
AN ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL
AND MINORITY IDENTITY
RELATIONALITY: THE CASE
OF ANTIOCHIAN EASTERN
ORTHODOX COMMUNITY IN
ISTANBUL

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Should I have the same religious identity in order to claim a land of my own? (36, Woman)

Introduction

This article focuses on the Antiochian Orthodox¹ minority living in Istanbul and their perceptions of the relation between their ethno-religious and national identities in Turkey, a Sunni-Muslim majority country. To date, the subject has attracted little scholarly attention or systematic analysis. This oversight in the field is arguably driven for the most by the thorny issue of state-religion relations in Turkey. A secular state since the founding of the republic in 1923, Turkey is nevertheless a Muslim-majority country and the question of the rights of its non-Muslim citizens has proved remarkably difficult to resolve.

¹ There are insufficient data regarding the precise population of Antiochian Orthodox at present although sources estimate 5000. The Treaty of Lausanne (1923) – which was the final WWI settlement, in this case between the Allied powers and the successor state of the defeated Ottoman empire – established the legal basis of religious minority rights in Turkey. No particular group of non-Muslims was explicitly favoured in the Treaty, leaving the Antiochian Orthodox and Istanbul Rum Orthodox communities with equal minority status. For the rights of non-Muslims under the Treaty, see Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Lausanne Peace Treaty,” accessed April 20, 2014, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty-part-i_political-clauses.en.mfa.

Despite this secular order, Islam has always played an important role in the symbolic formation of Turkish identity. Indeed, modern state-society relations have remained embedded in the framework of national consciousness that reflects the Sunni-Islam identity of the majority of the population at large. In reality, Turkey has never been as homogeneous as the official discourse and historiography would have us believe. But it is only comparatively recently – the last thirty years or so – that researchers have been able to publish research openly questioning this hegemony. Even as the diversity of Turkish communities at the macro level is increasingly laid bare by research, a close of look at the ever-shrinking non-Muslim communities themselves at the micro level reveals much heterogeneity. They include economic and cultural – not to mention gender – differences that prevent them acting collectively most of the time.

Compared to other non-Muslim groups², the Antiochian Orthodox community is seldom studied in the social sciences. More to the point, qualitative research focusing on how this minority group conducts its daily life is practically non-existent. Therefore, this study problematizes how this particular ethno-religious minority community has drawn the relationship between national and minority identities in comparison to other non-Muslim minority communities. In this context, this study asks the following questions:

- How do Antiochian Orthodox people based in Istanbul construct their national identity as a minority group?
- Do they link their ethno-religious identity to their national identity, and if so how?
- Do they consider their ethno-religious identity as an important factor in defining their national identity?

² Along with the Rum (Istanbul Greek Orthodox community), Jewish and Armenian communities, the body of non-Muslims living in Turkey today is a diverse group composed of Syriacs, Chaldeans, Maronites, Bulgarian and Georgian Orthodox, Levantines, Antiochian Orthodox, etc. The Treaty of Lausanne does not mention any non-Muslim communities by name. Thus, despite the extreme limitations and obstacles even they have encountered, only the most well-positioned – the Rum, Jewish and Armenian communities – have been able to benefit from the rights granted to non-Muslims in the Treaty.

- Is it possible to create a supranational (i.e. citizenship-level) identity for minorities in Turkey? If so, what are the obstacles to the construction of such a supranational identity?

We have sought to answer these questions by analysing narratives collected through in-depth interviews conducted between 2016 and 2017. This field research was part of a research project conducted by the authors titled “A study on Identity Perception of Antiochian Orthodox based in Istanbul and Their Relationality with the Istanbul Rum Community”.³ The data collected through this fieldwork will be presented in the light of the theoretical debates within the citizenship, nationalism and secularism literatures.

Although there has been a remarkable increase in research on non-Muslim minorities over the last 20 years, scholarly works focusing on the sociology of daily life of non-Muslims are limited. Moreover, the qualitative work on Antiochian Orthodox based in Istanbul forms a minor share of this small literature.⁴ These studies have also tended, ironically enough, to render the Antiochian Orthodox community invisible and even silent while at the same time marking the group out clearly from the (significantly larger) Istanbul Rum Community.⁵ As it is indicated in a recent study, official Rum discourse disregards the existence of Antiochian Orthodox in their daily life in Istanbul.⁶ Considering this gap in the literature, this article aims to question how the relationship between ethno-religious and national identity is constructed. It draws on interviews conducted with Antiochian Orthodox of various ages, socio-economic classes and genders. In so doing, it also contributes to the identity and citizenship studies in the minority literature.

³ This study, which partially includes data used for this article, will be published as a book chapter by İstos Publishing by January 2018.

