# Hellenes and Arabs at Home and Abroad:

# Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo in Athens

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**Abstract**

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**Abstract:** In this thesis, I show how communities living together in relative equality in Aleppo, Syria, and fleeing the same conflict, experienced very different outcomes depending on which religious community they belonged to. Members of the Greek Orthodox Christian community from Aleppo who have moved to Athens reported that their new home is *exactly the same* as the community they left behind. Members of the Muslim community from Aleppo in Athens did not agree with this statement. Why do Greek Orthodox Christians fare so much better than their Muslim compatriots in Greece? I argue that this inequality is a result of opportunities and challenges created by policies instituted during the *great unmixing of peoples* in the early 20th century and the *refugee crisis* in the early 21st century. Greek Orthodox Christians are equal citizens in a secular Arab republic that values ecumenism and members of the Greek diaspora in a Hellenic republic that privileges Greek ethno-religious belonging. They are *Arab Hellenes*, equally Greek and Syrian. Drawing on data collected in interviews with members of the Greek Orthodox Syrian community in Greece, as well as Syrians of different faiths in other countries, I examine what went *right* for Greek Orthodox Syrians in Athens and suggest policy tools that government and civil society can use to create similar conditions for Muslim Syrians in Greece.

**Contents**

## 0.0 Executive Summary

The increase in migration to Europe over the last decade is often framed as an acute crisis. Although migrants come from all over the world, people fleeing the conflict in Syria have received heightened media, political and academic attention. The matter of integration and whether or not these migrants can adapt successfully to living in European societies is particularly contentious. In this thesis, I identify a group of migrants from Syria who have done just that, reporting that their new home is *exactly the same* as the community they left behind. These are members of the Greek Orthodox Christian community from Aleppo who have moved to Athens. After interviewing this community, I wondered why Greek Orthodox Christians from Syria fare so much better than their Muslim compatriots in Greece? I use ethnographic interviews and historical policy analysis (Hoefer, 2011) to investigate a successful case of migrant integration and suggest policy changes which would recreate the conditions of this success for other communities.

I found that the Greek Orthodox Church presents these migrants with a ready-made community that provides continuity, a support system and a sense of belonging. The culture of the community reinforces a narrative of historical Greekness already present in Greek Orthodox Arab traditions, and more recently strengthened by the efforts of the community's late leader, Metropolitan Paul Yazigi, to build ties between the Greek state and Aleppo's Greek Orthodox population. Greek immigration policy and the definition of Greek ethnicity embedded in Greek law allow them to migrate as diaspora Greeks and, therefore, avoid the stigmatizing labels of foreigner and refugee. They draw on existing transnational networks to secure visas and travel securely to their new homes. Meanwhile, Syrian policy toward regular emigrants preserves their property and civil rights as Syrian citizens, while those who flee as refugees are dispossessed.

Their legal status in both Greece and Syria, pre-existing transnational networks and their sense of belonging in Greece mean that Greek Orthodox Christians from Syria experience migration as a continuity, rather than a rupture. Although Syrian citizens of different faiths enjoyed relative civil and legal equality prior to the war and a shared sense of national identity as Arabs and Syrians, I argue that both Greek and Syrian institutions have privileged Greek Orthodox Christians over their Sunni compatriots. Syrians fleeing to Greece as asylum seekers risk death at sea, face imprisonment upon arrival and then enter a slow-moving asylum system which, in many cases, results in deportation to Turkey - often after several years in a camp or living precariously in Greek cities without the right to work or access healthcare or shelter.

Drawing on data collected in interviews with members of the Greek Orthodox Syrian community in Greece, as well as Syrians of different faiths in other countries, I examine what went *right* for Greek Orthodox Syrians in Athens. I argue that governments and civil society can use policy as a tool to create similar conditions for Muslim Syrians in Greece, suggesting several policy measures. Finally, I argue that Greek Orthodox Christians' ability to be both *Arabs* and *Hellenes* demonstrates that the real barrier to integration is not faith, foreignness or culture. Rather, it is nationalist ideologies and the legal frameworks built on them, the asylum system established after WWII and European media and governments' characterization of this migration as a 'crisis' to be dealt with using short-term policy measures to prevent those seeking safety and inclusion in Europe from finding it. The quiet success of Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo demonstrates that, for one community of migrants, life in Europe is 'exactly the same.'

# 1.0 Introduction

Greek Orthodox Christians in Syria are a small community, around 3% of the pre-war population, who have survived and, in many instances, thrived despite the conflict in Syria which began in 2011 (Pacini, 1996, pp 312-326; BBC, 2015). Although most did not migrate, the hundred who have moved to Athens represent a 'successful' case of integration, and policymakers can benefit from learning what went right for this community. In this paper I ask why Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo in Athens have fared better than their Muslim compatriots. In this section, I introduce my arguments and provide an overview of the thesis.

Given that the integration of immigrants and refugees is a key policy goal for both governments and non-governmental organizations, understanding the impact of policies on stakeholders is crucial to policy design. This paper uses Shore and Wright's (2011) concept of 'policy worlds' which present opportunities to certain communities and individuals, while excluding others. I argue that communities act strategically in response to these opportunities, shaping and shaped by policy. The opportunities and challenges created by later policies overlap with those of previous policies. The effect is cumulative -- shaping and shaped by communities and individuals acting strategically. The results of this interplay between policy, institutions and communal responses to them are overlapping levels of inclusion and exclusion that may constrain community members' strategies in response to later policy. Immigration and nationality policies enacted in one period of migration have unforeseen outcomes for communities in future migration events. In the case of Greek Orthodox Christians from Syria, this outcome aligns with integration policy goals.

It may seem intuitive that a group of migrants that share a language and religion with the population of their host country fare better than another group that does not. In this paper, I

confirm this assumption but challenge the notion that this is due to factors inherent to a group, religion or country. I argue that the mechanisms in policy, history and identity make this success possible. If that is the case, we can use similar mechanisms to increase integration in future migration events.

I argue that Greek Orthodox Christians from Syria are able to position themselves in Greek society as *Arab Hellenes*. I conclude that *Arab Hellenes* are uniquely situated in a privileged position with regards to both the conflict in Syria and the dual economic and migration crises in Greece. This study may contribute to the design of migration frameworks which provide policy space designed for stakeholders to belong in both their 'origin' and 'host' countries -- to encourage integration while retaining transnational ties.

## 1.1 The *Great Unmixing of Peoples* and *The Refugee Crisis*

In this thesis, I present evidence to connect policy choices from the early 20th century with the personal experiences of people migrating from Aleppo to Europe and the US in the 21st century. I highlight two important migration events in the Eastern Mediterranean. They occurred 100 years apart, but involved the same communities -- Armenians, Greeks, Turks and Arabs. The first is often called the '*great unmixing of peoples*' which took place as the Ottoman Empire became a number of states divided by newly-crafted and often essentialist national identities. It started as early as 1908, peaked in genocide and population exchange between 1914 and 1923, and continued until the 1950s. Paradoxically, the policy decisions governments made during this *great unmixing* solidified multiethnic and multiconfessional conviviality in the city of Aleppo where Armenians, Greeks and Arabs fleeing southward all became Aleppan and Syrian alongside their Syriac, Alevi, Druze, Jewish, Catholic, Turkish and Kurdish compatriots.

The second migration event is often simply called the '*refugee crisis'* and started shortly after the 2011 Syrian Uprising became a prolonged (and ongoing) armed conflict. As Syrians fleeing this conflict arrived on the shores of European countries, European media and policymakers debated what actions to take. They often narrowly focused on the challenges these migrants posed to European citizens and governments, rather than on the rights of those arriving, their obligations under international law or possible resolutions to the crisis that forced these people to migrate in the first place (Triandafyllidou, 2018).

When Aleppo was under siege and its inhabitants forced to flee, policies made by governments in response to the *great unmixing* and in the interim had unforeseen impacts on Syrians. After 100 years of being Aleppans, they were again displaced. For Aleppans, this was the real unmixing. Government and church policy decisions unmixed them based on their ethnicity and religion, material conditions, social networks and migration route. These policies affected their lives in three interrelated areas: migration experience, integration experience in their host countries and the limits of their legal status. For each of these areas, I identify policy-making institutions, analyze a historical policy in relation to the current policy framework, share the experience of my interviewees and then make a policy recommendation.

## 1.2 Migration, Integration and Legal Status

The first area where policy privileges Greek Orthodox Christians is migration experience. I argue that contemporary Syrian, Greek, EU and Orthodox Church policies work together to make migration easier for Christians and more difficult for Muslims. I argue that Greek Orthodox Christians are most privileged by these policies, as many of them are EU passport holders who become residents and citizens upon entry. Members of other Christian communities

had a more difficult migration experience but were still able to rely on visa protocols and the formal asylum system to migrate in relative safety. I argue that Muslims, on the other hand, are denied access to formal migration and asylum systems although they would prefer to make use of them. Instead, they are forced to use illegal, irregular and informal means such as false documents, dangerous routes and the services of human traffickers to seek safety abroad.

The second area where EU, Greek and Syrian policies privilege Greek Orthodox Christians is integration experience. Greek Orthodox Christians reported a strong sense of belonging, that their lives and communities in Greece were 'exactly the same.' Christians are more likely to have existing social networks outside of Syria because of past migration patterns, favorable treatment of Christians by French Mandate authorities during the *great unmixing* and foreign language education through religious schools. Their cultural understanding and ability to work in both languages gives them an economic advantage. For instance, many work in fields directly related to the 'refugee crisis.' I found that their pre-existing transnational ties were reinforced by contemporary policy frameworks, allowing them to maintain connections in both Syria and Greece. They used these networks as a strategy for 'emplacement' -- responding to local networks and needs with transnational networks, and vice versa (Korac, 2013). They were more likely to spend time with Greeks, even if they lived in the US or UK.

Armenian and Chaldean Christians reported less of a sense of belonging but had learned the local language and were more likely to be employed. They cited this material security when asked about integration, even while expressing more nostalgia for Syria than the Greek Orthodox Christians I interviewed. Meanwhile, Muslims expressed little feeling of belonging in their host country, were less likely to learn the local language, and were more likely to be unemployed. For them, returning to Syria is not an option.

The third area where policy privileges Greek Orthodox Christians is legal status. I argue that Greek Orthodox Christians' status as dual citizens or legal residents with protected rights in both Syria and Greece is key to their successful migration and integration experiences. Most of the other Christians I interviewed had visas, permanent residence or legal asylum in their host countries -- statuses which did not allow them the full rights of citizens but which gave them the right to work and live openly without fear of deportation. Muslims living as refugees or undocumented migrants have no path to citizenship and have been stripped of Syrian nationality and their assets in Syria. Those I spoke to cited 'papers' as the main barrier to their well-being.

### 1.3 Policy Recommendations

I will discuss policy recommendations based on my interviewees' experiences in the areas of migration, integration and legal status. First, I suggest that the movement of people across borders is not necessarily a crisis and argue that the refugee crisis frame narrows the focus of policy to short-term solutions. My interviewees' memories of past forced migrations from the *great unmixing* period demonstrates that the policies instituted during such migration events shape these communities' identities and lives over multiple generations. I argue that policymakers should address migrants as potential future citizens rather than a temporary problem. They should streamline and adequately fund the systems and institutions that serve refugees and offer the right to work on arrival to fulfill their obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 protocol (UNHCR, 2010, p. 22). Finally, they should provide institutional support to informal solidarity networks such as those that came about during the *refugee crisis* among volunteer humanitarians, non-governmental organizations and migrants themselves.

Second, I focus on barriers to integration within Greece. The Greek public education system teaches a narrative of Greek national history which stresses Greek ethnonational homogeneity, while excluding the rich historical and contemporary presence of Greeks from other religious and ethnic identities (Mackridge, 2009). On the other hand, this narrative also celebrates the integration of large numbers of migrants from the country's founding to the present during various large migration waves as the repatriation of lost Greek diasporas (p. 188). I suggest that the Greek ministry of education incorporate material about the country's diversity and frame Greece as a 'nation of immigrants.'

Greek Orthodox Christians discussed the centrality of the Church community to their social life and sense of belonging. I suggest that the Greek government and European Union facilitate programs promoting religious connections between members of the Muslims communities of Greece and the arriving refugees. They could also reopen some of the hundreds of unused mosques around the country to worship. Greek Orthodox Christians from Syria also cited the importance of Greek diplomatic outreach to diaspora communities, including language and cultural programs. I suggest that the Greek government extend those efforts to Greek speaking Muslim communities such as those in Hamiddiye, Syria and Northern Lebanon. Finally, I highlight Christian refugees' desire to serve as intermediaries between local populations and Muslims to support integration efforts and cultural understanding, and suggest that policymakers take advantage of the presence of a population uniquely qualified to serve in this role.

Third, I draw on lessons from my interviewees with regard to legal status. The Greek Orthodox Christians I spoke to emphasized the strategic ways they leveraged their legal status as citizens in Greece and Syria to thrive in both places. Meanwhile, Muslim Syrians stressed

repeatedly how the issue of legal documentation or the lack of it had haunted their lives for years, affecting their physical and mental health. Refugee policy should not exile them from their home country, even if they were threatened there. Long-term policy should foster secure connections to their home country which may serve as a route of return, a route of trade, a route for justice and redress, autonomy and self-realization or merely a sense of security. I found that those who maintained connections in Syria formed deeper ties in Greece, and, for those without it, legal status was a barrier to connections and freedom of movement in both places. Therefore, I suggest that host-country policymakers create legal categories granting rights, such as freedom of movement, access to the financial system and consular services, which include migrants in their host countries without cutting them off from their home country.

As I will show in this thesis, if the communities who came to live together in Aleppo after the *great unmixing* were equal citizens in Syria, they can also be equal citizens in Europe. National and religious identity are not primordial and policies built on this flawed assumption create structural inequality. Equal Syrian citizens become unequal when they cross the border. Orthodox Christians experience their new country as "the same" while Muslims experience it as alien. The privilege and integration that the former benefit from is not the result of the domination of others. It is the result of policies implemented by institutions over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, which provided this community with the opportunity to make claims to Syrian, Ottoman and Greek belonging. None of these policies were specifically intended to settle them in Greece as a diaspora, but Greek Orthodox Christians shaped the outcomes of these policies to survive and thrive in the wake of conflict in Syria.

## 2.0 Literature Review

This thesis addresses a gap in the literature on migration in Greece and those displaced as a result of the ongoing conflict in Syria. During the course of my research, I did not encounter any other scholars who had worked with members of the Greek Orthodox community from Aleppo in Athens. Nor were many scholars of Greece aware of this small community who consider themselves Greek and whose stories are a part of the history of the wider trend of Greek diaspora 'returning' to the homeland. By framing this community as a successful case of migrant integration, I hope to illuminate the failures and successes of policies and government efforts at integration. Although there were few policies explicitly targeting this community, they were able to take advantage of the opportunity structures present in Greek nationality policy around diaspora. This study therefore adds to the existing literature on integration.

### 2.1 Hellenic Studies

Why is someone born in Aleppo as a Syrian citizen, whose mother tongue is Arabic, welcomed in Greece as a Greek? Hellenism -- the national ideology that defines Greekness in terms of language, religion and blood -- links Greek speakers, Greek Orthodox Christians and the descendents of the Ancient Greeks, Romans and Byzantines to the Modern Greek state. This ideology shaped the Greek constitution and state institutions and informs contemporary Greek migration and nationality policies (Gallant, 2001). *Hellenism* has evolved over the history of modern Greece, shaping the decisions that leaders made and the way that they interpreted events, engaging in mythmaking to link the state they built to that of the Byzantines and the Ancient Greeks and casting it as miraculously liberated from Turkish domination. Yet, many scholars

challenge the traditional portrayal of the Ottoman period as brutal *Tourkokratia*, highlighting continuities between the Ottoman Balkans and the Modern Greek state (Kostes, 2018).

Prior to the First World War, Greek Orthodox and Muslim communities in Anatolia engaged in extensive *intercommunality* (Doumanis, 2013). While religious identities were the most salient identities in their daily lives, the structure of community relations was built for coexistence rather than tension between these groups. The convivial Anatolia invoked by Doumanis' subjects is similar to the Aleppo invoked in my own interviews. This intercommunality was torn apart during the *great unmixing* period when Muslims from the Balkans and Greeks from Anatolia were deported en masse as part of a project to create ethnically and religiously homogeneous states (Clark, 2006). The population exchange shaped modern Greece's demographics as well as its policies with regards to immigration from the diaspora, refugee resettlement and integration.

The Hellenic narrative linking the territories of ancient Greece and their inhabitants to the modern state, known as the *megali idea*, has also shaped Greek policy. Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo appeal to this national myth to cast themselves as *Hellenes* returning to their homeland just as Anatolian, Pontic and other Greek diasporas before them. Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo are not the first to see Greekness as an identity to aspire to. Prior to the enlightenment, Greek identity was a prestige identity (Roudometof, 1998). The Phanariots were Greek speaking, Istanbul-based leaders of the *Rum millet* under the Ottoman Empire. Orthodox Christians from all over the Balkans emulated these elites' Hellenic culture. Reaction to perceived domination by the Phanariote elite also spurred intellectual movements against them. The religious politics of the Orthodox church were an important route both into and out of different national identities in the Eastern Mediterranean (Kitromilides, 1989 & 2006).

Hellenism has also played a role in Greek foreign policy. The Greek state founded the Secretariat of Greeks Abroad in 1982. It initially served Greek emigrants but also built a relationship between the Greek state, Greek nationals abroad and the Greek diaspora. Its successor organization, the World Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE) promoted Hellenism outside of Greece (Venturas, 2013; Roudometof, 2000, p. 18). These organizations were geared toward the Greek diaspora in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, but framed Greek migration policy so that Christians from historically hellenized territories can appeal to claim membership in the Greek diaspora and, therefore, legal status in Greece. These institutions helped Greek Orthodox Christians in Syria develop a network both in Greece and among Orthodox and Greek diaspora communities around the world.

## 2.2 Middle Eastern Studies

Greek Orthodox Christians from Syria consider themselves part of the Hellenic world in part because the Syria of the New Testament is a Greek-speaking, *hellenized* place. Between the first century and the present, Christians in Syria went through waves of hellenization and arabization. In the last decade, many scholars of the early Islamic world have challenged the traditional East/West discourse by situating early Islam in the context of the Greco-Roman world and its religious traditions (Muhanna, 2018; Wasserstein & Johnson, 2015; Hoyland, 2012; Al-Jallad, 2020). They highlight the continuities between the Hellenic and Arab Middle East.

Greek Orthodox Christians played an important role in social, political and economic life in the Islamic empires. Heather Sharkey (2017) described the contract which served as the basis for these communities' status in a Muslim-dominated society:

> From the beginning, Muslim leaders made a deal, or set of deals, with Christians and Jews, that established terms for coexistence […] Muslim rulers recognized Christians and Jews as *ahl al-kitab* , that is, as "people of the book" who possessed scriptures and had a kindred belief in God. [...] They called these Christians and Jews *ahl al-dhimma*, or *dhimmi's*, meaning "people of the pact," and promised them the right to worship and pursue livelihoods without interference, provided that they recognized Muslim hegemony and acceded to various conditions. (p. 39)

Arabic-speaking Christians engaged with Muslim and Jewish intellectuals and with each other in the Arabic language throughout the medieval period (Griffith, 2008). They led the translation movement in Baghdad which was key to the translation of Greek philosophy and the hellenization of Arab thought. Greek Orthodox Christians in the Levant underwent a process of arabization between 875 and 975 AD (Griffith, 2008, p. 130) and by the 16th and 17th centuries, they had formed links with other communities both within the Ottoman Empire and outside of it (Kilpatrick, 2017). The relationship between European powers and Arab Christians became salient at this time, and was the source of economic and social networks reaching into Europe. The Syrian Greek Orthodox Christians I spoke to stressed the networks which began in these centuries and strengthened during the mandate period as a factor in Orthodox Aleppans' privileged status in Europe vis-à-vis their Muslim compatriots during the 21st century *refugee crisis.*

In the 19th century, Middle Eastern Christians were highly integrated in the global economy, demographically proliferating, influential in cultural production, and some of the main economic actors around the Mediterranean and the Ottoman empire (Roussos, 2014). Although mandate powers later framed their goals in part as protecting Christians or rediscovering 'lost ancestors,' Christians in the Middle East were not under threat nor isolated from their co-religionists in Europe for most of the Ottoman period.

The *dhimmi* contract was the basis of the *millet* system, an institution for managing diversity in the Ottoman Empire (Masters, 2001 & 2003). This system granted autonomy to communities within the empire on the basis of their religion (Barkey & Gavrilis, 2016). Ottoman successor states established successor institutions in the form of personal status laws. In Syria, these personal status laws shaped relationships between communities (Rabo, 2012 (1) & 2012(2)). Syrian nationality and personal status laws and the Greek state's evolving diaspora policy in the mid and late 20th century added to the policy world of the 19th century. The Syrian Personal Status Law No. 59 of 1953 enshrined elements of the *millet* system that recognized communities' autonomy based on religion under Syrian law and the Syrian nationality law of 1969 provided for Syrian nationality to be determined and passed on through paternity (Rabo, 2012).

