KURDISH
STUDIES

The role of collective identifications in family processes of post-trauma reconstruction: An exploratory study of Kurdish refugee families and their diasporic community

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Abstract

While collective identifications of diasporic Kurds have attracted considerable scholarly interest, their possible role in familial processes of post-trauma reconstruction has hardly been studied. The aim of this article is therefore to develop an explorative understanding of the deployment and meaning of collective identifications in intimate family contexts by examining the interconnectedness between the transmission of cultural and political belonging and post-trauma meaning-making and coping in Kurdish refugee families. After contextualising diasporic Kurds' collective identifications through an ethnographic depiction of the Kurdish diasporic community in Belgium, this article reports on findings from a small-scale, exploratory study with five Kurdish refugee families in Belgium. Thematic analysis of family and parent interviews indicates how cultural and political identifications may operate as sources of (1) dealing with cultural bereavement and loss; (2) commemorating trauma; and (3) reversing versus reiterating trauma. Overall, this study's findings support an explorative understanding of collective identifications as meaningful resources in families' post-trauma reconstruction.

Keywords: Family; collective identity; Kurds; trauma; diaspora.

ABSTRACT IN KURMANJI

Rola nasnameyên komelî di pêvajoyên malbatî yên vesazkirina paş-trawmayê de: Xebateke raveker li ser malbatên kurd ên penaber û civakên wan ên dîasporayê

Tevî ku nasnameyên komelî yên kurdên dîasporayê ta radeyeke baş bûye mijara lêkolînan, rola wan a muhtemel di pêvajoyên malbatî yên vesazkirina (selihandin) paş-trawmayê qet nehatine vekolîn. Lewma armanca vê gotarê ew e têgihiştineke raveker pêş bixe li ser rol û wateya nasnameyên komelî yên di çarçoveya mehremiya malbatê de, ku vê yekê jî dê bi rêya vekolîna wê têkiliya rijd bike ya di navbera neqlkirina aidiyetên çandî-siyasî û rêyên sazkirina wateyê û serederîkirina li dû trawmayê di nav malbatên kurd ên penaber de. Piştî diyarkirina çarçoveya nasnameya komelî ya Kurdên diasporayê bi rêya teswîreke etnografîk a cemaeta diasporaya Kurd li Belçîkayê, ev gotar encamên ji xebateke biçûk a bi pênc malbatên kurd ên penaber ên li Belçîkayê pêşkêş dike. Tehlîla babetî ya hevpeyvînên ligel malbatan û dayik û bavan nîşan dide ka çawa nasnameyên çandî û siyasî dikarin bibin çavkanî ji bo (1) serederîkirina bi mehrûmiyeta çandî û windahiyên xwe; (2) bibîranîna trawmayê; û (3) kêmrengkirin an, beramber vê yekê,

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dubarekirina trawmayê. Bi giştî, encamên vê xebatê wê têgihiştineke raveker tesdîq dikin ku nasnameyên kolektîf çavkaniyên kêrhatî ne di vesazkirina paş-trawmayê ya malbatan de.

ABSTRACT IN SORANI

Dewrî nasname bekomellekan le prose binemalleyîyekanî sazkirdinewey paş-trawmayîda: lêkollîneweyekî şirovekarî binemalle penabere kurdekan û civatî ewan le diyaspora

Le katêkda nasname bekomellekanî kurdekanî diyaspora le layen şarezakanewe giringiyekî berçawî pê drawe û serincî ewanî bo lay xoyî rakêşawe, bellam sebaret be egerî dewrî prose binemalleyîyekanî sazkirdinewey paş-tirawma be degmen lêkollîneweyek encam drawe. Ke wate, amancî em wutare perepêdan be têgeyîştinêkî şirovekarane lemerr bekarhênan û manay nasname bekomellekan le bestênekanî têkellawîy binemalleyîdaye, ke le rêgey peywendîy nêwan rewtî gwastineweyî grêdraweyî kultûrî û siyasî, sazbûnî mana û herweha rahatin legell kêşekanî qonaẍî paş tirawma le binemalle kurde penaberekanda taqî krawetewe. Dway awirrdanewe le civakî diyasporay kurd le Belcîka, nasname bekomellekanî kurdekanî diyaspora le bestênî xoyda xwêndinewey bo krawe û bem gêreye lem wutareda lêkollîneweyekî şirovekarane bo qebareyekî biçûk le pênc binemalley kurdî penaber le Belcîka dekrê û encamekanî billaw dekrêtewe. Şîkarîyekî babetiyaney wutuwêj legell binemalle û dayk û bawkekan nîşanî dedat ke çon dekrê nasname kultûrî û siyasîyekan wek serçaweyek bo em sê mijare derbikewn: (1) girodebûn be ledestçûn û bizirbûnî kultûr; (2) webîrhênanewey tirawma; û (3) pêçewanebûnî tirawma leberamber dûbarebûneweyda. Beşêweyekî giştî, encamekanî em lêkollîneweye piştgîrî le têgeyîştinêkî şirovekarane le nasname bekomellekan dekat ke wekû serçaweyekî giring bo sazkirdinewey binemallekan le dway qonaẍî paş-tirawma seyr dekrêt.

Introduction

Within the field of Kurdish studies, collective identification of Kurds in the diaspora has since long attracted considerable scholarly interest. Drawing on this notion from social identity theory (Simon et al., 1998; Tajfel, 1981; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Recher and Wetherell, 1987), research has extensively explored how diasporic Kurds shape their collective identity in exile and herein define themselves and other Kurds as belonging to a particular cultural, religious, linguistic, and political group (e.g. Keles, 2014; Toivanen and Kivisto, 2014). An important dimension of collective identification among Kurdish immigrants that can be distinguished in the growing body of research is their strong transnational political commitment. In that respect, substantial studies have explored how diasporic Kurds are mobilised in homeland political processes (e.g. Baser, Emanuelsson and Toivanen, 2015; Casier, 2010a; Demir, 2012; Grojean, 2011). In order to raise awareness of the plight of Kurds in host societies and with the aim of impacting on homeland politics, Kurdish associations and institutions in the European diaspora have proven to be very effective in engaging diasporic Kurds in the struggle for political rights, by means of well-functioning community centres that provide Kurds with social and practical support, yet equally inform them about the homeland predicaments and organise fundraising, for example for the rebuilding of destroyed villages or schools in Kurdistan (Baser et al., 2015; Griffiths, 2000; Toivanen, 2015; van Bruinessen, 2000; Wahlbeck, 1998). Due to the large influx

of Kurdish political refugees following the armed conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s, transnational political mobilisation further consolidated as the Kurdish diaspora gradually politicised: Kurdish communities became more and more oriented towards developments in Kurdistan and the political violence in Turkey during this timeframe awakened many Kurds to their ethnic identity (Baser, 2013; van Bruinessen, 2016).