⁴ For the recent studies in this field see: Anna Maria Aslanoğlu, Foti Benlisoy and Haris Rigas, *İstanbul Rumları: Bugün ve Yarın* (İstanbul: İstos Yayınları, 2012); Parthena Gioltzoglou Polina, “Making a Home: Symbolic Representations of Domestic Space Among The Christian Orthodox Antiocheans In Istanbul,” (Masters Thesis, İstanbul: Sabancı Üniversitesi, 2014); Tevfik Usluoğlu, *Arap Hristiyanlar* (Ankara: Ütopya Yayınları, 2012).

⁵ The definition of “İstanbul Rum Community” includes those (at least) third and fourth generation Orthodox Christians born and grown up in Istanbul who speak Greek.

⁶ Polina, “Making a home,” 19.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. We will first detail the social profile of Antiochian Orthodox along with their historical background in Antioch and its surroundings. This will be followed by an outline of the methodology of the study followed by a statement of the main issue of this research and an analytical assessment based on the conceptual and theoretical background.

Istanbul-based Antiochian Orthodox: Social Profile and Historical Background

Even though Antiochian Orthodox are considered part of the Istanbul Rum Orthodox community due to their religious identity, they are in practice differentiated based on their mother tongue and socio-cultural status. The large-scale migration of Antiochian Orthodox from their traditional homelands in Turkey's southeast to Istanbul during the last 20 years has cast a bright light on this differentiation (and the discrimination that often comes with it).

Since the question of religious belonging has been excluded from the population census since 1965, no certain data on the population of ethno-religious communities in Turkey exists. Similarly, different sources make varying claims about the population of Antiochian Orthodox. In his book *Rums in Turkey*, Akgönül estimated the Antiochian Orthodox living in Istanbul in 2007 at between 500 and 1,000.⁷ A more recent study has put the number at 800.⁸ According to the head of the Antiochian Orthodox community, while the total number of Antiochian Orthodox in the Hatay–Mersin region in southeast Turkey number around 8000, the first and second generation who migrated to Istanbul from the 1970s and 1980s are between 1500 and 2000.⁹

⁷ Samim Akgönül, *Türkiye Rumları: Ulus-Devlet Çağından Küreselleşme Çağına Bir Azınlığın Yok Oluş Süreci* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2007), 346-347.

⁸ Aslanoğlu et. al., *İstanbul Rumları*, 223-233.

⁹ Fadi Hurigil, "Hatay ve Mersin Bölgesinde Yaşayan Hristiyan Cemaatlerin Yapısı, Sorunları ve Çözüm Önerileri [Demography, Problems of Christian Communities Living in Hatay and Mersin Region and Suggestions for Solution]," in *Azınlık Vatandaşları-Eşit Vatandaşlar: Rum Cemaati Üzerine Çalışma Metinleri* (İstanbul: Rum Cemaat Vakıfları Destekleme Derneği, 2010), 107.

Although Antiochian Orthodox are considered to be a part of the Istanbul Rum Orthodox Community, they are under the authority of Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch – located in Damascus – which acknowledges the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople as *primus inter pares*. Thus, language appears to be the main objective axis of division Istanbul Rums and Antiochian Orthodox, who are in fact part of the same confessional community (i.e. they share a common liturgy and rites). While Istanbul Rums speak Greek as their mother tongue, the Antiochians' mother tongue is Arabic.¹⁰

The Arabic-speaking Orthodox belong to an ethno-religious community whose regions of origin are Hatay, Iskenderun and Mersin in the southeast of the country. Hatay is the present Turkish name given to Antioch (Antakya in Turkish). The region that includes Antioch was subject to Arabification policies until 1098 A.D., when the crusades began. Following a short period under Christian rule, Arabification of the region continued after the region was conquered by the Mamluk Sultanate in 1298.¹¹ The Orthodox based in the region first became Ottoman subjects in 1516 with the Battle of Marj Dabiq and have since then continued to exist as culturally Arab Christians.¹²

According to various sources, a close relationship between the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Patriarchate of Constantinople during the Ottoman era was preserved until the 1890s,¹³ when the rise of Arab nationalist movements in the region saw the election of an Arab Patri-

¹⁰ This is mostly the case among the first and second generations of Antiochians, some of whom were born in Mandate Syria and whose educational and cultural inheritance derives from there. The third generation of Antiochians (those born after 1970), in contrast, were all born in Turkey have been wholly assimilated into the Turkish language and society through education. Thus, unlike their parents and grandparents they generally do not speak Arabic, even at home.

¹¹ Bruce Masters, *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World: The Roots of Secterianism* (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 49-50.

¹² Haris Theodorelis-Rigas, "Model Citizens or a Fifth-column? Greek Orthodox (Rum) Communities in Syria and Turkey between Secularism and Multiculturalism," in *Diasporas of the Modern Middle East: Contextualizing Community*, ed. Gorman, A. and Kasbarian, S. (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 38.

