Kurdish Agency in Denmark and the Challenges Facing the Diaspora Community

Master's Thesis

Culture, Communication, and Globalization

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Abstract

This project explores how the diaspora Kurdish community in Denmark practices agency. It draws inspiration from Boaventura de Sousa Santos' work on epistemologies of the South, and takes Alinia, Wahlbeck, Eliassi, and Khayati's work on the Kurdish diaspora and the triadic relationship to the homeland, the diaspora, and the host country as the foundational framework. The research is based on a series of interviews with members of The Dialogue Club, a Kurdish grassroots organization that organizes cultural, intellectual, and social events that focus on Kurdish identity and history.

Through the application of thematic analysis and postcolonial theories, we can see that The Dialogue Club views reclaiming agency from the perspective of disrupting the community's ties to past dynamics that have recreated forms of domination that's buttressed on capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal hegemony. They highlight three main challenges to the Kurdish community's agency: 1) extremist Islamist movements, who attempt to recruit Kurdish youth from the community; 2) Kurdish political parties who use their financial resources to fracture the Kurdish diaspora; 3) the Danish government's attitude toward immigrants and the lackluster integration proposals which doesn't lead to meaningful results.

They've worked to provide solutions to these challenges through community building via grassroots initiatives that work to rebuild the Kurdish identity in the diaspora along feminist, secular, and democratic principles, and a rejection of political ideologies that exclude or deny diversity of opinion. To achieve these things, they've emphasized the role of women in the organization and have dedicated a substantial effort to focus many of their events on issues regarding women's autonomy in Kurdish society. Additionally, they attempt to foster the creation of hybrid cultures, that can reconcile the differences between the Kurdish identity and Danish culture. At the same time, they see this type of hybrid culture as a defense against the influence of Islamist movements, who often take advantage of social isolation to recruit young people.

The analysis highlights the role of the triadic relationship in diaspora identity formation, as the dynamics seen in diaspora Kurdish community building and identity formation runs parallel with developments in Kurdistan. In this way, The Dialogue Club's initiatives can be seen as a miniature community that implements the democratic confederalist philosophy prevalent in North Kurdistan (Turkey) and West Kurdistan (Syria).

Introduction:

There exists approximately forty-five million Kurds on this planet. Of those forty-five, nearly two million live in Europe. (KPI, n.d.)

Often referred to as the largest stateless nation, the Kurdish homeland was divided in the early years of the 20th century, leaving its people scattered across four nation-states, where they have faced genocide, massacres, ethnic cleansing, assimilation, and internal colonialism (Maisel, 2018; Khurshidi, 2023). Despite this, the latter decades of the century was the stage upon which the Kurdish movement made itself visible again. In part through armed resistance, in part through political activism, Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora in Europe mobilized en masse in the 1990s and gave birth to the Kurdish liberation movement. (McDowall, 2007; Khayati & Dahlstedt, 2014)

In the 21st century, the struggle for visibility shifted and became a struggle for agency and self-determination. In Kurdistan this manifested in the creation of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the establishment of Rojava (West Kurdistan), otherwise known as the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, the entrance the HDP party, the first Kurdish party to enter Turkey's parliament, and the Women, Life, Freedom Protests in Iran was the culmination of a century of repression and decades of community building and social activism. (Maisel, 2018) But still, Kurdish agency remains a target for these four states. And in Europe, Kurds continue to face discrimination, criminalization, and alienation. (Bregnbæk, 2022; Dirik, 2021)

With this background, this project aims to understand how Kurds practice agency. Specifically, this project focuses on the Kurdish diaspora. More specifically: the Kurdish community in Denmark.

Kurdish studies, and especially Kurdish diaspora studies, is a nascent field of research. Due to the 'de-facto stateless status' of many Kurds (Bregnbæk, 2022), Kurdish people are often categorized by nationality, rather than ethnic or culture identity, meaning that in official reports they're often tallied as Turkish, Iraqi, Iranian, or Syrian. While this

makes it difficult to produce an accurate number on the Kurdish population, the larger issue it causes is effective invisibility. Beyond leaving Kurds without official status, this invisibility also harms the diaspora's ability to engage in community building and political activism. And the political pressure that the four states exert, has made it very difficult for researchers to work in the field of Kurdish studies (Dirik, 2021), despite the fact that in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden constitute the largest immigrant population. While in France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and Belgium their combined population numbers between 1.3-1.8 million. (KPI2, n.d.)

This is problematic for two main reasons: 1) invisibility in Europe makes it more difficult for official authorities to effectively engage with Kurdish communities within their borders, despite the relatively large population size; 2) the lack of knowledge about the Kurdish diaspora misrepresents the Kurdish community, who are often more likely to identify with their European home than with Iraq, Turkey, Syria, or Iran. (Roderburg & Toivanen, 2024)

To reiterate: this project aims to explore how Kurds practice agency in Denmark. For this purpose, this project takes inspiration from the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, which is rooted in postcolonial scholarship and provides an analytical framework for social science research specific to postcolonial societies. (2018) Santos' framework emphasizes the role the historical context of colonial practice and the 'abyssal line', as postcolonial societies in the Global South operate from an epistemological position that's inherently different from those of the Global North. Additionally, Alinia and colleagues' work (2014) on diaspora identities, and the influence of the diaspora's triadic relationship to the 'homeland', diaspora, and host country, is essential to understanding the Kurdish diaspora. They argue that any changes in any of these three points causes reactions in the other two, which then affects the identity of the diaspora population. In effect, this dynamic makes it so that Kurdish political and cultural initiatives are transnational in nature.

In terms of data for research, this project is built on a series of interviews I've conducted in 2025 with the members of a Kurdish grassroots organization called The

Dialogue Club, founded in 2021. The Dialogue Club organizes social, intellectual, and academic events in Copenhagen, Denmark, and their events revolve around Kurdish culture and Kurdish history, with a focus on agency and identity. They've become an integral part of the Kurdish community and regularly put together seminars for speakers from Europe and Kurdistan. Additionally, while the majority of the attendees at their events are from Denmark, there's also a minority that visits from Sweden, Norway, and Germany. In this project the concepts of agency and identity are central to the research. To limit the scope of the research, the following research question guides the focus of the project:

How is the Dialogue Club engaging with identity formation and community building practices to reclaim agency for the Kurdish community in Denmark?

And the sub question:

How is the Kurdish community's triadic relationship to Kurdistan, the Kurdish diaspora, and Denmark affecting the Dialogue Club's identity formation and community building practices?

I've drawn from the work the work of Alinia and colleagues who describe diaspora in the following words:

"Diasporas have been defined as expatriate communities that are characterised by their specific relation to a real or imagined homeland. Yet, "homeland" has to be understood as an idea; it is actually dislocation and relocation in relation to an idea of a homeland that characterises the diaspora. Thus, the concept of diaspora has been useful to describe the processes of social organisation, transnational relations and community formation connected to displacement." (2014, p.54)

Likewise, the work of authors such as Dilar Dirik, who focuses on Kurdish political mobilization and community building (2021); Roderburg & Toivanen, whose research involves comparative studies on Kurds and other Middle Eastern communities in Europe (2024); Özlem Galip, who uses Kurdish literature to study identity formation in the diaspora (2012); Susanne Bregnbæk, whose case study on Kurdish migrants in Denmark highlights

the effect of asylum policy on identity and integration (2022), and many others who've engaged in the field have contributed to my research.

Literature Review:

Diaspora Kurdish Studies:

The field of Kurdish studies is an emerging field, which as of the time of writing is still in need of further research. However, authors involved in Kurdish studies have already provided a number of projects which shed light on Kurdish communities and peoples.

Susanne Bregnbæk's case study, focusing on a Kurdish migrant called Hiwa in Denmark, shows the toll of the Danish state's policies on vulnerable refugees, "[Hiwa] knew several people stuck for years in Danish detention camps, some literally drugged themselves with antidepressants to dull their senses. He told me a harrowing case of a young single mother who, as a last resort, made porn movies through a webcam to provide for her three children, leaving her largely ostracized even in the leftist Kurdish community." (2022, p.356) Bregnbæk's work shows a side of Denmark and Danish politics which is at odds with the country's humanist image. This reality is made worse when compared to Denmark's policies regarding Kurdish immigrants in the previous century, where the state would make life easier on Kurdish guest workers – helping individuals stay on top of legal issues such as residency applications, family reunion, and work permits. (Hjarnø, 1991) In contrast, as Bregnbæk points out, Denmark's politics in the 21st century has been a case of waging psychological war on refugees who come to the country often ridden with trauma, "[…] the L 140 bill in Danish asylum policies, otherwise called Paradigmeskiftet (the "Paradigm Shift" Law), was adopted by a broad parliamentary vote. The central aspect of this law is that all residence permits are considered temporary; refugees and people who have received family reunification must have their residence permits confiscated 'unless this is strictly at odds with Denmark's international obligations.'" (Bregnbæk, 2022, p.354) The results of these policies has been a decrease in integration and Denmark as a country alienating skilled individuals, who would otherwise be a valuable member of society and contribute to the country. (ibid.)

Denmark's legislations regarding immigration are not unique to Kurds. However, what is unique to Kurds is the criminalization of the Kurdish identity, which is prevalent across Europe, as Dilar Dirik writes, "[...] politically active Kurds have long had the status of suspect communities in the eyes of European states. A large number of activists are subject to surveillance, raids, protest and travel bans, and deportation threats." (Dirik, 2021) Dirik focuses on Germany, however similar developments have also been present in Denmark. One such example is the closure of Kurdish Roj TV by the Danish government (Guardian, 2013). As Dirik argues, most attempts to rectify the image of Kurds in the diaspora is often met with further repression, and so the Kurds are stuck in a limbo: either they're seen as dangerous communities, or, as multiple authors have argued, they're made invisible. In large part, the criminalization of Kurdish activities has made it difficult to build a comprehensive field of Kurdish studies, specifically when addressing the Kurdish communities in the diaspora, "If criminalisation directly affects people's ability to act politically, stigmatising representation impacts their willingness to openly speak their mind. Media reports often reduce heterogenous and popular Kurdish political activities in Europe – which include cultural festivals, educational seminars and anti-domestic violence projects – to a caricaturised image of a gang-like sect that preys on young people for recruitment to become glorified martyrs in armed struggle." (Dirik, 2021)

Emerging studies:

Currently, one of the issues facing Kurdish communities in Europe is the categorization of Kurds as Iraqi, Syrian, Turkish, or Iranian – effectively rendering the Kurdish community invisible.

Despite this, the limited research shows that lumping Kurds into national categories is a major misrepresentation of their cultural values and identity. Arakon and Demrich (2020) show that in Germany, Kurds who have immigrated from Turkey differ from Turks in a number of ways: statically Kurds are more secular, Kurds show higher integration success, higher German fluency, and, vitally, less than half the Kurdish population feel any connection to Turkey, and would prefer to adopt a German identity than Turkish. Yener-

Roderburg & Toivanen (2024) show that Kurds in Germany and France with dual citizenship view the passport they hold from their 'native' country with mistrust, and in many cases have even attempted to renounce it. And in terms of politics, Kurds, as a bloc, vote and engage very differently from Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian, and Turkish populations in Europe. (ibid.) This delineation in identity is also visible in how Kurdish authors in the diaspora write about Kurdishness, with concepts of territory, culture, language, and many others used to reflect a separate Kurdish identity. (Galip, 2012)

Additionally, Kurdish communities have taken initiative in the past few decades to build alliances with other communities in similar situations. Ayar Ata writes that Kurds in Europe, specifically in the United Kingdom, have transcended the "state-centric understandings of history and identity." (Ata, 2023, p.74) Instead, the focus among individuals and institutions look at shared experiences as common ground, upon which identity can be negotiated. In terms of political will, a similar pattern is emerging according to Maria Koinova, where Kurds have united with Armenians and Assyrian diasporas to build broad coalitions to voice common demands, such as a genocide recognition and democratization of Turkey. (Koinova, 2019)

Overall, the consensus among the authors is that the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, Denmark included, is moving away from old forms of identity development and a focus on regaining lost agency is practiced in new ways. In projects focusing on decrypting Kurdish identity through art, multiple authors have laid out core tenets of Kurdishness in the 21st century. Anni Webster's work points out that Kurds actively reject a homogenous Kurdish identity, instead common experiences and common values are the uniting factor, (Webster, 2024) The values, which are often highlighted as being intrinsic to Kurdishness, are secularism, feminism, ecological and green politics, and diversity of Kurdish culture, "Kurdish exiled novelists demonstrate through their literary works that, in terms of literary construction of alternative narratives of identities and politics, their own political and identity implications are often at odds because of a diversity of views and ideologies." (Galip, 2012, p.74) In art, the work of contemporary artist Raz Xaidan (Ozcelik, 2021), shows a similar trend: focusing on Kurdish women and the role of women in fostering

solidarity and resistance rooted in indigenous cultures of Kurdistan, Kurdish and non-Kurdish. These themes are also major points within the political philosophies of Kurdish parties in Turkey and Syria, who advocate for equity in political representation of ethnic groups in Kurdistan, and equal division of political leadership between men and woman. (Burç, 2020)

In both literature and politics, what often rises as a uniting factor is Kurdishness itself with all its diversity. (Galip, 2012; Webster, 2024; Koinova, 2019; Ata, 2023) This understanding of Kurdish identity, then, also stands in agreement with Arakon and Demrich (2020) and Yener-Roderburg & Toivanen's research (2024). At the same time, the Kurdish identity in the diaspora is directly tied to Kurdistan.

Alinia and colleagues write that diasporic identities can't be simplified and viewed only in terms of the connect to the 'homeland'. While past experiences and collective trauma from Kurdistan plays a major role, specifically within diasporic political projects, other factors are equally influential, "As diasporic communities and identities are characterised by a 'triadic relationship' including the home countries, host countries and the transnational diaspora communities, any change in the socio-political situation in these points of references imply certain changes in diasporic projects and identities." (Alinia et al., 2014 , pp.53) This triadic relationship is central to understanding diaspora community building and initiatives.

In a study about Kurds in Sweden, Khayati and Dahlstedt show that the Kurdish community in the country have become a major actor within Swedish and Kurdistani politics. Through the establishment of multiple organizations, the Kurdish community has worked toward a dual agenda, "This 'dual agenda' is a manifestation of the far-reaching transborder citizenship practices among the Swedish Kurds, addressing life issues in both sending and recipient countries and as a result connecting Sweden with various Kurdish populations in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria." (Khayati & Dahlstedt, 2014, p.60) This development, which largely took off in the mid-1990s, is comparable to other Kurdish communities in Europe, according to the authors. The upside for the Kurds in this situation

is that, in the diaspora, the challenge posed by fragmentation of Kurdistan in the early 20th century, and division into four nation-states which have continuously enacted racist, oppressive, and violent policies against Kurds, is being reversed through transnational initiatives and cultural reawakening. As a result Kurds who originate from one part of Kurdistan have become active in discussing and bringing attention to the plights and politics of Kurds in a different part of Kurdistan – for example: 'Iraqi' Kurds taking up activist roles in solidarity with Kurds in Turkey. (ibid.) And the other end of the dual agenda, encourages Kurds to integrate into Swedish society and culture, and to negotiate and engage in Sweden's politics as Swedish citizens. This negotiation of identity through accepting the diversity of Kurdish culture and engaging in transnational politics reflects what previously mentioned authors have argued for regarding the heterogeneity of the Kurdish identity. Additionally, this form of community building and political engagement within the triadic relationship of diaspora identities is likewise echoed by other authors. Veysi Dag (2024) for example, shows a similar pattern among Kurdish diaspora communities in Berlin and Jewish Kurds in Jerusalem. Jowan Mahmod's research on Kurdish online communities in the diaspora (2019) sheds light on the emergence of similar patterns.

All in all, the literature on Kurdish diaspora communities highlight similar trends. However, as previously mentioned, while the field is now in a better state than ten or twenty years ago, research on Kurdish communities in Denmark is still rare. Research, which is available, such as Schøtt's work on Kurdish mobilization (2021), largely focuses on political relationships rather than community and identity. The aim of this project is to add to the scholarship of Kurdish studies and fill in a piece of the mosaic regarding Kurds in Denmark.

Philosophy of Science:

Ontology:

In the social sciences, the ontological position of the research is involved with the questions regarding the nature of social entities (Bryman et. al., 2016). In essence it is the

question of whether “social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built from the perceptions and actions of social actors.” (ibid. p.28) These two opposed views make up two ontological positions, with the first being objectivism, as apparent by the description of objective social entities with reality external to social actors, and the latter constructionism, where the nature of social entity is being predicated upon the perceptions and actions of social actors.

This project takes a constructionist ontological position. This position implies that social phenomena are a product of social interactions and are therefore subject to change due to future interactions (ibid.) While social science research necessitates that social factors are considered, the research I conducted also emphasized this fact. The literature on the topic and the interviews with the members of the Dialogue Club vividly highlighted the relevance of historical, social, and political context. Approaching this project from a constructionist ontological position allows me to put the data I have collected through the correct contexts and to their effects on social reality.

Epistemology:

Epistemological position in social sciences is involved with the question of how we know things. (Porta & Keating, 2008) Bryman et. al. outline two main epistemological positions: positivism and interpretivism. They describe positivism as a position that “advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences in the study of social reality and beyond.” (Bryman et. al., 2016, p.24) Likewise they point out that within this position, knowledge must be acquired objectively and hence be value free.

On the other hand, interpretivism is a position that comes out of the view that study of social reality cannot be undertaken with the same logic of research procedure as the study of natural sciences. (ibid.) In other words, because the study of social reality is involved with understanding human behavior, we must approach it with human subjectivity and context in mind. Then, from there, take an interpretive approach to understanding social reality.

