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Collective Narratives of the Kfarsghabi Diasporic Community: An Important Tool to Reinstate Group Solidarity, Ethnic Identity and Societal Acceptance

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Abstract: This paper explores the significance of collective narratives for a particular diasporic community. The analysis demonstrates that addressing narratives is important not only to ensure understanding between old and new members, but also to expand societal acceptance and provide adequate formal assistance to sub-ethnic communities. The Kfarsghab community, whose members identify with a Maronite village in the Wadi Qadisha (Holy Valley) in Lebanon, is a suitable case study, especially due to the high commitment of certain members who disseminate information and stories. I analyzed digital platforms, searched in archives, and conducted qualitative interviews with community members in five countries. Using a qualitative content analysis, I inductively generated categories to examine why certain members are particularly dedicated to (re)producing collective narratives as well as to understand the core themes and morals of stories. The analysis illustrates why members act as community librarians, storytellers, external messengers, and social reporters to share myth and legends that have different effects: Narratives about group solidarity convey implicit imperatives that secure the existence and transformation of a community. The normative messages enable a mutual understanding and foster everyday support among long-term and potential new members. Stories that highlight the ethnic identity ensure differentiation from other sub-ethnic groups and strengthen the cohesion among members with hybrid identities. Hereby, members preserve the remembrance of a common origin as a central identity element even if the actual descent is not decisive for membership. Other narratives emphasize societal inclusion by portraying successful members as role models. Overall, collective narratives prevent the disintegration of diasporic communities with the potential to counter negative stereotypes attributed to ethnic groups perceived as an entity. Diasporic communities should be acknowledged as a stabilizing element of societies, as they promote social recognition of members and function as a counterbalance to experienced racial discrimination.
Keywords: Collective narratives, diaspora, ethnic identity, Lebanon, media.

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Cultural Assimilation, Out-marriages and Negative Stereotypes as Threats to Diasporic Communities

Since the beginning of migration history, diasporic communities have faced the risk of disintegration as members have adapted to mainstream society, triggered by assimilationist policies of the host societies. In the United States, many Arabs and Middle Easterners were refused citizenship between 1909 and 1920, which forced them to prove their "whiteness" to become eligible for naturalization and to enhance their socio-economic status (Gualtieri, 2001). Similarly, in Australia, many first-generation immigrants concealed or denied their ethnic and religious identity in response to the "White Australia policy" that prevailed from the 1880s to the 1920s (Batrouney, 2006). Migrants and their descendants were expected to assimilate up to the 1960s/1970s in both countries. Nevertheless, leaders of diasporic communities have continued to preserve the ethnic identity and group cohesion despite xenophobic movements, the lack of ethnic churches in large areas and out-marriages (Naff, 1992).

In the wake of the "ethnic revival" and a rising political recognition of cultural difference, the emphasis on elements of ethnic identity as expressions of belonging to American and Australian society gained prominence (Khater, 2005). Since the mid-1990s, however, there has been a shift away from multiculturalism by conservative governments in Australia, while the politics of "One Nation" are gaining popularity. In the United States, former President Donald Trump's zero tolerance policy on the border with Mexico and his travel ban (labeled the "Muslim ban" by critics) are examples of attempts to redefine the "nation of immigrants". The increasing Islamophobia, prejudice, hostility, profiling, and violence towards Arabs and Middle Easterners (Kumar, 2021) caused them to feel relabelled as "non-white", which heightened their awareness of "Arabness" (Elaasar, 2004; Haddad, 2004). Those concerned negotiate their identity either through an increasing awareness of their ethnic identity or through assimilation (Zahrawi, 2020).

In academia, attention has also been paid to the negative stereotypes (re)produced in the media. They can encourage members to show decreasing interest in their ethnic origin. With changing tendencies, Arabs have been portrayed as "baddies–billionaires, bombers and belly dancers" (Shaheen, 1984) in television and cinema. After World War II, the negative stereotyping intensified associated with a conflation of Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim images, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the onset of the war on terror. Arabs and Middle Easterners are dehumanized and misrepresented as "bad guys", as suspicious, disloyal, risky, barbaric, violent, irrational, sexist, different and "the eternal other" (Sharma et al., 2020). In Australia, the discourse is dominated by media reports on criminal activities of so-called "Lebanese gangs" (Poynting, 2014). In these reports, criminal acts and anti-social behavior are often explained with cultural differences (Collins & Reid, 2009), instead of highlighting socio-economic disadvantages, particularly of Muslims with a Lebanese ancestry, who immigrated to Australia predominantly since the beginning of the Lebanese civil war in 1975. Moreover, comedy television-series such as "Here Come the Habibs" (Stratton, 2017) in which extended Arab families are portrayed in an exaggerated way contribute to such misrepresentation. The stereotypes reproduced are perceived by many individuals as stigmatizing: "There is not a single major, positive Middle Eastern character on Australian television – we are only represented in the most negative of ways" (Royalle, 2016, "I thought you wanted diversity", para. 1).

In contrast to such homogenizing portrayals, individuals with an Arab or Middle Eastern ancestry and their communities are characterized by segmentation and hybridity. Conflicts and fragmentations along various lines, such as local identification, religion, politics, class, gender, ideologies and causes of migration are obscured by the notion that diaspora is linked to

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achievements such as transnational networks, entrepreneurship and new organizations. Research on the shaping of boundaries between different sub-ethnic groups is scant (Yan et al., 2019), particularly in the Arab context. Instead, studies focus on demographic and socio-economic characteristics of migrants from the Arab world, their degree of acculturation, their status in different social fields (e.g., Suleiman, 1999), experiences of racial discrimination (e.g., Hage, 2002; Poynting, 2014; Tabar et al., 2010), particular sub-ethnic groups (e.g., Escher, 2008; Hyndman-Rizik, 2010), and strategies of their "ethnic leaders" to counter racist campaigns (e.g., Collins et al., 2000; Tabar et al., 2003).

Moreover, artistic expressions that span different genres (drama, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, essay writing) are analyzed in relation to memory, trauma, history, and reconciliation. Theatre productions, poems, and novels as well as graphic life narratives, music and films are valued as revolts against racial, gender and cultural oppression (Marchi, 2011) embedded in historic, national, cultural, political, familial and gendered contexts (Alsultany & Shohat, 2013; Deebi, 2012). They make the voices of Arabs and Muslims heard enabling them to recuperate their identities as well as experiences and strengthen resilience. According to Alshetawi (2020) and Naous (2020), these expressions have taken great strides towards changing the stereotypes of Arabs and Middle Easterners and countering Islamophobia by addressing mainstream society. In addition, researchers interpret art as a counterforce to the sub-ethnic divide due to the potential to conceal existing boundaries. However, this idea diametrically opposes many everyday practices. The importance of art for intra-group cohesion is only studied at the margin.

How sub-ethnic groups preserve a distinct identity – which can be linked to a certain region or village of origin – is rarely the focus of research, although certain members are highly active in this regard. Diasporic communities play an important role in immigrant societies as they support the well-being and social acceptance of individuals and function as a counterbalance to experienced discrimination (Hashemi et al., 2019). Yet little is known about the broad range of people who document, process, and publish collective narratives for preserving the distinct ethnic identity. Especially in view of the (Post-)Arab Spring, studies predominantly focus on artists, writers and activists and their identity constructions to understand how art, language and the narrative world are used as political tools (Müller-Funk, 2020).