¹³ Usluoğlu, *Arap Hristiyanlar*.

archate in Damascus.¹⁴ As a result of these developments, the churches in Adana, Mersin and Tarsus decided to declare their independence from the Patriarchate of Antioch, demanding to join the Patriarchate of Constantinople instead.¹⁵ Although this conflict between the patriarchates of Antioch and Constantinople – in many ways a product of the clash of 19th century Greek and Arab nationalisms within the context of the late Ottoman transformations – was never resolved due to intensified warfare occurring in the region. At this time, the Greek nationalist discourse increasingly referred to the local Arab Christians as *Greeks speaking a different language (Başka dilli Yunanlılar)*.¹⁶

In July 1939, the surrounding Hatay region was ceded to Turkey from the French Syrian Mandate and Antioch itself was renamed Hatay. The Antiochian Orthodox along with the other ethnicities in the region thus became Turkish citizens, and their religious centre, Patriarchate of Antioch in Damascus remained within Syrian borders. The Orthodox community of this region today continues to be a part of the Patriarchate of Antioch as well as recognising the authority of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople but performs religious rites in Arabic (whereas Orthodox use Greek).

Antiochian Orthodox began to migrate to Istanbul in the 1940s in search of better educational, occupational and economic opportunities. This migration wave was redirected overseas from the early 1980s. While the community spread to various countries around the world – including France, Sweden, Australia, South America – the majority of the community preferred to go to Germany as a part of that country's guest worker program. Those who emigrated to Istanbul as a part of the first wave preferred to settle together in the same neighbourhoods with their relatives who then helped them find jobs. Those who came with

¹⁴ Church of Greece, "Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East: Historical Overview," accessed August 22, 2016, http://www.ecclesia.gr/english/news/antiocheia/historical_overview.htm; J. G. Melton and M. Bauman, eds., *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices* (ABC-CLIO, 2010), 1253.

¹⁵ Foti Benlisoy and Stefo Benlisoy. *Türk Milliyetçiliğinde Katedilmemiş Bir Yol 'Hristiyan Türkler' ve Papa Efim* (İstanbul: İstos Yayınları, 2016), 63.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 249

the first wave mostly settled in the neighbourhoods surrounding the churches belonging to Istanbul's Rum community.

Examining the socio-cultural profiles of the Antiochian Orthodox one also realizes that the education level of the first generation of Antiochian Orthodox who migrated to Istanbul is quite low.¹⁷ According to one study, 70 % of the Antiochian Orthodox in Istanbul experience financial difficulties, generally working for low wages within the church community – either as sacristy workers or as security guards in the churches, schools or other buildings belonging to the Istanbul Rum Community.¹⁸ This has produced first and second-generation Antiochian Orthodox with lower cultural and economic capital, which means they are considered different from the Istanbul Rum community in terms of their social status. One measure of this is the fact that the share of the Arabic-speaking Antiochian Orthodox in schools that belong to the Istanbul Rum community is increasing day by day.¹⁹

Against this background, this study will examine how Antiochian Orthodox based in Istanbul approach their national identity, develop the linkage between their ethno-religious identity with national identity, and question if it is possible for non-Muslims to build a citizenship-based identity. In the remainder of the article, we will provide brief information regarding the fieldwork and later analyse the data derived from the field in the light of the research questions set earlier for this study.

Methodology

Among the burgeoning oral history research that has been published in general in Turkey over the last 15 years, only a handful of memory studies focusing on non-Muslim minority communities have been un-

¹⁷ Theodoretis-Rigas, "Model Citizens or a Fifth-column," 47

¹⁸ Aslanoğlu et. al., *İstanbul Rumları*, 223-233.

¹⁹ According to oral history research drawing on in-depth interviews conducted between 2013 and 2016 as a part of doctoral dissertation fieldwork, today there are 2500 to 3000 Rum Orthodox living in Istanbul most of whom are above 60 years old. It is estimated that around 1500 of these people are, in fact, Antiochian Orthodox. Özgür Kaymak, "İstanbul'da Rum, Yahudi ve Ermeni Cemaatlerinin Sosyo-Mekânsal İnşası" (PhD diss., İstanbul Üniversitesi Kamu Yönetimi ve Siyaset Bilimi, 2016).

dertaken.²⁰ Worse still, few if any of these studies focus on the Antiochian Orthodox community. Their small share among the other religious minority communities – as well as their being scattered across different parts of Turkey – their geographical distance to the centre, and their introverted characteristics are the main reasons for this absence in the literature. Therefore, this community and their daily life routines have not received fair attention in the academic literature.

This study aims to fill part of this gap in the social science literature by focusing on Istanbul-based Antiochian Orthodox of different generations, gender and social class. In this context, we conducted interviews with 17 men and women who immigrated to Istanbul at different time periods. The universe of the fieldwork was kept limited to eight female and nine male Antiochian Orthodox who emigrated to Istanbul a while ago and who either continue living in Istanbul or left to go abroad. In the selection of the interviewees we tried to maintain a gender balance, while the group can be roughly categorized in the following age ranges: 20–30, 30–40 and 40–50 year-olds. It is also important to mention that the interviewees were specialized in different occupations. Only one of the interviewee described herself as a housewife. The others include a psychologist, a CEO (Chief Executive Officer), a journalist, a marketing expert, and an academic researcher. Among the male interviewees, there are academics, journalists along with merchants and jewellers.