This project is rooted in an interpretivist epistemological position. This is not only due to the theoretical basis of epistemology, but also due to the analysis methods used. The first method, thematic analysis, is interpretivist in nature. The second method, which I will address is further detail in the following sections, is rooted in epistemologies of the South (Santos, 2018). Epistemologies of the South differ from epistemologies of the North in their conceptualization of social research due to the historic role of colonialism. Additionally, there is an emphasis on combining postcolonial traditions of understanding the subaltern with the dynamics produced because of power imbalances. In effect, beyond taking an interpretivist epistemological position to analysis, it is also necessary to approach the research process with consideration to the different interpretations of social science.

Methodology:

Research design and strategy:

Within the social sciences, the terms 'design' and 'strategy' have been used in different ways by different authors. Creswell (2009) for example, uses design to describe the qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, while Bryman and colleagues (2016) use design to describe whether a study is a case study, comparative study, etc. This project has been structured and created based on Bryman and colleagues' methods, therefore I will be using their terminology.

The three main research strategies according to Bryman and colleagues (2016) are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches. Bryman and colleagues make this distinction in research strategy and writes that research strategy is "[the] general orientation to the conduct of social research." (Bryman et. al., 2016, p.32)

Qualitative research is more generally oriented toward a constructionist ontological stance and an interpretivist epistemological stance, and places importance on "words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data." (ibid., p.32) In addition to

the the ontological stance and epistemological stance of my project, which are harmonious with qualitative research, the scope and focus of my project also make it necessary to use qualitative data to produce satisfactory results. The interviews I have conducted in this regard are in line with this necessity. A qualitative approach allows me to base my findings in the analysis of the interview data and to frame those findings within the appropriate context to answer my research question. Hence, my research strategy is qualitative.

My research design also works well with my research strategy. This project is designed as a case study, which, as a researcher, enables me to dig into my particular research area more deeply, as Bryman and colleagues outline, “case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question.” (Bryman et. al., 2016, p.154) Likewise, given the scope, time limitations, and resource limitations, a case study is more appropriate to understand the Kurdish community in Denmark through the Dialogue Club. This can also increase the validity of the results in this project, as the limited scope of the study decreases variability.

Logic of Inquiry, Data Collection, and Analysis Method:

I have chosen to present the logic inquiry, data collection, and analysis method together, as they informed one another in this project. The logic of inquiry allowed for flexibility, specifically in the analysis, which in such a project was necessary as I will show in the following sections.

Logic of Inquiry:

I have taken an abductive approach in this project. Abduction, unlike deduction and induction, allows the researcher to continually adapt their research to new findings and new knowledge obtained through the process of the study. (Bryman et. al., 2016)

This abductive approach has been pivotal in narrowing down the focus of the project and allowing the project to shift when necessary. Had I taken a different approach, it would have left me in a state of trying to fit information gathered throughout the research period

with a theoretical framework which would not align with the chosen topics of research. Ultimately, this would've resulted in a subpar project.

This project started with a curiosity regarding how Kurds in Denmark express their identity, however, the series of interviews I conducted allowed the project to go beyond the surface level aesthetics of culture and identity and toward investigating the mechanisms and factors relating to how culture and identity is shaped and their interplay with agency. For this reason, the abductive approach has been ideal as, "Abductive reasoning starts with an observation and tries to explain it using the most likely explanation, switching back and forth from the puzzle to the social world and the literature [...]" (ibid., p.78). This switching back and forth allowed me to adapt my theoretical framework to my data collection, and vice versa, throughout the process.

Data Collection:

The vast majority of the data used for this project comes from five interviews conducted with members of the Dialogue Club. While there were multiple members who were eligible, I chose these five who met three important criteria:

1) They hold Danish citizenship
2) They have been members of the club since its founding
3) They are currently active members

These three criteria allow me to base my findings in interviews which would be freer of external factors. One external factor, to which I had to be considerate, was a fear of authority, which for many Kurds who have grown up in Kurdistan is a real and continuous threat, even in the diaspora. (Dirik, 2021) Often this fear manifests in a worry of deportation. Speaking to Kurds who hold Danish citizenship meant that my interview participants would be more willing to speak openly.

The second and third criteria ensured that interviewees have suitable knowledge about the Dialogue Club and that their membership is based on a broad range of experiences that has ensured their continuous membership and activity – meaning that

their interviews are representative of the Club's goals and ideals and the data I collect is a credible reflection of the community. Additionally, the members I interviewed have diverse backgrounds: they come from different parts of Kurdistan, have different experiences ranging from community organization, political activism, professional sports, military experience (Kurdish Peshmerga forces), and human rights activism. Furthermore, the sample of interviewees includes three men and two women. For privacy reasons, I have only included their first names in the project.

The members I interviewed are the following:

Member	Role	Origin	Background
Goran	Founding member and ex-director of the Dialogue Club	South Kurdistan (Iraq)	Civil society activist
Hidayat	Charity Initiative and events organization	South Kurdistan (Iraq)	Community organizer and author
Law	Charity Initiative and events organization	South Kurdistan (Iraq)	Ex-professional football player
Shadi	Director of the Dialogue Club	East Kurdistan (Iran)	Women's rights activist
Gohar	Founding member and events organization	East Kurdistan (Iran)	Peshmerga and political activist

All interviews were conducted in person, with the first one having taken place on March 29th and the final interview on May 2nd. The interviews were conducted in Kurdish, as it eased communication and ensured that the participants could express their ideas and thoughts in their preferred language. The interviews were split into two halves and contained semi-structured and open-ended questions and followed an interview guide

made up of ten questions[1]. All members were asked the same questions, with the exception of Goran and Gohar, who were asked an additional question regarding the founding of the club.

The development of the interview guide is based on Bryman and colleague's framework, which ensures variety in types of questions (2016). Similarly, the criteria laid out by Bryman and colleagues also served as a helpful guide to ensure interview quality, where the first interview, with one of the founding members, acted as a pilot interview (p.939), allowing for further probing questions in subsequent interviews. In line with this, the open-ended questions helped me gather information which I might have not considered, and the semi-structured approach allowed me to ask the interviewees to expound topics they touched upon, through questions which would focus on values, beliefs, behavior, and encounters. (ibid. pp. 932-933)

The first half of the interview primarily focused on the participants' backgrounds, which played a pivotal role in helping build a rapport with the interviewees. As Bryman and colleagues point out, "[building a rapport] encourages the other person to want (or at least be prepared) to participate in and continue with the interview." (2016, p.462) While my first criteria for sampling ensures more openness, it doesn't immediately build trust and rapport. By asking about their backgrounds, relating to their stories through stories of my own, and showing that I understand their cultural and political perspective, I aimed to build a relationship through establishing commonalities between us. This was vitally important in two ways: 1) it effectively allowed me to communicate that their points will not be lost in translation and/or be misunderstood, and 2) that their historic contexts, experiences, and backgrounds will remain an important factor in the presentation of their answers, allowing for nuance. However, likewise relevant is to remain neutral and not react in such a way that would sway the interviewee one way or another – to the extent possible (ibid.). This second point pushed me to become less of an active participant – meaning I would ask questions

[1] Appendix 1

and listen rather than contribute with sharing my own experiences – in the second half of each interview, where the focus was The Dialogue Club.

Analysis Method:

The first method I have implemented in this project is thematic coding, also referred to as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, similar to the logic of inquiry and semi-structured interviews, allows for a degree of flexibility while simultaneously building a framework of analysis which, when combined with the aims of the project and the theoretical framework, grounds the research to narrow the focus of the work to the intended scope.

I have made use of Braune and Clark's work on thematic coding (2006), which asserts that the data used for research ought to be observed a minimum of two times. To that end, I have recorded each interview, which gave me the freedom to focus on what each participant said during the interview and allowed me to spend less time note taking. In of itself, this can constitute a first observation of the data, which when combined with the abductive approach, allows for coding to begin at the nascent stages of research (Bryman et al, 2016).

During each interview, I limited my note taking to highlighting points which were repeatedly expressed either by the individual participant or across multiple interviews. These initial instances of the research helped shape the project and alter the research question and choice of theory in tandem with the data collection. I also observed the data *corpus* of the interviews a second time and third time afterward, to carve out the data *set* from with the data *corpus*, which I have used for further analysis. (Braune & Clark, 2006) In the second phase of coding, namely identifying the relevant data *set*, I focused my attention on approaching the interview data systematically using methods of latent thematic analysis, which provides grounds for the creation a more organized way of categorizing my data through a coding process. (Braun & Clarke, 2006) A latent thematic analysis constitutes a mode of analysis that "goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, [...] [thus] the development of themes themselves involved interpretive work." (ibid. p.13)

This data *set* was chosen in accordance with the focus of the project at two different levels of the research. The first level was concerned with sections of the interviews which mainly revolved around the Kurdish community in Denmark. This first level also served to inform the second level. The second level was concerned with all other sections of the interviews that are relevant to the theoretical framework of this project.

The next three phases revolved around finding the themes in the data and defining each theme, where I am "sorting the different codes into potential themes and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes." (ibid., p.19) More specifically, in phase three the goal was to gather the data which could fit into prescribed themes. Phase four acted as a confirmation step to legitimize the themes generated, where the themes were investigated on two levels: 1) whether the themes work in relation to the coded data, 2) whether the themes work in relation to the whole data set (ibid.). Phase five refined the themes generated through creating "clear definitions and names for each theme." (ibid., p.35)

At the end of these five phases of analysis, I end up with four themes generated from the codes. Finally, these themes become subject to analysis and interpretation on the basis of my theoretical framework, and which ultimately become the guiding knowledge upon which I base my conclusions. The codes and themes generated are presented at the end of this section.

The sets used for analysis and generation of themes have been translated and transcribed.[2] Due to the length of each interview, as each half of each interview ran for forty-minutes on average, and the lack AI tools which can help with Kurdish transcription and translation, I have forgone including full transcripts of the interviews. However, the data used in the analysis are provided in the appendix. As a fluent Kurdish speaker – with experience translating various dialects of colloquial and academic Kurdish – I translated

[2] Appendix 2

the data myself. In addition, all the interviewees have given me permission to share the recorded interviews if necessary for ethical and quality purposes.

Here I will highlight once more the relevance of the abductive approach in this project, which has been integral in shaping the analysis and building a theoretical framework. Specifically, this approach allowed the research to develop to the point of necessitating the selected themes to be analyzed within a specific analytical method which is relevant for topics like this. Here I am referring to Boaventura de Sousa Santos' framework which deconstructs and directs attention to the critical differences in epistemologies of the North and epistemologies of the South in terms of social science research. (Santos, 2018) Santos' work straddles the line between analysis method and theoretical framework, hence why it is referenced here and in the Theoretical Framework section.

As Santos argues, research on social and political projects of postcolonial societies cannot be undertaken through the analytical lens of Eurocentric research. Echoing the language of Edward Said and other postcolonial scholars, Santos brings attention to the 'abyssal line', which influences Eurocentric research and shapes epistemologies of the North. The abyssal line makes societies of the Global South invisible and legitimizes their suffering through dehumanizing discourse. Due to this state of invisibility, epistemologies of the North often fail to recognize the repetition of divisive and dehumanizing discourse of colonial practice. Hence, Eurocentric research often recreates the same harmful representations, "The abyssal line is the core idea underlying the epistemologies of the South. It marks the radical division between forms of metropolitan sociability and forms of colonial sociability that has characterized the Western modern world since the fifteenth century. This division creates two worlds of domination, the metropolitan and the colonial world [...]. The metropolitan world is the world of equivalence and reciprocity among "us," those who are, like us, fully human, [...] the colonial world, the world of colonial sociability, is the world of "them," those with whom no equivalence or reciprocity is imaginable since they are not fully human." (Santos, 2018, pp. 20-21) As Santos argues, societies of the Global South engage with concepts of agency, self-determination, and liberation with the

presence of the abyssal line as a main factor. That's to say understandings of postcolonial experiences must contextualize these experiences within the reality of the abyssal division, as it fundamentally shapes South-South, South-North, and North-South interactions. Likewise, solutions that postcolonial societies propose through social and political projects emphasize the necessity of addressing the abyssal line at the outset, which has been created and reinforced through colonial and neocolonial practices.

In this context, two processes are implemented in identifying patterns of domination and combating them. The first is sociology of absences: "The sociology of absences is the cartography of the abyssal line. It identifies the ways and means through which the abyssal line produces nonexistence, radical invisibility, and irrelevance." (ibid. p.25) Through sociology of absences, epistemologies of the South engage in a critical reevaluation of history, culture, and power, and the role they play in the production of forms of domination through exclusion. The purpose of sociology of absences is not to combat domination, rather it is meant to highlight the hegemonic forces which create domination and deconstruct the mechanisms of exclusion by which said domination is made invisible. Essentially, it points to the problem and explains why the problem isn't solved. Through this process, sociology of absences provides the tools and the knowledge necessary for the second process: sociology of emergences, "the sociology of emergences aims at converting the landscape of suppression that emerges from such a diagnosis into a vast field of lively, rich, innovative social experience." (ibid. p.29) This core idea of the abyssal line, then, is a mainstay within the epistemologies of the South, and through referencing and acknowledging this divide, patterns of domination can be highlighted. This understanding is pivotal to social science research on postcolonial societies. As such, this project is rooted in the epistemologies of the South, which emphasizes that analysis on approaches to agency must be rooted in knowledge regarding the historical context of Kurdish society, and the role and influence of the abyssal line on these approaches. Santos' work, beyond providing a foundation for the analysis, also informs, and is a part of, the theoretical framework of this project.

Codes generated:

Goran Interview	Shadi Interview	Gohar Interview	Hidayat Interview	Law Interview
Danish treatment	Islam	Islam	Social connection	Charity
Danish perception	Kurdish women	Kurdish culture	Kurdish culture	Kurdish connection
Kurdish women	Social pressure	Kurdish education	Social awareness	Volunteerism
Integration	Youth	Political bias	Cultural awareness	Danish perception
History	Political influence	Social isolation	Danish perception	Open dialogue
Social connection	Danish treatment	Islamist movements	Political influence	Islamist movements
Youth outreach	Kurdish language	Culture	Life experiences	Shared activity
Culture	Democratic approach	Integration	Open dialogue	
Secular thought	Islamist movements	History	Kurdish women	
Funding	Unwritten rules	Open dialogue	Islamist movements	
Danish government	Honor killing	Shared activity	Anti-ideology	

Codes collated	Themes generated
Danish government Youth outreach Danish perception Danish treatment Kurdish education Kurdish language Integration Secular thought Funding Islamist movements	Relationship with Danish Society
Integration Social connection Kurdish women Secular thought Funding Democratic approach Political bias Anti-ideology Social isolation Open dialogue Islamist movements Charity Volunteerism Shared activity	Parallel community building
Social awareness Cultural awareness Integration	Preservation of collective culture and history

Kurdish language Kurdish education History Culture Islamist movements Youth outreach Honor killing Kurdish women Life experiences	Preservation of collective culture and history
Open dialogue Anti-ideology Democratic approach Volunteerism Culture social connection Political influence Islamist movements History	Reimagining Kurdish society

Ethical Consideration:

There are many ethical considerations to which I have worked to remain sensitive and to maintain high ethical standards. Starting off, I have followed GDPR laws which ensures protection for the individuals who've agreed to participate in interviews with me and to safeguard the information they've shared with me. Beyond asking for explicit permission on each recorded interview, I have also sent a copy of the interview recording to each individual.

Beyond this, I have also attempted to the best of my abilities to remain sympathetic and understanding, especially because every participant shared personal stories. Many of these stories involved accounts of tragedies, which they had witnessed in person. Their stories and their backgrounds in Kurdistan, specifically in one of the most turbulent periods of Kurdish history in which multiple massacres and a genocide took place, brought out strong and vivid emotions. So, outside of adherence to GDPR laws, I also worked hard to be considerate of their pasts and to not push any of the participants to delve into topics that they did not feel comfortable discussing.

Throughout the writing of this project, I have sought to be uphold high ethical standards as I am presenting interview material and using them for analysis. As I am commenting and analyzing interviews that contain personal histories and experiences, it would be irresponsible of me to not consider my own biases which might otherwise lead to false representations of the Kurdish community and the interviewees.

To that end, I have worked reflexively to remain aware of my own biases and my own political and personal opinions, as to not allow them to affect the outcome of my research. I have taken inspiration from Guillemin & Gillam (2004) to commit to reflexivity. One way which I have done this is to present all my data within the proper context and nuance, to not cherry pick samples of data which might influence my analysis and cause my findings to lose objectivity.

Additionally, I have also cited all material from other authors to avoid plagiarism and safeguard my own work and the works of other authors whose research has contributed to my project.

Limitation:

This project has been designed as diligently as possible, with each section being the result of many hours of research. Though it needs to be stated that due to the interpretive approach relying on the researcher's interpretation, the validity of the results can be compromised due to subjectivity. To minimize this to the extent possible, I have based my analysis and findings on well-established theories and drew from peer-reviewed academic works. Additionally, I have worked to ensure that the data I have collected for analysis comprise a relatively large sample size, within the limits of this project, as to not misrepresent The Dialogue Club or Kurdish community in Denmark.

One way to improve the validity of such a project would be to work collaboratively with researchers who can bring a different perspective to the interpretive process, and to relate this project to a larger body of Kurdish studies. Likewise, a larger sample size would benefit the conclusions.

While this project aims to answer questions about the Kurdish community in Denmark, it does so from a limited scope, namely the case of identity and community building practices in the Dialogue Club, its members, and events. Case studies allow for a specific focus and deep research; however, cases differ. Therefore, the conclusions need to be understood with this context in mind and should be contextualized within further future research.

Positionality:

I believe it's necessary to disclose my position within the research process, as, despite all attempts for objectivity, social science cannot be completely value-free and will include a certain level of the researcher's subjectivity. However, this is not inherently negative, as my connection to the topics comes with benefits and understandings regarding the Kurdish

and Danish society. This gives me access to Danish and Kurdish culture which is harder to attain without first-hand experience.

