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# Inherited traumas in diaspora: postmemory, past-presencing and mobilisation of second-generation Kurds in Europe

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**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the way in which conflict-generated diasporas pass on collective memories of a violent past onto the next generation. It contributes to uncovering the intergenerational memory transmission patterns in the diaspora by examining how new generations inherit the experiences of a violent past from their parents and mobilise and demobilise around issues concerning such past. By focusing on the Kurdish diaspora as a case study, the authors suggest that diasporas gradually form collective memories that may align with or differ from the narratives of those who stayed in their home countries. The collective memory of diasporic communities is also shaped by various factors related to their new countries of residence. This diasporic memory is ever evolving, influenced by each new generation that not only inherits but also reinterprets the shared memories, asserting their own agency in this ongoing process.

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## Introduction

Violent events occur in a specific time and place, but their legacies keep haunting the victims even years later when victims change locations. As Bernal (2017, 23) rightly states, "violence has a long after-life; it lives on after the events are over, leaving its mark on individuals and on institutions". In other words, "violence leaves traces", as suggested by Schramm (2011, 5) in her article Landscapes of Violence; "be it habitually remembered or consciously evoked, it has profound effects on individual consciousness as well

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as collective identifications". Especially in cases where perpetrators target a specific community, violent events can create collective or cultural traumas affecting an entire society, before gradually turning into a collective memory (Halbwachs 1992; Hirschberger 2018). These actions may take all forms of political violence, including genocides, ethnic cleansing, femicide, sexual violence as a weapon of war, torture, displacement and dispossession. The memory of violence is not only entrenched in people's bodies and minds, but spatial practices that are put in place in forms of memorials or shrines also constitute part of collective memorialisation efforts (Schramm 2011, 5). Indeed, as collective memory emerges and evolves, it significantly influences the collective identity of a community. Memory serves as a bridge that connects the past with the present, shaping the understanding and perception of a community's shared history and experiences. It provides a sense of continuity, allowing individuals within the community to establish a cohesive narrative of their collective identity.

In some cases, victims continue to live in geographical locations where violent encounters occurred and deal with triggers which incessantly remind them of the past (Staub 2006). In other cases, such violent conflicts may compel people to migrate and form diasporas outside the borders of their home country (Brinkerhoff 2011; Féron 2017; Haider 2014) merging collective memory with exilic memory. Traumatic experiences become enmeshed with feelings of loss, expulsion, dispossession and nostalgia for the homeland as time passes. Diasporas, despite being spatially far from where such conflicts take place, keep their ties to their homeland in various ways, and continue to be affected by collective traumas that haunt the community (Bernal 2017; Karabegović 2019; Müller-Suleymanova 2021; Orjuela 2020). For instance, Armenian diaspora and its continued determination for the recognition of the genocide provides an example of this point in this regard. Their efforts have contributed to raising awareness about genocide denial, promoting human rights and preventing similar atrocities in the future (Féron and Baser 2023).

Indeed, other conflict-generated diasporas, such as Chileans, Argentinians, Eritreans, Palestinians and many others, have also experienced political violence and carried the memories of their experiences to subsequent generations. Chileans and Argentinians, for example, suffered under brutal dictatorial regimes in the 1970s and 1980s. Many individuals and families fled their countries to escape repression and violence. These diasporas have actively worked to preserve the memory of the atrocities committed during those periods and seek justice for the victims. They have formed organisations and raised awareness about human rights abuses. The memories and narratives of these experiences have been passed on to subsequent generations through storytelling, cultural preservation and activism, serving as a reminder of the importance of democracy, human rights and social

justice (Haider 2014; Serpente 2015). Although diasporas remain connected to the homeland, their collective memory and identity are also affected by the new transnational environment that they find themselves in, thus offering them diverse opportunity structures to mobilise and become politically active (Baser 2015; Kleist 2008). As time goes on, cultural traumas may become the common denominator between those who stayed and those who left, but diaspora communities' collective memory around these experiences may begin to differ because of new experiences in different post-conflict contexts (Orjuela 2020).

Conflict-generated transnational communities can play a significant role in seeking justice for past atrocities and for transitional justice efforts. Scholars have tried to understand diaspora groups' leverage in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes by examining their participation in peace processes and contributions to truth commissions in various cases including in Haiti, Liberia, Bosnia and Colombia (Baser 2017; Hoogenboom and Quinn 2020; Karabegović 2019; Stokke and Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2019; Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2016). While these studies acknowledge that diasporas are not only passive recipients and carriers of collective memory work, they also underline that diasporas have agency and have a say in (re)shaping and (re)creating such practices. Scholars have also started drawing attention to *intergenerational* differences in terms of remembering and memorialisation, which have an impact on mobilisation for truth and justice seeking efforts (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013). Indeed, second generations' identities and mobilisation patterns can be quite distinct compared to their parents' generation (Toivanen and Baser 2022). This trend has been approached through the term *postmemory* (Hirsch 1992), referring to symbolic transgenerational acts to transmit memory from one generation to another. In the case of diaspora, this means that such cultural, collective traumas are transmitted by migrants to the next generations (Baser 2015; Hirt 2021; Müller-Suleymanova 2021; Orjuela 2020; Toivanen and Baser 2019). Although new generations in diaspora may not have any direct lived experience of their parents' homeland or its violent past, they can nevertheless maintain an interest in contributing to the memory work that holds the diaspora community together.

