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**Intricacies of Engaging Diasporas in Conflict Resolution and Transitional Justice: The Kurdish Diaspora and the Peace Process in Turkey**

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*The growing literature on diasporas' involvement in homeland conflicts shows that diasporas have the power to influence political, social and economic developments in their country of origin and residence. Although this is an emerging field of research, there is still much to discover about the roles that diasporas play in conflict resolution and transitional justice mechanisms. This article intends to fill this gap by scrutinizing the Kurdish Diaspora as a case study. Based on in-depth interviews with Kurdish diaspora and extensive fieldwork observations in Europe between 2008 and 2015, it explores the intricacies of integrating diasporas into conflict resolution by analyzing approaches of homeland actors and fragments within Kurdish diaspora groups throughout the different stages of the peace processes.*

*Keywords: Diaspora, Peace Process, Transitional Justice, Kurds, Turkey*

**Introduction**

Scholars from various disciplines within the social sciences point out that diasporas cannot be ignored when discussing contemporary conflicts (Cohen, 1997; Smith, 2007;

Cochrane, 2007; Brinkerhoff, 2011; Van Hear, 1998; Kleist, 2007; Pirkkalainen and Abdile, 2009; Féron, 2017). The growing literature on diaspora involvement in homeland conflicts show that diasporas have the power to influence political, social and economic developments in their country of origin and residence. They develop multiple loyalties, become engaged both with home and host country political affairs and function well in both realms (Van Hear, 1998; Vorrath, 2012). Many diasporas are associated with political activism, and a considerable number of them are actually the result of conflicts around the world. They “mobilize financial, diplomatic, social, cultural and religious capital in the service of conflicts in the ostensible homeland” (Fair, 2005, p.147). Although there is an emerging field of research on this topic, there is still much to discover about what role diasporas play in conflict resolution. The rise of diaspora politics, as Lyons and Mandaville (2010) put it, poses a challenge to our traditional understanding of foreign policy-making that puts emphasis solely on state-state relations, IGOs or NGOs. This article argues that it also poses a challenge to our traditional understanding of peace-building and transitional justice. If we want to comprehend the mechanisms of contemporary conflict resolution in today’s world, engaging these populations must be a vital dimension to overarching peace-building strategies (Tint et al., 2014, p. 8; Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2016, p.23). However, as peace processes are difficult tasks especially when it comes to determining inclusion and exclusion of actors, engaging diasporas as non-state actors to negotiation frameworks becomes all the more complex. Especially considering that the idea of inclusion has not found a consensus in peace studies just yet (see Suazo, 2013), engaging diasporas in these processes also brings about novel discussions into the field.

The Kurdish case is exemplary when it comes to diaspora influence and engagement.

The conflict in Turkey continues to be subject to considerable diaspora influence and

this merits further attention. Turkey has been experiencing a low-intensity civil war since the 1980s. Since then, there have been various ceasefires and, finally, an attempt at peaceful resolution. The peace process between the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the Turkish state collapsed in the summer of 2015 with the eruption of armed clashes between the conflicting parties. During the course of the conflict, the Kurdish diaspora in Europe played a crucial role in terms of forming advocacy networks worldwide, raising awareness of the Kurdish cause, protesting and preparing petitions in order to make the voice of oppressed Kurds in Turkey heard in their hostlands. The diaspora even founded a short-lived government in exile in Brussels. They worked as lobby groups at local, national, and supranational levels and they transnationalized the Kurdish Question (see van Bruinessen, 2000; Eccarius-Kelly, 2002; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Baser 2015). Therefore, it was not surprising that the diaspora also tried to have a say at the peace talks both directly and indirectly. The Kurdish diaspora aimed to complement the efforts of homeland actors who were in favor of an immediate peaceful resolution. But did they truly have the power to exert influence over such a complicated process? Did they act as spoilers or supporters in the conflict? No systematic or quantitative academic research has been conducted on how the diaspora perceived the process to this date. It is the objective of this article to exposit the involvement of the Kurdish diaspora in the failed peace process in Turkey in order to demonstrate the complexities and challenges of involving diasporas in conflict resolution.

Against this background, the article initially presents a review of the existing literature on diaspora involvement in conflict resolution by giving examples from a variety of cases. After presenting the theoretical framework on diaspora engagement in conflict resolution, reconciliation and transitional justice, the focus shifts to the

Kurdish diaspora. The role that the Kurdish diaspora played during different phases of the conflict and the heterogeneous structure of the Kurdish Diaspora are analyzed by looking at different groups with varying repertoires of action and political agendas. The arguments are based author's interviews with Kurdish diaspora members and fieldwork observations in various European countries during the peace process in Turkey, which is explained in details in the methodology section below.

### **Diaspora Engagement in Peace and Conflict**

Inclusion and exclusion of relevant actors in peace processes and transitional justice is still an on-going debate. As Paffenholz (2014, p.4) argues “the key question in designing peace processes is to decide who should participate in which phase, role and format in order to reach a quality and sustainable agreement”. Authors such as Suazo (2013, p.5-6) and Paffenholz (2014, p.4-9) have discussed whether long-term inclusion of various parties in conflict can increase trust levels, decrease the possibilities of spoiling, enhance legitimacy and representation, and thus paves the way for more sustainable solutions when it comes to peacebuilding. Following Stedman (1997), Suazo (2013, p.6-8) also argues that a high level numerical inclusion of many parties will lead to a higher likelihood of peace and allows different actors to consolidate their interests during negotiations. Other authors such as Wanis-St.John (2008, p.4) also discuss the role that civil society can play in peace processes and peacebuilding arguing that the discussions generally underplay the difficulties of inclusion while normatively advocating participation.

As Paffenholz (2014, p.4) opines, it is usually the context of the process which determines who should participate and how. She lists different formats of participation such as inclusive participation at the negotiation table, observer status, consultation or

problem-solving workshops. These discussions, however, usually revolve on inclusion of warring parties, interest groups, civil society or women. The debate on inclusion of diasporas is a recent phenomenon in this field and there is an emerging literature on whether diasporas can be agents of peace (Zunzer, 2005; Baser 2015). Below, I lay out the recent debates in social sciences on what roles diasporas can play in peace and conflict and then I turn to a slightly novel discussion on diaspora engagement in transitional justice. I then discuss the intricacies of diaspora inclusion.

### ***Diasporas as Agents of Peace or Conflict?***

One way or another, diasporas become involved in contemporary homeland conflicts. They either directly support a group that is in conflict with the home state, or they whole-heartedly support the home state's policies regarding a certain issue. Their support can be through financial means as well as through diplomatic and political interventions. Sometimes, this support can be through recruitment, training and supplying arms (Shain and Barth, 2003). Previous research on diasporas and conflict has mainly focused on investigating the role of diasporas as radicals or hardliners who contribute to the prolongation of conflicts in the homeland and as less likely to compromise during peace processes (Lyons, 2004; Shain and Barth, 2003). Diasporas were described as long-distance nationalist communities pursuing radical agendas, while taking advantage of the freedom and economic benefits that the host land provided them (Anderson, 1983). It has been argued that members of the diaspora have contributed to the escalation of conflicts rather than supporting constructive conflict resolution (Zunzer, 2005). Newman and Richmond (2006, p.2) suggest that ethnic or national diasporas may even act as spoilers during peace processes and that "[d]iaspora support for the Tamil Tigers or for the IRA, or US support for Israel, not only

empowered these actors to resist a peaceful settlement but also allowed them to adopt more ambitious goals than might otherwise be expected once they did negotiate.”