To sum up, the current gaps in empirical understanding are linked to a poorly differentiated view on the fragmentation of ethnic groups and a limited focus on actors who mainly belong to the cultural scene. To understand why some diasporic communities dynamically change and thereby persist despite cultural assimilation, out-marriages and negative stereotypes, the following questions arise: Why and how are individuals involved in the (re)production of collective narratives? What are the core themes, normative massages, and effects of collective narratives? What implications can be derived from the analysis for politics and the media?

Theoretical Framework: Communities of Practice and the (Re)production of Collective Narratives

The formation of a diaspora must be understood as a process of social movement. It is crucial to analyze the agents of diasporic imagination as well as their associations and institutions as they carve the discourse of community through which a particular diasporic imagination is negotiated (Sökefeld, 2006). In this sense, diasporas can be conceptualized as Communities of Practice (CoP) who share a common concern or passion. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), the members participate in a process of collective learning while they interact regularly. Each individual contributes to the continuity and self-positioning of the group to varying degrees in

accordance with personal competencies. The following indicators of a CoP determined the selection of the case study to secure its suitability for understanding the significance of collective narratives: The diasporic community analyzed must have lasting mutual relationships, shared ways of doing things, a consensus in descriptions of who belongs, mutually defining identities, specific representations and artifacts, shared stories[2], local lore, inside jokes, and a shared discourse which reflects certain perceptions.

The CoP concept allows one to comprehend the making of a community driven by a wide range of members with different backgrounds. They are not necessarily involved in artistic activities, but contribute to the groups' collective identity in a variety of ways. It serves as heuristic inspiration for identifying responsible members and their motivations due to the following roles mentioned by Wenger et al. (2002) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2013): Community librarians provide access to knowledge, shared memory, tools and guidelines. So-called social reporters capture significant moments within the community and document events of mutual learning. Their reporting often takes place on a rather informal, subjective, and immediate level. In contrast, external messengers decide about the target group and the appropriate format to present relevant community insights, statements, or narratives to the public.

Building on the idea that the construction of an ethnic identity "involves, among other things, a gradual layering on and connecting of events and meanings, the construction of a collective narrative" (Cornell, 2000, pp. 42–43), it is necessary to take a closer look at stories told by members. They reveal information about the shared history, the communities' interests, priorities and problems as well as the expected behavior among members (Vargas, 2020).

To identify relevant narratives and their implications, two different understandings of the term "collective narrative" in social science and community psychology literature are useful. Both understandings concur that stories allow individuals to understand the culture and context of a community and to build social relationships with each other. On the one hand, the term is linked to single stories that recall specific events, relate them in the same order and present the same ending related to emotions. Such collective narratives can be described as myth if the incidents referred to "represent more than the 'facts' of history … [and] embody or explain a wider set of values, beliefs, and aspirations" (Heyer, 1995, p. 154). When analyzing narratives, it is important to notice references to factual or fictitious past events because they provide clues to the current self-image of the groups, patterns of interpretation, implicit imperatives, future hopes, and objectives (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998). Concisely, Assmann (2007) claims that myths facilitate orientation in the world, have an appeal character and thus carry normative and formative power.

On the other hand, the term "collective narrative" relates to a collection of stories with similar themes in group members' personal narratives (Prins et al., 2013). Personal narratives are shaped by so-called paradigmatic stories – a subcategory of collective narratives – that represent the ideal life course and mediate a set of core values. New members shape their personal stories over time by taking on an existing set of paradigmatic stories reproduced in museums, videos, comics and exposed in corridor walls, on websites and during corporate events. Besides, written sources such as autobiographies, memoirs, diaries and newsletters contribute to the circulation of identity-relevant paradigmatic narratives (Linde, 2000). Hence, members speak not just of themselves when they talk about their lives, but of and for others with a similar fate: "The individual tale becomes a collective tale: the one voice may be the voice of many" (Plummer, 2001,

[2] In this paper, the terms *narrative* and *story* are used synonymously and in a broad sense. They refer to personal and collective stories of different genres: "[F]ables, legends. foundation myth, fairy tales, oral history, jokes, reminiscences, gossip, (auto)biographies and ethnographic vignettes" (Bönisch-Brednich, 2016, p. 205).

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p. 31). Thus, this article treats common themes in individuals' self-accounts as expressions of shared experiences and a collective identity.

Overall, collective narratives create a consciousness of belonging among members who might never have met. They are articulated face to face and shared online and can be assigned to the following five types: (1) Stories of commonality deal with the imagined common origin, migration as a group experience, challenges of pioneers, the sharing of resources, mutual caring, hospitality, solidarity, common accomplishments, and joint recreational activities (Karner, 2021). (2) Identity stories express hyphenated identity constructions based on plurinational and hybrid adscriptions, inter- and transcultural affiliations, new lifestyles as well as gratitude for new opportunities and attempts to reconstruct identity and home in new locations (Nyman, 2009; Bönisch-Brednich, 2016). (3) Stories of nostalgia express homesickness combined with alleged wishes to return as a symbolic bond that connects members. They also highlight differences in living conditions and attitudes between the place of residence and the claimed place of origin (Karner, 2021). (4) In contrast, victim narratives often relate to historical events and deal with displacement, racism, exploitation, marginalization and exclusion as well as existing hierarchies and power relations (Marchi, 2011). (5) These stories are interlaced with counter narratives of resilience and resistance that thwarts mainstream perceptions. Such alternative narratives that are repressed due to existing hegemonic structures of power tend to arise thanks to digital media (Borst & González, 2019). Representatives of empowering research claim that victim and counter narratives should be made visible as forms of resistance to claim home, belonging and community (Olson et al., 2016). Memories and storytelling by the subjugated must be analyzed as weapons to comprehend, resist, transform, and heal from forced migration, war, genocide, patriarchy, racism, and in the case of the Black diaspora from the history of slavery and colonization (Hua, 2013).

When examining collective narratives, it is also important to consider that they are shaped by the respective social context and meta-narratives, i.e., "the dominant narratives about [societal practices] ... including the value and norm systems" (translated from German, Keupp et al., 2002, p. 286). Meta-narratives are communicated through mass media or other large cultural and social institutions and networks. To detect such influences, one must take account of leading myths of settler nations like the one of rags to riches, or other discourses related to the integration or assimilation paradigm.

Moreover, collective narratives are not only shared directly through stories. The content and meaning can also be coded as visual images, symbols and rituals or expressed in social interaction and performances. Accordingly, members might be unaware of the narratives they implicitly accept, enact and use to create their life stories (Rappaport, 2000).

Overall, the use of conventional and digital media contributes to the circulation of narratives independent of spatial distance. For diasporic communities, digitally circulated narratives are particularly important since they articulate frames of reference and cultural codes beyond national boundaries (Leurs, 2012). The variety of communication channels with controlling members in different places worldwide requires a multi-sited approach and an analysis with multiple methods in the online and offline world.