In the following pages, we reflect on the existing theoretical understandings of collective trauma and how that relates to diasporic postmemory and memory mobilisation in more detail. By examining how second-generation Kurds form the diasporic memory that builds on Kurdish communities' collective trauma and identity, we explore the role they play in memory work within three distinct spheres of diaspora engagement. This examination is based on the theoretical framework proposed by Van Hear and Cohen (2017), who analyse diaspora mobilisation across three levels: the household/extended family sphere, the known community sphere, and the imagined community sphere. We adapt this framework to understand the construction of diasporic

memory, particularly in relation to the impact of collective trauma. How do new generations inherit the experiences of a violent past from their parents? How do they narrate on their experiences of the collective trauma, and how do they mobilise and demobilise around issues concerning it? The Kurdish diaspora[1] constitutes an exemplary case in point on the topic as it is one of the largest stateless diasporas in the world (Toivanen 2021; Wahlbeck 2019), whose diaspora formation has been triggered, in addition to labour migration, by persecution, political violence, genocide, displacement and dispossession.

## Collective trauma and diasporic postmemory

Collective trauma refers to the long-term impact of a traumatic event that has affected a specific community (Hirschberger 2018). Collective memory of a traumatic event is different from individual memories as creation of collective memory paves the way for persistence of such memories beyond the lives of survivors (Hirschberger 2018, 1). In the context of ethnic, religious and ideological conflicts where a community is subjected to violent acts from genocide to persecution, the trauma lingers for generations and the process of reconstruction of this tragedy in the minds of those who experienced it and those who inherited it continues. In some cases, such experiences gain a foundational value for a group's collective identity and narratives surrounding those tragedies may become an integral part of nation-building practices (Baser and Toivanen 2017). In other cases, "chosen amnesia" can become a survival strategy for victimised groups (Buckley-Zistel 2006).

When collective memory is constructed around selective remembering of a violent past, certain historical facts may gain symbolic meaning and turn into myths and foundational narratives. "Chosen traumas" and "chosen glories" (Volkan 2021) that feed into collective memory work may determine how a group draws boundaries and self-identify as a distinct community (Baser and Toivanen 2017; Chernobrov and Wilmers 2020; Orjuela 2020). In the diaspora context, such feelings of loss and despair are united with the experience of exile and dispossession, and lead to the merger of collective memory with exilic memory. This process paves the way to the creation of a new phenomenon that Toivanen (2021) calls "diasporic consciousness" or Levenson (2021), by building on Rothberg's (2014) work, calls "transnational memory" – a memory anchored in the homeland that operates at different scales from local to global. This transformed version of memory is then transmitted to other generations via postmemory practices and as Hirsch (2008, 107) argues, postmemory "constitute memories in their own right" for future generations. Postmemory is created through narratives, memorialisation events, rituals and traditions, which can also be autonomised as a result of transnationalisation processes shaped by different contexts'

opportunity structures and political, social and economic environments that also shape the diasporic identity (Baser 2015; Féron 2017).

Scholars have studied how cultural traumas are inherited by second-generation members in diaspora and how collective memories are (re)shaped and (re)created as older generations "pass the torch on" to the future generations (Féron 2023; Orjuela 2020). For instance, Müller-Suleymanova (2021, 13) has conducted extensive research among Bosnian second generation in the diaspora and concludes that "the relationship to the parents' homeland is shaped not only through the prism of the past but also through ongoing political and structural (economic, social) violence in the regions of origin." Intergenerational transmission of memory is a common practice among diaspora communities as it constitutes a central part of identity-building, boundary-making and survival strategies in the transnational space. As "postmemory and intergenerational remembrance are factors in the formation and development of a diaspora identity" (Numansen and Ossewaarde 2015, 41), transmitting such consciousness to future generations becomes vital for the persistence of the diaspora community. In other words, past experiences lie at the very heart of diaspora formation as diaspora members often have had to leave their homeland because of traumatic experiences. Such past experiences determine diaspora community members' present actions that aim at intergenerational transmission and are motivated by the duty of remembering. This also often determines the survival of the diaspora as a distinct community in the receiving country (Chernobrov and Wilmers 2020, 915).

## *Memory mobilisation in diaspora*

While away from homeland, the ways in which the collective memory is transmitted might take versatile forms which give a distinctness to the intergenerational evolution of collective memory. Generations of the diaspora are born and raised outside the homeland experience the legacies of a violent past differently than their peers whose parents stayed in the homeland, as they did not have to bear the same consequences of the conflict on a daily basis. Generations in the diaspora will form transnational identities influenced by the migration experience of their parents, political, social and economic conditions in the receiving country, and by the interactions with other groups in the diaspora. They are not survivors of violent acts themselves and they have not witnessed these events from a close distance. However, by memory transmission, they inherit the effects of collective trauma experienced by previous generations (Numansen and Ossewaarde 2015). They, then, reinterpret this "inherited knowledge" (Weldon 2015) according to their own parameters that are products of their transnational upbringing.