Although they have a point, as Cheran (2006, p.7) suggests, this myopic view which depicts diasporas as supporting violence or prolonging conflicts actually prevents academics from addressing diaspora contributions to peace and conflict resolution. Cochrane (2007, p.27) endorses this point of view by stating that positive diaspora contributions generate less attention than more violent interventions. The emerging literature indeed provides insights about diasporas as critical agents of social, political and cultural change in more constructive and less confrontational ways (Horst, 2007). Diasporas have been partly – sometimes exceedingly – effective in assisting conflict transformation and have been actively engaged in post-conflict reconstruction. There is an increasing belief that by lobbying at national and supranational levels and by aiding the process of transition and reconstruction, diasporas are playing an increasingly important role in achieving political compromise and peaceful conflict resolution in their homelands (Hall and Swain, 2007). They can have a positive political impact on peace-making through human rights advocacy, by raising awareness among the hostland public and decision-makers. In addition, they can potentially provide direct political support to pro-peace actors in the homeland, as well as participating in homeland peace-making initiatives as advisors (Baser and Swain, 2008). They can even participate in drafting constitutions in the aftermath of conflicts, as was the case with the Eritrean Diaspora (Antwi-Boateng, 2011, p.13). Emerging publications, therefore have been underlining these positive impacts more assertively and challenging the already existing negative light on diaspora groups.

The financial contributions of diasporas can also be vital for post-conflict societies (Brinkerhoff 2011). The case of Somalia is noteworthy, as remittances are of very high

economic importance domestically and much of the expertise and resources for sustaining the ongoing peace process come from diaspora communities in the West (Van Hear,1998). Ambe-Uva (2011) also shows that the Tiv Diaspora in the US, Canada and the European Union plays a significant role in democratization and peacebuilding in Nigeria by sending remittances and getting involved in various types of development project. These financial, political or social engagements are usually dependent on various factors such as the host country's political opportunity structures, the leverage that the diaspora has on homeland actors as well as the homeland's openness to receive such influences (Baser, 2015).

### ***Diaspora Engagement in Transitional Justice***

Many scholars also suggest that too little attention has been given to diasporas' roles in transitional justice mechanisms or in truth-seeking efforts, especially in judicial processes (Mey, 2008; Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2016). Academics have called for the participation of internally displaced peoples and diasporas in truth-seeking mechanisms, as these processes may uncover human rights violations during the conflict in a more inclusive manner. As Tint et al. (2014, p. 1-2) put it, there are various reasons diasporas should be involved in peace and transitional justice mechanisms: firstly, "they share the common experience of undergoing a life-altering transition aggravated by the reality that it is typically stemming from adversity", secondly, "they endure various degrees of loss and trauma, including separation from family, isolation, breakdown of community, discrimination in their new environment and loss of identity, status and livelihood", thirdly, "as they resettle, their ability to lead successful lives is challenged by new cultures, religions, climates, educational systems, economic realities, employment situations, languages, and social and political barriers", and finally, "they are often minorities in their adoptive countries



and neighbourhoods which adds a layer of difficulty they have not previously encountered.” Diasporas’ traumas are different than the trauma of those who stayed in the homeland and directly suffered the consequences of the conflict. However, diaspora experience, especially in exile, does not guarantee a life free of suffering. Some diaspora members might leave the homeland with great trauma behind them and great challenges ahead. Moreover, as Wiebelhaus-Brahm (2016, p.25) suggests, engaging diasporas in transitional justice processes will provide full accounting of human rights violations as much as possible, and this will give diasporas a greater stake in homeland’s future in a post-conflict reconstruction setting. Pointing to the growing acceptance of a right to truth in international law, he asserts that diasporans have as much right to have their suffering acknowledge as those who have never left the country. As Orjuela (2017) argues, transitional justice is becoming more and more deterritorialized and turning into a global project where a variety of non-state actors play extensive roles. Diasporas are among those actors who can shape, reformulate or even drive them as diaspora members are not only activists, but in more cases also victims, witnesses and even perpetrators of mass atrocities (Orjuela, 2017, p.2). It is observable that the academic tone of the debate with regards to transitional justice is dominated by issues of morality as opposed to utility, unlike in the case of peace processes, and that the core of academic discussion revolves around victimhood and obligation in the perception of diasporas as part of the solution to conflicts.

As Young and Park (2009, p.350) rightly put it “[i]t is a valid question to ask whether members of diaspora populations can be considered victims, as this consideration has great bearing on whether states have an obligation to include diaspora groups during a national truth commission process.” Getting diasporas involved will inevitably include them in claim-making processes and the right to reparation, restitution,

compensation, rehabilitation and guarantees of non-repetition (Young and Park, 2009, p.354). The same is true for peace processes. Are diasporas considered as the victims of conflict and therefore *de facto* stakeholders in conflict resolution processes, or are they considered a part of the process because they can influence political outcomes? The jury is still out on the answers to these questions. As Bradley (2013, p.2) suggests “[i]f displaced persons are not recognized as critical stakeholders in truth-telling processes, the narratives and recommendations that emerge from these initiatives will inevitably be incomplete, consigning the displaced to remain on the margins of their societies.” However, others might object to this by saying that they have not suffered as much as the locals and they should therefore be kept out of these sensitive processes (Shain and Aryasinha, 2006). “Armed groups, governments or the civil society in home countries may be reluctant to accept diasporas’ authority and mediation. In some cases, diaspora groups can be perceived as ‘foreigners’, already too distant from the hardship of the conflict to take a part in the peace settlements, or voice the concerns of those ‘who have stayed’ (Freitas, 2012). Even if they return to the home country, they may still remain isolated, as the others will continue to perceive them as outsiders. Diaspora members might be perceived as having lost touch with the reality on the ground, as in the case of Somali diaspora (Lewela, 2012, p.4), or of Liberia (Antwi-Boateng, 2011, p. 20). In some cases, where active participation in negotiations is deemed to be impossible, some scholars such as Bala suggest that diasporas might not be stakeholders in peace negotiations but that they can still contribute to transitional justice processes by partaking in truth-seeking efforts even if they do not affect anything (Bala, 2015, p.33).

As Wielbelhaus-Brahm (2016, p.25) states, “on a more ad hoc basis, in the 1980s and 1990s, diaspora populations were able to participate in truth commissions in

Argentina, Chile and Guatemala through their embassies.” In recent years, some truth commissions have included diaspora groups either as conceivers of the process as or statement-givers and peace activists. This has been the case in Haiti, Liberia, Sierra Leone and East Timor (Young and Park, 2009; Haider, 2014). These experiences, however, were not immune to the aforementioned challenges. More importantly, the very power relations that lie at the heart of the homeland conflicts can play out in diaspora spaces as well when it comes to getting involved in transitional justice mechanisms (Orjuela, 2017, p.2).