Empirical Approach and Analysis of Analog and Digital Media

Building on the two understandings of the term "collective narrative", such stories can be identified in at least two ways: From the interview process by asking members questions about the historical narratives of their particular community; or from the analysis and coding of themes that emerge across personal stories of members (Olson et al., 2016). To detect collective narratives, this

paper draws upon a combination of interviews and participant observation field research at five locations, as well as digital media analysis and archival research. It is part of a broader research project on "Lebanese global communities"[3] in the field of cultural geography.

As a suitable case study for this paper, I will focus on the Kfarsghab community for four reasons: (1) Due to a long history of migration that goes back to the end of the nineteenth century as pointed out in the next section, members remember changing social discourses in their residence societies. (2) Kfarsghabis are considered exceptionally successful in different places worldwide, due to their members' achievements in business (e.g., construction and commerce), politics and academia, as well as in the service sector, legal system and clergy. (3) They have established several religious institutions and associations as organizational structures in Lebanon, Australia and the United States. Their venues are used for a broad range of community-building events and educational programs like exhibitions and panel discussions to preserve the collective identity. (4) Kfarsghabis also show a strong communicative connectivity, especially when compared to the other communities studied. With the emergence of social media platforms, exchange about current events and past happenings increased and remained on a high level.

This is valid even though 90 percent of community members live outside of Lebanon. They trace their ancestry to the Maronite village Kfarsghab[4] located in North Lebanon in the Wadi Qadisha (Holy Valley), where the migration history is said to have begun. The absolute number of Kfarsghabis worldwide is estimated at 16,000 to 20,000 (Cameron, 2007). However, these numbers must be considered as exaggerated, since many are descendants of the third or fourth immigrant generation who are no longer aware of the village of origin of their ancestors. Those who migrated to countries such as Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, the United Kingdom, France, and New Zealand did not establish organizational structures similar to those in Australia and the United States; a plausible reason for their weaker ethnic identity.

To better understand the motivations for (re)producing collective narratives and their meaning, I applied a multi-sited empirical approach. I visited families and individuals who relate their assumed common origin to Kfarsghab as well as their meeting places (e.g., association buildings, churches, homes), and celebrations in the cities Sydney (Australia), Easton (Pennsylvania, U.S.), Providence (Rhode Island, U.S.), and Dubai (United Arab Emirates), where many Kfarsghabis live.[5] In the summer of 2014, I conducted exploratory interviews and observations in Lebanon, during the time of the year when many visitors from the diaspora stay in Kfarsghab. The repeated visits to Lebanon in the following years up to 2017, when I stayed there for one year, created a basis of trust that had a positive impact on the empirical work at the other locations, which I visited once or twice[6] between 2014 and 2018.

Members who act as community librarians, social reporters, storytellers, and external messengers not only provided me with copies of community magazines, jubilee and memorial

[3] With a comparative approach, I studied diasporic communities whose members imagine a shared ancestry from the following villages in the Wadi Qadisha (Holy Valley, Lebanon) as a central element of their collective identity: Kfarsghab, Ehden, Aitou, Hadath el Jebbeh, Diman, Hadchit, Miziara, Blouza, and Bcharre.

[4] Since the late seventh century, the Wadi Qadisha gave shelter to Maronites, an ethnoreligious group whose Eastern Catholic Church has been in communion with Rome. During the reign of the Ottoman Empire, they stood under the protection of France and enjoyed special rights in the autonomous district Mount Lebanon (e.g., Wirth, 1965).

[5] In 1977, it was estimated that 8,000 Kfarsghabians lived in Australia, 2,000 in the USA (1,200 in Easton, Pennsylvania and 600 in Providence, Rhode Island), 500 in other countries, and 1,000 in Kfarsghab itself (AKLA 1977). The current e-mail list of the Australian Kfarsghab Association (AKA) covers only 1,296 households.

[6] My research stays took place in Sydney in December 2014 and September 2016, in Easton in July 2015 and November 2018, in Providence in January 2018, and in Dubai in October 2014 and January 2015. At all locations, also in Lebanon, I chose to stay in rented accommodation to be easily contactable by potential interviewees from different communities.

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booklets, newspaper articles and exhibition display, but also added me as a member on their main communication platforms. Facebook groups are subject to membership restrictions set by administrators who want to "restrict access to maintain the quality of members" (M. Stephan, personal communication, July 19, 2014). Becoming a member allowed me to observe the communication in the following Facebook groups on a regular basis, as well as to detect previously posted myth and legends: Kfarsghab Lebanon (n.d., founded on May 2, 2012, 1,741 members), AKA - Australian Kfarsghab Association (n.d., founded on May 18, 2012, 1,977 members), and Our Lady of Lebanon Church - Easton (n.d., founded on August 18, 2010, 2,152 members).[7]

With the aim of analyzing internally and publicly disseminated narratives in relation to temporal contexts, I included not only Facebook groups, Instagram accounts (e.g., kfarsghabnation, kfarsghab), websites (e.g., https://www.kfarsghab.com.au/, https://stgeorgeri.com/, https://www.ololeaston.org/), and a blog (http://www.kfarsghab.net/), but also analog media. This included 43 of 49 community magazines named AKLA News (Australian Kfarsghab Lebanese Association News) published up to three times a year in Sydney between 1968 and 2000. In addition, I collected over 100 digital copies of local newspaper articles about well-known personalities from Kfarsghab, their initiatives, projects, and events. I was able to obtain articles not only from private collections of community members and through online databases, but also discovered material in local archives, such as the Khayrallah Center Archive in Raleigh (North Carolina, U.S.), the Easton Area Public Library, and the Australian Lebanese Historical Society in Sydney.

This material is supplemented by recorded qualitative interviews with 55 Kfarsghabis, 17 experts (e.g., priests, association presidents and consuls), and two group interviews conducted between 2014 and 2018. While following the snowball-method, some people acted as gatekeepers and introduced me to other community members. I also continued to make contacts on my own to capture the inside-outside perspective, knowledge, experience, and opinion of inactive members and those considered to be less representative. To initiate "ero-epic conversations" (Girtler, 2001, p. 150), I memorized questions to encourage members to talk about their biographies, personal/familial migration history, involvement in clubs and associations, motivation for their commitment as well as identity elements, sense of belonging, experiences of alienation and desires. In all different locations, I conducted the interviews in English, the main language for most of the members.

It is important to note that I never explicitly asked people with whom I talked to tell historical narratives about their particular community but relied on ad hoc recounting. Members often told such tales once the recording device had been switched off, in the car on the way to community gatherings or during the more than 40 events which I was able to attend: Village festivals, board meetings, religious ceremonies, celebrations with formal speeches, and family gatherings provided numerous situations for informal sharing of anecdotes.

Many legendary stories are disseminated both orally and in writing often with the help of digital media platforms. This reflects the potential of combining the analysis of media content with qualitative empirical methods. The latter provides insight into interpretations and meanings of shared narratives and self-images. Using a qualitative content analysis, I inductively generated categories to examine the motivations of members actively involved in the (re)production process, the media and platforms used, as well as the themes and meanings conveyed via narratives, which I further differentiated with the help of MAXQDA.