Besides orienting diasporic Kurds towards a shared political cause, diasporic community associations also play an invaluable role in enabling the development and celebration of Kurdish culture, by offering Kurds the opportunity to develop their knowledge of Kurdish language, culture, and history, for instance through organising language classes and historical lectures (Griffiths, 2000; ; van Bruinessen, 2000; Wahlbeck, 1998). Concerning these cultural identifications, research has documented the different ways in which cultural continuity is preserved and contested in family relationships (e.g. Erel, 2013) and the ways in which cultural identity and belonging is understood by ordinary Kurds as compared to community leaders (e.g. Holgate, Keles and Kumarappan, 2012). Overall, among diasporic Kurds, political and cultural identifications appear to be inextricably linked, as the expression of their socio-cultural as well as political belonging is perceived as a means to differentiate themselves from superimposed identities connected to Turkish oppression (Eccarius-Kelly, 2015).

In this paper, we aim to explore how expressions of cultural and political identifications (e.g., sharing cultural practices; engaging with cultural narratives or political discourses) play a role in intra-family processes of post-trauma reconstruction in Kurdish refugees. Having faced multiple traumatic events and severe losses linked to situations of organised violence in their home countries, refugees might experience a loss of connection due to the destruction of important social bonds and a fragmentation of cultural structures (Rousseau, 2000). Here, refugees' lived experiences can be marked by traumatic suffering, characterised by the loss of continuity, meaning, social connectedness and trust (Herman, 1992), often compounded by complex dynamics of negotiating cultural change and continuity in exile. Post-trauma reconstruction then centrally revolves around refugees' rebuilding of continuity, meaning, connection and trust. Furthermore, given that traumatic experiences often have an important collective dimension, as they centrally involve oppression, persecution, or torture because of one's belonging to a particular ethnic, political, or religious group (Kira et al., 2012), forced migration scholars increasingly argue to locate these dimensions of post-trauma reconstruction within the relational, cultural, and political contexts that form the locus of the traumatic predicament (Kevers, Rober, Derluyn and De Haene, 2016). Post-trauma reconstruction, therefore, first and foremost takes place within the family and in the group with which the refugee identifies (Rousseau, 2000). In this paper, we explore this relational process of post-trauma reconstruction by analysing how the transmission of collective identifications related to Kurdish

culture and politics may support families of the Kurdish community in Belgium to rebuild continuity, meaning, social connectedness and trust in their personal and familial life history of persecution and exile.

While the exploration is lacking in scholarly work with the Kurdish diaspora, this objective of exploring collective identifications as vehicles of post-trauma reconstruction seems particularly relevant, as studies in different refugee communities provide growing evidence that identifications with cultural and political frames may constitute an adaptive way of dealing with lived experiences of collective violence, loss, and exile (e.g. Guribye, 2011; Kanagaratnam, Raundalen and Asbjørnsen, 2005; Mekki-Berrada and Rousseau, 2011). One aspect of collective identifications that has been studied in previous research is the role of ideological commitment in psychosocial wellbeing. Although findings on the association between strength of political attitude and psychosocial adjustment are mixed (Shamai and Kimhi, 2006), some studies point to the protective role of strong ideological commitment in mental health of children and youth who have experienced political violence (Kanagaratnam et al., 2005; Punamäki, 1996). Other studies have further explored the different dimensions of this protective role of collective identifications. Concretely, studies indicate how connecting individual recollections of trauma and hardship to a larger, collective narrative of the family and the community may enable refuges to deal with experiences of discontinuity and disconnection caused by forced displacement (e.g. Ramsden and Ridge, 2013). Here, anchorage in tradition was found to protect refugees in post-conflict situations from the chaos and fragmentation in the wake of horror and atrocity (Bagilishya, 2000; Foxen, 2000; Mekki-Berrada and Rousseau, 2011). Further, other studies have documented how collective identifications may provide refugees with a means to transform their individual experiences of trauma into positive social action. For example, a study with Tamil refugees in Norway analysed how cultural-political narratives and symbolism related to heroes and martyrs provided Tamil refugees with a sense of meaning by promoting their engagement in community service (Guribye, 2011). In another study, it was documented how Rwandese genocide survivors who suffered from feelings of survivor's guilt, restored meaning by engaging in several commemoration projects and voluntary associations, keeping the memory of their communities' plight alive and assisting other refugees (Bourgeois-Guérin and Rousseau, 2014).

Within family relationships, research has demonstrated how the transmission of cultural values and collective history may allow parents to provide their children with a sense of stability and continuity in a context of family separation, cultural change, and exile (Bek-Pedersen and Montgomery, 2006; Mekki-Berrada and Rousseau, 2011; Rousseau, Rufagari, Bagilishya and Measham, 2004). Interweaving the intra-family transmission of individual exile narratives with a common cultural and political narrative may thus play a cohesive role in families, providing psychosocial support to the younger

generations (Chaib and Baubet, 2015). At the same time, the intergenerational transmission of homogenous national and political identifications may leave the second generation feeling ambivalent and "in-between", as these constructions might be in tension with their own developing articulations of their diasporic identity (e.g. Mavroudi, 2007).

This growing body of research addressing the role of collective identifications in refugees' coping in the aftermath of trauma highlights the interweaving of personal and collective meanings shaping post-trauma reconstruction. Overall, scholarly work increasingly illuminates the different roles cultural and political identifications can fulfil in individual and intra-family coping with lived experiences of traumatisation and exile, indicating the intricate interconnections between collective and personal dimensions of meaning imbuing collective identifications in life histories of collective violence and exile.

Given the active, lively presence of collective, cultural, and political identifications in the Kurdish diaspora, the present study takes these emerging findings as a starting point for an interest in these intersecting collective and personal meanings in Kurdish diasporic communities and aims to develop an explorative analysis of the possible roles of collective identifications in intra-family coping with a history of persecution and trauma within Kurdish families. In developing this exploration, we specifically focus on the operation and meaning of cultural and political identifications in parent-child relationships through addressing interconnections between the transmission of collective identifications and post-trauma meaning-making and coping between parents and children.

In what follows, we will first delineate the fieldwork context and methods of data collection and analysis adopted in the current study. Subsequently, we explore processes of collective identifications within the diasporic community, with a particular focus on community dynamics incited by the upsurge of violence in the refugee community's homeland that coincided with the onset of the study. Next, we turn to the family level and develop an explorative analysis of the various roles these cultural and political identifications play in families' ways of coping with and giving meaning to trauma and exile.