For instance, the Liberian Truth Commissions are an exemplary case for inclusivity of conflict-affected communities outside a state’s border as witnesses and victims. They also effectively created a platform for the debate regarding on-going trauma and conflict within diaspora communities (Young and Park, 2009, p.358; Dabo, 2012, p. 9-10). The commission finalized its preparatory work between 2005 and 2006 and recruited and trained statement-takers who would cover not only people who lived in Liberia but also the diaspora. Around 20,000 statements (1,631 of them from the diaspora) were collected. These included the testimonies of those who live in the US, UK, Ghana and in other West African countries (Young and Park, 2009, p.343). Diaspora involvement was also present in other procedures such as report-writing and official public hearings. As Steinberg (2010, p.2) explains: some 600 volunteers, most of them corporate lawyers working *pro bono*, were given instruction in Liberian history and justice. Similarly, Hoogenboom and Quinn (2011) report that the Haitian diaspora in Canada played a key role in the transitional justice period in Haiti. They built links with the International Centre for Human rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD) since they were seeking to partner with an organization that would enable them make their voice heard. They played a vital role in requesting truth

commissions and they were influential in selecting the commissioners. Although they provide significant variation in several dimensions, all these examples show that there is a strong will among diaspora communities to at least become a part of the peace process from afar at various levels including truth-seeking, commemoration and legal justice (Orjuela, 2017, p.3). There is still no systematic research that measures the impact of diaspora involvement on these processes and whether such involvement has any influence on homeland actors' policy-making decisions.

Wiebelhaus-Brahm (2016, p.24) argues that “the nature of violence, characteristics of the diaspora, and the interests of the international community are important factors shaping diaspora interests and influence with respect to transitional justice”. In this article, following his remarks, it is also claimed that willingness of homeland actors' including the government and the insurgent groups' leadership matter immensely in determining which diaspora group will be involved, and if so, when and how.

### ***Who to Engage? How to Engage?***

When researching ways of conceptualizing diasporas, scholars acknowledge that diaspora groups are not homogenous entities, and researchers therefore need to take into account different aspects such as ideological cleavages, class relations, gender and religious differences among the diaspora (Kleist, 2007; Lyons and Mandaville, 2010; Féron, 2017). Abdile and Pirkkalainen highlight that “even within the same diaspora, groups and individuals may assume different roles and may be mobilized to undertake contradictory responsibilities when interacting with the homeland” (Abdile and Pirkkalainen, 2011, p.51). As Galipo (2011, p. 8) further argues, “there is always a plurality of voices within the diasporas, especially when different waves of displacement are taken into account. Fragmentation within diasporas often reflects the

social and political division in the homeland.” Based on this, divisions among different groups within the diaspora should also be embedded in any research that is concerned with diasporas’ role in conflict and peace processes (Horst, 2007, p.8). A diaspora’s political stance and rivalries with other groups are not static either. Scholars such as Kleist (2007) rightly argue that under certain circumstances, divergent groups may form contingent alliances for a common goal but their political, social and economic structures may remain fragmented.

Involving diasporas in any phase of conflict resolution is a complex task, especially for third parties. At the core of the matter is the question of defining who represents the diaspora and, if the presence of fragmented groups within a diaspora can be detected, how to approach them and involve them in policy mechanisms. The diaspora group’s *capacity and motivation* to influence homeland conflict (Freitas, 2012, p. 5) is also immensely important in terms of determining the scope of its actions. Some groups may have higher motivations but lower capacities in terms of influencing peace outcomes, while some others might be cautious to act even though they have the ability to influence a peace process. Some might have negative aspirations about the conflict yet lack the capacity to act as spoilers, while in other cases; they have all the capacity but remain indifferent. Developing diaspora engagement projects will be complex for politicians, as well as third parties, unless these facts are considered (Horst, 2007).

### **Methodology**

The article builds on in-depth interviews with Kurdish diaspora members in various European countries between 2008 and 2015. The interviewees were Kurdish-origin first and second-generation individuals who were engaged in transnational activities towards homeland politics which included protests, demonstrations, advocacy, justice and truth-seeking, lobbying and commemoration among others. The first strand of

research has been conducted as part of author's doctoral thesis<sup>i</sup> between 2008 and 2012. In this four-year period, the author conducted around 100 interviews with first and second-generation diaspora Kurds in Sweden and Germany, spending at least six months in each location. The focus of this study was how diasporas were importing homeland's conflict dynamics to these European countries and what determined their repertoires of actions.

The second strand of research has taken place between 2012 and 2014, while the author was a post-doctoral research fellow.<sup>ii</sup> This study specifically focused on how diasporas perceive the peace process in Turkey and what mechanisms they used in order to engage themselves in the process as influential actors. This study entailed fieldwork in the Netherlands, France, Germany, Sweden, the UK and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq with 2-3 week visits to each location. The author conducted around 100 interviews by visiting Kurdish diaspora organizations, meeting other influential diasporans such as authors, journalists, poets and other public intellectuals.

The last strand of research took place in Sweden in 2015 and solely focused on exile perceptions of peace and forgiveness from a sociological point of view. In the end 25 testimonies were collected in five different locations in Sweden.<sup>iii</sup> Among the interviewees, there were activists who are now at critical roles at PKK sympathizing organizations in Europe, victims of torture and abuse in Turkish prisons especially after the 1980 coup d'état, family members of victims who were subjected to extra-judicial killings and forced disappearances as well as others whose relatives were/are members of the PKK's armed struggle. There were also intellectuals, former politicians, lawyers and journalists who came to Europe as asylum seekers and are still living in exile.

In the course of these three research projects, the author has participated in diaspora protests, commemoration events, seminars and diaspora organizations' annual gatherings. The interviews and observation materials were then anonymised in order to protect the identity of the informants as this is a highly sensitive issue. Although a significant number of interviews were recorded, a considerable number of interviewees avoided voice recordings, therefore the author relies on both transcriptions and interview notes. The data is archived in relevant university servers. In addition to first hand data gathering, the author has also analysed content in traditional and social media, diaspora organizations' leaflets and communications with their members. Therefore, the findings of the article are based on this extensive multi-sited field research which included the countries where sizeable Kurdish communities reside. The span of this research also contained the different stages of the peace process which gave the author the chance to observe each and every stage while on fieldwork with the possibility to comprehend the intra and inter group dynamics.

