IDENTITY AND SOCIAL BELONGING AMONG THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY IN TURKEY: A SOCIAL IDENTITY COMPLEXITY APPROACH

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the social identity complexity of contemporary Turkish and Armenian identities by situating individual and collective experiences within historical and structural processes of nation-building. Drawing on Roccas and Brewer's (2002) theory of social identity complexity and broader social identity frameworks (Tajfel, 1981), it examines how individuals navigate multiple, intersecting group affiliations in a context shaped by civic inclusion and social exclusion. Tracing the evolution from the Ottoman millet system through the Ottomanist and Muslimhood contracts to the Turkishness contract of the early Republic, the study highlights how successive frameworks alternately fostered overlapping identities or imposed hierarchical and compartmentalized structures. The analysis demonstrates that Armenians and other minorities negotiate identity by balancing adaptation to dominant civic-national narratives with the preservation of distinct sub-identities. By combining historical analysis with theoretical insights, the thesis contributes to understanding the cognitive, structural, and political dimensions of identity in contexts of contested belonging and nation-building.

Keywords: Social identity complexity, Turkish identity, Armenians in Turkey, nation-building, Ottoman millet system, Turkishness contract, minority inclusion, civic and ethnic identity, historical legacies, intergroup relations

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, **Damla Zeynep Oğuz**, candidate for the MA degree in Nationalism Studies declare herewith that the present thesis titled "**Identity and Social Belonging Among the Armenian Community in Turkey: A Social Identity Complexity Approach**" is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography.
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Damla Zeynep Oğuz

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Finally, I hope this thesis contributes to a more inclusive understanding of identity in Turkey; one that embraces complexity, difference, and shared belonging.

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I. Introduction

I.I Background and Rationale

Identity has long been a central concept in the study of social, political, and cultural life. In contexts marked by historical pluralism, nation-building, and intergroup hierarchies, understanding identity requires more than an essentialist or superficial approach. The Republic of Turkey presents a particularly instructive case in this regard. Emerging from the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the new nation-state faced the challenge of integrating a diverse population while promoting national cohesion. Minority groups, including Armenians, Greeks, and Jews, occupied a precarious position in this process. Although the Turkish state formally adopted a civic model of citizenship emphasizing legal equality and secularism, the lived realities of belonging were often conditioned by ethnoreligious and cultural hierarchies (Baskın Oran, 2018; Ünlü, 2018).

This study focuses on the Armenian community in Istanbul as a case to examine the complexity of social identity. The Armenian community provides a particularly salient example due to their historical experiences of exclusion, their continued presence in Turkey, and their negotiation of multiple identities in contexts where dominant narratives of Turkishness shape inclusion. By analyzing these dynamics, this research aims to contribute to broader debates on how minority communities navigate historical legacies, state-driven categorizations, and personal affiliations, offering insight into the structural and cognitive mechanisms that shape social identity in Turkey.

I.II Problem Statement

Traditional approaches to identity often oscillate between two extremes. Strong, essentialist conceptions treat identity as fixed and inherent, which risks reinforcing rigid boundaries and

nationalistic projects (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Weak, constructivist approaches emphasize the fluid and socially constructed nature of identity but may render it analytically amorphous, obscuring the ways in which political, social, and historical factors harden boundaries in practice. In Turkey, this tension is particularly salient: while the state promotes a civic, secular notion of Turkishness, exclusionary practices and structural inequalities persist, limiting the practical realization of inclusive citizenship for minorities (Baskın Oran, 2018).

Understanding the social identity complexity of contemporary Turkish identity therefore requires an analytical framework capable of accounting for both structural constraints and individual navigation of multiple affiliations. The theory of social identity complexity developed by Roccas and Brewer (2002) offers such a framework. It moves beyond binary notions of inclusion and exclusion by examining the subjective perception of multiple ingroup identities, the degree of overlap or differentiation among them, and the strategies individuals employ to reconcile or separate these identities. Applying this lens allows for an exploration of how Armenians and other minorities manage the tensions between historical legacies, ethnoreligious boundaries, and civic expectations of national belonging.

I.III Research Objectives

This study has three primary objectives:

1. To analyze the historical evolution of identity frameworks in Turkey, tracing the transformation from the Ottoman millet system through the Ottomanist, Muslimhood, and Turkishness contracts.
2. To evaluate the social identity complexity of contemporary Turkish identity, with particular attention to how minority communities, especially Armenians, navigate multiple group affiliations in contexts shaped by exclusionary state practices.

3. To examine the consequences of identity complexity for inclusion, intergroup relations, and social cohesion within Turkey, drawing on theoretical insights from Roccas and Brewer (2002) and the broader social identity literature.

By situating contemporary identity within historical and structural contexts, this study seeks to bridge macro-level state policies and micro-level experiences of belonging, offering a nuanced understanding of the interaction between institutional arrangements and individual identity negotiation.

I.IV Research Questions

This study addresses the following central research questions:

1. How have historical frameworks of governance, such as the millet system and subsequent identity contracts, shaped the social identity landscape in Turkey?
2. How do Armenians and other minority groups experience and negotiate multiple group affiliations within the dominant Turkish national identity?
3. What structural, cognitive, and motivational factors influence the development of social identity complexity in Turkey, and how do these factors affect patterns of inclusion and exclusion?

These questions guide an inquiry into the interplay between historical legacies, state-driven categorizations, and individual identity strategies, allowing for a detailed understanding of the layered nature of identity in Turkey.

I.V Theoretical Framework

The theoretical lens of this study combines insights from social identity approach with the concept of social identity complexity (Tajfel, 1981; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Social identity theory emphasizes the role of group membership in shaping self-concept and intergroup behavior, highlighting processes of categorization, self-enhancement, and ingroup-outgroup distinctions. Social identity complexity extends this framework by examining how individuals perceive the relationships among their multiple group memberships and the cognitive strategies they use to reconcile conflicting affiliations.

Roccas and Brewer (2002) identify four models of social identity complexity: intersection, dominance, compartmentalization, and merger. Each model represents distinct cognitive patterns for organizing multiple affiliations. These models provide a valuable framework for analyzing the historical and contemporary experiences of Armenians and other minorities in Turkey, enabling the identification of structural constraints, individual strategies, and situational factors that shape the negotiation of identity.

I.VI Significance of the Study

This study offers both theoretical and empirical contributions. Theoretically, it applies social identity complexity to a context where historical legacies and state-driven exclusion shape minority experiences, demonstrating the utility of the framework in understanding layered and contested identities. Empirically, it provides a historical and contemporary analysis of Turkish-Armenian relations, illustrating how multiple affiliations are navigated in contexts of conditional belonging. By doing so, the study contributes to debates on minority rights, citizenship, and national identity in post-imperial societies, offering insights relevant to scholars of sociology, political science, and history.

I.VII Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter II provides an elaborate introduction and discussion of the Social Identity Complexity theory (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) and a historical overview of the Ottoman millet system and subsequent social contracts, tracing the evolution of identity frameworks leading to the modern Turkish state. Chapter III presents the methodological aspects of the thesis, focusing on researcher positionality, research design and theoretical background of the method of analysis, Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Chapter IV analyzes contemporary Turkish identity, focusing on Armenians and other minority communities, examining patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and identity negotiation. Chapter V concludes by summarizing the findings, discussing implications for social cohesion, and identifying directions for future research.

By integrating historical, theoretical, and empirical perspectives, this thesis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexity of Turkish identity, highlighting both the constraints imposed by state and societal structures and the strategies through which individuals navigate multiple affiliations.

II. Literature Review

II.I Social Identity Approach: Foundations for Understanding Identity Complexity

The use of social identity complexity theory aims to contribute to revealing how minority identities are shaped, constrained and negotiated in Turkey. This venture demands a conceptual grounding in the social identity approach. Encompassing both Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorization Theory (SCT), this approach represents a foundational framework in social psychology for understanding intergroup behavior, identity construction and the psychological bases of group-based perception. As Hornsey (2008) points out, these theories emerged as a

response to dissatisfaction with individualistic models of prejudice that dominated social psychology. Social Identity Theory reconceptualized group membership as a psychologically meaningful and socially consequential dimension of self-definition, capable of structuring both intergroup dynamics and individual self-conception. (Hornsey 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Henri Tajfel and colleagues conducted a series of experiments to test how important historical or contextual meanings behind intergroup relations are. These experiments demonstrated that arbitrary and meaningless group categorizations, such as grouping individuals by dot estimation or coin toss, were sufficient to show ingroup favoritism, despite the absence of interpersonal interaction, material incentive or group history. (Tajfel et al., 1971). These findings challenged dominant explanations of bias and laid the foundation for a theory in which social categorization becomes a powerful driver of perception and behaviour. Tajfel and Turner (1979) hypothesised that social interactions occur along a continuum ranging from the purely interpersonal to purely intergroup, with group salience fundamentally altering how individuals perceive themselves and others. At the interpersonal end of this continuum, individuals view themselves in terms of their unique traits and characteristics, whereas at the intergroup end, social category memberships become the primary category of evaluation. However, the scholars also emphasized that interaction on the purely interpersonal end of the continuum is a rare case (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social identity theory proposes that individuals are motivated to sustain a positive self-concept, partially derived from the perceived status and distinctiveness of their ingroups. Accordingly, individuals engage in cognitive and behavioral strategies such as downward comparison, selective dimension emphasis or mobilization for social change to maintain or to elevate the perceived value of their group affiliations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). John Turner and his

colleagues extended the framework of social identity theory by developing Self-Categorization Theory, elaborating on the cognitive mechanisms underlying group perception and self-definition. While SIT emphasized motivational and intergroup dimensions, SCT directed analytical attention to contextual and cognitive cues. SCT introduced the concept of depersonalization, whereby individuals, when identifying with a group, come to perceive themselves and ingroup members as interchangeable embodiments of a group prototype instead of separate individuals (Turner et al., 1987). According to SCT, self-categorization occurs at multiple levels of personal, social and superordinate human identity, depending on the salience of any given level shaped by contextual fit and accessibility (Hornsey 2008; Turner et al. 1994).

Together, SIT and SCT offer a context-sensitive and dynamic framework for understanding how individuals construct and negotiate their social identities. The self is understood to be both individual and social, shaped through processes of categorization that influence perception, behavior and emotional evaluation. These processes are dynamic and responsive to contextual cues such as intergroup power dynamics and normative expectations. Depersonalization is amongst these processes, whereby individuals, upon identifying with a group, come to perceive themselves not as unique, autonomous agents but as interchangeable exemplars of a shared group prototype (Turner et al., 1987). Contrary to being dehumanizing or reductive, depersonalization enables norm conformity and fosters group cohesion under conditions of heightened intergroup salience. This mechanism is especially relevant for minority individuals operating within hegemonic and exclusionary national narratives, where there is a heightened sense of solidarity and belonging to one's ingroups and the need to elevate perceived value of identity.

Moreover, the social identity approach foregrounds the significance of power hierarchies and status differentials in shaping identity processes. As Tajfel and Turner highlighted, individuals

are not only motivated to maintain positive distinctiveness but also constrained or enabled structural conditions of permeability of group boundaries and the perceived legitimacy of existing group inequalities. Thus, SIT presents identity not as a fixed psychological construct but as a socially embedded process that is constantly renegotiated in relation to broader power structures (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For minority individuals in Turkey, whose group memberships may be stigmatized, invisible or repressed, such insights are vital to understand the complex ways individuals navigate and reconcile multiple and often conflicting social identities.

Overall, by integrating cognitive processes of categorization with structural and motivational factors, the social identity approach provides the foundation for investigating more nuanced models of identity, particularly those that account for the tension between belonging and exclusion. As such, it offers a vital theoretical ground to explore social identity complexity and its implications on minority identification in the context of modern Turkish nationhood. To do so, I will now discuss the constructivist and essentialist approaches to identity and social identity complexity.

