

Negotiating Life in Times of Crisis: The Transnational Return Migration of Refugee Adolescents and Young Adults from Germany to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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In this article, the concept of transnational migration serves as a foundation for analyzing the perspectives of children and adolescents on family movements of migration, their transnational practices, and their sense of belonging. The article discusses, on the basis of a case study, the critical situations children and young people encounter in the context of transnational migration and education. Drawing on Lorenzer's methodology of hermeneutical cultural analysis, the researcher conducted a set of interviews with refugee

children, adolescents, and young adults who have returned with their families from Germany to Iraqi Kurdistan. The article shows that, in light of the conflicts arising for the interviewees in the experience of transnational return, a special emphasis on education can aid their integration into the new society.

Keywords: Transnational migration, Return migration, Iraqi Kurdistan, Crisis, Education

Introduction

Until the 1990s, studies on return migration emphasized the need to consider the return of migrants to their countries of origin a "second migration" (Wolbert 19) due to the challenge to the return and reintegration process posed by unrealistic expectations and idealized, mythical imaginations around the country concerned on the part of the re-entrants. Some scholars went as far as regarding a return—in the words of Unger a "special case" (30) within movements of migration—as more conflict-laden than the initial migration (Markowitz and Stefansson). In the view of Gmelch and others, a return was the definitive end point of the migration process.

In the 1990s, an approach centering on the concept of transnational migration has greatly expanded theories of migration and return migration, taking into account the nature of the phenomenon as diverse in its dynamics, emerging through repeated migrations, symbolic transnational ties, or transnational practices of daily life:

We have defined transnationalism as the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build

such social fields are designated 'transmigrants'. Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political – that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, feel concerns, and develop identities. (Glick Schiller et al. 1f.)

Likewise, researchers informed by the transnational approach assert that the concept of return migration has to be “broadened and considered as a transnational process rather than a one-way occasion” (Eastmind 17). A return features a distinctive *turn-over* dynamic and may be followed by further migrations.

The mainstream of international migration studies prior to the advent of the transnational approach “can be guilty of masking [...] the experience of children and young people” (Hatfield 244). They were seen as “baggage” (Orellana et al. 588) within family migrations and as “vulnerable, needy and powerless” (White et al. 7). The present-day discipline of migration studies accords them the status of active partners in familial migrations, with interests, experiences, and wishes of their own. However, their specific experiences and perspectives remain under-researched (Hunner-Kreisel and Bühler-Niederberger).

The article at hand offers a view on the transnational approach to migration that proceeds from education science and brings a psychosocial perspective to bear on the issues. It discusses, on the basis of a case study, the experiences of Kurdish¹ children, adolescents, and young adults who have returned with their families from Germany to Iraqi Kurdistan. The interviewees developed ties to Iraqi Kurdistan several years before they returned with their families and are involved in diverse transnational practices; their identities appear mutable in accordance with the environment they are living in, and most of them consider their return to be only temporary and plan to migrate back to Germany or to another country in the future. The analysis will focus on the interviewees' individual experiences and on the role of education within the process of return; a specific emphasis on challenges, contradictions, and crises emerging from the experience of return migration will seek to cast light on an area hitherto neglected in transnational migration studies.

Transnational Migration and Education

International discourse on migration once featured a prominent focus on the problems, conflicts, and difficulties experienced by migrants in relation to their migration; iconic manifestations of this

attitude appear in what Park termed the “marginal man” and Oberg's concept of “culture shock.” The predominant view on migrants characterized them as uprooted and torn between different cultures. The concept of transnational migration has revised this limited perspective and introduced the idea that migrants switch creatively and autonomously between countries, regions, and cultures (Glick Schiller et al.). A consequent emphasis within current migration research is migrants' potential to make use of migration-related resources, competencies, and opportunities.

The concept of transnational migration has also gained considerable attention in research studies in educational science. Of especial note is the study conducted by Fürstenau on young adults who repeatedly migrate between Germany and Portugal. The author shows that continuous migration between two education systems is more of an enrichment than a challenge for the migrants. The study by Sievers, Griese, and Schulte focuses on migrants who have developed transnational activities between Germany and Turkey; its authors illustrate the capacity of transnational migration to present an opportunity to overcome the discriminatory structures of Germany's education

system. Research by Goeke has demonstrated that transnational migration plays a positive role in boosting educational success for the adolescents within his study in both their countries, Germany and Croatia. Additionally, German research from the 1980s and 1990s has shown that placing emphasis on education and educational success can be an important strategy for reintegrating children and adolescents from so-called “guest worker” families into their or their parents’ countries of origin after their return there from Germany (cf. Wolbert).