### **The Kurdish Question and the Peace Process**

There has been an armed conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK since the early 1980s. For a long time, the Turkish state had a 'no negotiation with terrorists' approach and opted for a military solution (Berkowitz and Mugge, 2014). The PKK, on the other hand, emphasized that it was fighting for basic human rights for Kurds, including freedom of expression and recognition of their ethnicity. Their argument was that it was state violence that had pushed them towards an armed struggle. They demanded that the Turkish state recognize their identity, grant educational rights in their mother tongue and recognize the crimes that were committed by the state.<sup>iv</sup>

To date, the conflict has cost some 40,000 lives and has displaced a million or more (Casier, Jongerden and Walker, 2013). Between 1984 and 1999, an unknown number of victims were also killed in ‘mystery’ killings (or disappeared). These disappearances have been attributed to the Turkish police, intelligence services, *gendarmerie* and village guards. Thousands of people were also internally displaced as a result of the deportation of the Kurdish population from some 3,000 villages (Jongerden, 2017). Internal migration has also accelerated Kurdish dispersal to Europe, as the first step of displacement that eventually caused the formation of the largest stateless diaspora in the world (Eccarius-Kelly, 2002).

After the imprisonment of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the Kurdish movement rapidly transformed itself into an urban social movement as well as a political power in Kurdish regions (Gurbuz, 2016, p. 34). The movement also dropped the idea of a separate Kurdish state and instead adopted a strategy that foresees a semi-federal solution that demands the decentralization of the Turkish state. The AKP (Justice and Development Party) came to power in 2002. Their rise to power was a turning point in Turkey for many reasons. Political Islam became extremely visible in the public realm and, at the same time, ‘taboo’ topics such as Kurdish identity and peace negotiations were opened to discussion. The AKP began gradually implementing reforms to accommodate Kurdish identity in order to align itself with the membership ideals of the European Union. This tactic brought electoral success to the AKP in the 2007 elections due to the Kurdish votes that it poached from other parties. This enabled the AKP to further consolidate their power (Gurbuz, 2016, p.60). The AKP government declared the beginning of a process of reforms on the way to a potential resolution of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in 2009, which it called the ‘Kurdish Opening.’ The PKK and Kurdish activists were also still questioning the



sincerity of the government on the route to a potential resolution and they were skeptical of its actions. During the rapprochement period, it was still possible to observe the oppression of Kurdish identity and freedom of speech. Many Kurdish politicians and journalists were arrested, pro-Kurdish parties were outlawed or criminalized, Turkish politicians constantly referred to the Kurdish movement as ‘terrorists’ and ceasefires were violated, though on a fairly small scale. At the same time, the ‘peace project’ was alive and kicking and the media was paying a great deal of attention to the whole process.<sup>v</sup>

In the course of the peace process, the Turkish government understood that there was a need for more concrete steps in order to reach a resolution to the Kurdish Question and the ‘Oslo Process’. In 2009, a procedure involving talks between the PKK and the Turkish National Intelligence agency (MIT) was launched in secret. This was later leaked to the public in 2011 and brought no concrete results. However, it was a sign that the Turkish state was now addressing the primary actor of the Kurdish movement, the PKK. “Between September 2008 and 2011, these reform efforts were accompanied by several meetings, apparently in Oslo, between high-level representatives from the National Intelligence Agency (MIT) and top PKK leaders [in exile] like Zübeyir Aydar, Sabri Ok, Remzi Kartal and Adem Uzun, with the presence of an international mediator” (ICG Report, 2014, p. 2). “The Oslo Process collapsed in 2011 and many important issues such as conditional amnesties; returns, transitional justice and disarmament remained unsolved” (ICG, 2014, p.3).

In April 2013, Prime Minister Erdoğan appointed 63 people as ‘wise people’ in order to formulate fact-finding commissions that would be responsible for different regions of Turkey. Within two months of observations and trips to various locations, they were expected to report back to the Prime Minister about their findings. This exercise

was kind of ‘testing the waters’ strategy, but it was tailored for testing Turkish sensitivities towards the process rather than, Kurdish ones. These people, who became part of the ‘wise people’ committees, were journalists, authors, actors, academics or public intellectuals who were thought to have the capacity to understand the people’s expectations from the peace process. Each commission wrote a report on their expectations. These emphasized the confusion experienced by people during the peace process above all else.<sup>vi</sup> The Turkish Parliament also founded a ‘Resolution Commission’ that included ten MPs from the ruling AKP, and one member from the pro-Kurdish party, which at the time was called the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party).<sup>vii</sup> At the end of the commission meetings, the AKP and the BDP<sup>viii</sup> published their own interpretations of the meetings.

One of the topics brought back to the negotiating table most frequently was the question of the transitional justice mechanisms that would be put in place after a peaceful resolution. Pro-Kurdish politicians and civil society organizations kept emphasizing that “in the course of the conflict, both sides committed innumerable serious crimes, including murders, extrajudicial executions, torture, kidnappings and other human rights abuses” (ICG Report, 2014, p. 17) and therefore a transitional justice mechanism would be essential for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. While the Kurdish MPs and lawyers of the PKK leader Öcalan met him on an irregular basis, Öcalan also repeatedly declared that he was in favor of establishing truth commissions modeled on the South African example (ICG Report 2014: 20). Many civil society organizations such as the Human Rights Association and the Truth, Justice, Memory Center supported this initiative and focused on organizing seminars, demonstrations and archival work on the possibility of truth commissions in Turkey. A conference was organized in 2011 with the participation of the international community

comparing Turkey's experience with other countries such as South Africa. The International Crisis Group's report (2014) also suggested that although the negotiating parties had not yet made a public declaration, full negotiations would mean that Turkey and the PKK would have to eventually agree on a conditional amnesty, laws to smooth transitional justice, and truth commissions. It was suggested that the Turkish government and the PKK should agree on forming a truth commission composed of independent experts, which would, in the end, prepare a final report to be submitted to parliament. The Turkish government did not declare how it would implement transitional justice mechanisms, although the board and the commission on legal arrangements and human rights set up on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 had a clear mandate to do so' (ICG, 2014, p. 20).

The general decline of the peace process began around that time. Although there was much enthusiasm for the peace process, there was also a '*peace process fatigue*.' As the process moved forward, it needed to seek more transparency, a stronger agenda and the comprehensive inclusion of civil society and other actors. This, however, did not take place. The Turkish authorities constantly reiterated that the PKK did not agree to disarm and that disarmament was a condition of the government's presence at the peace talks. On the other hand, the PKK blamed the government for putting even more pressure on the Kurdish movement and not making any constitutional changes that guaranteed equal citizenship rights for Kurds. The peace process collapsed with the resurgence of armed clashes in the form of urban warfare in Kurdish cities in the Summer of 2015.