Fieldwork context and method

The present study is based on fieldwork conducted between March 2015 and June 2016 with Kurdish refugee families from Turkey and their community organisations located in Belgium. In order to develop a qualitative understanding of the role of collective identifications in familial processes of coping with trauma and exile, this study combined an ethnographic approach at the community level with in-depth interviews with participants from five Kurdish refugee families. Gaining insight into the role of collective identifications in familial processes of post-trauma reconstruction requires an emic understanding of these processes of collective identifications at the level

of the community at stake, and therefore a contextualised, multi-method approach seemed warranted.

For the purpose of developing a contextualised analysis of the dynamics of collective identification in the Kurdish diasporic community in Belgium, data collection involved the following aspects: (a) open-ended interviews and informal conversations with key figures of different Kurdish institutions and associations, focusing on their mission and core activities as well as their relationship to other Kurdish organisations; (b) participant observation during several cultural and political community events (e.g. political demonstration, Newroz celebration); and (c) monitoring Kurdish and Belgian media channels regarding events related to the Kurdish question in Turkey and their repercussions in the Kurdish diaspora in Belgium (e.g. magazines of Kurdish associations, social media within Kurdish diaspora).

After gaining access to and building trust with Kurdish associations, we were assisted by community leaders and key figures to recruit families for participation. The five participating families (10 parents, 17 children) came from different Kurdish villages and towns in their home region of South-East Turkey and applied for asylum in Belgium after persecution triggered by their affiliation with political or activist groups or their ethnic background as Kurds. Families arrived in Belgium between 2000 and 2012. Three families had one child born in exile; all other children (n = 14) were born in Turkey. Almost all family participants had been granted official refugee status, except for some fathers whose asylum application was still pending because of their connection to the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, Kurdistan Workers' Party). Postponement of decisions in Kurdish asylum cases is part of a diplomatic strategy not to burden EU-Turkey relations, which also involves governmental surveillance of pro-Kurdish political activities in several European countries and the continued presence of the PKK on the EU terrorist list (Casier, 2010b).

After negotiating informed consent during two or three introductory meetings, consecutive in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with each of the five participating families. With the aim of analysing the role of collective identifications in families' meaning-making and coping with lived experiences of persecution and exile, data collection in each family concretely involved one family interview (with both parents and children; mostly spread over two or three sessions) and one parent interview (with both parents), as integrative part of a long-term participant observation during families' daily activities at their homes (e.g. sharing a meal, watching television, playing with the children). Data collection in the participating families turned out to be highly intertwined with the ethnographic fieldwork at various community events, given that we regularly, yet mostly inadvertently, encountered family participants at these demonstrations and cultural gatherings. Research conversations with participating families took place at the families' homes and were conducted in close cooperation with professional interpreters who had a Kurdish background and a history of (forced) migration themselves. This

enabled the respondents to express themselves in Kurdish or Turkish, according to their preference, and allowed us to avoid potential negative outcomes (e.g. role reversal; distress due to expected translation of sensitive or delicate information) of children acting as interpreters for their families (Rousseau, Measham and Moro, 2011). Interviews with parents and children together aimed to explore families' practices of remembering life preceding migration and their patterns of intra-family trauma communication (Kevers, Rober, Rousseau and De Haene, 2017). Parent interviews invited the parents' further reflection on the intergenerational transmission of memories related to collective violence and trauma in their family. Prior to commencing the study, approval of the research design was obtained from the KU Leuven's Ethics Committee.

Qualitative data analysis of *ad verbatim* transcripts[1] was conducted in different stages and involved both thematic and dialogic analyses of the interview material (Riessman, 2008). In the context of the current study, we engaged in a further analysis of the thematic codes that were part of a coding grid that had been developed in the light of a larger study (Kevers et al., 2017). Concretely, thematic analysis focused on those codes that were considered particularly relevant in relation to the present research question on collective identifications, involving for instance sub-codes on participants' cultural and political meaning-making as well as sub-codes that addressed families' memory practices, given that the latter had been found to contain multiple references to participants' cultural and political identity as Kurds. After scrutinising all relevant thematic codes, prominent cross-case themes (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) concerning the role of collective identifications in dealing with trauma and exile were identified.

Below, we first present the ethnographic contextualisation of collective identifications in the Kurdish diaspora in Belgium, followed by our thematic analysis of the possible roles of these collective identifications in families' coping with trauma and exile. In these subsequent paragraphs, empirical case material collected throughout participant observation, in-depth interviews, and more informal conversations will be discussed in an integrative way. For reasons of confidentiality and safety of participants, all identifying details have been omitted.

An ethnographic exploration of collective identifications in the Kurdish diasporic community

Brief history of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict

Since the foundation of the Turkish republic in 1923, Turkey's Kurds have suffered decades of oppression, war, and uprising. From its inception, the

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[1] *Ad verbatim* transcripts of videotaped interviews were made in Dutch (as interpreters translated from Kurdish/Turkish to Dutch). Unless otherwise stated, all case vignettes' translations from Dutch to English are the authors' own.

Turkish government introduced measures designed to deny and prohibit Kurdish ethnic identity, such as banning the Kurdish language and giving new Turkish names to Kurdish towns and villages (McDowall, 2004). Kurdish resistance against these policies throughout the 20th century culminated in the foundation of the PKK in 1978, whose guerrilla fighters became involved in an armed struggle with the Turkish state in the 1980s and 1990s. Thousands of villages were destroyed and millions of inhabitants uprooted; thousands of Kurdish activists, journalists, lawyers, and community leaders were imprisoned or killed. This led to a large influx of political refugees into Western Europe (van Bruinessen, 2000). Shortly after the detainment of the PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire, yet they resumed their armed activities in 2004 because the negotiation process with the Turkish government was not proceeding as expected. After years of insurgency and counter-insurgency operations, a peace process was launched in early 2013, which raised hopes of a peaceful resolution of the decades-long conflict.