Transnational Migration and Crises

The current discourse on transnational migration may risk creating the impression that migrants can adapt effortlessly to different conditions in several countries and expand their room for maneuver in such a way as to avoid discrimination and disadvantage (Gesemann 12). It casts transnational migration as almost exclusively positive, rather than as a process that may give rise to contradictions and crises. Only a few researchers emphasize the challenging aspects of transnational migrations. Rohr has contributed significantly to the discourse by investigating children and adolescents’ transnational lives in Ecuador and finding that broken promises, unfulfilled hopes, and disappointments may be

concomitants of transnational migrations. This contradiction and complexity are aspects which the discourse on transnational migration should not shy away from including and exploring.

From a psychosocial point of view, all forms of migration are conflictual experiences associated with feelings of separation and sorrow (Rohr et al. 8). Researchers have characterized migrations as a “shock” or as a traumatic experience, even where these effects are not evidently visible (Grinberg and Grinberg 9; Akhtar).² The article at hand assumes that every migration is accompanied by a crisis. Filipp and Aymanns define a crisis as a critical life event that challenges an individual’s self-concept. The literature asserts that a crisis is a normal situation every migrant has to cope with (Kronsteiner 329f.), precipitated by the loss of people, objectives, places, language, culture, and/or traditions (Grinberg and Grinberg 28). Garza-Guerreo points to the mourning of these losses as one of the major challenges in overcoming the crisis. Throughout this process, migrants can rebuild their identity and the migration can become an experience of innovation and renewal. If the process goes less positively, migrants may develop chronic conditions with pro-

found and lasting effects and manifestations (Grinberg and Grinberg).

This psychosocial perspective on transnational migration can serve as a basis for raising new questions that, though yet to attract the focal interest of research in this field, are key to our understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of transnational migrations. It is imperative in this context to determine whether transnational migrations can also cause crises to arise when they are not single and permanent, but multiple and in each instance temporary.

Return Migration to Iraqi Kurdistan³ and Education

In the early 1990s studies on Kurdish children, adolescents, and young adults in Germany indicated that transnational practices have not been inherent to their lives. Şenol, who conducted the first study on Kurdish children and adolescents in Germany, highlights complex identity crises as part of the processes by which these young people integrate into German society. The study describes its subjects’ inability to align their families’ expectations with those of their societal surroundings. In consequence, many of Şenol’s interviewees felt rejected by one or the other. Kızılhan found that most of the Kurdish adolescents interviewed for his study did

not feel properly part of German society because of the lack of official recognition of the Kurds' ethnic identity. Implicit in this finding is an *either-or* approach: either the adolescents are *Kurdish* or they are *German*. Schmidt and Skubsch disagree with this apparent binary opposition in their studies, published in the late 1990s. They point out that Kurdish adolescents with experiences of migration develop an identity that allows them to adapt to both societal and familial expectations. However, most of the adolescents interviewed for their studies wish to integrate into the German society. Since the widespread use of the internet and social media, along with political and social changes which have ushered in new opportunities for regular visits particularly to Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish children and adolescents living in Germany and other European countries have acquired the opportunity to come to know their family members in the Kurdish regions and familiarize themselves more closely with the Kurdish language and traditions and practices of daily life. In addition to these symbolic transnational practices and temporary mobility, an increasing number of Kurdish families have decided to return permanently or temporarily from various European countries to Iraqi Kurdistan since 2003 (cf.

Askari; Emanuelsson; Keles; Salam; Schleimer).⁴

The children, adolescents, and young adults investigated in the study at hand returned between 2003 and 2013 to the highly dynamic society of Iraqi Kurdistan. Since the US liberated the Kurdish region in the northern part of Iraq in 1991, turning the region into a semi-autonomous area after a long history of violent conflicts, Iraqi Kurdistan has been engaged in a "dramatic and [...] on-going transformation process" (Salam 2). Economic growth due largely to oil production, socio-political and cultural developments, and higher levels of stability and security, especially subsequent to the establishment after Saddam Hussein's fall in 2003 of a new constitution for Iraq defining Iraqi Kurdistan as an autonomous region, have precipitated processes of change and lent them momentum. In the context of this study, changes in the significance of education within Iraqi Kurdistan acquire specific import. Yakub Othman has suggested that most of the Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan did not attach great importance to education during times of conflict and war. However, since the beginning of the above-described processes of change, education has gained great precedence as a value in the region and, as Salam

points out, as a further catalyst to societal transformation (279).