### **The Kurdish Diaspora: An Actor or a Spectator?**

The Kurdish diaspora has always played an important role when it comes to lobbying host states, organizing large protests and making the Kurdish Question more visible

than ever in the European political scene (Berkowitz and Mugge, 2014; Baser, 2015). Their activities included organising petitions and campaigns, violent and non-violent mass demonstrations and protests, sit-ins, highway blockades, hunger strikes and even self-immolation. The diaspora Kurds also provided resources for the PKK including financial contributions, social capital and the recruitment of fighters (Eccarius-Kelly 2002; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). The size of the Kurdish community grew with various migration flows over the years, and today there are more than a million Kurds residing in Europe.<sup>ix</sup>

Leaders of various Kurdish political movements came to Europe and formed the basis for a strong transnational non-state actor that would challenge Turkish domination as they carried the movement beyond the Turkish state's reach and control. Many Kurdish activists who belonged to movements such as the PSKT<sup>x</sup>, which existed prior to the PKK, are still active in diaspora politics and some of them still keep their loyalty to these movements despite the fact that the PKK has now monopolized the Kurdish movement. The PSKT organized the first Kurdish worker's association (KOMKAR), which still has a loyal membership (Orhan, 2016, p.54). It rejects armed struggle and was for a long time the "severest critic of the PKK" (Van Bruinessen, 2000, p.4). Kemal Burkay, who until recently was an exile in Sweden, led the movement. After the mid-1980s, the PKK gradually became more and more active in the diaspora sphere as well as in the homeland, and established its domination over the Kurdish movement.<sup>xi</sup> It treated other Kurdish organizations as rivals and clashed with them either by material force or simply by recruiting from their established constituencies.<sup>xii</sup>

The interviews with the Kurdish diaspora members from both groups revealed that they perceived themselves as both actors and as victims of the conflict, and they

believed that their suffering continued in the diaspora. For many Kurds who fled the conflict in Turkey, European states offered many opportunities, including freedom of speech and association (Baser, 2015). They were free from oppression based specifically on their Kurdish ethnic identity, however they now found themselves in yet another setting where they faced more generalized xenophobia, discrimination and statelessness. Their victimhood did not disappear; it simply took another form in the diaspora (See Østergaard-Nielsen 2003).

While the Kurdish diaspora was getting mobilized for the struggle in the homeland, European countries started banning Kurdish organizations one-by-one as a result of the PKK's tactics abroad such as blocking highways, invading embassies or conducting violent demonstrations. Another reason for banning Kurdish organisations was the extreme diplomatic pressure that European countries received from Turkey. Germany banned the PKK in 1993 and the European Union placed the organization on a list of terrorist organizations in 2002. These developments quickly brought about the criminalization of the movement, and concurrently, the diaspora activities surrounding it (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Organizations were banned, funding opportunities were cut, and active members of the community were put under surveillance. The PKK cadre in Europe was put on INTERPOL's wanted list for narcotics trafficking (ICG Report, 2014, p. 2) and other crimes. Due to pressure from Turkey, Kurdish TV channels were banned, Kurdish-language education in countries such as Germany was rejected by the local Turkish diaspora, and inter-communal violence erupted between Turkish and Kurdish communities in many countries in Europe. As observable in other cases, historical grievances travel with community members into the diaspora and they affect resettlement efforts and cohesion within the diaspora (Tint et al., 2014, p. 1-2).

Turkey also requested the deportation of PKK sympathizers, and this caused tremendous insecurity among diaspora members. One of the interviewees, who was on INTERPOL's wanted list, claimed that he cannot travel outside the Netherlands and he was under surveillance of homeland and hostland security authorities.<sup>xiii</sup> Most of them did not have the chance to acquire citizenship in countries where naturalization laws are strict. As asylum seekers, they also had no hope of returning to their home country. If they were to return, some would be subject to arrest for political crimes. For instance, one interviewee mentioned that although he acquired Swedish citizenship and renounced his Turkish one, he visited Turkey after 20 years of being in exile and he was arrested and then deported back to Sweden without any explanation.<sup>xiv</sup> For many, therefore, peaceful resolution to the conflict carried with it the possibility of having criminal charges against them dropped in the homeland and, eventually, the promise of return. This double criminalization both in home and host countries, the state of limbo and feelings of insecurity contributed to developing attachments towards the homeland, maintaining an interest in the homeland conflict, and at the same time feeling the constant need to become involved in conflict resolution.

Many interviewees have suffered torture and other human rights violations in Turkey. Their villages were burnt by the Turkish armed forces, they were deported from their towns, their family members disappeared or were subjected to extra-judicial killings. Some are deprived of citizenship. These traumatic experiences also left a sense of having 'unfinished business', and those affected constantly waited for closure. These traumas were inherited by subsequent generations and become a part of the diasporic memory. Second generation Kurds suffered from the spillover effects of the conflict back in the homeland. Therefore, the question was not whether the diaspora had an

emotional motivation to get involved, but how they would manage to partake in this process as an actor rather than as a spectator.

### **Complexities of Engaging the Kurdish Diaspora(s)**

#### ***Pre-Talks Phase: Factionalism in the Diaspora Unfolds***

The ‘Kurdish opening’ launched in 2009 paved the way for the discussion of several issues previously considered taboo in Turkey. However, it fell short of engaging with the demands of the Kurdish movement in Turkey. There were conflicting views about these developments in Kurdish diaspora circles, revealing the fragmentation and competing narratives within the diaspora. There was an especially visible rivalry for the domination of diasporic spaces between the two main groups within the Kurdish diaspora: the PKK-led organizations and KOMKAR. Relations between these two groupings “never became cordial” (Van Bruinessen, 2000, p.5).

The author observed that at the end of the 2000s, KOMKAR made constant declarations of support for the process, while PKK-related organisations were more cautious and less optimistic in their comments. Around this time, state-related bodies were tailoring strategies to broaden the scope of their initiatives to include the diaspora. Initially the AKP government did not want to engage in an official dialogue with the PKK or with its diaspora organisations. They aimed at reaching the Kurdish population at home and abroad by bypassing the PKK. The representative of KOMKAR Berlin, for instance, stated that their organization, despite being criminalized by the Turkish state for many years, were visited by Turkish officials, journalists and other public figures for potential talks on cooperation.<sup>xv</sup> For a PKK-sympathising diaspora member, this was a clear sign that KOMKAR was collaborating with the Turkish state, preparing the end of the PKK. For him, this was “just another divide and rule strategy” played by Turkey.<sup>xvi</sup>

As Galipo argues, sometimes divisions within the diaspora are counterproductive to positive outcomes due to a lack of joint efforts, and intra-group rivalries may act as a barrier to a more durable solution (Galipo, 2011, p.19). In this process, there was neither any cooperation between the two Kurdish actors, nor any initiative from homeland actors to unite them. For the PKK, the AKP was seen as a threat with regards to its constituency, but for KOMKAR, sympathising with the Kurdish elite, the AKP was erasing a militarist legacy and it might enhance opportunities for them to outbid the PKK. Freitas argues that, “the potential existence of internal competition for resources and leadership among different groups may also eventually contribute to the weakening of diasporas’ positions altogether” (Freitas, 2012) and it seems like this was the case for the Kurdish diasporas. Rival groups were used against each other and could not establish a common stance.