Various authors in diaspora studies started referring to the utilisation of collective trauma by diaspora groups as "past-presencing", a concept

coined by Macdonald (2012). Orjuela (2020), Chernobrov and Wilmers (2020) and Levenson (2021) drew our attention to the ways in which diasporas' first and second generations tie past to the present via diverse repertoires of action. Past-presencing complements the discussions on collective memory and cultural trauma by unpacking the complexity of bringing past into conversation of self-identification at the individual and collective levels. In the words of Chernobrov and Wilmers (2020, 917), the term suggests that "identities are rooted not simply in sharing a connection to a common history and remembering past events, but in continuous and even implicit re-purposing and re-making of their meaning in present". When past-presencing occurs in contexts where cultural trauma exists, ontological insecurity and identity threats (Hirschberger 2018) can be persistent for the forthcoming generations of diaspora despite their spatial and temporal distance from past atrocities. The next generations of a given diaspora could inherit a sense of victimhood and contribute to processes such as "ongoing struggle for recognition, a battle against forgetting and in the case of immigrants, the risk of alienation from the homeland and its culture" (Numansen and Ossewaarde 2015, 43).

Levenson (2021, 58) explains the fluidity of collective memory: "from a praxeological perspective, memory is understood as an ongoing, interactive social practice which can be performed, (re)produced, confirmed, discussed, and felt and linked to identity, spaces, places, and time." Although the core of memory creation is anchored in specific traumatic event(s), different "memory entrepreneurs" (Fine 2001; Jelin 2003) may carry out different "memory projects" (Conway 2010) by prioritising certain acts and memorialisation practices (Lefort 2023), while downplaying others depending on their agenda and interests. As Schramm (2011, 5) rightly points out, memory landscapes are emergent and contested and they are constantly reproduced by different people who are engaged in memory work in various ways. Therefore, as transmission of collective memory continues, it is also affected by who mobilises around memory work and how, in which contexts and under which circumstances. Subsequent generations' interpretation of the collective trauma is in no way static and unchangeable throughout time (see Le Huerou and Merlin 2023). It can also be shaped by the second-generation members' transnational visits to their parents' homeland during childhood and young age, as well as by the ongoing events taking place in the homeland.

## *Analytical approach: spheres of diaspora engagement*

Theorising diaspora mobilisation, especially when considering subsequent generations, presents inherent challenges. The degree of mobilisation varies significantly among diaspora groups and can also evolve over time,

influenced by political, economic and social changes in both home and host countries. The conceptual framework proposed by Van Hear and Cohen (2017) regarding the three spheres of diaspora engagement in conflict settings proves valuable in our analysis. The authors argue diverse interpretations of diasporas' role in conflict can be attributed to different forms of diaspora engagement occurring within distinct public and private spheres (Van Hear and Cohen 2017, 172–173).

These spheres of engagement are:

- The household/extended family sphere, which primarily encompasses private and personal interactions within families and households.
- The known community sphere, referring to more public interactions among collectives of individuals who are acquainted with each other or aware of each other's existence.
- The imagined community sphere, largely existing in the public domain, including transnational political arenas and other similar contexts (Van Hear and Cohen 2017, 173).

By employing this framework, we can gain insights into the varying degrees and types of diaspora involvement in conflict situations. It allows us to understand how diasporas engage in different spheres, shaping their roles and impact within conflict dynamics.

The first sphere, characterised as personal and private, involves diaspora members helping their immediate and extended families who remain in their homeland. This sphere revolves around transnational exchanges at the household and family level. These exchanges can include visiting the "homeland" and maintaining communication with relatives who have migrated or stayed behind. The second sphere, known as the known community sphere, encompasses encounters in schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces, associations, or religious gatherings. The authors highlight the significance of hometown associations within this sphere, as they often serve as the initial platform for diaspora mobilisation. Engagement in this sphere enables diasporans to maintain connections with their communities at home and abroad, fostering transnational ties among kin. For example, diasporans may initiate projects to raise funds for education, healthcare, or relief purposes in their homeland. The third sphere, the imagined community, draws inspiration from Anderson's (2006) concept and involves engagement in political processes within the diaspora's country of origin and residence. In this sphere, diasporans may feel a sense of affinity and belonging to their global kin, even without prior personal connections. They perceive themselves as part of a broader imagined community. It requires greater levels of social mobilisation compared to the more routine activities of the household and community spheres.

## The formation of the Kurdish diaspora

Kurds have faced oppression in their respective countries, including Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, where their identity, cultural heritage, minority rights and right to self-determination have been denied. As a result of the lack of these opportunities and the deprivation of basic human rights, many Kurds have been compelled to leave their homelands, giving rise to Kurdish diasporas across the world through various waves of voluntary and forced migrations (Eccarius-Kelly 2002).