[7] The cited membership figures are based on data from May 21, 2022.

Context: Kfarsghabis in Easton, Providence, and Sydney

The majority of Kfarsghabi families in the United States live in the small town of Easton, where the first group is said to have arrived in 1901. After disembarking at Ellis Island, a Syrian-Lebanese businessman allegedly took them to Easton by train (Elias, 2011): "Easton was chosen as the destination for the group from Kfarsghab simply because Faour had no sellers in the area" (Karam, n.d., Immigrants to Easton, Pennsylvania 1900-1901 section, para. 15). As early as the 1920s, only 40 percent were still working as peddlers. More than a quarter (28 percent) sold dry goods or fruits as merchants. The remaining 26 percent found employment in local industries (mostly iron, steel, and hosiery mills) (Smith & Scarpato, 2010).

Kfarsghabis also settled in Providence in larger numbers where they were actively involved in establishing a Maronite Catholic church in 1911. In 1929, Members of the Kfarsghab community opened a Maronite church in Easton. These faith-based institutions could emerge in a country where religious diversity is a legacy of colonial history. So-called ethnic churches supported the inclusion in American society through services such as language training and opportunities to acquire civic skills. To this day, they serve as centerpieces for spiritual, social, and cultural experiences and member interaction. The church congregation in Easton counts 350 families today, 170 of which are considered active.

With at least 90 percent of Easton's Maronite community hailing from Kfarsghab, the Kfarsghab Club was founded there in 2009. The stated goal is to preserve the Kfarsghab identity and to promote social activities, independent of the influence of the clergy. In contrast, Kfarsghabis in Providence, who make up only a fraction of the Maronite community there, have not established their own club. They have been active in the Maronite parish together with families whose ancestors had left neighboring villages (e.g., Bcharre, Ehden, Hadchit, Blouza) since the turn of the nineteenth century (Doumato, 1985).

Simultaneously, Kfarsghabis – like many Lebanese Americans – had prioritized the education of their children, who were considered Americanized in terms of their daily practices and lifestyles, without abandoning values such as family cohesion and the success ethics (Naff, 1992). Such convictions become clear in a discussion about the nativist flavor of local politics, in which a Kfarsghabi highlighted their sense of belonging and social mobility: "What they wanted was … to integrate us into American society, but we were Americans anyway. … We went to school, you know, most of our people who graduated there became magistrates, lawyers, doctors" (Smith & Scarpato, 2010, p. 152).

Kfarsghabis began emigrating to Australia in 1887. After the first group found work in the Broken Hill mines, many followers earned their living as hawkers, (rail)road construction workers, and agricultural laborers. Following the outbreak of World War II, many Kfarsghabis moved to Sydney, where Lebanese immigrants had opened shops, department stores, and manufacturing plants, as well as the first Maronite Catholic Church that was built in Redfern in 1897. The largest number of families from Kfarsghab arrived between 1946 and 1955. Australia's open immigration policy at that time caused a great decline in the village's population.

As early as 1952, Kfarsghabis in Sydney founded the Australian Kfarsghab Lebanese Association Ltd. (AKLA) as the successor to a charitable organization. The popularity of village associations increased in Australia from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, when multicultural politics emerged. The growing heterogeneity within the Lebanese community in Australia due to the immigration of all confessional groups during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990) is expressed in the formation of further social, political and religious organizations (Batrouney & Batrouney, 2019). However, in Australia, only a fraction of Kfarsghabis regularly attend Maronite church

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services because many first-generation immigrants changed their religious affiliation to the Anglican or Roman Catholic Church (Batrouney, 2006). This is not uncommon in the United States either (Naff, 1992), which implies that the discussion in this article refers only to those descendants who identify with a diasporic community to this day.

The main reasons for adapting to an Anglo-Australian lifestyle were pressures from the White Australia policy and assimilation policies prior to the 1970s. Simultaneously, many Christians with a Lebanese ancestry try to distinguish themselves from Muslims, which is related in particular to the shift in racial othering from an "Arab other" to a "Muslim other" since the Cronulla Riots in 2005 (Hussein & Poynting, 2017). Members of the Kfarsghab community described here feel offended by the fact that Lebanese Australians are assumed to be a homogeneous group:

> *The problem is in Australia: It can be a very racist place. Especially with what happened in Martin place [2014 terrorist attack]. And you get people footing down Muslims and whatever. They treat everyone with the same brush. It's been very hard for Lebanese in general, because some people are ignorant and think that all Lebanese are Muslims or all Muslims are Lebanese. Stereotyping. … And we have contributed a lot to Australian society.* (J. Hanna, personal communication, December 26, 2014)

The fragmentation of the so-called "Lebanese diaspora" is also apparent at the spatial level, e.g., in Western Sydney. Members describe an imagined border between neighborhoods with around 40 to 50 percent Christians (e.g., Parramatta, Canterbury-Bankstown) compared to neighborhoods with a share of over 30 to 50 percent Muslims (e.g., Lakemba, Auburn) (.idcommunity, 2016): "You know, in Granville, Guildford, Merrylands. This is the green line[8], if you wanna put it that way. And we're in competition with the Muslims" (Y. Taouk, personal communication, November 12, 2014). Economic competition among Australians with a Lebanese ancestry exists particularly in the residential construction market in Western Sydney, which is dominated by Christian Lebanese with Kfarsghabis playing an exceptional role. Kfarsghabis are considered one of the most close-knit and economically successful sub-ethnic groups in Sydney.

Media, Platforms and Motivations by Kfarsghabis to (Re)produce Collective Narratives

Nowadays, Facebook groups are used to keep the community up-to-date about news relating to group members (e.g., birth, baptisms, weddings, deaths), events (e.g., festivals, "haflis"), and the wide variety of initiatives in Australia, the United States, and Lebanon (e.g., charity projects, new meeting places, created memoirs). Prior to the spread of the internet, such information was communicated in the AKLA News. Produced in Australia, this community magazine reaffirmed conventions and commonalities among its readers worldwide without obscuring differences in lifestyle: "It softens the edges and allows the American reader to glimpse the life of a transplanted community very much like his or her own, yet significantly different in ways that pertain to social customs and institutions" (AKLA, 1998, p. 31). Most importantly, it has compiled success stories and serves as a source for the reproduction of narratives to this day. Text extracts

[8] The Green Line was the front line running through Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War, separating the predominantly Muslim factions in the west from the Christian-dominated east.

from AKLA News are republished on websites, blogs, and in social media and illustrated with historical pictures, documents, and newspaper clippings.