II.II Identity and Complexity

In their seminal article *Beyond "Identity",* Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000) argue that the analytical usefulness of 'identity' as a concept must be critically reconsidered due to its overwhelming theoretical weight. They point out the dichotomous uses of the term's strong and weak conceptions. Strong conceptions treat identity from an essentialist perspective that risks reifying of ethnic boundaries. This perspective assumes that identity is an enduring and inherent quality of individuals and groups, which may easily become a tool to reinforce the already essentialist projects of national consolidation. Such strong perceptions are often in the nationalist right's discourse in Turkey (e.g. claims of unadulterated descent from Central Asia or the

Ottoman Empire). Weak conceptions on the other hand, take a constructivist approach and emphasize that identity is fluid, multiple and constructed through multiple processes such as discourse and practice. While this approach better captures the lived experiences of minority communities in Turkey, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) warn that an excessively fluid understanding of identity renders the concept too elastic and potentially too obscure to apply to situations in which social and political changes might momentarily harden identities.

This critique of the strong and weak conceptions of identity provides an insightful glance to contexts where long-standing societal stigmas and constant history of political and social polarization complicates and rigidifies the negotiation of identity among individuals and communities, sparking heated discussions about identity. Then the question is, how should identity be approached? The authors suggest focusing on processes of *identification and categorization* (the ways individuals are labeled and positioned by themselves and others), *self-understanding and social location* (how individuals perceive their place in society), and *commonality, connectedness, and groupness* (varying intensities and forms of collective belonging) (p.20). For the purposes of this project, I will make use of the critique proposed by the authors to avoid making idealistic generalizations about being Armenian or Turkish as much as possible and focus on evaluating the historical background that surrounds both categories.

Building on this critique, the theory of social identity complexity developed by Sonia Roccas and Marilynn B. Brewer (2002) offers a valuable framework for analyzing the layered identity dynamics experienced by Armenians in Turkey. Rather than rebutting essentialist and constructivist approaches as opposing models, this theory operates within a constructivist paradigm and helps explain how individuals navigate the tension between state's dominantly essentialist narratives of identity and their own relatively fluid, intersecting group affiliations.

The authors associate social identity complexity with *"the nature of subjective representation of multiple ingroup identities"* (Roccas and Brewer, 2002, p.88). As social identity theory, the social identity complexity theory interprets collective ingroup identities, where the individual associates themself with others through a depersonalized lens of common attachment to a certain group (p.89). According to this model, high complexity of social identity requires an accumulation of distinct social affiliations whereas in more simplistic structures the multiple affiliations converge into a dominant ingroup. Thus, the level of complexity is directly proportional to the recognition of distinctiveness of each group affiliation.

This theoretical lens is particularly useful for the persistent tension between the Republic's official promotion of a civic and secular national identity and the lived realities of identification shaped by historical, political and social dynamics. While the state presents 'Turkishness' as an inclusive, civic category, in practice it often operates as an ethnicized and culturally exclusive identity that limits full belonging for minority groups such as Armenians (Baskın Oran, 2018). Besides the past and present constitutional principles promoting a civic model of citizenship, this study also considers the unequivocal gap between 'Turkishness' as a marker of full national belonging and the more limited, legalistic notion of being bound to the Republic of Turkey through citizenship. One may question whether it is worth the effort to establish a more inclusive treatment of minorities, the century-long experience of Turkey proves that it is worth the effort and necessary to ensure social stability and strength.

Following Roccas and Brewer's (2002) framework, this study interprets state-driven narratives and practices of nation-formation to examine the shaping of social identity structures in Turkey. The Turkish case offers a particularly instructive example for two reasons. First, there are competing historical legacies of different ideological streams, secular-republican ideals, and

long-standing social hierarchies intersecting and producing distinct patterns of identity consolidation and differentiation. Second, although there are works that examine the history of Turkish-Armenian relations, especially in the context of 1915, the structural patterns of social identity in contemporary Turkey remain underexplored.

Roccas and Brewer (2002) propose four structural models of social identity complexity: intersection, dominance, compartmentalization and merger. Each of them reflect a different cognitive pattern for organizing multiple group affiliations. These models help clarify the ways individuals reconcile or separate their identities, and analyze identity navigation in contexts like Turkey, where civic belonging and ethnoreligious heritage intersect in uneasy ways. The authors highlight that "The actual degree of overlap between social categories of which a person is simultaneously a member may vary considerably.". (Roccas & Brewer, p 89). Keeping this note in mind, I will now move on to the discussion of the four models of social identity complexity from the least complex to the most. Then, I will discuss the factors that influence complexity and the consequences of social identity complexity.

The intersection model is the least complex of all four, the authors suggest. The main categories of identification that determine our positions in the wider communities we belong to, such as ethnicity, religion, gender and profession, can be vastly diverse in terms of their defining characteristics. In this model, the individual defines their ingroup as the specific compound combination of multiple group memberships. Such a definition results in a single and unique identity that is distinct from its contributing larger categories, and individuals who do not share all of these joint identities are considered outgroups. The authors state that this model of complexity corresponds to Hewstone et al. 's "social exclusion" pattern in how multiply categorized others are perceived. (p.90). Turning to a cognitive complexity perspective,

intersection is considered the least complex because it reduces multiple and potentially diverse group identities to a single and highly exclusive category. In other words, this model simplifies the cognitive load that belonging to a multiplicity of groups and acknowledging at least most of them could create, separating compatible elements of both identities from those that are incompatible. The authors point out that adopting intersection leads to "hyphenated identities" in bicultural contexts, such as African-American, as an example to highlight the intersectional identity as "a blend of both ethnic heritage and host society residence" (p.90). In the Turkish context, though not of interest to this thesis, it is appropriate to mention the Turkish-Orthodox community as an example.

The second least complex model of social identity structure is the dominance model. Within this model's framework, the individual adopts one primary group identification, and all others are subordinated to the dominant identity. Here, secondary identities are not viewed as independently salient but are perceived as aspects of the self that relate to and are interpreted through the lens of the dominant identity. As a result, the individual's perception of others is strongly shaped by this primary group affiliation. Those who share the dominant identity are included within the perceived ingroup, while individuals who don't are categorized as outgroup members. Even when outgroup individuals possess converging secondary identities or affiliations, they are still regarded as outgroups due to their lack of membership in the primary, dominant category.

To give an example from the Turkish context, an Armenian citizen of Turkey who speaks Turkish as their primary language, supports the national football team and participates in state ceremonies may still be viewed as an outgroup member because their ethnic and religious identity diverges from the dominant category. This tendency to categorize others primarily based on an overarching identity reflects what Roccas & Brewer refer to as the category dominance

pattern or a hierarchical model of identity organization (p.90). In such a hierarchical mode, affiliations beyond the primary category may be tolerated or even acknowledged among ingroup members, but they do not alter the basic ingroup-outgroup boundary. It is possible to observe such adoption of Turkishness as a supra-identity amongst the Circassian and Laz communities. This model represents a step up in complexity compared to the intersection model, its level of complexity is not fixed and may vary depending on the characteristics of the dominant group itself, particularly its categorical heterogeneity and demographic size (p.92). I will explore this topic in more detail later, it is important to note here that the dominance model most closely resembles the structure of official Turkish identity, especially in terms of its implications for inclusion and identity complexity.

As the dominance model allows for a limited form of complexity through the subordination of secondary identities to a primary one, it remains constrained by its hierarchical structure and the rigid ingroup-outgroup boundaries it reinforces. Moving beyond this, the next level of social identity complexity is represented by the compartmentalization model. In this structure, there is more than one group identity that holds significance for the individual and these identities are expressed through a process of differentiation and contextual isolation. Rather than simultaneously integrating multiple identities, the individual chooses to activate them separately depending on the social setting, following a logic of "A or B" rather than "A and B". (p. 90-91). Each identity becomes salient within a specific context. For example, a professional identity may be primary in the workplace, whereas an ethnoreligious identity may become more relevant in a private or community context.

As such, compartmentalization allows individuals to maintain distinct, nonconvergent identities without requiring them to be reconciled or merged. This aligns with the concept of alternating

biculturalism, where different cultural affiliations are consciously expressed in different contexts. (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). However, the authors suggest that in more pluralistic settings, individuals may evaluate others using an additive framework, where shared identities increase perceived similarity and acceptance. Although compartmentalization reflects a higher degree of complexity than intersection or dominance by recognizing and differentiating among multiple identities, it lacks the integrative synthesis quality of greater complexity. At its cognitive core, it resembles a form of cognitive isolation, and depending on its strength, it may lean toward dominance or merger identity structures.

In contrast to the compartmentalization model, which maintains multiple identities through contextual separation, the merger model reflects the highest level of social identity complexity among others. In this final framework, individuals simultaneously recognize and embrace their non-convergent group memberships in their most inclusive form., forming a social identity that represents the union of all salient group affiliations. (Roccas&Brewer, 2002, p.91). Rather than isolating identities to a dominant category, individuals who adopt the merger model incorporate multiple group memberships as simultaneously central to the self across contexts.

This structure engenders a highly inclusive and diverse ingroup identity that transcends single categorical distinction. As Roccas and Brewer note, this identity mode corresponds to the "equivalence pattern" in the evaluation of others, whereby those who share any of the individual's group affiliations are perceived as ingroup members and evaluated similarly. (p.91). The cognitive process underlying merger aligns with the mechanism of transcendence, through which seemingly inconsistent cognitions are reconciled by invoking a superordinate principle that integrates them. (p.91). Therefore, social identity under merger retains both differentiation

and integration, acknowledging distinct group memberships while synthesizing them into a coherent whole. This model matches most closely with identity configurations such as "intercultural identity" or the idea of the "world citizen". In such configurations, inclusivity supersedes categorical categorical boundaries. (p.92). Though merger can, in some cases, resemble dominance if one highly inclusive identity becomes central, it differs by preserving complexity through its integrative structure.

Having discussed the four structural models as articulated by Roccas & Brewer (2002), it is crucial to understand how social identity complexity is measured and what factors shape its development. The core measure of complexity lies in an individual's subjective perception of the relationships among their multiple ingroup identities. Specifically, the degree of overlap or differentiation between group memberships. Complexity is higher when individuals perceive their group affiliations as distinct yet simultaneously central to their self-concept; it is lower when these identities are seen as overlapping or hierarchically ordered. Operationally, Roccas and Brewer (2002) assess this through two dimensions: the perceived similarity between group prototypes (i.e. values, norms and characteristics) and the perceived overlap in group membership. Lower perceived overlap on either dimension suggests a more complex identity structure. This complexity is shaped by a range of factors the authors call antecedents. Experiential factors such as living in a multicultural, integrationist society tend to increase complexity by exposing individuals to crosscutting group distinctions, whereas stratified or assimilationist societies tend to reduce it by reinforcing convergent boundaries between group identities.

Personal attributes also matter, individuals with a higher need for closure or who value social conformity and power are more likely to favor simpler identity structures, while those who value

openness to change or universalism are predisposed toward higher complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002, p. 95-98). Situational factors such as cognitive load, stress, or ingroup threat can temporarily reduce complexity by narrowing attention and increasing reliance on singular group identities. Taken together, these factors influence whether individuals come to perceive their social world through rigid ingroup-outgroup boundaries or a more inclusive and differentiated understanding of their multiple group memberships.

A key antecedent to the development of social identity complexity is the complexity of social experiences. Individuals immersed in diverse, multicultural settings are more likely to encounter overlapping and nonconvergent social categories, conditions that enhance their awareness of multiple, distinct ingroup affiliations. Such environments challenge singular modes of identification and foster greater tolerance for difference by encouraging cognitive flexibility. In contrast, highly stratified or assimilationist societies, where ethnicity, religion and class align predictably, reinforce social homogeneity and limit opportunities for cross-categorization, leading to a more rigid and simplified self-concept ((Roccas & Brewer, 2002, p. 96). Cognitive motives and an individual's tolerance ambiguity complement these structural factors. A high need for closure, marked by a desire for certainty and decisiveness, correlated with simpler identity structures that minimize ambiguity by emphasizing clear and overlapping group boundaries. Conversely, uncertainty-oriented individuals who are more comfortable with navigating ambivalence are more likely to recognize the dissonance between social roles and group memberships, thereby fostering higher complexity (p.97).

