UK with increases in the cost of living, and this caused anxiety with some, at times leading to mental health problems. With no immediate support due to being separated from family, the solution was to return. Araz explained:

“The UK is so expensive, you work all the time and don’t get very far in paying the bills. It is so hard, I became ill with worry, and when my cousins told me that I did not have to pay any sort of tax in Kurdistan I went back for a visit to see if I would like to live there. I have been here for four years now, life is more manageable, I work hard but I feel I have money in my pocket, I don’t worry about bills all the time” (Araz 28:M).

Araz acknowledges that life is easier in Kurdistan compared to that of the UK, and that financially he can manage. Some respondents made reference to the fact that they had an element of control in their lives, where as in the West they were controlled by the demands of the everyday cost of living. He continues:

“In the UK everything has got out of control, petrol seems to go up every week. Sometimes I would have to think, “Do I need to make certain journeys?” Money governs you, that is not the case here, I can take more control over what I do, and not the money” (Araz 28:M).

7.2.2 Return through family

For some diasporas the pressure to return came from their own families to take on responsibilities to support a family run business, or elderly relatives left behind. Marriage was also a return factor with many respondents having arranged family or tribal marriages. The pull of the family network was stronger than the desire to stay in a country with few family obligations. Khalil had to return to his homeland when his older brother could no longer look after the family business:

“I did not really want to go back home but I had to help my brother. His children are too young to help him, there is only me, I am the youngest so I have now to work in the family factory, it is my duty and responsibility [...] My family have found a wife for me, I have to do this it is my

responsibility, I do not want to bring shame on them”
(Khalil 35:M).

Returning to Kurdistan was often influenced by family members, however the responsibility and obligations faced by many respondents to do ‘the right thing’ caused many personal dilemmas. Adnan recounts how he met his wife, and being bound by family obligation and duty, decided to stay in Kurdistan:

“I went to Erbil for a family wedding, I meet and fell in love with Sophia who is now my wife. Sophia’s family didn’t want her to go to the UK, so I decided that I would stay. It was a hard decision for me to make but my family and Sophia’s wanted us to stay and make our life in Kurdistan. I have set up a business here, which is doing very well, I don’t think I would have had the same opportunity in Plymouth. It is definitely easier in Kurdistan for me, staying was the right decision” (Adnan 29:M).

Through Adnan’s decision to stay he recognised that he had an opportunity of starting a new life, an opportunity that was not available to him in Plymouth. Sami another Kurdish diasporan had his life interrupted in the UK when he had to go back to Kurdistan and take on family obligations after a family bereavement. He too saw the experience as a positive factor in return:

“When my father died I went back to Kurdistan, everyone was so kind and supportive, I felt I had a real connection, it was different to being back in England, I had a real rooted experience. As the only son I had to stay and look after my mother and youngest sister, it was a hard decision to make, but sometimes you have to respond to your family obligations, sometimes blood is stronger than your own wants” (Barwan 33:M).

However not all respondents like Adnan and Barwan were happy with family decisions to return. Many women found it particularly difficult to settle back in

Kurdistan, and many wanted to return back to their host countries where there was equality in the gender roles, and women had independence and greater opportunities to succeed. Ronia shared her concerns and her hopes that she will return to Plymouth:

“Mom and Dad said I had to go back with them as I was too young to be left in England; I didn’t want to go to Kurdistan. Being a woman is so difficult here you don’t have the freedom that you do in England, as soon as I am old enough I will return back to England. I haven’t made many friends here [in Kurdistan] because I feel I am different to the others, I really miss my friends in Plymouth” (Ronia 18:F).

This was an almost universal feeling amongst younger women returnees, who were pressured by the family to return home, or were too young to be left in the UK. Though women’s rights have improved significantly in Kurdistan with many women working, there is still a large gap with western and Kurdish gender roles. Many women marry and raise a family with no career aspirations, and this can cause internal conflict within the family unit. Barin tells of the frustration she felt with not having the independence in Kurdistan that she had enjoyed in Plymouth:

“I was worried when my husband told me we were going home, life for women in Kurdistan is not the same as it is in the west, there is no expectation other than getting married and looking after the home. I had some independence in Plymouth. I know it was only a part time job in a shop, but I earned and it made me feel good that I too was contributing to the family household. My husband says it will look bad for us if I work in Kurdistan, but I feel bad not working, I feel like a caged bird who once tasted the air but can only look at others from behind the bars” (Barin 30:F).

Women returning from the west faced many challenges – not just the gender stereotyping – but pressure from relatives to conform to certain norms of Kurdish ‘womanness’, under the traditional family matriarch hierarchy. Respondents who had lived in the west for an extended period of time found the family interference particularly difficult, an intrusion into marriage and family life that they resented, in their host country they were not bound to such norms. Asmer tells of the heartache and loneliness she felt on returning to Kurdistan, as she found it difficult to re-establish her life within her family circle and the disconnection she felt from her extended family:

“I know my mother in law was trying to help me, but it felt like she was criticising everything, the way I looked after my children and husband, my house. Everything I did was wrong, or she would make a joke saying “was that the British way?” Inside I was screaming, but I could not tell her that I hated what she was doing to my family, the way she always undermined me. My husband and I would argue a lot about it, but he would not stand up for me. I am so unhappy I just want to go back to England, but I can’t go by myself and I can’t leave my children” (Asmer 33:F).

This sense of helpless desperation is also voiced from Donya, a second-generation diasporan who followed her husband to Kurdistan.

“I did the right thing, I went with my husband and family back to Erbil. I know many husbands commute to and from Kurdistan and the UK, but I wanted us to be a complete family. It has been awful, my husband’s family are so critical of how I run my home, even my children. It is particularly hard when my husband travels for work, I feel I am in prison, I hate it” (Donya 27:F).

Many Kurdish women like Donya enjoyed a different family life in their diaspora host country, where family life was less complicated and greater intimacy grew between husband and wife, as there was no direct interference from the

extended family. Their return to a more traditional Kurdish family life brought to many diaspora women unhappiness and difficulty in settling into a different way of life.

7.2.3 Self-return

Between 2004-2012, the biggest return factor was the change in the political and economic situation of Southern Kurdistan. Respondents felt that it was a safe place to go back to, with increased security and stability in the country of origin. It had become a more attractive place to live without the worry and threat of violence against them, which respondents or their families had been exposed to for a prolonged period of time. With the region being secure it encouraged outside international and diaspora investors to set up businesses in Kurdistan, and this in turn has had a major impact on the economy, which saw an enormous boost in income. Business opportunities were numerous, and land was given by the KRG to individuals who had business plans. This period of time was economically vibrant with the opportunity of buying land, building homes and setting up new businesses.

Many diasporans wanted to make a positive contribution to the redevelopment of Kurdistan, using the skills and knowledge learnt in the host country, and they viewed this as an exciting opportunity to bring about a platform for change. Having being exposed and assimilated in very different environments in the host country had expanded the diasporans' viewpoints, which they hoped would change wider society. They were often supported by family members who were benefiting from the booming economy and offering employment in the family business. Dara explains why he left England:

“When I finished University I went to Kurdistan, I wanted to be part of the new generation of people to develop Kurdistan to the place it should be. All my life I have heard stories from my parents and my cousins, what an amazing place it is. My cousin offered me a job, which I took. I feel a sense of pride that I have brought to Kurdistan skills and knowledge gained in England” (Delawer 25:M).

There are many other diasporans like Delawer who recognised the opportunities of returning, not just as personal gain, but in supporting their families and taking a proactive stance in the redevelopment of Kurdistan. This sense of nationalistic pride is supported by the KRG. A number of Kurdish diaspora returnees are intensely involved with politics and development in south Kurdistan, with many people both in the KRG and political scene having dual lives, with homes both in south Kurdistan and in the West. Returning to south Kurdistan is often seen as an opportunity to be close to family and work within their field of expertise, which sometimes is difficult to achieve in the UK or other western countries.

7.2.4 Aspiration to return

Whilst some returnees found adjustment to life in Kurdistan difficult, other respondents in Britain maintained aspirations to go back to their country of origin. Loneliness, separation from family and friends, the feeling of exclusion and lack of self-worth, the absence of valuable employment, and the recession in the West, were all contributing factors to the aspiration to return. Suzan explained why she wants to go back home:

“I miss home so much, my family and friends, the town I lived in. My family are missing the children growing up, and my children are missing out on their heritage. Things have changed so much, my husband says he is happy in Plymouth and Kurdistan is a good place to visit but not to live in, but I still hope that one day he will change his mind and we can live there permanently” (Suzan 39:F).

The feeling of ‘missing out on heritage’ is a consistent feeling of diaspora children. Some second and third generation young people explained that they wanted to connect to their homeland and their aspiration to return has been supported by social media. Stories told by their parents, grandparents and extended family in Kurdistan, and supplementary Sunday school – which explores the Kurdish language, heritage and culture for diaspora children – have all contributed to supporting some respondents in being fiercely proud and having a nationalistic outlook, as Warvan told:

“I love hearing stories from my Mum and Dad about Kurdistan, I look on the internet about places there, it looks so beautiful. As soon as I have left university I will definitely go there to see if I can get a job. I have lots of family there who would help me, it is my dream.” (Warvan 19:M).