In order to start cooperating with the Kurdish diaspora, the AKP government and AKP sympathizing diaspora organizations took several steps such as the opening of a dialogue with Kemal Burkay to secure his return to Turkey from exile. AKP politicians also met one of the most influential Kurdish singers, Siwan Perwer, who had long been in exile, and convinced him to return to Turkey. He was a prominent figure in the Kurdish movement whose songs encouraged many young Kurds to join the resistance movement. Perwer returned to Turkey and joined AKP rallies and election campaigns. This caused uproar among PKK-sympathizing circles, as Perwer was seen to be ‘selling-out’. During my interview with Perwer, he also confirmed that he was receiving threatening messages for his cooperation with Turkish state authorities.<sup>xvii</sup> AKP-led diaspora organizations such as the UETD organized talks with KOMKAR between 2009 and 2011 in order to discuss further collaboration.<sup>xviii</sup> KOMKAR leaders also made a press declaration stating that they recognize the value



of the AKP's reforms. For the KOMKAR leadership, the demands of the Kurds could have been restored by democratic struggle, and there was therefore no need for an armed struggle. Although they were not in complete agreement with the government, they wanted an end to violence on both sides.<sup>xix</sup> While the Turkish government tried to bypass the PKK and its affiliated organisations at the beginning of the 'Kurdish opening', KOMKAR and its affiliated organisations saw this as a window of opportunity to put the HAK-PAR, the political party affiliated with PSKT and KOMKAR, back on the political scene in Turkey. KOMKAR organised several meetings in Europe with Turkish political actors in order to discuss the current state of affairs in Turkey and launched a reactivation of HAK-PAR.<sup>xx</sup> Their approach to the new developments was almost always a mirror image of what the PKK was advocating.

While this power struggle was taking place for the domination of diaspora spaces, the Turkish state initiated secret talks with the PKK. This is because approaching rival Kurdish movements and Kurdish public figures that were critical of the PKK did not bring any mass support to PKK's rivals. Moreover, this strategy was unable to challenge the biggest Kurdish movement in Turkey. Groups such as KOMKAR might have survived in the diaspora but they had no real support base in Turkey, especially from the Kurdish youth. When this information about the talks became public, the PKK's rivals felt sidelined within this new process and organized a conference in Duisburg, Germany, in April 2013 to declare that although they had a positive approach towards the peace process, they were unhappy with the lack of transparency.<sup>xxi</sup> From 2011, these groups were not even visible during the peace process.

### ***The Peace Process: Unconditional Support Intertwined with Skepticism***

During the peace talks, the imprisoned PKK leader communicated his message via his lawyers or through members of parliament. He sent three letters to communicate his position: one letter to the pro-Kurdish political party, one letter to PKK headquarters in the Qandil Mountains, and one letter to the diaspora. It was very important that he acknowledged the diaspora as an actor in this process. He asked for the organization of a 'Peace Conference' by the Kurdish diaspora in Brussels, which was subsequently held in Summer 2013. Many Kurdish diaspora organizations as well as Turkish leftist, Armenian, and Assyrian organisations participated in the conference. They published a declaration which focused on issues such as demanding equal rights, criticizing Turkey for its foreign policy, asking European states to terminate arms deals with Turkey, establishing committees for reconciliation and coming to terms with the past, sharing the ideals Gezi protests, returning constitutional rights to the Kurds and drafting a new constitution that fully erases the legacy of the 1982 constitution. The conference committee agreed that they should establish sub-committees that would be responsible for different specific questions while they were giving support to the peace process in Turkey. These sub-committees were: Truth, Reconciliation and Justice; Women and Youth; PR; Law; Road Map and New Constitution; and European Affairs. There was a strong emphasis on the need to establish truth commissions in Turkey and to make sure that other mechanisms of transitional justice put in place enabled Turkey to face its past. This was particularly significant for the many Kurds who had been brutally assaulted by the Turkish state and who sought closure. One of the sub-committee's statements was as follows:

As the participants of this conference, we perceive ourselves as components of the peace and democracy process. We do not limit

our duty to solely following the negotiation process, we declare to the public that we will be an active intervening party in the process and we are working towards socialization of the peace and democracy process, involving other communities in this struggle besides the components of this conference, informing public in Europe and contributing to durable peace.<sup>xxii</sup>

The conference was important for a variety of reasons: it showed that (i) diaspora members kept their attachments to and interest in homeland politics, (ii) the diaspora wanted to be part of the peace process, (iii) the diaspora elite synchronized their discourses with the homeland actors, (iv) the diaspora elite cared about the hostland dimension of politics and wanted to act as a bridge between the homeland and hostland and most importantly, (v) the diaspora is not a spoiler but rather a supporter of the peace process. In peace processes, actors who are not satisfied with the terms of an agreement or other developments in the course of peace negotiations will engage in disruptive behaviour unless their demands are met (Stedman, 1997; Newman and Richmond, 2006). In the Kurdish case, however, this overt wrecking behaviour from different factions within the diaspora is not in evidence, if anything “the diaspora was careful not to do anything that might negatively influence it” (Democratic Progress Institute Report, 2013, p. 10).

What was critical about this conference was that despite the fact that it was highly inclusive of other non-Kurdish groups who have a pro-Kurdish stance, it was exclusive toward other pro-Kurdish groups that were rivals of the PKK. Both groups supported the peace process and constantly struggled to become a part of it. Although their interpretation of ‘peace’ might have significant overlaps, it was clear that their

roadmap to achieve this goal varied immensely. Therefore, it is possible to detect two “competing forms of engagement” (Lewela, 2012, p.3). There was an asymmetric relationship between the two: The PKK had both the capacity and motivation as mentioned by Freitas (2012), while KOMKAR had the motivation but lacked the capacity to influence the course of events in the homeland. When trying to engage diaspora groups in homeland-related issues from peace-building to development, a common ground needs to be found in order to unify diaspora efforts (Horst, 2007). The inclusion of diaspora groups in this important process was conducted in an arbitrary, disordered way. An interviewee, who was the former head of the largest Kurdish diaspora which has no links to neither to the PKK nor KOMKAR, stated that “I have given my life to this struggle... 30 years spent working for peace and now I cannot find a single channel to make my voice heard.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Therefore, other figures in the diaspora who remained distanced to mainstream organizations but mobilized for the Kurdish cause outside these circles were also sidelined by both homeland and diaspora actors. PKK-sympathising interviewees, however, had a different take on the negotiations. One interviewee who was a spokesperson for a Kurdish organization in the Netherlands said that he has full support for the PKK during the negotiations and continued “we don’t have to know everything. The PKK knows that they are doing.”<sup>xxiv</sup> Another interviewee, who is a Kurdish activist and singer in Sweden also said “the PKK has our proxy for negotiations”. According to her, the diaspora should support the process but stay aside and let the PKK dominate the process.<sup>xxv</sup>

The Kurdish diaspora is one of the most vocal diasporas in the world. It possesses considerable expertise on transnational advocacy, as the movement itself stems from a politics of resistance. When it came to getting actively involved in a peace process, the diaspora’s role was secondary. Throughout the process, the Turkish government

addressed the diaspora groups interchangeably and at different times, all the while playing them off one against another and increasing its own leverage throughout the negotiations. In addition to this, both PKK-aligned organisations and KOMKAR tried to side-line each other during this process rather than trying to collaborate in order to find a common basis from which they could push the Turkish government towards reform. No group, however, had the capacity for spoiling or derailing the peace process in the diaspora and neither group had this intention. The Democratic Progress Institute's research (Democratic Progress Institute Report, 2013) on the diaspora elite also confirms author's observations in the sense that Kurdish diaspora members were not more radical than the homeland actors and actually gave their full support to homeland decisions. The diaspora elite seemed to be a supporting component of the process despite their hesitations. Many Kurdish exiles not identifying themselves with either group also declared that they were in agreement with the aims of the peace process. This support was not for the AKP's own agenda within the process, but for the ideal of putting an end to the conflict. Many were still critical of the government, the content of the peace process, the lack of incentives offered by the Turkish state, however, there was no major opposition to the idea of negotiation itself.