The roots of the Kurdish diaspora can be traced back to the period before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. However, a more recognisable modern diaspora emerged after the mid-1960s. Initially, most Kurds who migrated to Europe were intellectuals and students seeking to pursue further education. However, a larger wave of migration occurred after the 1960s when Turkish Kurds started migrating to European countries as guest workers, facilitated by bilateral agreements between Turkey and states such as Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. Subsequently, another wave of Kurdish migration took place after the 1970s, primarily due to political turmoil and chaos in Turkey following the coup d'états of 1971 and 1980. These factors further contributed to the growth and dispersion of the Kurdish diaspora. Clashes between the Turkish army and the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party) caused further forced displacement and mass migration of Kurds from Turkey to Europe. In the case of Iraqi Kurds, large migration flows occurred after seminal political crises including the Iran-Iraq War, Anfal and Halabja massacres as well as other regional armed conflicts. Each traumatic experience created different levels of exilic experience and collective trauma for Kurdish communities with different backgrounds. For instance, while Kurds from Turkey experienced political violence which included criminalisation, denial of ethnic identity and associated rights, political oppression, forced migration and extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances, Kurds from Iraq experienced genocides and chemical attacks by the Saddam regime (Wahlbeck 2019). The more recent war with ISIS, and the siege of Kobane also added different layers of trauma for dispersed Kurdish populations all around the world. While there is no recent or reliable census specifically focused on the Kurdish population in Europe, updated sources and Kurdish organisations estimate that approximately two million Kurds reside in Europe, with around one million in Germany alone (Wahlbeck 2019). Utilising new technologies, benefiting from globalisation, and residing outside the borders of their home states, which often criminalise their identity, diaspora Kurds have leveraged their exile status to advocate for their cause and influence homeland politics from afar (Van Hear and Cohen 2017). The exilic experience, initially presenting the Kurdish diaspora as victims, has gradually provided

them with opportunities to assert their claims and engage in transnational activism. By harnessing the advantages of living in diaspora, Kurdish communities have found ways to affirm their agency, foster transnational solidarity and mobilise across borders.

## Methodological considerations

The findings of this article are based on both authors' extensive fieldwork among Kurdish diaspora communities in Europe (France, Finland, the UK, Germany, Sweden), Turkey and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq between 2008 and 2020. Over 200 semi-structured interviews were conducted with first and second-generation diasporans,[2] returnees and local policymakers, journalists and academics within several projects over the last decade in English, French, Finnish and Turkish. Additional data to complement the semi-structured qualitative interviews and observation included diaspora organisations' websites, diaspora members' interviews published in online media outlets, politicians' speeches and newspaper articles. Drawing from a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022), we specifically focused on narrations of memory, families' and community's violent experiences and mobilisation surrounding collective trauma. The citations in this paper illustrate these themes. Ethics were considered carefully due to the sensitive nature of the topic, and all necessary precautions to avoid harm to research participants were taken. Interviewees' names and other identifiable features have been anonymised.

For the purposes of this paper, we focus on second-generation diaspora Kurds whose ancestors are from Turkey and Iraq and who engage in distinct memory-building processes and activities in comparison to their parents. These consist of diasporic repertoires of action, such as participating in commemoration events, organising demonstrations, conferences, seminars, or petitions and lobbying host country political circles and international organisations. The participants had never experienced living in the homeland of their ancestors, yet their main goal includes the recognition of past mass atrocities against Kurds. They have been raised in the transnational space, meaning that their parents' homeland has been referenced frequently, they had completed short visits and diaspora tourism in Kurdistan, and in some cases, they had also witnessed atrocities committed against their family members from a distance. They have grown up in the diaspora community, meaning that they have inherited narratives of collective trauma and past events from different actors, including memory entrepreneurs, known diaspora brokers in the homeland and abroad, diaspora organisations and their members, and friends, relatives, and family members.

## Second Generation and the Formation of a Transnational Memory

Today, the Kurdish diaspora is one of the most prominent and visible social movements in Europe. It continues to be the voice of Kurds outside the borders of Kurdistan by applying its various repertoires of actions to draw attention to the events taking place in Kurdistan. Such actions vary from alerting media outlets, organising sit-ins, evacuating consulates and parliamentary buildings, to preparing petitions and campaigns to raise awareness about the situation of the Kurds. Several studies have examined Kurdish diaspora communities' transnational mobilisation towards homeland politics as well as their related diasporic identity formation. Moreover, new generations are taking part in such transnational activities across different European countries. Previous studies show that second-generation Kurds have a strong interest in Kurdish political movements in Kurdistan and they are very active in online and offline platforms during critical junctures back in their homeland (Baser 2015; Eccarius-Kelly 2002; Schøtt 2021; Toivanen 2021). There are episodic moments of activism but there is also sustained interest in intergenerational transmission of Kurdish identity, memory and commitment to struggle among the diaspora members. However, only few studies have examined Kurdish diasporas' inherited traumas[3] and postmemory (practices) from an intergenerational perspective. For instance, Toivanen and Baser (2019) show how the Anfal genocide is remembered by the Kurdish second-generation from Iraq, how they take part in memory work and actively participate in collective events surrounding justice-seeking and resistance initiatives. In the following sections, we analyse how postmemory works at different spheres and how the Kurdish second generations contribute to memory work while getting involved in past-presencing and the act of remembering part of their everyday lives. In the sections below, we apply Van Hear and Cohen's (2017) three-level framework to better understand how the second generation mobilises in different spheres that constitute the overall transnational experience.

### *The household/extended family sphere*

Second-generation Kurds in Europe have grown up in a transnational social space, in other words in settings that "reference the homeland ideologically, materially and affectively each day" (Levitt 2009, 1231). The diasporic household/extended family sphere is typically characterised by such transnational space, also evidenced in our research. Research participants narrated their life stories as an inseparable continuation of their parents' and families' exilic experiences. The reason they were born in specific European countries was the direct result of their parents having been forced to leave the "homeland."

Their individual life stories were located as being part of the past generations' exilic experiences that had then been passed on to them through storytelling of the experiences in the "homeland", of departure, journey and settlement to the new country. These family stories that had been transmitted to them by their parents and other family members contained painful memories of exile, torture, injustices, death and forced disappearances.