According to Salam, returned migrants hope both to support the developments in Iraqi Kurdistan in order to promote its independence and to profit from the manifold development processes currently in progress in the region. Askari states accordingly that many Kurds returned due to "new political and economic possibilities" (193). However, while they receive acknowledgement among some sectors of Kurdish society as valuable contributors to the processes of transformation and pluralization currently underway, returned migrants face hostility from other quarters because of the experiences and lifestyles they had enjoyed abroad (Salam). Returned children, adolescents, and young adults may equally be confronted with suspicion from members of society who do not value transnational identities, practices, and realities and are instead keen to maintain "old values" and "tradition," as King puts it.

Research Methodology

The qualitative research study at hand explores the question of how Kurdish children, adolescents, and young adults with experience of transnational migration cope with their families' return from

Germany to Iraqi Kurdistan, and specifically analyzes the role of education in the return process. During field research carried out between 2011 and 2013, the researcher conducted a total of 32 in-depth interviews with returned Kurdish children, adolescents, and young adults aged between fourteen and twenty-five. The strategy for the selection of interviewees was based on the “snowball effect” (Reinders). The interviews were conducted in the three largest cities in Iraqi Kurdistan in locations determined by the interviewees, such as schools, universities, at the interviewees’ homes, or in public places such as cafés or parks.

All interviewees were born in Germany or moved there with their families to various different regions and cities at a young age, during either the first Gulf War (1990-1991) or the intra-Kurdish conflict (1994-1998). They returned with their families to one of the three biggest cities in Iraqi Kurdistan after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime. All of them developed transnational practices during their time in Germany, which emerged on the basis of lasting and profound relationships with family members and friends in Iraqi Kurdistan supported by modern means of communication and regular visits to the region. They passed through the German

educational system, some of them attained school-leaving qualifications in Germany, and all of them continued their education after their return.

The interviewees showed a distinct desire to communicate, which was of importance and benefit to conducting a narrative interview. However, some of them were unfamiliar with the narrative form of the interview and did not respond to a storytelling prompt. The interviewer therefore discussed the opening question with all interviewees before the start of the interview, in addition to using further stimuli, such as alternative versions of the opening question, during the interview in order to elicit more narrations. The structure of the interviews was designed to prompt self-reflection, meaning that their narrations foregrounded their personal thoughts and memories.

Analysis of the interviews took place on the basis of Lorenzer’s method of scenic understanding, which is based on a methodology of in-depth hermeneutical cultural analysis and seeks to understand the multiple layers of meaning within interviews and texts. The use of the method permits the identification of social processes, relationships, and realities that are not immediately visible and that the inter-

viewees do not explicitly express. The interpretation of the interviews commenced with the collection of “first impressions” (Salling Olesen and Weber 21), followed by an exploration of specific sequences with the aim of validating, revising, or refuting the initial approaches to the text’s understanding. The interpretation process additionally sought to infer the significance of education to the adolescent returners. Concluding, the use and arrangement of further sequences enabled the researcher to present the findings in the form of a single case analysis, thus elaborating a holistic and realistic view of the interviewee’s reality. While this method does not generate quantitative findings, it does allow the formulation of certain generalizations by identifying aspects common to all single case analyses (Geertz 37).

In pointing out that hermeneutical interpretations are always culture-bound, Chakkarath raises the question of whether it is even possible to understand and analyze interviews or texts whose interlocutors or authors are located in different cultures (272). He suggests critical discussion and reflection of different interpretations as essential for avoiding the falsification of understandings and interpretations. The researcher sought to do justice to this

injunction by embedding the interpretation process in the context of two interdisciplinary groups consisting of members from diverse methodological and disciplinary backgrounds and concluding the interpretation of each interview in a psychoanalytical supervision meeting.

Case Study

Yin considers that even a “single case study can be the basis for significant explanations and generalisations” (6). This article will therefore present only one case study, which will act as an example of the interviewed children, adolescents, and young adults’ lives in Iraqi Kurdistan after their return from Germany. Its selection derives from its incorporation of two aspects shared by most case studies in the sample: the way the interviewees experienced their return and the role of education in the process.