### ***Where is Justice? Diaspora Demands Truth Commissions***

As Budak (2015) argues, the human rights dimension of the conflict not only includes political and cultural rights but also the right to truth and reparations, which can only be provided by transitional justice mechanisms. Previous studies showed that "limited and strategic acts by the Turkish state to address past wrongs did not actually paved the way for a comprehensive coming to terms with the past process so far (Bakiner, 2013). As mentioned above, various NGOs and civil society organizations have

already started creating momentum to contribute to Kurdish truth-seeking efforts. These activities includes repeated demands such as prosecution of perpetrators, acknowledgement and public recognition of human rights violations, an official apology and then compensation (Budak, 2015,p.12). Kurdish civil society groups as well as the diaspora organizations have mobilized around those issues and made their demands quite visible in the international arena. Although Turkey has taken small steps, especially considering EU conditionality, most of these demands were not addressed in a systematic manner. As Jongerden (2017, p.2) claims, the state in Turkey applied a transitional justice approach to the Kurdish issue which dealt with compensation of damage as an individualized transaction.<sup>xxvi</sup> Focusing particularly on how the state handled the legacy of forced migration and village evacuations from the 1990s, he further claims that the state whitewashed its hands from further responsibility by turning victims of the state into debtors to the state. During the peace process, there was no discussion of a comprehensive view of restorative, reparative and retributive justice and these issues were not integral to the peace process (Budak, 2015, p.13).

Although it was highly demanded by civil society and other Kurdish organizations as well as the pro-Kurdish political parties in the parliament, a truth commission in Turkey has not been materialized. As Budak (2017,p.12) opines, a truth commission vested with sufficient power and resources to carry out impartial investigations of human rights violations would be the key for a peaceful resolution in Turkey. As these demands mentioned above were not met in the slightest, the Kurdish population in Turkey then formulated a “do-it-yourself” approach for dealing with injustices (Jongerden, 2017, p.3), and formulated their own protest and commemoration mechanisms to keep truth and justice-seeking efforts alive. As they think that justice

has not been sufficiently pursued and achieved, various individuals from the homeland and the diaspora started suing Turkey to the ECtHR. This is actually a common practice among exiles who pursue their cases in foreign courts when they are disappointed in the justice mechanisms of the home country (Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2016, p.28). Pushing for justice through universal jurisdiction is used by diaspora groups from Chile, Argentina and Rwanda among others (Haider, 2014, p.8). A Kurdish diaspora activist from the UK, Kerim Yildiz, has even prepared a manual for “Taking Cases to the European Court of Human Rights”, which acted as a guide for Kurdish individuals to take the human rights violations against them to courts outside Turkey. These cases “have highlighted the human dimensions of mass atrocities and resemble the work of a truth commission” (Budak, 2015, p.13).

However, most of the justice-seeking initiatives were usually confined to Turkish borders, leaving diaspora testimonies out of the picture for the time being. In other words, local Kurds’ justice-demands were most of the time picked up by the diaspora and were transnationalized via advocacy, commemoration and protest; while diaspora Kurds’ demands in return got lost in the cacophony of numerous efforts or due to other issues that were prioritized over them. The establishment of a truth commission was one of the most desired outcomes of the negotiations, stated by the interviewees. Diaspora elites regularly commented on this and insisted that they wanted to actively get involved in order to contribute to transitional justice. Especially my interviewees from Germany and Sweden, repeatedly mentioned that they want to testify in courts and face the perpetrators who tortured them, burned their village or caused their family members’ disappearance. Among the interviewees, there were also complaints that the lack of transparency and inclusion in the peace process might also reflect on the transitional justice mechanisms that would be put forward at a later stage. Some

communicated their concerns that because they were not members of organizations that are known to support the PKK, they will not be included in the process albeit they have been active in pro-Kurdish diaspora mobilization for decades. An interviewee from Sweden mentioned that “the PKK will not be happy to our side of the story”.<sup>xxvii</sup> Another Kurdish activist from France, whose brother was murdered by the PKK in Paris in 1987, stated that he has no trust in a truth commission that is led by the Turkish-state and the PKK only, because intra-group injustices will not come to the fore.<sup>xxviii</sup> As many other interviewees, he deemed international support and involvement essential for a credible process.

As mentioned above, politicians and civil society organizations also made references to the need to consider the return of exiles to Turkey. Nonetheless, no specific policies were formulated in this regard. Although it was acknowledged that diaspora members were victims of this conflict, their agency was not recognized as vital for the process. The center of peace process discussions was in Turkey and their travel there to participate in rallies, seminars or other means of debates were limited due to their arrest warrants. Therefore, they were expected to be passive recipients to the policies that would be formulated in the homeland. Legal modifications were needed in order to formulate policies of return, to drop pending trials and accusations, to regulate compensation/reparations, to give a say to the diaspora in the outcome of negotiations, and to facilitate their involvement in truth commissions. However, at the end of a decades-long protracted conflict, the homeland actors had a certain set of priorities and the diaspora’s active involvement was not high on the agenda.

### ***Hurdles in Front of Diaspora’s Peace and Justice-Seeking Efforts***



One of the pitfalls of this process was that most of the attention was focused on elites, and there were no bottom-up initiatives to measure the perceptions of diaspora members who did not hold key positions. During the peace process, numerous surveys were conducted in Turkey in order to measure both Turkish and Kurdish expectations about the process. None of these surveys included the diaspora. It was only possible to see how Kurdish diaspora members were thinking collectively about the peace process during mass demonstrations with the participation of thousands chanting slogans demanding peace. Considering that long-term peacebuilding measures should also include the diaspora – as a consequence of the conflict having become transnational – policymakers should have taken into account that peace and reconciliation is also needed amongst Turkish and Kurdish diaspora communities. An inclusive peacebuilding mechanism might also consider mapping reconciliation strategies for diasporas in each specific host country, as they have created autonomous diasporic spaces over time (Féron, 2017).

Additionally, none of the ‘wise people’ commissions were sent to the diaspora. The only recognition of diaspora issues by the ‘wise people’ commissions, was the observation that some regulations would need to be put in place to facilitate the return of exiles.<sup>xxxix</sup> Other discursive references appeared in parliamentary commission reports<sup>xxx</sup> and political speeches. At one of the meetings organized by the parliamentary commission, it was even suggested that the return of exiles should be prioritized over the disarmament of PKK fighters as this might mitigate the situation and prepare the ground for potential next steps.<sup>xxxi</sup> The BDP’s alternative report also suggested that issue of return and its legal implications should be discussed.<sup>xxxii</sup> The International Crisis Group (2012, p.18-19) dedicated a section of their report to examining diaspora support to the PKK. However, its primary focus was the question

of security and terrorist-financing, rather than the inclusivity of the peace process or whether transitional justice mechanisms would include Kurdish migrants who reside in Europe. However, it did state that the diaspora could play a significant role in reconciliation, as first-generation migrants in particular are receptive to the idea of return. The report also urged the Turkish government to draw major pro-peace diaspora leaders into the negotiations. Despite these broad references to the internally displaced and exiled, there was no concrete agenda that suggested tailoring specific policies for them.