These laws affected the three subgroups of the Greek Orthodox Christian community differently. In particular, those with Greek nationality had to choose whether to pass it on to their children -- who would then have to renew their residence permit every two years and live as foreigners in Syria, or to opt for Syrian nationality. The choice to maintain this nationality is evidence that although many considered themselves Arabs, they continued to value Greek nationality. Those who remained in Antakya and Kilis became Turkish citizens, subject to another *millet* successor regime (Theodorelis-Rigas, 2015; Kaymak and Beylunioğlu, 2017).

Competing forces of hellenization and arabization, along with Catholic influence, were consequential to the development of distinctly Arab forms of Christianity during the Ottoman Empire (Panchenko, 2016). Arab Orthodox politics under the Ottomans can be characterized as a tension between hellenization and arabization (Panchenko, 2016), which led to what Masters (2001) terms "the *millet* wars" and the unification of certain sects such as the Melkites with the

Catholic church. Arab nationalism among church officials in the Levant was a reaction to the increasingly Hellenic character of the Orthodox church in Syria under the influence of the Greek state (Vovchenko, 2013). The Russian Orthodox Church intervened in favor of Arab nationalism, aiming to protect Orthodoxy from the spread of Catholicism (promoted by the French government) in the region. Russian foreign policy promoted the arabization of the Patriarchate of Antioch in the late 19th century and its autocephaly from Constantinople in 1898.

Lord Curzon famously called the bloody period at the beginning of the 20th century the *Great Unmixing of Peoples* (Sharkey, 2017, p. 305). Borders were drawn between new nation states, while France and the UK colonized the Arab territories of the Ottoman empire. While the Northern provinces of the Ottoman Empire descended into genocide and intercommunal violence, the Arab south remained relatively peaceful and absorbed refugees fleeing from the North because of the "Ecumenical Frame", an anti-sectarian intellectual, legal and political tradition that shaped the society of the *Mashriq* during that period (Makdisi, 2019).

Forced migration in what became Southern Turkey and Northern Syria led to the creation of "accidental diasporas" (Tachjian, 2009; Brubaker, 2000; Theodorelis-Rigas, 2015) as new borders were drawn. After the breakup of the Ottoman empire, the Arabic speaking Orthodox Christian community was divided between the states who signed the Lausanne Treaty of 1923. The Turkish Law Establishing the Province of Hatay in 1939 brought the formerly French Mandate controlled and Christian-inhabited city of Antakya [1]into the Turkish republic

[1] In Anglophone Christian tradition, this city is referred to as Antioch. In modern Turkey, it is called Antakya. The patriarchate that serves Christians in the Levant was founded there, but moved to Damascus in the 17th century, retaining the name. In this thesis, I refer to the post-*unmixing* city as 'Antakya' and to the pre-*unmixing* city as Antioch; to Christians who belong to the Antiochian Patriarchate or trace their heritage to that city as 'Antiochians' and to residents of the modern city as 'Antakyans.' Some of my interviewees used the terms interchangeably, and I have retained their usage when quoting them.

(Theodorelis-Rigas, 2015; Öztan, 2020). Whereas the cities of Antakya, Aleppo and Kilis had been part of the same polity for nearly a millennium and shared important economic, cultural and communal ties, they now found themselves in different countries. The Sanjak of Alexandretta, whose largest city is Antakya, was the final piece of the Turkish-Syrian border to change hands in 1939, just before Syrian independence from France in 1946 (Shields, 2011). It remains one of the few regions of Turkey populated by Arabic speaking Greek Orthodox Christians and is the origin of many members of the Greek Orthodox Community of Aleppo, who still distinguish themselves as *Antiochians*. Those who moved to Aleppo from Antakya in the West joined existing Greek Orthodox communities who had fled from Kilis in the North two decades before.

## 2.3 Migration Studies

Integration is often discussed as something done *by* migrants arriving in a new country. However, since the early 2000s there is increasing agreement among migration scholars that integration is a two-way process. The traditional conception of integration is vague and does not take refugees' agency into account (Korac, 2003). Refugees in particular make use of "weak ties" as a resource when migrating. Any small opportunity can influence their path. Those ties can be both local and transnational. The transnational networks help them to integrate locally, and their local networks help them return or support family and friends back in their place of origin. Korac (2013) calls this strategy 'emplacement.' Some European countries, such as the UK have adopted a framework which takes into account the criticisms of top-down integration, acknowledging the two way nature of integration and mandating a focus both on the refugees and on the host community in a process of "mutual accommodation" (Ager & Strang, 2008).

The Greek Orthodox Christians use their Syrian and Greek citizenships as tools in their own emplacement strategy, maintaining ties in both countries. Even though there have been no explicit policy efforts to integrate them, they are successful relative to their Muslim compatriots. The asylum system is meant to address integration, but the way this system frames forced migration as foreclosing the possibility of return means that Muslim Syrians have been cut off from their networks in Syria and denied the opportunity to build new social networks in Greece.

Migration scholar Jenny Phillimore (2020) argues that we should shift our focus in integration theory from the refugees to "opportunity structures" in the receiving country that affect integration. She defines these as "sets of resources, arrangements and pathways that can facilitate or block integration through mechanisms such as inclusion, racism and xenophobia" (p. 7). Hellenic ideology teaches that Greece is an ehnic and religiously homogeneous country. Nevertheless, its history is full of migration and mobility, integration, religious and linguistic diversity. Reframing the Greek national narrative as one that is religiously, linguistically and culturally inclusive would more accurately represent the facts of its history and allow it an 'opportunity structure' through which to integrate refugees.

Shore and Wright (2011) use the concept of *policy worlds* to argue that policies migrate through different contexts and are translated at each phase. Policies have a 'runaway' effect reshaping their environment. The legacy of the millet system is an example of a policy that created a *policy world* (Loizos 1999; Barkey and Gavrilis 2016). Greek Orthodox Syrians' remarkable integration in modern Greece would not have been possible without opportunity structures created by the confluence of policies instituted by the Ottoman government, the Greek government and Orthodox Church in the 19th century within the context of the *millet system*. The nationality clause in the Greek constitution of 1827 made it possible for the *rum millet*,

Greek-speaking peoples, those of Greek descent or Orthodox faith in the diaspora, to claim citizenship in the Kingdom of Greece ( Roudometof, 1998; Christopoulos, 2013). The Ottoman Reform Edict of 1856, which was the first policy to extend equal citizenship rights to Ottoman citizens regardless of religious community (Masters, 2001), and the arabization of the Antioch Patriarchate in 1898 granted Arabic speaking Orthodox Christians institutional independence from the Greek speaking Orthodox elite in Constantinople (Vovchenko, 2013). What had been an institution for managing the diversity of the empire's subjects through their religious communities was adapted to manage the citizens of states according to their *national* community (Masters, 2003; Kitromilides, 1989 & 2006). These three policies created an overlapping policy space in which members of the Arabic speaking Greek Orthodox Christian community, after the Ottoman empire, could articulate claims to Syrian, Turkish and Greek nationality.

The 1951 UN convention on refugees created overlapping international regimes governing the movement of people. This regime complex allows states to engage in forum shopping, evading certain obligations and complying with others according to their interests (Betts, 2010). Richer countries in the Global North have invested in creating a complex international system to repel asylum seekers in order to avoid their obligations under the 1951 Convention, which inadvertently created incentives to keep asylum seekers away from countries' territory. States use policy, physical structures, and institutions to control the mobility of migrants outside the territory of their intended destination state. Richer states contract with poorer states to prevent migrants from reaching them (Fitzgerald, 2019 & 2020). For countries on the periphery, refugees constitute a resource which can be used to extract rent from those in the center (Tsourapas, 2019). Greece and Turkey receive significant grants and support from the

EU to keep refugees in their territory. In addition, they are able to use the threat of releasing migrants into Europe to extract political concessions (Reidy, 2020; Erlanger, 2020).

The policies chosen by the EU, Greece, Syria and Turkey since the outbreak of war in Syria in 2011, and the subsequent migration of millions of Syrians through Turkey and Greece on their way to Western Europe, further shaped the policy world and opportunity structures available to Greek Orthodox Christians. The Dublin III regulation made EU members responsible for fingerprinting and registering asylum seekers entering their territory and required them to pursue asylum cases in the state of first entry (Cabot, 2014; Triandafyllidou, 2018). As a result, asylum seekers are unable to move freely in Greece, or to leave it. The EU-Turkey deal of 2016 attempted to address migrant arrivals by paying Turkey to keep them in its territory and by authorizing deportations from European countries to Turkey (Weber, 2018). The Syrian Law 10 of 2018 required those who had abandoned property in Syria to file claims with Syrian courts. Many of those who had fled as refugees were unable to file and were therefore dispossessed of their remaining assets in Syria (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

These policies sharpened the material differences between Orthodox Christian Syrians -- who came to Greece by plane with visas or passports in hand -- and their Muslim compatriots, who came by boat or land as refugees. Paradoxically, the secure legal and material status of integrated Orthodox Christian Syrians in Greece allowed them to appeal to the Syrian government and their networks in Syria and retain their property there, much of which was outside of conflict areas and had never been considered abandoned. Because Greek Orthodox Christians are able to find work in the NGO sector, they also avoid the effects of the economic crisis in Greece. They have survived the *refugee crisis*, the worst outcomes of the conflict in

Syria, and the economic crisis by positioning themselves as *Arab Hellenes*, between native Greeks and Syrian refugees.

## 3.0 Methodology

In this thesis, I examine the consequences of specific policies implemented by state, regional and ecclesiastical institutions for Greek Orthodox communities moving between Southern Anatolia, Northwestern Syria and Greece during the *great unmixing* period between 1908 and 1950 for communities moving from Aleppo to Greece during the *'refugee crisis'* from 2011 to present. I use data gathered through interviews and participant observation (ethnography) with Greek Orthodox and Muslim Syrians in Greece and other countries to conduct a comparative case study focused on their lived experience in relation to these policies and institutions. I use frameworks such as accidental diaspora (Brubaker, 2009), intercommunality (Doumanis, 2013), conviviality (Rabo, 2012(2)), opportunity structures (Phillimore, 2020) and 'Policy Worlds' (Shore & Wright, 2011 ) drawn from scholarship in the fields of Migration Studies, Middle Eastern studies and Hellenic Studies to analyze my data in context .

The three data sources: policies; historical and contextual data from scholarship on the region; and the data collected from interviews with community members permit me to triangulate my evidence. These policies place certain communities and their members into different relationships with institutions that directly affect their migration experience and integration outcomes. The evidence of this is detectable when I compare the experience of Christian Syrians with Greek nationality to that of Muslims with Syrian nationality.

## 3.1 Data Sources

I used a snowball sampling method and conducted ethnographic interviews with my Greek Orthodox Christian Arabic tutor, Laila, then her family, her church community and eventually with members of other Syrian communities. I also conducted participant observation, attending Greek Orthodox Church services in Athens and Seattle as well as working alongside and for refugees at Safe Place International and Orange House in Athens. I read scholarship on these communities and compared it with the data gathered from interviews, identifying specific historical events and actions by governments during the early 20th century which shaped the convivial and intercommunal life of Syria's largest city Aleppo for the next one hundred years. I asked my interlocutors about their migration experiences, their integration experiences and their legal statuses with reference to current EU, Syrian and Greek government policies.

I conducted interviews with Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Chaldean, Atheist and Muslim Syrians who were born or lived in Aleppo, and who subsequently moved to Greece, France, Sweden, the UK and Turkey; one Muslim raised in Greece who moved to Aleppo; one Iraqi Protestant who lived as a refugee in Aleppo before seeking asylum in the US; and one Greek Orthodox priest from Lebanon who ministers to a church in Seattle (see Table 1 for a detailed list of my interviewees). Their names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Incorporating the experiences of other communities alongside Greek Orthodox Christians helped me isolate the way that orders of inclusion and exclusion operate to privilege some groups over others. I found that Greek Orthodox Christians benefitted from a special set of opportunity structures which privileged their migration, integration and legal status, especially in Greece. Other Christians generally had a longer and more difficult migration process but were

also able to take advantage of opportunity structures that privileged Christians. Muslims, on the other hand, had to resort to more informal modes of migration while they were also excluded from policies intended to integrate migrants and provide them with legal status.

I read official statements and watched interviews with two church officials, John X of Antioch, and his brother, Paul Yazigi of Aleppo. John X is the Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Church based in Damascus and Paul Yazigi was the metropolitan of the archdiocese of Aleppo. From the very beginning of my research interviews, the Arabic speaking Greek Orthodox Christian community constantly mentioned Metropolitan Paul and his leadership in the community as well as his kidnapping and disappearance at the hands of the Islamic State in 2013. Arabic speaking Greek Orthodox Christians of the Antiochian tradition all over the world pray for his safe return each Sunday before the liturgy. They share about him frequently on social media. Both Paul Yazigi and his brother John X speak Greek and have visited the country. They both pursued policies to strengthen ties between the Aleppo Greek Orthodox community and Greece, often in partnership with the Greek consulate and government. I analyze these statements and interviews and compare them with my interlocutors' statements.

I compare the responses from members of the various religious communities of Aleppo with one another. I use historical policy (Hoefer, 2011) analysis to correlate their stories about their ethnicity, religion and histories with the actions of governments and institutions during the period they discuss. I compare their responses about their material conditions, social networks and migration route using Shore and Wright's (2011) interpretive framework and concept of *policy worlds*. I correlate government and institutional policies during the *refugee crisis* with the *opportunity structures* that these policies, interacting with historical policy, have created for the Greek Orthodox community from Aleppo migrating to Greece.

My data about the historical policies comes from the Middle Eastern, Migration Studies and Hellenic Studies literature, while my data about the policies of institutions and governments during the refugee crisis comes from policy documents, NGO and journalistic reports on the implementation of those policies and recent critical scholarly literature in refugee and migration studies. I present my analysis in three categories: migration experience, integration experience and legal status. In each section, I choose policies from the *great unmixing* period related to the data in my interviews and policies from the *refugee crisis* period. I use data from the interviews to compare the effects of these policies on the experience of different communities. In each section, I draw on the successes of the Greek Orthodox Christian community from Aleppo in Greece to make a policy recommendation for recreating this success for the Muslim community.

## 3.2 Limitations

I started my research with this community in Greece in the Summer of 2019 with plans to return in 2020. However, lockdown measures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic required me to cancel my travel plans and find an alternative strategy to complete my research. This was a challenge, but it ultimately opened up several avenues for conducting interviews -- which I may not have pursued had the pandemic not occurred -- and which also helped solve an issue I had run into using the snowball method among the Athens community.

While some of my interviews with Christians were conducted in Arabic, all of my interviews with members of the Muslim community were conducted in English, often with friends or friends of friends from among my own network who speak the language very well. Most Syrian Muslims in Greece do not speak English. Speaking English puts my respondents in a privileged group with regards to other Syrian Muslims in Greece. However, this may be a

strength for the present study rather than a weakness. Although the people I spoke to may have better language skills and more opportunities than most refugees, I think this similarity in terms of education and class to the Christians I spoke to makes them a better comparison group. Since many of them had foreign language education and international connections not typical of their co-religionists in Syria and Greece, their perspectives offer an opportunity to tease out which elements of their experience are due to being Muslim, their irregular and informal migration routes and their legal status.

Another limitation was one that other ethnographers have also spoken of, namely that Syrian refugees, particularly those with strong English skills, have been asked to tell their stories before by asylum authorities, NGO workers, academics and journalists. Many have even come up with an elevator pitch version of their own narrative based on what they expect their interlocutor wants to hear. Cabot (2014) notes that "these more polished ways of narrating and performing also leaked into ethnographic interviews with me, as I too was interpreted as an audience seeking a “refugee story.” " (p. 117). To get past some of this tailoring, I often introduced my own criticisms into our conversations about the ways refugees are pressured to tell their stories as if they are pure victims. Those I interviewed were eager to talk about the exhaustion they felt at constantly having to present a refugee narrative, highlighting their migration experience at the expense of other parts of their lives and personalities. I hope that this served as an invitation to be more frank and made it clear that I was interested in their real experience, rather than a confirmation of some refugee narrative I wanted to write.

During the initial phase of my research, I chose not to disclose my personal religious affiliation and background, believing it might compromise the data I collected in interviews. I am Jewish, and specifically a member of the American Jewish Diaspora. Although I did not initially

intend to discuss my own religious background, as I got to know my Arabic tutor Laila and her family and asked questions about their religious community, it came to feel unnatural and unnecessary to avoid disclosing my own background. I was aware that many people raised in Syria might have limited experience with Jews and might believe stereotypes or have bias; or that they might fear I am biased against Arabs and Syrians. In particular, as many of my interlocutors support the Syrian government and associate Judaism with Israel -- a country that Syria considers an enemy -- I was worried that they might find my work suspicious. In addition, discussing religion, intercommunal relations and politics is considered uncouth and potentially rude among Syrians in Aleppo in general, who pride themselves on living in a cosmopolitan and multi-communal city, whose inhabitants do not discriminate on the basis of sect (Rabo, 2012 & 2012(2); Makdisi, 2019).

As I discussed the relationship that Laila and her family felt with Greece, a country they had never visited but with which they had a religious and diasporic link, I couldn't help but compare their feelings about Greece with my own feelings and my community's feelings toward Israel. I wondered if I or my family, given a similar situation in our own country, might choose to emigrate to Israel, especially since we can claim citizenship as members of the Jewish diaspora. Eventually, I did mention that I was Jewish, and Laila, her family and I had an interesting and open discussion about Judaism, Israel, and Syria. They were curious about my political and religious beliefs, and which I was happy to share. They were open-minded and my fears that they might not want to participate in my research after learning I was Jewish were unfounded.

Unfortunately, this may not be true for the rest of their community. At the time of that conversation, I had several interviews with community members arranged. None of the

interviewees mentioned my Judaism or any issue with me as a reason for doing so, but all of them subsequently canceled (or indefinitely delayed) their appointments with me. Laila and her family told me not to share my Jewish identity with other members of their community, and I did not. I suspect that they may have mentioned it to someone else in this close-knit community -- perhaps as a curiosity rather than a problem. While I still felt welcome attending their church services on Sunday and people there received me warmly, I wasn't able to carry out any more face-to-face interviews during the course of my time in Greece. When I tried to make interview appointments, they were politely delayed or declined. On my final Sunday in Greece, Shadi, Laila's husband, mentioned to me that I should not be surprised if one man in particular's 'hands will shake' when I greet him, because he is Palestinian. I took this to mean that he had been told I was Jewish and Shadi assumed that he would be uncomfortable around me.

I was worried about this development and what it might mean for my research. Had I made a mistake by revealing my religious background? During my interviews, however, attempting to dissimulate when asked about it had caused some awkwardness and might have affected my interviewee's willingness to trust me. I wondered if perhaps I, an American and a Jew, was simply not the right person to carry out ethnographic research with a tight-knit community that might feel vulnerable as immigrants and a minority in Greece.

Ultimately, this proved to be less of a challenge as I continued my research. After my second research trip to Greece was canceled due to the pandemic, I made most of my contacts online rather than through that initial church community. In many of my interviews, my interviewee was an old friend who had known my background for a long time. In others, the subject didn't come up. In the few in which it did come up, my interviewees reacted in their own ways, ranging from indifference to interest.

The most surprising of these was probably that of a young man living in Aleppo and studying English literature, who discussed his love for the plays of Arthur Miller and compared his own experience having been raised in Greece and integrating in Syria with that of Jews in the United States in the 1950s. Another interviewee, an Orthodox Priest from Lebanon, told me about several Jewish converts to Orthodox Christianity that he knew and then discussed the Orthodox Christian view of Judaism during the early Christian period. Although I suspected that Laila's friends from church may have canceled their interviews because I was Jewish, I did not ask. However, in every interaction where I *did* discuss my own position as an American Jew with my subjects, the conversation was a catalyst rather than a barrier, much as Turkish anthropologist Ilay Romain Örs' conversations with her Greek *Polites* subjects were (Örs, 2017, pp. 27 & 72).

A final challenge was that the COVID-19 pandemic caused Greece to close its borders to non-residents during the Summer, usually the height of the tourist season. Because of these lockdown measures, I was unable to travel to Greece to continue interviewing members of the Greek Orthodox community in Athens. Instead, I turned to social media to find and interview members of the community. First, I asked some of my existing contacts in Athens. Then, I posted in Facebook groups such as "Foreigners in Athens" and "Expats in Greece", explaining that I was an American researcher seeking to interview people from Aleppo living there. I had started attending services at Seattle's Antiochian Orthodox church as an observer before the pandemic, and I continued to make contact with congregants.

This way of networking was difficult -- writing to strangers online was the equivalent of cold-calling. Once I had made contact, I still had to convince my initial contacts that I was trustworthy and that it would be worth their time to contribute to my research. I spoke with 61 different people online, but only interviewed 10 of them. On the other hand, this online method

also exposed me to a wider range of interviewees. I interviewed people via video chat in Sweden, the UK, Greece, Syria and the US. While my initial goal was to interview only Muslims and Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo, the challenge of finding subjects also opened me up to other communities, whose personal experiences provided necessary perspective and triangulation for what I had learned from the Greek Orthodox community. These included an Iraqi refugee who had lived in Aleppo, a Chaldean Christian and two Armenians.

In the end, I found that giving someone access to Facebook friendship can increase a researcher's social capital: they can look at your profile going back years, and photos and posts. They can verify that you're a real person and that you have friends. What kind of friends do you have? What kind of things do you do online? It is a trust builder. Those who may have been hesitant to do an interview with me have since seen me posting photos of my dog, videos of me playing the bouzouki, and comments where I made jokes with my friends.