Personal value orientations further shape identity complexity. Those who prioritize conservative values such as tradition, security and conformity tend to favor more homogenous and simplified structures that reflect social order and predictability. By contrast, individuals who are on better

terms with stress autonomy, equality and tolerance are more likely to maintain multiple, differentiated ingroup memberships without collapsing them into a dominant category (p.98-99). These values encourage an appreciation of cultural diversity and ideological difference, making room for more integrative, inclusive identity representations. The development and accessibility of complex identities are also contingent on *situational factors*.Acute stress, heightened cognitive load or perceived threat to a salient ingroup can temporarily reduce identity complexity by drawing focus to a single dominant affiliation. In such moments, individuals may revert to simplified identity structures that emphasize certainty and group solidarity at the expense of inclusion (p.98-99). This dynamic highlights the situational flexibility of complexity. Even individuals with generally complex identities may exhibit simplified patterns in response to environmental pressures.

The consequences of social identity complexity extend far beyond internal cognition. They shape intergroup dynamics and broader social attitudes. Individuals with higher complexity are more likely to perceive others as overlapping across multiple social dimensions, reducing binary us-vs-them distinctions and fostering tolerance of outgroups (p. 100-102). This manifests in three key ways: first, it attenuates *intercategory accentuation*, or the exaggeration of differences between groups; second, it reduces the *evaluative centrality* of any single group identity, thus lowering the motivational drive for ingroup bias; and third, it promotes *cognitive balance* by pushing individuals to resolve contradictions when someone is simultaneously ingroup and outgroup across different dimensions. Empirical studies support these claims, showing that individuals with higher identity complexity demonstrate reduced prejudice, greater openness to social contact and more resilient self-concepts in the face of group-based threats. Particularly in pluralistic societies, or in contexts where civic inclusion is normatively emphasized but not

substantively realized this theoretical framework becomes indispensable. It offers a way to interpret how individuals from marginalized groups cognitively navigate the often contradictory demands of national belonging, cultural heritage and personal self-concept.

The theories and concepts outlined above are effective tools to how identity is negotiated and structured in contexts where individuals must navigate conflicting social affiliations and dominant state narratives. The social identity approach opened a Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) call for moving beyond both essentialist and overly fluid understandings of identity underscores the importance of examining how individuals are positioned through processes of categorization, self-understanding, and perceived groupness. This shift in focus opens the door to more mature approaches that capture the dynamic and sometimes conflicting nature of identity in socially and politically charged environments. Roccas and Brewer's (2002) theory of social identity as a singular or static category, this framework allows for fluctuations of complexity in how individuals relate their various social affiliations. In contexts like Turkey, where the official discourse promotes a civic model of national belonging but simultaneously maintains ethnocultural boundaries, this theory offers critical tools to analyze how individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities such as Armenians, navigate these layered identity structures. By applying this lens, this study uncovers how patterns of inclusion, exclusion and compartmentalization shape both individual experiences and broader social cohesion.

The discussion of social identity approach and social identity complexity theory underscores that the ways in which individuals relate to each other and their multiple ingroup affiliations are shaped both by cognitive and motivational factors as well as the wider structural and ideological environment they are situated in. In contexts where the state's discourse promotes a dominantly civic model of belonging to the nation while simultaneously reinforcing ethnoreligious

boundaries, as in Turkey, the negotiation of identity is necessarily intertwined with the political and historical conditions that have shaped those boundaries. In Turkey, the lived experience of identity complexity for Armenians and Turks, cannot be understood without reference to the historical evolution of state-community relations, the legacy of Ottoman governance and the nation-building project of the early Republic.

The historical trajectory structured the opportunities for and limitations to belonging; producing patterns of inclusion, exclusion and compartmentalization that persists into the present. The next section will therefore focus on the historical background tracing the institutional and ideological arrangements that shaped the contours of Armenian and Turkish identities. Following this, the discussion will return to the theoretical terrain to examine nationalism as an interpretive framework for understanding how historical legacies continue to influence the structure of contemporary social identity complexity.

II.III The Millet System, the Ottoman Reform and Social Contracts

II.III.I The Millet System

The millet system has a central place in understanding the Ottoman Empire's approach to managing its diverse religious and ethnic communities. Established formally under Sultan Mehmed II following the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, this governance framework functioned as a proto-social contract between the imperial authority and its subjects. The millet system delegated significant autonomy to religious leaders while reinforcing a hierarchical order privileging Muslim communities. Although millet names sometimes carried ethnic associations, the system divided communities primarily by religious confession. For example, smaller ethnic groups within the Orthodox Christian confession were placed under the jurisdiction of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate (Barkey & Gavrilis, 2016). Emine Yeşim Bedlek, a Turkish scholar whose

work, *"Imagined Communities in Greece and Turkey" (2016)* I will be using for this brief part, notes that the millet system was theoretically abolished with the 1839 Tanzimat Charter, when the Charter introduced reforms to establish legal equality among Ottoman subjects regardless of religion, language or ethnicity. According to Bedlek, the resistance to its removal, especially by the Ecumenical Patriarch Iōkeim III, ensured its practical survival until the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. During the Lausanne negotiations, its religiously based categories remained as practical means to distinguish between Greeks and Turks whose linguistic and even ethnic boundaries were deeply interwoven, despite the new republic's intentions to discard Ottoman-era frameworks (Bedlek, 2016).

Functioning as a top-down arrangement similar to a precursor of a social contract, the millet system delegated administrative responsibilities to religious leaders such as patriarchs and chief rabbis, who shared that authority with forthcoming figures and community institutions. Since the millet system was built on the Islamic law, *Sharia*, religious authorities of each millet were bestowed with internal autonomy in cultural and judicial matters, tasked with maintaining order, ensuring loyalty to the state and collecting the additional tax levied on *non-Muslims*, cizye, in exchange for protection (Barkey and Gavrilis, 2016; Emine Yeşim Bedle, 2016). Although Sharia granted protection to non-Muslims and prohibited forced conversion, another column of the system was based on a hierarchy that privileged Muslim communities over others.

The millet system not only regulated religious, cultural and juridical aspects of life, but it was also actively involved with the political and economic integration of the non-Muslims into the Ottoman Empire. Another important quality of this system, as Bedlek emphasizes, was that unlike Western imperialism, the millet system did not directly aim at assimilation or colonization. Therefore, a multicultural and a mostly harmonious society was created (Bedlek,

2016, p. 12-13). Communities such as the Orthodox Christians, *Millet-i Rum*, had the capacity to preserve their language, traditions, institutions and to actively participate in administrative and commercial life. This capacity also had a role in the ethnoreligious diversity in the Ottoman administration as statespersons, diplomats and advisors, which included important figures mostly from Armenian and Greek millets such as Boghos Nubar Pasha, Kevork Ajemian, Alexander Ypsilantis and Stephanos Mousouros. In addition, the system exempted non-Muslims from military service which enabled extended land ownership and developments of extensive trade networks linking the Empire to the West and the East (Bedlek, 2016). During and after the dissolution of the Empire, the economic strength this commercial capacity brought to the non-Muslims even created an illusion that they were hierarchically higher than the Muslims and would lead to discontent among Muslim communities, which extended to today.

From a social identity complexity perspective, the millet system reinforced a singular religious axis as the defining feature of communal classification and self-identification. Although it enabled coexistence and a pluralistic imperial setting, institutionalized divisions maintained clear-cut social boundaries between communities, limiting the opportunities such as marriage or commercial partnership to develop cross-cutting identities. Such distinctions later underpinned the transformation of communal identities into modern nationalisms in the late Ottoman and early Republican eras (Bedlek, 2016). In other words, the millet system drew the faultlines of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire as well as the nation-building strategies of the Republic. Keeping in this perspective, I would argue that despite the almost solid social boundaries, the millet system kept a relatively higher social complexity than other, later versions of an antidote to growing social discontent.

While the millet system represented an early, religion-based framework of governance and communal identity in the Ottoman Empire, the socio-political upheavals of the 19th century onwards necessitated new modes of social organization. As nationalist and separatist pressures intensified, the Empire sought to redefine its relationship with the diverse population through a series of evolving social contracts, attempting to accommodate changing realities. Barış Ünlü's seminal work, *The Turkishness Contract: Formation, Functioning and Crisis* (2018), offers a comprehensive analysis of the Ottomanist, Muslimhood and Turkishness contracts. These successive structures to reconfigure the parameters of belonging and identity shifted from a relatively pluralistic, yet hierarchical millet system to a first attempt to a more inclusive structure of equality and later to gradually more exclusive social contracts. Although this shift was also promoted top-down, the three contracts can be distinguished from their precursor, the millet system, thanks to the much wider diversity of political participation. The following section will explore this progression, beginning with the Ottomanist contract's ambitious attempt to forge equal citizenship in the midst of growing internal fractures and external pressure.

II.III.II Ottomanist Contract

In his book, *The Turkishness Contract: Formation, Functioning and Crisis (Tr. 2018)*, Barış Ünlü delves deep into the transformation of the Millet System into a series of social contracts that targeted different audiences as the core constituent of an emerging society. Thus, a new ideological trend, Ottomanism, was put forth toward the end of Mahmud II's rule to prevent disintegration. (Ünlü, 2018, p.82). The first reforms toward equal citizenship among the subjects consisted of material changes, such as abolishing the obligatory practice of different clothes worn by different communities in the public space.

The first concrete step toward equality came with the Tanzimat Decree of 1839. The decree guaranteed the security of life and property, promised equality before the law, and aimed to transform the Empire into a state of law by limiting the sultan's powers. Tanzimat's promise was later reiterated in 1856 by the Islahat Decree. Thanks to it being the embodiment of a call for unity, promising equality, justice, freedom, and more, the author suggests that the period between 1839 and 1876 was a period of Ottomanist Contract. (p. 84). The decree aimed to transform the subjects of different confessions into "Ottoman citizens" and to push foreign pressure from the Western powers.

The Ottomanist Contract seemed promising not only to the Ottoman government but also to the Western powers who thought it would be a solution to the Eastern Question (Şark Meselesi). It had brought material advances such as the establishment of modern schools, secular law were introduced and most importantly non-Muslim 'citizens' found representation in bureaucracy and in time in the Ottoman parliament. As famous historian İlber Ortaylı points, non-Muslim representation reached around 30% of the first Ottoman Parliament. (Ortaylı, 1978). In return, the new order also expected taxes, military service and loyalty from its citizens whom it promised to protect and cherish. However, these new frameworks seemed to remain superficial due to several reasons; the most important being the fact that independence movements had already begun in various parts of the realm and as mentioned above the separation between the Muslim and Christian constituents due to the atrocities committed against Muslims in the lost parts of the territory.

This novel order caused discontent among the newly emerging class of independent Ottoman intellectuals, the Young Ottomans. They were a group of dissident intellectuals who acquired modern education, mostly in Europe as part of the modernization efforts that began with the

efforts to build the Ottomanist Contract starting in the reign of Mahmud II. They had taken up finding a salvation for the continuity of the Empire as a struggle and campaigned for reformist values of constitutionalism, political representation, and freedom. However, they were unsatisfied with the two decrees. Despite their reformist position, Young Ottomans were not ardent supporters of Ottomanism. Renowned sociologist Şerif Mardin's observations of the group suggest that their emphasis on Ottomanist values promoting equality for all constituents of the Empire were inconsistent and reluctant. (Mardin,1998). Their reluctance to all-encompassing equality is present in their belief in Islam being the most important factor to unite the nation. The ideal of the Ottomanist contract entailed high social complexity, acknowledging affiliations with different categories of ethnicity, religion and class. I view this reluctance as a sign of lower identity complexity, hence their emphasis on Islam as the uniting factor.