Another drawback of this experience was that there was no sufficient third-party support for facilitating diaspora engagement in the process. As shown above, in the case of Liberia, Haiti and Zimbabwe, it was third-party think tanks, civil society organizations or even host states that started certain initiatives to at least provide a platform for diasporas to make their voices heard. In this case, there was no durable mechanism which could transmit the message from the diaspora to the homeland actors. This might make things harder for the diaspora, especially when there remains a potential for truth commissions in Turkey in the future. As the Liberian case shows, the inclusion of diasporas to transitional justice mechanisms is a costly effort and homeland actors should be ready to shoulder this burden. The Kurdish diaspora could have acted in a more strategic way to better engage with host states in order to increase their leverage. However, as third parties also consider group motivation and capacity (Vorrath, 2012, p.5), a united umbrella organization free from the internecine politics of Kurdish diaspora factions could have been much more attractive. Third parties might get confused about whom to approach when the diaspora community is divided along ideological lines (Horst et.al., 2010). If diasporas are too politicized or criminalized, this might also lead to the decisions not to engage (Horst et.al., 2010,

p.22; Vorrath, 2012, p.25). Since the PKK-sympathizing diaspora might deter various third parties from engagement, an overarching transitional association with a fresh outlook solely focusing on peace and reconciliation, and on questions of transitional justice could be very useful. It would also eliminate the competing agendas for advocacy from rival Kurdish diaspora groups.

## **Conclusion**

Until very recently, the general approach to diasporas was to either ignore their impact entirely, or express skepticism about their power and capacity. Currently, the trend is changing towards including them in every single phase of conflict resolution, management and transformation. However, as the examples above show, this inclusion usually remains at the discursive level. Whilst these new trends have brought about the acknowledgement that diasporas do matter, we still do not know the true scope and limitations of their actions and the difficulties and peculiarities of engaging them in certain phases of conflicts. Previous studies were occupied with diasporas' emotional attachments to their homelands, and contemporary studies are occupied with diaspora agency and utility. When it comes to post-conflict phases, we need to formulate a holistic approach to peace and reconciliation that is more comprehensive and puts the conflict in a historical and transnational perspective.

The Kurdish case demonstrates that diasporas often show an interest in conflict resolution in their homeland because it is the very reason they are outside the borders of their homeland in the first place. They also want to get involved in transitional justice mechanisms, as these would give them some sense of justice and closure. However, their participation is not immune to challenges, because it is not devoid of internal politics and power relations. Although homeland actors acknowledged the

presence of the diaspora and sought support from it, they did not reflect the needs of the diaspora systematically in their policy formulations. The diaspora was asked to be present, but was relegated to a complementary role rather than that of an active playmaker. Diaspora participation also mostly took place at the elite level. A novel and comprehensive approach is needed in order to reveal the diverse expectations about the peace process, which included diaspora narratives of suffering and exile distinct from those of their compatriots in the homeland.

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<sup>iv</sup> For more information on the Kurdish Question See Bozarslan (2001).

<sup>v</sup> For more information on the peace process see a recent report published by Coskun and Cicek 2015.

<sup>vi</sup> See: Oran 2014.

<sup>vii</sup> The BDP was active on the political scene between 2008 and 2014. It is succeeded by People’s Democratic Party (HDP).

<sup>viii</sup> ‘BDP Kurt Sorunu Komisyon Raporu’[*BDP Kurdish Question Report*], Available online [[https://serdargunes.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/bdp-kurt-sorunu\\_komisyonu\\_raporu.pdf](https://serdargunes.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/bdp-kurt-sorunu_komisyonu_raporu.pdf)]

<sup>ix</sup> It is hard to give an exact number of Kurds in Europe as their host countries do not register them as Kurds, but do so according to the nationality they hold. It is said that the number of Kurds may be up to 2 million.

<sup>x</sup> It is currently affiliated with the Kurdish political party HAK-PAR, which was founded in 2002 in Turkey.

<sup>xi</sup> For an excellent account of the evolution of the PKK See Yegen (2016).

<sup>xii</sup> PKK members allegedly murdered some KOMKAR members in Germany and France. See: Baser 2015.

<sup>xiii</sup> Author’s interview, Amsterdam 2013.

<sup>xiv</sup> Author’s interview, Sweden 2012.

<sup>xv</sup> Author’s interview, Berlin 2013.

<sup>xvi</sup> Author’s interview, Berlin 2013.

<sup>xvii</sup> Author’s interview, Berlin 2011.

<sup>xviii</sup> Author’s interview with UETD representative in Cologne, 2011.

<sup>xix</sup> ‘Avrupa’daki Kurt Acilimi’ [*Kurdish Opening in Europe*] Available online [<http://www.haberler.com/2-avrupa-daki-kurt-acilimi-2827224-haber/>].

<sup>xx</sup> Author’s interview with former KOMKAR Representative, Paris 2013.

<sup>xxi</sup> ‘Diaspora Toplantisi Sonuc Bildirisi. [online] Available at: <<http://www.kurdistan-aktuel.org/haberler/30-avrupa/12264-diaspora-toplantisi-sonuc-bildirisi.html>>

<sup>xxii</sup> ‘Demokrasi ve Baris Konferansinin Sonuc Bildirgesi Aciklandi’ [*Democracy and Peace Conference’s Declarations Announced*]. [Online] Available at: [<http://avrupasurgunleri.com/demokrasi-ve-baris-konferansinin-sonuc-bildirgesi-aciklandi/>].

<sup>xxiii</sup> Author’s interview, Stockholm 2015.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Author’s interview, Amsterdam 2013.

<sup>xxv</sup> Author’s interview, Stockholm 2015.

<sup>xxvi</sup> In 2004, Turkish government enacted the Law on Compensation for Losses Resulting from Terrorism and Fight against Terrorism. For more information see Budak (2015, p.14-15).

<sup>xxvii</sup> Author’s interview, Stockholm 2015.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Author’s interview, Paris 2013.

<sup>xxix</sup> ‘Akil İnsanlar Guneydogu Raporu’ [*Wisemen Commission South east Report*], [Online] Available at: [<https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/sites/default/files/raporlar/akil-insanlar-guneydogu-raporu.pdf>].

<sup>xxx</sup> *Komisyon Raporu* [Commission Report] [Online] Available at: [[http://tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/cozum\\_sureci/docs/cozum\\_kom\\_raporu.pdf](http://tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/cozum_sureci/docs/cozum_kom_raporu.pdf)], 82, 93, 210.

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<sup>xxx1</sup> *Komisyon Raporu* [Commission Report], 350.

<sup>xxxii</sup> *Komisyon Raporu*, [Commission Report] 442.