When sending out the first emails to Kurdish associations with the prospect of initiating the research process in the first months of 2015, the political situation in Turkey was looking rather promising for the Kurds. We therefore expected to investigate participants' remembering practices and communication patterns regarding collective violence and loss as part of family histories in the past. However, throughout the course of this study (running between March 2015 and June 2016), Turkey formed the backdrop to an unforeseeable escalation of violence. Research encounters coincided with worrying incidents in participants' home regions, and conversations often revolved around these current events. On June 7th 2015, the democratic, left-wing and pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP) exceeded expectations by surpassing the 10% threshold in Turkey's general election (Lang, 2015), which initially boosted our informants' confidence in a positive evolution toward increasing legitimate political participation of the Kurds. Turkey's president Erdoğan, however, planned new elections to take place in November 2015, having failed to attain the parliamentary majority he needed to introduce a full presidential system. Furthermore, the summer and autumn of 2015 were marked by several bombings at Kurdish political gatherings in Diyarbakır, Suruç, and Ankara, killing over a hundred civilians (Letsch and Khomami, 2015). Although ISIS claimed responsibility for these attacks, these events implied the end of peace negotiations between the PKK and the Turkish government, with the latter increasingly concerned over Kurdish gains in Syria and Iraq (Lindenstrauss, 2016). The different Kurdish towns and villages our respondents had fled from became the scene of extended curfews, military operations, and armed clashes, resulting in over 150 civilian casualties (Amnesty International, 2016). In several cities in Turkey's South-East, members of the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (*Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareketi*, YDG-H) and the Civil

Protection Units (*Yekîneyên Parastina Sivîl*, YPS)[2] took up arms in order to defend their cities against these state security operations, in which according to Amnesty International (2016) and Human Rights Watch (2015) disproportionate force had been used. After the November 2015 elections, in which the HDP again obtained a positive result, military actions intensified as some Kurdish cities declared self-governance. Independent news coverage of the escalating violence became more and more difficult in the poisonous climate of media crackdowns and silencing of opposition (Pitel, 2016). Overall, 2016 did not bring hope for peace or justice, rather to the contrary: the Turkish government went further and further in silencing all democratic and oppositional forces, while the PKK and the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (*Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan*, TAK)[3] carried out several deadly attacks on soldiers, policemen, and other government targets, contributing to a further escalation of violence in contemporary Turkey.

Collective dynamics in the Kurdish diaspora in Belgium

Against the background of this ongoing violence in the homeland, participant observation during community events and research interviews with key community figures and families unfolded. In two subsequent paragraphs, we explore collective identifications in the context of Kurdish community associations as well as in relation to the larger host society.

Kurdish associations: Mobilisation and fragmentation

Kurdish associations in Belgium, with its capital Brussels known as an important hub in the Kurdish transnational space (Casier, 2010c), are numerous and diverse. Besides umbrella organisations like the Kurdish Institute of Brussels (*Koerdisch Instituut Brussel,* KIB), several towns have their own Kurdish cultural centres, in which cultural (e.g. folkloric dance and music classes) and educational (e.g. Kurdish language and history classes) activities are organised. Although these associations aim to represent Kurds from all different Middle Eastern and Caucasian states across which the Kurds live today, it is usually Kurds from Turkey who run the centres and participate in their activities. In contrast to Kurds from Iran and Iraq, diasporic Kurds from Turkey have been identified as a highly organised and politicised community (Griffiths, 2000). All five participating families were to a greater or lesser degree involved in these community organisations and were actively mobilised for the cultural and political events that were organised throughout the year. When visiting the families, we were often shown invitation flyers or text messages appealing for their presence in these activities. A text message about a planned manifestation

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[2] The YDG-H is an organisation founded in 2013 by youth who sympathise with the PKK. The YPS is a rebel group founded in 2015, mainly involved with resistance and urban warfare in Turkey's South-Eastern cities.

[3] The TAK is a radical Kurdish nationalist militant group in Turkey that, unlike the PKK, pursues Kurdish independence.

sent to the first author in late December 2015 illustrates these appeals, which were usually widely distributed among diasporic Kurds:

> "Let's get together to denounce this mentality that kills babies in their mothers' wombs, this mentality that allows police officers to enter homes and kill civilians, this mentality that persecutes the Kurdish people using tanks, guns, and bombs. Do not remain silent in the face of these massacres, it is now that we must act and be the voice of the oppressed."

At all community events we attended, the prominent place given to cultural and political symbols sparked our attention. For example, at the 2016 Newroz celebration held in Liège on March 19th, the walls of the building were covered with posters of Abdullah Öcalan, images of famous PKK martyrs, flags of different Kurdish armed groups, and the Kurdish colours red, green, and yellow. Moreover, many of the attendees wore traditional clothes, and some of the (sometimes very young) children were dressed in tailored PKK uniforms. Newroz refers to the Kurdish New Year, usually celebrated at the beginning of Spring (March 21st). Rooted in an ancient legend about Kawa the blacksmith, who led an uprising against the Assyrian Empire and informed the people of his victory by lighting a fire on the top of a mountain, the festival gradually became politicised and reconstructed into a contemporary myth of resistance (Aydin, 2005; Gunes, 2012). A father of four children who had fled Turkey after long-term imprisonment in inhumane conditions explained his understanding of the Kurdish spring festival as follows:

> "The most important symbol of Newroz is the New Year's fire. This fire symbolises the incineration of the exploitation of Kurds' brains. It is the celebration of freedom; a day reminding us of the ongoing rebellion against the assimilation and persistent repression the Kurds are subjected to."

Referring to the contemporary myth of resistance mainly constructed and disseminated by the PKK (Gunes, 2012), this father's quote illustrates how diasporic Kurds' understanding of Kurdish identity as marked by an infinite cycle of violence and resistance fits into a collective framework of political subjectivity envisioned by the Kurdish movement. In all participating families, such elements of a strongly politicised ethnic consciousness could be found. After showing us pictures of family members and acquaintances that had joined the Kurds' armed resistance, another father of four who had been engaged as a militant activist for the Kurdish cause, explained this understanding of personhood as inextricably connected to a Kurdish collectivity. He said:

> "Our community is inseparably bound up with this party, with this movement. The party is not a disconnected organisation – to the contrary, it is strongly present within the community. The party and the community are intertwined. In that sense, each and every Kurd is

part of this movement and in some way contributes to it. It doesn't matter what your personal vision is; in one way or another you're involved with the movement and the party. The party encompasses the community, and everyone is part of it, from the left to the right."

Although during the first months of fieldwork we obtained the impression that Kurdish refugees from Turkey were strongly united with regard to the political direction the Kurdish movement needed to take, this later proved to be more nuanced. In line with Wahlbeck's (1998) observation that political divisions in Kurdistan divide diasporic Kurds and their associations, we gradually learned through informal conversations with several community leaders, as well as ordinary Kurds, that ideological differences were sometimes very deep. Speaking hesitantly while emphasising the importance of preserving confidentiality in light of potential negative repercussions, informants told us about the friction that existed between some of the associations. They also shared personal experiences of being avoided or excluded by some Kurds after voicing critical remarks about the PKK or the existing hierarchies within the diasporic community. Moreover, one family that initially showed interest to participate in our study later withdrew because they feared that sharing their divergent opinions and experiences could bring discredit upon their community. Although hardly visible on the surface, these examples point to a veiled fragmentation within the Kurdish community in Belgium. Overall, however, these elements of community fragmentation seemed to be held in check by the Kurds' common orientation towards gaining more cultural, political, and economic rights in their ancestral territories; a wish all community associations and individual participants we encountered seemed to share, despite ideological disagreements and cultural and religious differences. Here, the strong politicisation of Kurdish collective identity, which entails a cognitive restructuring of the social environment into opponents (i.e. the states that currently occupy what Kurds claim as their homeland) and potential allies, thereby facilitating a coherent and unifying sense of shared victimhood (Klandermans, 2014; Yildiz and Verkuyten, 2011), appeared to allow our informants to somehow transcend their internal fragmentation.