To be able to focus on the socio-cultural differences among the Antiochian Orthodox community we also aimed to reach community members of different social classes. Therefore, while most of the interviewees belong to the middle class, some of them belong to upper-middle or even upper socio-economic class. One of the difficulties encountered during the data collecting process was to approach members of the communities from the lower socio-economic classes. Although we tried to overcome this obstacle through the snowball technique (via our existing interviewees and our social networks) we experienced serious

²⁰ For general information on memory and oral history studies in Turkey see: Leyla Neyzi, “Oral History and Memory Studies in Turkey,” in *Turkey’s Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Kerslake, C., Kerem Öktem and Robins P. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 443-459; Esra Özyürek, *Hatırladıklarıyla ve Unuttuklarıyla Türkiye’nin Toplumsal Hafızası*. 2. bs. (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2012).

difficulties in reaching these people. When minority status combines with poverty and lack of education it can reinforce these disadvantages and lead to religious, ethnic and class-based discrimination.²¹

The interviewees were found through snowball sampling. Due to the sensitivity of the topic at hand, individuals' names are not revealed throughout the text. Instead, a coding method commonly found in sensitive qualitative studies is embraced. Thus, narrations quote interviews and use a categorization scheme including the interviewee's gender and age (35 (Age), F/M (Gender)). The in-depth interviews were designed thematically through semi-structured questions. The qualitative approach employed also revealed Antiochian Orthodox experience through the voices of the community members, as well as the construction of the link between ethno-religious and national identities through their daily life practices. Although it is not possible to achieve a 'perfect' profile of Antiochian Orthodox based in Istanbul – and this study does not promise to offer one – we still believe it makes a significant contribution to our knowledge about Antiochian Orthodox in Turkey.

National and Minority Identity Relationality in Turkey

The article is indeed the first of its kind in the citizenship and minority literatures to cover Antiochian Orthodox. It thus questions the national identity perceptions of the Antiochian Orthodox people as well as their construction of the link between national and ethno-religious identities. However, this construction cannot be separated from the general setting – the controversial design of secularism in Turkey that has led religious minorities to experience limited freedom of religion under the shadow of Islamic identity.

Freedom of religion has been a very sensitive issue since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, despite the principle of secularism being stated in the country's constitution since 1937. This is especially evident in considering the status of non-Muslim minorities.²² Contrary

²¹ Kaymak, "İstanbul'da Rum, Yahudi ve Ermeni."

²² Anna Maria Beylunioglu, "Freedom of Religion in Turkey between Secular and Islamic Values, The Situation of Christians," (PhD diss., Florence: European University Institute, 2017), 1.

to the expectations of the early Turkish secularists – who assumed that as Turkey became more civilized and modern, it would also become more secular – Islam has remained the effective symbolic force and a strong cultural referent in the construction of Turkish national identity.²³ İnalçık has also underlined the fact that Turkish secularism and its relationship to Islam represented a continuity between the Ottoman state and modern Turkey in the sense that “the temporal authority supersedes the religious authority.”²⁴ Turkish modernity is based on secular premises. However, as Türkmen has stated, the aim of the Turkish form of secularism has never been to accommodate the political authority and Islam, it has rather been to maintain religious authority under the reign of secularism.²⁵ For non-Muslim communities, thus, secularism in Turkey appears, ironically enough, to be heavily “Islamic”, thereby restricting the practical applicability of the principles of universality and impartiality.²⁶

Despite all the reforms undertaken in the name of secularism, religion remained a fundamental disjunctive element which led to an *us versus them* divide within Turkish society. Along with secularisation processes in Turkey, the state neither remained impartial to religion nor limited it to the private sphere, a core principle of laicism as espoused by political elites.²⁷ In practice, the state – especially since the 1980s – has promoted Sunni Islam as a kind of public theology even while implementing Westernization reforms.²⁸ Thereby, the institutionalization

²³ Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Nilüfer Göle, *Melez Desenler* (Hybrid Designs) (Istanbul: Metis, 2000); Binnaz Toprak, “The Religious Right,” in *Turkey in Transition*, ed. I.C. Schick and A.E. Tonak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²⁴ Halil İnalçık, “Osmanlı Hukukuna Giriş [Introduction to Ottoman Law],” *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* 13(2) (1958): 102-126.

²⁵ Buket Türkmen, “A Transformed Kemalist Islam or a New Islamic Civic Morality? A Study of ‘Religious Culture and Morality’ Textbooks in the Turkish High School Curricula,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29 (3) (2009): 381-397.

²⁶ E. Fuat Keyman, “Modernity, Secularism and Islam, The Case of Turkey,” *Sage, Theory, Culture and Society* Vol. 24(2) (2007): 225.

²⁷ Kaymak, “İstanbul’da Rum, Yahudi, Ermeni.”