My research was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my own position as an American Jew, language and accessibility, as well as time and scope. Over the course of this project, I came to care deeply for the people I interviewed. In the future, I hope to continue to work with Syrian communities from Aleppo, perhaps comparing them to communities in other cities or to other people migrating across borders and split into members and non-members of their host country's diaspora. I hope that the present study is the first of many opportunities to work with them.

## 4.0 Arabs and Hellenes at Home and Abroad

Prior to the war in Syria that started in 2011, Christians made up around 12% of the Syrian population, or 2.5 million people (Pacini, 1996, pp. 312-326). Of these, the largest group

were (and likely still are[2]) Greek Orthodox Christians, whose population was around 500,000 (BBC, 2015). In addition, the other significant Christian communities in Syria are the Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, Greek Catholics, Syriac Orthodox and Syriac Catholics.[3]

Though there are no current statistics available, prior to the Syrian conflict there were between 3,000-10,000 Greek-speaking Syrians, many of whom considered themselves 'Greek' by origin or ethnicity (Tsokalidou, 2006, p. 1248). These include Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, and Sunni Muslims; some of whom are second, third and fourth generation Greek nationals born in Syria who hold a Greek passport and a Syrian residence permit.

Most Syrians of all faiths consider themselves Arabs and the Syrian public education system teaches that the Syrian nation has an Arab character (Rabo, 2019; Groiss, 2012, p. 40). However, there are many ethnic groups in Syria including Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians and Yazidis. None of these are legally recognized as minorities, but Armenians and Assyrians can attend schools in their languages, while teaching Kurdish is forbidden (Rabo, 2018, p. 58).

The Syrian government is legally a secular republic, although the President is required to be a Muslim (Rabo, 2012 (2) p. 131). While all Syrian citizens are considered equal, they are also divided into religious communities, each of which is governed by what are known as "personal status laws" that give each religious community the right to form courts that "regulate betrothal, marriage and dissolution of marriage" (p. 138). Today, these personal status laws are one of the main sources of imbalance between communities because they limit the freedom of non-Muslims and women to a greater extent than Muslim men (Makdisi, 2019 p. 10; Rabo, 2012

[2] No comprehensive census has been performed since the beginning of the war in Syria in 2011.

[3] I have chosen the most common terms for these communities as I encountered them in texts, but all of the communities I have identified use multiple and sometimes overlapping terms to identify their faith community. For a detailed description of each community, see **Pacini, 1998**

(2), p. 137). Since the courts established by this policy only have jurisdiction over a single community, marriage between members of different communities is effectively illegal, unless the groom is a Muslim or one party converts, although there is also considerable social stigma attached to conversion (Rabo, 2012 (1), p. 88; Reilly, 2019, p. 74).

For both legal and social purposes, one's religious identity is very important. Regardless of individual beliefs or piety, most Syrians' faith community is the main organizing force of their social world. Most Syrians are able to discern what community a person belongs to at the first encounter (Rabo, 2012 (2), p. 134). While everyone is considered equal within Syrian society, and most Syrians appear to agree that this should be so, most still acknowledge "imbalances" between different communities as well as the Islamic character of Arab society (Rabo, 2012 (2), p. 140; Rabo, 2012 (1), p. 88; Makdisi, 2019, p. 121).

### 4.1 Aleppo

In this section, I examine Aleppo as it was before the conflict, highlighting the ways that different religious and ethnic communities lived together ('conviviality'), aware of their role as members of their community in relation to other communities ('intercommunality'), and observing a taboo on upsetting this balance by openly discriminating on the basis of sect or ethnicity ('the ecumenical frame').

In Aleppo, different religious and ethnic communities lived and worked together. The functioning of the city depended on a balance wherein different communities shared spaces and work but lived in their own neighborhoods. Doumanis (2013, p. 1) described this system whereby communities work and live together while respecting communal identity and boundaries, as 'intercommunality.' In her work on contemporary Aleppo, Rabo (2012 (2), p.

124) uses Paul Gilroy's term 'conviviality' to describe "the process of cohabitation and interaction that has made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life" in Aleppo. My interviewees described both 'intercommunality', where each sect played a unique and agreed upon role in the functioning of social life, and 'conviviality', in which this diversity was considered ordinary. For my research, I interviewed people from Aleppo and other cities in Syria from different faiths and ethnic communities. Many of them highlighted the importance of intercommunality and conviviality in their everyday lives. I will introduce my interviewees by name but have created a table (Table 1.) which you can refer back to for details of their age, origin, religious/ethnic community and location as of the time of our interview.

Kilian, who came to Aleppo as refugee from Iraq, highlighted both segregation and mixing in the city:

> My neighborhood was called Said Ali, so that face of my apartment building was all Muslims, but behind my apartment on the other side was all Christians and Armenians. There are only the apartment walls separating the two streets. It was normal for people to come to the markets in different neighborhoods. The Armenians had shops in the Muslim neighborhood. Muslims from different neighborhoods had shops in that neighborhood.

Sara discussed economic relationships between communities, as well as solidarity between students from different religious communities in school:

> We had a nice harmony. Where my father worked -- he owned a shoe factory -- there were businessmen who were Muslims and Christians. I never heard of any problems because of religion. He even sent his products to other cities in Syria. He had a lot of wholesalers who were Christian. The biggest percentage [of Syrians] are Sunni Muslims. We lived in our groups. Armenians lived in another part of the city. Kurdish people lived in another place…
>
> Sometimes [in school,] we made deals between Christians and Muslims so we could take extra days off for each other's holidays. They would try to put exams for us so we have to come, but we would all protest. We would all take all the religious holidays off. It was one class, and we would refuse to come on the other student's holidays.

**Table 1.**

| Name | Age | Origin | Community | Current Location |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abdulla | 28 | Manbij, Syria | Sunni | Athens, Greece |
| Basel | 28 | Aleppo, Syria | Sunni | Istanbul, Turkey |
| Dudi | 47 | Homs, Syria | Greek Orthodox | Athens, Greece |
| Jack | 27 | Latakia, Syria | Sunni | Athens, Greece |
| Kemal | 29 | Syria/Greece | Sunni | Aleppo, Syria |
| Kilian | 30 | Baghdad. Iraq | Protestant | San Diego, USA |
| Laila | 45 | Aleppo, Syria | Greek Orthodox | Athens, Greece |
| Mona | 70 | Aleppo, Syria | Greek Orthodox | Athens, Greece |
| Nabil | 45 | Aleppo, Syria | Chaldean | Eslöv, Sweden |
| Nairy | 42 | Aleppo, Syria | Armenian Catholic | Athens, Greece |
| Ohan | 28 | Kessab, Syria | Armenian Orthodox | Marseille, France |
| Sabri | 28 | Aleppo, Syria | Greek Orthodox | Chios, Greece |
| Sam | 27 | Deir Ezzor, Syria | Sunni | Belfast, UK |
| Sara | 29 | Aleppo, Syria | Sunni | Istanbul, Turkey |
| Shadi | 50 | Aleppo, Syria | Greek Orthodox | Athens, Greece |
| Toni | 55 | Beirut, Lebanon | Greek Orthodox | Seattle, USA |
| Yousef | 33 | Aleppo, Syria | Greek Orthodox | London, UK |

Kemal, who grew up in Greece before moving to Aleppo, told me that the different community members can identify one another by last name or profession. He explained that Aleppo is known for taking pride in its tradition of intercommunality and conviviality:

> In history you can tell from the last name. The surname shows the person's origin. The ones that have to do with professions or jobs have to do with when the Ottomans came to Aleppo and took the craftsman. From then on, they were known for their crafts. People with those surnames are easily identified as the original Aleppans. You belong to a city and your name shows it.
>
> Aleppo has this characteristic of following suit from their forefathers. It is a very traditional city in the sense that people here don't like to change. If you are a journalist, your son will be a journalist, your grandson will be a journalist. Before the crisis, people

used to take the path of their forefathers. I am not talking about a certain sect or race. All the population in Aleppo. Other cities are more flexible. In Damascus or Homs, you find mixed people together. In Aleppo it is unique in the sense of following suit.

[People from Aleppo] have a special attachment to their city. Their houses represent memories. They don't want to change their house or their job. They are energized to do the same thing every day. I have traveled to Damascus and other places; I notice the difference. The difference everywhere else is there is change. In Aleppo you find beauty and joy in the routine. I can pinpoint the unique things that Aleppo has because I came from outside. During Ramadan, they don't eat in front of their Muslim friends. They respect their customs. We do too. When Muslims celebrate, they go to their areas for Christmas and Easter. It is embedded in the culture. We are brothers.

Ohan moved to Aleppo from the Armenian majority village of Kessab. He noted that different communities were known for specific occupations. He also highlighted both similarities and differences between his village and the city:

Aleppo is just a bigger version of Kessab. Instead of one community, you have big communities of Kurds, Muslims, and a huge community of other ethnicities like Assyrians, Armenians, Circassians and all these communities. The Armenian community is centralized around two or three or four major districts in the city. It was a really weird situation. You have Armenians who are 50 or 60 years old and working in a shop but don't speak Arabic. Their Arabic is shitty. This is the majority but for the young generation, we spoke Arabic well, but the older generation worked as mechanics and stuff like that. They had a very good reputation. Whoever wants to fix his car goes to the industrial area and you realize that the Armenians are more expensive, but they are known for their high-quality work. Even though they are more expensive, people prefer them. This is in Aleppo especially.

Nairy shared a nostalgic anecdote about her youth in Aleppo where she felt safe going out as a woman, despite taboos about unaccompanied women traveling alone at night:

We all went to each other's events. We even enjoyed their Ramadan more than [Muslims]. In general, when you say that Syria is a Muslim country, it is not like even Jordan which is openminded. It is much more. In Dubai you see new buildings, like a dream, but they have much stricter rules. In Syria it wasn't like that. We were in University at Ramadan and most of the children came to the cafeteria and had tea with us. You won't be fined if they saw you smoking or eating outside in the street. It was normal. We went to their weddings; they came to our weddings.

Every Saturday or Sunday we were in the restaurants with live music and singers singing Armenian and other languages and Arabic singers. It started with slow music and then got very crazy until 6 in the morning. Every Saturday and Sunday. We had a really nice time. Just dancing. We used to go to some restaurants which serve Ful. There was a

> place open 24 hours. It was very famous in the old town of Aleppo. Abu Abdo. He died a few years ago and it was very sad. After these parties, these dinners, we used to go there at 5 or 6 am for Ful. You know the situation; you can't be only girls. But sometimes we went anyway. Old Aleppo is not Christian. It was mostly Muslims, but we felt safe at that time for early breakfast after staying up all night. The restaurants in front of the Citadel. We were there dining and after dinner we went for nargileh and tea.

Nabil shrugged when I asked him about interacting with members of other communities. It was so normal for him that the question seemed unnecessary:

> When I was in Aleppo, I knew everyone from every community. 95% of my friends were Muslims. It was a Christian neighborhood but there were a lot of Muslims too. Aziziya. Most of them are Christians. There is nothing that makes us special. We are Syrian like everyone else. There was nothing that made us special. We are all like other Syrians. We are free in Syria to live our religion, nothing special.

Prior to the Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, Syrians of all faiths rarely discussed their religious identities openly. This was not because they feared discrimination, but because diversity was the norm and discrimination on the basis of sect was taboo. Makdisi called this taboo against sectarianism the 'ecumenical frame' (2019). That frame emerged following intercommunal violence in the mid-19th century and was enshrined in Ottoman law under pressure from Europe in the Ottoman Reform Edict of 1856 (Masters, 2001, p. 143; Masters, 2013, p.173) which granted members of each *millet* rights as equal Ottoman citizens. Many of the people I interviewed described circumstances across the country, but especially in Aleppo, that fit within an ecumenical frame. Mona explained to me that:

> In general, we don't ask what community someone is from [...] We use euphemism by saying which church we go to or which church we live next to. We don't ask which community. We know from the name or the family, but we don't ask that as a first question. I need to be his friend to have that right.

Basel confirmed what she had said:

> I didn't even know if my friends were Muslim or Christian or Kurdish. I found out later. We didn't ask them about it… We didn't talk much about religion.

However, relations were not perfect. As with any community, there were stereotypes and biases related to ethnicity, religion and political views. Syria is ruled by a family from the Alawite minority and the country is majority Sunni. Christians came to see the government as a protector of religious minorities and the secular nature of the state as a guarantee against expressions of Islamic religiosity in public spaces, which might signal a weakening or loss of Christians' equal status and social freedoms (Rabo, 2012(2), p. 131; Leonhardt, 2018). Rabo writes that in Aleppo, Christians see the majority Sunni Arabs as "small minded and fixed on controlling the female use of space" (p. 127) and they see themselves as better educated (p. 129) and associated with modernity and development (p. 137) while Muslims "lack a scientific attitude" (p. 137). Most Syrians consider themselves Arab, but there are large Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian communities among others. Among Christian groups, there is competition between Orthodox and Catholic sects, as many communities have both an Orthodox and Catholic offshoot. There are Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics (Melkites); Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Catholics; Syrian Orthodox as well as Maronites. Kilian, the Iraqi refugee, had an outsider's view of Aleppo:

> Despite the fact that they want to present Aleppo as a melting pot, I don't think it is. There was a lot of prejudice against each other, they just don't like to show it publicly. Because the regime was secular for a long time, each religion was thriving in its own territory. The Christians didn't have any trouble celebrating holidays or building new churches. Religious freedom from the government gave minorities in Aleppo protection.

My respondents also brought up other tensions and distinctions, as well as personal experiences of discrimination. While Christians tended to have a vaguer and more general sense of Islamic fanaticism and Muslim men's harassment of Christian women as a potential danger, Sunni Muslims reported specific incidents of anti-Muslim discrimination. They reported that these increased just before the conflict. Sara, who earlier shared stories of solidarity between

communities, also shared experiences of more explicit discrimination against her because she was Muslim, as well as some of the distinctions in class and education in the community:

> My school was in the same area. It was a very nice school for girls. We heard some stories of Christian girls saying that Muslim guys come and harass them. I am not sure if it was real harassment or because he is Muslim. I had lots of friends and I didn't wear a hijab. Many of the Muslim girls do. My friends were mostly Christians. My school was very close to my house in a Christian community and most of my friends thought I was Christian. They were shocked when I went to the Islam class and not to the Christian class. How is it you don't use hijab? How is it you go to the Islam class? The teacher would accidentally give me a Christian book. We used to have these conversations in school: the teacher would say the Christians are more intellectual or that the young boys and girls grow up together, so they don't have harassment problems. In Syria they think only Muslims have this problem. I feel bad about this. They say it is because Islam separates the sexes and covers women. This was really bad.
>
> One of my friends was Christian and we hung out every day at each other's places and the family were so cool. No problems. My father never told me she's a Christian so she can't come. I remember once she called me and said we can't meet anymore. This was before the revolution. Her mother learned that I was Muslim and said I cannot meet with her. I was too young to understand if this was an increase in tension. There was maybe, but not from Muslim people. You can find some Muslim people that don't want to see Christians, but they live in the countryside or far away. In those areas they are all very conservative…
>
> When the revolution started, it started from the poor areas which were Muslim. They took refuge in other parts of the city. They lived in the schools and university campus. Christians treated them like animals. It was so bad. We don't want you; we are afraid of you; you are harassing our girls. Your boys are bad, you are supporting the revolution and destroying the country. This created big problems between Syrians and suddenly people started to care if you are Christian or if you are Muslim. That's when I started to make more Muslim friends whereas in my previous life I had more Christian friends. People didn't want to walk with a Muslim.
>
> We had this before the revolution. There was a view of class. If he comes from that district, it means he is not educated, poor, and poor had a negative meaning in Syria. It means you're not educated. Even in the swimming pools in the summer, if we went to the swimming pool with our Christian friends, we could enter. Mostly they were owned by Christians and you had to know someone. Otherwise, you had to wait for Tuesday because it is the women's only day.

None of the Muslims I spoke to shared a sense of Christians as a threat or a danger, but they did view them as allies of the government with special privileges and a condescending

attitude toward Sunnis in particular. They still spoke of them respectfully. Kemal noted both their privilege and their important role in Syrian society:

> Here, Christians have more privileges. You have very successful Christian figures in society, doctors, scientists and scholars. They are real patriots in all of the terms and what that suggests.

The Armenians I spoke to, in particular, shared a sense that Islamic politics were a threat to Christians. They explicitly linked the protesters who resisted the Assad government to the Muslim Brotherhood. Ohan, who was not a government supporter, also expressed why he did not feel he could take part in the revolution:

> The opposition is an Islamic opposition. I know people who used to be opposition activists. They got arrested and executed by the opposition! There is no opposition except for these individuals around the world who are secular and have ideas of constructing a new government, or a democratic government. Now, if you tell them in Idlib that Bashar will leave and there will be a secular government, they will say what have we been fighting for for six years? We want sharia.

Nairy drew a distinction between her Muslim friends and neighbors and Islamic political groups that she considered dangerous:

> We were brought up with Muslims. I have very good friends and neighbors. Not all are the same. There is one level that is really educated and open minded but again the majority of Muslims do whatever the sheikh says. Back then it was the Sunnis. The Muslim Brotherhood. Even after the Arab Spring in Egypt, they tried to be in power.

In this section, I have provided a snapshot of life in Aleppo and Syria for those who grew up in the late 20th and early 21st century before the conflict that led to the *refugee crisis*. Syrians of different ethnicities and religions lived together in a convivial society built on intercommunality -- where communities had a shared sense of boundaries and roles between them -- and an ecumenical frame that provided a taboo against sectarianism. This society was not perfect and there were ethnic, political and religious tensions that ultimately contributed to or

were exacerbated by conflict. However, this sense of diversity as normalcy shows that members of these communities saw themselves as one cohesive multicommunal society.

## 4.2 The Greek Orthodox Community of Aleppo

In this section, I will focus on the Greek Orthodox community in Aleppo prior to the conflict in Syria. My interviewees emphasized the centrality of the Church and its leaders to their community. They frequently referenced their own history, highlighting veins of arabization and hellenization as well as tension between Orthodox and Catholics. I find that the Greek Orthodox community of Aleppo experienced increased hellenization in the early 21st century under the leadership of Metropolitan Paul Yazigi, in contrast to the 20th century, when Antiochian Orthodox churches stressed their Arab character; and in contrast to other patriarchates such as the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, where the hellenization of the church is seen as "religious colonization" (Roussos, 2009). Finally, Greek Orthodox Christians in Syria have an international network both to Orthodox majority countries and to Orthodox diaspora communities abroad. These elements contribute to their decision to migrate to Greece and Greece's willingness to receive them as a returning diaspora.

The Greek Orthodox of Syria call themselves *Rum*, which means 'Roman', and sometimes *Yunani,* which means 'Greek'. *Rum* was the primary appellation of Greek Orthodox communities in the Eastern Mediterranean until the 19th century (Theodorelis-Rigas, 2015, pp. 33-34). Beaton (2007) argued that rather than thinking of themselves through a national or ethnic frame, inhabitants of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) empire were united by a shared religion and a relationship as subjects of the power of Istanbul, legitimized by the Church (p. 80). Greek became the main language of administration and remained so throughout the Eastern Roman and

Byzantine Empires and into the Islamic period, losing its dominance but serving as a secondary language of administration for certain purposes in cities such as Istanbul all the way through the Ottoman Empire (Panchenko, 2016, pp. 3-11; Barkey & Gavrilis, 2016, p. 27).

Between the Arab conquest in the 7th century and the conquest of both Istanbul and Syria by the Ottoman Empire in the 15th and 16th centuries, Orthodox Christians in Syria were increasingly isolated from the ecclesiastical leadership in Constantinople and underwent a process of *arabization*, increasingly using Arabic rather than Greek in both religious and personal affairs (Sharkey, 2017, p. 36; Panchenko, 2016, p. 15).

This period was also a period of fracture and schism within Christianity. While Christian monophysite "Eastern Orthodox" Christians such as the Armenians and Assyrians had already broken away from Rome and Istanbul, the "Great Schism" led Constantinople to break from Rome, while during the crusades several Orthodox communities, especially those in Syria, re-established ties with the Catholic Church (Panchenko, 2016, pp. 37-62; Pacini, 1998, p. 31).

All of these churches: the Eastern Orthodox churches, uniate Catholic churches, and Eastern Orthodox Churches, were represented in Antakya and Aleppo during this period, and continue to be today. Thus, Aleppan and Antiochian Christians during this period were presented with competing claims by multiple states, empires and religious communities (Levtzion, 1990, p. 306; Sharkey, 2017, p. 210; Panchenko, 2016, p. 170; Pacini, 1998, pp. 31-35). This provided an opportunity for those living there to negotiate their identities depending on which community they chose to belong to.

By the middle of the 16th century, the Ottoman empire had conquered much of the Arab and Greek worlds. After 600 years apart, Orthodox Christians in Syria and in Greece found themselves once again part of the same polity, whose capital was in Istanbul. Like the Umayyads

in Damascus in the 6th century, the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II incorporated much of the Byzantine administrative structure into his Imperial bureaucracy and granted the Orthodox Patriarch significant power over all Christians in the empire in exchange for their loyalty (Panchenko, 2016, pp. 74-78; Wasserstein & Johnson, 2015, p. 266). Greek Orthodox Christians from Romania to Egypt forged religious and economic ties throughout the Ottoman world. They became a 'middleman minority' (Roudometof 2000, p. 369), playing an important economic and political role throughout the empire and in its relations with other empires such as Russia and France (Kilpatrick, 2017; Vovchenko, 2013).