The Young Ottomans, containing intellectuals of different backgrounds and ideologies, soon became important actors in the newly established Ottoman media and public opinion. They saw the decrees as proof of the compromises made to the Christians and thus Western powers. (Ünlü, 2018, p.89). They published their ideals of a modern constitutional monarchy based on Islamic principles, where Islam serves as a uniting force. However they did not completely dispose of the significant amount of non-Muslim population remaining within the borders, so they also made use of an Ottomanist discourse when necessary. With their efforts to unite the Muslim constituents around Islam, Ünlü coined the Young Ottomans as the first Islamists of the Ottoman Empire. (p.89-90).

Despite its ideas of equal citizenship, the Ottomanist contract did not live long. With the Russian War of 1877, Sultan Abdulhamid II closed the parliament and suspended the Constitution, starting an authoritarian rule. The Muslim refugee influx that started with the wars in the Balkans

significantly increased as Russia advanced through the East. This naturally caused a further increase of the overall Muslim population, pushing the non-Muslim part of the population toward a prospective minority position. As the limitations of the Ottomanist Contract became increasingly apparent; this inclusive vision, as far as inclusivity went at the time, began to unravel. The optimism surrounding Ottomanism could not survive the pressures from the Christian nationalist movements and growing resentment among Muslims. This ideal, with its relatively high level of social identity complexity, gave way to a more exclusionary and homogenizing vision. Following the suspension of the parliament the next phase, what Ünlü calls the Muslimhood contract, centered around Islam as the primary category of identification started.

So far, this discussion examined Ottomanism as a political ideology crafted by the political elite to save the Empire. Much of the historiography has followed the framework articulated by Yusuf Akçura, a Pan-Turkist ideologue who immigrated from Russia to the Ottoman Empire. Akçura's framework presented Ottomanism as a distinct political ideology, developed to save the Ottoman Empire from complete dissolution. (Antramian, 2020; Akçura, 1904). This perspective later became popular in nationalist and comparative historiographies, situating Ottomanism in binary opposition to Islamism or Turkish nationalism as a failed project to integrate the Empire's diverse populations. This framework implies that non-Muslim millets only wished for total independence and that Ottomanism was destined to fail due to such efforts of self-governance. However, this first effort to establish a social contract may be interpreted in terms of its reflection on the very minority communities it targeted to integrate.

Richard E. Antramian proposed in his 2020 work "*Brokering Belonging: Ottoman Armenians and the politics of confession"*, that Ottomanism can also be taken as a "repertoire" or "cultural

tool kit". According to Antramian, the Armenian clergy took up the Ottomanist policies as an opportunity to justify and promote reform demands by extending a network of social, cultural and economic mechanisms to control community institutions and sustain active participation in imperial governance (p. 101). As I've mentioned before, the millet system allowed for the prominent members of the non-Muslim communities to be included in governance, especially in bureaucracy and diplomacy. Despite religious and economic segregation, Armenians were embedded in the imperial framework of the Ottoman Empire as well as any other millet, even the Muslim communities. Therefore, it must be emphasized that the demands for reform varied across different factions within Armenian communities, led by elites, clergymen and intellectuals. For Armenian clerics such as Mkrtich Khrimian, this "cultural tool kit" enabled a nuanced reading of structural hierarchies and opportunities for reformation within the imperial framework. Khrimian worked as a bridge between the Porte-employed Armenians and local communities to couple imperial and local understandings to build coherent claims for reform; realizing that the Ottomanist constitution was the link between the Armenian community and the Sublime-Porte (Antramian, 2020).

While reformists like Khrimian sought to use the Ottomanist contract as an opportunity to secure legal protections and communal rights within the Empire, others rejected integration. Political parties that promoted different strands of Armenian revolutionary nationalism emerged both inside and outside Ottoman territories, including the Armenakan Party (1885), the Social Democrat Hınchakian Party (1887), and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun, 1890). These movements increasingly diverged toward separatism, leading armed resistance and advocating for Armenian independence. (Libaridian, 2004; Panossian,

2006; Walker,1990). The Hınchakians and Dashnaksutyun left a lasting reputation in present-day Turkish society, for their violent and dauntless resistance especially in eastern Turkey.

The Ottomanist contract ultimately failed to secure long-term stability not because its ideals were inherently flawed, but in my view, because it lacked the political and ideological foundation to withstand the growing ethno-religious divisions within the empire. As European powers increasingly aligned themselves with the Christian communities, and the perception that internal reforms undermine Muslim privilege, Ottomanism came to be viewed with suspicion by the very groups it sought to unify. In this sense, Ottomanism reveals the limitations of civic identity formation in an imperial context shaped by asymmetrical power dynamics and competing loyalties.

Analyzed through the perspective of social identity complexity theory, the Ottoman imperial government and elite sought to construct a common, civic identity to promote loyalty to the state. This civic identity, Ottoman citizenship, ideally transcended religious and ethnic divisions. Considering that under the Ottomanist paradigm, an individual could simultaneously identify as Armenian, Greek or Turkish, Circassian and Georgian, while also embracing a superordinate "Ottoman" identity. In my view, the promise of equal citizenship, representation of ethnic groups in the parliament, establishing secular law alongside religious law and fostering civic rights illustrates attempts to adopt and institutionalize a merged identity. This approach, in theory, encouraged overlapping memberships and promoted cross-cutting affiliations, which Roccas & Brewer (2002) argue increase tolerance and cooperation across groups by reducing the salience of intergroup boundaries.

However, the Ottomanist merger faced structural and sociopolitical constraints that highlight the limits of high complexity identity frameworks. First, growing nationalist movements and

separatist tendencies created pressures that complicated the reconciliation of subgroup and superordinate identities. Political parties such as the Armenakan, Hınchakian and Dashnaksutyun illustrate this divergence with their strong emphasis on ethno-national identity and independence reflects their tendency toward dominance or compartmentalization models of identification. In their example allegiance to the ethnic group outweighed loyalty to the overarching Ottoman identity. Second, the Empire's Muslim majority often perceived Ottomanist reforms as a threat to their privileged position, causing a dispassionate approach to fully embrace the 'Ottoman' identity. These tensions reveal that while the merger model offered a normative blueprint for high social identity complexity, its implementation was constrained by asymmetric power dynamics, external pressures and competing loyalties.

This perspective on Ottomanism illuminates its innovative potential as well as its structural fragility. This first attempt sought to establish a social contract based on a relatively more complex identification model to cultivate inclusivity and multilayered identities to accommodate such a diverse population and protect the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. Although I argued that it would fit in the merger model, I would also like to underline that since this model never got to be fully implemented, my interpretation is only based on its theoretical outline. The gradual unraveling of Ottomanism paved the way for a new mode of inclusion and exclusion. This new mode was more attuned to the shifting political realities and anxieties of the Muslim majority. This next phase, Muslimhood Contract, reoriented the foundations of belonging to the Empire around Muslim solidarity, subordinating ethnic differences to a singular religious identity. Whereas Ottomanism required recognition of multiple, overlapping affiliations; religious, ethnic, local and imperial.

II.III.III Muslimhood Contract

Before I begin, I must note that the transition from one contract to another is not a clear cut switch but more of a series of interwoven processes. It is often challenging to determine the precise dates when such changes occur, most of the time ideologies grow together, nourishing each other. This is also the case for the Muslimhood contract. As I've discussed above, Muslim elites, especially Young Ottomans saw the Ottoman reforms as concessions given to Christian millets due to external pressure at the expense of Muslim interests. Although they articulated support for Ottomanist ideals at times, they believed that uniting the Ottoman Muslims was the right way to save the Empire. Thus the development of the Muslimhood Contract went hand in hand with that of the Ottomanist Contract. The fact that the persistence of religious institutions alongside secular ones is a strong proof that even the state and communal authorities were hesitant to let go of the dichotomous structure of governance despite the Tanzimat and Islahat reforms (Ünlü, 2018, p.85-87).

The Muslimhood Contract was based on the premise of safeguarding the social, political and economic interests of Muslims. It emerged as a response to the growing anxieties of the late Ottoman period when the rise of nationalism and separatist movements required action to keep Ottoman territories intact. As mentioned in the previous section, the 1877-78 Russo-Ottoman War led to an increased influx of Muslim refugees to Ottoman Turkey, increasing the resentment against Western powers and local Christians who were seen as their protegés by the local Muslims. Ünlü suggests that this resentment was rooted in two main factors. First is the widespread idea that the Ottoman reforms were in fact economic and judicial concessions given to Christians (Ünlü, 2018, p.86). The second factor consists of two emotions; the refugee's resentment toward Christians and fear of displacement (p.92).

In addition, the presence of missionary activities especially in the eastern provinces where Kurdish and Armenians dominate the population solidified the fears and resentment, and heightened the perceived threat of Armenian independence movements (Kieser, 2013). This political context strengthened the foundations for Muslim unity. In summary, the atmosphere of anxiety triggered by major territory losses transformed the religious comradeship ideals that were already present among Muslim communities transformed into a political consciousness uniting Muslims from the center to the periphery of the state (Karpat, 2010).

The reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II was decisive in consolidating the Muslimhood Contract. His Pan-Islamist policies institutionalized the idea that Sunni Muslims were the only reliable community for the survival of the empire. Non-Sunni groups were increasingly regarded with suspicion and practices of heterodox Islam were systematically suppressed. The Hamidian regime sought to assimilate practices such as Alawism, Caferism, Yezidism and others (considered to be heterodox Islamic practices) through the establishment of state schools, mosques and demographic engineering strategies to consolidate a uniform system of Sunni identification (Ünlü, 2018; Deringil, 2002). As Sultan Abdülhamid himself stated, the safeguarding of the empire depended on the loyalty of Sunni Muslims (Ünlü, 2018; Sultan Abdülhamid, 1975). His memoires reveal a vision of a political community grounded in the unity of Sunni Islam.

From the perspective of social identity complexity theory, the Muslimhood Contract represented a significant narrowing of inclusivity compared to the Ottomanist framework. Ottomanism had approximated the merger model, integrating imperial, local and communal identifications into a broader vision of being an “Ottoman”. In contrast, Muslimhood reflected the logic of compartmentalization (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Different ethnic groups could maintain their

particular identities, only within the overarching boundary of Sunni Islam. The key boundary was drawn between Muslims versus nnon-Muslims whose loyalty was increasingly questioned in the wake of territorial loss, mass refugee movements and nationalist claims of independence (Ünlü, 2018; Kieser, 2013; Karpat 2010). This reduction in identity complexity laid the groundwork for the eventual transition to the Turkishness Contract by consolidating Muslim solidarity and entrenching exclusionary boundaries against Christians and non-Sunni Muslims.

II.III.IV Turkishness Contract

Compared to the transition from the Ottomanist Contract to Muslimhood Contract, the transition to the Turkishness Contract was somewhat a fuzzier process marked by major continuities and relatively smaller divergences. As Barış Ünlü (2018 emphasizes, the Muslimhood Contract was both an ethical and a social contract. It demanded solidarity among Muslims while drawing firm boundaries between Muslims and non-Muslims, thereby relieving Muslims of ethical obligations toward outgroups, particularly those perceived as threats to the survival of the community and the Ottoman state (p.159). The Young Turks and the Turkic intellectuals who had migrated to the Ottoman Empire from Russia had substantial influence on the founding groups of the Republic of Turkey, due to a significant continuity both in terms of individual membership and intellectual heritage.

At the beginning of the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923), the leading cadre was composed of various Muslim groups such as Turks, Kurds, Circassians, Laz, Bosniaks and others that sought refuge in the Ottoman Empire (Ünlü, 2018). Although this unity dissolved due to political fractions through the war period and beyond, the remaining cadre who founded the Republic of Turkey recognized that Muslimhood alone would not suffice as the unifying principle of a modern nation-state (p.162-163). Having emerged victorious from the War of

Independence, they sought to establish and consolidate a durable and homogenous national identity. Their solution was to Turkify the social contract founded upon the Muslimhood Contract.