Warvan express his desire to live life in Kurdistan, and his support network to help realise his aspirations. The majority of respondents, when questioned, had family support in either employment or accommodation, with a large proportion working for the KRG:

“When my lecturer asked what do I want to do when I leave university, I say I want to go to my homeland Kurdistan, I want to help develop it, make it an independent state, a great nation, I am Kurdish and proud of it” (Warvan 19:M).

7.2.5 Between dreams and reality

Many Kurds in diaspora often dreamed about returning to their homeland of Kurdistan, particularly among the first generation, although they were not always certain when they could return permanently. However, Alinia and Eliassi (2014) have emphasised that, “the dream of return seems to be as existential for them as the creation of a home (land) is here and now for the young generation” (79). The dream of return to Kurdistan was discovered in this research to be not only with the first generation but also among the second and third generation Kurds who were raised and grew up in the UK. Kamal stated his experiences that:

“It is strange, I wanted so much to go to England, I heard that life was good there, it was safe and a place where there were many opportunities. When I arrived in England it was not like I thought it would be. It took a long time to get to know people, I felt that a lot of people didn’t like me

being there, in the papers there was something all the time about migrants. It was difficult to get a good job, there were plenty of jobs in take-aways and car washes, everything was too expensive as well. So I made the decision to go back to Kurdistan, my family said I could go and work in the family business. I have been here nearly two years, and I don't feel that I belong - I think I have become too westernised – I say things and people disagree with me or I disagree with what they are saying. I miss England, I want to go back, but I know I will still feel that I don't fit in, I don't know where I belong really” (Kamal 29:M).

Kamal talks about the alienation he feels in both the host and country of origin, and of not belonging to either. For some respondents this was a shared experience, where the long-held dream of going back to the motherland did not match the reality of life once there. Some returnees felt disappointed, while others felt betrayed by family or friends, or even the political system that painted a picture which was biased, and in some cases a total distortion of the truth. Rizgar articulates how he felt:

“For so long I dreamt about what life was going to be like back home (Kurdistan). My family and friends told me things had changed so much, I know it was safer, they told me the standard of living was good and attitudes had really changed. There was growth and a good standard of living, it sounded great, I was so excited [...] Things were not how everyone said it would be, to find a place to live is so expensive. There are not plenty of jobs, and the way of thinking for many people hasn't changed either, I feel I have been cheated and lied to, this is not what I expected” (Rizgar 44:M).

Rizgar was not the only respondent who saw a disparity between the dream and reality of return. Hajeen, a second-generation diasporan, recounts the resentment and the prejudice she experienced on her return:

“I had a dream for so long to go back to my homeland, to see where my ancestors came from, I heard that it was a beautiful country and there were many opportunities there. But when I arrived the stories I heard were all wrong, there were no opportunities and I would never be able to buy a house as land was too expensive. I felt that people resented me because I grew up in the West, the dream did not match the reality. I felt I had been lied to cheated” (Hajeen 20:F).

The disappointment felt was especially true for second and third generation diasporans, who enjoyed the cultural variety and freedom that the UK offered, the gap between the two countries was apparent and stories they heard from their families had a biased stance. Ronia explains how her excitement was short lived:

“When my family returned to Kurdistan I was so excited I had read so much and saw lots on TV about Kurdistan, how it was our motherland, my Father spoke about it as the Promised Land. It was very different from how I imagined it to be when we arrived. There really wasn't much for young people to do, in Plymouth I would go out for coffee, but here there is nowhere to go. This is not the Promised Land for me” (Ronja 18:F).

There was acknowledgement from some respondents that life in Kurdistan had indeed improved, in regards to women and children's rights, and a growing economy. However, things were slow, particularly on the political scene, and impatience was evident that the dream of a better society was far from complete. Delawar explained:

“You take things for granted in the UK, simple things like electricity the health care, the choice of things to buy in the supermarkets and the transport system, it really has taken me a long time to get used to Kurdistan. I know parties are trying to work hard for positive change, but things take so long, my dream of a better Kurdistan is only partly there” (Delawar 25:M).

7.3 The positive and negative experience of return

During the first year of return, the majority of Kurdish returnees faced many problems in readjusting. This was especially related to family conflicts and weak interactions with the non-returnee population of the country. Male returnees had more political challenges than female returnees; on the other hand male returnees suffered less socio-cultural related adjustment problems than female returnees did.

When living in the UK, Kurds in diaspora encountered a totally new environment. Regardless of positive or negative challenges, the diasporans could identify problems and perhaps adjust to them over a period of time. On return to Southern Kurdistan they were supposed to fit in and not act as aliens, however when Kurdish diaspora returnees come back to south Kurdistan they encounter diverse and complex challenges. The degree of the challenges should, therefore, be seen in terms of the frictions between the past experiences and the situations returnees encounter in South Kurdistan.

A considerable amount of Kurdish returnees are not only surprised, but also bewildered about the changes they see in south Kurdistan, not only in the physical infrastructure but also socio-economic situation or in some cases a lack of change. This is particularly true for Kurdish returnees, who left south Kurdistan at an early age or were born in western countries as second generation Kurds, the return experience could be almost identical to that of an immigrant population leaving the home country for another country to settle in. An extended time of absence makes Kurdish returnees lose their memories or give distorted ones of Kurdistan, regardless of how many relatives are living with them in diaspora to assist with relocation. Due to the extended periods of

absence from the homeland, friends and relatives may have moved on or died, and familiar landmarks been taken down or redeveloped.

Education and skill building are an investment in human capital, and the outcomes will usually not be noticeable within a short phase of time. Some Kurdish returnees assimilated skills during their diaspora experience, and they continuously increased their level of education. The Kurdish returnees who gained a higher standard of education faced less readjustment challenges than those with lower standards of education, because of their exposure to fast growing technological changes. Those diaspora who made frequent trips to South Kurdistan had a higher success rate of resettlement compared to those who visited occasionally or not at all, their successful transition was accelerated and a smoother process, due to knowledge and workings of what was happening in the country. I have found that frequent trips to South Kurdistan have had positive and strong connections with returnees' successful settlement. Respondents' experiences of return were mixed, especially in the time of adjustment. The adjustment of returnees depended on their ability to live in an alien environment participating in the system and also in challenging the impediments that could prevent them from being a part of the system (Smith 1982). Diasporans who had spent the longest time in their host country found readjusting the hardest. King and Christou (2010) explore the connection of the journey into spaces of selfhood in a place of return. Aziz explains why initially returning was a positive experience with the reconnection of family and friends and the feeling of belonging that he did not experience in Plymouth, however as life became more routine the reality of day-to-day living became apparent, with a lack of choices and family expectations to resume his former life before diaspora, the pressures become too intense:

“Life in Plymouth was OK but I did feel that there was something missing, I felt I didn't really fit in though there is a large Kurdish community there. When I went back to Kurdistan to live I instantly fitted in, I was invited to so many people's houses to eat, I felt really valued that I belonged. As time when on it began to change, and though I still went to friends and families houses, life

became routine and I started missing my life in Devon, the freedom and the freedom of choice, doing things for me and not because it was expected of the family. The banking system wants to make me shout, it is so slow and there is just not the choice here that there is in England. I feel expectations here are too high, I can't be myself, I have to be Kurdish first and do what the family tell me to" (Aziz 29:M).

For many diaspora the realities of living with services that are inadequate, compared to those of the West, proved challenging. Health care, education, and amenity supplies gave cause for concern and frustration. Some respondents stated that though they had no professional status, they enjoyed in the West services that were excellent compared to that of Kurdistan, especially health care and education. They also said that administration in the UK, especially that of banking, was well organised, the systems in Kurdistan made life difficult and simple tasks became laborious and time consuming. Kazem explained that:

"I enjoy being back with my family in my country again, but I didn't realize how bad the administration system was here, it hits you when you leave and go to a country that is so totally different. I don't know whether I will get used to it, I will just have to wait and see" (Kazem 35:M).

Kazem voices his frustration of the internal workings of the region, and is unsure whether he can adjust to it. However, these frustrations were often overlooked by respondents who said that the social interaction and belonging to a culture that understood them far outweighed the internal annoyances. This was especially true of those respondents who felt isolated or marginalised in their host country, or individuals who found life isolating being away from their extended families. Ronak explained that she receives additional support from her family and has found this particularly helpful, as she has been struggling with her new baby:

“I am so glad we have moved back to Kurdistan, my sister lives nearby and my husband’s mother lives with us, this has been such a big help, I have not been well after the birth of my second child. I know in Plymouth the health care was very good, but you need more than that, you need help and support from your family too, and that I did not get in Plymouth” (Ronak 29:F).

The recurring theme amongst respondents who returned to their country of origin was that of belonging and the feeling of isolation in the host country, their transition between the two countries and cultures was eased by family support. Karima underlines the fact that for her, the problems that she encountered in Kurdistan were bearable with her support network:

“I love being back in Kurdistan, being with the people I grew up with and my family. It is even better since Saddam’s downfall, it is a good place to live. Living in Britain was hard, I did feel lonely and sometimes people were racist towards me, but there is none of that here. I am not saying there are no problems, but when you are with people who understand and love you, problems can be faced, so returning was definitely the right decision for me” (Karima 31:F).