Until the beginning of the 20th century, hellenized Greek Orthodox elites in Istanbul exercised official, state-sanctioned influence over the empire's *Rum Millet*, a designation which at first included all Christians, but over time became narrower and narrower as other communities claimed their own status as sovereign *millet*s until it included only Greek Orthodox Christians. (Roudometof, 1998, p. 15; Theodorelis-Rigas, 2015 p. 37; Panchenko, 2016, pp. 74-78). This centralization of state and religious power in Constantinople led to another wave of hellenization among Orthodox Christians, especially between 1711 and 1820 (Roudometof, 1998, p. 23, Sharkey, 2017 p. 87; Barkey & Gavrilis, 2016, p. 26; Masters, 2001, p. 98).

In Syria, there had long been competition between urban centers over the Patriarchate of Antioch (which had since been moved to Damascus) (Panchenko, 2016, p. 163). During the 18th century, the Patriarchate in Constantinople appointed Greek-speaking patriarchs to Antioch (Panchenko, 2016, p. 170), which ultimately led the Antiochians to "expel their ethnically-Greek

Patriarch and clergy in 1898-1899 and replace them with Arabs." (Donovan, 2019; Thodorelis-Rigas, 2015, p. 37). The Antiochian Patriarchate still has Arab clergy.[4]

The breakup of the Ottoman Empire triggered migration across newly drawn borders and the *unmixing of peoples*. These migrations affected opportunities for integration, migration and mobility available to members of this community throughout the rest of the 20th and into the 21st century (Tachjian, 2009). Most importantly, the Greek Orthodox Community of Aleppo as recalled by my interview subjects took shape, comprising three subgroups -- those with Greek nationality, those who migrated from the now Turkish territories of Antakya and Kilis, and the indigenous Greek Orthodox community of Aleppo. Shadi explained to me how the descendants of Christians fleeing Turkey came to be incorporated in Syrian society, especially after the Assad family came to power in 1971:

> 20% of the Greek Orthodox in Syria have Greek nationality. 50% are Antiochian from Turkey and they are very proud. Talking about Aleppo, in 1880, there were no (Orthodox) Christians in Aleppo. After that they came from Antakya, from Kilis, from Gaziantep, from all these borders and became Syrian. The Christian Orthodox majority came mostly after 1900...
>
> They were killing Christians in 1888, one Ottoman Sultan. The first Christians living in Aleppo, lived above the city in the hills. Telal. They had a special area which was closed from both sides. It was closed at night and outside Aleppo. There is a wall around it. This was outside Aleppo and that's where Christianity in Syria started. It came from outside and they were not allowed to go inside. They came from Gaziantep and this region. They still live in this area and they have a guard at night that closes the door.
>
> The old generation, my father and uncle and them, were not educated. They came as refugees from Turkey. Their parents were not educated. They were poor and worked for their money. During this period, just the rich people could study and work. In the 1970s the Baath party came to power and extended free education for everybody. They were able to send their children to school. We were poor but we got educated and we learned, and we worked, and we built good conditions compared to many places.

[4] However, contemporary Greek Orthodox communities from Antioch (now Antakya, Turkey) face pressure to assimilate within the Hellenic cultural, religious and educational institutions of Greek speaking *Rum* elite in contemporary Istanbul who themselves face assimilatory pressure within a wider Turkish nationalist culture. Contemporary Greek Orthodox Arabs from Antakya thus constitute a minority within a minority (**Thodorelis-Rigas 2015, pg 50)**.

> Compared to my grandfather, we made a big difference in education and level of life. Big difference. This is a common story for everybody in Syria. They supported the poor people. There was a big transformation from 1970 to 2000.

When asked about what made their community unique, more than one of my interviewees sent me a link to an interview with Paul Yazigi the late Metropolitan of Aleppo and brother of the current Patriarch of Antioch, the leader of the Church to which most Greek Orthodox in Syria belong. Paul Yazigi was elected in 2000 and served as the leader of the community in Aleppo. My interviewees saw him as a martyr for their people, as he was abducted by the Islamic State in 2013 and has been missing ever since. In the video, an interview with a Greek Orthodox news portal, Yazigi (2011) speaks Greek and explains the history of Aleppo from a Greek Orthodox Perspective. His interpretation of the role of religion for society is in harmony with the idea of the ecumenical frame and intercommunality. He highlights the Orthodox relationship with the Catholic and Muslim communities in the city, using the ancient Greek name 'Veria' for Aleppo.

> We've got only a small flock, but the city is on the front line. The Orthodox are face to face with the nursery of the Catholics in the Middle East. Aleppo, that is Veria, is the first big city [South of] Turkey. When the crusaders entered the Middle East, they stopped and set up an administration and built fortifications in the city and then made their way further south. So, it has a lot of history for the Catholics.
>
> Now, in these parts of the Middle East, the language has been Arabic since the 7th and 8th centuries when the Arabs came and their language spread. Of course, after that until the 13th century the language of the liturgy was Greek. because the people there spoke Greek...but after the 13th century, Greek became the language of only the priests and well educated. So, the people lost the language and began to translate the liturgical texts. As this went on the language was forgotten...Even today we still retain a few bits in Greek that people know by heart, you know. That's the position today in the patriarchate of Antioch...
>
> ...because we're a minority and it's not in the interests of the government and such to like to be very religious. But in the end, we realize the people in the Middle East are very religious, regardless of which religion they follow. We Christians, I believe, from education, from the nature of our religion, especially the Orthodox because the Orthodox church is purer and further removed from politics, I believe Christianity is a preparation for the kingdom of heaven, not for an earthly kingdom. So, we're a little distant from political life, just a little. And we're trying to pass on that spirit: that religion means one thing, it's a set of rules for you to have good relations with other people.

Laila stressed the central role of the Church in the social and material and cultural lives of the Greek Orthodox Christians:

> [Greek Syrians] have a lot of feelings toward the country, but I will focus on the church in their life because more of their activities are related to the church. We fast more than the Muslims. We have Christmas and before Christmas, 40 days of fasting and 50 days before Easter. We celebrated Christmas, organized camping trips for families. We did a lot of activities.
>
> The salary previously before the war, depending on the position, you didn't find anyone who was so poor that they couldn't feed their family. Now it is so difficult for them to provide for their families and their kids. The church helps in general. They give them the basics like rice, sugar, oil, and things like this every month. They make distributions for all the people. They help them with these basic needs.

Shadi shared that belonging to the church was more salient than belonging to the country:

> All Greek Christian Orthodox in Syria belong to their Church first and then also they belong to the country of Syria. Unfortunately, in Syria, you don't have any political life. Not for Christians or for every community. We didn't play any role in that. Most people believe we live here, and we have our traditions, we practice them. No one interferes with what we want. We don't get involved in politics. If you want to get involved with politics, there are just some parties. For those who want to be involved in political life, they joined the parties. Those who don't want to just serve in the army, served his church and served his community. I served in the army and worked for a company that belonged to the army too.

Yousef mentioned Orthodox Christian leaders' important role in Syrian history.

> The idea of national identity in Europe didn't reach us until the 1950s. The Arabs favored Arab Ottomanism based on the enlightenment. The two people who established the Baath Party: Michel Aflaq and Hourani were a Christian and a Muslim.

Until the *great unmixing* sparked Christian migration from what is now Southern Turkey to Aleppo, the city's Christian population had been mostly Catholic since the 17th century (Panchenko, 2016, p. 170). The first group of Orthodox Christians fled from Kilis, directly north of Aleppo, as the area became Turkish territory and Turkey began deporting its Orthodox population to Greece (Masters, 2001, p. 183; Tachjian, 2019, p. 4). Antakya maintained its own

special status as a mandate of France, belonging neither to Syria nor to Turkey until it was ceded to Turkey in 1939 (Shields, 2011). Thus, Antiochians moved more gradually and already had connections in Aleppo when they arrived. Another group moved from Greece and many of them kept their Greek nationality. These three migrant groups became part of Aleppo's existing Greek Orthodox community but maintained their status as sub-groups within the community.

When I asked about Antiochians, Laila explained to me that:

> They are so proud that they are coming from Antakya. The most important place for the Greek and Syrian Orthodox was Antakya. In the beginning of the 20th century a lot of resettlement came from Turkey to Greece or Turkey to Syria.

Her mother, Mona, said:

> The Antiochians have a strong relationship. They are a tight community inside the community. They don't have problems between the other groups. The relationship between the other communities is very strong.

Shadi discussed differences among the sub-communities in Aleppo's Greek Orthodox community. He contrasted his grandparents' experiences of fleeing from Kilis, to those of the Antiochians. Tensions between the communities even led to defections to Catholicism:

> The Antakyans are on top. They think they're on top. They are from the cultural city. They believe they are educated people. They were rich also, so they believe they are in the center. The others are from villages and they were living on agriculture. This is the big difference between country and city. When my grandfather came to Aleppo in 1914, there were few Orthodox in Aleppo. most of them were in Aleppo for 100 years. So, when they came, they didn't have a chance as refugees and the church didn't support them. They gave them tents in poor places. They weren't given any welcome. When the people came from Antakya it was different. They were educated people and they knew how to play a good role.
>
> I remember in our church there was a big scandal between the two sides. Some of them changed their church to Catholic based on this scandal. They said there was discrimination against people who came from villages versus cities. This was in 1930 or 1935. The people who came from Antakya had better treatment than those from Kilis or others. They didn't run away. They had time to prepare to come. They collected what they had, and they were rich, and they were welcomed. They were educated people. They were not refugees. They moved smoothly. This was in 1939. They had time.

When I spoke with Toni, a Greek Orthodox priest who founded an Antiochian Orthodox church in Seattle, he stressed that Antioch was the first place that Christians called themselves Christians, even before the Greeks had converted. For him, the ancestors of the Antiochian community were more authentically Christian than the Greeks and the Russians.

Yousef also mentioned that Antioch's Christians were the 'original' or 'first' Christians:

> Our perception is that the original Christians are Greek Orthodox and Syriacs. We are the descendants of those despite the long period of Arabic colonization. However, Antioch was lost in the 8th century, so we are not attached to it like the Greeks are to Constantinople. The Greek Orthodox patriarch moved in the 17th century from Antioch to Damascus.

The tension between Hellenic and Arab identity within the Greek Orthodox church in Antioch often politicized the Greek Orthodox community. After Greece declared its own church autocephalous from Istanbul, Russia and France competed with Greece for influence among Orthodox populations in other parts of the world (Vovchenko, 2013). The tension between Arab and Hellenic elements of Antiochian Orthodox identity took on new relevance later in the Syrian conflict, when Aleppans were forced to flee.[5]

Sabri spoke about the tension between the Arab and Hellenic elements of his identity:

> I am from Aleppo. I grew up in the Orthodox movement. I know the saints and the icons. I know why we pray this and why we pray that. In Syria we were called Christians for the first time. When you know what you really believe and the history of the church and why they are called Greek Orthodox and not Arab Orthodox, and we are Arabs. I am Arab, I am not Greek at all. But I am still called Greek Orthodox because the Arabs were racist against the Christians and they couldn't handle that some Arabs were Christians, so they put us in the race of the enemies.
>
> Some of them are third generations of Greek migrants, I have a grandfather who was a Greek who migrated in 1825, 1830 to Turkey and from Turkey to Syria. This is a […] story I know from my grandmother. She always told me that this country is not our

[5] Antiochian Greek Orthodox who remained within the borders of Turkey continued to be served by the Metropolitan of Aleppo until the beginning of the Syrian conflict (**Yazigi, 2011**). Because the majority of Orthodox in Turkey are Greek speakers served by the Grecophone Patriarchate of Constantinople, Arab speaking Orthodox Christians in Turkey have undergone both Turkification and hellenization as a minority within Turkey's Greek Orthodox minority (**Theodorelis-Rigas, 2015; Kaymak & Beylunioğlu 2017)**

> country. I always felt like that. I asked her and she said we came from a different generation of migration. I understood that we have Greek in our blood and that is why my surname is Nicola.

After learning the history of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, which fought against the Greek-speaking leadership in Istanbul for the right to choose its leaders and conduct services in Arabic, I was surprised to find expressions of attachment to Greece among my interviewees in Athens, even those with Greek nationality. Laila shared her feeling of being Syrian and Greek:

> Both of my parents had Greek passports. My grandparents and my great grandparents are Greek. I feel I am Syrian and Greek at the same time because I was [born in Syria]. I have all my life there, my history there. I feel I am Greek Syrian. When I was in Syria, I started to learn Greek because in the church there was a teacher from the Greek embassy who came to the church for one lesson per week from October to April.
>
> When I came to Greece, I went to the university, I started lessons, I passed the examinations. Greek is my language and a very rich language. I always thought that Greece was the mother of civilizations with a nice history. I am proud that my roots are from Greece.
>
> When I was small, I didn't understand the meaning of Greek. Later, as years went by, I understood that the person creates his identity, not the country or the nationality. Every person is different and has his own identity. Maybe one person comes from one country or another country, but his identity is different from his nationality or country.
>
> When I was in school, they asked me if I am Greek, and they asked why I am Greek and speak Arabic. I said my family came from Greece and stayed in Syria. I always answered this question. I feel I belong in both Syria and Greece. I could not choose one. I cannot tell you, because really inside me I feel that I am Greek Syrian.

In the 19th century, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch had sought independence from the Istanbul-based Greek speaking elites that had dominated it during the Ottoman period (Roudometof, 1998). With support from Russia, the church had distanced itself from Greece and Greek national dominance (Vovchenko, 2013). I argue this may be why many Arabic and Greek speaking Orthodox migrating to Aleppo from Turkey during the *unmixing* opted to stay in Syria, even if they had Greek nationality. However, by the 1970s the Greek government was actively supporting the church's activities in Syria and Lebanon (Arab Orthodoxy Blog, 2014). As metropolitan of Aleppo, Paul Yazigi also saw the opportunities for

study, travel and funding offered improved relations with Greece as a strategy to strengthen his dwindling flock's ties to Orthodox culture in the face of what he perceived as threats from defections to Catholicism and pressure from radical Islam (Yazigi, 2011). He believed that Greek Orthodox Christians were in a position to make Islam more tolerant and less fanatical, to serve as a bridge between Christian Europeans and Muslim immigrants. He founded the Anatoli school to teach Greek, French and English and requested a Greek professor from the Greek consulate in Aleppo (Kyrillos, 2020). The fact that their leader stressed the Greekness of the community and actively engaged in a policy of hellenization before his subsequent traumatic disappearance catalyzed community members' association with Greece. They had learned the language, and many had traveled there for visits, pilgrimage or study with his blessing and help. Naturally, when Syria no longer felt secure, they turned to what they saw as a familiar spiritual homeland as the first option. Yousef described Yazigi as the most important leader in his community, who sought to strengthen the community's relationship with Greece:

> Metropolitan Yazigi had an amazing vision and understanding of the Middle East. He wanted good relations with Greece. He sent many to do their PhDs. in Greece and found scholarships for people [to study in] Greece. Greece would see this as expanding their culture. He requested some Greek teachers. There was an agreement with the Greek government. Turkey and Greece both have consulates in Aleppo, because we are part of Greek culture, we are a bridge between both.
>
> Aleppo was the only place that had this. I link this directly to Yazigi who was abducted. It hasn't been continued given the circumstances. Further activation or relations with the Greek government was a brave step of Metropolitan Paul and started since he was in Latakia before coming to Aleppo. Latakia has a strong presence of Orthodoxy, so the main reason isn't the competition with Catholics, but it's a way of getting support to reach the image/vision he had in mind in terms of being active and influencing the Orthodox church. Competition is always triggered by the Catholics in their attempt to attract native Greek Orthodox in Syria. The Hellenic spirit exists as a cultural behavior rather than a nationalistic tendency. People who are strongly engaged in The Church understand the relation with Greeks much more than those who aren't.

Laila described events held by the Greek consulate and the Greek-language programs that they offered, which Paul Yazigi had helped arrange:

> Every year in Aleppo the Greek community would arrange a small party with people from the Greek embassy and they would make vasilopita with a gold coin inside. The relationship between the Orthodox church in Syria and the Orthodox church in Greece and all the people that work in the church, most of them go to Greece in order to study in Athens or Salonika.
>
> It depends on the person but 90% of the Orthodox in Syria feel that they belong to Greece. During our stay in Greece, a lot of people came to Greece from Aleppo, and a lot of them did not have Greek nationality. Even people who had Syrian nationality but are Greek Orthodox feel they belong to Greece like they belong to Syria. The religious identity is very important for Syrians.
>
> From 2000 until 2010, there was always a teacher from the Greek government in Aleppo giving classes to the people. It took place in the church with communication between the church and the Greek government. It happened two times a week for each level, the kids, the parents, beginning intermediate and advanced. It was 8 months a year.
>
> Some people I met because I took courses there. One person traveled to Greece and that was why he wanted to learn. Other people wanted to learn the basics in order to go study in the University. Other people already had Greek nationality and were born in Aleppo and for this reason they want to learn. Most of them either had Greek nationality or they are religious, and they thought it was important to learn this language. Maybe 10% were these mixed couples or it was just someone who was independently interested in Greece.
>
> In Damascus there is a Greek embassy, but the Greek consulate in Aleppo could not do anything. They just invited the Greek community when there was a celebration. If you wanted a paper or any official thing you had to go to the Greek embassy in Damascus. The Greek people in Aleppo, most of them have nationality and used to go to the church frequently. On the other side there are non-Greeks who went to the church, but they believe that their roots are coming from Greece, so they already had a connection with the Greek people. Some people who didn't have Greek nationality still felt 100 years ago they lost papers and they would have had Greek nationality, but they believe that their roots are from Greece.

During his tenure as Metropolitan of Aleppo in the first decade of the 21st century, Paul Yazigi chose to strengthen his institution's relations with the Greek government. He did this to strengthen the culture of his flock and provide them with opportunities in the face of what he perceived as a challenge from the Catholics and their institutions as well as the threat of radical Islam.

> The Catholics regard [Aleppo] as the Vatican for the Middle East and it's true that the Catholic element is very powerful in the city. They have a lot of influence on the Orthodox because they have lots of foundations, schools and hospitals and people go to wherever there are Christians generally. There's not many of us Orthodox but we have, I don't want to say difficulty, but a great responsibility because we're faced with a powerful Christian front consisting of Catholics, Armenians and Protestants and we also have the other very powerful front of Islam.
>
> Now with our daily dialogue within our life in the Middle East, especially with Islam, this is the important role of the Christians in the Middle East, where Islam was born, that we should make Muslims find a different interpretation for these fanatical elements. It was Christians who wrote down Arabic. It was Orthodox Christians who described the grammar of Arabic. So, we've contributed much to the history of Islam, the Arabic Language, since we're a feature of the history of the region, and we were here before them. I believe the role of the Orthodox and of Christians in general there is to create a spirit of freedom and an open movement. within Islam that will reach out to other parts of the world.

After their return to democracy in 1974, the Greek government shifted from a policy of supporting Greek citizens abroad and assuming their eventual return to promoting "Ecumenical Hellenism," which simultaneously increased diaspora community ties with the Greek "homeland" while encouraging them to remain in the countries where they lived. The state provided favorable business opportunities, education and cultural benefits to Greeks abroad, as well as founding institutions and organizations such as the World Council of Hellenes Abroad to support the diaspora and act in Greece's interest.

In this 2011 interview, recorded in Greece for a Greek audience, Metropolitan Paul is appealing to Greeks to support him in building institutions and connections for the Orthodox in Aleppo to protect their interests in the face of perceived threats from both Catholics and Muslims. In return, he stressed the Greek heritage of the community, which also included Greek nationals like Laila and her mother. For them, his kidnapping and presumed death at the hands of the Islamic State in 2013 confirms that his fears were at least in part well founded, and certainly confirmed this for members of the community.

In the eyes of the community, Paul Yazigi seemed to foresee the conflict and his own disappearance. He became a martyr and his words carried even more weight than before. His attempts to cultivate connections between Greek state institutions and local Orthodox institutions, provision of Greek language lessons and insistence on the Greekness of Aleppan Orthodox heritage, combined with his traumatic disappearance, meant that when the country descended into conflict, Greek Orthodox Christians in Aleppo turned to Greece as a safe and familiar place to which they could 'return.' Prior to the crisis, there were around 4,300 Greek Orthodox families in Aleppo. By 2016, only 2200 remained (Al-Khasi, 2016).

In this section, I have provided a background on the Greek Orthodox community of Aleppo prior to the *refugee crisis*. I have emphasized the importance of the Orthodox Church, its institutions and its schools in the social life of the community. I have shared their vision of both the Arab and Hellenic strains in their history, as well as their connections to other communities and to Orthodox in other countries. In the next section, I will show how these elements affected their migration experience when they moved to Greece, in contrast to their Muslim compatriots.