Firmesk⁵ was 23 years old at the time of the interview in 2013. In 1996, at the age of six, she fled with her mother, her sister, who is four years younger than her, and her brother, who is five years younger, from their home town in the south-east of Iraqi Kurdistan to a city in North Rhine-Westphalia in Germany. Her youngest brother, who was four years old in 2013, was born in Germany. Firmesk’s father had

fled to Germany several years before his wife and his children. All members of the family have taken German citizenship. Firmesk was unaware of the reasons for her family’s migration to Germany and stated that she “has never asked.”⁶ She assumed that her father had migrated as a *guest worker*, and did not know that labor migration from Iraqi Kurdistan to Germany was not possible.

Firmesk attended a comprehensive school and had planned to study education-oriented social work after leaving, but failed to win a university place, after which her parents decided to return permanently to their old home town in Iraqi Kurdistan so that she might continue her education. Returning in 2012, she commenced a course of bachelor’s degree studies in humanities at a public university, and has returned temporarily to Germany on several occasions for practical placements and summer schools.

Although she has been asked to work as a lecturer at a university in Iraqi Kurdistan, Firmesk still plans to return to Germany to continue her studies there. She hinted in the interview that her return to Iraqi Kurdistan may not be the last migration in her life, and also commented that she does not yet know where to settle in the

future and that she wants to keep all her options open.

The way in which Firmesk talked about her life before migrating to Germany was particularly striking. She described her childhood in chronological order, concentrating on facts without adding thoughts or reflections or discussing matters in emotional terms. She referred to her grandmother as the most important person in her childhood because she had raised her and her siblings while her mother worked to provide for the family after her father’s migration to Germany. However, she would not be drawn out further on her time with her grandmother:

As I told you before: I was at my grandmother’s house very often and she sang songs to me. It was a nice time. I had a nice childhood. [...] Yes, I was [...] a good child.

She mentioned her grandmother only once more, while describing the period immediately after the family’s arrival in Germany:

Suddenly we were away from grandma. We had been with her every day, every night. Yes [...] I was alone in Germany and my parents had other things to do.

They wanted to have a new life and find schools for us and [they wanted] us to be successful and have better opportunities. But I had my old life. Suddenly it was gone and I was supposed to talk in German all the time because it was important to my parents. Then I forgot how to talk in Kurdish because I was so busy learning German.

Firmesk said very little about her life in Germany. After talking about her parents and their desire for her and her siblings to succeed in the German education system, she focused on descriptions related to her return migration to Iraqi Kurdistan. She referred to having constantly struggled with disapproval from the people now around her, but added quickly that she has not let their opinions influence her life and behavior. She complained of rejection by some of her fellow students and lecturers:

But there are some boys who do not want to accept that a girl is more successful than they are. They are like that. It hurts them when a girl is more successful! [...] They always say 'You are way too German!' I feel unwanted.

When I asked her how she handles situations of this kind, she confessed:

To be quite honest: it is hard. Sometimes ... I don't feel understood and I don't know what to do. When I talk to my parents they are mad at me or they fear that I won't finish my studies. So I don't tell them. [...] I tried to talk to my mother. She told me 'We are here again, it's different. Do concentrate on your studies.' I am successful in my studies ... Fortunately! That is why they cannot say anything. But everything is chaotic [here in Iraqi Kurdistan] and everyone trusts their gut. But I get used to it quickly. I had to. What shall I say? I miss Germany a lot and would like to be there. And when I am there ... I have no place at a university although I did wait for one for a long time. [...] It's okay. I will stay [in Iraqi Kurdistan] if I get the good job at the university they promised me. Not a single person understands it. I don't even understand myself. [...] I always say: 'I am both' [Kurdish and German].

At first sight, Firmesk appears a typical representative of the transnational migrant as depicted in current research. She incorporates both Germany and Iraqi Kurdistan into her life, physically by being mobile as well as symbolically by remaining in contact with family members and friends in Germany, reading German

newspapers online, and watching German television. It appears, then, as if she is able to integrate her experiences in Germany and Iraqi Kurdistan into her daily life and tap into the full potential of the transnational practices she performs. A driving factor for Firmesk's active pursuit of a transnational way of life appears to be her education. Her international mobility, in enabling her to continue working towards her objectives in another country, helps her to overcome or work around the educational limitations imposed by circumstances elsewhere, in this case her inability to secure a university place in Germany. Firmesk describes her ongoing migrations and border-crossing practices as a natural and personally non-challenging part of her life.