The sense of belonging for returnee diasporans was a motivator in return and made a significant impact on an individual’s wellness, knowing that others empathised with them. The lack of belonging in their host country created isolation and separation from their local environment. Ayub explains how he feels happy and fulfilled and how the anxiety he experienced has ceased:

“I had no purpose in Plymouth, I worked in my friends’ take-aways, I knew I could do so much more, I had dreams and aspirations, it all got too much for me. The doctor said I was suffering from anxiety. It was a big

decision to go to Kurdistan, but it was a good one, I feel at peace with myself now” (Ayub 22:M).

Ayub is a second-generation diasporan who experienced extreme anxiety in his host country. His levels of anxiety grew when he could not get a job that fulfilled him, he felt he had no status, purpose, or direction, he felt marginalised by his peers who did not seem to empathise with him, and pressured by his family to return back to Kurdistan. Ayub eventually returned, where he got a job in a local school using his skills and knowledge, and gained status and recognition in the local community.

7.4 Future plans in the host country

Many first generation Kurds living in Devon arrived in diaspora single, and after many years of exile they returned to Kurdistan with the intention to marry, with plans to bring their spouse to the host country for settlement. Many individual participants in this study highlighted their plans for the future, a future plan in their host country in case return remained impossible, and plans for the place of departure.

Diasporans in the UK had future plans for Kurdistan – if not for themselves, then for their children – these hopes included independence. The reality of return seemed to hinge on the independence question, and independence seemed to be a driver. Some acknowledged that the probability of independence would not happen in their lifetime, but remained optimistic for the future. Taher a first generation diasporan outlines his hopes:

“For the future I hope that Kurdistan would be an independent state, then I would go back, but I don’t really think it will happen in my lifetime. So I will do the best I can for my new homeland Britain, and be a good citizen and do what I can here” (Taher 53:M).

For some respondents the dream and reality of return did not match up to expectations. Long-held dreams and aspirations of returning to a mythical

motherland underpinned by family members, and social media portraying Kurdistan as a utopia, left some respondents feeling deflated and bewildered. There appears to be an acknowledgement that time spent in the host country should be spent wisely with a commitment to education and getting a good job, but not all diasporans had the desire to permanently go back. Yassien stated that:

“I really want to make the best use of my time here and get a good education, go to university, and get a good job. At the moment I don’t have any plans to return, but no one really knows what is really going to happen in the future” (Yassien 23:M).

These feelings were not just felt by individual diasporas, Omar details his hope for his children’s future, where retaining their Kurdish heritage and identity was important, but he had no desire to return to the country of origin on a permanent basis. Instead he envisaged a transient life, passing from one country to another, being a ‘diaspora tourist’:

“I want my children to have a good education, even go to university if they want to. I want my daughters to get good jobs and do more than I did with my life, and it is important that my children know the Kurdish way of life, the customs and cultures. So I want us all to go back home at least once a year to celebrate our traditional festivals like Newroz” (Omar 48:M).

Participants in diaspora identified the importance of their children succeeding and doing well. Omar wants his children to benefit from the opportunities that were not available to him, however it is important to him that Kurdish customs and heritage are remembered and practised, reinforcing the Kurdish way of life. The term ‘diaspora tourist’ refers to a tourist vocation in which members of a diasporic group return to their family homelands in search of personal and cultural heritage. This is accomplished in a manner that reflects a sense of personalised belonging and connectivity.

Many first generation diaspora want to return to Kurdistan, but they also want to establish a life in the host country. Some Kurds wish to take advantage of their lives in diaspora, in order to further professional and personal goals that are related to their place of return. Some studies argue that it is possible to understand the new arrivals and first generation life in diaspora, as a career during which they are trying to prepare themselves for their ultimate goal, which is a return to the country of origin (Lundberg 1989, Wahlbeck 1997). Wahlbeck pointed out that “many refugees spend their time studying and gaining knowledge which they can utilise after they have returned” (1997:145).

7.5 Contribution or impacts of diaspora

Diaspora groups play an important part in the facilitation of the movements of skills, capital, production and goods. Many studies have identified that the existence of a large diaspora group is very significant for growing foreign trade, investment, and the transfer of knowledge. Diaspora connections can make diaspora groups seem more appealing to those in the country of return by easing the job search, development of links to other,s and integration into the host country. Newland and Patrick (2004) have illustrated that “for many countries, diaspora are a major source of foreign direct investment (FDI), market development (including outsourcing of production), technology transfer, philanthropy, tourism, political contributions, and more tangible flows of knowledge, new attitudes, and cultural influence” (2). However, in some cases diaspora group participation could prolong conflicts. In a study made by Smith and Stares (2007), they discovered that:

“...diaspora can be both ‘peace-makers’ and ‘peace-wreckers’; they can be both at different periods and at the same time, and in order to assess their role it is necessary to understand the historical context, as well as their interests, aspirations, institutions and objectives” (cited in Hendow 2010:12).

Natali (2006) also found that the Kurdish diaspora were both ‘peace-makers’ and ‘peace-wreckers’. She shows that there were “varying diasporic roles

during different periods of the conflict cycle, some of which supported peace-making and some of which encouraged conflict” (8).

Kurds who attained high academic achievements and experience whilst in diaspora have greater opportunities in the place of departure than those who have fewer skills and knowledge. A number of high-level positions within the Kurdistan Regional Government and political parties have been held by Kurdish returnees from diaspora. Ben Porat (2011) highlighted that:

“...return diasporas can be a product of homeland’s needs and policies, this determines fluid relations between diaspora and homeland. Therefore homeland also becomes fluid by claims, reclaims or renounces the status of certain groups as its diasporas according to its changing needs and goals, thereby indicating its own fluidity” (91).

The contribution and impacts of Kurdish diaspora can be argued as a product to the Kurdistan homeland, but it is also important to note that some individual returnees become prominent in non-political fields in their place of return (Kurdistan) and have an important impact on the relationship and development of both the host country and Kurdistan. Khazal illustrated that:

“I returned to Kurdistan to be part of place recovering from tragedies and horrors that one could never imagine. I moved to Kurdistan in the spring holiday (Newroz) to see what life would be like in my homeland. I was invited to a political party meeting and after that day I was invited to be a minister within the KRG. I accepted the challenge, as I was able to contribute positively and use my skills and knowledge to great effect. I hope I have made a contribution to Kurdistan” (Khazal 35:F).

Khazal, having gained professional status in the diasporic host country believes she can be part of the changing process, part of the new body of young professionals returning to homeland and contributing to the redevelopment of the new Kurdistan. Hawkar, another diasporic professional, explains that for him return is not just about getting professional recognition, but the nationalistic

pride and reconnection to his heritage and his part in being proactive in the development of the region:

“I decided to return initially due to the fact I always had a nationalistic attraction to Kurdistan. I want to make a serious effort to be part of the development. Kurdistan has become the focus of world attention and will be so for the next few decades. We will be experiencing huge changes in the region – it makes sense that the people of Kurdistan will benefit from these opportunities and work positively in being part of this development. When I got a job as president of a university in Kurdistan, I knew I had to accept it due to my skills and political arena, but also to connect with my roots. My return is related to my political and professional career but more importantly, to serve and contribute to the development of Kurdistan” (Hawkar 46:M).

Experiences gained in the diaspora are important to the development of the political and professional arena, as such skills are not readily available in Kurdistan. From the perspective of the KRG, certain experience and skills are required to contribute within the redevelopment of the region. Diasporans who remember their experiences have an interest in returning to support the development of their country and actively help people who remained in the Kurdish homeland.

Many diasporans have also contributed to families left in Kurdistan by sending money to support businesses, education and building property. Medication and other merchandise which is hard to come by, or of an inferior quality, have been sent to Kurdistan by diasporans, and they see this as supporting their families and their country by injecting cash into the economy and thus supporting indirectly the redevelopment of the region. Said says:

“I try to help out as much as I can, I send money back to my family and sometimes I buy medical items such as

blood pressure monitors these, things are hard to come by in Kurdistan” (Said 37:M).

Omar also stated:

“The quality of clothes and toiletries is not very good in Kurdistan so when I visit I try and buy toothpaste, and make up also things like paracetamol for my nephews and nieces, they love it when I return” (Omar 48:M).

Money was not the only contribution made by diasporans; many respondents gave their time and skills when visiting Kurdistan, as they saw their education as a valuable resource and asset. Nazdar, a teacher in the UK who visits Kurdistan in the holidays, values her visits there and the contribution she feels she makes:

“I try to use my education as much as I can to help my country especially in the higher education departments. Resources are limited and sometimes things can be a little out-dated, I feel I make a real contribution and am proud of what I do” (Nazdar 25:F).

Sania also feels she has made a positive contribution as a role model. She hopes that her life in the UK will impact on the girls in the local school she visits:

“When I go back I am always asked to give English lessons in the local school, the kids love it and the stories I have to tell them. I think I have inspired some of them, especially the girls as I am a woman” (Sania 29:F).

This cultural exchange of ideas is seen by many diasporans as a way of forging change, they see that being immersed in the West has given them the ability to have a wider outlook on many aspects of society. Hawkar feels that living in the UK has given him an advantage in seeing beyond his own sphere:

“Definitely living in the UK has given me a broader political outlook, I try to see things more objectively, when I lived in Kurdistan I saw things from a very biased narrow way, the information and knowledge I have learnt from western politics can definitely help the political scene in Kurdistan” (Hawkar 46:M).