## 4.3 Migration Experiences

The Muslims and Christians I interviewed all shared stories of harrowing migration experiences. However, most of the Christians shared their grandparents and great grandparents' experiences rather than their own. Their own migration experiences -- from Aleppo to Greece and other parts of Europe -- were less disruptive. Some of them already had a Greek passport, others were able to secure tourist, work or student visas thanks to their language skills, friends or family connections in Europe and government officials prepared to admit Christians. On the other hand, most of the Muslims I interviewed had migrated irregularly by boat or by land,

risking their lives to cross front lines, seas and borders; spending all of their money to pay smugglers and losing anything they left behind in Syria. They arrived in countries where they did not speak the language or have many connections before arrival, facing inhumane conditions, impossible-to-navigate government bureaucracy and little opportunity to move forward.

In this section, I will recount the migration experiences that my interlocutors shared and show that the details of these migration accounts from the *great unmixing* period have a bearing on Greek Orthodox Christian migration to Greece and Europe today: some had foreign passports, most had international networks, claim to status as a diaspora of Greece and education in foreign languages which made the migration resulting from the *refugee crisis* easier for them than Muslims. I will contrast their relatively comfortable migration experiences with the difficulty of other Christian communities and that which Muslims have faced since 2011.

Greek Orthodox Christians were able to move to Greece because of their status as members of the Greek Diaspora. Greece has valued diaspora 'return' immigration since its founding (Vogli, 2013). The nationality clause in the Greek constitution of 1827 enabled Greek speakers, those of Greek descent or Orthodox faith in the diaspora to claim citizenship in the newly founded kingdom (Christopoulos, 2013). The legal concept of *omogeneis*, which allows people to claim Greek nationality based on religion, language and ancestry continued to play an important role in Greek migration policy throughout the 20th and into the 21st century as diaspora Greeks from Turkey, the Soviet Union, and Albania 'returned' to their homeland (Christopoulos, 2013; Venturas, 2013; Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002).

Leila, her husband Shadi and her mother Mona moved to Greece shortly after the war started, before the siege of Aleppo. She and her mother were Greek citizens. Although they were

born and raised in Syria, Leila's paternal great grandparents had passed their Greek nationality on to her and therefore her family had to renew their residence permits in Beirut every year.

> People who have Greek nationality had to go to Beirut to change their papers. When the problem started in Syria, the embassy closed. It is difficult when they need papers. There is a small consulate, a small office for when any person needs something easy. But for other issues for the passport and other issues, we don't have a Greek embassy in Syria, so they have to go to Beirut to take an appointment with the embassy.
>
> I have Greek nationality. I just have a Greek passport. Previously I had a residence permit in Syria. I was born and raised and studied in Syria, all with a residence permit. All my life was there, and I had a residence permit and renewed it normally without a problem. Both of my parents had Greek passports. My grandparents and my great grandparents are Greek.

Her husband Shadi did not have Greek nationality; he was a Syrian citizen. He described his ancestors' migration from Kilis to Aleppo, remarking that the difference between those who received Greek nationality and those who received Syrian nationality was a material one:

> I don't have Greek nationality; I have Syrian nationality. But if we check our family 100 years ago, we had Greek nationality. We lost it after the First World War because when the Ottoman empire finished, they asked people what their nationality was. Syria didn't exist but we said Syria and they said go get Syrian nationality. If they said I am a Greek, they sent them to the Greek embassy to take a passport. As this cost money and people were very poor, they preferred to say they were Syrian.
>
> Our family left Kilis, which is in Turkey now. This is from *Ekklisia* which means church [in Greek]. Most of the people there were Greek nationality. My cousin is Greek. My aunt got married to someone from the same village and he is Greek. Actually, I can think that our region is Greek. I remember when my grandfather and grandmother escaped from Turkey, from the slaughter happening in 1914, my grandfather took my grandmother. She was his fiancé and he put her on a horse, and they ran away in their pajamas. They took just some money and jewelry and ran away to Aleppo. They didn't have any time, so they lost their papers and their property. They had a lot of land and agriculture. They ran away because they were slaughtered by Kurdish. … The Ottomans pushed the Kurdish to kill the Christians.
>
> They spoke Turkish. I remember my grandfather spoke in Arabic and Turkish. We use many Turkish words even now. This was not in the Antakya area. It is a different culture. They are Orthodox but a different culture. In Antakya, they are more Arabic speaking. Still today. In Kilis, they were mostly Greek.
>
> My grandfather was a policeman. My other grandfather was a builder, a mason. They built many churches in Aleppo. Most of the Greeks lived with the Antakyans and in Kilis. they were all Greek. Syria didn't exist, they were *Rum. Rum millet.* They are Greek and they decided they are Syrian in 1923 [...] so they went and took the nationality.

Most of the Greek Orthodox Christians I spoke to flew to Greece or their other destination countries with passport or visa in hand and arrived as citizens, students or residents. The Christians of other denominations had more difficult journeys, although ultimately less difficult than those of the Muslims. Nabil's family also came during the *unmixing* period:

> My family came originally from Diyarbakir in Turkey. When there was the Armenian genocide in Turkey, my family came from Diyarbakir to Syria. My great grandfather moved to Aleppo and started his life over there.

Nairy's family are a mix of Armenians from Anatolia and from Syria:

> The Armenians in Syria didn't come just after the genocide, there were some there before also. The number increased after the genocide when they came from Turkey and settled in the Northeast of Syria, most of them. My father's family, one of the families, was from there.

Ohan from Kessab discussed how his Armenian ancestors had lobbied the French to prevent their village from becoming a part of Turkey:

> When the French mandate was in Syria, there was a deal between the Ottomans and the French that from Antakya to the Syrian border, when they handed it to the Turks, Kessab was inside this region that would be handed to Turkey. A lot of Armenian communities and the priests and religious people came to a deal with the government that Kessab not be handed to the Turks. They succeeded and cut Kessab out of Hatay.
>
> My brother speaks Turkish because he is older than me and socialized with my grandparents who spoke Turkish a lot because of the history of the region. When I grew up, they were already dead, so I had more difficulties with Turkish. He went to Yerevan.

Kilian recounted how, after leaving Iraq as refugees for Aleppo, his family had to flee Syria and move to the US. However, he still felt that his religion made his journey possible:

> For Muslims it was harder. There was outreach in churches and the UNHCR and EU and US prioritize Christians and non-Muslims as [they are] persecuted in Iraq. LGBT are the most vulnerable and after that were the Iraqi Christians. I didn't present myself as a Christian, because by the time I was coming to the US, I had already left the church. I didn't tell my sexuality to DHS. I was so afraid. The interpreter was Syrian, and I was afraid I would get in trouble with my family. I am assuming they could tell.

Nairy told me about the different ways that Armenians left Syria:

> There are many Armenians who came with a tourist visa but stayed illegally. They want to come here, especially to Greece, even though it is not the same as Norway. I used to know a family here who got married and moved here. They are both from Syria and they had children. When the war started, they saw it as an opportunity. They went to Norway because they wanted more money. Although they were living in a village in Norway and they have 8 months of cold and snow, they are used to it and every summer they come here to spend the summer. They are okay with this situation because this was good for them to have money from the government and the government takes care of the child until the age of 20. It is a white country with good social services. They really need people and new blood. They don't get married and have children. It's not enough. This is one reason even Canada and Sweden and Norway want refugees.
>
> Of the Armenians who left Syria, most spent a few months or years in Lebanon and waiting for their line to the UN. Very few went that way. A lot went with something called Armenian Home. They went to Canada. They sold everything there and they needed to stay in Lebanon. This was one of the terms that they got to be approved to go to Canada. Private sponsorship organizations. The refugees that came to Europe, for example my Aunt who is in Germany as a refugee, they started even before they took residence, started to take money from the first month that she arrived at the camp.
>
> Lots of the Christians have friends and families in other countries. Back then, even in Northeast Syria where my grandparents came from, there were also some people who instead went to other cities in Syria. Most of them went to Sweden and Norway. That part of Europe. Especially to Sweden. Most of the Arab Christians from Syria who left from Haseki and Qamishli also because they had families there. These are the Arabic speaking Christians. Most of the Armenians were leaving quickly. I guess they had more money and so it was easier. Plus, they were not like the Muslims coming with ten children.

She came directly to Greece with with her husband, who works as a jeweler:

> When my husband came, he had a brother in Greece already. He has a sister in the USA in New York. His cousins live in Los Angeles. His plan was to go to his sister in the USA. When he went to Santorini for a visit, he fell in love with the Greek islands and stayed here. He started to work, and he really liked it here. Sometimes we think about the children and their future because the situation here is not like a normal European country. On the map it is, but it is really more like Syria and Lebanon.

Dudi first moved to Jordan, and then secured a 'Golden Visa' for Greece through her husband's business:

> I had a connection with Greece before I moved because of my husband's business. We came two times to visit before we moved to Greece. I came to Greece. For me it was the best country I visited, I love it. I love the kind people, the warm weather. Before we

> moved to Greece, we were living in Jordan. Life there after Syrian war was difficult. I couldn't get a driving license. I needed it, but I couldn't work after the war. Life there is so difficult for Syrians. I moved here four years ago in August 2017. I have a golden visa; I am not a resident or a refugee.

Nabil used friendship and work connections to secure a visa for France and then onward travel to Sweden, where he applied for asylum:

> In 2011 the war started in Syria and I was hoping that the war wouldn't be too long, so I waited for it to get solved. But after a little while, three years, it got worse and worse, I decided to travel. I decided to leave my country. It wasn't easy to leave my country and all I had and my career of 40 years. But life is short, and time is going, and it was a very bad life, so we had to go. I left for another country. My goal was to go to another country in which I wouldn't be a refugee and become a citizen if I lost my Syrian citizenship.

One of my Greek Orthodox interviewees did not rely on international connections or the official international migration system to travel to Greece. Sabri traveled to Greece after paying a smuggler to take him to Turkey and then boarded a boat to cross the Aegean as a 'refugee' rather than a member of the diaspora. His experience demonstrates that Christian identity is key to accessing the formal migration system: when he arrived via the informal system as a 'refugee', his Christian faith was also cast into doubt. I told Sabri about my other Greek Orthodox interviewees' experience. This was his reply:

> Actually, this is the opposite of what happened to me. I came to Chios in 2017 and I lived in a refugee camp. I already studied the language and when I went to the church, they didn't believe there were Christians in Syria. I went to church and did the liturgy and went to take communion and they rejected me and told me there are no Christians in Syria. The priest asked me why there are Greek Orthodox and Catholics in Syria. They told me I have to be baptized again.
>
> I needed someone to help me. I went to the church because I grew up in the church. I thought I would find an opportunity. I was living in the tent in the refugee camp. I am not such a believer. In the beginning, they gave me 5 euros and told me to go away. When I came back, they looked at me weird and told me I have to pay to be baptized. He grilled me about the Orthodox church.
>
> Chios is full of narrow-minded racist people. They were burning the tents of the refugees. I believe it is a weakness in their identity. They are doing that because they are scared they will be Muslim. They didn't see any other Christians in their life.

Sabri also discussed his experiences with the asylum service in Greece and several different international organizations such as the UNHCR and FRONTEX, the European Union's border agency. They asked him to tell his story repeatedly, doubted his identity and asked him to prove that he was a Christian.

> During the registration with the European Asylum Support Office, they asked about your religion and I told them I grew up in a Greek Orthodox family. He repeated the question three times. He asked me why I am Christian. I told him this is how I was born; I didn't choose it. He was confused. He asked for five minutes and then he came back and gave me the acceptance of being outside the border procedure, which was very good because I am Christian. But for me this is also racism.
>
> This was the same at the asylum interview in Athens. Katexaki asked me why my name is Nikola, and my father's name is Michel. I told her every small community has their own beliefs and they give names based upon their beliefs. My father and my mother were born Christian because of my grandparents. She asked me for the name of my church, and she checked on google maps and she found it. We did this interview in Greek and I was speaking Arabic with a Greek interpreter. Even the interpreter, who was Libyan, was surprised.
>
> I came by rubber boat and they didn't believe I was Christian. They put me out of the border procedure, which means I won't be sent back, under the EU-Turkey agreement. Because I am Christian, they knew Turkey wasn't safe for me.
>
> I had a weird experience with FRONTEX. They also asked if I was Christian and what my religion was. I said I am Greek Orthodox. The interpreter was Lebanese and he said okay you are Catholic. I said no, I am Greek Orthodox. In the end, they wrote that I am Catholic. When I had to sign the papers, I had to cross out Catholic and write Greek Orthodox. I don't know why he did that.
>
> I told my story more than 100 times. I am trying to tell people that in Syria we have Christians and Yazidis and different religions. There are not only Muslims and Alawites and Sunni. It's kind of tiring now.
>
> Please don't work with UNHCR. They only have the name and the people who are working mess up anything. Some of the most racist people I have ever met are the workers of UNHCR who feel they are here to fix the world. They don't even ask people what they need. There is no one in a refugee camp who asks for a residence permit. They only need security and food and they failed to give both of them. If you want to help someone, you should help him as he needs. You don't wait for him to come and help you.

Sabri criticizes the asylum system, which is dependent on interviews with arriving asylum seekers to determine their 'vulnerability' (Cabot, 2014, p. 115). Prior to the *refugee crisis*, Greece had been Europeanizing its asylum procedures to comply with the Dublin II (and

then III) Agreement, which requires that arriving refugees apply for asylum in the EU country where they are first registered by EU, UN or local authorities (Triandafyllidou, 2010). The arrival of millions of people fleeing conflict in West Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia for Europe between 2014 and 2016 presented an economic and humanitarian challenge to countries on the internal and external borders of the EU. Traditional humanitarian actors such as the UNHCR, Save The Children, MSF and other 'firefighting' types of NGOs set up shop in Greece, Italy, Turkey and other EU frontier states (IARAN, 2019). Local NGOs, focusing on different subsections of the refugee crisis, also proliferated.

By 2016, the proliferation of NGOs, the presence of informal aid networks (often associated with the political left), the flow of capital and people, as well as allegations of abuse and corruption, spurred a crackdown on NGOs and civil society actors in Greece (TNH, 2018; Lindsay, 2020). The EU supported these measures as they helped to contain asylum seekers outside of its contiguous interior. Domestic far-right factions such as the Golden Dawn supported it because they saw an alliance between leftists and asylum seekers as a threat to their political power and (imagined) Greek ethnic and national homogeneity (Cabot, 2016 & 2018 & 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2014). Between 2016 and 2020, the Greek government instituted new asylum laws (Amnesty International, 2020) and new limits on foreign NGOs (Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Lindsay, 2020); it cracked down on left-wing organizations and evicted informal refugee camps and abandoned buildings that had been reclaimed by solidarity organizations; and it pursued corruption claims against NGOs for alleged abuse (Kathimerini, 2018; Howden & Fotiadis, 2017).

As a result, the formal asylum system came to a halt, with most asylum seekers stuck in camps for months or years. Greece denied most claims and deported them to Turkey. FRONTEX

and the Greek coastguard have both been accused of illegally sinking refugee boats or pushing them back into Turkish territorial waters (Psaropoulos, 2021). Rather than provide the system with the resources it needed to process asylum seekers, the EU has joined a widening trend of using strategies of externalization and 'remote control' to further undermine it (Fitzgerald, 2019). This strategy has been condemned by the UN and human rights groups (UNHCR, 2021; Crisp, 2020; Meral, 2018; Grandi, 2020; Nyabola, 2020).

On September 8, 2020, a fire destroyed the Moria Refugee camp on the island of Lesbos, causing the displacement of several thousand refugees. The UNHCR and local NGOs provided temporary food and shelter. Several European countries and the European Commission resettled unaccompanied minors and funded emergency housing. Most of the refugees were moved to another camp. This catastrophe catalyzed reforms to EU policy addressing the *refugee crisis.* The dramatic images published in the media influenced the ongoing renegotiation of the European asylum system. After the fire, the EU announced a 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum' to replace the 2013 Dublin III regulation (which was criticized for overburdening EU border countries) with a policy of 'mandatory solidarity.' The EU also renewed the 2016 EU-Turkey migration agreement (European Commission, 2020).

Almost all of the Muslims I spoke with had passed through Turkey on their route, and several still lived there. Yet Syrians are not considered 'refugees' or eligible for asylum. Instead, starting in 2014, Syrians have been able to register for Temporary Protection which allows them to work and reside legally in Turkey. Some Syrians have also received Turkish citizenship (Aras & Duman, 2019). The EU has therefore focused on Turkey as a solution to prevent its member states from having to grant asylum to Syrians, often ignoring the conditions in the members of vulnerable populations (Weber, 2018).

Basel is one of the Aleppans who has settled in Turkey. Unlike the Christians above, his family lost everything during the process of migration:

> When we started university there were so many bombs. Gas bombs. They bombed the university, and they took a gun and shot in the sky or between your legs. It was very hard to be in the university and not get arrested. You could not focus on your study because all the university was very distracting with bombs and guns. Sometimes after the revolution it got worse, and planes dropped bombs.
>
> I came to Turkey in 2015, during the siege of Aleppo. It was very hard and before we came my brother and father came. Me and my mom came. I was studying, but I couldn't wait anymore. One day we took my mom and went out. At the border, the Syrian police did something to my mom's passport. They scratched her photo on the passport so she couldn't pass the border. She went back and I continued and when I told my father, he went back to Syria and had to get her a new passport. It was so dangerous and expensive. She was lost in the middle of nowhere at the border. It was so hard for her to get back to Aleppo. They said why did you come back? And they asked her so many questions. They said that the people who did this were not border guards. But they were, I had paid them bribes.
>
> I spent all my money at the border. At every checkpoint there was a bribe. They took all my Syrian money and all my dollars. We went to Aleppo, to Tartus and then a bus to Lebanon and then a plane to Adana. Then the bus to Istanbul. I have never tried to go to another country. If I had to leave Turkey, I would never go back to Syria. I would go to Canada or America or Dubai. The problem is my parents are with me and I don't want to leave them. Moving is not easy for my parents. They are old. We don't know what is going to happen. I applied to Canada or America. My parents refused.

Jack spent several years living in Turkey before paying smugglers to take him to Greece. Because he came to Turkey on a tourist visa before the temporary protection regime was instituted, he was subject to deportation when his visa finished.

> I didn't need to apply for a visa for Turkey. At the time when I left in 2014 or 2015 you didn't need a visa. You just went to the airport and you got a visa there. After a few years, they told me I have to leave the country. I had to stay there for two or three years illegally. I went out of Turkey because they were deporting people to Syria.

After he came to Greece, he was frustrated by the complete paralysis in the asylum system. Using his English skills, he managed to find a job and bypass the asylum process:

> So, I packed my bags immediately and came to Greece by boat. I got stuck on an island for several weeks. I didn't get caught. I arrived on the island, I put my sunglasses on and walked right past the police. I was chill. They got everyone else on the boat. I just walked

down the street. I came to Athens to get asylum papers and start the process. I will explain it quickly. If you want to apply for asylum the only way to call them is via Skype. You book an appointment, and you go. I tried every day for a year, and no one answered. I worked with some NGOs here and managed to meet some people with the ministry and fix my papers. Many people are being deported from the houses, because they stopped giving money to refugees. They started deporting everyone. There are some squares here where you will see whole families living their whole lives. They are not able to get papers to have a job or to get the fuck out of this country. Greece is playing this refugee card to get money from the EU.

Sam left Deir Ezzor when it was clear he would be drafted into the Syrian military:

> I didn't decide to leave Syria. There was a situation. I was young. It was very dangerous. It was mandatory for each man to share the war. The police started collecting students, even those who had a reason not to go to the military. So, at that time in 2015, there was no exception even if you are an only child or a student. You have to go to the military.
>
> First, I went from Syria to Turkey. I went to Istanbul for 6 months. I went by the smuggling route. I went to Greece by sea also with a smuggler. I arrived in Mytilene. I had to stay in a camp for a long time. One week in Mytilene to Filipiana camp. I was in there for two years in the tents.
>
> When we met, I was already in Athens. It was the point of improving my life. I went to an [asylum] interview, but I didn't continue my process there. I was going to renew the 6-month card. Otherwise, you have to wait four or five years to get another ID. I was in Greece for 2.5 years. I learned some Greek.

I met Sam in 2019 when he was teaching Arabic to volunteers in Athens. He had already been in Greece for several years at that point. When I contacted him for an interview and he said that he was in the UK, I assumed his asylum case had finally gone through. But it had not. Despite spending most of his adult life in migration or asylum proceedings and despite his excellent English and work skills, Sam is still trying to achieve the legal status that would allow him a stable life. Yet he told me he never wanted to leave home in the first place:

> I also got to the UK with a smuggler. I went by plane. I am applying for asylum in the UK, and I finished almost all of my process and I am just waiting for the results. I am not allowed to work.
>
> In Greece most of my friends were multicultural and I was meeting volunteers from everywhere. In Greece, it is a nice country and nice people and nice weather but there is so much corruption and it is already full of refugees. There is no chance to work there. It is so hard to find a job and build a future as a refugee. I already had a problem when I left my country, and the second problem was that I was in Greece.

> I never had a plan to emigrate. I didn't even get a passport. In the future, if Syria got back as before I would prefer to return. For me, I will be able to because many countries are already involved. Maybe in the future, but in the near future I don't think so.

Despite his desire to return, Sam and his family would be threatened if he did. Unfortunately, his absence is also a risk.