Furthermore, the continuous nature of the conflict and the situation of Kurds in the ancestral "homeland" in the 2010s introduced different dynamics to memory-building in the family sphere. Present-day injustices in the "homeland" were also very much transmitted through the diasporic and transnational family sphere and visible in the motivations to engage and mobilise politically. For instance, one research participant, born in France of parents who had fled Turkey for political reasons, narrated his reasons to become politically mobilised, integrating stories on the fate of family members who had remained in the ancestral homeland:

> My grandfather who died in 1982, was killed by the Turkish army as was my uncle who died and whose body was never found, which is quite common. He was a guerrilla. Then there's another uncle who is in prison, he'll never get out. We feel directly concerned because it's our close ones who are concerned. When I see it in the television or in Facebook, the young combatants, we feel concerned. Kobane, we feel concerned, because our history has always been in front of the cameras, something that happened twenty-five years ago, but we feel concerned because of that history. (M, Paris 2019)

In a similar vein, various interviewees in Sweden and Germany spoke about how their parents' individual and collective traumas had an impact on their everyday lives (see Müller-Suleymanova 2023). One interviewee in Sweden (M, Stockholm 2010), asserted that his father's experiences in Turkish prisons, which included torture and other types of human rights violations on a frequent basis, left him with such poor health that he was not able to work after he arrived to Sweden. This not only affected the family dynamics and their survival strategies in the new context, but he also underlined that every time he looked at his father, he remembered the brutality of the Turkish state. This has contributed to his individual memory-building regarding the Turkish-Kurdish conflict despite the spatial distance from armed clashes and structural violence experienced by his parents on a daily basis in their hometown. Another interviewee in Germany (M, Berlin 2011) mentioned that his father had poor mental health and problems with post-traumatic stress disorder, and this had a significant impact on how he engaged with his own wife and children. For this interviewee, who was an active member of a Kurdish diaspora organisation in Turkey, this individual experience contributed to his identity-building process. As he grew up, he stopped blaming his father for aggressivity and lack of communication skills but diverted his anger and energy to do something for other Kurds going

through similar situations. Other interviewees mentioned that their parents' perilous journeys from Iraq to Turkey and then to the Netherlands left a big dent in how they interpret the world around them (M & M Amsterdam, 2013). The fear and constant feeling of insecurity was inherited by their children. However, over time the children managed to interpret their parents' traumas and opted to work around healing them starting from the individual level.

Ortner (2016) has demonstrated that "descendants of exiled Holocaust survivors unwillingly inherit their parents' continued dislocation." This can be also said to be the case of the Kurdish second generation in our research. This continued "dislocation" was kept alive through the continuous conflict in the Kurdish regions, but also in many cases through the socialisation into political activism through the family sphere. This meant that many participants had taken part in political demonstrations from a very young age, became familiarised with the history of the Kurdish conflict and "inherited" also political activism through their parents. This did not mean that their political mobilisation would be a direct replica of that of their parents (Toivanen 2021). In a similar manner, their memory-building was not based on the lived experience of exile as it was in the case of their parents. Both had their own generational dynamics. Second-generation diasporans became familiar with Kurdish struggles for justice at a young age. They formed their own initiatives and gradually carried their individual memory work that was shaped at the household sphere to a transnational dimension thanks to social media and to the transnationalisation of the Kurdish movement(s).

In terms of the extended family, our research shows that many interviewees with extended family members who had been victims of state-perpetrated violence in Turkey and Iraq, became active combatants either in the PKK or the Peshmerga forces in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Their families treated their losses as "martyrs" and this created a symbolic marker for their belonging to a wider Kurdish nation. As the conflict situation has been continuous in both contexts in different ways, second-generation diaspora members came to a realisation that the causes that compelled their parents to migrate were not one-off situations. The trauma also lingered because there was no closure as conflicts continued, and their kin suffered. Therefore, distance from the homeland did not necessarily mean disengagement with the emotional traumas surrounding loss and grief.

In some cases, the experiences of injustice were not merely "inherited" and transmitted to the research participants by their parents and family members. Visits during childhood and during the adult age to the parents' homeland also contributed towards the sense of injustice. This is particularly visible in two research participants' narrations, who reminiscence their experiences of visiting Turkey as children:

> We were feeling happy, arriving to the homeland. We went out during evenings, and with the innocence of a child, I spoke Kurdish, and at the time if you spoke Kurdish at the border … My mother struck me, she didn't want them to know that we were Kurds. After I cried and we crossed the border. A small anecdote. I'm certain I'm not the only one. (F, Helsinki, 2017)

> For instance, when I was ten years old, we were in Kurdistan, with my family. And the Turkish soldiers arrives during the night. They made everybody get out and they tortured my grandfather. They put him in prison during a month and I witnessed that. It's a feeling of injustice that comes from that. (M, Paris, 2020)

An interviewee in Sweden also mentioned that everyday racism and xenophobia faced in their current country of residence can be traced back to the main reason why their parents had to leave their ancestral homeland. Traumas, therefore, are inherited but at the same time are reinterpreted in new settings (see Paul 2023). He accounted:

> I did not choose to be a second-generation migrant. I did not choose to be born here. I am away from my homeland and whose fault is this? It was not up to my parents to decide where they spend their lives either. We are here for a reason, and this motivates me to join the Kurdish cause from a distance. (M, Stockholm, 2013)