According to this solution full membership to the nation would no longer rest solely on being Muslim, but also embracing Turkishness. This reflected both the continuity of the Committee of Union and Progress Cadre, who after 1906 were dominated by Turkish nationalists, and the ideological influence of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, whose commitment to Western-style secularism made Islamist discourse untenable for the new order (Ünlü, 2018, p.163). Thus, the Turkishness Contract not only marks a shift in identity politics but also symbolizes the transformation from an imperial *millet* system to a secular nation-state framework. Contrary to what its name suggests, this contract did not entirely exclude non-Turks but it imposed significant limitations. Being born Muslim was the overall prerequisite for full membership. However, Muslims who did not identify with Turkishness as well as Turks who adhered to competing affiliations were denied full inclusion (Ünlü, 2018, p.165). Early speeches by Atatürk reveal the extent to which loyalty to Turkishness, rather than mere Muslimhood became the new standard of belonging (Ünlü, 2018; Mustafa Kemal, 1923/1993).

A striking example of how Turkishness Contract and the influence of Islam is found in the population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923. The parties agreed on the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations during the Lausanne Conference of 1922-1923, that stipulated a compulsory exchange of Orthodox Christians from Anatolia and Muslims from Greece (excluding Istanbul and Western Thrace). Notably, ethnicity or language were not among the criteria of determining who had to leave and who could stay. Many Greek Orthodox Christians in Anatolia, such as the Karamanlis, were native Turkish speakers and even

sought to demonstrate loyalty as "Christian Turks" before and during the War of Independence, yet were nonetheless expelled (Ünlü, 2018, p.168). Conversely, large numbers of incoming Muslims from Greece did not speak Turkish at all and were of different ethnic affiliations. The population exchange profoundly altered the demographic balance. The ratio of Christians to Muslims in Anatolia dropped from roughly 1:5 in 1913 to 1:40 by 1923 (Keyder, 1999, pp.112-113). The Greek-Turkish population exchange had enduring socio-economic consequences beyond demographic ones. The departing Christians constituted a significant portion of the Empire's trading and urban professional classes, while the majority of the incoming Muslims were rural peasants who lacked the land to work to earn a living. Despite the new state's efforts to redistribute wealth, this profound change contributed to long-term disruptions in commerce and industry.

Ünlü (2018), noted that the confidence in Muslim immigrants stemmed from the widespread belief that they could more easily be assimilated into Turkishness than non-Muslim populations (p.169). In this sense, it is visible that the Turkishness Contract adopted the ingroup solidarity of the Muslimhood Contract but narrowed its scope by layering a secular-national identity framework over the religious boundary. Thus, the framework combined exclusionary mistrust toward Christians, deeply rooted in Ottoman-era narratives of betrayal, with voluntary assimilation expectations directed at Muslim communities.

At this stage, we should turn to the account of researcher Baskın Oran's work on minority identities: *Minorities in Turkey: Concepts, Theory, Lausanne, Domestic Legislation, Precedents and Applications* (Oran, 2018*).* Oran argues that the official framework of nation-building that shaped the conditions of belonging acknowledges that it is impossible to renounce one's ethnic identity (sub-identity in this case) altogether. However, this framework expects the individual to

adopt Turkishness as a supra-identity above all else and to suppress the expression of the ethnic sub-identities to be expressed in the private sphere (Oran, 2018, p. 27-28). As Oran (2018) and Ünlü (2018) discuss in their respective works, the Turkishness Contract has created an elaborate framework of inclusion and exclusion for minority communities, especially for those who were considered to have been cooperating with the Western Powers during the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The Turkishness Contract deserves to be discussed in further detail because it represents an approximately hundred-year process of extensive national consolidation project. Its impact on non-Muslim minorities, Armenians in particular may be summarized in a chronological list of events and policies that occurred during the Republic.

Period	**Event / Policy**
1923–1928	Abandoned property laws, citizenship revocations
1942–1944	Wealth Tax, forced labor conscription (Twenty Classes Conscription)
1955	September 6-7 Istanbul Pogrom
1967–1974	Property/foundation restrictions
1986–2001	Registry orders blocking restitution

2005–2007	Article 301 enforcement on intellectuals, Hrant Dink's assassination and the legal process that followed
2001-2008	Reconciliation efforts, public apologies, reforms
2021-	Heritage demolitions, land disputes
2023-	Border opening discussions

In sum, The Turkishness contract represents both continuity and rupture in the genealogy of identity contracts in the late Ottoman and early Republic periods. Similar to the Muslimhood contract, it preserved the primacy of religion as a boundary marker, ensuring that Muslim origin remained a prerequisite for full membership in the national community. Yet, it layered a secular-nationalist dimension this criterion that privileged Turkishness as the superordinate marker of belonging. This multilayered framework both marginalized non-Muslims through policies of compulsory population exchange and subjected Muslims of diverse ethnic origins to expectations of conformity to a Turkish supra-identity. In doing so, the Turkishness Contract reveals a dual nature: simultaneously expansive in its attempt to integrate a wide range of Muslim groups, yet restrictive in its enforcement of conformity.

As Oran (2018) highlights, ethnic sub-identities could persist only in the private sphere, subordinated to the overarching expectation to identify as Turkish. This transformation signaled a departure from the plural but hierarchical imperial order to a secular and homogenizing nation-state framework. By drawing on legacies of exclusion from the Ottoman period while

introducing new principles of homogenization and secular nationalism, the Turkishness Contract institutionalized a lasting model of conditional belonging, which would profoundly shape minority experiences in the Republic of Turkey.

Historically, the Ottoman Millet System provided a hierarchical structure, which enabled coexistence and pluralistic engagement distinguishing communities primarily by religion instead of ethnicity (Bedlek, 2016; Barkey & Gavrilis, 2016). From a SIC perspective, the Millet System allowed individuals to maintain multiple, overlapping identities, approximating toward higher complexity. Distinct group memberships were recognized but hierarchical ordering and limited intergroup mixing constrained identity structured along the merger model.

Similarly, the Ottomanist Contract sought to create an inclusive civic identity (Ottoman) that transcended religious and ethnic boundaries. In theory, this aligned with the merger model, emphasizing overlapping affiliations and cross-cutting group identities. Despite state or elite sponsored efforts, structural constraints including the rising of nationalist movements, Muslim majority's resistance and external pressure, implementation remained limited, often forcing individuals and communities to adopt dominance or compartmentalization strategies to navigate competing loyalties (Ünlü, 2018, Antramian, 2020).

On the other hand, Muslimhood Contract marked a deliberate turn to narrowing of inclusivity by prioritizing Sunni Muslim identity as the dominant category. This reflects a sharper shift toward compartmentalization amongst the Muslim majority, where ethnic identities could persist, only within the overarching umbrella of Sunni Islam and non-Muslims were increasingly excluded (Ünlü, 2018). Social identity complexity decreased sharply as multiple affiliations were subordinated to religious solidarity.

Finally, Turkishness Contract further refined the boundaries with a secular-nationalist superordinate identity. Full national membership required both Muslim origin and alignment with Turkishness. This contract exhibits dominance model characteristics for non-Turkish Muslims and non-Muslims: minority ethnic identities are allowed in private spheres but subordinated to Turkishnessi while non-Muslims often face outright exclusion (Oran, 2018; Ünlü, 2018). Complexity remains low for non-Muslims and conditional for Muslims of diverse ethnic origins.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The overarching aim of this research is to explore how members of the Armenian community in Turkey negotiate their multilayered identities and to examine which models of social identity complexity (SIC) best explain their strategies. To address these questions, I adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative methods are particularly well suited for investigating identity because they allow the researcher to capture the lived experiences of the participants, their personal reflections and context-dependent strategies for negotiating belonging. Rather than attempting to measure identity as a fixed attribute, opting for a qualitative approach enabled identity to emerge as a dynamic concept as Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2000) argued.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection tool as it combines pre-determined guiding questions with flexibility for participants to elaborate on what they themselves perceive as most significant. This format has especially been appropriate and useful because it creates opportunities for participants to narrate their own journeys of self-understanding, highlight experiences of belonging and exclusion, and reflect on the fluid intersections between different aspects of their identities. It also enabled me as a researcher to

probe and guide the participant to elaborate on themes such as the overlap, separation or hierarchy of identities; dimensions that are central to the social identity complexity theory (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Data collected through semi-structured interviews were supplemented by historical contextual analysis. Identification, categorization and belonging cannot be separated from the broader political and ideological frameworks within which they take shape. The study incorporated a review of the major ideological shifts shaping Armenian experience in the Ottoman Empire, the early Republic and contemporary Turkey. I specifically drew on Ünlü's (2018) analysis of the three major trends: Ottoman, Muslimhood and Turkishness contracts. In my view the first two have had the greatest impact in terms of shaping identification and negotiation strategies of Armenian citizens of Turkey as well as those who identify themselves as "Turks". This is because they have determined the later strategies of nation-building of the Turkishness Contract in the first place, as discussed previously.

By combining interviews with contextual historical analysis, the study addresses both the micro-level of personal identity negotiation and the macro-level of ideological frameworks, yielding a layered understanding of Armenian identity in Istanbul.

III.I Sampling Strategy

Participants were selected using purposive sampling strategies, as the research required individuals who were willing to speak directly about the experience of being an Armenian in Istanbul and Turkish citizens as well as individuals who have been maintaining their relations with their community and in multicultural contexts. To ensure that participants reflected both strong community affiliation and exposure to diverse social environments, the following inclusion criteria were established:

1. Participants were between the ages of 18 and 45.
2. They were born and reside in Istanbul.
3. They were members of the Armenian community by heritage and upbringing.
4. They attended Armenian schools from elementary through high school.
5. They had completed university education.
6. At the time of the interview, they were employed in multicultural work environments.

The emphasis on formal education in Armenian schools was intentional and a must because it ensured that participants had spent their early and adolescent years primarily within Armenian cultural institutions. Simultaneously, requiring current employment in multicultural workplaces meant that participants also engaged regularly with outgroups, specifically Turkish and Muslim colleagues. According to social identity complexity theory, such exposure to multiple identity-relevant groups fosters complex identity representations by forcing individuals to reconcile overlapping and sometimes conflicting group memberships (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

III.II Recruitment

Recruitment occurred through the researcher's personal and professional connections, including networks during undergraduate study and workplace interactions in Istanbul. While this strategy risked limiting diversity within the sample, the widespread cautiousness in discussing such topics with outgroups that has developed through collective trauma made it necessary. Initial search began informally and indirectly through first degree contacts, casually mentioning that I was looking for participants for this research project. At this point I introduced the project as a study to explore Armenian identity and belonging to Turkey. Following their recommendations, I met the potential participants in Istanbul during the fieldwork I did in Istanbul in March 2023. After

the introduction of myself as a researcher and my project, potential participants were directly asked whether they would be open to take part in research concerning Armenian identity in Turkey. Contrary to my expectations, the group of potential participants proved to be rather enthusiastic at first glance.

III.III Preliminary Interviews

Before full participation, preliminary interviews were conducted in person and lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. These interviews served two purposes: (1) to determine whether participants met the recruitment criteria, and (2) to assess their willingness to engage in potentially sensitive conversations about their past experiences, their identity and belonging. The preliminary interviews included questions about demographic information (age, place of birth, current residence) educational and occupational background. Through these conversations, I also sought to ensure that participants felt comfortable discussing their identity within a research context.

From an initial pool of five volunteers (who had accepted to join the preliminary interview), three participants ultimately met all criteria and agreed to take part in the study. Although small, this sample aligned with the logic of qualitative research, where the aim is not statistical generalization but the generation of rich, detailed accounts that illuminate the complexity of identity negotiations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant provided extensive narratives that traversed family history, community experiences, education, personal life and broader reflections on identity as well as their opinions about current politics.