The administrator of the Facebook group "Kfarsghab Lebanon", who has a representative function within the community as a descendant of the most influential political family from Kfarsghab, decides on the information posted together with a team of content creators. He realized that stories about past and present achievements of individuals have a high potential to (re)create and strengthen transnational relations:

> *In America we have a population in Easton and Providence. It was always thought that this particular segment [in Providence] was integrated into America, meaning that they are a little bit too far from us now. … These guys drifted away. But through the Facebook page, I have realized for some of the content that we get quite a few comments and likes from Providence. And – I was so happy to find this – a Kfarsghabi was running to be the mayor of Providence and we put a feature on him and he is very happy and his cousins are very happy… When you win one you win their family and the flame keeps going… So, the community on which we kind of gave up on has reappeared which is very nice.* (M. Stephan, personal communication, July 19, 2014)

Kfarsghabis share success stories not only to preserve social ties, but also to change the perception about people with a Lebanese ancestry. In Sydney, the administrator of the AKA Facebook group openly expresses her intention to counteract social prejudices in an interview:

> *There are some good stories out there about how the Lebanese have contributed. And we have contributed a lot to Australian society, especially in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They set up many businesses. … There's a lot of people that are very well-known and well established. Businesspeople in various areas of government, medicine. And they're the ones that you never hear about. You always hear about the Lebanese that cause trouble. So that's what we try to do, to change people's perceptions if we can.* (J. Hanna, personal communication, December 26, 2014)

The interviewee was highly involved in two exhibitions in Sydney on the achievements of Kfarsghabis in 2007 and 2012. The organizers invited local politicians – some of whom were from Kfarsghab – and journalists to the opening ceremony. Following the exhibitions, the community received media attention, e.g., with a double-sided article in the Sydney Morning Herald entitled "Home from Home" (Cameron, 2007). It was illustrated with pictures of Kfarsghabis at the beach in Sydney, a panoramic view of Kfarsghab, the Lebanese appetizers offered during the opening ceremony and a picture of a hand-drawn family tree (see Figure 1). These and other photos are available to date in the online edition of the article. Moreover, various Catholic publications in Australia (e.g., Catholic Weekly) reported on the event. Given the pride that Kfarsghabis have for being "great assimilators" (AKA, 2012a), as stated on the AKA website, combined with their ongoing integration, exhibitions are considered to be important for allowing young people to connect with their heritage. The AKA spokesman explains in a newspaper article why they organized the exhibition: "We are absolutely Australia-integrated but also have a love of our heritage" (Petrinic, 2012).

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In order to organize the exhibitions that encompassed around 1,000 items, including photos and memorabilia, J. Hanna meticulously archived historical documents (e.g., old photos and videos, obituaries, letters, Kfarsghabi in the news), interviewed members about their migration history and built up a genealogical database. Continuously, she documents current events by taking and posting pictures and (live) videos. Beyond Sydney, she is known as an expert on questions relating to kinship ties between Kfarsghabis. In her opinion, the community will disappear if the knowledge and shared memory is not preserved for younger generations: "I think we've got to focus more on the heritage. … [T]hey get to a stage where they say 'Who am I, why am I here? … Why do I do this?'" (J. Hanna, personal communication, December 26, 2014).

Figure 1

The Abraham Family Tree, Published in the Newspaper Article "Home from Home" in 2007

(photographed by M. J. Karner, 2014, December 11)

A permanent exhibition on immigrants in Northampton County in Easton's Sigal Museum received similar media attention when it opened to the public in 2019. An Arabic teacher, who grew up in Kfarsghab and moved to Easton in 2000 where her husband had been living, was highly involved in collecting artifacts and providing photos, stories, and family heirlooms to the museum's curators. These items were exhibited in the section of the museum dedicated to Lebanese immigrants (Tatu, 2019). During her employment at the Lafayette College, she had supported ethnographic research on Easton's Lebanese community beforehand by suggesting interview partners to colleges and students. An associate professor of anthropology who is not a member of the Kfarsghab community benefited from this. Her oral history project focuses on the loss of Easton's "Lebanese Town", a neighborhood demolished due to urban renewal in the 1960s that is remembered as cohesive, safe, and multi-cultural. On an ongoing basis, her findings are published in scientific articles and books (see Smith & Eisenstein, 2016) and will be easily accessible through a multimedia website under construction.

Moreover, the Arabic teacher is currently compiling a Kfarsghabi cookbook to preserve the knowledge of so-called "village recipes". Besides recipes collected in Kfarsghab, it will contain dishes newly created in the diaspora thanks to interaction with other groups in the demolished multi-ethnic neighborhood (e.g., baked macaroni infused with Lebanese spices). The cookbook will be sold to visitors of the "Lebanese Heritage Days". This festival has been organized annually in Easton since 1978 and attracts around 10,000 visitors. The two-day event not only serves to preserve the collective identity of the group, but also affects the external image of the community, supported by reports in the local media:

> *Some came for the authentic Middle Eastern food that included grilled garlic chicken, tabbouleh and stuffed grape leaves. Others came to see the folk dancers. But most use the festival as a reunion of sorts. Just a few hundred yards to the south, along Lehigh and S. 3rd streets, is what was once the Lebanese neighborhood. … Most came from the same Qadisha Valley, Lebanon, village of Kfarsghab, and despite the demolition of their neighborhood, their heritage remains strong. The two-day festival works to maintain it.* (Assad, 1999, para. 8–11)

Besides such affirmative reports in the local media of Lehigh Valley, one can find critical comments by Kfarsghabis about political developments in their country of origin. Kfarsghabis expressed their concern and dismay about the Lebanese civil war, the Israel–Hezbollah war in 2006 and catastrophic events like the "Beirut Blast" in 2020. In this context, they refer to the instability as a reason for emigration, emphasize their striving for peace and prosperity, and ask to end foreign intervention in Lebanon: "The Lebanese people are peaceful people. … [O]n behalf of the Statue of Liberty, … get freedom for the people of Lebanon" (Freeman, 1989, 10 p.m. section, para. 26).

Another example of how members try to verify the collective narrative of a common origin is the "AKA Kfarsghab Family Tree Project". Since 2012, a database has been created to reconstruct the lineages of the founding families of the community using modern technology and quasi-scientific methods. The online portal where members can enter and search for genealogical data currently comprises 12,741 entries (May 21, 2022). One founding member of the Kfarsghab Club in Easton calls on members to register: "I'm fascinated by the history of the village, by the notion of the five families. It's who we are, it's our roots. And if you don't write it down, it's gone. And it's gone forever" (J. Hanna, personal communication, July 28, 2015). His father Joe Daniels, who wrote a column for the Arabic-language newspaper in New York named Al Hoda, is known as the former "unofficial historian of the village." He received this nickname because he presented his archive collection of photos, books, and old poems to members during sessions about the communities' history decades ago. Inspired by this, his son and founding member of the Kfarsghab Club organized a panel discussion in 2016 to exchange personal histories among members. This event was documented on film to share the stories online with members worldwide.

Myths and Legends of Kfarsghabis in the Twenty-First Century

Kfarsghabis exchange a large number of narratives with the help of analog and digital media compared to other communities' studied. A content analysis of the stories shows that the majority can be assigned to the following three core themes: Group solidarity, ethnic identity, and social inclusion. To illustrate this, seven stories are reproduced as examples here that received media attention and thus potentially have an impact on the community's reputation. They can either be

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regarded as collective narratives or myths because members retell them in similar ways and ascribe the same implicit imperatives to them (example stories: The Magnificent Seven, The Titanic Legacy, The Stranger, Kibbeh Hill). Another subcategory of collective narratives are paradigmatic narratives or legends about living or historical figures (example stories: Raymond Baurkot, Rosi O'Brian, James Saad).