The host society: Inter-community tensions, silencing, and criminalisation

In relation to the escalation of violence in Turkey during the timeframe of our study, tensions between nationalist Turks and Kurds in the Belgian diaspora increased regularly. For example, in late March 2016, the Belgian Council of Communities from Kurdistan (*Navenda Belçîka*, NavBel) and partner organisations held a vigil near the European institutions in Brussels with the purpose of denouncing the EU-Turkey refugee deal and the ongoing military operations in Turkey's Kurdish regions. Soon, nationalist Turks organised a counter-demonstration, which was covered by Belgian media and described as

a "tent war" between PKK activists and Erdogan supporters (Vanlommel, 2016). In one incident, reported from the scene by NavBel, the tent in which the Kurdish activities took place was set on fire:

> "… Our tent and the vigil were targeted by Turkish fascists after the Turkish media reported about it. Even president Erdoğan and Prime Minister Davutoğlu have targeted our vigil. They criminalized us and our campaign and suggested that it should be prohibited by the Belgian authorities. Eventually, the Turkish embassy increased pressure on the Belgian authorities and the vigil was dissolved, although we initially received permission to organize it. …" (Excerpt from NavBel press release, March 20th, 2016)[4]

Beside illustrating the polarisation between certain groups of Kurds and Turks, this quote also highlights the Kurdish perception of how publicly visible Kurdish cultural and political symbols were received in the Belgian host society. Our respondents, Kurds affiliated to community associations as well as participating families, repeatedly voiced their perception of a lack of action and deliberate silencing by European institutions. In response to the long-lasting curfews and security operations in Turkey at the end of 2015, NavBel released a press statement:

> "… Instead of calling Turkey to order, we take note that the EU is now relaunching negotiations concerning Turkey's EU accession. Apparently, Europe is not losing any sleep over human rights or the conflict between Kurds and the Turkish state. The 661 people who died by political violence are apparently not a priority for the EU. …" (Excerpt from NavBel press release, December 15th, 2015)[5]

One 23-year-old son sent us a text message around that same period, saying:
> "… No Turkish or European television channel, no Turkish nor European political party, no European newspaper is paying attention to it. Supposedly it is terrorists that are killed, but unfortunately that is not true. It's a massacre. …"

These examples show how decisions on the international level seriously affect the Kurdish political movement and its supporters' trust in EU institutions. In this respect, Casier (2010b) noted the important influence of the designation of the PKK as an international terrorist organization on PKK sympathisers' relation vis-à-vis Europe. And indeed, throughout our fieldwork our respondents expressed a sense of disrespect given what they perceived as Belgian institutions' criminalisation of Kurds as potential terrorists. For

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[4] This press release, originally in Dutch and titled "Dringend persbericht: Turkse aanval op Koerdische wake in Brussel", was distributed by e-mail.

[5] This press release, originally in Dutch and titled "Mensenrechtenrapport over Turkije: De EU verliest alle geloofwaardigheid", was distributed by e-mail.

instance, a father of two adolescents, who was actively engaged in the Kurdish cultural centre of the city where he lived, shared his indignation about the unequal treatment of diasporic Turks and Kurds during a parent interview:

> "Our community associations are put under pressure, they are closely monitored. In our city, there is a large Turkish community, and the municipality's elected representatives don't want to lose their voters. For that reason, they don't treat us equally, they are not impartial. Once, the city council invited all non-profit associations in town to a meeting. Fifty associations were invited, except us, the Kurdish association: we did not receive an invitation. We are brushed aside and perceived as 'different'."

Overall, our close involvement with the Kurdish community during the timeframe of our study enabled us to observe how participants aligned themselves with their associations' efforts to raise awareness for the ongoing repression of the Kurdish people in Turkey and elsewhere. At public community events, cultural and political identifications were ubiquitous and clearly served this collective interest of resisting oppression while equally providing diasporic Kurds with a strong sense of collective belonging and solidarity. Yet, the reception of these publicly visible elements of Kurdish identity in the host society proved to be ambivalent, as these expressions of cultural and political identifications incited tension with Turkish nationalists and sometimes resulted in being stigmatised as terrorists. This corresponds to previous studies on diasporic Kurds in other European countries, which have shown that expressions of Kurdishness are not only mobilised in opposition to dominant national identities in the home region (e.g. Turkey) but are equally exhibited or concealed in response to exclusion and othering faced in the host country (e.g. Sweden) (Alinia and Eliassi, 2014). Varying foreign policies vis-à-vis Turkey and the Kurdish question and varying degrees of tolerance to the activities of Kurdish organisations within the individual European states will affect processes of collective identification. For example, in countries with political contexts that are more favourable to Kurdish culture and identity, transnational activities will be more strongly developed (Khayati and Dahlstedt, 2014). Yet, dynamics of war and protest in Turkey and the organisational strength of the PKK seem to be even more relevant for understanding processes of cultural and political identification (Grojean, 2011). Hence, the mobilisation and contestation of participants' collective identifications should be framed within the broader social contexts of cultural community and host society.

An exploration of collective identifications in coping with collective violence in family relationships

Within the context of the diasporic community outlined above, the five Kurdish refugee families that participated in our study attempted to rebuild

their lives in the host society. In what follows, we examine the significance of collective identification in the context of family relationships, developing an explorative thematic analysis of how these elements of cultural and political identity play a role in post-trauma reconstruction by mobilising processes of meaning-making and coping with lived experiences of collective violence in refugee families. In the subsequent sections, we build on case examples with the purpose of explaining how collective identifications and belonging equipped parents and children to restore meaning and connection in the aftermath of traumatisation and loss, as well as entailing the risk of conflict and exclusion.