III.IV Researcher Positionality and Reflections

I position myself as occupying and in-between space in relation to this research. I am not a member of the Armenian community. I identify as Turkish and a Turk in terms of nationality,

national-belonging and ethnic heritage. Growing up in Antalya, a city in the southernmost part of the country, I attended both state and private schools which adhered to the curricula mandated by the National Ministry of Education (MEB). In these formative years of education, I vividly remember being taught very briefly about the presence of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, mostly about "Armenian betrayal" to the Ottomans and atrocities committed by Armenians. However, my personal encounters with Armenians in Istanbul, which began during my undergraduate years in Istanbul significantly changed my awareness of the complexities of Armenian identity. A personal relationship during this period first drew my attention to the challenges and sensitivities surrounding Armenian-Turkish relations. This experience prompted broader interest and personal reflections on issues of identity, belonging and interethnic identity dynamics in the Turkish context.

My academic training reinforced and deepened this interest. At Boğaziçi University, where I studied political science alongside translation and interpreting studies, I was introduced to theories of nationalism, identity and minority-majority relations. A course that particularly focused on nationalism provided me with the theoretical foundation to frame my emerging interest in Armenian-Turkish relations in a systematic way and fueled my curiosity about the nation-building process and its implications in contemporary Turkish politics.

I became actively involved with the Hrant Dink Foundation (HDF) towards the end of my undergraduate studies. My first position there was as a project assistant to the Armenia-Turkey Normalization Process Stage III (ATNP III), an initiative designed to create opportunities for individuals and institutions who sought to understand each other across the border, despite the land border that has been closed since 1993 due to conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This experience not only exposed me to diverse perspectives on reconciliation but also

highlighted the potential and fragility of dialogue in contexts marked by historical conflict and mutual trauma. Upon completing my coursework at Central European University, I returned to Turkey for personal reasons and acquired a new position at the HDF to coordinate a project to disseminate inclusive discourse practices through specialized training modules and workshops. This second experience further deepened my engagement with institutional approaches to dialogue, minority rights and Armenian-Turkish relations.

These personal, academic and professional experiences situate me neither as an insider nor as a complete outsider. They rather put me in a position of proximity and direct access to interethnic relations as well as providing me with a multi-layered and nuanced understanding of reciprocal perceptions. This positionality has influenced both access to participants and the research process. My personal and professional proximity to the community facilitated trust and access to networks that may have been less accessible to an external researcher. At the same time, I remain conscious that my identity as a non-Armenian has shaped my sampling, although unintentionally, in a way that brought me together with candidates who were relatively comfortable with discussing such sensitive issues with an outgroup and what interview participants chose to discuss when delving deeper into their sense of identification and belonging. To address these dynamics, I have approached the study reflexively to the maximum extent possible, making my positionality explicit and grounding my interpretations in participants' own narratives to ensure that my personal experiences did not unduly bias the analysis.

III.V Data Collection

III.V.I Interviews

The primary method of data collection consisted on semi-structed interviews conducted with the three participants in Istanbul. Each interview lasted between 90 minutes to two hours. To

maximize participant comfort, interviews were held in locations chosen by the participants: one took place in the participant's home, another in a café and the third in an office setting. Allowing participants to select the location helped create a sense of safety and autonomy, particularly important given the sensitivity of discussing ethnic identity in Turkey.

An interview guide was developed to ensure consistency across conversations while leaving room for flexibility. The guide covered themes of:

- Family background and connections to the Armenian community,
- Educational history (with a focus on Armenian schools and transition to university),
- Past professional experiences,
- Current occupation and workplace diversity,
- Perceptions of identity and belonging.

Each guiding question was complemented with potential probes to elicit deeper responses. For example, when discussing education, participants were asked: *"Which schools did you attend?"* Following probes included *"How do you think attending an Armenian school influenced your sense of identity?"* and *"What role did your university peers and professors play in shaping your sense of Armenian identity?"* Similarly, when discussing employment, participants were asked: *"What is your current profession? Can you describe your working environment in terms of its cultural diversity?"* Probes included *"Do you feel more comfortable or more cautious in your current work environment compared to past experiences, especially in Armenian community settings?"*

In accordance with the intent, the flexible structure of the interviews allowed participants to guide the conversation toward aspects that mattered most to them, while ensuring coverage of the key dimensions necessary for analysis through the lens of social identity complexity.

III.VI Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were central to the design and conduct of this research. All participants received an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures taken to preserve confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Pseudonyms were assigned and identifying details were removed from transcripts to protect anonymity. Interview recordings, transcripts and informed consent documents are stored securely on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. Relevant documents may be provided upon authorized request. Given the sensitivity of Armenian identity and community in Turkey, particular care was taken to ensure that participants did not feel pressured to disclose information they were uncomfortable with sharing.

Having outlined the research design, sampling and data collection; it is also important to clarify how the interview materials were analyzed. The interpretive nature of qualitative research requires transparency about the researcher's standpoint as well as a clear account of the analytic process through which meanings were generated. I employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) in order to capture both the depth of participants' narratives and the complexity of their social identities as developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2021) and explained by David Byrne (2021). RTA was selected because it aligns with the constructivist orientation of the study and emphasizes researcher's active role in interpreting patterns of meaning (Byrne, 2021, p.1393). This method of analysis also offers a flexible yet rigorous framework for identifying

patterns across participants' accounts. The following section will introduce RTA, explain key principles and outline the steps taken in its application on the interview data.

III.VII Data Analysis

III.VII.I Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) provided the analytic framework for this study. RTA is a flexible, interpretive approach to qualitative analysis that facilitates the identification and exploration of patterns of meaning within a dataset (Byrne, 2021; Braun et. al. 2019). Unlike other approaches, RTA positions the researcher as an active and reflexive agent in the process of knowledge production. In RTA, themes are interpretive constructions developed through active engagement of the researcher with participants' accounts, theoretical assumptions and broader socio-political contexts. RTA resonates with the aims of this research to explore how members of the Armenian community in Istanbul negotiate their multilayered identities and to interpret these processes through the lens of the Social Identity Complexity theory.

RTA is based on several theoretical and methodological principles that distinguish it from other forms of thematic analysis. The recognition of the researchers active role in interpreting meaning patterns is central to RTA. Interview data are classified into codes and themes. In this context, codes represent analytic labels applied to the segments of data that capture meaning relevant to research questions. Codes can be descriptive, reflecting the surface content of participant accounts or interpretive, pointing toward underlying assumptions or ideologies. On the other hand, themes are broader patterns of meaning that bring together related codes under a central organizational framework. Themes are actively developed through researcher's reflexive engagement with the dataset (Byrne, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019).

In strong relation with the interpretive nature of RTA and the active meaning production of the researcher, RTA is a flexible and organic analytic process in which codes and themes evolve iteratively throughout analysis (Byrne, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding may operate both at the semantic level, capturing explicit content and at the latent level, interpreting underlying assumptions, ideologies and social contexts. Furthermore, this analytical method combines data-driven insights (inductive) with theoretical framing (deductive) in practice (Braun & Clarke, 2019). RTA operates through six phases of iterative analysis proposed and developed by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013, 2014, 2020), which were followed to the best extent through the analysis phase of this research.

Phase One: Familiarisation with the data

The first phase involves immersion in the dataset through repeated reading and engagement with the material (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The scholars advise researchers to transcribe data themselves, noting pauses, inflections and paralinguistic features to develop a close understanding of the data and identify information relevant to the research questions. Although the transcription of the interviews were completed via an offline tool, I closely examined each interview several times (3-5 on average), corrected mistranscriptions, took notes, marked pauses, sighs or emotional reflections in addition to my initial notes taken during and after the interviews.

Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes

In the second phase, researchers are expected to systematically code the dataset, produce concise descriptive or interpretive labels for data segments relevant to research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Codes can capture both semantic and latent meanings and should be applied

consistently across the dataset. Braun and Clarke encourage researchers to document the evolution of their coding to provide transparency and trace how codes may develop into potential themes (2020).

Phase Three: Generating Themes

Once coding is complete, codes are reviewed and grouped into prospective themes and sub-themes based on shared meanings. At this stage, the researcher engages into active interpretation of the data and constructs meaningful insights related to research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Phase Four: Reviewing potential themes

Prospective themes should be repeatedly reviewed in relation to the coded data and the dataset as a whole. This phase involves assessing the coherence and distinctiveness of each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Discrepancies may necessitate restructuring, adding, or merging themes and codes. Revisions should be carefully documented to ensure transparency and credibility of the analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Phase Five: Defining and naming themes

Themes are refined, defined and named to capture the essence of the patterns identified. Each theme should present a coherent narrative distinct from other themes, while collectively providing a comprehensive account of the dataset. Researchers select illustrative data extracts and engage in interpretive analysis, situating findings in relation to research questions and existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Names of themes should be concise, informative and memorable for enhanced clarity and engagement.

Phase Six: Producing the report

The final phase involves reporting analysis, synthesizing codes, themes and interpretations into a coherent narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2013). RTA emphasizes integrating interpretation and contextualization directly into results rather than strictly separating findings and discussion sections. In this final stage, researchers should draw upon documentation, reflective notes, and thematic maps to produce a logically structured and compelling account of the data, capturing both the richness and complexity of participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

Throughout these six phases, RTA expects researchers to engage deeply and reflexively with qualitative data, producing rich, nuanced interpretations while acknowledging researchers' active role in constructing meaning.

III.VIII Limitations

As with all research, this study is subject to a number of limitations that should be acknowledged. First the sample size is small. Only three participants interviewed. Even though the in-depth nature of semi-structured interviews provides rich detail, the findings cannot and should not be generalized to the wider Armenian community in Istanbul or beyond. Instead, this study contributes to the limited insight into the processes of identity negotiation rather than statistical representation through deep and nuanced narratives collected through fieldwork.

Second, participant recruitment was conducted through personal networks. As stated previously, this may have shaped the type of individuals who agreed to participate. Participants who are more open to discussing identity with outgroups and who are already engaged extensively in multicultural environments may have been more likely to volunteer. As a result, the voices of

those who are more cautious, marginalized or less willing to participate in such discussions may be underrepresented.

In relation to the previous limitation, positionality of the researcher is also a limitation. As an individual identifying as Turkish but who has personal, academic and professional ties to issues surrounding Armenian-Turkish relations, my in-between position provided me access and rapport with participants. However, it may have also influenced the way questions were asked and responses interpreted. Through the research process, I paid attention to maintain reflexivity to mitigate potential effects yet complete neutrality is neither possible nor claimed.

Fourth, the study is limited in terms of sociodemographic diversity, primarily due to the small sample size. The criteria for participation were restricted to individuals of Armenian heritage, aged 18-45 who attended Armenian schools until high school and who currently work in multicultural settings. The criterion regarding the age of participants was to ensure fully informed and voluntary participation of adults, who have had enough experience of the changing landscape of identity politics in Turkey. The emphasis on attendance to Armenian schools was to ensure that participants of this research had acquired formal education in Armenian language and culture, which are only available in Armenian schools in Turkey. The condition of working in multicultural settings enabled the sample to represent individuals who daily engage in interethnic relations, thus increasing the diversity of situations they have encountered. While such purposive sampling was consistent with the aims of exploring social identity complexity, it excluded other groups within the Armenian community, including those educating entirely in Turkish schools, those who work in community-specific work environments or older generations who may have experienced identity negotiation differently. In addition, the criterşon about education assumed that attendance to Armenian schools, despite their apparently inefficient resources due to

economic difficulties, pointed to a higher level of commitment to the community at least during upbringing.

Finally, this study is limited by its geographical and temporal scope. The interviews were conducted in Istanbul in 2023 just before general elections, a context shaped by specific political, cultural and social dynamics. Armenian communities in other cities in Turkey, though blatant scarcity in population, or in the diaspora may face different challenges and adopt different strategies of identity negotiation. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to the literature by providing rare first-hand accounts of Armenians in Istanbul and by situating these narratives within the broader theoretical framework of social identity complexity. The limitations outlined above do not undermine the value of the findings but instead indicate the need for caution in their interpretation and for further research to broaden the scope and diversity of representation.