The impact of return is seen not just economically, but socially. Diasporas have informal and formal experiences and knowledge (Emanuelsson 2008), and when returning they do so with different informed cultural norms and values acquired in their host country, in particular, attitudes towards women and children. Many respondents felt awkward within family situations where social norms of the West were not met in their country of origin. Warvan, a second generation diasporan points out that hitting children as a punishment is not an accepted norm in the West, and how his change in values might have a chain-reaction with his brother:

“My family was surprised when I returned, as I picked up some British ways and manners. We never say please or thank you in the Middle East, but in Britain most people do. I also found it hard when my brother would hit his children, I was uncomfortable, I explained that you could not do that in Britain, that the police would be called, they laughed at me, but I think they thought about it, I have noticed my brother does not hit the children so much especially when I am around. I think that other Kurdish people returning will do the same, all these little changes make for bigger changes” (Warvan 19:M).

Warvan believes that small changes will eventually lead to bigger ones; many diasporans are met with suspicion because they return with different mind-sets. Family, friends and work colleagues can often challenge these new ideals. Neyaz tells of his experience setting up his new business:

“Since returning I have started my own business as a business and office management consultant. The west are very advanced in office administration and in how to make things easier and more efficient in running a successful business. At first people were suspicious of me, but when they saw what sense it made they were supportive. I am glad I went to the UK, I feel I have brought some really useful knowledge back to help my country” (Neyaz 29:M).

Despite the challenges Neyaz met with at first, introducing new ideas perceived as westernised by his work colleagues, there was an engagement by the diaspora and the host on both supporting expansive change.

Returnees brought back knowledge and resources that could socially and economically make a difference. Befreen, who trained as a nurse in the UK hopes to set up breast awareness clinics in the regions’ hospitals; she wants to break through the cultural barrier and taboo of discussing intimate health matters which exist and makes such work difficult:

“I have tried to explain to my Mum the importance of checking her breasts for lumps. At first she would not talk about it, she got cross and embarrassed with me. I said that in England there were many well women which encourage you to check so to catch any cancer early. I think it is sad that our culture should not talk about these things, they can really save your life, I am trying to start up a clinic at the hospital” (Befreen 32:F).

Befreen is making an impact on social values and recognises that a change of mind-set is required, enabling a proactive stance on preventative checks. Many diaspora families are proud of their children and want them to succeed in higher education and bring those skills, abilities, and knowledge back home to Kurdistan. Rashid recognises the importance of the education he received in the host country and the impact and contribution this could bring to his country of heritage:

“My family are proud of me for having gained a good education in the UK and now teaching at the university, I know the things I have learnt in the UK will be really important in developing students who want to make a real difference in the country’s development. I have a wider outlook on world politics now and how positive infrastructures really help to boost economies” (Rashid 22:M).

7.6 Temporary return

Disappointment and disillusionment for returnees to the country of origin led some respondents to stay in Kurdistan on a temporary basis, visiting and/or commuting to Kurdistan, but having a permanent base in the UK. For some respondents this was the only way of successfully combining both worlds. Many women were reluctant to return on a permanent basis, enjoying greater independence in the West and less family interference, while families with children at school in the UK often did not want to interrupt education. Many returnee diaspora have temporary contracts with the shift in the economy in Kurdistan, and better healthcare and services in the west. Barzan tells why he returns to Kurdistan on a temporary basis:

“I have temporary work in Soran University, when I have completed the contract I will return home to Plymouth. My wife doesn’t want to live in Kurdistan, she says life is better in Plymouth and the children are in school as well. I have the best of both worlds, temporarily working and living in Kurdistan, and living most of the time in the UK, keeping the whole family happy” (Barzan 28:M).

For many diasporans, the importance of visiting family and friends and keeping family connections was of immense importance, and a clear reoccurring theme in the respondents’ answers of temporary return. Many diasporans were concerned at losing connectivity with family groups and Kurdish culture, and wanted their children to have a sense of belonging to their motherland. Taher explained why it is important for his children to stay connected with the family:

“...we go back to Kurdistan to visit twice a year always for Newroz. I want the children to know what our culture is about, only if you breathe the air and see and taste what is around you will you learn. It is also important to stay with our family and see our relatives, the children might not know them if we don't go back” (Taher 53:M).

Shilan, another temporary return diasporan, tells how his home is in the UK and how he has adopted a new cultural identity:

“It's great visiting my family and friends in Kurdistan, but I could never live there again, England is my home now. I am Kurdish-British, I don't think in the Kurdish way, I prefer to be Westernised. I know this hurts my parents, but it is how I feel” (Shilan 29:F).

The region's security and protection from ISIS for some were also reasons of temporary return, with special allegiance to family members who had been involved in many wars and conflicts that have shaped Kurdistan. Harem explained that:

“As soon as the war with ISIS is won I will return home to England, I don't see me living forever here, I just want to protect my homeland and my people. My grandparents have put up with so much, with brutal regimes in the past, it is not going to happen again.” (Harem 26:M).

Harem identifies that as soon as the war with ISIS is won he will return to the UK. The reality is that it might take some time, but the intention is still to do so, his motivation of temporary return was loyalty to his family and motherland.

7.7 Return diaspora to diaspora

The term of 'diaspora to diaspora return' is used to understand how the experiences of living at the place of return, and to discover why return diaspora

make the decision to return back to the diaspora life. The term 'diaspora to diaspora' refers to people that have gone through double diaspora life experiences. Tölölyan (1996) emphasises that diasporic people, "turn and return" toward the homeland while recognizing that they maintain dynamic attachments to both homeland and host land. The major reason behind the returnees in Kurdistan to return back to diaspora life was sustainability and security of the region, although the recent consequences of the Kurdish political crisis among the Kurdish parties and the relationship with the central Iraqi government has damaged the economic situation in Kurdistan. Azet gives the reasons why he wants to return to the UK:

"I returned to the UK because Kurdistan is not safe anymore. I brought my family with me, I would worry about them too much there, it is not just the threat of ISIS, but also the increasing living costs there. I also worry about the political parties, everyone has an agenda in Kurdistan, it does not seem a stable environment to raise a family" (Azet 33:M).

For some respondents the decision to return to their host country was initially driven by outside factors beyond their control, but precipitated the desire to return. The lack of quality education, inadequate health care, and poor infrastructures were some of many reasons given by respondents for returning back to their host countries. Karwan explained:

"I thought life in England was expensive, that's the reason we returned back to Kurdistan, but the wages are low in Kurdistan, they do not pay professionals what they are worth, buying and renting houses is expensive too. It has become difficult to maintain a good standard of living in Kurdistan that's why I returned back to the UK" (Karwan 38:M).

While Karwan cites the cost of living as a reason for return, he has concerns over his children's education and welfare in Kurdistan, as well as the teachers'

influence. In a culture that places great emphasis on education, Karwan feels his children will benefit from education in the UK:

“I am not happy with the education my children were receiving, I know things have changed greatly but the way some of the teachers treat the children is wrong and the resources are so limited. I think a good education is really important for everyone, and it is my responsibility to make sure my children have the best, that’s why we returned back to Plymouth. When my children are older they can make the decision for themselves to return or not” (Karwan 38:M).

Avin was forced to return to Europe when the international company she worked for relocated. With the changing security implication and lack of well-paid employment Avin felt she had no choice in the decision to re-return to diaspora life:

“The European company I work with was leaving Kurdistan, they felt it is no longer safe or sustainable there, that brought me problems, if I wanted to work with them I would have to return back to the UK. I needed a good job, things are changing in Kurdistan and not for the better” (Avin 27:F).

Avin also returned to her diaspora country, she wanted to contribute to the new Kurdistan but when she arrived she met limitations in employment prospects. Samira also faced considerable pressure from her family to get married in the traditional way, and thus felt that the only way open to her was to return to the UK:

“As a woman I don’t have a chance to live the life I want in Kurdistan, it is all about the man and what he wants. I couldn’t get the job I wanted even though I have a degree, and I know the family really wanted me to get married to

someone of their choice. I am now back in Plymouth and live my own life, I have the job I love and one day I will choose my husband, I know this is going to cause problems in the family, but that is just way it is” (Samira 23:F).

Mevan, on return to Kurdistan experienced a different family and social demand placed on him, that of joining the army. The threat of ISIS has meant that many Kurdish men in diaspora have expectations placed on them to join the army; this is not just from their families, but also from the wider society. For many respondents this meant returning to the diaspora host country:

“Things were getting very difficult in Kurdistan, I no longer felt safe. My family were putting a lot of pressure on me to join the army, I didn’t want to. I returned to the UK because it is safe and I have freedom of choice, I feel so guilty but I have to be true to myself” (Mevan 26:M).

Many respondents had an internal conflict regarding change. Their traditional norms and values had changed in the diaspora host country, and when returning to the country of origin they felt alienated from what they once believed in. This was a motivator for diaspora to diaspora return. Goran tells how he tried to settle down in Kurdistan, but he could not conform and live the life expected of him:

“I have tried living again in Kurdistan, but the security and sustainability of the region changed after the threat of ISIS, we made a decision to return back to Plymouth. I know some people return to fight against ISIS to protect Kurdistan, but I have no choice but to save my family and return to Plymouth. There were so many challenges that we can’t cope with rather than re-return back to the UK” (Goran 30:M).