Having moved to Denmark in my formative years, I've lived half of my life in Kurdistan and half my life in the diaspora. Simultaneously, beyond a connection to these two sides of Kurdish culture, my education and life in Danish school system, among Danish friends and workplaces have helped me experience life with a foot in two different societies.

In relation to this: my work as a writer, journalist, and researcher in Danish places of work and with Kurdish newspapers and outlets has provided me with a lot of experience in the subcultures that exist in professional, social, and leisure settings. And I have experienced the negative and positive sides of both these cultures: from racism, discriminatory behavior, and exclusions to kindness, beautiful traditions, and empowering and inclusive politics and rhetoric. As such, I don't consider myself only Kurdish; my life is equally Danish. In this instance, this dual identity helped me build trust with the interview participants, while also ensuring a level of cultural understanding within the context of Kurdish life in Denmark.

My connection to my Kurdish identity plays an influential role in my choice research topics. And my Kurdish identity and experiences as Kurdish man is a driving force in my interest in Kurdish culture and Kurdish Studies. Likewise, my choice to study the Kurdish community in Denmark is related to the fact that Denmark is my home and Danishness is part of who I am. So, I occupy a standpoint where I am at once an insider and an outsider to both these cultures; a position that helps me distance myself and gives me a point of reference through which I can view Kurdistan and Denmark.

Given the topics present in my analysis, I should also bring attention to my political and religious leanings. I am not a politically active person, though, I observe and follow politics closely, specifically Danish, Kurdish, and international politics. I am also not a religious person, though I am aware of the sensitivity surrounding religious topics and approach it with this sensitivity in mind.

Theoretical framework:

The theoretical framework developed for this project borrows from the postcolonial tradition. The field has proved useful in producing literature which bypasses Eurocentric understandings of postcolonial societies, namely societies which have been on the receiving end of colonial practices.

In this project, postcolonial concepts revolving around *third space identity*, *desertion*, and *agency* play a central role in the analysis of the Dialogue Club. And as the theoretical framework shows, the concepts of identity and agency are interrelated and play into and through each other constantly. For this reason, despite the structural delineation I've provided for the sake of organizational clarity, theories relating to identity and agency are present in both of the following sections.

Postcolonial Identity:

When addressing postcolonial identities, one of the authors who has provided a solid framework for theoretical analysis is Homi Bhabha. Bhabha's theories regarding liminality and third space identities offer a way to investigate the relevant individual factors of postcolonial identities.

Taking Said's Orientalism as a point of departure, Bhabha's theory disagrees with Said regarding the agency of the colonized in that he argues that the agency of the colonized is apparent regardless of colonial domination, "Bhabha claims there is a space 'in-between the designations of identity' and that 'this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy." (Easthope, 1998, p.145)

Homi Bhabha argues that colonization doesn't necessarily lead to erasure of entire cultures, rather the colonized subjects turn to a hybrid culture, a paradoxical position whereby the colonized want to mimic the colonizer while simultaneously retaining their native culture. (Bhabha, 1994) This hybridity then becomes a way for the colonized to practice agency by taking on elements of the colonizer's identity and culture. This concept

is most clearly visible in postcolonial art, about which Elleke Boehmer eloquently writes, "[...] the act of doubling the white man's image in effect displaced the representations of authority. [In hybridity] we can see here how imitation became a kind of remarking, the creation not of a simple copy but of something subtly but distinctly new. [...] Mimickers reflected back to colonizer a distorted image of his world; they undercut his valorized categories of perception." (Boehmer, 2005, pp.163-164) Through mimicking the colonizer, the colonized is able "to subvert the master-discourse." (Loomba, 2005, p.78)

Bhabha's work is important for this project, given the historical context of the Kurdish people. The suppression of Kurdish identity and culture have remained as stalwart forces and obstacles in Kurds' attempts to establish foundations for the continuation of their culture, which was disrupted and forcefully altered following the first world war. (See introduction; literature review) Both Bhabha and Said make the case that this pattern of domination through suppression is a form of denying the colonized agency, and as a result the colonizer, which sees itself as the center, 'otherizes' the colonized and pushes the colonized to the periphery. The concept of center and periphery is also present in Santos' framework. The abyssal division, which can be seen as a rearticulation of center vs periphery, is also based on the otherization of the colonized subject. Likewise, all three agree that the production of knowledge and political domination are at the center of this otherization. Said provides a succinct description of this: "[the] massive and ancient discursive regime took these essentially mobile positions and fixed them in relation to an imaginary centre in Europe. The 'Orient' became an object which could be known by a European subject as it could not know itself." (Easthope, 1998, p.145)

Where Bhabha and Santos differ with Said, however in terms how the colonized regain agency. While Bhabha points to the formation of hybrid cultures and third space identities, Santos highlights the role of the epistemologies of the South and how critical scholarship originating in postcolonial societies give rise to different types of emergences in their resistance against domination. These emergences facilitate forms of resistance which frequently lead to rejecting cooperation with the forces that dominate them. (Santos, 2018) This type of resistance is also highlighted in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's work.

Hardt and Negri choose to concentrate their arguments on the role of space and location in relation to 'empire' and domination. For these two authors, one of the central questions is why the exploited and dominated do not resist. They posit that methods of resisting hegemonic domination have shifted because empire itself has changed, "In the contemporary world [...] the dialectic between productive forces and the system of domination no longer has a *determinate place.*" (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.209) It's for this reason that they argue that resistance in the contemporary era is not be performed through *sabotage*, but through *desertion*. The shift in methods of domination has made empire void of a physical center, and now "the exercise of domination is formed through communicative networks." (ibid. p.211) Meaning, that there is no longer a place outside 'empire'; therefore, resistance is performed through *deserting* the places of power where domination is produced, literal and metaphorical. (ibid.) This idea of desertion is a useful piece of the puzzle in analyzing the Dialogue Club.

However, here it is also necessary to highlight the criticisms of their approach. For some, resistance through desertion is not possible if understood literally. In this case of Kurds, for example, physical desertion and exodus have often been used to delegitimize them (see 'Arabization' & 'forced relocation' in Maisel, 2018; McDowall, 2007). One way in which Hardt and Negri make the argument relates to resistance against hegemonic forces through desertion of capital and the political systems which maintain it. (2001) In relation to Kurds, as authors such as Demirtas (2019) and Burç (2020) have demonstrated, desertion of political systems and places of power where domination is practiced and legitimized, is a powerful method of resistance. It's this understanding of Hardt and Negri's which is applied in the Analysis and Discussion sections.

Returning to Santos, he reiterates Hardt and Negri's arguments regarding desertion, at an epistemological level: "the sociology of emergences, in order to be convincing and mobilizing, must be capable of articulating at both the micro and the macro levels. The credible potentialities, latencies, and possibilities of resistance against domination must be traced on concrete terrain inhabited by oppressed social groups, that is, at the micro level. By symbolically enlarging them, the sociology of emergences shows that said

possibilities are valuable beyond their original context and are therefore credible on a much larger level, that is to say, at a macro level." (Santos, 2018, pp.250-251) In simpler terms, Santos' argument is in of itself a desertion of the prevalent mode of thought which insists upon hierarchical dichotomies. This way of thinking, which he describes as "Eurocentric critical thinking" (ibid. p.248), simplifies and fails to address the complexities which exists in daily life, and at the large scale of inter-community interactions and global interactions.

Postcolonial Agency:

A main concept for analysis in this project is 'agency'. Within this framework, Edward Said and Stuart Hall's work on representation has been utilized to supplement Bhabha's theories on identity and agency.

Similar to other authors mentioned, Hall writes that power is not constituted merely through physical coercion, "but also in a broader cultural or symbolic term, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way – within a certain 'regime of representation'." (Hall, 2003, p.259) As Said posits, through this representation, this delineation between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident' (1979), and the specific language and narratives constructed around these two broad identities, the West positioned itself as the superior, while portraying the 'Orient' and its people as objects which were there to enrich the lives of the people 'Occident', and hence inferior. This is easily visible in the writings of the Orientalist François Chateaubriand, whose reductionist views of the 'Orient' has painted an essentialized, objectified, and primitive image of the cultures and peoples of Southwest Asia and North Africa. (ibid.) However, this same mechanism is implemented at multiple levels of society and identity, and it is not strictly tied to 'Orient' vs 'Occident'. Other formulations, when taken to deconstruct patterns of representation and domination, include 'us' and 'them' (Santos, 2018), 'center' vs 'periphery' (Bhabha, 1994), 'Self' vs 'Other' (Said, 1979).

Both Hall and Said point to the specifics of domination and agree on the methods through which domination is practiced. Within Hall's work, analysis of the different

methods of representation, which create stereotypes, is highly relevant because that stereotyping produces which, "*reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes 'difference'*." (Hall, 2003, p.258) In other words, identity of the Other is simplified and made void of the potential for development. Likewise, "*stereotyping deploys a strategy of 'splitting'.* It constructs a divide between the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then *excludes* or *expels* everything which does not fit, which is different." (ibid.) Here, Hall's words run parallel to Santos' argument regarding hierarchal dichotomies. (2018) In the same manner, Said writes about Orientalism's reductionist attitude which aids in defining the 'Self': "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'." (Said, 1979, p.40) In much the same way as Hall, Said highlights the role of stereotyping, which then validates the *splitting*. The qualities attributed to each identity, broadly speaking, which are continuously reinforced and repeated, validates the division. In this way, the Orientalist narrative authenticates the decision to not give the 'irrational, depraved, and childlike' Oriental the same agency, or any agency. Relatedly, Santos' concept of the abyssal line is likewise vital, as it leads to two different types of exclusions: abyssal and nonabyssal. Nonabyssal exclusions are acts of domination, where the underlying reasons are perceived to be inherently different to abyssal exclusions, "[nonabyssal exclusion] are managed by the tension between social regulation and social emancipation as well as by the mechanisms developed by Western modernity to manage it, such as the liberal state, the rule of law, human rights, and democracy." (Santos, 2018, pp. 20-21) Nonabyssal exclusions, which are predominantly prevalent in the lives of the citizens of the metropolitan world, are not rooted in the innate 'humanness' of the individual or community, rather they are rooted in social differences and power inequalities. On the other hand, abyssal exclusion, prevalent in the lives of the citizens and communities of the colonial world, "takes place through the dynamics of appropriation and violence; the appropriation of lives and resources is almost always violent, and violence aims directly or indirectly at appropriation. The mechanisms at work have evolved over time but remain

structurally similar to those of historical colonialism, that is to say, those mechanisms involving violent regulation without the counterpoint of emancipation." (ibid. p.21)

These understandings of identity and agency is useful to understanding the interviews with the members of The Dialogue Club in relation to life in Denmark, and also the historic context of Kurdistan and the Kurdish identity.

Analysis:

In this section I'll be presenting the results of the semi-structured interviews and analyzing them within the theoretical framework of this project. The themes presented in the methodology section are organized here in a manner that build on each other to further enhance the coherence of the project. Though the interviews were semi-structured and included open-ended questions, the answers from the interviewees showed a similar trend. Certain topics were more acutely highlighted than others, and for the sake of structural clarity, I have organized themes which encompass more than one topic into sub-sections.

Before presenting the interviews, some general information regarding The Dialogue Club is necessary. One of the Club's founders, Goran, informed me that Club is ran by a board comprised of the members, where delegation of tasks is quintessential to its functioning. The decision-making within the Club is also a core element: each a decision is the result of a voting process:

"Every January, we convene a conference and engage in a 'discussion forum', through which we elect the board members and delegate tasks. When, for example, I suggest organizing event for, let's say June, for [an individual], we use the forum to debate the merits of the individual and topics they would bring to the Club. After the debate, we put it to a vote, wherein a simple majority is necessary for a decision to be made." (Goran interview, 2025, 12:00)

The events that The Dialogue Club organizes vary in nature, though they all revolve around Kurdish culture. They organize seminars for expert speakers and notable figures in Denmark and globally. Additionally, they also organize social events that bring the Kurdish community in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Germany together. Though the majority of the attendees are from Denmark. Beyond the structure and functioning of the Club, the interviewees also attested to the voluntary nature of participation in the board and the events. And the interviewees described the core goals of the Club as a break from the past,

in which similar Kurdish diaspora organizations have been supported and funded by Kurdish political parties. Other organizations, due to the dependency on a said parties, made them ideologically and politically linked to the parties and their influence on the Kurdish community:

“The parties would often place their own cadres within the organizations, and through that they would attempt to influence the community to bring them closer to their own political goals and agendas. […] By contrast, a non-profit grassroots organization built on the basis of voluntary participation like The Dialogue Club, is formed by the community itself. This allows the organization to represent the community and a common goal.” (Hidayat interview, 2025, 19:20)

Furthermore, the strength of the Club, in contrast to past organizations which have failed, lies in its philosophy of accepting all political, religious, and social viewpoints, and using the Club’s events and platforms to allow for discussion, rather than shunning minority perspectives. (Gohar Interview, 2025)

“The foundation of The Dialogue Club is rooted in the diversity of ideologies. […] The Dialogue Club always tries to preserve Kurdish culture [in Denmark]. It does so by organizing events for individuals who can talk about different aspects of Kurdish society.” (Gohar Interview, 2025, 0:10)

From this description, the members paint a picture of the Club as being a haven for political, religious, and ideological differences. Rather than picking one line and following it, it aims to bring people to the events for them to hear about the multitudes of elements which makeup Kurdish culture. However, as Hidayat said in his interview, the purpose of the Club isn’t to decide on solutions, but provide a platform through which the community can then practice their agency:

“We try to be an organization that can facilitate mechanisms through which people can gather and verbalize their ideas. We don’t make decisions for the community. […] For example, we invited one academic to come talk about the issues facing women in our

society. At the same time, we also provided a platform for others to provide a counter-view, to foster dialogue in the community." (Hidayat Interview, 2025, 37:00)

The reason for this approach, according to the interviewees, lies in the history of previous experiences and the power of divisive rhetoric and its fracturing influence on Kurdish society. Despite this democratic approach, one element which is ever-present is the focus on Kurdish culture, Kurdistan, and diaspora communities, which according to Club members are concepts inherent and foundational to the Kurdish diaspora identity. I'll focus on this in further detail in the following sections.

The Dialogue Club also has a charity initiative in the form of a mobile bookstore. The books are donated by Kurdish authors from around the world, and during their events they set up a kiosk where the members and attendees decide on the price: at times this has led to members donating a whole month's salary for a single book. All the proceeds from the bookstore are then sent to charity organizations in Kurdistan to be used to help families with disabled children. (Law Interview, 2025)

The Dialogue Club's Relationship with Danish Society:

In this section, I will present some of the answers from the interviews pertaining specifically to the Kurdish community in Denmark. The aim is to establish context before delving into analysis.

The Dialogue Club members often described their relationship with Denmark as one which lacks reciprocity in terms of the government and municipal authorities' engagement with the community. Specifically, they raised points regarding the changes that the Danish government has enacted in asylum laws over the past few years, and the dramatic shift that came as a result of these changes.

For example, one of the topics revolved around the municipalities' approach to the Kurdish community. As Law states, in the past the municipalities took an active role in helping the individuals integrate:

"When I first came to this country, I worked as a volunteer football coach for around six months, training kids who were ten to twelve years old. And I didn't really speak the language yet, but as they say, 'football is a universal language'. At the time I lived in [city name redacted]. The municipality knew that I was an ex-professional footballer, so they invited me to a meeting with a translator, and they asked me [if I was interested in coaching kids]. It helped me a lot in terms of learning the culture, integrating into society, picking up the language, and it also helped the [Danish] community get to know me." (Law Interview, 2025, 54:20)

Similarly, other members also mentioned the more proactive role the municipalities took in the past: Shadi talked about the municipality funding an organization called Nydanske (New Danes), which aimed to preserve Kurdish culture, while aiding in integration and community building by Danes and Kurds. (Shadi Interview, 2025) However, since then, Denmark's new approach to asylum and immigration, dubbed Paradigmeskiftet (the paradigm shift), has had a massive impact on immigrant communities in Denmark. (Bregnbæk, 2022) In terms of the Danish government's initiatives toward the community, all the participants spoke of the need for the government to pay more attention to the community's needs, which, they argued, has been ignored.

In relation to this, one topic which is of vital importance for the Club members is Kurdish language classes that can help Kurdish children strengthen their Kurdish language skills:

"At the Dialogue Club we place great importance on Kurdish as a mother language. One shortcoming for me is the lack of support for this [by the Danish government]. [...] In Sweden, for example, children of non-Swedish parents are expected to attain high grades in mother language classes in school, and these grades, like any other, have an impact on their university applications. [...] Unfortunately, in Denmark this is not something we care

about. [...] Back in the day, we did have Kurdish language classes, but they removed them." (Gohar Interview, 2025, 0:30)

Though, as she explains, the whole of the blame can't be placed on the Danish government:

"It hurts me to say that many families, my family included, didn't put in the effort to teach our children and our grandchildren Kurdish well enough at home. We speak Kurdish, and they answer in Danish. However, had those classes still existed, as they exist in Sweden, it would have taken some of the burden off the families." (Gohar Interview, 2025, 2:30)

They also mentioned other issues that they perceive as important to the community, likewise go unaddressed. This is despite the Club reaching out to public institutions and offering help. For example, one thing that they see as a potential threat to both the Kurdish community and Danish society at large is the influence of extremist Islamist movements on their youth:

"According to our abilities, we try to have a positive influence on the youth in our community, before those extremist movements get a hold of them. We see more young people at our events nowadays, and we're trying to organize more events for them specifically. [...] But the issue is that these movements are trying to exert influence at a very early stage of life. Here I'm not talking about the youth, but children in elementary school. I have worked in education, and I have first-hand experience with this. These groups try to target immigrant children that they haven't won over. They try to pull them in, and if they can't [win them over], they threaten them. And children are scared: either they join them, or they change schools. [...] With [our previous organizations], we hoped to play a role in countering this. There are schools that have a large number of immigrant children. We talked to one of the schools and asked if we could organize a presentation or an event to talk to the children about secular thought and culture, but the principal refused. He said they didn't want to risk a backlash. We went to a different school, and we got the same answer." (Goran Interview, 2025, 34:00)

And while their offers to help have been rebuffed, they said that the municipalities are also not interested in supporting their own grassroots initiatives to help their communities. So, in terms of engagement with the Danish authorities, they feel they are at an impasse:

“The municipalities have programs to support NGOs and civilian organizations, within a set of conditions. The first condition is that the organization is officially registered. The second condition is that you must have a defined project. But when you propose a project, they don’t place importance on the fact that our events benefit the Kurdish community here or that they help individuals become socially and culturally conscious. Instead, they want projects that benefit Denmark directly. And it’s very hard to quantify how our events [benefit Denmark directly]. They don’t see our cultural initiatives for the benefit of the Kurdish community in Denmark as fitting the criteria. With [our previous organization] they helped us financially for our first project but refused to help us on our second project. So, for the Dialogue Club we didn’t ask for financial help, nor did we register. Our members fund everything.” (Goran Interview, 2025, 26:40)

Their work in terms of cultural initiatives and reaching out to the youth in the community is worth paying close attention to, given that the Danish government has begun a process of tackling the issue of what they call parallelsamfund (parallel societies). For the Danish government, the existence of these parallel societies, is a cause of worry, as they argue that these parallel societies are isolated from the broader Danish society and its values. (Barse, 2018) While this topic isn’t the focal point of the project, it becomes relevant within the analysis.