Collective identifications in dealing with loss and cultural bereavement

Developing and celebrating elements of collective identifications in the family context appeared to assist participants in soothing the pain of being separated from their homeland and its cultural practices. Although the participating families regularly referred to their home region as a site of trauma, where they had endured severe state repression and human rights violations, they also characterised it as a source of pride, resistance, and social belonging, which they deeply missed and to which they hoped to return one day. A mother of two children, who had arrived in Belgium three years prior to the interview, narrated how her grief was related to a persistent longing to go back home:

> "It's not easy to adjust to this new life. I keep thinking all the time: 'When will we go and visit our land? When will the time come when we may return for good?'"

In parent-child relationships, communication about the homeland often focused on this dream of returning,[6] as was explained by one family's father:

> "We don't talk about the [difficulties of the] past, but we do look ahead… We make plans and fantasise about returning to the homeland, and dream about its gardens, animals, and farmlands and about what we could do there."

In several participating families, parents and children attempted to ease the pain of loss by replicating typical elements of the Kurdish way of life in their new homes. For example, two families reinstalled the traditional practice of pigeon-raising in their host country gardens, and we learned how parents actively engaged their children in this ancient tradition. Pigeon caretaking is a

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[6] This "dream of returning" has been extensively documented in research with Palestinian refugees. See for example Richter-Devroe's (2013) study on the imaginaries of return of three generations of Palestinian refugees. Whereas older refugees, who had fled during the Nakba, tend to take a romantic view, presenting their lost homes as a paradise, the youngest generation referred to the homeland in a more contradictory way, imagining the right of return first and foremost as a collective political project to claim the right to choose whether and how to return to their homeland.

prevalent cultural practice in immigrants from Turkey and has been found to be closely connected to individuals' understandings of their ethnic identity and culture (Jerolmack, 2007). Therefore, refugee families' involvement in this particular practice of pigeon keeping may be one of the ways in which they attempted to maintain connections to the homeland by cultivating its cultural customs in the host country. In another family, one son spent much time constructing a wooden chicken coop in the garden, and told us how his mother wanted him to recreate the atmosphere of life in Kurdistan in order to make life in the host country, far away from their former neighbours, bearable. The mother remained closely in touch with these neighbours in the homeland and even considered it important to have their approval on how she currently furnished her garden and decorated her home. During a family interview, she explained why:

> "It is very important [to keep in touch with the neighbours] because we shared what happened in the 1990s. We've been through everything together."

Here, it seems as if the mother, by recreating the homeland environment in and around her new house, also evoked these dark years of armed conflict and persecution she and her family had endured together with their neighbours. For this mother, the furnishing of her garden was required to be able to feel close to her neighbours, who had played a crucial role in helping her and her family survive the years of war.

Collective identifications also appeared to operate as vehicles of indirect communication about loss and grief in the family, as was illustrated by a twelve-year-old boy who explained the significance of his *saz*[7] as follows:

> "When I play my *saz*, my mother knows that I'm thinking about my homeland. One time she saw me playing and she told me: 'Soon, we will go back to visit Turkey'. [Silence] I think she wanted to console me."

As seeing her son play the *saz* encouraged his mother to comfort him or start a conversation about his feelings of missing and grief, this example illustrates how engaging with cultural practices in the family context may equip refugee families with a medium to dwell on lived experiences of loss, homesickness, and cultural bereavement.[8] Refugees' nostalgic longing for a lost homeland has been a salient theme in forced migration research with several refugee communities (e.g. Mirzeler and Jafarov, 2012; Ramsden and Ridge, 2013). Studies with Kurdish refugees in western host countries (e.g. Eliassi,

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[7] The saz (*bağlama* in Turkish) is a stringed musical instrument often used in Turkish and Kurdish folk music.

[8] The term "cultural bereavement" was introduced by Eisenbruch (1991), who argued it should be used to refine the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder in refugees. According to Eisenbruch, cultural bereavement is an existential aspect of the refugee's predicament that involves the loss of social structures, cultural values, and self-identity after abandoning culture and homeland.

2010; Toivanen and Kivisto, 2014), as well as internally displaced Kurds in Turkey (e.g. Geerse, 2010; Stefanovic, Loizides and Parsons, 2014), show that the desire to return often remains strongly present. A nostalgic representation of the homeland, which is constructed within the transnational, mediatised diasporic space, appears to evoke strong memories and emotional attachments, hereby acting as an important marker of belonging and identity for forcedly displaced Kurds. Yet, the participants in our study expressed ambivalence in referring to their home region as a site of pride, resistance, and social belonging, which they heavily missed, but equally as a site of trauma, where they endured severe state repression and human rights violations (see the following section on *'Collective identifications and commemorating trauma'*).

In the same family where the *saz* fulfilled a significant role, watching video recordings of traditional Kurdish wedding parties was a recurring family activity. After the son had shared that attending these traditional weddings represented an important part of their diasporic lives, the mother explained how watching these videotapes reminded her that she was part of a strong community that would carry her through hard times:

> "I'm very happy that the Kurdish community is so bound together. We have left so much behind and live in a different country now, yet when Kurds meet among themselves, it's like they are all family. There's a large commitment to each other within our community, you can note that at our cultural festivals and weddings, but also when someone in the community has died: we all get together and support each other. This strong connection makes it easier to be so far away from home."

This example illustrates the driving force of collective belonging, and its evocation via video images watched in the private context of the family, as a way of re-establishing social connection and trust in the wake of uprooting and forced displacement from their homeland. However, the right to rely on the commitment and solidarity of other Kurds in the diasporic community for this mother seemed to be dependent on one's efforts to participate in collective agendas, as she made critical remarks about Kurds who were not fully engaged in social engagement within the community:

> "Many Kurds who have come here, applied for asylum based on the events in our homeland, for example by referring to family members who have died in the armed struggle. Yet, some of them are not doing anything in favour of the Kurds. I always say: 'You're here thanks to our combatants, God will punish you for not doing anything'."

For this mother, conveying her membership of the Kurdish community also seemed to relate to her lived experience of being personally indebted to the

Kurdish guerrillas for being able to live freely in the host society, while they had to continue the resistance in dangerous circumstances.

Overall, a strong sense of belonging to a larger collectivity and remaining attached to the homeland seemed to be actively transmitted in all participating families by means of different cultural practices, which served as important sources of dealing with loss and cultural bereavement.