Group Solidarity: "All for one…and one for all" (Hanna, 2015a).

The first group of Kfarsghabis who arrived in Adelaide is remembered as "The Magnificent Seven". As the story goes, they took up an offer by the parish priest of Bcharre, a village near Kfarsghab, whose children had worked successfully in the mines of Broken Hill in Australia and promised to support the newcomers. Once the Kfarsghabis had arrived, the priests' children warmly received them, rented them a room and provided Western-style garments to discard oriental clothing. On the first night, the group of Kfarsghabis suddenly left the room when they heard the town clock strike midnight, believing that it was the church bells calling them to mass. They were stopped in the street by the night watchman. Unable to speak English, they made the sign of the cross. For this reason, they were introduced to a parish priest who began to look after them. He taught them essential English words and provided them with goods to peddle: "Those first seven great heroes, not being familiar with the language and traditions of this new country, preserved with faith, confidence and solidarity and were successful in opening the gate for a steady immigration to Australia" (AKLA, 1986, p. 5).

However, one day two members got lost in a forest and were saved by strangers who fed them and allowed them to spend the night in their home. By way of thanks, the two Kfarsghabis took the initiative to gather and bundle the freshly cut wheat. In return, the owner who gave them shelter bought up all their peddling goods for a decent price. Afterwards, he drove them back to Broken Hill where they were luckily reunited with the rest of the group (AKA, 2012b).

The central message of this story is that Kfarsghabis solved difficult situations as a group while their adherence to their faith protected them. They gratefully accepted support from compatriots and strangers to find their way in the new country. The appreciation they expressed awarded them with unexpected success. In addition, the story emphasizes that the acquired material resources of the first group were responsible for the successful immigration of other Kfarsghabis. "The Magnificent Seven" secured for others "a new life of prosperity and happiness" (AKLA, 1986, p. 5). Supporting new immigrants from Kfarsghab and sharing resources are thus themes that appear in many personal narratives.

The most famous story of Kfarsghabis is the "Titanic Legacy", which was not only shared internally among members but was also reported at least three times in the Lebanese press (e.g., Beirut's Al-Anwar newspaper in 1994) and recounted in a monograph (see Elias, 2011). Moreover, it gained much attention in social media. One example is a Facebook post by a hobby-researcher on January 16, 2017, shared 227 times (see Badawi, 2017). The tale is about a group of Kfarsghabis who had planned to take the *RMS Titanic* but stayed ashore when one member of their group became sick. Instead of coming a little closer to the American dream, all members decided to cancel their plans. The villagers had made a pact to travel as a group, which ultimately saved their lives. Some narrators also portray the collective grief in Kfarsghab when news about the sinking of the Titanic reached the village. However, mourning turned to celebration when villagers heard that the entire group postponed their trip, which was perceived as a "miracle".

As a reaction to a post in the "Kfarsghab Lebanon" Facebook group (see Khoury, 2015), a member commented: "All for one...and one for all. Support and care for your loved ones" (Hanna,

2015a). The Facebook comment relates to the historical adventure novel "The Three Musketeers" by French author Alexandre Dumas in 1844 that expresses togetherness, a sense of unity and group solidarity. In a figurative sense, Kfarsghabis can only "survive" in foreign places if they look after each other, express sympathy in times of loss and share pleasure. For Kfarsghabis, the moral lesson of their Titanic story is to always stick together, even if the advantage is not yet apparent at the time of the decision. This unquestioned solidarity is also highlighted by journalists in articles about Kfarsghabis: "[T]he sense of equal prospects, mutual support and of being together in the same boat seems never to have left them" (Cameron, 2007, para. 30). To emphasize this, journalists quote Kfarsghabis with phrases such as: "We're a very close-knit group of people – very ethnic. We pray together, cry together, party together, do everything together" (Yurconic, 1989, para. 22).

In contrast, narratives about members who have defied the norms of the community are only shared internally. Normally, such stories are told face-to-face and only hinted at in social media.[9] They illustrate the consequences of misconduct to members and suggest ways for compensation. Moreover, collective bad decisions are remembered and handled through stories as a form of collective crisis management (Karner, 2021).

Ethnic Identity: "I definitely feel a very strong sense of pride and a deep connection to come from this village" (M. Moussa, personal communication, July 19, 2014).

Many collective narratives serve as a reminder of the assumed common origin. The village of Kfarsghab (see Figure 2) is also often mentioned as contextual information in local newspaper articles about the community, e.g., in a report about Easton's demolished "Lebanese Town" in which a Kfarsghabi nostalgically portrays everyday life in the neighborhood: "It typified the village in the old country where so many of us came from. The houses were clustered around the church and that helped preserve our Lebanese heritage. It was like a village within the city" (Kenna, 1983a, para. 14).

Kfarsghab itself is usually described as a village connected to the world and emotionally linked to the fate of its migrants as the Titanic legacy has already shown. In personal narratives, the place is depicted as paradisiacal with a caring, pristine, and museum-like atmosphere. Thereby, the assumed village of origin is constructed as a sacred place that symbolizes the community bond based on spirituality, shared norms and values. Important imperatives are hospitality and generosity, as highlighted in a story about a Kfarsghabi world traveler. When he visited the village in 1977, he discovered a place that had been completely spared by the Lebanese civil war. The exhibition organized by the AKA in Sydney in 2012 included quotes from his later published travel-blog and some photos taken with his Kodak 110 Instamatic:

> *I didn't think anyone would know of my family. … I had only planned to stay an afternoon. I never left Kfarsghab for 21 days. Kfarsghab became one of the best times of my travels. I was tired, and sick, and starving, and had almost no money. They looked after me like a father and a mother. I fattened up on the best food I have ever eaten. … I thought I would be a stranger, but instead I found family.* (AKA Exhibition Board, Sydney, 2012)

[9] Defamatory articles about Kfarsghabis in the local press are criticized, e.g., in the AKLA News, for their non-representativeness and the damage they inflict on the community.

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When Kfarsghabis recount this story, they emphasize that as soon as villagers found out that "the stranger" was a "Kfarsghabi", they refused to let him return to his hotel in the neighboring village. This underlines the unconditional group cohesion linked to assumed kinship relations.

Thanks to such stories, community members of all ages consider themselves not only as American(-Lebanese) or Australian(-Lebanese), but more specifically as Lebanese from Kfarsghab. For many, the perception of descending from Kfarsghab is associated with a feeling of being blessed and special as the headline shows. In addition, other elements from various spheres (e.g., language, nationality, religion, sports) make up hybrid personal and collective identities that overlap to varying degrees.

Among the cultural elements, Lebanese food has a special meaning for many as memories are associated with it. The story of why a hillside next to Coogee Beach in Sydney is nicknamed "Kibbeh Hill" reads as follows: Many families from Kfarsghab used to gather there and eat kibbeh, a dish of raw meat, onions, spices, and parsley. Today, the AKA is trying to revive this meeting place on various holidays by circulating the appeal "Back to Kibbeh Hill" on social media and on its website. Whether Kfarsghabis actually used to bring raw meat is not known and doubted due to the required cooling process: "My parents never brought Kibbeh to the beach. But I think maybe it was more of a myth. They probably called it Kibbeh hill because it sounds Lebanese" (J. Hanna, personal communication, December 26, 2014).