²⁸ Nükhet Sandal incorporates the term public theologies as an analytical framework in order to discuss the obstacles set against the equality of Christian citizens of Turkey in public space. Nükhet Sandal, “Public Theologies of Human Rights and Citizenship: The Case of Turkey’s Citizenship,” *Human Rights Quarterly* Vol. 35, No. 3 (Ağustos 2013): 631-650.

of secularism has occurred alongside the marginalization of non-Muslim minorities.²⁹ As a result, given the close relation between Islam and Turkish national identity, non-Muslim Turkish are often led to feel like “second-class citizens” and face a constant struggle against exclusion from the system.

All of this is bound up in the legacy of modern Turkish state formation following the collapse of the Ottoman empire during the First World War. Non-Muslim ethno-religious identities carry regrettable stigmas that religious identities separate these Turkish citizens from the rest of the Turkish society. Along with the Ottoman principle of Muslim superiority over other “Peoples of the Book”, the memory of the supposed “treachery” of non-Muslim Ottoman subjects and the related Armenian genocide have left a mark on Turkey’s collective memory that make it impossible to separate religious and national identities³⁰ As Çağaptay and Beylunioglu have argued, today most Turks view Christianity as a challenge to their national identity because it stands as a threat to their nominal Islamic identity.³¹

As explained in details above, by not being a Muslim, non-Muslims are being excluded from Turkish national identity, which is followed by the perception of *communities that cannot be assimilated*. Therefore, Islam emerges with a very powerful symbolic and cultural role in the constitution of societal relations and social identity formations of

²⁹ Lerna Ekmekçioğlu, “Paradoks Cumhuriyeti: Milletler Cemiyeti’nin Azınlıkları Koruma Rejimi ve Yeni Türkiye’nin Üvey Vatandaşları,” *Toplum ve Bilim* 132 (2015): 106.

³⁰ In times of crisis or conflict given that people who have an ethnic, cultural or religious background that diverges from the “projected ethno-national identity” are in a position to “destabilize and disrupt the normativity of national cultural forms and practices” and “homogenous identities.” (H. Bhabha, “Cultural diversity and cultural differences,” in *The post-colonial studies reader* (2nd ed.), ed. B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, & H. Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2006); Tatjana Takseva and Agatha Schwartz, “Hybridity, ethnicity and nationhood: legacies of interethnic war, wartime rape and the potential for bridging the ethnic divide in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina,” *National Identities*, April 24, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2017.1298580>).

³¹ Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey, Who is a Turk?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 139; Beylunioglu, “Freedom of Religion,” 121.

Turkish people³² and differences on basis of religion become a tool to determine “foster children” aka non-Muslim citizens of the republic.³³

Antiochian Orthodox and their Ethno-religious and National Identity

As mentioned, religious identity forms the basis for most people in Turkey to construct a national identity. For the Antiochian Orthodox that we interviewed, this involves a double move for constructing citizenship. Interviewees first emphasize their ethno-religious background after which they highlight their Turkish citizenship. Since being Turkish is perceived as equivalent to being Muslim, Antiochian Orthodox have developed an identity definition that indicates that they are not Turkish by referring to their membership to a different ethno-cultural-religious community. As Frederik Barth has suggested, both an individual’s identity perception and others’ perception towards his or her identity matters in regard to ethnic groups and identity perceptions.³⁴ This study, drawing on Barth’s claims, argues that the perception of *not being an equal citizen* is an identity attributed to non-Muslims by the society at large. Antiochian Orthodox, therefore, tend to refer to Turkish citizenship / being a Turk not in the context of ethnicity, but instead as a cultural phenomenon in reference to geography, collective memory, language and culture.

The interviews also suggested that the main obstacle that prevents Antiochian Orthodox from adopting Turkish identity based on citi-

³² Fuat Keyman and Ahmet İçduygu. *Citizenship in a Global World: European Questions, Turkish Experiences* (London: Routledge, 2005).

³³ Ekmekeçioğlu, “Paradoks Cumhuriyeti,” 106; According to 1974 decision by the Council of State they defined non-Muslims as ‘foreign citizens’. This statement has also been repeated in 1988 at the article 5/j of the “Regulation for defence against sabotage” which included a referred to non-Muslims as “foreign citizens within the country and those who are of foreign ethnicity” in listing the possible categories that can make a sabotage attempt. In addition to that an administrative court also referred to a Rum from Turkey as “foreign citizen” on 17th April 1996. Elçin Aktoprak, “Bir Kurucu ‘Öteki’ Olarak: Türkiye’de Gayrimüslimler,” *İnsan Hakları Çalışma Metinleri*, 16 (Ankara, 2010), 44.