Goran put the safety of his family as being of central importance in making the decision to return to diaspora life.

7.8 Safety and security

This feeling of duty and responsibility for the family is not the only returnee motivator. With the recent increasing threat of ISIS, some respondents wanted to return home to protect their family and homeland. However, the last waves of Kurdish diasporas to return to south Kurdistan have been individuals wanting to protect the Kurdish homeland and fight side-by-side with the Peshmerga (armed forces of Kurdistan) against Islamic State (al-Dawlah al-Islamiyah – frequently called ISIS or ISIL). This was particularly apparent with second-generation diaspora who had strong nationalist feelings, like Kawani who recently returned to South Kurdistan (figure 7.2):

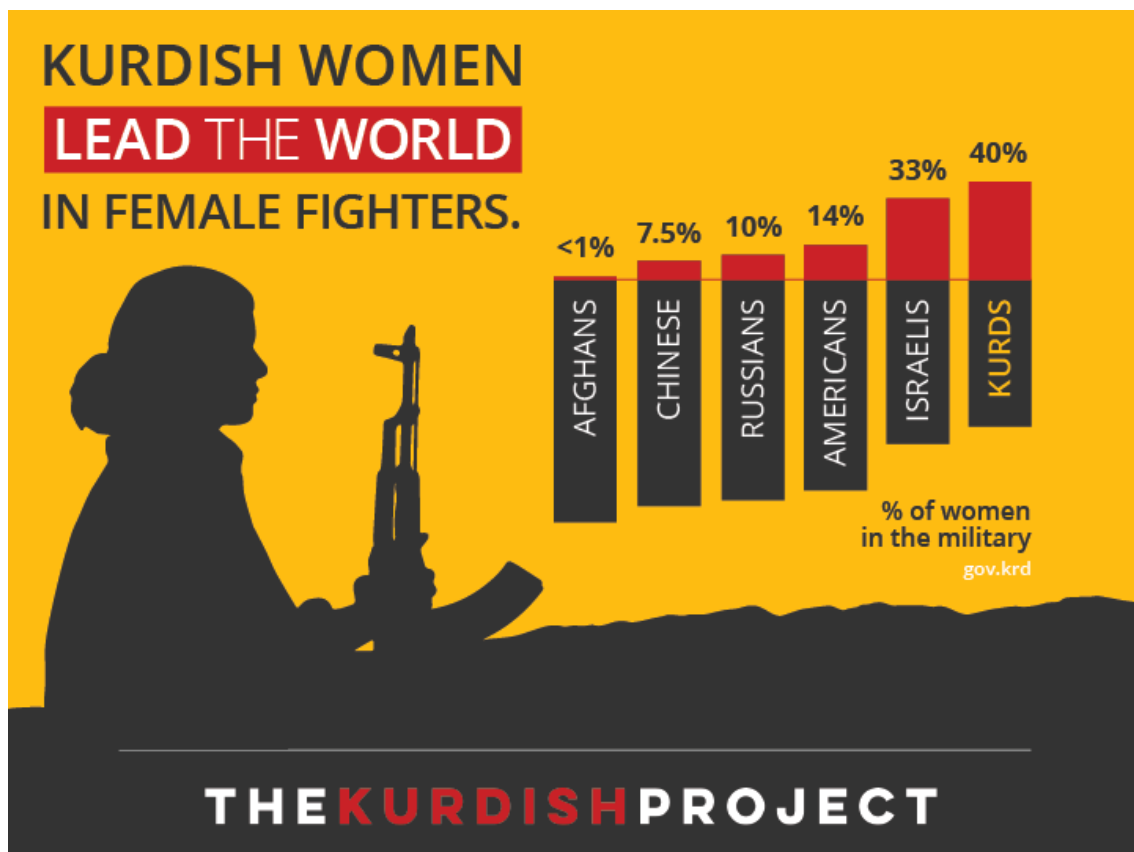


Figure 7.2 The Kurdish Project

“I have been in the UK since 1988, I was a member of the Peshmerga before I arrived in the UK, I was fighting against the Saddam Hussein Baathist regime. I am so happy now I am back with the Peshmerga. I returned to support my

brother and sister, and also it is our duty to protect the Kurdish land from terrorists or any enemies” (Kawani 55:M).

Chiya, who has lived in the UK for more than two decades, believes that the Kurdish returnee diaspora have increased due to those who want to support their homeland’s safety and security. After a proclaimed ‘caliphate’ over part of Iraq and Syria in June 2014, several thousand people went from western countries to join terrorist activists. On the other side of the battle line, many Kurdish people, particularly second and third generation Kurdish diaspora, returned from western countries, in solidarity with the Kurdish Peshmerga in South Kurdistan, and took up arms to protect their homeland:

“I cannot stay at the home in the UK to watch the Kurdish homeland be destroyed by Da’ash and kill my family and friends in Kurdistan. I decided to return back to Kurdistan to support the Peshmerga. At least with my knowledge I can be an interpreter or publish the story of the Kurdish battles online to outsiders to let them know what is happening in the homeland of the Kurds. I believe many people like myself return back from western countries and can do much with the pen and language to support Kurdistan. We were given three days training in how to use small weapons. I am so proud of the Kurdish Peshmerga as they have got most of our territory and land back” (Rawand 25:M).

Even some of those participants who lived the majority of their adult life in western countries have returned to protect south Kurdistan. As Rawand indicated above, the Kurds’ return from diaspora will provide support through their knowledge of languages and skills to the territories of Kurdistan, regarded as an important marker of belonging. Like many of the Kurdish returnees from western countries, Rawand wants to be part of the closest thing to be proud of, what the Peshmerga achieves in the recent war against Daash or ISIL. The war against Daash articulated a greater sense of Kurdishness or Kurdayati in Kurds;

it has particularly united all the Kurdish political parties to have one army to protect Kurdish territory.

Kurdish diaspora believed that without a British or European passport their ability to eventually return to their country of resettlement became more difficult. With the security situation in south Kurdistan fragile, and the real possibility of deteriorating, the ability to return to Europe was an important consideration.

7.9 Conclusion

The theme of return is a recurring subject when interacting with Kurdish diaspora particularly with the first generations who are forcibly separated from their native Kurdistan, and who often maintain a strong desire to be reconnected with families and friends back in Kurdistan. As pointed out by King and Christou (2011), the revival of studies focusing on returnee Kurds should be explained with 're-conceptualisation' of the study of migratory phenomena through the adoption of diverse frameworks, ranging from the 'mobility prototype and the transnational approach to diaspora studies' (452).

The duration of the stay in South Kurdistan for return diaspora members was influenced by a number of factors. First, a lack of security; second, temporary employment positions; and third – perhaps the most influential – the health and education system, and a variety of urban infrastructures which are still being rebuilt in the south of Kurdistan. Without these amenities, some Kurds from diaspora expressed an unwillingness to permanently relocate themselves or their families to south of Kurdistan.

Little has been written on Kurdish returnees; most studies have focused on the Kurds while they were in diaspora. In addition, most research has been conducted in host countries, particularly in western countries, where many Kurdish diaspora settled. Ben Porat highlighted that:

“return diasporas can be a product of homeland’s needs and policies, this determines fluid relations between diaspora and homeland. Therefore homeland also becomes fluid by claims, reclaims or renounces

the status of certain groups as its diasporas according to its changing needs and goals, thereby indicating its own fluidity” (2011:91).

Information from the participants suggests that after many years of diasporic return, some of the interviewees consider the UK as their homeland. Furthermore, results have discovered that a high percentage of Kurdish returnees consider Kurdistan as the homeland. In addition, some of the returnees considered that they had ‘two homelands’, which makes difficulties essentialising concepts of diaspora and supports the intention of discourse of the Kurds as a return diaspora structured by two different homelands. Firstly the Kurdish territories where originally Kurds came from, and secondly the UK or other western countries where the proportion of the Kurds are living today. Analysing the interviewee’s accounts has revealed and acknowledged a narrative of successful integration in the UK, which has contributed to substantial feelings of belonging. The Kurds who consider Kurdistan as their homeland have expressively attached to their childhood memories, family roots and place of birth in Kurdistan. It was also discovered during the empirical research that interviewees often differentiated among the ‘new home’ and the ‘old home’, or between both territories, thus representing the complex identification processes of a return diaspora. Carter (2005) expresses a territorial analysis of a connection among the diaspora and its territories. He expresses transcending the hybrid and diaspora identities that capture the multiplicity, and indicates the geopolitics of diaspora, which helps to understand the complex and ambiguous ways in which the territory is reconfigured through transnational practices.