However, from a psychosocial perspective, the interview with Firmesk reveals a number of conflicts and challenges. It seems as if it is almost impossible for her to talk about crises, which emerged in the context both of her migration to Germany and of her return migration to Iraqi Kurdistan. She hints at them, but essentially either reinterprets them or places them, to a substantial extent, under what might be called a taboo. One reason for her reluctance or inability to talk about the crises, conflicts, and challenging and emo-

tional aspects of her experience of migration may be the weight of parental expectation in regard to her and her siblings' education. Firmesk in particular, whose stagnating educational career was one of her parents' reasons for returning to Iraqi Kurdistan, is subject to the expectation to subordinate all else in her life to the achievement of educational goals. To this end, the expectation upon Firmesk is that she migrates and return migrates without experiencing—or expressing—any difficulties, focuses wholeheartedly on her studies after migrating, and becomes educationally successful by making use of the resources a transnational lifestyle provides. Firmesk's statements in the interview reveal that she does not want to be a burden to her family and therefore constantly and ambitiously attempts to fulfil her parents' expectations, which includes the denial or suppression of any migration- and return migration-related experience of crisis.

Firmesk's acquiescence to this exclusive focus on education helps her to handle the crises arising through her experience of migration and return migration by pursuing her educational goals as a distraction from confrontation with the crises. Educational success offers her a basis for the further development of her transna-

tional lifestyle because she knows that a return to Germany will only be realizable if her educational success is sufficient to admit her to a university there. Moreover, educational success provides her with self-confidence, which in turn generates a sense of stability in her new environment after her return migration. It is a stability not seriously undermined by the conflicts she describes experiencing with fellow students and other members of Kurdish society due to her transnational identity and lifestyle. Indeed, educational success offers her a defense for her way of living and increases her acceptance by her social environment.

Discussion

As a case study representative of all interviews, Firmesk's story shows that the interviewees do not consider their return from Germany to Iraqi Kurdistan as permanent, but instead as a return in a transnational sense; they keep their options open without committing themselves to one context. The interviews, as exemplified by Firmesk's case, also demonstrate the occasional transnational activity and mobility the returned children, adolescents and young adults tend to show. These transnational activities and practices, and their focal point—on either Germany or Iraqi Kurdistan—differ in accordance with the

life stage of the interviewees and the contexts in which they live. Firmesk, for instance, did not become more transnationally active until after her family's return to Iraqi Kurdistan. She started moving between Germany and Iraqi Kurdistan in the context of her studies at the university in Iraqi Kurdistan. The primary transnational practices in which she engages on a day-to-day basis are of a symbolic nature and aimed at maintaining ties to her former life in Germany.

In a manner again representative of all interviews, Firmesk's case study indicates that despite their involvement in transnational practices, the young people's transnational return from Germany to Iraqi Kurdistan is more than simply a return to their or their parents' country of origin. Instead, the children, adolescents, and young adults experience the return as a new migration, with attendant conflictual experiences. The apparent ease of the border-crossing activities engaged in by these young people belies the multi-layered, complex, and potentially crisis-generating nature of the turning point marked by the return. Delcroix found that discussion of the migration among families is an important factor in coping with migration-related crises. However, like most of the interviewees, Firmesk did not talk with her

family about their migration to Germany or the reasons behind it, nor about their return to Iraqi Kurdistan or that region's history; neither did the family discuss the migration-related crises that arose. A reason for the apparent taboo on these topics may lie in the trauma resulting from the systematic persecution of the Kurds by Saddam Hussein's regime and/or in families' experiences during their flight from Iraqi Kurdistan. Differences within families in attitude towards returning to Iraqi Kurdistan may be another factor; the interviewees' parents often identify strongly with Iraqi Kurdistan, and most of them returned with the intent of remaining there permanently. They consider Iraqi Kurdistan their home, from which they had been separated (cf. Ammann). Their children take a contrasting view: to them, Iraqi Kurdistan is not their sole locus of belonging, and their families' return is part of an ongoing, reversible, and transnational migration (cf. Baser). The parents, however, expect their children to fully accept their decision to return permanently and appear to impose taboos upon doubts and upon discussion of challenges encountered in relation to the return, uneasiness around their new life in Iraqi Kurdistan, and any sense of crisis the return has occasioned.