³⁴ Fredrik Barth, *Etnik Gruplar ve Sınırları [Ethnic Groups and Boundaries]* (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayınları, 2001).

zenship is the religion factor.³⁵ This confirms the existing research on minorities in Turkey, which emphasizes the importance of religious identification in defining national identity.³⁶ As quoted in the narration below, the Antiochian Orthodox considers the negative perception towards them as a discrimination against themselves which in many cases forces them to declare their identity and prove that they are *as Turkish as anyone else*.³⁷

“Yes, I am a Turk. I feel Turkish emotionally. In certain cases, I tried to convince my friends. Because in Turkey, even if they have also emigrated to this land, people do not accept the fact that Christians are also Turks. They equate being Muslim with being a Turk.” (32, W)

Üstel³⁸ also emphasizes that Turkish citizenship is not only defined by the legal and political relationship between individual and state, it is also constructed through systematic sacrifice, loyalty and servility. In Turkey, men and women build a personal citizenship definition through fulfilling their duties to the country. As the following example also reveals, this is also the case for non-Muslims. It is sometimes distinctly expressed and exemplified with such words as “fighting for one’s country and sacrificing your life for that purpose.” The aforementioned long-standing view that non-Muslims acted with Allied powers in the First World War to subjugate Anatolia (leading to a collective trauma) has seen non-Muslims stigmatized as faithless, infidel citizens of the republic. This official discourse has been reinforced through schooling, official history and by the statements of political elites. Therefore, non-

³⁵ A recent doctoral study analyzing the daily lives of non-Muslims in Istanbul has argued that these claims about the impact of religion on identity perception is valid for Rums, Jews and Armenians of various ages, socio-economic backgrounds and genders. Kaymak, “İstanbul’da Rum, Yahudi ve Ermeni.”

³⁶ Article 66, paragraph 1 of the Constitution states that ‘Everyone bound to the Turkish state through the bond of citizenship is a Turk’. Although Turkish officials insist that the usage of ‘Turk’ does not denote an ethnic identity, non-Muslims do not find this explanation credible and convincing.

³⁷ This finding is also valid for the first and second generation Rum, Jews and Armenians based in Istanbul, Ibid.

³⁸ Füsün Üstel, *Makbul Vatandaşlığın Peşinde: 2. Meşrutiyetten Bugüne Vatandaşlık Eğitimi*. 5. Baskı (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011), 327-328.

-Muslims have not been considered as “approved citizens” and constantly remain in need to prove their loyalty to the population at large:³⁹

“My father says, ‘your grandfather fought in the Independence War with Turkey; not with the British. Therefore, they were the Turks who were ready to sacrifice their life for this country.’ I was moved by this.” (32, W)

Almost all the interviewees defined their citizenship on the basis of rights and duties. In another word, similar to the population at large, voting at elections, doing military service, paying taxes were considered as being *good citizens* for non-Muslims. Non-Muslim citizens due to the reasons referred above, feel the urge to *be better citizens than ordinary Muslims* and *prove* this against the population at large.

“...but due to being a minority there is this ‘state of being obliged to be a good citizen.’ In order to make sure that people accept you, ‘you need to be good, you have to be a good citizen.’” (30, M)

Along with the definition of citizenship on the basis of rights and duties, it was also possible to observe the emotional bond to citizenship during the fieldwork. In reference to this bond some of the interviewees drew attention how they establish a strong symbolic bond with the codes embedded in the Turkish culture by featuring the emotional ties they harbour with the Turkishness:

“I laugh to the same things that a Turkish person laughs at... I do not laugh at an American’s joke! I am a Turk. I am a Turk but I am a Christian.” (52, F)

“I am a person of this land.” (28, M)

While for some Antiochian Orthodox being of Arab origin and being from Antioch are prominent in building a relationship between their ethno-religious and national identity, for others being an Orthodox Christian or a *Rum* Orthodox is the primary identification. They generally refer either to their Rum / Arab ethnic origins or being a Rum Orthodox / Orthodox, Christian / Greek Orthodox as their religious

³⁹ According to Mesut Yeğen another factor determining Turkishness other than religion is the loyalty to the country. Mesut Yeğen, *Müstakbel Türkten Sözde Vatandaşa*. 5. Baskı (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), 112.

identity before they complete this identification by emphasizing being *a citizen of Turkish Republic*. In that sense, there is a duality in the identification process: on one side there is the political-cultural identity, on the other side their ethnic identity, an intertwining of nationality and religious belonging, as emphasized by Smith.⁴⁰

Even when conscious group identities do coalesce, they do not necessarily do so around the ideas of shared descent or ethnicity. Some Antiochians seem to have rejected an “ethnic-based sense of identity” (Arabness/*Rumness*), celebrating instead a sense of group identity that is informed by a strong sense of geography and the immediate local (Antioch) belonging. In the following description “Turkish Republic / Turkish Citizen” does not include an ethnic connotation but indicates a political citizenship.