Collective identifications and commemorating trauma

While the abovementioned examples show how holding on to positive aspects of Kurdish cultural identity allowed family members to mitigate the strong feelings of missing and bereavement related to being involuntarily displaced from their homeland, other cases suggested that cultural identifications also played a role in channelling painful memories of collective violence and trauma experienced in the home country. Several respondents mentioned how traditional Kurdish music evoked sad memories related to these personal and collective experiences of trauma, which they considered important not to forget. In fact, some participants were actively involved in learning to sing and play these traditional songs themselves, videotaping their musical interpretations and sharing these on their social media profiles. Here, songs referring to the revolution made participants dwell on their memories, as a 25-year-old daughter explained:

> "We Kurds have a lot of revolutionary songs, and in these days [of escalating violence], those songs are very painful. There are many songs about failed love or about the martyrs. They also make me emotional and sad. … When I listen to those songs, I think about my childhood, about the good things in life, but not always. Sometimes I think about sad moments. By listening to this music, I relive those memories or those events; they remain fresh in my mind."

In family relationships, collective identifications were mobilised by parents to transmit the family's history of persecution and forced displacement to their children. Here, several parents explained how the transmission of elements of Kurdish cultural and political identity within the family enabled them to remind their children of their Kurdish roots, whose historical oppression had been an important reason why they had migrated to Belgium. This was illustrated by the following quote by a mother of two children who herself had suffered under the discriminatory policies and cultural oppression of the Turkish government and several of whose ancestors had been killed during ethnic cleansing operations:

> "The importance that I attach to the transmission of Kurdish identity does not mean that I'm not well integrated, or that I think my children should not integrate. … We know this country and its laws and regulations; we have a good life here. Yet we also want to tell our children: 'don't forget who you are, don't forget why you are here.'

> That is very important, it's a kind of lesson you want to pass on to your children."

Actively reminding her children of their Kurdish roots enabled this mother to make them remember their collective history of marginalisation, forced assimilation, and displacement, while at the same time reversing this historical oppression by emphasising instead of repressing Kurdish identifications in the family context. In several participating families, this role of collective identification in commemorating traumatisation in exile could be found, and Kurdish political and cultural identity appeared to be symbolised and transmitted by different means. For example, the father of the aforementioned family referred to the symbolic force of the colours of the Kurdish flag:

> "These colours are the reason why we are here. They symbolise our honour, our culture, our history. … Other people might say 'those are just the colours green, yellow, and red', but they mean something else to us."

Earlier in that same interview, the father had explained how these colours reminded him of his first encounter with Kurdish activists and their violent persecution when he was a young boy, recounting how the Kurdish colours operated as markers of memory to how his life had become entwined with this resistance. Yet, his personal war-related experiences were no topic of conversation in the family; instead, these widely shared colours seemed to function as silent reminders of the family's close commitment to their community's ongoing struggle.

Research encounters with another family were always succeeded by sharing a large Kurdish meal. Always eager to talk about her home-made recipes, the mother of this family once explained what one of her favourite dishes reminded her of:

> "We used to prepare this dish at weddings or town meetings, together with all the mothers, grandmothers, and young girls. When we prepare it here at home, we often reminisce about life in our home region. This dish is closely related to Kurdish culture. When the Kurdish guerrillas secretly visited us at night, we served them these *dolmas*, their favourite dish."

Spending much time on teaching her daughters how to prepare traditional Kurdish food, this mother not only transmitted typical recipes but also made sure they remembered life in their home region, which involved personal encounters with representatives of the Kurdish armed struggle. This may have helped her children understand themselves as members of a cultural and political community they did not cease to be a part of in exile, as well as served as a reminder of the meaningful role their family had played in the Kurdish resistance.

Overall, the transmission of cultural practices and other important aspects of Kurdish collective identity in family relationships played an important role in parents' and children's commemoration of their familial history of persecution and displacement. Addressing these personal memories of traumatisation in the family context was closely interwoven with cultural and political meaning-making.

Collective identifications in reversing versus reiterating trauma

The mobilisation of cultural and political identifications within families also seemed to operate as a means to preserve or restore belief in the possibility of peaceful coexistence, which in many participants had been damaged as a result of confrontations with man-made violence and atrocity. In some families, the PKK's current framework of anti-capitalism, ecologism, democratic confederalism, and women's emancipation (Yarkin, 2015) permeated parents' and children's daily discourse. In these families, PKK-related symbolism (e.g., pictures of martyrs; scarfs traditionally worn by Kurdish guerrilla fighters) was omnipresent in the family home, as was also illustrated by one two-year-old child who always greeted us making a peace sign with her fingers, cheerfully saying "Apo, Apo", a frequently used nick name for Abdullah Öcalan. Here, clinging to the optimistic project of the Kurdish movement, which promises the possibility of a more equal world, may have provided families with a positive perspective for the future and a means to continue to believe in the benevolence of mankind, despite the oppression and persecution they had endured.

In other families, parents expressed hesitation about bringing their children in contact with the ideology and iconography of the Kurdish movement. One father connected his hesitation to the desire to avoid his children's involvement in a repetition of violence:

> "I could show my children images of guerrilla fighters on Kurdish television channels, but if I did so, I might encourage them in that direction, and they may become soldiers in their thoughts and language by the time they turn fourteen. I experienced the war myself, and I see how bad war is. I want to keep them away from that, I wish them to have a different life. I don't want them to go through the same feelings or experiences as I did."

Concerned about the possibility his children would understand only the language of violence, this father explained us that he wanted his children to engage in a different kind of resistance in order to reverse the family's history of trauma. With the purpose of instilling his children with a sense of hope and trust in humanity despite ongoing conflict, he turned to ancient cultural legends and myths as important sources of inspiration:

> "When I tell these ancient legends to my children, I can imagine or even feel how people used to live at that time. … Thousands of years ago, private property did not yet exist, everything was shared by the

> collective. … Repression did not yet exist, all people were equal. Those stories and myths hold important lessons for today, that is why I consider it important to tell my children."

Tracing the possibility of a world of peaceful coexistence without oppression in Kurdish mythology and folklore, this father employed cultural identification as a means to transmit moral values of equality and solidarity to his children. Furthermore, he encouraged them to read a lot themselves, considering these attempts to gain extended knowledge and understanding of Kurdish culture and distant history as a means to reverse the deliberate negation of his people's heritage in Turkey.

Relatedly, another father explained how he preferred to transmit cultural identifications clearly separated from his personal history of persecution, as he feared his children's excessive involvement with the Kurds' history of oppression could possibly hamper fruitful adjustment in the host society:

> "We attach considerable importance to the transmission of our cultural habits and practices, but we do not transmit the difficult experiences we have been through because we want to avoid that our children would be concerned about these issues. It's very important that they are integrated here, and if we excessively transmit our history, it will hinder their successful integration."