Lack of recognition in the host country rekindled the feelings of victimisation and injustice. In Germany, interviewees frequently mentioned the lack of official recognition of Kurdish identity as a separate identity from that of Turks, which made them feel doubly excluded. The lukewarm approach by host societies to the plight of Kurds in the Middle East continues to be widely criticised by the Kurdish diaspora. For instance, Sweden's recent approach towards the Kurdish enclave in Rojava has also caused uproar as the country supported Turkey's official discourse towards Kurdish forces in Syria as part of the PKK, listed as a terrorist organisation in Europe.[4]

The psychological importance of family members' personal experiences within the context of postmemory has been discussed widely. In her previous work on the Kurdish diaspora, Baser (2015) states that the Kurdish question in Turkey has been a topic at Kurdish families' dinner conversations in the diaspora and that these storytelling mechanisms have facilitated the intergenerational transmission of the desire to contribute to the Kurdish struggle and to justice-seeking efforts. Similar examples can be found with other diaspora communities. In the case of Palestinian diaspora, Zaidan (2012, 42) found that "creating a Palestinian collective memory in the Diaspora is a family business. The family memories are passed on orally. The family plays a main role in transmitting memories of the catastrophe and the image of the lost homeland, and the life in homeland before the catastrophe". We also found family interactions playing a particularly significant role in how family histories were transmitted to second-generation members and how they situated themselves within

such histories. Intergenerational memory transmission in the (extended) family sphere played a key role in making sense of one's own positionality and operated also as a motivating factor for political mobilisations.

## *The known community sphere*

Avtar Brah (1996, 183) has argued the way collective memory is narrated serves to constitute community, in form of "the everyday stories … individually and collectively". In the case of diaspora communities, this is particularly visible not only in the family sphere, but also in the known community sphere that refers to the sphere of encounters outside the home environment. In the diaspora context, the known community sphere also encompasses the collective realm of associational life related to diaspora organisations. Most research participants had taken or were still actively taking part in events organised by Kurdish diaspora organisations. We observed that diaspora organisations usually invested in mobilising youth for the Kurdish cause by organising specific events for them or forming sub-committees for young people to determine their own agenda under the umbrella of larger Kurdish organisations. The most common form of activity was taking part in political demonstrations to protest the situation of Kurds in the ancestral homeland. These included marches as part of "Freedom for Öcalan" campaigns, sit-ins, and blocking highways to attract attention to their cause. Another form of activity were commemoration events organised by diaspora organisations for victims of massacres and genocides. Other activities organised by diaspora organisations included language courses, dance or football tournaments which also conveyed political messages, mobilised participants around a common heritage, and included acts of remembering and resilience against oppression. In these events, symbolic political issues are frequently mentioned despite the nature of the event not being political itself. These initiatives also contributed immensely to the memory-building practice and created a diasporic identity connected to Kurdish suffering.

Similarly, second-generation Kurds took part in different events at the community level where past suffering and trauma were referenced, one example of such being the commemorative events for the Anfal Campaigns. Such events served to keep the community together and are quite telling of the stories and postmemory practices through which the past becomes constructed. Furthermore, due to the continuous nature of the conflict in the Kurdish region, the postmemory practices became infused with references to the ongoing conflict, thus allowing the diaspora actors to construct a narrative of continuity to past suffering. In this sense, past-presencing became a tool to make claims related to the ongoing situation, as demonstrated in young diaspora Kurds joining the Kurdish forces such as YPJ and Peshmarga during the war against ISIS.

Serpente (2015) observes in her study on the mechanisms of postmemory among second-generation Chileans and Argentineans living in Britain that there is a need to expand the notion of who we consider as suitable memory carriers. She suggests we need to move beyond the familial sphere to examine what it means to belong to a "memory community", referring to spaces where individuals come together as collectives to remember. Indeed, our material revealed that the interactions at the known community sphere had a significant impact on how second-generation Kurds made sense of their ancestors' migration and exilic experience, their own positionality in the receiving country, and their contribution and dedication to the global Kurdish nation and its struggles for recognition. Diverse factors affecting engagement to diaspora affairs and to memory work included family members' personal experiences in the homeland (which may or may not contain memories tainted with physical and structural violence); their social interactions with other Kurds, members of "adversary diaspora groups" (Baser 2015) and host society members; and their dedication to other identities (religious, political and so forth). The associative sphere was particularly influential in this regard, as the events organised by diaspora associations served as spaces where community members could circulate, construct and build on particular memory narratives (see Voytiv 2023). In a similar manner, Chernobrov and Wilmers (2020, 928) have studied past-presencing and postmemory practices in the case of Armenian diaspora. The authors show that young diaspora Armenians "were acutely aware of and deeply involved in the reproduction of a past that they had not directly witnessed". This was also the case for second-generation Kurds. For instance, one research participant considered his active involvement as a debt to be paid, whereas similarly to him, another one referred to it as "a sense of duty", towards the family and the Kurdish community more broadly.