IV. Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret and critically engage with the findings of the interviews in light of the theoretical framework and historical context outlined in previous chapters. Emergent codes and themes are created and examined through the lens of Social Identity Complexity theory (SIC) as proposed by Roccas and Brewer (2002), while also drawing upon the broader literature on social identity and national belonging discussed in previous chapters. The interviews reveal how members of the Armenian community in Istanbul navigate the coexistence of multiple, sometimes conflicting, dimensions of identity; ethnic, religious, regional, civic and diasporic, and how these dimensions are made meaningful within the political and historical context of the Republic of Turkey.

Social Identity Complexity theory provides a lens for understanding how individuals cognitively present the relationships among their multiple group memberships and the implications of this

complexity for social perception, intergroup tolerance and identity negotiation. According to Roccas & Brewer (2002), individuals may structure theşr overlapping social identities through four primary models: intersection, dominance, compartmentalization and merger. Intersection model indicates that the individual converges multiple group memberships around a single shared identity while in the dominance model, one group identity takes precedence over other memberships. On the other hand, individuals who adopt the compartmentalization model keep their multiple identities separate and activate them selectively depending on the context. Last, the merger model allows the individual to integrate multiple group memberships into an inclusive and overlapping self-concept. Higher social identity complexity is characterized by recognition and integration of multiple, sometimes conflicting group memberships. It is associated with greater cognitive flexibility, empathy and tolerance toward outgroup members. However, it also requires the capacity to navigate potential social and psychological tension when context demands prioritization or concealment of certain identities. These models can be observed at work simultaneously or separately in daily life. Individuals may consciously or unconsciously activate these models as a negotiation strategy.

In engaging with these findings this chapter also situates them within broader debates on nationalism, minority belonging and social identity. As Tajfel (1981) highlighted, social identities are always formed in relation to intergroup boundaries, while Brubaker and Cooper (2000) emphasize that identity should be treated as flexible and changeable rather than a fixed category. Although the participants did not directly comment on historical policies or processes, their emphasis on layered and fluid belonging was in agreement with Ünlü's (2018) observation that the Turkishness contract continues to structure terms of civic inclusion and social exclusion.

Taken together, the themes generated in this study attempt to illuminate the adopted strategies of survival and models of complexity by the Armenian community in Turkey. The findings point to a dynamic process where individuals negotiate their sense of self through a balance of inclusive complexity and protective compartmentalization. These processes are evidently shaped by historical memory, intergroup relations and present-day sociopolitical realities. The following sections will discuss these themes in greater detail, illustrating how participants' identification processes correspond with the theoretical models of social identity complexity.

The thematic analysis of the interview data generated a set of codes that were subsequently organized into broader and interconnected themes. Each theme attempts to capture a distinct dimension of how Armenians in Istanbul construct, negotiate and protect their social identities. The coding process was guided by the Social Identity Complexity theory, which emphasizes the ways individuals cognitively represent the relationships among their multiple group memberships. As detailed in the methodology chapter, the reflexive approach adopted here allowed for the identification of both recurring patterns in the data and the tensions and contradictions embedded in participants' narratives.

The thematic analysis of the interview data generated codes that were subsequently organized into three interconnected themes, reflecting both the multiplicity of identity positions available to participants and the contextual strategies they employ to navigate them:

1. Multiplicity and Fluidity of Identity - Captures the overlapping and dynamic nature of Armenian identity, illustrates how participants integrate multiple social group memberships into an inclusive self-concept, consistent with the dominance and merger models of SIC depending on the participant.

2. Contextual Negotiation and Survival Strategies - Reflects the ways in which participants strategically activate or suppress certain identities depending on social context, aligning with compartmentalization and demonstrating adaptive responses to historical and contemporary pressures.

3. Boundaries of Belonging and Tolerance - Highlights how intergroup relations, civic expectation, and family norms shape perceptions of who belongs and how tolerance is practiced, revealing traces of dominance in family expectations and the limited relevance of intersectional convergence in participants' lived experiences.

The upcoming sections will present these themes in detail coupled with extracts from the interviews to illustrate how participants map onto the four models and how they reflect broader processes of civic inclusion, social exclusion and identity negotiation in contemporary Istanbul and thus Turkey.

IV.I Multiplicity and Fluidity of Identity

Multiplicity and fluidity is a central theme that emerged from the interviews, expressed in the participants' tendency to draw upon several overlapping self-definitions. Their reflections illustrate a strong awareness of identity as both layered and contextually flexible, resisting reduction to a single, fixed category. All three participants expressed that they are an amalgamation of their multiple identities.

When asked to describe their identity Participant1 responded:

"I introduce myself as a Sivas Armenian (Sivas Ermenisi), and I'm proud of that … I was born and raised in Istanbul, so I am both an Istanbulite and a Sivas Armenian (Sivas Ermenisi) … I say I am a Sivas Armenian, an Istanbul Armenian, and an Armenian from Turkey (Türkiyeli

Ermeni) ... A person doesn't have a single identity … because identity isn't one piece, it is a few pieces combined … it's an amalgam … labels can even change depending on circumstances."

This direct articulation of identity as layered and multiple demonstrates Participant 1's conscious awareness of his situation as an Armenian in Turkey. At the same time, his account foregrounds ethnicity and emotional belonging as the principle lenses through which identity is negotiated. The insistence on Armenian heritage as central to self-understanding and self-categorization suggests traces of Roccas & Brewer's (2002) model of dominance, whereby one identity domain, ethnicity in this case takes precedence over others.

Yet, their reflections also reveal the fluidity of self-identification and the pragmatic ways in which identity may be adapted to shifting contexts. For instance: they state: *Today I might say 'I am a Sivas Armenian', but in the future, if I work in the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (here, the participant refers to the possibility that he might one day acquire Armenian citizenship) *I might say 'I am from Armenia'."* They further explained *"Labels change; they are not fixed. I say different things depending on the context* (about his identity)*."* This statement directly aligns with Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) argument that identity should be understood as situational and contingent, activated or downplayed depending on institutional and social demands.

Participant 2 described themself as follows:

"I was born in Istanbul in 1996, in Şişli. My mother is from Adiyaman, my father is from Amasya. I grew up in an Armenian family, so I'm Armenian. I have a twin brother; we were born as twins; I have no other siblings; we've lived in Yeşilköy since I was born. I'm 27 years old. I went to an Armenian primary school at my mother's school in Yeşilköy, and University at Koç University. Now, for the last three years, I've been working at an NGO."

In contrast to Participant 1, Participant 2 described his identity more in biographical and civic accounts of identity. He expressed belonging to a specific, local Armenian community in Istanbul, instead of a past relation to another region. His awareness about familial heritage transmission points to a heightened sense of relativity in terms of identification, pointing to the fact that they acquired Armenian identity through his parents and their familial connections that could have been different if they were born into a different family. This reflects a more complex and fluid orientation, Armenian identity is understood in relation to the family they are born into and the institutions that shape socialization. Such an account implicitly demonstrates the relativity of identity: had family origins been otherwise, identification might also have taken a different form.

Participant 3 adopted yet another perspective, emphasizing their position within the Armenian community through active involvement in civic and religious institutions.

"*... I am a member of the executive branch of the S.V. Church Foundation, I have been active in the community groups and foundations since middle school and engaged in social activities such as folklore and charity. Thus, I've had the opportunity to be involved with my community and to observe it closely both at the local and general level. I am also one of the first members of a youth group established by our former patriarch Mesrob Mutafian."*

Unlike the first two accounts, Participant 3 did not emphasize familial or ancestral heritage, but rather their long-standing role as a community participant and observer. As a member of an older cohort (aged 35-45), they framed Armenian identity in terms of civic participation and institutional engagement. This generational lens illustrates how identity is not only inherited but also shaped by involvement in communal structures. Their observation that "*we (Armenians) are a reflection of the broader society, degradation in general social practices influence our*

community" further emphasizes the relational nature of identity, situating the Armenian community within the wider social fabric of Turkey. While they did not explicitly mention that they accepted Turkishness as a supra-identity, this account highlights the embeddedness of Armenians in Turkish society, pointing to the ways in which communal life is shaped by the same social processes affecting the majority of population.

The participants also discussed their perspectives about their position within Turkey. Each participant drew a different picture. For instance, Participant 1 stated that *"For me, Armenian is an ethnic identity, and Turkishness doesn't represent me. Others may adopt it as a civic identity, but I don't…I am also a Christian, but above all I feel connected to Armenia. I love Armenia and miss it. At the same time, I deeply love Istanbul."* This account stood out among the others because P1 was the only one to explicitly comment about Turkishness as a supra-identity and their preference.

IV.II Contextual Negotiation and Survival Strategies

The second theme, Contextual Negotiation and Survival Strategies, highlights how identity is not only multiple and fluid but also actively managed in response to social and political constraints. Participant 1's reflections vividly illustrate strategies of concealment, adaptation and selective self-representation that characterize minority identity negotiation in Turkey.

They explained: *"My name is Mıgırdich but sometimes I introduce myself as Murat. Because Murat is a common name both in Turkish and Armenian, it is also a quieter and harmless name that doesn't bother anyone."* The participant also provided similar accounts of identity concealment strategies employed by their parents to avoid attention and scrutiny: *"My mother's name is also an apparent Armenian name, it is also hard to pronounce for a Turkish speaker, so she uses Aylin, it is also used in Armenian as well but easier to pronounce and also a common*

Turkish name.". The participant's father's account is more striking. *"My father, likewise, is called 'Vedat' at work instead of 'Vahakn'. He uses 'Vedat' as sort of a shield so that his identity does not affect his business in commerce."* These small but significant daily strategies demonstrate how everyday identity practices are shaped by pragmatic calculations of safety and accessibility.

From the perspective of Social Identity Complexity theory (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), such strategies can be evaluated as attempts at compartmentalization. Rather than integrating multiple identities into a coherent whole, the participant and his family selectively bring some identities under the spotlight while suppressing others depending on the social environment. This compartmentalization allows for safer navigation of majority-dominated spaces, while retaining Armenian identity within the private sphere. In this sense, contextual changes emerge as a survival mechanism to reduce exposure to prejudice but simultaneously reinforces the necessity of strategic concealment.

The account of Participant 1 also revealed a tension between protection and resistance. For instance, the participant recounted his mother's warnings: *"Don't write anything on Facebook or Instagram, don't throw yourself into the fire. If something happens, Armenians will be the first to suffer."* Participant 1 also recounted her warnings about not speaking Armenian or calling her *mama* in public. Despite this, they asserted: "*But I do speak, I look them straight in the eyes. I have that in me."* This duality, coupled with the instances of opting for Turkish names illustrate the incompatibility of identity components within the Social Identity Complexity theory. While compartmentalization serves as an effective coping mechanism, it is also an emotionally costly process which requires constant vigilance and negotiation.

Brubaker and Cooper's distinction between identity as category and identification further clarifies this tension. The shift from "Mıgırdich" to "Murat" demonstrates how externally imposed categories, what names sound acceptable, which identities are tolerated in public space, shape the repertoire of possible identifications. Identity here is not only a matter of self-understanding but also a negotiation with dominant social categories that delimit what can be safely expressed. The participants' narratives reveal how Armenians in Turkey are compelled to engage in strategic self-identification, adopting labels that minimize risk, even when they do not align with self-understanding.

Conversely, Participant 3 's account demonstrates an overall strategy of blurring their identity. While they frequently emphasized that they do not explicitly engage in identity concealment, they stated that *"My mother, anticipating possible burden, found a middle way in naming me and my sibling in French."* This points to a slightly different strategy of negotiation that diverts attention from their Armenian identity. Participant 3 explained that "*People often ask where I am from originally and how I learned Turkish, assuming I am a foreigner but they don't give me a hard time explaining it because I say my mother loves the French language, which is also not a lie. Instead, (laughing) what's hard is to teach them how to pronounce my name correctly."*

Differing from the first two accounts, Participant 2 stated that *"My parents gave me and my twin sibling Armenian names but they are not so explicit. I don't recall having to change my name or anything like that but growing up I remember being laughed at because my name resembles a scientific term in Turkish."*

From a reflexive standpoint, the accounts discussed within this theme demonstrates the burden of identity negotiation in minority contexts. The participants not only adapt to survive within the dominant social framework but also reflect on the costs of doing so. The emotional exhaustion of

switching or opting for non-Armenian names, the limits on freedom of expression, and the intergenerational transmission of caution. Their accounts highlight how Armenians in Istanbul negotiate belonging through strategic silence, calculated disclosure and protective performances of self.