Outside of the Club’s attempts to reach out to the Danish authorities, their attempts toward Danish society hasn’t resulted in anything meaningful either:

“In order to attract Danes to our events, we need to hold events in which the speakers speak Danish. And we’ve done that. For example, we organized a seminar for [name redacted], a Kurdish activist and journalist, to speak about Kurds who’ve been recruited by

ISIS. He spoke at the event and had a lot to offer, but sadly not a single Dane attended." (Goran Interview, 2025, 30:00)

They've also organized other events which do not focus on Kurdish topics, such as an event where an author talked about his book on children's education in Denmark, but it has yielded similar results. (Gohar Interview, 2025, 13:00) One of the members expressed his sense of disillusionment regarding the Club's ability to become a bridge between the Kurdish community and Danish society. His approach negated the need for the Club to do that work directly:

"What good will it do if we organize events and we sit down with a parliamentarian, a sociologist, a journalist, or a community organizer a couple times a year? In my experience there's a better way. Where I work, I work with Danes. [...] When I first started working there, they thought [Kurds] don't drink alcohol. When I drank with them, they were surprised. Now they know we have a drinking culture. They thought [our societies] were drowning in vulgarity and was wild and primitive. So, I told them about our notable people, our art, our music, our jokes. I showed them real life examples. [...] Little by little, they changed their views on Kurdish society just through daily interactions." (Hidayat, 2025, 34:00)

Despite this, however, the members agreed that certain aspects of these two different socities would always stay mutually exclusive. Due to the history of Kurdish people, the experiences, and collective traumas, they believe it is important for the Club to remain focused on Kurdish topics, rather than try to become a bridge between Kurds and Danes:

"Our generations have lived through wars, political instability, economic blockades, genocides, the pains of migration, and statelessness. These experiences tie us to one another. [...] [If we want to] talk about these experiences, we are limited to people who've been through these things and who can understand us, which is the Kurdish diaspora. If [the Dialogue Club] tries to do too many things at once, our limited resources will hinder us from having any meaningful impact on our community. And at the same time [our limited

resources] will also stop us from connecting to Danish society." (Hidayat Interview, 2025, 25:00)

Though, the members emphasize that their aim wasn't to insulate the Kurdish community and isolate it. On the contrary, a large part of their work is aimed at helping Kurds integrate into Danish society. I will focus on this in more detail in the coming sections. But the interviews outlined the list of issues they're occupied with, and for them these topics make up the lion's share of what The Dialogue Club see as important for the Kurdish community in Denmark. The next few sections will analyze the role of these issues and the Club's engagement, and how they play into the community's agency.

Parallel community building:

A sizeable portion of the Dialogue Club's events are geared toward community building. In terms of building agency, there are a few different aspects worth exploring in this section. Namely, aspects relating to places of power and identity. These two concepts lie at the core of the themes presented in this project, and the themes often overlap, due to the interconnected nature of identity and agency, as Stuart Hall has shown (2009). Here, context also becomes vital to understanding the community building practices, as the influence of the triadic relationship on diaspora identities is often at play. (Alinia et al, 2014)

Social Cohesion (and Political Neutrality):

One topic which was often brought up during the interviews was an issue that is common to Kurdish communities globally, namely the divisive influence of politics. In Kurdish politics, division reaches extremes of armed inter-party fighting and civil war. This reality is important to consider, as the members of the Dialogue Club have lived through a period of civil war in Kurdistan known at *Şerî Birakujî* (Kurdish: The Fratricide War) (Salih & Hama, 2021)

As shown in Hidayat's interview, past organizations' dependence on political parties have played a role in fracturing and dividing the community. So, one way in which the organization has worked to bypass this pitfall has been a strict policy which outright bans members from pushing political agendas as pertaining to one or more parties at the Club's events. This idea is so passionately protected, that even the board members have at times recused themselves from speaking at events, because they acknowledge that their political biases would become a factor:

"Being an active member of a political party, if I organize a seminar in which I speak on a topic, my political bias would naturally be a factor. How do I know this? Because I know that my agenda is tied to my party's agenda. And my activity, to this day, is tied to my party's ideology. My biases hold me back from engaging [from a neutral position]. Whatever I speak about, will be influenced by my political affiliation." (Gohar Interview, 2025, 24:30)

Gohar's acknowledgement of her biases, however, should not be seen as a rejection of individuals with party membership, rather as a form of protection for the tenet of political neutrality that the Club members hold dear. In another section of the interview, she describes a previous organization, which failed due to a few members who, due to their biases, would often cause issues and hinder them from reaching consensus:

"Even though I agreed with a lot of what they said, the fact that their actions were fracturing the community, and their methods were not constructive, it led us to take a stand." (ibid., 19:00)

Similar to Hidayat's answers relating to voluntary participation and not accepting funding from political sides, this approach to politics and ideology has allowed the members to practice agency by unlatching themselves from outside influence. At the same time, the members also acknowledge the price of this neutrality, which limits the Club's resources and abilities. But they try to combat in a variety of ways. One way is their social events:

"Some people who attend [our events] do so to meet others whom they wouldn't have had the chance to meet otherwise. [...] Due to the political dynamics in Kurdistan, some powerful political parties have worked to fracture the Kurdish diaspora. They use [financial rewards] to incentivize this, and they make these rewards contingent on the individual not partaking in intellectual events and social organizations. This forces social isolation, which obviously has a negative effect. [...] However, when we put together an event, and an individual decides to attend, they're practicing agency, they're practicing independent decision-making. We find it important to strengthen individual agency, to foster an atmosphere where people can meet, exchange ideas, and show them that their contributions are valuable." (Hidayat Interview, 2025, 10:50)

What Hidayat describes here is a continuation of an already established, and well-studied, model of political power that's prevalent within the politics of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: namely the rentier system. This system, which is built on a nearly pure capitalist economy, makes use of economic incentives to strengthen the elite's hold on power.

(Gurbey et al, 2017) As Gurbey and colleagues describe it: “Through these process two parallel events occurs: first, taking away the income and keeping it in the hands of the elite, and second, making people dependent on the elites through the process of rentier.” (p. 114) While the Kurdish community in Denmark is not dependent on the Kurdistan Regional Government in that sense, this method of exerting influence is still relevant as a continuation of the political and economic system in the Kurdistan Region, which strips the dependent of his or her independence of decision-making. Many organizations, whose members are patronized by political parties, are offered rewards such as political sponsorships in elections in Kurdistan, which comes with a lavish lifestyle, social status, and high salaries; an offer which entices even Kurds in the diaspora who are under minimal pressure from Kurdistan’s political atmosphere. (Hidayat Interview, 2025, 22:00)

Given the role of the Dialogue Club, and its opposition to the effects of these types of political parties and their divisive influence on the Kurdish community, the members’ adherence to political neutrality can be understood within Hardt and Negri’s theories on desertion of places of power, as they state that hegemonic forces must be countered with anti-hegemony. (2001) In this context, these political parties constitute the hegemonic force, who use their relatively enormous resources to “occupy the entire social terrain.” (ibid., p.209)

For the Dialogue Club, this form of resistance isn’t solely rooted in rejecting political parties’ patronage, it expands further into the foundational core of the Club: the fostering of diversity of opinion and ideology and rejecting the imposition of one voice over others. These parties in Kurdistan, who often legitimize their hold resources and power by relying on nationalist rhetoric and patriarchal social structures (Rafaat, 2018), push out voices that reject this domination and disenfranchise groups who are negatively impacted. In effect, these parties constitute a type of emergence that Santos describes as counterhegemonic appropriation, a type of emergence that, in the struggle against external domination, recreates and reutilizes “concepts, philosophies, and practices developed by dominant social groups” in the service of local domination, thereby reinforcing abyssal exclusions. (Santos, 2018, pp.30-31)

The Dialogue Club counters these political parties, who enforce ideological lines, political agendas, not by abandoning their Kurdishness, rather through, "an oblique or diagonal stance." (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.212) This manifests in fostering community building via democratic means, diversity of opinion, and a process that can delegitimize the divisive force of hegemonic power. This form of resistance, in Hardt and Negri's terms, "is the evacuation of the [rhetorical] places of power." (ibid. p.212)

Furthermore, providing a space for diverse opinions and political leanings, is a way of engagement with concepts of the ecology of knowledges and intercultural translation. (Santos, 2018) The Dialogue club, as a space that encourages dialogue, becomes the platform through which sociology of absences can come take shape. I'll return to this point in the following sections.

However, the Club's independence and oppositional stance does come with downsides. One of the drawbacks, which was a motif throughout the interviews, is the Club's struggle against well-funded movements such as extremist Islamist movements.

Integration:

Danish policy towards immigration and asylum has taken a sharp turn in the last decade. (Bregnbæk, 2022) Alongside these developments, the Danish state has also worked to decrease what it has dubbed parallel societies (parallelsamfund), which the Danish government defines as a community that is "physically or mentally isolated, follows its own values and rules, without any notable contact with Danish society, and without any willingness to become a part of Danish society." (Barse, 2018, translated by author)[3] The government's policies on parallel societies have attracted criticism within Denmark, largely due to what critical voices describe as the state legitimizing actions that target Muslim communities. (Kjeldtoft, 2016) Regardless of the validity of the governments' policies,

[3] Original Danish text: Et parallelsamfund er fysisk eller mentalt isoleret og følger egne normer og regler uden nogen nævneværdig kontakt til det danske samfund og uden ønske om at blive en del af det danske samfund.

however, Kurds, who are majority Muslim, can also fall within the list of communities that the term 'parallel societies' can encompass, which comes with negative connotations that facilitate racist rhetoric.

The members of the Dialogue Club are also aware of the effects of these policies on their community. For them, aiding the community's members in the integration process is a key aspect of their initiatives:

"There are certain factors [in society] that motivate us to do toward the work we do. When someone migrates to Europe, if they're not socially conscious, they'll live in a way that's oriented toward individual interests only. [...] This can disincentivize the individual from wanting to forge social connections and diminishes society's ability to hold the individual accountable and help them correct course." (Hidayat Interview, 2025, 9:20)

Here Hidayat highlights the necessity of society to engage the individual, or the community, in order for real integration to occur. In effect it's a give and take. The ultimate aim for the Club is to decrease social isolation, both in terms of isolation from the Kurdish community and Danish society. In many ways, this isn't too far off from what the Danish government, at least in theory, has stated to be the goal of the policies: integration and social cohesion. (Folketinget, 2018) Other common issues raised by the Danish government's report on parallel societies, issues such as women's freedom and women's autonomy, are likewise highlighted by members of the Dialogue Club. The government's report states that around 50% of women with non-Western backgrounds feel their freedom and autonomy is limited by their families. (ibid.) In the interview with Shadi, she referred to similar problems within sections of the Kurdish community:

"The environment exerts so much pressure on the individual that they are forced to conform. In our societies, to a large degree, mothers have become guardians of the family honor. When people talk about someone's daughter, or some kind of rumor spreads, the environment pressures mothers to such an extent, that, to alleviate that pressure, they act in a stricter fashion toward their daughters than their husbands or sons might have. Young women don't even get support from their mothers. Society has stripped women of their

agency to such a degree, they've become unable to act [independently]." (Shadi Interview, 2025, 32:00)

Along these thoughts, Shadi also outlines the result of these societal expectations, which can go to violent extremes due to rising influence of extremist Islamist groups:

"Religion isn't inherently bad. Everyone needs something to believe and turn to in difficult time. If someone practices Islam in this way, in a way that's personal to them, I have no right to tell them what to believe or what to think. [...] But there's religious scholars, who have financial backing, who disseminate interpretations according to their own agendas. Those who back them financially want to push Islamist forms of religion. Then, people who aren't socially and cultural conscious accept these interpretations because they come from [scholars], and fall into extremist crowds and commits [all kinds of violence]." (1:06:00)

For her, like the other members of the Club, the issue must be tackled at the root. The way the Club members see it, by creating platforms for open dialogue, they hope the values that the Club is built on can be transmitted to other members, to the families, and eventually the community as a whole.

The difference between the government's approach and the Club, however, is rooted in the manner of solution. The government's report essentially highlights and renounces the culture that causes these problems, and the proposed solution includes breaking up areas of high immigrant population and relocating the individual families to areas with more diversity to help integration. (Barse, 2018) What's relevant here is that the report facilitates *splitting* in a very direct way. This *splitting* mechanism is very obvious in the comparative graphs and infographics that depict the positivity of Danish culture and the negativity of non-Western cultures. (Folketinget, 2018) In line with Hall's theoretical approach to the power of stereotyping, this imposition of essentialized understandings and infantilizing discourses takes away a community's right to agency, "[...] *stereotyping deploys a strategy of 'splitting'.* It constructs a divide between the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and the unacceptable. It then *excludes* or *expels* everything

which does not fit, which is different." (Hall, 2003, p.258) Additionally, as Barse writes, the formulation of the values ascribed to these communities is misleading and vilifies non-Western culture, given that independent research shows that these communities are closer to Danish society than the report suggests. (Barse, 2018) Furthermore, this approach, where culture is placed at the heart of the problem is in line with Santos' formulation: "abyssal exclusions, when viewed from this side of the abyssal line (the metropolitan side), are alternatively considered as the product of fate, of self-inflicted harm, or of the natural order of things." (2018, p.24)

By contrast, the Dialogue Club aims to break this fixed definition of good vs bad, or Danish vs Kurdish. For them, by building the community around inclusion and open dialogue, the Kurdish diaspora can combat discourses which work to essentialize their culture, especially in the case of young Danish-Kurdish individuals. The Club's approach, through their events and seminars that focus on culture, which relies on sociology of absences to deconstructs colonial practice and religious extremism, contextualizes exclusions within a historic framework and provides an alternative way of understanding. Thus, they avoid *splitting*. Rather, they rely on 'intercultural translation', which works to create shared struggles, "premised upon the recognition of difference". (Santos, 2018, p.33) Compared to stereotyping, which demonizes and isolates, intercultural translation helps the community recognize that abyssal exclusions produced by colonialism and patriarchy are a shared struggle. This is easier to see in the Club's cultural initiatives, which is the next section of this project.

For the Dialogue Club this is another form of resistance, which aims to break the influence of stereotyping practices through a diagonal stance. In other words, it's in line with the approach of desertion of places of power: instead of aiming to engage in *sabotage* (Hardt & Negri, 2001), which would amount to denigrating Danish society to elevate the Kurdish community, the Club abandons discursive practices that create the *splitting* effect. They have opted to take a diagonal stance: a foot in each world for the betterment of the community. Gohar points to the necessity of fostering both sides of the community's identity, in order to really achieve integration and become a successful member of society:

“Our events revolve around two basic concepts. One is the simple necessity of fostering social cohesion; basically, to help us stay in touch and understand one another. [...] The other is the want to find ways to serve the larger society we live in. For example, we have a seminar [in May], for a young author who’s written about Danish culture and children’s education. We want to help get the word out about him and his book. [...] Additionally, if there are ideas [the author] can share, then our community should take those [Danish] ideas home with them, make use of them.” (Gohar Interview, 2025, 13:00)

The Dialogue Club’s approach to community building then, is rooted in embracing Danish culture, instead of bashing it. While the government’s approach, imposing nonabyssal solutions on abyssal exclusions, is in line with domination in the metropolitan world, where “The struggle for social emancipation is always a struggle against social exclusions generated by the current form of social regulation with the objective of replacing it by a new and less excluding form of social regulation.” (Santos, 2018, p.21) So, the government proposes a solution that in theory addresses patriarchal domination, but exacerbates colonial domination, colonial within Santos’ terminology.

What the interviews show is that the Club’s approach, at its core, is resistance to being caught in a no-man’s lands between Kurdish and Danish, and reclaiming agency by rejecting divisive positions.

Preservation of culture and collective history:

One of the stated goals for The Dialogue Club is the preservation of culture and dissemination of Kurds' collective history. For the members, the importance of these things lie, not only in protecting the diaspora's Kurdish identity and historical roots, but also in its importance as an effective tool that can aid integration into Danish society, and as a bulwark against the influence of Islamist movements.