Figure 2

The Village Kfarsghab in North Lebanon

(photographed by M. J. Karner, 2014, July 2)

Societal Inclusion: "He worked extremely hard and achieved great success in his business ventures" (Hanna, 2015b).

By telling stories about successful individuals in business, sport, politics, science, and the military, Kfarsghabis express that they participate as active citizens engaged in shaping society. The narratives emphasize their integration efforts, patriotism, and identification with American and Australian society.

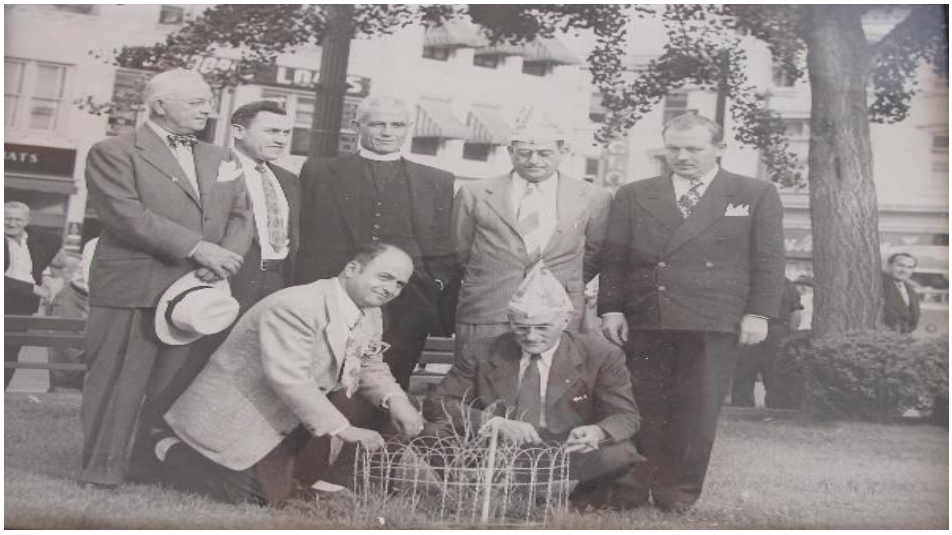
Stories about a businessman known as "beloved godfather" or "the patriarch" (see Figure 3) in Easton exemplify how role models are constructed. The businessman distributed beer since the end of prohibition in 1933, was on the board of directors of several companies and became one of the largest landowners who profited from selling more than 20 of his properties to the city of Easton during urban renewal (Kenna, 1983b). His moral attitudes are remembered as decisive for his success and projected onto his ancestry:

> *Mr. Baurkot soon put to work the energy and drive he brought with him from Lebanon, taking advantage of every opportunity and succeeding in everything he tried. His wisdom, goodness, and generous personality earned him respect and affection in commercial, social and political circles. … He is known to State and Local Government authorities, Ambassadors and Lebanese Clergy all over the U.S.A.* (AKLA, 1971, p. 10)

He sponsored Kfarsghabis to emigrate and assisted them in the new country, as he emphasizes: "I helped them to find jobs, homes. Every one of them. And I didn't charge nobody any money to do it. Not one penny" (Kenna, 1983c, para. 8). Moreover, he is known for having supported many organizations and non-profit clubs in Easton, received recognition in local media and was honored as an "Outstanding Lebanese Immigrant" by the "Lebanese American Cultural Society" in Philadelphia in 1963.

Figure 3

Raymond Baurkot (bottom left) Planting a Cedar Tree in Easton's Centre Square in the 1960s



(photographed by M. J. Karner, 2015, August 2)

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Paradigmatic narratives like this emphasize his ongoing commitment to the community while obscuring blemishes pointed out only by external journalists. Since many others were indebted to his financial and humanitarian favors, they didn't criticize him publicly, e.g., for the bad condition of his downtown properties (Kenna, 1983b). Stories like the one presented about the community leader Baurkot exemplify the American Dream and serve to enhance the perceived value of the group. Influenced by this are personal narratives of members that highlight successes and hide failures.

In Sydney, several newspaper articles about individual achievements of Kfarsghabis were on display during the exhibitions organized by the AKA in 2007 and 2012. One example is the story of Rosi O'Brian who is believed to be the first Kfarsghabi and probably the first Lebanese who bought property in Parramatta. According to the family records, she arrived in Australia in 1898 after a three-month steamship voyage. She exemplifies one of the "ventured women" who left her husband and children in Lebanon. It is remembered that when she was asked by the customs officer for her name, she replied in Arabic "Rosie bin Broheen." This sounded to his "Australian ear" as "Rosie O'Brian" and was noted on her official papers. The AKA exhibition presented her hawker's license and alien card. Particular attention is paid to the anecdote that after arriving she walked over 600 miles from Sydney to Toowoomba. Newspaper articles about her legacy appeared in both years after the exhibition (Cameron, 2007; Petrinic, 2012). To pay tribute to her courage and determination, her great-grandson decided to run 21 consecutive marathons in 21 days in 2009. The 28-year-old financial advisor, who was not a runner before, hoped to raise 60,000 AUD for Spinal Cure Australia with the support of local businesses and the community. His endeavor reached media attention in several local papers (Queensland Here I Come… on Foot, 2009; Walker, 2008).

Figure 4

Exhibition of Artifacts Commemorating James Saad

(photographed by J. Hanna, 2012, November 22, reproduced with her permission)

The exhibition in 2012 also recounted the story of James Saad based on information taken from an oral history interview with him. He was one of allegedly 23 Kfarsghabis who joined the Australian Army during World War II (see Figure 4): "On many occasions, during his deployment in Palestine and Syria, James was called upon to go under cover as a local to obtain certain intelligence information. He would dress in Middle Eastern attire, utilize his Arabic language skills and handsome Lebanese looks and would socialize with the locals to find out certain war information to assist the Australian Army and its allies during WWII" (AKA Exhibition Board, Sydney, 2012).

After his discharge from the army, he was very active in organizing and leading the ANZAC Day marches in Sydney each year for his battalion. In a newspaper article about the 2005 march, where James Saad is depicted carrying his battalion flag, he was given a say and explains that he lied about his age and name so that the Australian army would take him. He said that he was 21 instead of 18 and mentioned an "Anglo name". Yet, once he was in uniform, he changed his name back to his Lebanese one (Walker, 2005). Kfarsghabis value his engagement to date: "He's an example of… even though he's Lebanese, he wanted to fight under the Australian flag" (J. Hanna, personal communication, December 27, 2014). Such legendary tales about individuals express the communities' pride of being patriotic Australian without giving up their ethnic identification.