Children's successful integration in the host society was an important concern for parents, and seemed to imply high educational aspirations and expectations of positive inter-group relations. Herein, the transmission of collective identifications, such as elements of PKK ideology combined with aspects of the Kurds' distant history, were employed by parents to nourish their children's belief and involvement in the creation of a better world. A mother of two children, who herself had lost several family members in the armed conflict, explained it as follows:

> "We teach our children that people of different colour and ethnicity exist. We teach them to be in solidarity with the rest of the world. … The Kurdish people, the people from Mesopotamia, they have always protected and helped each other when there was a war. Following the Kurdistan Workers Party, we are convinced that the [nationalist] belief of 'one people, one community' is not the right way. Rather, we transmit values of respect and solidarity to our children, speaking as Kurds who are descendants from the people of Mesopotamia, where there have always been different colours, religions, and ethnic groups."

While the transmission of political ideologies and cultural stories in refugee families thus appeared to operate as an important source of reversing traumatisation by restoring hope for a better future, participating parents also expressed concerns that their children's strong involvement with their

collective identity as Kurds might reiterate trauma by inflicting racist sentiments and stirring up inter-group tensions with nationalist Turks, for example in the school setting. They explained how this had influenced the transmission of the collective predicament of the Kurdish people in family relations, which can be illustrated by the following quote of an eighteen-year-old daughter during a family interview:

"When I was younger, I used to tell my classmates that there is a war in Kurdistan, but as I grew older, my parents started to talk to me more often, and they told me I had to be careful with what I said at school; that bad things could happen."

Her father further clarified this during the parent interview:

"Of course we talk about our history, about who we are and where we come from, but I don't always tell them about what the Turkish regime did to the Kurds. Why? In order to protect my children: I don't want them to have their minds on politics too soon, and I want to avoid them becoming racists."

These concerns about peaceful coexistence in the host society appeared to impact on participating families' lives in the private contexts of their homes as well, as illustrated by the following excerpt of a dialogue between mother and daughter, taken from one of our interviews:

Mother: "Most people in our neighbourhood don't know we are real Kurds, if they knew they would…"
Daughter [interrupting her mother]: "Yes, they know we are Kurds, but we will never really talk about our political views. For example, in our house you will see objects with traditional designs, but you will never find political symbols. In our previous house, we had a portrait of Abdullah Öcalan and a PKK flag. But in this house, we did not put them, because we don't want a fight."

This family's sons, in contrast, did not want to give in to this implicit censorship and recounted anecdotes of how they had attempted to defend the honour of their family when Turkish neighbours had provoked the situation.

Overall, it seemed that cultural and political identifications allowed parents and children to reverse trauma by retaining a hopeful perspective on social relationships and the future of mankind, despite their history of trauma and exile. At the same time, these same elements of Kurdish identity risked fostering resentment and causing polarisation in the host society's current context of negative representations of Kurdish activism and inter-ethnic tensions between Turks and Kurds. This led most participants to carefully consider the public as well as the private expressions of these identifications. Here, participants' experience of again having to worry about the consequences of asserting their

cultural identity indicates the possible role of collective identifications in reiterating trauma-induced fear and restraint.

Discussion

Although exploratory in nature, this study's findings on collective identifications in Kurdish refugee families amply document the orientation of all participating families towards an active transmission of these markers of collective belonging in the family context. Participants' self-understanding as inextricably linked to a larger Kurdish collectivity fits with our observations at cultural and political events, where we noted how participants took pride in their ethnic identity and firmly committed to proceed with the struggle for cultural and political rights in Turkey as well as in Belgium. These observations clearly correspond to previous research in the domain of Kurdish studies that pointed to the vital role played by Kurdish community associations in preserving and reinforcing diasporic Kurds' cultural identity and transnational political commitment (e.g. Baser et al., 2015; Griffiths, 2000). In addition, our explorative analysis indicates that cultural and political narratives, practices, habits, and symbols are actively and dynamically mobilised in parent-child relationships and appear to play a protective role in assisting families to rebuild their lives in the wake of trauma, loss, and forced displacement, although they equally entail the risk of further conflict and exclusion. Indeed, despite the important role of collective identifications in families' dealing with loss and cultural bereavement, commemoration of trauma, and reversing their collective and personal history of traumatisation, these same collective identifications paradoxically turned out to be potential sources of conflict and exclusion, possibly leading to a repetition of previous experiences of marginalisation and isolation.

This suggests that the role of collective identifications in post-trauma reconstruction should be located and interpreted within a larger societal context of inter-group interactions and representations in the host society. In this regard, our findings appear to point to a triple bind of loyalties Kurdish refugee families seem to face with regard to their deployment of these collective identifications. Families not only try to respond to their community associations' expectations of their faithful commitment to the Kurdish cause; they also attempt to find their place in the host society, where expressing their collective identity may stir inter-ethnic tensions and negative perceptions. Furthermore, they have to find a way to manage their own personal experiences and ideas regarding the future of their children, which may in some cases deviate from their community's interests.[9] This implies that Kurdish families

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[9] Several scholars have documented how immigrant and refugee parents' attempts to fulfil demands of the new host culture (e.g. acquisition of the host country's languages, as well as expectations of peaceful inter-group relations) might be in conflict with the cultural rearing goals they deem important (e.g. the wish to ensure linguistic, cultural, and religious continuity and family cohesion) (Clycq, 2015; Roubeni, De Haene, Keatley, Shah and Rasmussen, 2015). In our conversations with Kurdish refugee families, these conflicting

have to look for a way to deal flexibly and sensitively with these elements of cultural and political identifications in all these different contexts.

Conclusion

Our study of Kurdish refugee families, involving an ethnographic contextualisation of their diasporic community, complements the extensive body of research on collective identifications in the domain of Kurdish studies. The research elaborated on the protective roles elements of cultural and political identifications can play in intimate family processes of meaning-making and coping with lived experiences of organised violence, loss, and exile, as is increasingly being documented in research with other refugee communities (e.g. Chaib and Baubet, 2015; Rousseau et al., 2004).

Future research with Kurdish refugee families could further investigate the association between collective identifications and post-trauma reconstruction, as well as study its relation with the quality of family relationships and inter-ethnic relationships in the broader social context of the host society. Overall, our study suggests that addressing the interconnectedness of individual and collective meaning-making, for example by studying individuals' or families' practices of remembering and grieving in the aftermath of trauma and forced displacement, combined with an analysis of the broader social context of community and society, might be an interesting avenue of future research within the domain of Kurdish studies.

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demands (and related conflicting loyalties) also arose and were further complicated by participants' narratives indicating potential conflicts between expectations of community organisations (e.g. strong transmission of cultural and political identifications in the light of transnational mobilisation) and families' individual goals (e.g. avoiding transmission of political identifications as a way to shape children's norms and values). Hence, our study's findings indicate the complex and multi-layered loyalties of Kurdish refugee families, which might be investigated further in future research.

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