Related to this is the Club's independence, which is vital for protecting the community from internal fractures. However, this leaves them in a situation where they're not as resource-wealthy to effectively stand against well-funded actors and organizations that aim to lure communities, and their youth, away. One of the issues, which is quintessential for understanding the allure of said movements, according to the Dialogue Club's founder, is tied to Danish society's inability or unwillingness to open spaces for non-Danes:

"Unfortunately, and this is perhaps a shortcoming from the Danish side, there isn't a broad sense of acceptance for foreigners. There are friendships, but it's surface level. There's no deeper co-mingling. So, [young Kurds] often find that warm friendship and acceptance among other foreigners. If they're lucky they'll find someone with similar values, but sometimes they're unlucky and fall into extremist crowds. [...] And that's not to say [ethnic Danes] are against Kurds or against foreigners; it's just how their culture is." (Goran Interview, 2025, 40:00)

There was a consensus among the members that this often leads to a sense of identity crisis among young Kurds. On the one hand, the adopted home, or in most cases the culture of the country in which the young Kurd was born, isn't welcoming. On the other hand, as Shadi mentions (57:00), the culture that the individual grew up with feels distant.

This idea of identity crisis also echoes Bregnbæk's study on Kurdish migrants in Denmark. Bregnbæk's work shows that there is constant pressure exerted on Kurdish migrants in Denmark by the state and a populace which fail to empathize or understand

them. In highlighting this issue, Bregnbæk points to the same inability or unwillingness that Goran mentions, and how this leads certain immigrants into dissociative states, “Hiwa’s experience was also reflected in the impasse and alienation he sometimes felt when communicating with Danish citizens outside his closed circles: ‘Very often, one of the first things people ask me—not just me, I share this experience with many migrants — is the question: Are you happy that you have come to Denmark?’ He said that if he did not provide the answer they expected, people would promptly reply, ‘So why don’t you leave?’” (Bregnbæk, 2022, pp.353-354) Simultaneously, despite having grown up in Kurdistan, Hiwa had reported that visiting Kurdistan felt ‘unreal’ and dreamlike, “Hiwa felt unable to share his life experiences with his family [...] because they would not understand his life in Denmark.” (p.360) Bregnbæk reports that in extreme cases, this culminated in a complete loss of identity; succinctly put into words as: “I don’t know who I am.” (p. 363)

In relation to the Club members, their work in part can be seen as an attempt to help newcomers and the youth in the community avoid this crisis. As Bregnbæk shows, one of the ways that individuals have combatted this crisis has been through holding onto their Kurdish identity, pursuit of intellectual endeavors, and a social life that includes others who understand them. (ibid.) And while adults are better able to hold onto that identity and forge those connections, the Club’s members argue that that same can’t be said about the youth:

“Young Kurds who were been born here or raised here aren’t in touch with Kurdish culture or history. Parents can’t dedicate the time and effort to educate them on that all the time. Those of us who grew up in Kurdistan were raised [in an environment] that helped us get in touch with our identities. [...] So, it’s our duty to help them bridge that [cultural] gap. The purpose here is ... as you know nowadays Islamist movements are very active. They exert extensive influence on the youth. If you don’t help a young people understand themselves, you might lose them to extremist ideologies.” (Goran Interview, 2025, 33:00)

In these cases, often what occurs is that this identity crisis and sense of lack of acceptance can make the individual vulnerable. In turn this vulnerability becomes a

pathway for Islamist movements with extremist ideologies to attract young Kurds in the community. This pattern to radicalization is a common path that many extremist movements work through, "[Extremist groups] exploit vulnerabilities such as social isolation, economic hardship, and personal grievances to lure individuals into their ranks. Many radicalised youths exhibit a deep sense of disenfranchisement, feeling alienated from mainstream society and looking for a cause to belong to." (Polizzi, 2025) Fostering a sense of identity and community is one way to counter these movements. Goran followed up his answer by giving examples of young Kurds who have been pulled into said movements and have even committed violent acts, demonstrating that the threat of these movements is very real for the Kurdish community.

Beyond the necessity of helping the youth avoid identity crises, the Clubs' members also see this as a tool that improves young Kurds' ability to integrate into Danish society:

"If our children want to be successful, they need to understand their culture. If they understand that, they can be a good citizen and a part of Danish society. It will enable them to take good values from [Kurdish] culture and good values from Danish culture and create a combined culture. […] [This would help them tie their lives] in Denmark to their own identities and be more willing to serve Danish society." (Gohar, 2025, 3:00)

Gohar also emphasized the role of family in this, stating that it's the parents' responsibility to foster an environment that allows children to integrate and explore these dual identities. (8:00)

In a very direct way, the concept that is presented throughout the interviews is the formation of hybrid cultures and third space identities. Within Bhabha's framework of identity formation (2004), these forms of identities are prevalent in postcolonial societies. The Kurdish case, rooted in the population's traumatic history of political suppression, internal colonialism, and state violence on the basis of culture and language (Maisel, 2018), has made the process of creating third space identities more familiar. This is evident in other studies as well, which often show that Kurds in Europe have a higher rate of integration. (See literature review)

Homi Bhabha makes the case that postcolonial societies, who've endured the brunt of colonial and imperial discourse and violence, often resort to mimicking the dominant group as a way to claiming agency, "'this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy." (Easthope, 1998, p.145) The rejection of cultural hierarchy as a core tenet of third space identities is worth highlighting, as Gohar's answers contain within them the same assertion, where she states, "There's bad in [Kurdish] culture and there's bad in Danish culture. It's important to find the balance." (Gohar Interview, 2025, 3:30) This position, which seeks to create equilibrium between the two identities, is especially clear in postcolonial societies' art and self-representation, which seeks to "undercut [the dominant side's] valorized categories of perception." (Boehmer, 2005, p.164)

Then, what comes across as steps toward integration, is simultaneously the creation of a third identity which claims agency by negating hierarchical dynamics. What's more, this approach is common to epistemologies of the South, which rejects hierarchical dichotomies. (Santos, 2018) At the same time, there are elements of sociology of absences present. This approach is also seen among other Kurdish diaspora communities in Europe. In Ayar Ata's study of Kurdish youth in London the oft repeated pattern is a break from national and ethnic categories, and a focus on shared values and experiences is emphasized instead. (Ata, 2023)

Returning to the Danish government's report on parallel societies, the difference lies in The Dialogue Club's desire to engage the community and highlight the root cause - in other words: the Club wants to treat the problem not the symptoms. This difference in in line with Santos' work that describes the differences between epistemologies of the South and North. Where the North, fails to recognize "colonialism as a form of sociability that is an integral part of capitalist and patriarchal domination," (2018, p.19), the South "highlights and denounces the suppression of social reality brought about by the type of knowledge validated by Northern epistemologies." (p.28) Here, the term colonialism should be contextualized as well, as what is meant is the continuation of colonial discourse and

practice through new means which manifest in racist rhetoric. This failure of recognition, as Goran and Bregnbæk's study highlight, often only alienates furthers. From this perspective, it can be argued that the Danish government's policies, both in terms of asylum seekers and in relation to 'parallel societies', can actually be counterproductive. As, if the underlying issues of integration aren't addressed properly, cutting individuals off from their social circles and networks leaves them vulnerable.

On the other hand, the Dialogue Club's takes a holistic approach, which aims to link patriarchal and colonial domination together, through supporting and propping up elements of Kurdish culture which are incompatible with colonial and patriarchal practices. Gender equality, a core component of the Kurdish culture is one of these elements (see literature review). Likewise, members I interviewed also emphasized the role of women in the Kurdish community and the Club:

"One vital aspect of the Dialogue Club is that a large percentage of attendees at our events are women. It's important to us that women also take part in our academic and intellectual seminars and lectures. […] It's important to us because [our society] has perpetuated the belief that women shouldn't occupy male-dominated spaces, to speak in male-dominated spaces. […] We don't tolerate members who seek to control women in our community. [At the Dialogue Club] women hold seminars, express ideas, and speak freely. […] And it's wrong to say that we allow women to do this; women are our active partners in these initiatives." (Hidayat Interview, 2025, 13:50)

Additionally, this also serves a secondary function, which aims to communicate this culture to the youth in the community. For this they emphasize the role of events which are not academic in nature, but are purely social:

"There are aspects of Kurdish life, which are inherently oppositional to the values espoused by radical religious dogmas. They nullify them. For example, Helperkê[4]: nowadays there are religious scholars that say people who dance Helperkê are infidels,

[4] Helperkê: traditional Kurdish dancing, in which men and women hold hands and dance together

whoever sings and plays music is an infidel. These are aspects which are dear to Kurdish culture. [So many of these things], which stem from traditional Kurdish ways of life, promote break the barriers imposed on men and women by dogmatic beliefs. [Due to our limited budgets] we haven't been able to organize as many social events as we'd like, especially compared to Islamist movements who organize frequent trips and are very well-funded. But we try to promote events that celebrate holidays like Newroz[5], where the youth can sing and listen to music and dance and socialize." (Hidayat Interview, 2025, 48:00)

These social occasions, which are aimed at promoting Kurdish identity and culture, are supplemented by commemorations of important historic events like the Anfal Genocide and the Halabja massacre. (Gohar Interview, 2025, 14:00) The hope for the Club is that either through direct youth participation, or through indirect influence via families, these events can create a foundational structure that the youth can hold onto and rely on when understanding and exploring their identity.

This understanding of identity formation, and its relation to agency, is also seen within literary traditions of postcolonial fiction, where the loss of identity is directly tied to the loss of collective history. At the point where history of the group is gone, the group, and its culture, is destroyed with it. (Anderson, 2016) In relation to this, the story of Newroz plays a significant role in cementing Kurdish identity and culture, as the Kurdish story of Newroz is directly tied to the struggle against Kurdistan's hegemonic occupation. (Maisel, 2018, p.222)

Moving beyond the stated intention of helping the youth traverse the pitfalls of their hybrid culture and identity, the work of preserving collective history and culture is also tied to the historic tribulations of Kurds. Taking the perspective proposed by Alinia and colleagues (2014), regarding the triadic relationship to homeland (Kurdistan), diaspora community, and current home (Denmark), it becomes clear that this is also a form of

[5] Newroz: Kurdish new year, celebrated on March 20th and 21st with music, Helperkê, and traditions rooted in Kurdistan's pre-Islamic religious and mythological beliefs

resistance against actions which have, through means of cultural and historic narratives, stripped Kurds of agency.

For example, in Turkey, Kurds have been collectively denied agency and self-determination by the Turkish state through the argument that: a) Kurds do not exist, but rather they are just a sub-category of Turkish people, namely: mountain Turks (van Bruinessen, 1992); b) that Kurdish culture is not rooted in the collective history of a people, but a combination of tribal factions – therefore it is primitive and has no legitimate ground to practice agency in modern nation-states (Zeydanlioglu, 2008), and this has led to multiple massacres and ethnic cleansing and assimilation campaigns. (McDowall, 2007) Similarly, within Iranian society, Kurds have faced, and still face, erasure. In the diaspora, Iranian activists and opposition figures have also played a role in this erasure against Kurds; this became a large issue which ultimately caused a rift between Kurdish and Persian communities during the Woman, Life, Freedom protests. (Mohammadpour, 2023) In Syria, the state has stripped Kurds of citizenship and made them stateless *de jure*, has enacted ethnic cleansing and Arabization campaigns against them, and banned the Kurdish language; in Iraq, the state has committed a genocide, ethnic cleansing, Arabization campaigns, and religion-based massacres. (Maisel, 2018) The common link throughout the treatment of Kurds in these four countries, beyond political and state-sponsored violence, has always been arguments which delegitimize Kurdish culture and existence and often label Kurds as migrants who are not native to the areas they inhabit. (McDowall, 2007)

Within this context, we understand the Dialogue Club's initiatives through the framework of Bhabha's theories once more, especially as many of their events pertain to topics that explore Kurdish language and history. Examples of this include a seminar organized for Kurdish historian Soran Hamarash, whose work covers the ancient roots of Kurdish culture and language within Mesopotamian history and the role of Kurds in the creation and formation of the modern Middle East (Goran Interview, 2025), and seminars focusing on the origins of the form of moderate Islam practiced among Kurds, which has sprung out of interactions between native Kurdish mythology and Sufi Islam. (Goran

Interview, 2025, 2:20) Relevant here is that the events that cover Islam, have presented the religion as an external force, which has changed and evolved in Kurdish society under the influence of Kurds' native pre-Islamic religions and beliefs. In a similar fashion to Gohar's answer, which seeks to balance Kurdish and Danish culture, and undercut the hierarchical dynamics in the diaspora, the Club providing a platform for the teaching of Kurdish history in relation to the Middle East and shared cultural heritage and background can be seen as an attempt to establish and disseminate information about the roots of Kurdish culture within the homeland, and thereby nullify the hierarchical dynamics which legitimize anti-Kurdish policies and denies Kurds agency. Once again, this is directly hinting at a push toward a hybridity that rejects hierarchy.

Reimagining Kurdish Society:

Rebuilding agency by cutting ties with the past:

The Dialogue Club's view of Kurdish identity and culture is perhaps something of a paradoxical position, where there is a strong emphasis on Kurdish history, while simultaneously they argue for a need to break from the past. However, what becomes clear from the interviews is that they employ a selective process of what they think must stay and what must go:

"The Kurdish community's understandings of life can be viewed as a continuation of life in Kurdistan. The circumstances [of war, poverty, and political discord] have created dynamics that have shaped life there. Those same dynamics have travelled with us [to Denmark] and have sometimes limited our ability to relate to Danish society." (Hidayat Interview, 2025, 25:00)

These circumstances and experiences are also defining elements of how many in the community view themselves and understand their identity. And though they want to communicate this history to the youth, they don't want the youth to be likewise limited by their experiences. There is an understanding among the Club members that to expect their children to live life as they themselves have is unfair and unrealistic. In part because of the aforementioned limitations it would impose on life in Denmark. The bigger reason, however, is that that way of life in Kurdistan is the product of times which have pushed Kurdish society toward recreating the same oppressive dynamics that they escaped escape in the first place.

Interestingly, this framing of the Kurdish community is a perfect representation of the abyssal line and the dynamics of the colonial world. As Santos argues, in the modern and postmodern age those dynamics aren't related on geography, and subjects of the colonial world are not exempt if they physically inhabit the metropolitan world. (2018) Similarly Hardt and Negri (2001) show that in the postmodern world empire isn't a location rather empire encompasses the social terrain. Therefore, one can't be outside of empire; resistance against hegemony must be rooted desertion. In this manner, the Dialogue Club

works to ensure that those dynamics aren't repeated in the next generation, and that the products of those dynamics – political strife, violence against women, identity crises, and cultural repression – aren't given a chance to remanifest in new ways. The solution the Dialogue Club offers is likewise in line Santos formulation: democratization of the community through open dialogue and idea exchange in order to tackle taboo subjects:

"[One of the] sources of conflict in [Kurdish] society is the lack of acceptance; in other words: accepting another's opinions, accepting their individual beliefs, accepting proposals for dialogue. I'm not saying acceptance is totally non-existent, but [opposition] is approached with suspicion. [...] We want to move away from the days when difference was used as a slur, and suspicions of difference was confronted with [violence and suppression]." (Hidayat Interview, 2025, 12:00)

The Club's strict policy of political neutrality and independence from political parties is in line with this need for democratization. Similarly, the Club's events on religion is another step toward this, as they only host speakers who either speak about religion in terms of its origins and historic roles or speakers who advocate for moderate forms of religious practice. (Gohar Interview, 2025) Moreover, one topic, for which they've worked to provide a platform frequently, has been issues that center women in the community. In 2024, the majority of their events were seminars for expert speakers who spoke on women's health, women's roles in society, and society's effect on women's autonomy. (Gohar Interview, 2025)

Through these events, the Club achieves two things simultaneously. The first is decentralizing power in the community: the centrality of religion, nationalist rhetoric, and patriarchal domination is rejected. All of this amounts to desertion. In this way the Club is engaging with the first step that is imperative in the sociology of absences, "the inquiry into the ways colonialism, in the form of colonialism of power, knowledge and being, operates together with capitalism and patriarchy to produce abyssal exclusions [...]." (Santos, 2018, p.25) This first step, which necessitates, "an exacting, painstaking critique of the social scientific knowledge that was produced in order to establish hegemony [...]," builds the

foundational knowledge. (Santos, 2018, p.26) The second step is "recognizing and engaging with other ways of knowing that offer alternative understandings of social life and social transformation [...]." (ibid.) This second step is likewise achieved, or at least attempted, through producing discourse which privileges a Kurdish identity tied to secular thought, emphasizing inclusion and moderate forms of Islam, and community agency without reliance on resources from political parties'.

Furthermore, as Hidayat highlights, at the core of it all is the understanding that the reality of Kurds in Denmark, and also in Kurdistan, is still rooted in the dynamics of the colonial world (34:00) as a result of the abyssal line. Understanding this division is central in their approach, which shows that, though both ethnic Danes and ethnic Kurds both experience exclusions, in the case of ethnic Danes those exclusions are perceived as resulting from "social differences and powers inequalities [...]," and not due to the victim being less of a human being. (Santos, 2018, p.23) While Kurds suffer from abyssal exclusions, which centers their innate 'humanness' and culture, or lack thereof, as the problematic factor. Santos' framing reaffirms what others, like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, have likewise argued. The conceptualization of the 'self' and the 'other' rooted in colonial discourse, then, is relevant. (Said, 1979) Given the Kurds' position in relation to the abyssal line, there's an acceptance that a struggle against abyssal exclusion will not bear fruit if attempted through mechanisms which yield results against nonabyssal exclusion. In fact, tackling it with this approach would only exasperate it. (Santos, 2018)

Here, again, there is a need to go back to Hardt and Negri, and the Club's initiatives and approaches to agency, which is rooted in desertion and Santos' arguments as "the struggles against abyssal exclusions entail a radical interruption of the logic of appropriation/violence. Such an interruption entails a break, a discontinuity," and: "Interruption may manifest itself in boycott or lack of cooperation." (ibid. p.25) The paradoxical position of holding onto history but breaking from the past can be understood from this perspective. In reference to the political atmosphere in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Hidayat's answers reaffirm this same point: namely that continuing on that path will

only breed more abyssal exclusions and cut Kurdish society off from the goal of practicing agency.