Discussion: Individual Efforts of (Re)producing Narratives to Promote Group Cohesion and Societal Acceptance

The above analysis intended to provide insight into the broad range of actors involved in the (re)production of collective narratives and their motivations. While previous studies mainly focus on writers, artists and activists noticed by external audiences, this study reveals four types of members crucial for the self-representation of a diasporic community:

- *Community librarians* archive information about common events and happenings to promote awareness of a collective identity. They apply (quasi-)scientific methods (e.g., interviews, secondary data research) to generate knowledge, use tools (e.g., genealogy software), and engage with members. Building on this, they share information digitally via websites and Facebook pages as well as analogously with the help of exhibitions and printed magazines.
- *Storytellers* communicate their knowledge with the talent to anchor events spatially and embed them in historical contexts. They often prefer oral over written forms of communication to reach members directly face-to-face. Deliberately, they highlight collective and individual achievements and help construct role models for members.
- *External messengers* prepare material for the public and act as gatekeepers for journalists and external researchers to increase the public visibility of the group. They value the interest and generated knowledge by non-members because the output revives the community discourse.
- *Social reporters* document significant social events and achievements of members. By using innovative, digital technologies and by setting access restrictions, they (re)define who can participate in the digital exchange.

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The following applies to all the described roles: They can not only be taken on by different members at the same time, but quite often, one individual performs several roles. The emphasized goal of engagement is to preserve elements of the communities' ethnic identity and its associated norms and values that change over time. By sharing narratives not only with old, but also with new members, they prevent the community from disintegration. Compared to actors from the cultural scene who consciously produce and stage their works to counter negative stereotypes (Alshetawi, 2020; Müller-Funk, 2020; Naous, 2020), these members contribute to changing the essentialist beliefs and stigmatizations of society rather unconsciously as a side effect. Thus, their commitment is primarily driven by the dissolution tendency of their diasporic community, whose members are successfully making economic, political, cultural, and social contributions to "host societies" that have become their societies.

Moreover, the content analysis of the collective narratives of the Kfarsghab community shows a differentiated picture that is compatible with the five types of narratives widely studied but goes beyond (1) stories of commonality, (2) identity stories, (3) stories of nostalgia, (4) victim narratives and (5) counter narratives. Collective narratives of the Kfarsghabi diasporic community can be grouped according to the core themes "solidarity", "identity" and "inclusion" leading to the following effects:

- *Mutual understanding* is emphasized by a large part of stories that convey the implicit imperatives and values of the group. Stories that idealize the solidarity and mutual trust teach adolescents and newcomers that members always have to support each other. The knowledge acquired and the adoption of solidarity practices allow outsiders who have experienced a different socialization to become members of a specific diasporic community regardless of their actual descent. The inclusion of new members counteracts dissolution tendencies and leads to the constant change of communities in view of composition, opinions, loyalties, and expertise all influenced by societal trends.
- *Ethnic differentiation* is expressed in stories that remind members of common ethnic identity elements. For the community under study, the central element is an assumed place of origin, to which most members associate their ancestry. It is constructed as a sacred place with a special atmosphere distinguished by integrity of nature and community. Kfarsghab is a symbol for the distinctiveness of the diasporic community that members are proud of. Further shared identity elements are often linked to the alleged common roots and reinstate cohesion. However, members identify to varying degrees with elements like food, festivals, language, or religion. These elements must also be understood as instruments of demarcation to sustain the differentiation between sub-ethnic groups perceived as homogeneous by outsiders. Other stories reveal multiple identities of members, their involvement in various communities, and their national and local identification.
- The aspiration for and acquisition for *societal acceptance* is voiced in narratives that highlight the belonging to the new society. With the help of life stories that represent the American or Australian Dream, individuals are portrayed as heroes and serve as role models for community members. Such paradigmatic narratives provide guidance to members who align their personal narratives and objectives accordingly. As a result, similar themes are reproduced, especially the ambition for economic success, family awareness and community involvement.

Overall, the stories presented illustrate that cultural elements, such as Lebanese food, dancing, and music (Naff, 1992), are only the visible elements used to construct the collective identity of Kfarsghabis. More significant is the self-understanding as emotional community of choice as well as the high degree of identification with the residence societies.

Conclusion: Collective Narratives as a Tool for Growth, Change and Recognition of Diasporic Communities

Collective narratives of diasporic communities can be described as myths or legends because they reaffirm the norms and values of the group in question regardless of their actual truth content (Assmann, 2007). Many stories convey normative directives and aspirations of the group and thus provide orientation to old and new members. Other stories reinstate the ethnic identity by expressing commonality in view of origin, religious beliefs, kinship, language, and further elements, whereby certain exceptional elements are emphasized to differentiate from other sub-ethnic groups. In this way, on the one hand, members continue to believe in ancestry from the same place or territory; on the other hand, people with a divergent ancestry learn about important elements of a community's identity and its imperatives through stories. Hence, newcomers who adopt solidarity practices can become members that introduce new trends and approaches. This is one reason why diasporic communities and their narratives constantly change. Whether a community endures or disintegrates depends on its adaptability to external influences.

The analysis also illustrated that paradigmatic stories (Linde, 2000) reflect societal expectations and efforts to be accepted in the new homelands. In particular, success stories represent the diasporic community in a way that contrasts dominant negative stereotypes and ascribed monoethnic identities with the potential to counteract anti-Arab sentiments. Compared to prominent writers, artists and activists, individuals that act as community librarians (Wenger et al., 2002), storytellers, external messengers, and social reporters (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2013) are primarily driven by concerns that the community is endangered by disintegration. The continuous development and expansion of digital tools will further facilitate the process of (re)producing collective narratives. Such diasporic communities will continue to strive in the twenty-first century, where members continue to spread collective narratives and thereby strengthen the solidarity and recognition among members worldwide.

At the overall societal level, diasporic communities are supportive, identity-building and enriching components and form a counterweight to tendencies of exclusion and marginalization (Hashemi et al., 2019). Policy makers in nation states with a pluralistic society should acknowledge the existence of sub-ethnic groups and their diasporic networks as economic, social and cultural resources. Consequently, they should support the establishment, maintenance, and development of community associations and information platforms. To develop the most suitable advisory services, measures, and funding programs, an active exchange between representatives of migrant-initiated organizations and decision makers is needed at eye level. In this process, listening to collective narratives can be useful in understanding the social, cultural, economic, psychological, and legal needs and problems of migrants and their descendants. An adequate treatment promotes feelings of acceptance and belonging of community members to the respective residence societies and contributes to their empowerment and social responsibility.

Providing suitable political, legal and financial assistance to diasporic communities can be advantageous at a broad scale. Initiatives by members range from cultural and educational events to charitable, voluntary, and civil society commitment and advocacy work that can benefit the general public. In addition, it is precisely the intercultural competence and social relations of

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individuals with diasporic networks that make them indispensable partners for municipalities and cities, especially with regard to a successful integration of refugee migrants. In contrast, it is not expedient to strive for the assimilation of immigrants and to reject any form of community building out of concern for ethnic isolation. Political measures associated with this stimulate xenophobia and Islamophobia in the population and stir up fears of foreign infiltration combined with the loss of a supposed culture of their own.

Journalists can make their contribution by reporting more extensively than in the past on activities, charitable initiatives, and the self-image of diasporic communities instead of focusing on negative headlines. By doing so, they promote intercultural understanding, mutual acceptance and recognition which is becoming increasingly important in view of the rising xenophobic movements in diverse societies of western nation states.

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