A further finding of Firmsesk's case which is exemplary for the wider sample relates to the status of educational success for both the parents and their children, with the former expecting the latter to attain or continue to attain it after returning to Iraqi Kurdistan. The interviews show that education takes on a range of functions in the interviewees' lives. First, achieving or maintaining educational success is, for most of them, the only way to continue their transnational practices and lifestyles. They plan to return to Germany, at least temporarily, after completing their schooling or graduating from university in order to continue their education. Educational success affords them the additional opportunity to expedite their integration into and acceptance in Kurdish society. Accordingly, transnational identities that appear, in the interviewees' accounts, to cause conflict with some sections of society tend to meet with greater acceptance when their bearers are educationally successful. In this context, I note an additional practical advantage of a transnational educational pathway in the shape of improved opportunities to live and work in either Germany or Iraqi Kurdistan. More broadly, the multiple opportunities that are concomitants of educational success in Germany and Iraqi Kurdistan, and the focus on education that precipitates this

success, help the interviewees to overcome crises arising from the experience of return migration by supporting their psychosocial stability and general wellbeing, giving them aims for the future, allowing them to maintain a transnational lifestyle and transnational practices of daily life, and enabling them to integrate into society in Iraqi Kurdistan without committing themselves fully to it.

Conclusion

The qualitative study at hand has investigated a number of issues that had previously not been the focus of close attention in recent discourse on transnational migration. While most studies in the mainstream of this discourse continue to concentrate on adults/parents as the principal actors of migrations, this study pays attention to the experiences of children, adolescents, and young adults. Most of the young people interviewed for the study had no choice but to follow their parents' decision, yet we would do them a disservice if we were to characterize them as passive; they develop their own transnational practices and dynamics, which may differ from those of their parents. Transnational practices, especially those related to education, also fulfil functional roles. Educational and academic success in both Germany and Iraqi Kurdistan appears to help the

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interviewees to navigate their transnational lives and opens up multiple opportunities for their futures in either or both countries.

One focal point of interest in this study has been the analysis of crises occasioned by transnational migration. It is evident from the findings that the interviewees' transnational return can trigger such crises, even, strikingly, where another migration is already planned and the situation of living in one country is only temporary. Focusing on education can help the young people to overcome these crises. It fulfils a stabilizing function by strengthening their capacity for self-perception, their transnational practices and lifestyles, and their opportunities to integrate into Kurdish society, which values educational success. However, the case study has shown that these processes cause crises and are full of friction.

In investigating transnational migration from a psychosocial perspective, this article has demonstrated the complexity of transnational migration as a phenomenon and an experience, and in so doing complements existing research and highlights another important and currently neglected facet of the concept.

Notes

¹ It is important at this juncture to note that *the* Kurds as a homogenous group do not exist, because Kurdish societies, identities, traditions, and languages are highly diverse. Accordingly, there is no valid general definition of *the* Kurds (Ammann 42). An additional, crucial factor which requires consideration is the broad range of dimensions which affect an individual's identity, such as gender, age, abilities, religious beliefs, socio-economic status and sexual orientation, none of which exist in isolation and all of which overlap to some degree. Nevertheless, Ammann also points out, without going into detail on processes of culturalization and/or ethnicization, that certain historical benchmarks and other factors do shape the identities and the everyday lives of most Kurds (42).

² For a critical discussion of the concept of trauma in the context of migration, see Mlodoch (18).

³ For an overview of the principal historical events which have left their mark on the history of Iraqi Kurdistan and which may also be influential factors in the migration and return migration of Kurds, see Ahmad et al. (28).

⁴ It is of course the case that not all migrants can be considered *transnational*; neither can all Kurds in the diaspora. Not all of them develop ties to more than one country, not all of them who take part in transnational practices do so all the time, and not all of them take part in transnational practices with consistent intensity. I hence concur with Alinia, in her study on Kurdish identities: "[E]ach individual acts differently [...] and defines her/his own relation to the society based on their own specific situation, needs and experiences" (251).

⁵ *Firmesk* is a pseudonym. I have omitted the names of cities and institutions in order to protect the interviewee's identity.

⁶ The interview was conducted in German and all quotations have been translated from German to English.

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