> At the moment, my family is still in Syria. But they started to go to each house and ask about who was missing. Are they alive, are they outside or are they joining the army? If they have someone who is considered bad then they can take your house or your stuff. I heard from other people who all the family is outside, they lose their houses. Especially people who have a political problem. Those ones are never going to come back, and the regime took their houses. If I go back it is a big problem because I left the country without doing military service.

This is because of two laws targeting refugees: the Syrian Law #10 of 2018, which seized the abandoned property of those who did not return to file an in person claim for it within one year (Abu Ahmad, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2018) and Article 97 of Syria's Military Conscription Law (Kayyali, 2021) which allows the government to seize the assets of Syrian men who do not serve their obligatory military service.

Sam is not the only Muslim I spoke to who has spent years moving into different countries, in hopes of finding stability somewhere. Abdulla went to Saudi Arabia, China, Turkey and then Greece. Since I spoke to him, he has traveled via smugglers to the Netherlands:

> After I graduated in 2019, I stayed in China for a little longer to extend my permit as a student, just to stay so I don't have to return to Syria. I couldn't get another scholarship. When Corona started I had already applied for a Turkish tourist visa. I was planning to go to Turkey for a holiday and I wanted to see my relatives in Turkey. I left China last February, 2020. I went from February 2020 to three months ago. I wanted to apply to university in Turkey, but it was so difficult. My sister is a refugee in the Netherlands, and she insisted that I come and do my masters there. In Turkey, I was looking for any door to open for me and I will be good. I thought about going back to China, but they made it stricter after Corona and even students couldn't return to China. They made it difficult for students.
>
> I couldn't stay in Turkey and get residence or do anything. The only place I could work is in Syria, but it is not safe there. I finished my medical studies, and I got my

certificate. I still need to do my internship for one or two years. I need to do it in an English or an Arabic speaking country. Many of my friends went to Jordan and took the exam and were able to work. If I go to Damascus where the regime is, they will take me to the army by force and there is no way to continue to do my degree.

I decided to come to Greece. From Greece, I am trying to fly to a better place. Greece is good but it is a bit difficult for us. Here we have to pay. The government is making it stricter for refugees. If I apply for asylum, it will take at least two years to get it. In Greece, I don't want to stay two years. I want to go to the Netherlands or Germany, so I can study and do my masters and work there. I am hoping to fly from Athens as soon as possible.

There are two ways from Turkey, by sea or by land. I went with some smugglers. I paid them 2500 euro. They get you cars, someone guides you. Even by sea, the Greek border control is so difficult. Everyone who comes to the borders, they send them back to Turkey. It is so difficult and cold.

I said I will try one time and if it works, okay. If it doesn't work, okay. It worked. I came to Thessaloniki and then I took a train to Athens. That was at the end of 2020. I started 2021 here in Athens. There are other smugglers who work from Athens to other European countries with some fake documents or IDs and they just say OK, here is the ID and go try. In the airport, it is much harder until Summertime, and they catch everyone who goes in Winter. They catch everyone without documents and send them back to Turkey.

In this section, I have compared the migration experiences of Greek Orthodox Christians, other Christians and Muslims migrating from Aleppo and other parts of Syria. The Greek Orthodox Christians shared traumatic memories from when their ancestors were forced to flee Southern Anatolia during the *great unmixing of peoples*. The policies of the Greek, Ottoman, Turkish Syrian and Mandate governments during that period shaped the 'policy worlds' that offered opportunities to some communities while excluding others (Shore & Wright, 2011). Depending on their migration route, material conditions and identity they either acquired Greek or Syrian nationality, either lost everything or were able to maintain some of their material wealth. During the *refugee crisis*, in part because of their experiences 100 years earlier, Greek Orthodox Christians were able to secure visas or passports and migrate legally and comfortably to their new countries. They also maintained houses and other assets in Syria. Other Christians had more difficulty but were able to use the international migration and asylum systems as they

were designed. Muslims were excluded from the formal immigration system and forced to resort to smugglers. Because many fled mandatory military service or could not return to claim their assets, they lost both legal status and were also dispossessed.

I have shown that the various communities of Aleppo lived in relative equality, but, as they crossed borders, their religion, identity, family histories and material conditions interacted with the policies of states and international organizations to privilege some over others, creating inequality between them. For Greek Orthodox Christians, this interaction created opportunity structures (Phillimore, 2020) to migrate safely and comfortably, securing visas or arriving as citizens from the diaspora in their new homelands. Other Christians, considered 'vulnerable' by the UNHCR, made use of the formal asylum system to seek resettlement in Europe and the United States. Muslims were shut out by formal systems but made use of informal systems such as smugglers and solidarity networks. This is another example of Shore & Wright's concept of the policy world -- in which Greek Orthodox Christians are most privileged and Muslims least privileged by an order of inclusion and exclusion (Weber, 2018).

All of these Syrians started in the same place, and nearly all of my interviewees have made it to their desired destinations; but on the way they had vastly different experiences. Some arrived with suitcases in hand, a community, a network and retained their property back in Syria. Others spent years struggling against inhumane conditions, risking death and losing everything to reach the same place. I had known Jack for several years by the time we did our interview. I was friends with him when we both lived in Turkey, and when he told me he had gotten residency in Greece, I congratulated him on his success. He replied:

> I am not a success yet. I am just getting started. I handled things well, I agree, but it took from my health. The stress was eating me slowly. The stress triggered a disease. I have Raynaud syndrome. It was triggered by the stress, the doctor said. I made it so far, but it took something from me. I can't smoke or drink coffee or whatever anymore.

## 4.4 Integration Experiences

In this section, I will share my interviewees' experience living long term in their host countries. Members of all communities lived and worked together as part of the same society in Aleppo, however they had vastly different migration experiences and were treated very differently by both European and Syrian policy. The opportunities created for them by policy have shaped their lived experience in each country and their sense of belonging. Religion played an important role for many of my respondents: those who had a church or religious community reported feelings of belonging while those who felt they were not accepted for their religion or were actively discriminated against reported less belonging. Stress, danger, poverty, unemployment, bureaucratic delays, language barriers and discriminatory treatment made it harder to integrate.

Ager and Strang (2008) have developed a 10-dimension framework for integration which has influenced integration policies in the United Kingdom, the EU and the United Nations. They highlight ten domains of integration: employment, housing, education, health, citizenship and rights, social connection, linguistic and cultural competency and freedom from fear and instability (p. 166). Orthodox Christians from Syria moving to Greece have integrated much more successfully than their Muslim compatriots in all of these domains: those I spoke to are more likely to be employed, living in stable housing with access to healthcare and many are citizens of Greece while others are permanent residents. They have established social connections and a sense of community; most speak Greek fluently and report that their lifestyle in Greece is "exactly the same" as it was in Syria. This theme was very common among the Orthodox I spoke to, although other communities did not feel the same way. Laila said:

> Life in Syria is very similar to life in Greece, so we were so happy. It is 95% similar for all the traditional things.

Shadi mentioned traditions and bureaucracy, although he also admitted he misses Syria:

> The Greeks are the same as us. Same traditions. When I met people with Greek nationality, like my wife, I didn't find any difference. I haven't noticed any difference between Syria and Greece, but I feel Syria is my country because it is my nationality. I lived there, I have friends and a company, family and a home. I have a relationship. I like it here; I have work and it is good. But sometimes I miss it there.
>
> The system in Greece is the same as Syria. Bureaucracy, the same exactly. The same streets and buildings, the same everything. I believe Greece is an ideal country for Syrian adaptation. Any Syrian who lives here will say he is in his country. The problem here in Greece is there is no opportunity for work. If there was a big opportunity for work, I believe 90% of all the Syrians who went to Europe would stay here. I think the timing was bad when they came here. They love Greece very well, but they say okay if we stay here, we will destroy ourselves. Greek people can't survive, how can we survive? Many relatives coming from Sweden or Germany to visit us here are surprised. They say it is like Syria or Aleppo. We didn't feel any difference. You are lucky here.

Due to their language skills and education, they often find work in NGOs which support refugees or in international businesses. Thus, they are spared from the worst of the Greek economic crisis. Since they have secure legal and financial status, they are also able to appeal to Syrian authorities and their networks in Syria with regards to business and property. Meanwhile many of the Muslim Syrians who fled the conflict have been dispossessed of both legal status and property back home. Greek Orthodox Christians' secure status and integration in both Greece and Syria has a cumulative effect that protects them from the Syrian conflict, the Greek economic crisis and the *refugee crisis*. Laila discussed her feeling of belonging in both Syria and Greece. Having legal status in both places helped her to feel at home in both countries:

> I feel I belong in both Syria and Greece. I could not choose one. I cannot tell you because really, inside me, I feel that I am Greek Syrian. Before I came to Greece, I came many times as a tourist. I visited. I know this country. It's not the first time I visited. I read about it. The mentality and the habits and traditional things in Syria are the same. Even people who have Syrian nationality but are Greek Orthodox feel they belong to Greece like they belong to Syria.
>
> I like Syrian culture and history and I like our life in Syria, but I never had any papers that said I was Syrian. I had a Greek passport, but until now I didn't feel I was

> only Greek or I was Syrian. I feel that I am Syrian in many ways and Greek in many ways. If there is a football match between the Syrian and the Greek team, I don't know who I would support or who I would be with.

Religious community was important for all of the communities in Aleppo. While in Athens, I attended church with Laila and Shadi as a participant observer. It was an old church, likely built before the founding of Modern Greece. Inside, the walls were painted with images of the saints, labeled in Arabic and Greek. Incense burned throughout the service, which was conducted in Arabic. Before the liturgy, the priest offered a prayer for Metropolitan Paul Yazigi's return. They sang the liturgy in Arabic and everyone lined up for communion. Shadi explained:

> It's the same liturgy [...] Exactly the same in every way. It's just that one is in Arabic and the other is in Greek. But the language doesn't matter.

I asked him if it was affiliated with the Patriarchate in Antioch, in Istanbul or in Athens.

> It belongs to the Athens patriarchate, but they let us use it. They gave this one to us.

After the service, everyone stood around shaking hands, smoking cigarettes, eating the communion bread and drinking tiny plastic cups of Arabic coffee, flavored with cardamom. There were Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians and Jordanians in the congregation. Antoine introduced me to the priest and some of his friends. When I spoke to people and they heard my accented Arabic, they greeted me in Greek. When they heard my accented Greek, they spoke to me in English.

I also attended an Antiochian Orthodox Church in Seattle. Because the congregation is small, they don't have a church of their own and the priest conducts the service on a voluntary basis in space loaned to them by the local Russian Orthodox Church. However, the priest, Father Toni, hopes to grow his flock so that he can be granted his own church and a career position. Before the liturgy, Father Toni offered a prayer for Metropolitan Paul Yazigi's safe return. The

priest would alternate singing the liturgy in Arabic and English, and most of the congregation seemed comfortable replying in both. Some parts of the service had Greek phrases, including the phrase meaning 'Christ is Risen' in Greek. They also said the same phrase in Arabic with a melody that all seemed to know. He explained the difference between Greek Orthodox and Antiochian Orthodox and how the church had lost many of its Arab members to Catholicism due to Greek domination of the church. He said the Arabs in Jerusalem, in particular, were treated as second class citizens by the Greeks.

In Athens, the Church of Greece accommodates the Antiochians. In Seattle, the Antiochians relied on the Russian Orthodox and viewed the local Greek Orthodox Churches as competition. In the UK, Yousef said that the Greek Orthodox church helped him feel at home.

> Most of my friends are Greeks. Successful integration means the ability to take part in social events with the native communities, appreciating their values and understanding their social unconscious behavior. The first thing I did in the UK was get in touch with the Greek church.

Dudi mentioned her friends and the importance of being in a Christian country:

> I have the same mix of friends in Greece. Most of them are Arab, not only Syrian but almost all of them are Christian friends and I have Greek friends. They are very good neighbors. Of course, for Syrian Christians, Greece is like heaven. Religion in Syria is important but in Greece also they are different. I can feel here is Christian Religion.

However, this successful integration experience is dependent on the mode of migration that was available to Greek Orthodox Christians. As I discussed in the previous section, Sabri is a Greek Orthodox Christian who came via irregular means as a refugee. After he was rejected by the church in Chios and had his Christianity called into question, he no longer felt belonging in Greece, Syria or the church. Instead, he embraced his statelessness as its own kind of identity.

> I won't be Greek or Syrian anymore. I will be me; I won't be like them. I see it as liberating me from having to belong in one nationality or another. I can't explain this to my friends or my parents. They only care about being nationalist and having people to belong to and have your own community and feel supported and really safe. For me, I am

safe as long as I am me. As long as I am free. This is why I don't care about what happened to me in the church. I already felt like that before. At the beginning of the war in Syria, I started to understand what nationalism means and what we should do and shouldn't do and what Arabs and Syrians and all this. I chose to be out of all this. I don't care about any of those things, and I just be me, especially when I understood what my grandmother said about "this isn't our country."

Even if they want to give me Greek nationality, I won't get it. I prefer to remain in refugee status forever. I don't believe in nationality; I don't want any citizenship. Being a refugee is not a legal status you get; it is a lifestyle. If you are a refugee once, you will stay a refugee all of your life. I am a citizen of the world. I don't belong to any other communities. I am not a nationalist. I don't care about race. I care about trying to help people to make a better world.

Ohan also mentioned religious belonging when discussing his feeling of belonging in France, although he also noted his perceptions about racism and islamophobia there:

In France, it is the first time I can put a cross on my neck without feeling afraid. I used to do it in Syria before the war. When I talk to people and get to know people, I don't say I am Armenian right away. I say I am Syrian and if we go deep, I say I am Armenian. They see I have dark skin and people look at me and consider me Bin Laden until I prove myself. I see a lot of racism from the skin color. It plays an important role.

I went on vacation with my white French friend. His family is very traditional. His father is old and so white. In the beginning he was not very welcoming. Once he knew I was Armenian and Christian and drinking wine and eating pork he relaxed. I had to break the ice.

Nairy discussed how material demands and needing to care for her children got in the way of learning Greek, which she saw as important for integration. She contrasted Greece's austerity welfare policies with those in Western Europe:

After 12 years, when I first came, the government used to give free courses. I went there for three months. During those three months you learn the basics. It is not a very easy language. I really tried. Back then, I was loving every day and learning and doing my homework. Three months wasn't enough. After that, I was pregnant and miscarried. I was alone. I couldn't go anyways and then they stopped these free lessons. Our economic situation didn't allow me to go to the university which is the best place to learn. I did what I could. Then, until now when my boys are in fourth and fifth grade, I am teaching them. They caught up with me, after they moved ahead I don't know what will happen. I learned with them.

In Greece, they are not giving money. It is not about whether they feel at home or not. If you go to Sweden or Norway or Holland or Germany, they are giving money. If I am in a new country I need to learn the language.

She too observed similarities between Greece and Syria:

> As I was saying, it is not like you are living in Norway or Germany, which is cold or rude or organized. It is really more like Lebanon and Syria. The government also plays a role. Even nature is very similar around the Mediterranean sea. Even the weather is the same. Plus, the people. They are very simple here. I was not crazy for them from the first day, but I like Greece. Life is simple. It is like Syria and Lebanon of course. To feel like home, I am not a refugee. It is okay. When I said yes to my husband, I knew that I would come to a place that I have no one. We have our community, our school, our church. When I got my children to school and with the parents, although some are Greek and not 100% Armenian plus a lot of Armenian from Armenia — and we have differences, we are not the same— we have friends and people who I call part of my family. Some are just friends.

Nabil, who lives in Sweden, attributed his own comfort there to having a job, legal status and the ability to speak the language. Religious belonging was not that important to him:

> I am able to work as a Kanun player after learning English in Sweden. I teach Kanun here and I am the first musician to get into their music institute and teach Kanun in the conservatory. The people of Sweden like Arabic music and I convince them about Kanun, and they love it. All the institutes teach it for Arabic and all Arabic people there. I have young Swedish students. Everything is there. Everything is comfortable. My cousins are still in Aleppo and I communicate with them. The church is not the reason I feel comfortable in the country. It is because I have work, and I have residence. It is not the church, but it is learning the language and getting residence and getting a job.

Kemal did not come to Greece as a refugee, but rather as a child in the early 1990s. He grew up in Greece and later moved to Aleppo:

> We migrated to Greece when I was one year old. The thing that attracted [my father] was the similarity and the eastern traditions. The similarity between Arab society and Greek society. You know better than me that Greeks are more like the Middle East in terms of customs and familial relations. They are different from the European cluster.

Kemal, who considers himself a practicing Muslim, discussed growing up as a Muslim in Greece in the 90s and early 2000s:

> When I told people I was Syrian, they didn't know where Syria was. They classified me with Turks for my religion. The name rings a bell. Kemal. They respected me and they loved me. I attended religion classes there and I sometimes had discussions about religion, and they appreciated the things I did. I felt a connection and belonging in the society. Greeks are emotional and they accept all nationalities and the racism there is

very limited. I would like to say *was*, because now I don't know. The racists may have constituted maybe 10% of the society.

I did encounter them. My history teacher was racist but when I attended history, I didn't raise this topic. I acted as somebody with a deaf ear and a blind eye. I can't change his mind. He was in his 60s. I know how he thinks and the grudge he has toward Muslims. I want to prove the opposite. Even my colleagues were not comfortable with the teacher. On the other hand, I had this Greek teacher who was the opposite. I was his favorite student. He had tendencies of being an atheist. I used to share with him lots of ideas and he used to compare me to his other students, saying that he comes from a different religion and nationality and he is better than you at school. I paid full attention to him and liked him very much. I was proud to share my faith. I felt accepted that I didn't try to be a Christian.

Once he moved to Syria, he struggled to feel at home in the country of his birth:

I don't listen to Arabic music. I was raised on Greek music and until now I still follow Greek series and music and sometimes when I feel stressed, I switch to Greek music and podcasts and lectures. I find it a gate to escape from the miserable situation. This year is better than last year. It's an exhausting subject to talk about the situation in Syria though.

I grew up in Greece and that is why I [...] struggled going back to my origins. I had only a Greek high school degree. I didn't know standard Arabic enough to take a high school exam in Syria. I took some Arabic courses and did the exam here and I passed and then I enrolled in English literature. I was lucky and God helped me. Later on, I started to settle down and arrange my life and make plans for the future. Little by little, I started to be independent. Life in the Middle East is the most complex and difficult compared to other places.

Especially for me, I don't feel a sense of belonging here. That's the main reason I haven't merged in the society. I am a different version from everyone here in this country. Though I have the qualifications and experience, I lack the sense of belongingness. This is because of my thoughts and ideas and doctrines. I am a different version of Syrian. It is very complicated. You know the feeling of being a foreigner in your own country? I don't share interests with people here. The joy I find is always in the sea, those blue skies and clear sun. Maybe I am a bit of both, a bit of Syrian and a bit of Greek, combined together.

However, if given the opportunity, Kemal would not return to Greece. He cites material factors, negative attitudes toward Syrians due to the refugee crisis and political problems:

People like me feel like a misfit. I am more keen on Greece than Syria. It's not because of the war, it is because of the mindset and traditions and beliefs as well. For me, I need to be a little more well off to make it to Greece. The picture of Syrians now in Greece is distorted. They might not accept me like they used to in the past, as I saw in the past. I don't blame them because they have seen the worst in us. The worst, I don't want

> to get into politics, but at the end of the day we are human beings and have limits. They were pushed to their limits.
>
> In the future, I am very much crazy about migrating to Canada. I have been trying to do that. The other day I received a phone call from a website and later on found out that it was a scam. They are fraudsters who operate. I prefer Canada or Australia. Far away. Honestly I have had a lot and I am fed up with the problems and the wars.
>
> In Greece it is not much better. They have their own problems but maybe there, things are quieter in terms of politics. You don't have countries fighting to control the country because it is part of the EU and somehow independent and even the society there is much softer. Plus, the fact that lots of foreigners always visit Greece makes it multicultural, whereas nowadays Syria is visited by very few people. In Aleppo, there are few tourists, but the thing is when you have more foreigners and more cultures in a city, life becomes more pleasant.

Abdulla also had a unique migration story. When I spoke with him, he had finished his studies in China, spent nine months in Turkey and then paid smugglers to take him to Greece. Now he is in the Netherlands. He mentioned the difficulties of finding a mosque to attend and meeting people:

> I do breakfast prayers and go to a mosque if it is available. If not, I pray at home. I fast for Ramadan as well. I celebrate all the Muslim festivals. They say the mosque in Athens is closed but I went for Friday prayer a few times. Now, even on Friday I am not going because of the Corona situation. I don't feel like staying forever. The country and the culture is not mine. I was not into this country. The food was good, but the people were difficult for me.

Jack took a more typical route. He fled Syria for Turkey in 2014 and stayed there until 2019. He made several attempts to cross by sea with smugglers, often spending several thousand Euro only to be pushed back to Turkish waters by the Greek coastguard or FRONTEX. He also lost his legal status in Turkey and was nearly deported back to Syria. When I spoke to him, he had been in Athens for around one year. He used his English skills and social media savvy to network and find work in Greece after he arrived, and also attributed his good fortune at not getting taught to his light skin and red hair:

Everyone else in the boat got caught and stuck there. Although the police passed me, they didn't stop me. But also, I don't look Syrian. I have long and red hair. I can blend in. I speak good English.