There are various reasons Kurdish returnees migrate back home, and these may be different from the reasons that caused them to leave home in the first place. The elements of returning are diverse, both in types and features, and can vary from simple individual concerns to those connected to the broader socio-economic and political parts of the departure and receiving territories of returnees. The causes for the majority of participants to return to Kurdistan who lived in different parts of the western countries included socioeconomic problems or matters such as unemployment and home connections, as well as reuniting with family members. Many Kurdish participant returnees discovered it

to be very difficult to settle and adjust to life in Kurdistan, particularly those who returned to the rural areas. Sardar explained:

“My family here (Kurdistan) always wanted me to be with them, so after 16 years I reunited with my family, but to be honest life here is very difficult, especially with the lack of the public services such as water, electricity, and healthcare, and the government doesn’t provide any support [...] some time I want to go back to the UK but I can’t leave my mother behind. I hope I can find a job in a big city and settle” (Sardar 39:M).

The most prominent factor that drove the majority of returnees to return to Kurdistan was the termination of the Saddam regime in 2003, and when the Prime Minister of the KRG, Nechirwan Barzani, restated his vision of being supportive of diaspora engagement in the Kurdish territory’s development, and to engage in the reconstruction process of the homeland. Since then, the Kurds in the diaspora have become dramatically associated in connecting to their states of settlement and Kurdish territory by shifting skills, capital, contacts and knowledge and “passing on concepts and values to the formerly isolated and undersupplied Kurdistan Region” (Emanuelsson 2008:24). Kurds who were living in diaspora had always hoped for an independent Kurdistan.

In analysing the returnee’s interview data transcripts, the study discovered diverse decisions to return to Kurdistan. The majority of participants expressed two or more return ideas, and so I argue that their justifications for return are diverse and at the same time complex. The complexity that was raised by most participants, was that Kurdistan has not been recognised or has independent status, and they feel that this is a threat.

The question of return for some respondents caused immense pressure living between two different cultures and belief systems, creating an environment where anxiety and depression grew. This often led to, or exacerbated, existing mental health issues, as Sarkewt explains:

“I find life here difficult, I think I have many problems with my head, I have seen too much and can't go home, but I just don't fit in here. I feel lonely, I don't have a good job, I am not using my skills, I feel trapped especially in my head, it makes me feel so bad” (Sarkewt 36:M).

Mental health issues especially depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress, are common in diaspora groups. Sarkewt's statement above explains how he feels trapped not being able to return home, yet finding integration difficult and so leading to social exclusion. The percentages of respondents who either had or have mental health problems are high.

Kurdish diasporans are a vulnerable group. For many first generation Kurds, the reasons they arrived at the host country was to flee the Baath party's brutal regime, or to escape social and economic difficulties. The experiences that they have encountered and witnessed, often the journey to the host country, separation from family, friends, and a familiar cultural environment, arriving in an alien country with a different culture, and language barriers, have all reinforced, and in some cases exacerbated, mental health problems. Respondents who were second and third generation diaspora have differing social and cultural challenges, torn identities with a dual sense of belonging, family pressures to marry or go back to look after elderly parents, help with family businesses, or join the army, and these pressures with emotions of guilt attached to return or not to return, and failed return attempts, have put increased pressure on some respondents contributing to psychological health problems.

Female diaspora returnees expressed concerns of gender stereotyping and pressures put upon them by their families to marry and conform to their homeland norms and values. For many who had experienced greater freedom of expression and opportunity in the west to lead a more independent lifestyle, the return to homeland was a traumatic and alienating experience, with feelings of suppression. This was more evident in second and third generation of diasporans who had been brought up in a western society and now had to conform to a country which did not have equal opportunities, especially in terms

of career aspirations. For some first generation female diasporans, returning to homeland was a positive experience, ending alienation from communities that they felt, whether imagined or real, excluded them. The freedom that return brought them was being part of a community where they contributed and felt valued, and had the support of the extended family network. The dichotomy of this is, for other first generation female diaspora living in the host country, that the separation from the extended family brought a new found freedom which liberated them, spending time with their husbands and bringing their children up without the influence and interference of family members.

The different experiences between first- and second-generation diaspora was evident and influenced the intention and decision to return. The second generation-diasporans who grew up in the West had different aspirations to those of the first generation. For some, allegiance to the homeland was influenced by social media, with increased patriotism and a desire to contribute to the social and economic redevelopment of Kurdistan, and some respondents wanting to return to fight against ISIS, and the hope that one day Kurdistan would be an independent state. For other second-generation diasporans, the situation of the economy, education system, health provision and the infrastructure with political instability and increased vulnerability of safety and security of the region, gave cause for concern and reasons not to return on a permanent basis. Some second-generation respondents concurred that visiting on a regular basis was important to them and their children, but living in Kurdistan on a permanent basis was not an option.

Second-generation diaspora who returned to homeland were sometimes confronted with hostility towards their newfound beliefs. Respondents interviewed said that often they were ridiculed by friends or family in their homeland, or treated with suspicion as having 'westernised ideas and beliefs'. This was especially true in the work place, where some respondents complained of the frustration they felt in having skills and knowledge that they could not use, due to different norms and values in the homeland. There was a higher return to the host country by the second-generation of diaspora, who found living in a different culture too alienating and too far removed from the western culture that they grew up in. Limited choice in leisure facilities, gender

stereotyping, economic difficulties, freedom of speech and political activities were seen as challenges that could not be overcome.

Although, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) does not have a specific department to identify talented Kurds in diaspora, the majority of participants return to Kurdistan through family and friend connections. People living in diaspora usually have a strong connection to their homeland and many children of the first generation return to Kurdistan, even though they were not born or raised there. One thing is certain, while there are diasporas in the western countries there will always be diasporas returning to homelands, whether that is on a permanent or temporary basis. Obtaining Western nationality is a major driver for Kurdish diasporans who are unable to have recognised status and nationality within their own territory in Kurdistan. For many this recognised status in a different country brings them freedom and security which they can only dream about in their homeland. Rizgar said with pride, “I am Kurdish-British, I am proud to be so, I am free I can go anywhere, it’s like being born again” (Rizgar 46:M).

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The aim of this research has been to study the Kurdish diaspora in Devon, as a case study to contribute to the diaspora and migration fields. This thesis provides an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of returnees to the homeland, and contributes to the development of contemporary diaspora literature. This includes a critique of diaspora experiences such as identity, belonging, transnational home and homeland. This study provides detailed information on development among the diaspora through community engagement and the idea of wishing to return, placed in connection to contemporary discourses on integration and transnationalism. Moreover, the study discussed the significance of these social procedures for the ways social specialists can work with marginalized and disadvantaged people and endorse their struggle for equal citizenship beyond discriminatory and racist experiences. The participants react to ethnic discrimination in a range of ways including interpersonal discourses, strengthening differences among the self, and by deliberately ignoring racism. This research has contributed to the development of up to date current theoretical approaches to diaspora. It has been revealed that diaspora is partly inimitable and has its feature characteristics as well as similarities with other diaspora. This is why each ethnographic examination may lead to new theoretical developments in the field of diaspora.

8.1 Experience in diaspora

The experience of social exclusion and ethnic discrimination among the diasporic community in Devon is widespread. This study shows the day-to-day racism that is faced by the diasporic population, and the consequences of such a perception has been that the political and social relationship among resident people and diasporans have become largely ethnicised. The War on Terror, the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the rise of ISIS, as well as Brexit has further aggravated circumstances for diasporans and consequently reinforced day-to-day ethnic and racial boundaries in the society. This experience was furthermore compounded with several research participants who highlighted that these processes of 'otherisation' are not limited to the Middle-East, but also haunt them in the UK in their everyday encounter with some people with

Iranian, Turkish and Arab backgrounds who reject the idea of the Kurdish identity. Rejections to accept the legitimacy of a Kurdish national identity only serve to strengthen ethnic Kurdish nationalism, fostering a reactive and defensive identity among those people who encounter these discriminatory practices.

This study examines diasporans' experience in a rural host city that has seen a large increase in a BME community, driven by the NASS dispersion policy of the UK government, which has further compounded racism. Many of the respondents interviewed recounted their first experience of a host community as being an unknown destination, with shared experiences of an often violent exit from their homeland and an uncertain future. Diasporans were driven by a lack of localised support, and the commonality of maintaining a cultural awareness to develop their own support networks and community frameworks in host communities. Keeping Kurdishness alive was seen as of primary importance to participants, and related to the experience in diaspora. Many participants vocalised that living in diaspora gave them space and opportunity to be 'Kurdish', to practise and follow ideologies and political freedoms denied to them in their ancestral homeland.

This study has shown that cultural differences in local communities have presented positive and negative experiences in diaspora, that present challenges to diaspora, especially gender related, with females experiencing a high level of racism especially when wearing Islamic/traditional dress. This study explored 'everyday racism'; the current literature does not focus on lived day-to-day experiences in a host country. Respondents often underreported incidents of verbal and physical abuse which they believed was due to a lack of knowledge from the local community, fuelled by the media which compounded negativity towards asylum seekers and refugee. This study illustrates that the demographics of Devon, a rural county, has had a significant impact of diaspora experiences with hidden racism. The contribution of data supports the incidents of day-to-day racism. Further research could be carried out to establish changes in racism in the light of Brexit, and which diaspora groups, or indeed how different religions experience this greater day-to-day racism. This said, the high number of racist incidents towards both male and female diasporas have

not deterred respondents who believed their challenges in their ancestral homeland have made them strong enough to accept them.