Along with rupture, or discontinuity, the process of rebuilding lies in sociology of emergence. Sociology of absences builds the foundation for understanding, and sociology of emergence starts laying the bricks: “The sociology of emergences starts from here and focuses on new potentialities and possibilities for anti-capitalist, anticolonialist, and antipatriarchal social transformation emerging in the vast field of previously discarded and now retrieved social experience.” (Santos, 2018, p. 28)

Santos outlines different types of emergences: the first is what he calls ‘ruin seeds’: an idea formed through a thorough process of engaging with sociology of absence, which recognizes colonial domination and aims to push past, but at the same time is rooted in collective nostalgia and an inability to break from the past. (p.30) These ruin seeds, which are born from surviving dilapidated relics of the past, want to produce a future based on the group’s pre-colonial history. There are elements of ‘ruin seeds’ within the Dialogue Club’s approach. The Club’s emphasis on the influence of native Kurdish mythology and pre-Islamic beliefs and fortification of a Kurdish identity through historic narratives is symptomatic of a ruin seed. However, despite these elements, the Dialogue Club’s desire to break from the past, makes it more congruent with ‘liberated zones’: “spaces that organize themselves according to principles and rules radically opposed to those that prevail in capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal societies. Liberated zones are consensual communities, based on the participation of all their members. They are of a performative, prefigurative, and educational nature.” (Santos, 2018, p.31) The Club’s basis of volunteer participation, its core values of secularism and openness, and financial and independence are in line with what constitutes a liberated zone. The Dialogue Club fits this description to near perfection, and it’s no coincidence given the triadic relationship of diaspora identities. This approach to community building is likewise present in parts of Kurdistan, and similarly in the diaspora.

Discussion:

The analysis shows that the Dialogue Club shares many similarities to other Kurdish organizations and communities in the diaspora. At the same time, the triadic relationship is equally influential for Kurds in Denmark. However, what requires further attention is The Dialogue Club's reaction to the dynamics of this triadic relationship. The challenges facing the community in Denmark – extremist movement mobilizations, integration, and abyssal exclusions – are also a reflection of Kurdish experiences in the homeland.

Starting with the role of Islamist movements, the Dialogue Club links the challenge to the context of the wider history of Kurdish agency. What becomes visible here is that for them Islamist movements in the diaspora and issues regarding integration are different dimensions of the same problem. In their engagement with sociology of absences, they're identifying false allies that recreate dynamics of dominations and deny them agency, "[false allies] force these emergences into accommodating themselves into boxes that separate existing dimensions of modern domination [...]." (Santos, 2018, p.29) In so doing, Islamist movements and religious extremists attempt to infiltrate the community under the guise of common struggle against abyssal exclusions, such as alienation and issues of integration in Denmark. Yet, these movements themselves are also rooted in forms of abyssal exclusion and impose patriarchal domination by reinforcing the same dynamics.

The Club rejects this approach through their events where they talk about Kurdish history, and the role of Islam in suppressing Kurdish society. However, in their engagement with sociology of absences, there is the realization that without providing an alternative way of understanding this history, they're vilifying the religion and its followers; thereby recreating the same dynamics of 'us' vs 'them' by mimicking hegemonic forces that dehumanize people of the region on the basis of cultural 'primitiveness'. What this would amount to is reinforcing the discourse of the Danish state, which, through means of splitting, demonizes Muslims in Denmark through hierarchal dichotomies. Without a further step, the Club's role here would be diminished to nothing more than a cheerleader

that equates criticism and denunciation to community building, and in the process of denouncing one side, it would exempt the other.

To avoid this, the Club engages in sociology of emergences through organizing seminars for religious scholars to speak about moderate forms of Islam and the melding of Islam with Kurdish culture to create the hybrid religion which is compatible with their secular mindset and doesn't impose exclusion. (Gohar Interview, 2025) This vital aspect of the Club's approach is indispensable for any society which occupies the colonial world, as "the absence of alternatives is intellectually convincing only for those who do not need them existentially in their everyday life." (Santos, 2018, p.250) As the members argue, the threat of these extremist movements, at least in the diaspora, is directly tied to issues of identity. Beyond a theoretical understanding, what they've argued, and Bregnbæk's (2022) study also shows, makes clear the real-life consequences of the absence of alternatives, which leaves their community vulnerable.

Additionally, their refusal to engage in a form of resistance which necessitates dichotomies based on hierarchy, avoids creations of 'Self' vs 'Other'; center vs periphery. However, a case can be made that despite their efforts, a de-facto 'Other' still exists; in this case extremist religious movements are the Other. The difference here, though, is that the 'Other' is not based on abyssal exclusion, nor is exclusion imposed on another disenfranchised group. Rather, the 'Other' is the hegemonic force itself, which seeks to dominate.

This approach, which is rooted in hybrid cultures formation, by reconciling cultural identity with historic realities and the community's needs, is vital as it provides the ground to explore society's possibilities and opens space for aspects of Kurdish culture that were not allowed to exist while the hegemonic force imposed its well. Without the initial steps of engaging with sociology of absences, engaging with sociology of emergences would remain elusive. (Santos, 2018) This groundwork also paves the road for addressing the challenges facing women in the community. As a result, tackling issues pertaining to women's roles and autonomy in society becomes easier, given that extremist interpretations of religion is

one of the main proponents of denying women autonomy in Kurdish society. (Shadi Interview, 2025)

In a similar way, the Club's commitment to financial independence and political neutrality operates on the same logical basis. Returning to the triadic relationship, we can see once again the influence of the homeland. In reference to the political atmosphere in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the members recognize the issues that challenge society there. Within this framework, the KRI embodies a third type of emergence: counterhegemonic appropriation, which entails "concepts, philosophies, and practices developed by dominant social groups to reproduce domination, but which are appropriated by oppressed social groups and then resignified, reconfigured, refounded, subverted, and selectively and creatively changed so as to be turned into tools for struggles against domination." (p.31) We can understand this in terms of the historic fight for liberation in South Kurdistan which relied on the nation-state model, traditional tribal factions which are patriarchal, and the alliance with capitalist economic powers as a means of diplomacy and attaining legitimacy. (Rafaat, 2018) Additionally, similar to many states that have dominated Kurds historically or in the modern day, the Kurdistan Regional Government heavily relies on ethno-nationalist rhetoric, and at times religious symbolism, to legitimize its actions and processes. (ibid.)

On the other hand, a Kurdish project that has given many Kurds hope is Rojava (Kurdish: West Kurdistan), the autonomous Kurdish region of north Syria, where a multi-ethnic administration governs based on principles of feminism – every ministerial and governmental position is held by a partnership of two individuals, one man and woman – secularism, anti-authoritarianism, and direct participatory democracy. (Burc, 2020) Rojava, like the Dialogue Club, is an example of a liberated zone. (Santos, 2018, p.31) Hidayat's answer, emphasizing the desire to move away from the dynamics of the past reaffirms the circumstantial parallels between both Rojava and the Dialogue Club, as liberated zones are the product of 'historical impatience': "Tired of waiting for a more just society [...] groups organize themselves to live experimentally, that is to say, to live today as if today were the future to which they aspire [...]." (ibid. 31) While the goal here isn't to compare a civil

organization that dedicates its efforts to intellectual and cultural endeavors to an autonomous government, the parallels between the two are innumerable. In fact, the Dialogue Club is seemingly built on the democratic confederalist philosophy that gave birth to Rojava; a philosophy that advocates for the creation of grassroots organizations comprised of individuals from the community, as people who are active in their community are better equipped to understand and find solutions for the challenges facing them. (Burc, 2020)

The second part of the triad, Denmark, has in effect recreated dynamics with which Kurds are all too familiar. Though here, I must emphasize, and emphasize emphatically: no real comparison between the historic oppression of Kurds in Kurdistan and their situation in Denmark are valid if taken at face value. That's to say that although similar dynamics are present, Kurds in Denmark aren't oppressed; rather they face discrimination and alienation. While both are negative, this project doesn't mean to compare them in degrees of harm.

In Denmark, as a minority, Kurds are often politically voiceless. What's more, their categorization via nationality, rather than ethnic or cultural identity, has made them invisible (Roderburg & Toivanen, 2024; Arakon & Demrich, 2020). Likewise, as Bregnbæk shows, Kurds can't easily access Danish society, and even when issues such as language and integration aren't obstacles, Danish society isn't eager to open spaces for them. (Goran Interview, 2025) In both cases of The Dialogue Club and Rojava, Kurds have rejected categorization within ethnic and national frames, seeing that abyssal exclusions and lack of agency is rooted in nationalist and patriarchal ideologies. The third part of the triad, the diaspora, is also relevant here, as Ata shows that this approach to identity is likewise prevalent among Kurds elsewhere in Europe. (Ata, 2023) In other words, as with the case of religion, nationalist and patriarchal structures are identified as false allies, which limits or extinguishes agency. Instead, they have opted for identity formation through inclusion, shared values, and hybrid cultures. As the same time, this also signifies a desertion of a place of power: while the Kurdistan Regional Government occupies nationalist rhetoric as a metaphorical place of power to strengthen its capitalist economy and hold on resources,

the diaspora and Rojava take a diagonal stance, where Kurdish culture and history still remain as a core elements of identity, but there is a refusal to engage with counterhegemonic appropriation as a type of emergence.

The triadic relationship is acutely present here, as this approach to agency and identity has been like a ping pong ball, constantly interacting with different Kurdish communities along the triangle and causing continuous reactions. The solidarity initiatives and alliance building that diaspora Kurds have been engaged in with Assyrian and Armenian communities (Koinova, 2019) can be seen as a product of this. At the same time, Kurdish politics in Turkey has shifted from using nationalist rhetoric to progressive, feminist, and cross-culture solidarity discourse. (Burc & Tokatli, 2020) In art as well, the late Kurdish intellectual and writer Sherko Bekas, once an ardent nationalist, began writing anti-nationalist literature in the late 1990s and early 2000s and advocating for secular, feminist, progressive values, and became an active influence in laying a foundation for a post-national consciousness within Kurdish art. (Korangy & Mortazaee, 2023) These developments, which influence and are influenced by organizations like The Dialogue Club, place Kurdish communities within a transnational context. They're also evidence for the Kurdish movement's engagement with sociology of absence and sociology of emergence and recognition of the new paths open to reclaim agency within the difficult historic context of the Kurdish existence. To reiterate Alinia and colleague's argument, it's quintessential that The Dialogue Club is considered within this triangle as "any change in the socio-political situation in these points of references imply certain changes in diasporic projects and identities." (Alinia et al., 2014, pp.53)

The final place where the triadic relationship can be observed is in The Dialogue Club's approach to integration. What's noteworthy is the succinct conceptualization of the abyssal line and the community's place within the divide in the interviews. The Club members' answers in reference to this is an indication to the route they've taken to reclaim agency, which is based on forms of resistance specific to abyssal exclusion, rather than solutions that are more appropriate to challenging nonabyssal exclusion that rely on "the liberal state, the rule of law, human rights and democracy." (Santos, 2018, p.20) Tying this

back to the homeland, the Kurdish movements, which have relied on arguments made on the basis of rule of law, human rights, and democracy as a potential solution to repression, have become disillusioned with the established order and promise of liberation through these means. That's not to say that they don't place importance on these concepts, as the interviews show that they clearly do in the case of The Dialogue Club, but that they recognize the abyssal divide as a roadblock which stops meaningful change. Without first acknowledging that, arguments based in rule of law, human rights, and democracy will only lead to lackluster solutions.

This disillusionment is nowhere as visible as in the foundation of the Kurdish Partîya Karkerên Kurdistan aka PKK (Kurdish: Kurdistan Workers Party). After years of political struggle and colonial domination in Turkey, the would-be founders of the PKK realized that the promises of democracy and citizenship in the republic wasn't a promise that applied to them, as they were the colonial subjects. As a result, they resorted to armed resistance against the Turkish state. (Marcus, 2007) In line with Santos' work, this armed resistance constituted discontinuity and interruption, which "may manifest itself in either physical violence or armed struggle, on the one hand, or in boycott or lack of cooperation, on the other." (2018, p.25) In the homeland, this resulted in armed struggle, while in the diaspora it's practiced through boycott or lack of cooperation.

The members of the Dialogue Club reaffirm this understanding. The members' interviews regarding reaching out to Danish society can be understood within this context. Specifically, Hidayat's answer, where he emphasizes the role of daily interactions are relevant here, as he recognizes the dehumanized perception of Kurds, and how any real change is contingent on first changing that perception, i.e. acknowledging the abyssal line and the divide between the colonial and metropolitan world. (Hidayat Interview, 2025) Adding to this, the Dialogue Club's charity initiative can also be seen as a reflection of these understandings. Though the Club operates like a liberated zone, the members are aware that 'living as if today were the future to which they aspire' on its own is not the mechanism which drives change, and that in the meantime grassroots initiatives have to fill the gaps.

So, in terms of understanding how the Dialogue Club pursues community building and identity formation to reclaim agency, it's clear that a holistic view of their actions is necessary. There's the need to analyze their initiatives within the framework of the epistemologies of the South, in which all forms of domination are synergetic or, at best equally, imposing. If action is taken to tackle patriarchal domination, without also addressing colonial and capitalist domination, then meaningful and lasting change would remain untenable. Though, when engaging in intercultural translation and working through the ecology of knowledge, they're able to create shared struggle. In this way, they can renounce the Islamist extremists without exempting the state's racist discourse. They can unlatch the community from the divisive influence of political parties and capitalist hegemony, without denigrating the Kurdish identity that those parties use to legitimize their hold on power. In the process, they create a liberated zone whose existence is not incumbent upon the formation of 'Self' vs 'Other' and hierarchical dichotomies. In other words, they don't view agency as a limited resource, that one group possessing agency must mean that another group must lose it.

While this presents a very positive outlook, not everything is rosy. As mentioned, the values of the Dialogue Club make its existence fragile. The failure of previous organizations is evidence of this fact. Ideologies stemming in political Islam, giving rise to Islamist movements, are strong threats. Nationalist discourse, backed by swathes of resources, are alluring. However, their approach to community building has so far helped them practice agency and form their identities based on their own values and not on the will of a force that seeks domination.

Conclusion:

The Dialogue Club's initiatives are a form of agency in of themselves. They've created a space where they define their own values and represent their own culture. Still, we cannot proclaim that the Kurdish community's struggle for agency has reached the point where it's free to act in the way it sees fit. The community is still hampered by economic obstacles that extremist movements and political parties use to their advantage to pull on the people one way or the other. Likewise, the political actions that affect the diaspora, both in Denmark and around the globe, and Kurdistan are a connection that The Dialogue Club cannot untangle. Therefore, the community's agency remains under the restrictions imposed by actors whose relationship to them is unilateral, in which the Kurds have little say. These connections force The Dialogue Club to operate within a transnational framework, hence why the values upon which they've built the organization is directly tied to the political influences originating in Kurdistan, the repressive policies in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, and the asylum, immigration, and social policies in Denmark. The closure of Kurdish media outlets in Denmark (The Guardian, 2013) and the criminalization of Kurds in Germany, due to Turkish pressure (Dirik, 2021), reflect this reality, which limits their agency.

Recent developments in Rojava, Syria are emblematic of the limitations of Kurdish agency. Since the fall of the Syrian Regime in December 2024, Kurdish media has been preoccupied, not with how Kurds can self-determine their future, but with how the United States and the countries of the region will continue their relationship with Kurds. Although that's not to say that Rojava has sat and waited for foreign envoys to tell them what they'll do. The Autonomous Administration has repeatedly emphasized that it stands in solidarity with other ethnic and religious minorities in Syria, like the Druze, Assyrians, Armenians, and Alawites. (Shams TV, 2025) They've highlighted that any solution for a future Syria must guarantee the rights of every ethnic and religious component in Syria, and that their struggle isn't only for Kurdish rights. In this way, even if only at a rhetorical level, the Kurds in Rojava are building alliances along the abyssal line with others who occupy the same

side of the line. In effect it's a continuation of their emergence as a liberated zone, and a refusal to develop an emergence in the shape of counterhegemonic appropriation. Even though, given the current political climate, the latter might be easier. This approach to agency is also reflected in the diaspora, where Kurds have built alliances with Assyrians and Armenians. (Koinova, 2019) Likewise, this is reflected in the work of The Dialogue Club, as they've rejected nationalist and divisive discourse. The reality remains that all new developments in Kurdistan will undoubtedly also affect The Dialogue Club and the Kurdish community's future.

The case of The Dialogue Club, however, shows that even limited agency has transformative potential. Their initiatives help their youth reject the influence of extremist movements, women protect their autonomy, the community not lose touch with their culture and identity, and eases integration to the benefit of both Kurds and Danish society. In this way, The Dialogue Club has already reclaimed agency, even if in a limited capacity.

What becomes glaringly obvious, however, is that the struggle for agency has no end point. A society cannot enact certain policies, foster a certain culture, or give rise to a specific political structure in order to free itself from the dynamics of domination once and for all. The work of claiming agency is the act itself. The moment these dynamics dominate again, the struggle for agency begins once more.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

When was The Dialogue Club established? [6]

What is the structure of the organization?

What is your role in the organization?

Have there been similar organizations before The Dialogue Club?

Were you in similar organizations before?

What drew you to The Dialogue Club?

What are the goals of The Dialogue Club?

Does The Dialogue Club focus their initiatives on the youth?

How many events does The Dialogue Club organize every year?

Does the organization receive funding from the state or municipalities?

How does the organization integrate into larger Danish society?

[6] Only relevant for the founder.

Appendix 2: Interview Transcripts

Goran Interview

1:25

Jil: You mentioned that the goal of this organization is to provide a space for Kurds, youth, to express their opinions, so, was this the thought behind the name The Dialogue Club?