He contrasted his own experience with that of the families he works with at an NGO:

I was working with the NGO today and seeing the families. The amount of sadness and pressure that is put on this family… I don't think anyone will be able to think anymore. They can't imagine life will be better. They lost hope completely. I can't expect anything from them after what they went through. The circumstances they went through and they are going through now are not human. A few centuries back, we fought like animals for food. It is this bad.

Unless you already have skills or something… you have to arrive with some connection or some language. For example, me and my friend here were just going around. We didn't have papers or whatever. I said I have an idea, let's go talk to people. We would talk to falafel places or a beauty place. We can make advertisements for you or do an Instagram video. We didn't have a laptop, we had to borrow one for each video. Now one of the places wants us to handle all his advertisements. We didn't have a clue what we were doing or where we were going but we just went for it. Something good will come from anything you do. Or something bad but at least something.

I worked with some NGOs here and understood how things are going. It is too crazy right now. Every few days we hear about someone committing suicide. There have been some fires inside the camp.

He noted the importance of language skills for his success in Greece:

Now, in Greece, I finally found a job. I am working in a call center in Teleperformance for Arabic. I speak Turkish but speaking English helped me too much. I was translating movies and for government officials even before I had a visa. I was volunteering. Everyone here speaks English. It helped me network. Without English I wouldn't survive.

His skills at networking and language helped him bypass the normal asylum procedure.

While he didn't want to go into all of the details, he told me he had met with a minister, who 'fixed' his papers just before he planned to pay a smuggler to take him to Western Europe:

It was very spontaneous. I met a guy who was building an NGO and needed some help with videos. We helped him with some translation and started building up to meeting with the ministry and that way was able to fix my papers. I have an asylum and I am waiting for my residence permit now. I want to stay in Greece. I had a chance to leave here. Many people want to go to Germany, but I decided to stay here. I know Greece. I know history.

Of course, then he came clean about the real reason he chose not to leave:

> I have a Greek girlfriend and she is the reason I stayed. I am learning a little bit of Greek with my girlfriend now, but it is going slowly.

In this section I have shared the different communities' experiences of integration into their host countries. For Greek Orthodox Christians, Greece is 'exactly the same' as Syria. For other Christian communities, there were a variety of challenges and routes to integration including employment and language skills. However, for Muslims there are institutional barriers. Although I spoke to relatively privileged members of the Muslim community who speak English, those who came via informal or irregular routes could not access legal work or asylum procedures. Instead, they used social skills, language skills and informal networks to survive in Greece and either normalize their status by irregular means or travel on to a third country.

## 4.5 Legal Status

In this section, I will discuss the final piece of the immigration experience, one that has already come up many times during the course of this thesis. Legal status is often the reward for legal migration and successful integration. Some migrants had legal status in multiple countries and used their transnational connections strategically, accessing job and educational opportunities. For those who migrated via irregular means or faced barriers to integration, attempting to secure legal status created an extra level of stress, especially if they faced danger in their home country. All of my interviewees mentioned the importance of legal status for their migration decisions. Some chose their target country on the basis of the legal status it would offer them or the ease of receiving a visa. They resorted to informal and irregular methods when they could not access these legal means of traveling to and staying in Europe.

Korac (2009) argues that integration and place-making are often transnational strategies which involve both the home country and the host country. Citizenship and other secure forms of legal status can be a practical tool that migrants use in their 'multi-site placemaking' strategies (p. 125). Greek Orthodox Christians in Aleppo used their access to Greek passports or visas before the conflict to take advantage of educational and job opportunities. Rather than estranging them from Syrian society, their foreign ties made their position in it more secure. Once the conflict began, they were able to migrate quickly and safely because of their access to legal status in Europe. They did not leave illegally or irregularly, so they also maintained their legal status in Syria, keeping their assets and even returning when necessary. Even after leaving Syria, Greek Orthodox Christians' legal status in both countries helps them keep ties in both places.

Syrian personal status laws granted them Syrian citizenship after their ancestors arrived from Turkey and Greek diaspora policy both granted Greek Orthodox Syrians a claim to Greek nationality, but also instituted programs to encourage them to remain in the diaspora (Roudometof, 2000, p. 78, Venturas 2013, p. 136). I asked Laila if being a Greek citizen in Syria had been a challenge or a benefit:

> Both of my parents had Greek passports. My grandparents and my great grandparents are Greek. This was before Syria was founded as a country. As I know, my great great grandfather came more than 100 years ago, and they used to stay in Syria because they like life in Syria. They had their nationality and a residence permit which they renewed and continued many generations without problems.
>
> It was never difficult at all. We did it without any problem. I just had to renew my residence permit. I had all the rights like others. No problem in school or university at all. My husband's aunt said that when they came they had some papers, but because people were ignorant they lost their papers. They all got Syrian nationality. The community that came from Greece protected their Greek nationality. My family came from Kirkira in Corfu.

When Greece became a part of the European Union in 1981, Syrians with Greek nationality became citizens of the European Union as well, able to work, study and live in any EU country.

The other Christians I spoke to were not citizens but were still able to secure visas for European countries, even after the war in Syria began. Dudi benefited from a *golden visa*, which provides residency in Greece for those who buy real estate. Nabil was able to secure a work visa as a musician in France, after which he traveled to Sweden to apply for asylum. He noted that he chose Sweden because they offered permanent residence to asylum seekers:

> I had a friend living in Sweden. In Sweden, you can have permanent residence. I knew I would miss my country. I knew I could start a new life in Sweden. I was lucky. I got a concert in France and a visa to Europe. I did my work in France and went on to Sweden. I asked for asylum in Sweden. Despite the fact that it was a new language and cold weather, I still like it because of the permanent residence. That's the main reason I didn't stay in France, even though I speak French very well. That's why I stayed in Sweden.

For Muslims, securing a visa or traveling to Greece or the EU was much more difficult. Although Kemal grew up in Greece and speaks the language fluently, after moving back to Aleppo in 2009 (before the conflict), he has been unable to secure a visa to visit the country:

> I met the consul in Aleppo. She was very cautious. I needed some papers from Greece because I couldn't get back to Greece. We had a residence permit and it expired and we couldn't get back. I needed some papers to enroll in University. I met the consul there. She didn't know what to say and she couldn't help me.

While living in Turkey and before paying a smuggler to take him to Greece, Jack had also tried to apply for a visa. He noted that his Christian friend managed to secure a visa, but he and his other Muslim friends were denied:

> For European visas in general, when I was in Turkey, I had applied for Germany for a studying visa with two friends. We got accepted in the same university and paid the same German course and everything through the same person. None of us had any legal issues but one of us was Christian. We got rejected and he got accepted. In Europe things work like that.

Jack also observed just how important legal status was to his feelings of belonging and integration in Greece. He had planned on paying a smuggler to take him to Germany but, after acquiring residence by informal means, he said:

> I was about to go if I didn't get my papers. I was so close. Then I got my papers and realized it is comfortable and the food is good, and the weather is good.

Abdulla got married while living in China, but after leaving the country with the hopes of completing his medical training in Europe (all he needed to do was complete a residency), he found himself separated from his wife due to the difficulties of acquiring a visa.

> I got married in China before I left in December, 2019 with my Russian girlfriend. After that, she was with me in Turkey, but I couldn't apply for a Russian visa to stay in Russia. Syrians have to apply for Russian visas in Syria. I said I would go to Europe and you can follow me. She can get the visa because she has a Russian passport. I tried the legal way before, and it failed, so I tried the illegal way. This is the first time in my life I stayed in a country without documents or broke a law.

Cabot (2014) discusses the role of legal status for refugees and asylum seekers in Athens who "assert forms of civil membership as persons entitled to lives that surpass the task of mere survival" (p. 199). She highlights the "intimate entwinement of legality and illegality in the culture of documentation surrounding migration and asylum in Greece."

> Stapled to a memo that included the individual's photograph, name, and country of origin, the deportation order was often the very first document people received when they entered Greece and were released from detention. Issued to those who had entered Greece in a "clandestine" manner or whose legal permission to stay had expired or been revoked, deportation orders stated that the individual had to leave Greece voluntarily by a specific date, usually within one month. Nevertheless, many new arrivals described the deportation paper not as an order to leave but as a permission to stay, or as in this man's account, a paper "good for one month." (p. 47).

Phillimore (2020) argues that "the nature of immigration and integration regimes has the potential to shape refugee integration outcomes" and critiques the way that systems discriminate between 'good' refugees who arrive via legal means and those who arrive illegally (p. 11).

Jack explains why such papers are so important for asylum seekers and also serve as both a barrier or a potential opportunity structure for integration. These refugees often spend years in camps or in the streets of Athens and other cities, renewing and applying for asylum procedures, receiving rejection decisions and appealing them. Jack did not express an objection to legal processes or the asylum regime, but rather communicated his desire for the systems in place to function as he believes they are meant to, so that Syrians can contribute to the societies they have become a part of:

> I think it would make refugees lives better if you stop fucking with the papers. If they just make things go as they are supposed to go. If the system works. I want to go to a building and make a call and make an appointment and go to the appointment and get my papers. Any refugee here with papers can work or study, they're legal. They have opportunities. There are too many NGOs that teach English bla bla bla or even in universities. Without papers they are not able to. They are fighting for survival because they don't have papers yet. This is becoming hard just for one reason: the papers. If they give the opportunity to have the papers without this pressure... you put the person in a psychologically fucked up situation for too many years he will not be able to think or work or learn anymore. If they made this easy, even if they left the country and went to Germany or anywhere else or if they stayed here they would be doing something. You have many thousands who are ready to work. They need to work. It is good for your economy. These people are ready to work. Put them in the fields or put them anywhere. For example, many people got arrested for working in olive fields. Why are you arresting him? He is doing something good for you. Give him papers and let him work. All the small papers go back to this. These people can't because they don't have papers.
>
> I was literally fucked up for a period of time. I did some translation and stuff for a period but then I didn't have any money. Especially with corona, we stayed in a house for a long time without 10 euros between us. Now I don't have a house. I am living with my girlfriend because of that situation. I was always ready to work. When I got my papers, I signed a contract with a company in a week. Many people are waiting for papers so they can have the same opportunity.

The Muslims I interviewed had also lost their legal status in Syria. Because many of them had fled mandatory conscription, their assets had been taken and they would be arrested and imprisoned if they ever returned to Syria. Acquiring secure legal status abroad is the only safe way to prevent deportation. Jack shared his fear of going back:

> I have a military court on me in Syria because I ran away from military service so if I get sent back either the court will take me and put me in prison or ISIS will take me.

In this section, I have shared my interviewees' experience with legal status. Greek Orthodox Christians had secure legal status in both Syria and Greece before the conflict and were able to leverage their transnational connections to pursue opportunities. After the crisis began, they migrated quickly and securely while maintaining their legal status in Syria. Other Christians took advantage of a favorable visa regime to migrate legally to Europe after the conflict in Syria began. The Muslims I interviewed, on the other hand, found themselves excluded from these regimes. They all expressed a desire, however, to acquire secure and durable legal status and highlighted the ways that their insecure legal status negatively affected their migration and integration experiences.

## 5.0 Results and Policy Implications

In this final section of my analysis, I draw on Migration Studies' scholarship and my interviewees' own experiences and suggestions to make policy suggestions that incorporate both what went *right* for the Greek Orthodox community and the challenges that the other communities faced related to migration, integration and legal status. In doing so, I will also provide a review of my arguments and the data from each section. The cumulative effects of policies enacted from the 19th century to the 21st century by diverse actors and institutions created opportunities and strategies for this community while excluding others, ultimately facilitating their integration in Greece as immigrants while protecting their transnational ties to Syria during the second decade of the 21st century.

Greek Orthodox Christian Syrians in Greece have achieved the desired outcome of EU integration policy, despite the fact that they are mostly overlooked by policies targeting Syrian

migrants. Rather, their integration is a result of policies made over the course of nearly two centuries and as a response to past conflicts and migrations. Understanding how these policies create spaces for strategy, opportunities and orders of inclusion and exclusion which lead to the integration of Greek Orthodox Syrians in Greece can inform migration and integration policy which aims to accomplish the same outcome for other migrating communities. Perhaps more importantly, understanding the unintended and cumulative long-term consequences of policies meant to respond to one conflict or migration event may help policymakers avoid their predecessors' accidental failures and duplicate their accidental successes.

In this paper I assume that national, ethnic and religious belonging are conditioned on social factors rather than some primordial and inherent attribute of individuals and communities. The people I interviewed lived together in an intercommunal society in Aleppo with relative equality and mutual respect. Yet, when they migrated to Europe, Greek Orthodox Christians experienced privileges that other communities could not take advantage of. Other Christians were able to pursue legal means to migrate, while Muslims found themselves excluded from formal migration systems and had to resort to informal and more dangerous means.

I have modeled my policy recommendations on the outcomes that Greek Orthodox Christians experienced, asking how these could have been recreated for Muslim Syrians. Migration from Syria to Europe has slowed in the last few years as the number of people being actively displaced by the Syrian conflict has decreased. However, migrants continue to arrive in Greece and at all the frontiers of the EU. While the present study has focused on Syrians, these recommendations do not only reflect the experience of Syrians, but also the way that policies create overlapping orders of inclusion and exclusion, opportunity structures and policy worlds that privilege some groups of migrants and dispossess others.

## 5.1 Migration Policy

In this section I examine the relationship between government policies during the *unmixing* and *refugee crisis* periods and my interviewees' experiences. This relationship shows that thinking in terms of crisis without considering inequities creates suffering that stays in historical memory; that instead there needs to be space in the national narrative to envision new arrivals as potential citizens; that offering legal status on arrival creates better outcomes; and finally, it illuminates the importance of social networks for migration and for integration.

Migration narratives were central to the identities of all the communities I interviewed. For those who came as refugees to Greece, this was their own difficult and traumatic experience risking their lives to cross borders and seas. For the Christians I interviewed, their ancestors' forced migration experiences, especially fleeing ethnic violence during the *great unmixing,* were an important collective memory. Those migration experiences and the policies of the Turkish state and French Mandate during the *great unmixing* period became highly relevant for those communities during the *refugee crisis* a century later. For example, those whose ancestors had acquired Greek nationality or who maintained a claim to Hellenic identity during that time were able to acquire visas and migrate comfortably.

Migration across newly drawn borders during the *great unmixing* period figured Greek Orthodox and Armenians in Aleppo as diasporas of new nation states. It also created ties to those nations as family members from that period and subsequent generations took advantage of diaspora return policies to emigrate. Since both Greece and Armenia have been part of larger multinational entities (the EU and the Soviet Union), these nationality claims also offered transnational opportunities. When war in Syria threatened the lives and means of Aleppans,

Greek Orthodox Christians in particular already had a strong international network of friends and relatives to draw on when they migrated -- a social and religious community that welcomed them to a country where they were also welcomed as a returning diaspora.

Migration and nationality policies at the time were not written with this future in mind. Greek nationality law originally included diaspora members in order to reward Greeks from Western Europe who participated in the war of independence with citizenship (Vogli, 2013), but has been adapted with each new wave of immigration to Greece -- from those who came from Anatolia during the Greek-Turkish population exchange to those who fled Nassar-era Egypt to those came after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Christopoulos, 2013) -- to figure these diverse immigrants as diaspora returnees and ethnic Greeks. In the 1970s, the Greek government reframed the diaspora not as a population to be repatriated but as potential representatives of Greek interests inside other countries (Venturas, 2013). Greek naturalization and foreign policy shifted its goal from bringing diaspora members to Greece to keeping them in their home countries. From the 1970s until 2010, naturalization became more complicated and costly. Non-ethnic Greeks could apply for citizenship after ten years of residence, but even then the process was long and difficult. After 2010, the SYRIZA government reformed naturalization laws, making it easier for the families of Greek citizens to naturalize and reducing the naturalization period for non-ethnic Greek residents from ten to seven years (Triandafyllidou, 2014, p. 414).

Turkish nationality policy was focused on continuing the Ottoman policy of cleansing its territory of or Turkifying non-Turkish populations (Theodorelis-Rigas, 2015; Tachjian, 2019 p. 2). The treaty of Lausanne stipulated the Turkish-Greek population exchange and subsequent policies such as the Capital Tax of 1942 stripped those who had left of their remaining property (Clark, 2006; Theodorelis-Rigas, 2015 p. 32). Much like the Syrian Law #10 of 2018, this law

was designed to prevent those who left from returning. As Shadi mentioned, those who fled from Kilis and left their property lost it, while those who fled from Antioch, which didn't become part of Turkey until later, were able to bring much more with them (Shields, 2011). The French Mandate authorities surveyed those crossing the border to determine their nationality. Those who could afford to pay for a Greek passport from the consulate could claim Greek nationality while those who could not became French Mandate subjects and citizens of Syria (Tachjian, 2019).

My finding that these different migration routes are remembered and a source of tension within the Greek Orthodox community of Aleppo a century later adds to an existing literature on historical memory of the *unmixing* period among different Greek diasporas. Contemporary policymakers should keep in mind both the lessons of past migrations and the creation of differences or inequalities which will become inscribed in historical memory. The successes and failures of the integration of Asia Minor refugees, another group displaced from Anatolia during the *great unmixing* period is a good place to start.

Sociologist Peter Loizos (1999) found that the refugees' mode of migration, the status that they receive on arrival and the possibility of return affect the way they remember their history. In Greece, where Asia Minor refugees were granted citizenship on arrival, their descendants still distinguish between groups that arrived at different times, from different places, speaking different languages (including Turkish, Arabic and Armenian) and with different levels of preparation or wealth. Among these are the Pontic Greeks from the Black Sea region of Asia Minor, the Karamanlides from Cappadocia, and the *Polites* from Istanbul. Örs (2018) carried out an ethnographic study with the latter community. Even after gaining Greek citizenship, they identify neither with the country of Turkey nor entirely with Greece. Örs argues that they could best be considered *Diaspora of the City* of Istanbul, whose sense of belonging is a cosmopolitan

one linked to Istanbul as a lost city, much like Antiochians in Aleppo identified with Antioch or Aleppans in Athens take pride in the lost conviviality of Aleppo. They were also spared the initial phase of the Greek-Turkish population exchange, maintaining more of their property and connections, migrating by regular means (albeit under pressure from Turkification policies) rather than in mass deportations; in this way the *Polites*' position vis-à-vis other Asia Minor refugees is similar to that of Greek Orthodox from Aleppo and their Muslim counterparts.

One reason that Greece was able to incorporate so many refugees during the *great unmixing* period, and so many diaspora Greeks from Egypt, Albania and the Soviet Union since then was its own national myth. This myth figures Greek nationality as a combination of Christian religion, Greek language and Greek ethnicity related to specific historical periods: Ancient Greece, the Byzantine Empire and Modern (Orthodox Christian) Greece's independence from Muslim Turkey (Herzfeld, 1982; Roudometof, 1998; Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002). However, Greece has always been home to different languages and religious communities, with existing Greek, Turkish, Albanian, Vlach, Slavic and Roma-speaking Muslim and Christian populations and Ladino-speaking Jewish populations (Naar, 2016). Greek-speaking diasporas also exist in Syria, Turkey, Egypt and other Muslim-majority countries. For many of these diaspora groups, Greek identity and Arab ethnicity were never mutually exclusive.

The first step in designing a migration policy for Greece that takes historical memory into account is to acknowledge the country's history as a home to many religious, linguistic and ethnic communities; constantly receiving, integrating and naturalizing new ones. Some of this work has already been done. While rewriting a national myth to incorporate 'foreign' migrants may seem like a far-fetched idea when we view nationalism through a primordialist or essentialist lens, scholars have shown that these myths change frequently according to historical

and political factors, especially in Greece (Chrisopoulos, 2013; Vogli, 2013; Venturas, 2013; Herzfeld, 1982; Roudometof, 1998; Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002). For example, a museum dedicated to Thessaloniki's Jews opened in 2001 and some of the housing built for Asia Minor refugees in Athens, known as *Prosfygas*, has been designated a historical heritage site and restored (Pantazopoulos, 2019; Chrysopoulos, 2019). This begs the question: will the ruins of the burnt Moria refugee camp one day be a museum dedicated to the heritage of Greek citizen descendants of 'foreign' refugees who were housed there? How will they view the current EU and Greek policies which kept their ancestors imprisoned in such camps?

Migration policy should not address arrivals through the frame of the *refugee crisis*. Instead, it should approach those fleeing conflict and war as future Greeks and the ancestors of the future Greek nation. The actions and policies of immigration authorities will shape historical memory. The difficulty of the migration route and the level of material hardship will all be relevant even a century later. The most successful migrants were those who had status on arrival. In the case of Orthodox Christians, arriving with a Greek passport in hand allowed them to start work immediately, build connections and even contribute to helping other migrants. Many of the Christians I spoke to shared experiences of volunteering and working with NGOs serving refugees or serving as an intermediary to help Greeks and Syrians understand one another and overcome culture shock. According to Laila:

> They come from the culture, so it is easy for the [Syrian] Christians to support and help Syrian refugees. They explain to Greeks how Syrians think. Our mentality is different. In Syria Christians celebrate name days, but the Muslims don't know. For this reason, […] Muslims need time to understand these celebrations.
>
> For religious Christians, they don't find any difficulty in the lifestyle in Greece, but for the Muslim refugees it was so different and difficult for them. In some ways, they helped the Muslims. Last year there were two or three families from Syria. Two of them were Christian and one was Muslim. They were in transit and went to another European country. The Muslim refugees were so surprised by the lifestyle. For the Christian Syrians, they tried to tell them.