> I tell myself that they have done all that so that I can study here. It's really mandatory, I owe it to them (his parents). It's the minimum I can do. But more generally, it's all Kurdish students who own to their families and to the Kurdish community in generation. It's a duty. (F, Paris 2018)

> I am telling myself that there are too many people, who are persecuted and who have died back there. For me it's a duty, to speak, to share all the information. It's a duty towards them, who are still there. And why we have come to Europe, is to be able to express ourselves, not to remain silent like our parents were back there. For me that's the objective of the second generation. So that we can speak up through cultural stuff, through associations, in our studies, even in everyday life by speaking Kurdish … (M, Paris 2019)

While the second generation participated in diaspora organisations and attended commemoration events, celebrations, funerals, weddings, concerts, picnics and other activities, they strengthened their bonds to their kin

community at different scales. The known community sphere complemented the pedagogical endeavours that were put forward by the family sphere and provided real-life examples to the second generation who was mostly informed about collective memory via indirect information. As Numansen and Ossewaarde (2015, 44) assert, "a diaspora politics of remembering within migrant communities transforms postmemory and instils in it the myths and community narratives that generate a sense of belonging far away from the original homeland". By becoming part of memory work transnationally, the research participants retained the opportunity to keep their ties to their ancestors' homeland, identity and culture as well as to the Kurdish (diaspora) community's collective suffering and trauma. In the Kurdish case, the legacy of physical and structural violence was a determining factor in the community's identity at home and abroad, and visible also at the level of postmemory practices.

### *Imagined community sphere*

Nations have been approached as socially constructed, imagined communities (Anderson 2006). Collective memory holds such imagined communities together and gives them a purpose and a sense of belonging. That is one of the reasons why political elites usually deploy collective memory for nation-building purposes. In cases where collective memory is constructed after a traumatic event or a tragedy, such as a genocide or war, "over time, collective trauma becomes the epicentre of group identity, and the lens through which group members understand their social environment" (Hirschberger 2018, 2). Chosen traumas and glories can be appropriated to create a foundational narrative (Volkan 2021) and they feed into memory projects anchored in historical facts but are interpreted differently by memory entrepreneurs (Amiot 2023; Baser and Toivanen 2017). For instance, in the case of the Kurdish nation-building processes, the most horrific event of the Anfal campaigns, Halabja massacre, has become profoundly emblematic of the collective memory of Kurds and an important memorial site (Khayati 2008, 243). More recently, the siege of Kobane has occupied such role in the imaginary of the Kurdish transnational nation (Toivanen 2021).

In some contexts where collective memory embraces collective trauma, resisting the dominant discourse becomes a part of group identity. Victims' own individual and collective memories contest memory from above and searching for justice keeps the community together. This can be observed in the case of the Armenian diaspora where the perpetrators deny victims the recognition of their suffering or in the case of Palestinian diaspora where a hierarchy of victimhood has been created among the adversary communities (Ganesh 2020; Kasbarian 2018). Collective memory, and consequently postmemory practices, then, become venues of resistance and

struggle themselves. Group survival becomes a matter of pride and identity, and the recognition of suffering can become vital for groups' sense of self. When subsequent generations inherit the diasporic memory, they also establish a feeling of belonging to a nation, not limited only to the diaspora community. For instance, Zaidan's (2012, 10) study on second-generation Palestinian diaspora members shows how the younger generation have become part of the process of the restoration of Palestinian history and have managed to form a kind of resistance from exile to transcend the state of dispossession, denial and statelessness.

This was also visible among second-generation Kurds, mobilising in online and offline spaces, where they had transnationalised Kurdish resistance and sustained its appeal globally. For instance, one research participant who was taking part in Kurdish cultural production, spoke of resistance and passing the memory on in the following way:

> So, there's a form of resistance among us, it's a form of existence for us. There were plenty of protests by the Kurds, we were betrayed by Ataturk in 1921, the Treaty of Sevres, the promise of an independent state. Then Lausanne (the Treaty of), words quickly forgotten again. The protests in 1925, Dersim massarcre in 1938. We have been massacred non-stop … So, resistance is a form of existence. It's a political claim, and cultural too. We have the *dengbesh*[5], people who sing their history, who haven't been able to write their own history. The memory passes on from one generation to another. (M, Paris, 2020)

Memory work, was thus, a form of resistance and related closely to one's belonging to the national community of Kurds. Hirt (2021, 22) has focused on the Eritrean youth in the diaspora and asserted that "postmemory experienced by children of conflict-generated diasporas and the nurturing of a nation's chosen trauma can help to create romanticised narratives of an imagined homeland among second-generation diasporans that create active support for a distant autocratic system." In this case, Hirt found that not only suffering but also feelings such as guilt can be transmitted to the next generation (Hirt 2021, 25). We found similar instances in second-generation Kurds' narrations. Feelings of responsibility and duty, guilt and gratitude were visible in research participants' narrations on Kurdish everyday resistance and their participation in it. Such feelings were linked to specific family histories and suffering, but also more broadly linked to the Kurdish nation and its fate. The transnational dimension of postmemory practices was visible in the way the Anfal Campaigns were referenced, not only as something that had happened to Iraqi Kurds, but that had targeted the very existence of the Kurdish nation. Passing the memory of such injustices went also beyond the diaspora identity and was motivated by belonging to a broader Kurdish nation. Simultaneously, the second-generation members' experiences in growing up with the narratives of the transnational

Kurdish nation and its past (and present) suffering had given way to a sense of diasporic consciousness, rooted in diasporic memory.