“For me, being able to preserve this distinct identity in a 99 % Muslim country is a kind of richness. Therefore, I want to underline that I say, I am of ‘Greek Arab Orthodox’ origin. In addition to that, I also mention that I hold a Turkish identity, in political sense. ‘Greek’ means religious identity to me. Then I say, ‘I am a Turkish citizen.’” (37, M)

“I say, I am from Antioch. I am against the term ‘Hatay’ because we were renamed Hatay much later. I am a Christian of Antiochian origin and I am from Turkey.” (28, F)

“I am a Turk. I am a Turk based on citizenship. But my religion is Christianity. If you go deeper, I am Rum Orthodox. If you go even deeper, I am an Arabic Speaking Rum Orthodox. Then they ask ‘how can this happen? The Rums here (in Istanbul) speak Greek’. The answer is that there was an [Arabic] acculturation since Antiochians are close to Syria.” (30, W)

These statements where interviewees describe themselves “...of ‘Greek Arab Orthodox’” origin by mentioning that they “hold a Turkish identity” afterwards is striking. It shows that – while there are those who prioritize ethno-religious identity over national identity, – the vast majority emphasizes ethno-religious and national aspects of their citizenship equally This can be observed from the following statement

⁴⁰ Anthony D. Smith, *Milli Kimlik*. Çev: Bahadır Sina Şener. 7. Baskı (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), 40.

made by two different interviewees: “I am a Turk as a citizen. But my religion is Christianity.” (31, F; 24, F)

Another observation that can be drawn from the fieldwork is the fact that the way that Antiochian Orthodox construct identity-citizenship varies according to age, socio-cultural and educational background. Two of the female interviewees’ families belong to the middle and upper middle class; they came to Istanbul to attend university and decided to stay in Istanbul afterwards. One of these interviewees describes their identity as based on “being from Antioch”. Another interviewee whose family is from *Samandağ*, Antioch talked about his / her identity perception as being *Antiochian Arab Orthodox*, thus emphasizing geography and geography-related ethnicity. According to this narrative, being an Antiochian Arab Orthodox signifies having a common diet and musical culture as well as a distinct language, customs and traditions deriving from spatial origins.

“There have been many who asked me where I was from after seeing my identity document. In such cases, I say ‘I am Antiochian Arab Christian’. Although we were born in Mersin, our diet, music, culture and language are Arabic. Even the meat we eat comes from a butcher in Antioch. When we were young (up to the age of about six), we would visit and stay two – three weeks with our family. But they do not understand when I say ‘Arab and ‘Christian’. Then I try to explain them that there were Arab Christians in that region during the Ottoman era. In the end, I say ‘I am also a citizen of Turkish Republic’. You see, you find yourself in a situation where you need to explain this just because your name is different [...]. My father is a leftist; once I asked him how should I express myself in such situations. He told me the right way is to tell people ‘I am a citizen of Turkish Republic’. But when people ask me I generally say ‘I am from Antioch, I am Christian.’” (35, F)

Another interviewee was born in the centre of Antioch states, however, she claims that she is neither an Arab nor a Rum. Instead, she feels Turkish and she prioritises Turkishness in her identity. According to her, the reason why she speaks Arabic instead of Turkish is linked to the fact that she grew up in a city bordering Syria. She admits that she is differentiated from the entire Turkish society because she is a member of a Christian community but she underlines that she feels *like a Turk*. It is possible to explain these two distinct narratives of two female

interviewees coming from the same ethno-religious background and speaking Arabic with the socio-cultural background.

“I am a Turk who can also speak Arabic. I know Arabic because we live at the Syrian border. I am Christian but I feel like a Turk. There are no question marks in regard to that. I feel deeply as a Turk. But I also feel people do not see me like that. According to them, the general perception is ‘you are a Christian but not a Turk’. My name is A.⁴¹ and [with this name] I can never be a Turk anyway!” (28, F)

The Turkishness constructed as a supra identity by the centralized state has weakened against globalization trends on one hand, and on the other hand, localization demands have led to the deconstruction of Turkish citizenship as a category. With the rise of the supra-identity versus sub-identity debate, it has been observed that especially the young generations tend to embrace the expression of *Türkiyeli* (from Turkey) instead of Turk (Turkish):

“I do not describe myself by saying ‘I am Turkish’ because it represents a nationalistic attitude and things become complicated [...]. When I am abroad, I tell them ‘I am from Turkey’. When they comment, ‘What an interesting name’, I say ‘I am from the Greek minority’.” (28, M)

Concluding Remarks

Since the founding of the republic, a constant reproduction of *us vs other* debate over religion on the state-society level has been observed. Ethno-religious and cultural traits are the main marker of Turkishness and national identity. The concept of non-Muslim thus also harbours an implicit hierarchy in that sense. In Turkey, the religions other than Islam are defined with reference to Muslimhood and are mostly equated with impiety and atheism. Marginalization of non-Muslims and the reproduction of the perception of ‘internal enemies’ and ‘foreign citizens’ through the national and public discourse as well as the educational system also contribute to increasing discriminatory attitude towards these groups.

⁴¹ A is a name which reveals her Christian identity. Kept anonymous by the authors.