Goran: The goal was to foster dialogue between people who participate and come to our events. When someone asks a question at the seminars or adds a comment, this on its own is a form of dialogue. So there were a few initial goals. The first was to allow for these types of conversations. The second was to present certain topics, that Kurds, whether the youth or the general population, are not very well versed in. So, we offer them information on these topics. For example, Mr. Soran Hamarash came to speak on something that I personally didn't know. That was parts of Kurdish history that was lost to us because experts hadn't found it or pursued it. So, as a historian he conducted research and determined that it was a part of Kurdish history, and has written two books on it, one in Kurdish and one in English. People loved the topic, and the venue was full. He gave a presentation about some of the letters native to the Kurdish language, which have retained their sounds and form for thousands of years. In another seminar, I talked about *Rewtî Heqe*[7](Kurdish: Heqe Ideology). *Rewtî Heqe* is specific to Kurds. It was a religious ideology that originated in Kurdistan, born of Kurdish lore and mythology and was related to Sufi Islam. It separated from the Sufi Naqishbandi Order and morphed into a socio-political ideology. It gained a large following from Pshdar to Kirkuk (South Kurdistan, Iraq) and was very popular until the 1940-1950s. It changed Islam and created a Kurdish form of Islam. It Kurdified Islam. Many political Islamists fought against it but eventually they had to relent.

12:00

Jil: Can you explain the Dialogue Club's structure and decision-making process?

Goran: The Club is ran by a board of fifteen individuals, and these board members are elected by the entire Club. Each board member serves a specific role. For example: organization director, vice director, media director, financial director and financial vice director, etc. Each member stays on the board for one year, until the next election. Every January, we convene a conference and engage in a 'discussion forum', through which we elect the board members and delegate tasks. When, for example, I suggest organizing event for, let's say June, for [an individual], we use the forum to debate the merits of the

[7] Transliterated from Sorani Kurdish: ڕەوتی حەقە

individual and topics they would bring to the Club. After the debate, we put it to a vote, wherein a simple majority is necessary for a decision to be made.

26:00

Jil: Does the organization receive funding from the state or municipalities?

Goran: The municipalities have programs to support NGOs and civilian organizations, within a set of conditions. The first condition is that the organization is officially registered. The second condition is that you must have a defined project. But when you propose a project, they don't place importance on the fact that our events benefit the Kurdish community here or that they help individuals become socially and culturally conscious. Instead, they want projects that benefit Denmark directly. And it's very hard to quantify how our events do that They don't see our cultural initiatives for the benefit of the Kurdish community in Denmark as fitting the criteria. With the Secular Institute [a previous Kurdish organization] they helped us financially for our first project but refused to help us on our second project. So, for the Dialogue Club we didn't ask for financial help, nor did we register. Our members fund everything. Each members makes a donation once a year, and with that we cover our expenditure. Though our expenditures are all that much. At the events we offer tea, coffee, milk, and the members, especially the women, bring pastries. So, that's easy to cover. And the venues we rent, are usually public, so fortunately we haven't needed to rely on anyone here on in Kurdistan. Though the issue arises when we want to organize a seminar outside of Denmark. Or when we invite someone from abroad to talk at our events. For example, when we invited Soran Hamarash [Kurdish historian], we booked him a hotel room close to [area name redacted]. He stayed two nights. The members could cover the hotel fee, and [individual members' names redacted] also hosted him for dinner. And we also had a members' dinner in [place name redacted]. And luckily, he was in a neighboring country, so we could also cover his flights. So far, we haven't had any financial issues.

30:00

Jil: How does the organization integrate into larger Danish society? Do Danes attend the events?

Goran:In order to attract Danes to our events, we need to hold events in which the speakers speak Danish. And we've done that. For example, we organized a seminar for [name redacted], a Kurdish activist and journalist, to speak about Kurds who've been recruited by ISIS. He spoke at the event and had a lot to offer, but sadly not a single Dane attended. Everyone who attended were Kurds, our own kids and families, some ten families. So, we want to redo that seminar, but this time in Kurdish because he had a lot to offer.

33:00

Jil: How does the Club's initiatives relate to Kurdish culture in Denmark?

Goran: "Young Kurds who were been born here or raised here aren't in touch with Kurdish culture or history. Parents can't dedicate the time and effort to educate them on that all the time. Those of us who grew up in Kurdistan were raised often heard and experienced Kurdish culture in school, in marketplaces, around family, and that helped us get in touch with our identities. So, when I and other came here we came with that understanding and knowledge of our culture, but our youth haven't had those experiences. So, it's our duty to help them understand who they are, to teach them about their language, their culture and bridge that gap. The purpose here is … as you know nowadays Islamist movements are very active. They exert extensive influence on the youth. If you don't help a young people understand themselves, you might lose them to extremist ideologies. You lose them and they won't come back. So, before losing them, we have to help them. Arm them with culture and knowledge. I'm not saying talk politics to them. No. Politics is personal. But teach them about their roots, where they come from, what history brought them here, language, art, music. It will interest them. Isn't that right? Yesterday, I saw a discussion between Halmat Goran and Muhamad Salih [Kurdish media personalities], and they were talking to young Kurdish man in England, who was speaking broken Kurdish mixed with English. He was criticizing Halmat Goran, asking him if he fears God's judgment in the afterlife, 'How dare you speak against the Qur'an? Who do you think created you? You're an infidel.' Halmat asked him where he was from, and he replied, 'I'm Kurdish, I was born in England.' Then the young man said, 'Give me your address, I'm going to come kill you.' Imagine a young man born and raised in England, possessing such an extremist mindset. He was willing to travel from England to Norway to kill that man. That's the danger. You have to help them before they reach that type of extremism. We can't influence everyone, but we try as much as we can. According to our abilities, we try to have a positive influence on the youth in our community, before those extremist movements get a hold of them. We see more young people at our events nowadays, and we're trying to organize more events for them specifically. They need that support. Society has ignored them.

J: What part of society? People from the community or the government?

G: I can't say it's completely on the government. You see the youth are often preoccupied with school and school life, so you can't intervene in their lives too much. But the issue is that these movements are trying to exert influence at a very early stage of life. Here I'm not talking about the youth, but children in elementary school. I have worked in education, and I have first-hand experience with this. These groups try to target immigrant children that they haven't won over. They try to pull them in, and if they can't [win them over], they

threaten them. And children are scared: either they join them, or they change schools. I once spoke with a principal of one of these schools, and I told him I thought it was their failings. I said, 'You've too soft against these groups. Because you're so worried about the arguments about tolerance, you're letting them harm these children. You're supposed to stand up for them and defend your values, not let them threaten kids and push them around.' With the Secular Institute [a previous Kurdish organization], we hoped to play a role in countering this. There are schools that have a large number of immigrant children. We talked to one of the schools and asked if we could organize a presentation or an event to talk to the children about secular thought and culture, but the principal refused. He said they didn't want to risk a backlash. We went to a different school, and we got the same answer. This is a problem. If it isn't recognized, it will keep hurting our youth.

40:00

Jil: On the topic of culture and youth, how has the Club attempted to help Kurdish youth retain their Kurdish identity and balance it with their Danish identity? Am I right to assume values such as secularism help them integrate into Danish society better?

Goran:

Forgive me, but I can't agree with that. Unfortunately, and this is perhaps a shortcoming from the Danish side, there isn't a broad sense of acceptance for foreigners. There are friendships, but it's surface level. There's no deeper co-mingling. So, they don't feel included, often find that warm friendship and acceptance among other foreigners. If they're lucky they'll find someone with similar values, but sometimes they're unlucky and fall into extremist crowds. This is a shortcoming from the Danish side, and they admit this. They're not very open. They prefer their own culture. [Personal story redacted] And that's not to say they are against Kurds or against foreigners; it's just how their culture is. They say it, too, that they're cold socially. So, I don't see a lot of Kurdish youth find that with Danish friends.

Gohar Interview

0:00

Gohar: The foundation of the Dialogue Club is rooted in the diversity of ideologies. There are leftist, radicals, Kurdish nationalists, everyone is included. The Dialogue Club always tries to preserve Kurdish culture here. It does so by organizing events for individuals who can talk about different aspects of Kurdish society. We've spoken about religion often to increase cultural consciousness. We've also spoken about mother language. At the Dialogue Club we place great importance on Kurdish as a mother language. One shortcoming for me is the lack of support for this in Denmark. This is quite different when compared to Sweden. In Sweden, for example, children of non-Swedish parents are expected to attain high grades in mother language classes in school, and these grades, like any other, have an impact on their university applications. I wish Denmark took a similar approach. It's very important to highlight this, because they often say that children should know their mother language. If they know their mother language, then it may ease learning other languages and make them appreciate other languages, the same way they appreciate their mother language. Unfortunately, in Denmark this is not something we care about.

Jil: Why do you think in Denmark we don't care about this?

3:00

Gohar: Back in the day, we did have Kurdish language classes, but they removed them. I think it goes back to the issue of racism. In Sweden there's the belief that if they know their own culture and their own language, they will respect our language and our culture as well. But in Denmark we don't care about that. It hurts me to say that many families, my family included, didn't put in the effort to teach our children and our grandchildren Kurdish well enough at home. We speak Kurdish, and they answer in Danish. However, had those classes still existed, as they exist in Sweden, it would have taken some of the burden off the families. A lot of my old friends in Sweden, who were Peshmergas like I was, teach Kurdish classes in school. Once a week, Kurdish children have Kurdish classes. If our children want to be successful, they need to understand their culture. If they understand that, they can be a good citizen and a part of Danish society. It will enable them to take good values from our culture and good values from Danish culture and create a combined culture. There's bad in our culture and there's bad in Danish culture. It's important to find the balance. If Denmark emphasized these things, it would help our children be more successful. And if they're more successful, who does it benefit? It would benefit this country of course. Our children would be raised better, they'd tie education in Denmark to their own identities and

be more willing to serve Danish society. But children here, even Danish kids, aren't very keen on dedicating their time and effort to their education.

8:00

Gohar: One of our goals is to ensure that the Kurdish community doesn't lose touch. We must be present for each other's difficult moments and good moments. And we must put in an effort to have an influence on our youth, in order for our youth to enter this society as fit and developed individuals. We're certain that if we set the example, in terms of genuine integration, our children will integrate into Danish society. This would benefit Denmark and our youth simultaneously. Unfortunately, as the Dialogue Club, we haven't found a way to attract Danish society to our initiatives. This is a dark mark on our efforts as the Dialogue Club. We haven't been able to communicate in a clear manner, to Danish society, what we want and what we believe, and what we want for our children.

13:00

Jil: So, in relation to Danish society and Kurdish culture, you mentioned the goal of fostering cohesion and integration. Is this one of the goals of the Dialogue Club?

Gohar: Yes, that's one of them. Our events revolve around two basic concepts. One is the simple necessity of fostering social cohesion; basically, to help us stay in touch and understand one another. We're happy to see our community, we talk, we make jokes, we argue and fight. The other is the want to find ways to serve the larger society we live in. For example, we have a seminar on the 25th, for a young author who's written about Danish culture and children's education. We want to help get the word out about him and his book, so that the community knows about him and they can get the word out. Additionally, if there are ideas he can share, then our community should take those ideas home with them, make use of them. It's also about inspiring our community. When we see someone from our community, who's become a success and carved out a place for himself in Danish society, we think 'I can do that too.' So, it's about bringing people together, supporting our community and our society, and also helping the new generation stay in touch with the community and Kurdish culture and Kurdistan. For example, every year we organize an event to commemorate Halabja[8], so that our youth here see what happened.

15:45

Jil: How long have you been active with the Dialogue Club?

[8] The Halabja massacre, which happened during the Anfal Genocide, took place on March 16th, 1988. On that day, the Iraqi air force bombarded the Kurdish city of Halabja with chemical weapons and killed over 5000 civilians in a matter of hours. (Maisel, 2018)

Gohar: I was first active in the Secular Institute. I started with them in 2013-2014. But after a few years, due to conflict between individuals, the Institute was disbanded. After that, we came together and founded the Dialogue Club.

Jil: Why was it disbanded?

Gohar: There were individuals who caused issues, to tell you the truth. We have a saying, 'They would put a piece of wood in front of the door, to stop it from closing.' Basically, they'd place obstacles in front of our initiatives. [personal story and individual names redacted]

19:00

Gohar: Even though I agreed with a lot of what they said, the fact that their actions were fracturing the community, and their methods were not constructive, it led us to take a stand. We left the Secular Institute and joined the Dialogue Club at its very start as founders.

22:30

Jil: I wanted to ask you about women in Kurdish society, and women's voices in Kurdish society. You mentioned that in Kurdistan and in Denmark, you've worked to support women and be active in highlighting women's rights. Has this work continued with The Dialogue Club?

Gohar:

At the Dialogue Club we're able to make sure no one impedes this work, because our members and our community is conscious about these issues. Though, unfortunately, our women aren't as active as they should be. They don't nominate themselves for board positions, they don't propose events where they themselves speak. I include myself in this criticism. We've had quite a few events on women's issues, where I didn't participate as a speaker, because I am politically active. Even though I want to be more active at the Club, I've held back, because we believe in political neutrality. Basically, the Dialogue Club's activities have to remain non-partisan. Being an active member of a political party, if I organize a seminar in which I speak on a topic, my political bias would naturally be a factor. How do I know this? Because I know that my agenda is tied to my party's agenda. And my activity, to this day, is tied to my party's ideology. My biases hold me back from engaging as an individual who's not tied to a party, like other might because I am a member of a party. Whatever I speak about, will be influenced by my political affiliation. Though that's not to say that I am not active in organizing events for women's issues. Though in terms of women as members, we think we still should have more. We have three women board members:

myself, Shadi, and [name redacted]. Though a lot of women do attend our events, they find them beneficial, they sometimes speak, too. You can see this from our archived seminars [video archives], women are heavily involved.

Jil: Is this increased participation a reflection of Kurdish culture or is it due to the Dialogue Club's initiatives?

Gohar: I think it's the Dialogue Club's ability to organize events that attracts women. The Dialogue Club presents topics that for me, as a woman, I want to know about and may benefit from. It also has to do with the fact that the Dialogue Club was founded by reputable people who are held in high esteem in the Kurdish community in Denmark, in Copenhagen and the surrounding areas. The people who attend also has an effect, they're well-liked in the community. If you want to build a community, you need to first be viewed as pillars of the community. This has enabled the Dialogue Club to be in touch with the people, their worried, and their problems. That's one of the strengths of the Dialogue Club, which is why when we hold a seminar, we regularly get 80-100 people in attendance. Of course the material content of the seminar also plays a role. For example we had a seminar for Dr. Ngin [well-known Kurdish doctor; expert in women's sexual and reproductive health], and at that event women attended in large numbers, because the material content was relevant for their lives. We've also held seminars on religion, but we don't want to over do it, because it would fatigue the community to always address the same problems. It's important that the Club knows what the community needs. We've organized many events for issues specific to women, and also for women who are experts in all fields of knowledge.

36:00

Jil: Other members have expressed worry regarding the influence of extremist Islamist movements on the youth. Is this a worry that you have as well? Are there steps to counter this?

Gohar: We've worked a lot in relation to this. For example, we've organized multiple seminars for Mariwan Halabjayi [Kurdish sociologist and social commentator], where he has spoken on different interpretations of Islam. We hope that this will enlighten parents and further their understandings, in order to help them play a more effective role in their children's lives. We've organized a lot of events on this topic, on religion. Unfortunately the youth haven't been very keen on such events. But parents attend. We see the family dynamics as an integral aspect of how our children develop. So, when parents attend and learn something, they can use that knowledge to influence their children's lives. Now, one issue is we can't really quantify how much effect this has had. What we try to do to improve

our community is that we tie topics together. For example, Kurdish culture, Kurdish language, and religion and beliefs. It's had an effect in my own life and my relationship with [individual's name redacted]. In our home we've began having conversations about history and Kurds' relation to Mesopotamia, to which [individual's name redacted] felt very detached from it. [Individual's name redacted] hasn't heard about these things. [Individual's name redacted] also hasn't had the experience of traveling back to Kurdistan to feel that connection to the culture. And here in Denmark, we hadn't had the chance to engage with our community as much as we wanted in the past. [Personal story redacted] The Dialogue Club has had an effect on me, it's helped me learn things about history and language that I didn't know before. So, when I would talk about these things at home, [individual's name redacted] often asks me where I learned this stuff, and I'd tell [individual's name redacted] I learned it at the Dialogue Club. So, the Club's effect is present in our lives, and we transmit that to our children.

Law Interview

52:00

Jil: Can you tell me about the bookstore and the charity initiatives?

Law: Hidayat and I have been focused on charity initiatives most of our lives in Denmark. We've often worked together on these things. We first met in Turkey[9], and at the time we met we were both working as volunteer teachers for children of Kurdish and Arab refugee families. [personal story redacted] We would also help people do translations, deal with the bureaucracies, we helped open a school for children of refugees and procured supplies from the United Nations. I also coached the kids as a football coach. When I first came to this country, I worked as a volunteer football coach for around six months, training kids who were ten to twelve years old. And I didn't really speak the language yet, but as they say, 'football is a universal language'. At the time I lived in [city name redacted]. The municipality knew that I was an ex-professional footballer, so they invited me to a meeting with a translator, and they asked me if I wanted the job. It helped me a lot in terms of learning the culture, integrating into society, picking up the language, and it also helped the community get to know me. At the time I was also working and going to language school, so I had a full schedule. After a few years, I started working with an Arabic newspaper on a volunteer basis and helped them with PR related tasks. After a while I took over as editor of sports news. So, I've been working with the newspaper for about fourteen years. Now, I also contribute with political op-eds, and write about the interrelationship of sports and politics. In terms of charity work, we have the bookstore. Because of Hidayat and I's history of work together, we decided to use a part of our time for the bookstore. On the one hand it's meant to encourage more people to read, because readership is decreasing. A lot of people often read short texts or headlines. So, we want to be a part of an enlightenment in our community that comes through books, especially on topics related to Kurdish history and politics. We feel we've played a good role so far, as people are eager to see us at the events. More importantly though is that we do this as a non-profit initiative, and we donate all the money to disabled children and children with chronic conditions who need monthly medication in Kurdistan. It's also for communities who are living in poverty, where the government hasn't done anything meaningful to help them. Many of these communities live in far off villages, so we help them buy blackboards for their schools, chairs and tables for their classes. We've ran the bookstore for about three years. In our first year we raised forty-four Danish crowns. We use our own cars and pay for everything out of pocket. And we haven't limited our initiative to Denmark. We load up the books in our cars and have

[9] Law and Hidayat migrated from Kurdistan through Turkey, and stayed in Turkey for two years while waiting for their immigration application to be processed by the United Nations.

been to Gothenburg and Malmo. At one time, when Hidayat didn't have a car, he packed the books in a suitcase and took the bus and train to Oslo to sell them there. Just to show you how much we care about this project. A few years ago, at one of the events, Hidayat said he's donating his full month's salary to help families in Kobanê[10], and that inspired more people to do the same. I want to highlight this to show the community's dedication to these efforts, and the love that we feel for one another.