Technological advancements and globalisation facilitated diaspora members communication with each other to a large extent as they managed to find groups and forums on social media to discuss issues that were specific to their country of residence and homeland. However, at the imagined community level it also served one other important purpose, that is, uniting the homeland and the diaspora. Constant interaction between those who remained and those who left creates frictions but also bridges these communities and perpetuates the belongingness to a wider community that is beyond the diaspora. Kurdish movement(s)' successful online campaigns to promote Kurdish rights and to put human rights abuses and other struggles on the spotlight created waves of anger, joy, pride and guilt among many Kurdish diasporans all around the world. The memory-building journey, which started at the household and extended family sphere and developed at the known community sphere due to active participation in Kurdish diaspora events in their local environment, was then completed by creating bonds with the Kurdish nation at the imagined community sphere. The amalgam of these three spheres contributed to postmemory practices, created a collective justice-seeking transnational community, and encouraged second-generation diasporans to participate in memory projects led by memory entrepreneurs at home and/or in the diaspora.

Our findings indicate there is not always complete alignment between the agendas of local and transnational memory entrepreneurs. Local communities, unaffected by diaspora-related considerations, often prioritise the examination of cultural traumas and the enduring effects of violence on their daily lives. In contrast, diaspora memory entrepreneurs may reinterpret these agendas and be motivated by additional factors such as maintaining diaspora cohesion and seeking recognition for their demands from policymakers and societies in their host countries. For example, in the case of Halabja, survivor testimonies reveal that the chemical attack continues to have a profound impact on the everyday lives of the local population (Karim and Baser 2023). However, many of the issues raised in these accounts do not necessarily translate into diaspora activities, which tend to focus more on commemoration and lobbying for recognition in the host countries. Therefore, when studying inherited traumas, particularly in the context of second-generation diaspora experiences, it becomes essential to further examine the transformation that collective memory undergoes. Understanding the shifts and adaptations that occur within collective memory in the diaspora, and how it may diverge from the experiences and priorities of local communities, requires careful investigation. Exploring the motivations and dynamics of diaspora memory entrepreneurs, as well as their interactions

with local communities, can shed light on the complexities of inherited traumas in diasporic contexts.

## Beyond inherited traumas

Bloch (2018, 650) has focused on collected stories as well as on silences among the refugee youth from Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Turkey (Kurds) and claimed that "as trauma is always present – whether narrated or not – it becomes embodied in the lives of the second generation". In a similar manner, we conclude also that the trauma of past suffering is present in second-generation Kurds' narrations and embodied in their lives in various ways. In this article, we analysed how Kurdish second-generation diaspora members inherit collective trauma and how they mobilise to contribute to memory work surrounding it. We argued that as collective memory is something always under construction, the way second-generation diaspora members reconstruct memory differs from the way their peers in the ancestral "homeland" and their parents' generation construct it. We identified various factors that have an impact on how they receive postmemory and act on it at collective and individual levels. We demonstrated how memory work takes place at different levels through the involvement of different actors at different stages and that diasporic memory is processual and eclectic; it is a mixture of lived and learned experiences and enmeshed with inherited traumas and indirect memories.

The Kurdish second-generation diaspora has inherited traumas from their parents and the kin community. However, their situation is different from other communities who are in a post-conflict stage. Conflicts that compelled their parents to migrate continue in different shapes and forms in the Middle East where majority of the Kurdish populations reside. While they certainly implement past-presencing to make sense of today's Kurdish conundrum, they also keep witnessing traumatic events in their ancestral homeland. Their "witnessing at a distance"-experience perpetuates their sense of belonging to their community and rekindles desires to "do something" for their ancestors' homeland which they also identify with (Baser 2015). Such motivations to mobilise are linked to a diasporic consciousness (Toivanen 2021) that cuts through the postmemory practices in which the second-generation members take part.

Our findings have broader implications for other diasporas arising from conflicts as well. We demonstrate that collective memory intertwines with diasporic memory in the transnational space, leading to transformative processes that differ from the collective memory production and experiences of cultural trauma within local communities. This holds true for both those who directly experienced violence and those who inherited it. Subsequent generations who remain in the homeland often face the enduring consequences of past

conflicts in their daily lives, while their peers in the diaspora integrate their migration-based experiences with inherited identities and traumas. Over time, reference points in memory construction overlap and diverge, giving rise to distinct patterns. Additionally, the context of each country of residence, influenced by factors such as social, political and economic opportunity structures, the diaspora's profile, interactions with other diaspora groups (sometimes adversaries), the size of the diaspora community, and patterns of conflict and cooperation within the community, plays a significant role. These observations highlight the need for further examination in future research. How do memory entrepreneurs operate in different settings? What discrepancies exist between local and transnational memory actors? How does the understanding of "trauma" and "justice" evolve over time and across different spaces? As diaspora studies increasingly address these topics, comparative studies will continue to enrich our understanding of the transnationalisation of cultural trauma and collective memory in the future.

## Notes

1. The article zeroes in on two diaspora communities specifically: Kurds from Turkey and Iraq.
2. The second-generation is defined as those who are born in receiving countries or arrived at very young age (see Levitt 2009). Our participants' ages ranged between 18 and 40 and they are all considered as second-generation members, as they were either born or have grown up in their parents' societies of settlement.
3. We refer to "inherited trauma" from a political sociology perspective. For a biological understanding of the term, see: Raza et al. (2023).
4. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-distance-itself-kurdish-groups-bid-join-nato-swedish-radio-2022-11-05/
5. The way to transmit Kurdish oral history through storytelling and singing.

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