Turkey has been going through an enormous process of change in the last decade, especially with regard to the political recognition of ethno-cultural and religious diversity, as well as to the transformation of the debates about the institution of national citizenship. During the Justice and Development Party (AKP) period, attempts made toward democratization of the country in the first half of the 2000s along with the European integration which were path-breaking in rupture of the homogeneity discourse. According to a recently completed doctoral study, the state still lacks a comprehensive legal framework guaranteeing freedom of religion on par with European norms; certain changes have nevertheless been observed in almost all aspects of freedom of religion, indicating an ongoing recasting process.⁴² Despite these reforms having taken place for the benefit of non-Muslim communities, Turkishness has continued to be defined on the basis of religion and equated with Islamic identity. Policies and regulations drawing on religion and language are still the main determinants of Turkish identity. As it has been argued, “non-Muslim minorities continued to experience enhancements of their rights and a relative expansion of their freedom of religion after 2011, as the recasting of the parameters of freedom of religion took shape through policies and practices inspired by the idea of freedom of religion, albeit conducted under the shadow of Islamic values.”⁴³ In this context, Kaya has also suggested that the Turkish national citizenship regime still bears strong ethno-cultural and ethno-religious elements originating from the Ottoman millet system despite the on-going process of Europeanization in different spheres of social and political life.⁴⁴

A close look at the construction of the relationship between national and minority identities of the Antiochian Orthodox living in Istanbul also reveals the predominant role played by Islam in the definition of national identity in Turkey. However, the perception of citizenship narrated by the Antiochian Orthodox may vary according to their age, socio-cultural background and gender. Almost all the interviewees

⁴² Beylunioğlu, “Freedom of Religion,” 224.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ayhan Kaya, “Ethno-religious narratives of citizenship in Turkey: Fabricating citizens through national education.” *Routledge* Vol.1, No.2 (2016): 119.

enjoy a two-pronged citizenship ideal by describing themselves with their ethno-religious identities such as Arab / Rum Orthodox, followed by an emphasis on their citizenship of the Turkish Republic. Since Turkishness has been equated with being a Muslim, the Antiochian Orthodox reproduce a discourse indicating their non-Turkishness and underlining the culture they belong to, in which their religious (Orthodox Christianity) and ethnic (Rum / Arab) identities are intertwined. Within this context, it would be possible to refer to a dual structure in terms of ethnic and political identity in construction of identity-citizenship relationship whereas they prefer to use “Arab / Rum Orthodox” and “citizens of Turkish Republic” expressions together to underline the fact that although they hold a distinct ethno-religious identity with respect to the ruling elite, they are still Turkish in terms of their political citizenship. When Antiochian Orthodox embrace the term Turkish Citizen / being a Turk, they do so not in its ethnic connotation but rather with cultural reference to its symbolic significance, including their belonging to the geography they were born into, a collective memory, and language (Turkish). With the stretching of the cultural identities both in global and local terms in the recent years, the new generation of interviewees tends to describe themselves as “being from Turkey” rather than “being a Turk”. However, the in-depth interviews still demonstrate that Istanbul-based Antiochian Orthodox of various ages, socio-cultural backgrounds and gender face obstacles derived from the religion factor in adopting a citizen-level Turkish identity.

To summarise, based on the Antiochian Orthodox group this study focused on, is it possible to talk about a national identity that would keep distance from ethno religious symbols? In other words, is it possible to overcome the ethno-religious divide and create a Turkishness in a supra-national sense? It would of course not be easy for a country of a Muslim majority to create a supra-national identity and internalize it on societal basis as well as perceiving non-Muslims as equal citizens of the republic. Primarily, in order to take a step forward towards this ideal, the discriminatory ethno-political discourses need to come to an

end following a reorganization of educational system⁴⁵ and redefinition of public memory which has referred to non-Muslim minorities as the “internal enemies” because national and ethnic identities are accomplished in the everyday practices and ordinary people simultaneously “negotiate and reproduce official versions of nationalistic discourses.”⁴⁶ Introducing new policies and regulations, an emphasis on ethnic diversity, religious pluralism, multi-ethnic tolerance and recognition of cultural hybridity is needed, along with engaging citizens in alternative forms of national identification that promote hybridity, inter-group connections, social trust and civic rather than ethnic politics and social engagement.

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⁴⁵ Textbooks in Turkey have long included negative misinformation about some Christians, representing them often as traitors. During the AKP period some discriminatory statements in textbooks have been removed or softened. However, Armenians and Rums (the Greek Orthodox community of İstanbul) continue to be viewed generally as a “treacherous” fifth column. Beylunioğlu, “Freedom of Religion,” 122.

⁴⁶ As Fox and Miller-Idriss have stated, ‘nation’ is a discursive construct, constituted largely by and through intersubjectively mediated claims that produce collective identity, mobilize people for collective projects and evaluate individuals and practices. Such communities operate based on excluding and marginalizing those defined and perceived as ‘other’. J. E. Fox and C. Miller-Idriss, “Everyday nationhood,” *Ethnicities* No. 8 (2008): 536–563.

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