This study illustrates that intercultural integration in the host community has benefited many respondents, allowing them space to build and improve relationships in the diaspora community and their homeland. Many experiences have been in dual societies with the cultural integration in the context of acculturation allowing contact and integration in both the host country and ancestral homeland.

8.2 Identity and belonging

There are multiple forms of identity in diaspora, and multiple places that can be called home. I have studied Kurdistan during a period of increasing autonomy. This has enabled me to examine some familiar questions in the diaspora studies field – like home, identity, belonging, and engagement, and have through an innovative and rigorous case study collated research material from participants who openly discuss their individual experiences. This study has shown that the Kurdish diaspora are proud of their allegiance to their ancestral homeland. Several participants indicated that identities are hybridized, with a mixture of two or more cultures. This is primarily due to the impact of the cultural encounters and the influence of British or western society. This cultural hybridity indicates dualised circumstances, such as dual languages and the mutuality of cultures. As the data demonstrates, many participants like Said claim to “have two identities” or find themselves “in-between”. This bridge makes it easier to settle in to UK society.

The results from this study indicate that holding British citizenship does not guarantee acceptance as being British, due to Britishness being constructed in every-day life in essentialist terms. In these terms appearance, name, culture and history were evoked as essential markers of the British identity. This study has also shown that the participants’ experiences of an exclusive Britishness can have a significant impact on their understanding of their everyday lives and identity formation in the UK. The study results also indicate that identity and belonging in diaspora is more than having an affiliation/attachment to the host country, it is about attaining an identity, which was denied in their ancestral

homeland. In particular, this research provides an understanding of the Kurdish diaspora in Devon, with reference to their experiences of identity, integration and return. Inter-culturalisation and multiculturalism provides diaspora people with the opportunity to strengthen their ethnic identity:

“Cross-border connections may be making the identities of those in diaspora more fluid, hybrid and ‘in-between’ as they actively strive to maintain symbolic and material links to their territorial homeland” (Mavroudi 2005:3).

The study highlights the fact that identity is changeable, fluid and not fixed in the relationship between the people and the surrounding environment. Many of the participants demonstrated that holding British citizenship did not guarantee acceptance as being British, as Britishness was constructed in day-to-day life in essential characteristics:

“Maintaining racism and discrimination against certain ethnic groups is a way for the dominant ethnic groups in the host societies to sustain and reinforce their self-perception and identity” (Khayati 2008:249).

The participants confronted ethnic discrimination in a range of ways, including interpersonal discourses, strengthening differences among the self and other, and deliberately ignoring racism.

The data from participants interviewed demonstrates that belonging to place and identity are in relation to home and where the participant’s family are residing. It has demonstrated the beneficial use of combining geographical and diasporic perspectives in a study that is committed to partially unravelling historicized and dynamic power tensions, relations, resistances and subjectivities through space and time. Some participants said that it was of greater significance to have the family living together, this then became home with a sense of belonging and identity to society. A large proportion of interviewees felt they had dual identities, wanting to retain the identity of their parents or their own place of birth as well as their diaspora society. Participants had an allegiance to both host and homeland and wanted their own children to

retain dual identity though for some returning to homeland was not considered an option.

The term Kurdishness has been used consistently among Kurdish communities, political party speeches in diaspora, as well as in Kurdistan. This identity of Kurdishness or Kurdayati has been highly developed in the diaspora. The Kurdish diasporan outside of Kurdistan attempted to achieve a more coherent identity and rediscovered a deep Kurdish identity (Griffiths 2002). The transnational exchanges between Kurdistan and the UK give an increase to a diasporic space that bridges the two societies. Geography is central to creating a national identity, due to national identities being usually anchored in territories (Eliassi 2015). Many participants identified territorial identity as being an important part of the struggle for recognition and independence.

The consequences of this research could be developed further by expanding the concept of cultural identity change in the social and cultural experience context through continued research on the ethnographic background, including distinctive thoughts regarding Kurdishness and Britishness, and how they vary, and what social and cultural components they consider Kurdish and British respectively. Moreover, further research could be conducted regarding the informants in this study, in the wake of returning to the ancestral homeland, or different informants who have already returned to the ancestral homeland, and what will happen to their identity. In addition, the difficulties that they will confront in a changing society, with particular regard to gender identity from westernised ideals, cultures and traditions acquired in the host society and in conforming to ancestral traditional values in the homeland. These could result in significant impacts on their notions of identity.

The study results indicate that holding British citizenship did not guarantee acceptance as British due to Britishness being constructed in every-day life in essentialist terms. In these terms, appearance, name, culture and history were evoked as essential markers of the British identity. This study has also shown that the participants' experiences of an exclusive Britishness can have a significant impact on their understanding of their everyday lives and identity formation in the UK. The study results also indicate that identity and belonging

in diaspora is more than having an affiliation/attachment to host country, it is about attaining an identity, which was denied in the ancestral homeland.

8.3 Community engagement

Community engagement and community cohesion have become focal points for government policy. The findings of my data, clearly illustrate that within local government, particularly in Plymouth, there is a lack of policy that is in line with national policy and has no clear strategic plan. This lack of resource has created mistrust among diasporans, believing that the lack of community strategy is a deterrent to community engagement. The diaspora literature does not examine the consequences of not having a community engagement policy, and in particular it does not examine this when there is a national policy that is not implemented locally. This study has examined the consequences of a lack of community engagement policy, what is the primary consequence a lack of trust. The concept of integration as a common procedure challenges the notion that it is the prevailing subjects who have admittance to power in discourses with regards to the diasporans. It is also the prevailing subjects who choose the extent to which diasporans can be incorporated or prohibited in British society. Diaspora groups are often described by public and private sector agencies as 'hard to reach'. However, participants' data shows that the integration may be motivated by a desire to contribute to the community cohesion policies and establish a cultural connection within the place of residence. Many participants are involved within their local community to actively engage and participate with the new host society. The data shows that engagement with black and ethnic minorities is a slow process and takes time to build connections and trust amongst diaspora groups, this is compounded with the lack of a localised diversity policy and with training.

The way we characterise the boundaries of ethnicities makes ground for the ways we comprehend multiculturalism. Distinguishing how the boundaries of the country or the predominant group are built, empowers us to demolish those group boundaries and demonstrate the conceivable outcomes of new drawings of group boundaries that are not exclusive and unbending, but rather more adaptable and receptive to the progressions and the elements of the population

and the political balance in our social societies. This procedure acknowledges that citizenship should be renegotiated.

Acculturation and integration from the informant's point of view have different dimensions. Many British citizens view immigration as a positive influence that enriches our culture and communities. It brings diversity and a wealth of cultural experiences to the UK. Integration is also a dynamic process, with vicious as well as virtuous circles. A tolerant and diverse society can more readily accommodate not only people who want to fit in, but also those who are keen to be different. The contribution of the Kurdish diaspora, especially the first generation to the local host community and new arrivals, is seen by some respondents as a significant factor in successful integration. This is played out in numerous ways, impacting on the local economy and culture within the host society. Respondents acknowledged that without the foundations established by the first generation of diaspora it would have presented more challenges for cohesion and inclusion.

In addition to integration, some of the results of this research demonstrate that integration symbolises the Kurdish first generation diasporans' willingness to firstly survive, and afterward to succeed, with integration into a new society. Integration is accordingly characterised as a consistent procedure of a diasporans engagement within the place of residence, but additionally is impacted by past dynamics as experienced in the society of origin. The procedure of inclusion in a new country is transversely accounted by referring to past experiences of exclusion or inclusion. In such a manner, the question of disintegration inside the ancestral homeland, particularly the period of the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein, the absence and the lack of trustful organizations, and the random violence, obliged individuals to rediscover new perspectives, for example, their group and ethnic gatherings while searching for support, help and assets.

Kurdish stories of settlement in western countries reflect the contradictory experiences between the present and the past. As indicated by research participants, once settled in the UK, the need to get to know the host society has been portrayed as a gradual process of insertion described by a recovering

of trust in authorities while adapting and coping with traumatic occasions of the past. In such a manner, integration is a complex procedure, which happens in a specific neighbourhood setting, however nourished by past memories. This research has been supported by the need to develop an empirical study that understands both the diversity of diasporans' experiences within the communities, and the complexity of the processes of integration and transnationalism, in order to contribute to the goals of advancing diaspora engagement and social inclusion at the local level. In this regard, the findings add to a growing body of literature on integration and transnationalism.

In Plymouth, the Kurdish diaspora has made significant efforts not only to integrate, but also to find employment or to start their own businesses. Most of the Kurdish people have expressed a desire to return to their own country and hope that one day there will be an independent Kurdistan. Some of those that have returned are able to use the skills they have learned in the UK to be able to secure worthwhile employment, other second generation Kurds can feel alienated from their original culture. Women in particular can experience a sense of loss of freedoms that they have enjoyed in the West. Many Kurdish people however accept the notion of a dual nationality and have made lives for themselves in the UK but still maintain links with their homeland through holidays and trips to maintain contact with their families and culture. This is especially important for young children who were born here but can often experience the greatest feelings of alienation. It has to be accepted however that the Kurdish diaspora is here to stay, and like the other people that have arrived on these shores, will eventually become part of a multicultural Britain.