> There is a Muslim refugee who is a single woman, and her situation was hard. One organization offered her to stay in a monastery and explained that this monastery is just for women. This woman was astonished because she didn't understand why it is just for women. Other Syrian Christian families know the culture and explained what a monastery is so that she could understand. They helped her to understand the situation and she had a good opportunity to stay there temporarily. It was her only safe place to go.

Nairy also helped refugee families through Caritas, a Catholic NGO:

> I volunteered in some organizations. With Caritas, here in Nea Kosmo, there is the Armenian Catholic church which has rooms around the church and a building very close. They started to get money from Caritas to renew this building which was in a really bad situation and bring people especially those who had children to stay there. They were from Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. One day, they said they will start to do school for the children teaching Arabic, English and Mathematics plus music, art and these things. I went there as a volunteer and taught the children English for a year and a half. We had another school with the Armenian Catholic church. The first year was the community children plus the refugees.
>
> The second year, only the community children came because the refugee children mostly went to Sweden and Germany. If someone needs me, I can go. I even went to Solidarity Now to give clothes and food. We made sandwiches for people who were sleeping in Victoria Square.

As we heard from Jack in the previous section, being criminalized on arrival, waiting in refugee camps and in the streets of Athens for years and living in uncertainty is the second barrier for refugees who have already suffered the dangerous journey by boat.

Greek Orthodox Christians also drew on existing social networks for support. They had relatives and friends who had already emigrated to Greece and other European countries. In addition to the social community, they provided insider knowledge about bureaucracy, jobs, housing and culture. Muslims, on the other hand, came with fewer international connections, although those who came before them as refugees did play an important role in sharing knowledge and resources. As Jack's work with NGOs demonstrates, those with more social resources leveraged them to help those refugees with less in a show of solidarity. They also

served as a connection between international solidarity networks and refugees without the language or technology skills to connect to them.

The politicization of the crisis, combined with its proximity to traditional humanitarian donor states, also attracted a large number of young volunteers. These volunteers were a mix of activists, tourists, students, locals and humanitarian professionals from Western Europe. They organized humanitarian aid through non-traditional means such as crowdfunding, Facebook groups, concerts, leftist organizations and even soccer clubs (Cabot, 2019; Rozakou, 2017). They successfully lobbied their own governments to accept refugees (Trandafyllidou, 2018).

Unlike in crises outside the EU, because of the Schengen agreement these activists and volunteers could easily move in and out of the crisis zone, staying as long as they needed without a visa and developing deep relationships with both refugees and locals. They used their own social capital along with photographs and social networks to conduct individualized casework. They extended their own social networks to include refugees and asylum seekers in a relationship that resembled a community more than a donor/recipient relation. At the same time, their language skills and privilege allowed them to familiarize themselves with the asylum system and network with the traditional NGOs and humanitarian actors to guide asylum seekers to take advantage of, evade or successfully access legal and organizational resources and restrictions (Cabot, 2014; Rozakou, 2017).

Rozakou (2017) calls this #humanitarianism, and the solidarity networks that formed in Greece during the *refugee crisis* are an organic example of what Paul Currion (2018) terms "network humanitarianism." (Cabot, 2018, p. 761). The strongest structures to come out of this crisis on one side are the increased border restrictions: walls, barriers and even buoys in both Turkey and Greece. What remains on the other are informal online solidarity groups; activists

who have developed an expertise in the international refugee and asylum system; a proliferation of crowdfunding and money transfer services; and the friendships and relationships between all of the actors involved, including mixed families and children of activists and refugees. In short, the most enduring institutions are harder borders and the new social networks that cross them.

Currion (2018) argues that these networks are the future of humanitarianism. Many of them function through platforms like Facebook or in chat groups. He argues for the intentional creation of a platform for people around the world to connect donors and recipients of potential supplies that is independent of national government, financial institutions and social networks. He calls it 'United beyond Nations.' He also sees networks and platforms as a diffuse and modular option, where self-help can arise organically among social networks on the ground in any given humanitarian context.

While social networks may seem somewhat esoteric when discussed in writing, I have witnessed concrete examples while working in Turkey and Greece during the period covered in this paper. During that time, a Facebook group called 'Refugee Buddy Network' was founded. Refugees seeking help posted directly about their needs. Members located all over the world answered these posts individually and then worked with other group members, some of whom were independent volunteers or residents of the country, to distribute aid as a result of the group. No one profited from the group, and it was not centrally organized. It served as a platform through which those seeking help could communicate directly with those who felt inspired to offer it. Then those involved with a distribution or donation broke off into a WhatsApp group, where they coordinated funds transfers through Square or Western Union and aid deliveries.

Because of the person-to-person coordination that happened through this Facebook group (as well as related WhatsApp groups), refugees traveling from as far away as Afghanistan and

West Africa have found resettlement in Ecuador, Mexico, the US and Europe. Along their journeys, they connected with NGOs and individual volunteers in each country. No doubt, many of those individual NGOs and organizations were able to take credit for their contribution to individual cases, but the driving force was this networked Facebook group -- a platform provided by a private company with no particular interest in contributing to humanitarian issues. This group is just one example of a platform for network humanitarianism.

In 'The Refugee Regime Complex', Alexander Betts (2010) proposes policy options which take advantage of recent changes in the structure of the international regime complex governing migration. He proposes linking "Northern" states' interest in attracting skilled labor with "Southern" states' interest in reducing the burden of large migrant populations. Borders are the key to this, and recent events at the Turkish-Greek border underscore this (Reidy, 2020). Rather than focusing on the capital cities, NGOs should set up their offices on complementary sides of international borders, such as the Greek-Turkish sea and land borders. Then, they should use network humanitarian platforms to bring in sponsors for material and legal needs of migrants on both sides. They can work alongside border officials, but also use their presence as a check on border officials' activity. Rather than barriers, these borders can become nodes in networks between countries. While migrants await asylum procedures, for example, they may already be meeting and interacting with volunteers from their future host country, building relationships that will make the wait more humane and the adjustment after resettlement easier.

At the moment, borderlands are often dangerous zones of heightened violence and insecurity, far from the surveillance of rights defenders in the capital. Placing NGOs on either side of borders will secure borderlands without securitizing them. Emphasizing a network humanitarian approach will provide a mechanism for asylum seekers, who often have limited

networks outside of their home countries, to build ties to the host country even prior to arrival. This approach aligns the interest of asylum seekers with nation states and provides a strategy for NGOs to demonstrate their legitimacy through effective network humanitarianism.

In this section I have placed the experiences of my interviewees in the context of government policies during the *unmixing* and *refugee crisis* periods. I have highlighted the importance of historical memory and migration narratives; legal status on arrival; and social networks. I suggested that policymakers approach migration not as a crisis, but as an event which will shape future citizens' identities and collective memory. I suggested that they learn from past migration events; streamline migration bureaucracy; and provide institutional support to the informal solidarity networks that have come about organically through network humanitarianism.

## 5.2 Integration Policy

As my interviewees' experiences demonstrate, there are no hard lines between migration and integration experiences. Forced migrants may or may not have a final destination in mind when they start their journey, especially if their main goal is to escape danger. A refugee like Sam who stayed in Greece for more than two years may have begun the 'integration' process before deciding to migrate to the UK, while a migrant like Jack who planned to continue to Germany changed his mind and became 'integrated' in Greece once he found a job and legal status. Migration experience, legal status and integration all affect one another, even across generations, as demonstrated by my Greek Orthodox Christian interviewees.

In this section, I argue that Greece has a rich set of social, cultural and historical resources that policymakers can draw on to aid Syrian refugees' integration. Greek Orthodox and

Christian immigrants and refugees who have integrated already are one resource. The Muslim populations of Greece, and the history of Islam in Greece and Greek Islam in the diaspora are others. Interviewees from all of the communities I spoke to are already helping refugees in their host countries integrate and settle, acting as a bridge between local and refugee populations. My respondents also mentioned the importance of religion in their lives. Christianity is explicitly taught as part of the national myth of Greece and Greekness, while Islam is associated with *Tourkokratia*, an oppressive force from which Greeks freed themselves. I recommend that Greece learn from the successes of ecumenism in Syria and foster connections between Greek Muslims and Muslim refugees, as well as between the Greek government and Greek-speaking Muslim communities in Syria and Lebanon. They should provide funding and support for mosques and cultural centers and educate all Greeks about Greece's Islamic history and present.

Metropolitan Paul Yazigi of Aleppo (2011) spoke to the importance of ecumenism and religious dialogue. Greek Orthodox universities and seminaries in Lebanon and Syria teach courses on Islam. He was speaking as a citizen of a majority Muslim country where the secular government protected his rights to citizens of a majority Christian country with a state-linked Church where the Muslim minority is persecuted. While the topic at that moment was Islamic extremism, his words can be read as a critique of the religious understanding of Greek nationhood:

> We teach dialogue. We teach the nature of Islam, the nature, the philosophy of religious affiliation. This creates an open climate, that is, if you accept the philosophy of other religious affiliations. If you accept the other person regardless of whether they are Christian or Muslim. That's their faith, it's not the people themselves. We can't establish religious states. A religious state is a mistake. God's not an earthly king and religious affiliation, religion, is a faith, that's […] metaphysical. The point isn't to create an earthly kingdom here with Islamic or Christian features only.

The indigenous Greek Orthodox communities welcomed Aleppan Christians and offered them a church, which was critical in making them feel welcome. The Turkophone population of Western Thrace and some of the Greek islands represents an indigenous Muslim community in Greece. Perhaps if the Greek Muslim community were to offer mosques and foster connections with the Syrians, this would lead to better integration. One challenge, though, is that there is already friction between Syrian migrants and Thracian Muslims. This is because Western Thrace is a common route for smugglers, and desperate refugees en route to larger cities often steal livestock and food from the local community (Dede, 2019; Yağcıoğlu, 2020). While there are some functioning mosques in Western Thrace, there are very few refugees in this region. Most are in major cities, and the Greek government did not allow a mosque to open in Athens until 2019 (Kitsantonis, 2020). While nearly every major city in Greece (and even many small towns) have unused mosques left empty since the Ottoman period, none are officially open for worship.

Greek government diaspora outreach was critical in priming the Greek Orthodox Christian population of Aleppo for migration by providing language classes, scholarships, travel opportunities, networking opportunities and cultural events. However, there are also Muslim Greek speaking populations in Syria and Lebanon (Tsokalidou, 2006). These communities are the descendants of Greek speaking Muslims from Crete who fled as intercommunal violence increased in the years leading up to the *great unmixing* (Doumanis, 2013 p. 137; Green, 2002) and they have preserved their language and culture. I was unable to find any evidence of official Greek diplomatic support or outreach to these communities and these communities do not feature in conversations about the global Greek diaspora. I was only able to contact one member of this community, who had fled as a refugee to Turkey from Syria, married an American and settled in the United States. He could not participate in an interview, but he expressed a fondness for

Greece, having learned the language and the alphabet but was unable to secure a visa to visit -- even after he had a Green Card in the United States.

Greek history and the Greek diaspora are not uniformly Greek-speaking nor Christian, although these parts of Greek history and heritage are often framed as Turkish domination. Greek education associates Islam with the Turks, who are portrayed as ruthless conquerors. The Ottoman period is known as *Tourkokratia*, or Turkish domination despite the fact that for much of that period Greek-speaking Christian populations held positions of power in the empire, experienced relative freedom and frequently suffered more at the hands of their Catholic neighbors to the West than at those of their Muslim neighbors to the East (Kostes, 2018; Doumanis, 2013; Theodossopoulos, 2006).

Since independence in 1821, Greece has experienced waves of immigration and emigration. In 1923, it absorbed more than 1.6 million refugees from Anatolia, almost equal to its population at the time (Kostes, 2018; Clark, 2006). Many did not speak Greek. It has also absorbed and integrated populations from Albania and the former USSR (Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002). While there is discrimination against some of these groups, many of them are fully integrated. Their arrival is represented as a return of ethnically pure diasporas to the true homeland, but this same history could frame Greece as a nation of immigrants and a patchwork of ethnicities, languages and minorities. Policies that teach this inclusive narrative of Greek history, rather than an exclusive ethnonationalist version, would likely decrease Islamophobic, nativist and anti-refugee sentiment among Greeks, which is a sentiment that has frequently resulted in violence against refugees and NGO workers (Cabot, 2014, p. 170; UNHCR, 2020).

Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo are aware of negative sentiments toward Muslims Syrians and seek to mediate between native Greeks and refugees. Laila noted that many Greeks do not know where Syria is, which language they speak, or that there are Christians there:

> To be honest I met a lot of people in Greece who didn't know anything about the culture or life in Syria. Sometimes they asked me: what is the language in Syria? Can you imagine? They called it the Syrian language. I told them it is the Arabic language. Some of them, other people, know about the culture. There are a lot of Christian Greeks in Aleppo and in general in Syria. Maybe 30% of the people don't know.

Even before the conflict in Syria, Metropolitan Paul Yazigi stated his belief that Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo could help Muslim migrants to Europe integrate:

> We know that Muslims in Europe are generally more fanatical [...] about Islam than those Muslims in Arab states. They go there, they see a big difference with Christianity, with the new society, with Europe, and they retain a lot of features that aren't from the depths, the philosophy of Islam. We in the Middle East, where we live every day in contact with Muslim people, are trying to give a boost and some power to those good movements in Islam, regardless of what they believe, as long as that person's prepared to talk to them on an everyday basis with love. (Yazigi, 2011)

Kilian recounted how both in Syria and in the US he has helped other refugees make the transition to their new countries:

> I was a bridge for them culturally and linguistically. I understood not just the language but the food and the religion and perspective of the new life and how to transition. Most of us who worked in resettlement were Iraqis because the largest number of refugees in that period were Iraqi.

Yousef also connected with Muslim Syrians in the UK:

> I keep relations with both sides here and I try to help the Syrians since we went through the same circumstances. I helped some Muslim Syrians especially with accommodation, registering for electricity, water, and other services.

In this section I have reviewed the factors which helped the Greek Orthodox community from Aleppo integrate in Greece: the international networks they formed with previous emigrants, language training and travel opportunities provided by Greek public diplomacy

outreach to Greek diaspora communities and a ready-made religious community in their host country. I suggested that Greek policy makers re-evaluate the ethnoreligious narrative of Greek history taught in Greek public education because it excludes the history and experience of Muslim Greeks and non-ethnic Greeks living in the country. I have suggested that the Greek state sponsor connections between the existing Muslim communities and refugees, helping create a sense of religious community by building mosques and cultural centers in the areas where refugees are located. I have contrasted Greek public diplomacy toward Christian diaspora members with Muslim Greek speakers in Syria and suggested including them in the vision of a global Greek diaspora. Finally, I have highlighted Christian Syrians' desire to serve as intermediaries between local populations and Muslims to aid in integration and understanding.

### 5.3 Legal Status

In this section I will review what my interviewees told me about the importance of a secure legal status for their migration and integration experiences. For those who took irregular migration routes, lack of legal status was a barrier to well-being, their ability to function in the host country and to maintain connections with their home country. Meanwhile, for Greek Orthodox Christians their status in both Syria and Greece helped them thrive -- maintaining property, assets and connections in Syria, while exercising their right to work and live in Greece as well as the rest of the EU. Other Christians, such as Nabil, chose their host country on the basis of the legal status it offered. All of my respondents preferred to travel and reside and work legally in their host countries, and those who chose irregular and informal routes did so only after exhausting legal avenues.

Many scholars have challenged the categories of 'refugee' and 'migrant', as well as an outdated asylum system, originally designed to fit the needs of refugees displaced in Europe after WWII (Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018; Cabot, 2018, p. 765). While some Aleppans arrived in Greece as fully documented Greek citizens with the right to work, others waited for months in refugee camps, making Skype calls, chasing papers through processes much like Cabot describes:

> This loosely articulated web of bureaucracy and policing procedures is, in turn, enmeshed in broader maps of this man's movements in Greece, encompassing border and transit sites, detention facilities, and police stations. He acquired a pink card not upon his initial entry, but after multiple detentions, and after he had received a number of different documents. In his account, these bureaucratic processes are often obscured or mediated by the corollary presence of other state and nonstate actors: the "guy from Algeria," the lawyer on Samos, the lawyer in Athens, the "private office" near the police (also very likely a lawyer or notary), the ARS, and the police interpreter. The pink card is similarly mysterious and unpredictable: once he acquired the document, he did not retain it, but it was taken away, and he needed a lawyer's help to reclaim it. (p. 45).

Unfortunately, an asylum seeker who managed to acquire this Pink Card would still not be entitled to work or be able to return to their home country even for a visit "since the travel document issued to refugees expressly prohibits travel to the holder's country of origin" (p. 58). As Jack mentioned in the Legal Status section, lack of documentation and slow bureaucratic processes were two main causes of refugees continued suffering once they arrived in Greece. They need some kind of status to access services and even begin the long, slow asylum process. However, the backlog of asylum cases means that they may wait years for an initial interview, and it may be years before they are able to work if their case is approved.

Until they are citizens of their new country (which can take up to a decade), they will travel on refugee travel documents which do not permit them to return to their home countries. This policy misses one of the most important observations that Korac (2009) made in her work with refugees from Yugoslavia in Rome and the Netherlands: refugees use citizenship as a

strategy to build transnational networks. Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo in Athens had been making use of their Greek citizenship to take advantage of business and educational opportunities in Europe even before the conflict in Syria. Once in Greece and the UK, the fact that they had a right to work, or study meant they could start their new lives right away. Because they did not flee Syria as refugees, they were also able to maintain their assets there. The arrival of thousands of Arabic-speaking Syrian refugees also meant that Greek Orthodox Christians from Aleppo had a unique skill set that was now highly in demand: speaking both Greek and Arabic, eligible to work in Greece, and familiar with both cultures.

Policy that addresses the legal status of refugees should not bar them from returning to their home country, even if they fled from danger or death there. Instead, it should offer them protection so that they *can* return or make use of their connections at home and avoid losing whatever they may have left behind. This will provide them with agency and choice, so that they don't feel imprisoned in Greece, nor forced to return. This could mean accessing the financial system or some form of diplomatic protection from a host country when a refugee travels to their home country. This status should allow and encourage them to work. Rather than keeping them in camps for years, where boredom, lack of opportunity and post-traumatic stress slowly reduce their likelihood of recovery, policymakers should address the waiting period by creating transnational humanitarian border zones which are not camps, but real communities with business and services connected with NGOs and solidarians to bring refugees through them and into citizenship and local networks.

## 6.0 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have shown how communities living together in relative equality in Aleppo and fleeing the same conflict experienced very different outcomes depending on which religious community they belonged to. I argued that this inequality is a result of opportunities and challenges created by policies instituted during the *great unmixing of peoples* in the early 20th century and the *refugee crisis* in the early 21st century. The narrative frames in which these policies were instituted had consequences outside their original contexts. Greek Orthodox Christians in Aleppo took advantage of national ideologies in two different countries: as equal citizens in a secular Arab republic that valued ecumenism, and also as members of the Greek diaspora in a Hellenic republic that privileged Greek ethno-religious belonging. They are *Arab Hellenes*, equally Greek and Syrian.

I found that the nationalist policy framework in place during the *great unmixing* shaped the outcomes of those moving across borders at that time and their descendants. The frame of the *refugee crisis* and the policies in place in the early 21st century similarly privileges certain kinds of migrants, migration routes and identities. I made policy suggestions based on the successful experience of Greek Orthodox Christians from Syria in Greece. I hope that the lessons of the *refugee crisis* will help policymakers address the immediate concerns of inequality and discrimination against Muslim Syrians fleeing as refugees to Europe. However, this case study also has wider applicability for future migration events.

While the Greek and Turkish governments violently dismantled *intercommunality* in Anatolia and the Balkans based on the notion that homogenous nation states would be more stable, communities in the city of Aleppo wrought a balance that countered essentialist nationalism, one based on mutual respect between Syrians from different communities,

*conviviality* and the ecumenical frame. The intercommunal fabric of Aleppo in the 20th century was in part a result of the *unmixing* policies instituted to their North. The discriminatory framework of the *unmixing* period remained in place when Aleppans fled the conflict in Syria. Only those included in the nationalist frame -- as *Hellenes* or *Christians* -- were able to move freely. European countries focused on shoring up borders and repelling fleeing asylum seekers as the *refugee crisis* progressed, but solidarity networks grew across those borders. Much like the *unmixing* in Anatolia and the Balkans created a more mixed Aleppo, the physical sharpening of borders has created stronger solidarity connections across them.

Policy frameworks instituted to address one crisis or historical moment have long term consequences and each framework builds on past frameworks to create opportunities that privilege some populations over others. This has effects over generations and is carried within populations through collective memories. Policymakers should widen their frame when addressing migration events, shifting focus from containing a momentary crisis to addressing the long-term needs and integration of populations into their own societies -- beginning with historical considerations and the policy worlds they have inherited. Structural challenges such as forced migration expose the inequities built into policy. When engineering a policy that labels some elements for inclusion and others for exclusion, policymakers should consider that those left out will forge an alternative to resist its biases. Migration and integration policy will be more successful if they pay close attention to who is left out and focus on building opportunity structures to include them over the long term.

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