[10] Kobanê, Rojava (West Kurdistan, Syria) was the city in which ISIS was first defeated in 2015. The city was largely destroyed after the war, in which Kurdish YPG (Yekîneyê Parastina Gel; People's Defense Units) defeated ISIS.

Hidayat Interview

9:00

Jil: What are the goals of the Dialogue Club?

Hidayat: The Club isn't a cultural center per definition; it's more of an independent organization. But we also do engage in cultural initiatives. We've had plays, poetry readings, and other cultural events. There are certain factors that motivate us to do the work we do. When someone migrates to Europe, if they're not socially conscious, they'll live in a way that's oriented toward individual interests only. For example, all of life's necessities are provided, even if they don't work. This can push someone to think individualistically, and not think of the broader society. This can disincentivize the individual from wanting to forge social connections and diminishes society's ability to hold the individual accountable and help them correct course. At the same time, capitalist and neo-liberal structure can isolate people from one another physically. At the Dialogue Club we believe that we need to meet each other and see each other in person, so that we remain in contact. We can't only stay in touch over the phone or over the internet. We need to be there together at our occasions and celebrations to give each other a hug, shake hands, exchange ideas, etc.

Some people who attend do so to meet others whom they wouldn't have had the chance to meet otherwise. With the way life goes, the busy schedule of work and responsibilities, there's less time to socialize. So, emphasize the need to foster our social connections and love our our community. This is one factor. The other factor is the political atmosphere in Kurdistan. Due to the political dynamics in Kurdistan, some powerful political parties have worked to fracture the Kurdish diaspora. They might offer someone a salary, or a piece of land in Kurdistan, or a symbolic position at a ministry, to incentivize this, and they make these rewards contingent on the individual not partaking in intellectual events and social organizations. This forces social isolation, which obviously has a negative effect. It isolates the individual, they don't engage with their community, they don't take part in the community's activities. However, when we put together an event, and an individual decides to attend, they're practicing agency, they're practicing independent decision-making. We find it important to strengthen individual agency, to foster an atmosphere where people can meet, exchange ideas, and show them that their contributions are valuable.

12:00

Another factor is that one of the sources of conflict in our society is the lack of acceptance; in other words: accepting another's opinions, accepting their individual beliefs, accepting proposals for dialogue. I'm not saying acceptance is totally non-existent, but it is approached with suspicion. We made this Club for people to come express different ideas.

We want to move away from the days when difference was used as a slur, and suspicions of difference was confronted with threats, brutal violence, suppression, and character assassination. Instead, we want to foster diversity of opinion. We want to converse, discuss, and criticize, so that others can do the same.

13:50

One vital aspect of the Dialogue Club is that a large percentage of attendees at our events are women. It's important to us that women also take part in our academic and intellectual seminars and lectures.

Jil: Why is this important to you?

Hidayat: It's important to us because social and religious elements have perpetuated the belief that women shouldn't occupy male-dominated spaces, to speak in male-dominated spaces. They've made it seem as though women's autonomy is the source of every problem in the world. They equate women's autonomy to family honor. And they want to dictate morality to women. They equate women to a piece of meat, and if women act freely in society, wolves will come and take a bite of her. We don't tolerate members who seek to control women in our community. At the Dialogue Club women speak, and no one can tell her hold her tongue. Women laugh and no one can say it's shameful to be loud. Women at our events dress however they want, and no one can tell her to dress in a different way. Women hold seminars, express ideas, and speak freely. So, the Dialogue Club supports women's autonomy. And it's wrong to say that we allow women to do this; women are our active partners in these initiatives.

19:00

Jil: So, what are the Dialogue Club's initiatives to achieve those goals?

Hidayat: I think it's important to highlight that there are two types of organizations that are prevalent in Kurdish society in Kurdistan. The first is organizations that are dominated by political party. These organizations are attached to the parties, across the political spectrum, from the communists to the Islamists. It's not only the dominant parties who do this. The parties would often place their own cadres within the organizations, and through that they would attempt to influence the community to bring them closer to their own political goals and agendas. They use the organization as a path toward political power and social agendas that benefit their parties. This is one type. I've worked within these organizations shortly, and I think they warrant a lot of criticism. The other type of organization are non-profit grassroots organizations. By contrast, a non-profit grassroots organization built on the basis of voluntary participation like the Dialogue Club, is formed by the community itself. This allows the organization to represent the community and a

common goal. Because the organization is born through the community's collective will. No company provides a budget, no party delegates an envoy to run the organization, no state has any security apparatus for which they can use the organization. It's just a group of people who convene and exchange ideas, and structure the organization's functions around volunteer participation and the democratic will of its members. At the Dialogue Club we don't do anything without voting on it, where a simple majority wins, and even then we emphasize the need to compromise and communicate the reason for how we vote with the minority. At the same time, this allows the for the unification of the communities goals with the individual's goals. So, this counters individuals who want to enter the Club for individual gains, such as political gains, financial gains.

22:00

But within organizations where political parties are at the center, you often see the directors or organizers who were involved suddenly get nominated for parliamentary elections by the party that sponsored their organization. So, the parties use the organization to push their own agendas, while the individuals use the organization for individual gains. The Dialogue Club doesn't operate this way. It's based on volunteer participation, and the members fund all the initiatives. Grassroots organizations in a sense have a natural birth, make it possible for the individual's goals, the community's goals, and the organization's goal to become a shared aspiration.

25:00

Jil: You mentioned that the Dialogue Club is mostly focused on the Kurdish community, and Danish people aren't involved. Can you tell me why there isn't a close connection to the broader Danish society? Have there been attempts to work on this?

Hidayat: The Kurdish community's understandings of life can be viewed as a continuation of life in Kurdistan. The circumstances have created dynamics that have shaped life there. Those same dynamics have travelled with us and have sometimes limited our ability to relate to Danish society. So, we want to enrich the diaspora with the initiatives that the Dialogue Club undertakes. So, a Danish individual is unlikely to suffer from the same dynamics that someone from the diaspora Kurdish community suffers from. For example, such as being given a modest salary and being told stay home and don't engage with the community. Because we come from a society that's suffered wars and poverty. We have people who, even though they consider themselves a leftist, or even a communist, once they've come to Denmark and seen life's necessities provided for them, they come to the conclusion that this must be the socialism I fought for, so I'll stay home and disengage from the community, I won't be involved with politics or any social initiatives. My point is that we

want to protect the connection between the community and the type of work we do at the Dialogue Club. And we've been relatively successful with this because we've focused our efforts on this specifically. Our generations have lived through wars, political instability, economic blockades, genocides, the pains of migration, and statelessness. These experiences tie us to one another. I've often heard people say that we should congregate with the youth and talk to them, and I always disagree. Just because we've had to live this way, it doesn't mean I have to impose those experiences on the youth. I will teach them our history, but they shouldn't take my experiences as advice or seek guidance from our lives. The new generation is the generation of now, not the past. I can't tell them how to live their lives. The same way I haven't been able to live the way previous generations have. Maybe they wanted me to, but it's not possible. And the youth can't adapt their lives to my experiences. So in terms of wanting to relate to Danish society, it's difficult at times. Because we want to talk about these experiences, we are limited to people who've been through these things and who can understand us, which is the Kurdish diaspora. If we try to do too many things at once, our limited resources will hinder us from having any meaningful impact on our community. And at the same time it will also stop us from connecting to Danish society. And there's a political dimension to this. Here I am referring to political and social institutions, and not Danish people as individuals. If you want to have a meaningful impact on European societies, you need vast resources. You need media power, you need broad representation, the same can be said in Kurdistan. This is true for both civil organizations and political organizations. It's possible to engage individuals, but not the whole society without these resources.

34:00

Jil: Beyond what you mentioned relating to culture and history, do you feel it's difficult to create that understanding between the Kurdish community and Danish society?

Hidayat: I think it's important to consider what issues we're facing. For us we consider something as like women partaking in our events as a positive step forward, but in Danish society this is not something that preoccupies them. Or that we help people express their opinions openly. In Denmark someone drew a caricature of Muhammad and the whole of the Islamic world threatened that they will cut off end their economic relationships with Denmark, if Denmark didn't apologize, but Danish society said, 'This is an individual practicing their right to free speech and this is a basic human right, and we can't deny an individual of that right.' My point is we're facing different issues. We're working to eliminate this restrictive mindset, which was too restrictive even forty years ago. Neither we, nor Danish society, can tolerate this mindset, but we're fighting against it, while Danish society

has moved past it. So, while we do this, we can't force European societies to commit to our efforts, when it's no longer an issue they need to confront the same way.

In terms of engaging Danish society, I think we should approach it in a different way. What good will it do if we organize events and we sit down with a parliamentarian, a sociologist, a journalist, or a community organizer a couple times a year? In my experience there's a better way. Where I work, I work with Danes. They're human and I'm human. When I first started working there, they thought we don't drink alcohol. When I drank with them, they were surprised. Now they know we have a drinking culture. They thought Kurdistani and Iraqi societies were drowning in vulgarity and was wild and primitive. So, I told them about our notable people, our art, our music, our jokes. I showed them real life examples. [Personal story redacted] Little by little, they changed their views on Kurdish society just through daily interactions."

37:00

Jil: What's the Dialogue Club's mission statement?

Hidayat: We try to be an organization that can facilitate mechanisms through which people can gather and verbalize their ideas. We don't make decisions for the community. We don't like to decide the direction the community should head to, the future of the community, or impose political ideologies related to Kurdistan's national aspirations for independence or political structures. We focus on fostering dialogue and open discussion. For example, we invited one academic to come talk about the issues facing women in our society. At the same time, we also provided a platform for others to provide a counter-view, to foster dialogue in the community.

48:00

Jil: How does the Dialogue Club engage with the youth in the Kurdish community?

Hidayat: In our experience, the Islamist movements have been more successful with youth outreach. They have projects and specific media content to attract the youth, and they have significant financial backing. And this financial support is backed by certain countries. For example, they may have a mosque, which they use for multiple functions. So, a child might go there to study religion, and when they're done, they go play in the playground next to the mosque, that the movement has built for them. On the other side of the mosque they might build a small football field, so that the kids can play football. They also take them on trips, they can keep the mosque tidy and comfortable, they provide them with meals while they're there. And they might produce, for example, a calendar with images of religious symbols, that the child can take home and hang up in their rooms. They

finance religious scholars to visit from Qatar, Turkey, Iran. But all of this is done because they have financial support.

Jil: How does the view Club view these movements and their ability to attract the youth?

Hidayat: We're worried. We try to combat it socially. For us we have to start with how we can reach out to families. As you know, family is a vital element in a child's development. If we can engage parents and help them understand their children and the influence of these movements on them, this is already an important step. If we can help the parents communicate better with their children, instead of react harshly and negatively to their children's interest in or connection to these movements, then that's a positive step. You can't force your opinions on the youth, but it's possible to reach out to them through conversations, constructive communication, and respect for their beliefs. We've seen it in our community, where parents have engaged their children respectfully and that's allowed the young man or young woman reject the influence of these movements. If we're able to effect parents in this way, this effect can reach the children as well indirectly.

Jil: You've mentioned the role of culture and the community in terms of agency, so how do you see culture's role in this?

Hidayat: There are aspects of Kurdish life, which are inherently oppositional to the values espoused by radical religious dogmas. They nullify them. For example, Helperkê[11]: nowadays there are religious scholars that say people who dance Helperkê are infidels, whoever sings and plays music is an infidel. These are aspects which are dear to Kurdish culture. Core elements of our culture, like Helperkê, communal living, equal partnership between men and women, these things, which stem from traditional Kurdish ways of life, break the barriers imposed on men and women by dogmatic beliefs. I think these things are important, they can help reshape one's mentality and thinking, but due to our limited budgets we haven't been able to organize as many social events as we'd like, especially compared to Islamist movements who organize frequent trips and are very well-funded. But we try to promote events that celebrate holidays like Newroz[12], where the youth can sing and listen to music and dance and socialize.

[11] Helperkê: traditional Kurdish dancing, in which men and women hold hands and dance together

[12] Newroz: Kurdish new year, celebrated on March 20th and 21st with music, Helperkê, and traditions rooted in Kurdistan's pre-Islamic religious and mythological beliefs

Shadi Interview

15:00

Jil: Have you worked with other similar organization before The Dialogue Club?

Shadi: I worked with the Chak Institute, where we focused on collecting documentation on the Anfal Genocide. For example, we contributed to a court case in the European Court of Human Rights, regarding an individual who had illegally sold chemical material to the Iraqi government. We also helped the Danish government locate [individual's name redacted, previous members of the Iraqi Ba'ath government, which committed the Anfal genocide], who had been living in Denmark. We also sent envoys to genocide conventions, to talk about the Anfal Genocide. The Chak Institute wasn't focused on community building, rather on genocide recognition initiatives and reached out to governments in order for the Anfal Genocide receive official recognition. In terms of cultural organizations, I was involved with Nydanske. It was a group in Greve [Denmark], where we would bring the community together and organize activities for families and their children.

32:00

Jil: On the issues facing women in Kurdish society, do you think the Kurdish community in Denmark has been able to address them?

Shadi: I think, whether we like it or not, religious elements and beliefs prevalent in Islam remains a factor and sections of the population use that to impose radical interpretations on people. So, this leads people to think less of a single woman if they see her with a man. When they see a young man and a young woman fall in love, they label it as immoral or wrong. They can't accept the thought of a man and a woman living together if they aren't married. [Personal story redacted] So, the influence of religious elements is important to highlight. It pressures individuals to act in a certain way. You can see it in so many of these 'honor killings', even in Europe. A woman is murdered, and the murderer is usually a brother or a father or an uncle, their own family members. And there's been an increase in these acts, which weren't as common in the past. The environment exerts so much pressure on the individual that they are forced to conform. In our societies, to a large degree, mothers have become guardians of the family honor. When people talk about someone's daughter, or some kind of rumor spreads, the environment pressures mothers to such an extent, that, to alleviate that pressure, they act in a stricter fashion toward their daughters than their husbands or sons might have. Young women don't even get support from their mothers. Society has stripped women of their agency to such a degree, they've become unable to act.

57:00

Jil: How does the Dialogue Club engage with the youth in the Kurdish community?

Shadi: The issue is even when there are initiatives to help Kurdish youth in Denmark, our political parties get involved and want to exert influence. If the organizations are neutral they don't support it, and if it's under the influence of a rival party, they try to alienate it from the community. Because of this our youth have been deprived. There are parties close to Kurds in Turkey, who do good work. Whether we agree on their politics or not doesn't matter. They provide cultural and linguistic education for the youth, and you can see that the Kurds who attend their events are much more aware of Kurdish culture and are more closely connected to Kurdistan. But those who don't lack that. A lot of the families in the community face a similar issue: our children don't understand Kurdish. They understand basic everyday language but are unable to express themselves or take part in conversations. Those families keep their children away from anything remotely political, so in the end the young man or woman loses touch. It's in part our own fault. Our traumatic backgrounds pushed us to keep our children away from the conversation relating to Kurdistan. So, the result is that, these sections of our youth view issues relating to Kurdistan and Kurdish people the same as they'd view a news report about Argentina; in other words it feels very distant for them.

1:02:00

Jil: I wanted to return to something you mentioned earlier about Nydanske. Can you tell me more about Nydanske?

Shadi: Nydanske was more community focused. We held social events and cultural events. [Personal story redacted]

Jil: What were the goals of Nydasnke?

Shadi: Initially the goal was to organize events focused on celebrating Kurdish occasions or holidays, and we also invited Danish people to help them engage with the Kurdish community. We also received some funding from the municipality. So, we brought Kurdish food to our events and Danes and Kurds would sit together and enjoy the event.

1:06:00

Shadi (On the role of cultural awareness): Religion isn't inherently bad. Everyone needs something to believe and turn to in difficult time. If someone practices Islam in this way, in a way that's personal to them, I have no right to tell them what to believe or what to think. And truthfully, we all need something that can ease our worries and something we can believe in. But there's religious scholars, who have financial backing, who disseminate interpretations according to their own agendas. Those who back them financially want to

push Islamist forms of religion. Then, people who aren't socially and cultural conscious accept these interpretations, because they come from sources that claim to be religious expert, and fall into extremist crowds who commit brutalities akin to what many dictators have done. We need to understand where information comes from, what use they provide, and what they achieve. Unfortunately, our society still adheres to our unwritten rules, and these unwritten rules can have these influences on people because rejecting them can mean being expelled from your community, and that's a pain that strikes deeper than any physical pain. You could get beat up, have your house burned to the ground, and I don't know what else, but it's not as painful as feeling rejected by society. Societal rejection crushes your soul. It leads people into depression, drug dependency, suicide.