As study participants indicate, the movement of people crossing borders in search of safety, security and increased opportunities has increased, policy makers are faced with the challenge of migration policies from a narrow vision of control within the wider vision of management. There are quite distinctive characteristic differences between new arrivals and the ethnic groups established in settled communities. The new community feels excluded to the new environment as a result of cultural differences including representations, their voices not being heard because of language barriers. Limitations in understanding the laws and culture in a place of residence was seen by some

first generations of diaspora as barriers to community engagement. Many of the participants were proud of their roots but identified that changes were needed due to the different social and cultural environments if they wished to assimilate into a new host society.

The results of this study could be developed further by expanding the concept of community engagement policy, the building of bridges of trust in the social and cultural experience context by continued research on the ethnographic background, including distinctive thoughts regarding integration, cohesion and the acceptance of being British, and how they vary and to what social and cultural components they consider in living together. Moreover, further studies could be conducted regarding the informants in this study in the wake of awareness of different diaspora groups who arriving to a new society and what has happened to them after arriving. In addition, the difficulties that they will confront in a changing society, with particular regard to cultural difference and norms and values.

8.4 Return

This research indicates that there is not enough literature on women and children's experiences of return in the diaspora. In particular the experiences of women and children returning from western to non-western contexts and the freedoms they leave behind, is neglected in current scholarship. In addition, this study outlines women's and children's experiences, characterised by feeling forced, disappointment, and frustrated.

When diasporans return they take with them their experience of living outside the homeland, including values, skills and relationships. Returning diasporans were keen to use their new knowledge and experiences gained in host nations in supporting the building of a new Kurdistan. This extended knowledge and skills base was seen by those interviewed to bring new opportunities to their returnee communities and the wider regions, but it was felt that it can also bring alienation and mistrust. Some diaspora have feelings of guilt for leaving Kurdistan in the first place, and then guilt for returning either because the reality of life in the host country did not match preconceived ideas and returning has a stigma of failure or has encountered mistrust from friends and family as being

'Westernized'. Gender played a significant part in attitudes towards return. Christou and King's (2011) research has highlighted "diasporic imaginaries and mobilities, including rootedness and rootlessness, are experienced differently by men and women" (287). The decision to return was predominately a male decision while female returnees did so with little alternative, women who felt liberated from the social norms and gender roles expected of them from their extended families, experienced freedom in the host countries away from the patriarchal influence. The decision to return was not self-determining, this also applied to young people who had little choice on the decision to return, for many experiencing the freedom and autonomy in the westernised host land created challenges in the homeland where women and children faced alienation within their own communities, with some being regarded with suspicion and mistrust as being perceived to be westernised.

The idea of the intention to return might be more readily adapted than the idea of diaspora, while analysing a more extensive transnational practice of Kurds and exploring their integration and transnational processes. Along these lines, this study contends that the dreams to return might be viewed as a productive idea both in diaspora and refugees studies, when managing inquiries of homeland and the examination of the notion of return. A few participants had returned back to their ancestral homeland for the first time and some of them had returned after quite a while living in the UK. An idealised picture of the imaginary country, Kurdistan was broadly held however after visiting south Kurdistan some participants indicated that their returning acted to demystify this admired and lost paradise of south Kurdistan. These journeys can be comprehended concerning their encounters of not being acknowledged and accepted as British and the vulnerability of the UK as their country or homeland. Verification of home and homeland is a social procedure that is arranged in political connections and structures yet it is likewise a social procedure where the overwhelming society constitutes a critical gathering of people. It is essential that belonging and citizenship are detached from ethnic ideas of Britishness in light of the fact that this is the fundamental motivation behind why diasporians with Kurdish backgrounds experience feelings of rejection.

In the case of the Kurdish diaspora, the return was frozen for a considerable amount of time, and turned into a plausibility to return after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Initially participants reflected on a return to visit their homeland before making a full decision to return as permanent. The temporary return is not based on the unknown, instead it is constructed and deconstructed through well-organised links or contacts, visits and data, connecting the Kurdish diaspora to the crosswise societies of settlement and the society of ancestry. Indeed, even those Kurds who did not express any longing to do a reversal to Kurdistan, because of their traumatic encounters and absence of close social contacts, concluded that temporary visits could be an attractive idea for the future.

The thoughts of return go beyond the mere nation-state discourse, however for all intents and purposes they intertwine with local opportunities. The return is always spatially set in contexts of personal identification that refer to localities such as towns or cities characterised by strong familial responsibilities and capabilities. In the meantime, the arrival can likewise be an issue of financial intentions particularly when managing recovered properties or new companies. In both cases, assessments of return may likewise be driven by sentiments of blame, which have persecuted people during their exile.

The new millennium has seen a significant increase in global diaspora/migration. Global diasporans have made a significant contribution to the political, economic, and cultural life in many sending and receiving countries, and almost every society has been influenced by diaspora/migration. Diaspora more than at any other time has become a greatly contentious issue within the political arena, with fierce supporters on both sides. Several countries have started to launch new up to date diaspora/immigration policies and regulatory barriers for diaspora and migration, and as a result are making international diaspora/migration more difficult with a rigid selection process.

The world's economic crisis has raised a platform for the increase in nationalism, with migrants being the targeted scapegoat. This study has also shown that the Kurds in diaspora are playing an important role in promoting relationship, skills and trade between their host and origin countries. It is also

important that the UK government and KRG take the lead, but work in connection with other non-government stakeholders in designing policies of engaging the diaspora. This is due to the process of managing diaspora people involving cross-bordering to access opportunities that enhance their livelihoods. The diaspora population consists of some highly educated and skilled people that could have a significant impact if they could transfer some of that knowledge and expertise back home in order to develop Kurdistan. Diasporans return with hopes and aspirations to build a new better Kurdistan, creating their idealised society with long distance imagination created in the host land. The new period of stability in South Kurdistan has enabled some participants to feel optimistic over the possibility of being part of a change mechanism.

It is important to remember that whatever one's stance on diaspora is, real individuals' lives are affected. Diaspora will continue to be a subject that is debated, for society to continue to grow, so must the ebb and flow of migration. This study is a way to claim that contemporary diasporas are not uniquely about the experience of oppression and trauma in the ancestral homeland, but also about concrete and tangible network formations and activities that take place in both time and space. The results of this research could be developed further by expanding the concept of return with special consideration of the changing dynamics running parallel, both in political and economic terms, with the increase and decrease of economies, and the evolving and changing political scene, such as with the current war with ISIS and recent decision of the UK to leave the EU.

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Appendix

Research Participants		
Name	Gander	Age
Ali	Male	44
Kani	Female	28
Hersh	Male	30
Omar	Male	44
Qader	Male	39
Hewa	Male	32
Safeen	Male	23
Hoshyar	Male	38
Yassien	Male	23
Shilan	Female	29
Rizgar	Male	46
Nasreen	Female	23
Renas	Male	37
Aree	Male	29
Bewar	Male	25
Rezan	Male	36
Paree	Female	29
Mustafa	Male	35
Kamyar	Male	20
Roken	Female	19
Bashir	Male	24
Kader	Male	47
Amir	Male	39
Karwan	Male	38
Ala	Female	28
Alan	Male	29
Amin	Male	31
Adel	Male	39
Sami	Male	27
Baroj	Male	33
Zakria	Male	38

Harem	Male	26
Saman	Male	23
Sheelan	Female	24
Delshad	Male	29
Aveen	Female	18
Hiresh	Male	19
Said	Male	37
Bayan	Female	26
Hemen	Male	33
Ahmed	Male	33
Kardo	Male	19
Ava	Female	18
Deldar	Male	21
Hajeen	Female	20
Barzan	Male	28
Saywan	Male	36
Khani	Male	20
Nareen	Female	21
Kovan	Male	23
Awaz	Female	29
Ashti	Male	38
Banaz	Female	33
Hazem	Male	27
Karokh	Male	22
Befreen	Female	32
Ibrahim	Male	30
Layla	Female	23
Rekan	Male	20
Awat	Male	31
Mala	Male	23
Warina	Female	32
Saleh	Male	37
Evan	Female	29
Hardi	Male	29

Nazdar	Female	25
Sania	Female	29
Paree	Female	29
Rebin	Male	26
Rashid	Male	22
Tara	Female	32
Neyaz	Male	29
Kazem	Male	35
Sarvin	Female	27
Kadir	Male	30
Araz	Male	28
Khalil	Male	35
Adnan	Male	29
Barwan	Male	33
Ronia	Female	18
Barin	Female	30
Asmer	Female	33
Donya	Female	27
Delawer	Male	25
Suzan	Female	39
Warvan	Male	19
Kamal	Male	29
Ronia	Female	18
Aziz	Male	29
Ronak	Female	29
Karima	Female	31
Ayub	Male	22
Taher	Male	53
Khazal	Female	35
Hawker	Male	46
Azet	Male	33
Avin	Female	27
Samira	Female	23
Mevan	Male	26

Goran	Male	30
Kawani	Male	55
Rawand	Male	25
Sardar	Male	39
Sarkewt	Male	36
Karen	Community worker	
Peter	Community leader	
Janathon	Community worker	
Jacky	Community worker	
Graeme	Police officer	
Martin	shopkeeper	
Keith	Police officer	
Roya	Community leader	
Dave	Fire officer	
Ann	Community worker	
Chris	Police officer	
Susan	Community worker	