In this sense, social identity complexity is not merely a cognitive schema of multiple group memberships (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) but also a political practice shaped by institutionalized categories and external constraints (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Participant 1's account specifically shows that contextual negotiation is not simply about fluidity for its own sake, but about survival in an environment where categories of belonging are unequally valued.

IV.III Boundaries of Belonging and Tolerance

The third significant theme that emerged from the interviews concerns the social boundaries of belonging and the way the participants articulate both inclusion within the Armenian community and limits of identification with the Turkish supra-identity. These boundaries reflect a negotiation of tolerance toward both ingroup and outgroup members, revealing how ethnic identity often operates as a dominant frame in participants' self-understanding.

Participant 1 articulated this boundary in clearly rejecting the category of "Turkish-Armenian":

"I introduce myself as a Sivas Armenian (Sivas Ermenisi), and I'm proud of that … I was born and raised in Istanbul, so I am both an Istanbulite and a Sivas Armenian (Sivas Ermenisi) … I say I am a Sivas Armenian, an Istanbul Armenian, and an Armenian from Turkey (Türkiyeli Ermeni) but I never say "I am Turkish-Armenian". Turkishness is not a 'superordinate' identity for me… Armenian is an ethnic identity and Turkishness does not represent me…some (Armenians) may identify with Turkishness and I respect that "

This explicit refusal of Turkishness as a supra-identity illustrates the operation of the dominance model within the SIC framework, where one category, Armenian ethnicity in this case, overrides or excludes others from integration. While the participant recognizes multiple identities related to Armenian identity, these are not extended to an inclusive merger with Turkish civic identity. Instead, boundaries are drawn to preserve ethnic distinctiveness, reflecting historical memory and lived experiences of exclusion.

While Participant 2 abstained from commenting on whether the term "Turkish-Armenian" represented them, Participant 3 stated that: *"I am a citizen of Turkey, me and my family, we belong to this country however I am first and foremost a mother and Armenian who would like to contribute to my own community first, the rest will come."* reflecting a similar adaptation of the dominance model.

Boundaries also emerged in relation to marriage and community expectations. Participants spoke of implicit and explicit pressures toward endogamy, often framed as protecting the sacrifices of past generations. As Participant 1 explained: *"In our community, there's always the saying: don't waste what your ancestors protected (Armenianness)... the idea is that you should marry an Armenian to preserve what previous generations strived to protect."* On the same topic, participants 2 and 3 also suggested that although marrying someone outside their community would not directly lead to total exclusion, children born of out-marriages may be excluded from Armenian schools. Participant 2 explained: *"... There are examples of children being denied from registering to Armenian schools because they require both parents to be Armenian. I do not know if it was legal or okay to do so but it happened in the 2000s."* Such statements indicate how belonging is internally scrutinized and tolerance toward out-marriage is limited and ethnic

continuity is prioritized. This further reflects the dominance of Armenian identity as the primary axis through which life choices are evaluated.

At the same time, participants acknowledged cross-group tolerance and connection. The oral histories of survival during 1915 such as families being hidden by Turkish neighbors were recounted with appreciation: *"My grandmother's family survived in Sivas because a Turkish family hid them… we still keep in touch with that family, their grandchildren still visit us. They even call my grandma 'hala' (auntie)."* These narratives complicate the boundaries of belonging, showing that while Turkishness is not accepted as a supra-identity, selective bonds of trust and tolerance remain meaningful.

The interviews also surfaced debates within the Armenian community, highlighting diverse orientations toward cultural responsibility. Participant 2 situated himself between those who are highly committed to preserving Armenian culture and those less engaged:

"... and then there are some who are very fanatical; I am somewhere in between. Of course, I care a lot about belonging to the Armenian community, but I am not one of those who see it as a responsibility to preserve it at all costs. I mean, if I want to be part of this community, of this group, then I also need to contribute to keeping that culture alive. What does that mean in practice? It means knowing the language. I don't speak perfect Armenian, but at least I know enough to communicate, and in that sense, I feel normal and I feel good about it…I could marry someone who is not an Armenian, I wouldn't mind that but I would like to practice my culture as well."

The same participant also highlighted the importance of family decisions in sustaining Armenian identity through education and institutions, while also emphasizing a sense of belonging to

Turkey: "*For example, my parents also had that mindset (attending Armenian schools, learning Armenian etc.). Otherwise, there were many other schools, but they chose to send me to an Armenian school, so that at least I could experience life within Armenian institutions. In that sense, I also feel that way in terms of identity. Apart from that, of course, being Armenian is not something extraordinary, there really isn't much difference from other people. I am someone who enjoys living in Turkey."*

This account demonstrates how participating in institutions serves as a key mechanism for preserving identity boundaries across generations. Yet the statement that "*...being Armenian is not something extraordinary, there really isn't much difference from other people. I am someone who enjoys living in Turkey."* indicates a flexible and tolerant orientation, where Armenian identity is maintained but not positioned in absolute opposition to the majority population. This reflects a form of compartmentalization within the SIC framework, where multiple identities are acknowledged but activated differently.

These accounts demonstrate how boundaries of belonging are actively constructed and negotiated. Ethnic identity emerged as the dominant lens, shaping decisions about labels, marriage and cultural practice. Yet, these boundaries are not impermeable: instances of cross-group solidarity, institutional preservation and moderate interpretations of cultural responsibility illustrate selective tolerance. Within the Social Identity Complexity framework, this theme reflects the dominance model most strongly, combined with moments of compartmentalization, where tolerance is situational and contingent. This selective inclusivity underscores the precarious balance Armenians in Istanbul maintain between protecting group continuity and navigating life in a majority-dominated society.

A comparative view highlights the distinct ways in which participants draw these boundaries. Participant 1 positioned Armenian identity in exclusive terms, rejecting "Turkishness" as a supra-identity and prioritizing ethnicity above all else. Participant 2 reflected a more moderate stance, valuing cultural continuity through language and institutions but distancing himself from "fanatical" approaches, emphasizing instead a balanced engagement with both Armenian and Turkish contexts. Participant 3, by contrast, framed belonging through embeddedness in community institutions and civic participation, while acknowledging the Armenian community as part of the broader Turkish social fabric. Together, these perspectives illustrate a spectrum of boundary-making practices from exclusivity to moderation to embeddedness that underscore the diversity of strategies Armenians in Turkey employ to negotiate belonging.

V. Conclusion

This thesis examined the social identity complexity of contemporary Turkish identity, focusing on how historical and structural factors have shaped minority experiences, particularly for Armenians. Drawing on Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) critique of essentialist and overly fluid identity conceptions and Roccas and Brewer's (2002) social identity complexity framework based on the Social Identity Approach, the study moved beyond static notions of identity to analyze how multiple affiliations are navigated within politically and historically constrained environments.

V.I Historical Trajectories of Identity Complexity

The Ottoman millet system created a hierarchical yet pluralistic social order, categorizing communities primarily by religion while allowing ethnic, professional, and local affiliations to coexist. From the perspective of social identity complexity, the millet system enabled moderate

complexity: it institutionalized boundaries but also permitted cross-cutting interactions that facilitated engagement across communities.

The Ottomanist contract sought to cultivate a merger-type identity by integrating local, communal, and imperial affiliations under a superordinate Ottoman identity. While theoretically conducive to high complexity, it faced structural constraints: nationalist movements, external pressures, and the resistance of the Muslim majority limited the realization of this inclusive model. Minority groups, particularly Armenians, navigated these opportunities differently, with elites leveraging Ottomanist policies as a "cultural toolkit" to pursue communal reforms, while separatist factions prioritized ethnic identity, reflecting compartmentalization or dominance models.

The Muslimhood contract narrowed identity inclusion, prioritizing Sunni Islam as the primary marker of belonging. Ethnic distinctions persisted but only within the Muslim boundary, producing a compartmentalized identity structure. The Turkishness contract, in turn, layered secular-nationalist belonging over religious affiliation, creating a dominance-based model in which full inclusion required both Muslim origin and adherence to Turkishness. Non-Muslims were marginalized, while minority Muslims were expected to subordinate ethnic identities to the Turkish supra-identity.

V.II Contemporary Patterns and Dynamics

Today, social identity complexity in Turkey remains constrained by these historical trajectories. For the majority, dominance-based identification around Turkish-Muslim identity prevails, with subordinate ethnic identities being tolerated but remaining secondary. Minority non-Muslims primarily experience compartmentalized identities, expressing affiliations in private or community contexts. Situational factors, such as political pressures or sociocultural expectations,

further limit the realization of merger-type complexity. Nevertheless, individuals exposed to pluralistic experiences and open to ambiguity may cultivate moderate levels of complexity within these constraints.

V.III Implications for Inclusion and Social Cohesion

The persistence of dominance and compartmentalization models reinforces ingroup-outgroup boundaries, shaping patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Historical and structural legacies constrain cross-cutting affiliations, illustrating the lasting influence of Ottoman- and Republican-era policies on contemporary identity negotiation. Due to the lasting legacy of these policies, social identity complexity remains low in Turkey. Enhancing social identity complexity through pluralistic engagement, education, and inclusive civic discourse could reduce intergroup bias, foster tolerance, and strengthen social cohesion in Turkey's multiethnic context.

V.IV Contributions and Future Research

This study contributes by applying social identity complexity theory to the Turkish context, linking historical state practices with contemporary identity structures. It highlights how conditional inclusion and exclusion shape minority experiences and demonstrates the relevance of layered identities in navigating national belonging. Future research could empirically assess identity complexity among different minority groups, examining how cognitive, motivational, and structural factors interact. Comparative studies in other post-imperial societies may further clarify the influence of historical legacies on complex identities.

V.V Final Remarks

In sum, contemporary Turkish identity reflects a tension between historical pluralism and modern homogenizing pressures. The Ottoman millet system and Ottomanist ideals suggest possibilities for high complexity, yet the Turkishness contract institutionalized dominance and

constrained integrative affiliations. Applying the social identity complexity lens illuminates how individuals negotiate layered identities, offering insight into both persistent exclusionary patterns and potential avenues for fostering tolerance and inclusive belonging in Turkey.

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Appendix A

Katılımcı Onam Formu

(for English see below)

Central European Üniversitesi, Milliyetçilik Çalışmaları Yüksek Lisans öğrencisi Damla Zeynep Oğuz'un yürüttüğü araştırma projesine katılmayı hür irademle, hiçbir baskı altında kalmadan, şahsi bilgilerimin paylaşılmaması ve mülakat sonucu elde edilen verinin kimliğimi ifşa etmeyecek şekilde işlenmesi ve kullanılması şartı ile kabul ediyorum.

Çalışma ile ilgili tü ayrıntılar araştıtmacı tarafından açıklandı ve tüm sorularım cevaplandı. Görüşmenin ses kayıt cihazı ile kaydedilmesine ve Central European Üniversitesi ile paylaşılmasına izin veriyorum.

Bu araştırma projesi Dr. Ana Mijić danışmanlığında yürütülmektedir.

Araştırmacı iletişim bilgileri: oguz_damla@student.ceu.edu

Katılımcının İsmi	Tarih	İmza
Araştırmacının İsmi	Tarih	İmza

Appendix A
Participant Consent Form

I voluntarily agree to participate in the research project conducted by Damla Zeynep Oğuz, a Master's student in Nationalism Studies at Central European University, without any pressure or coercion, on the condition that my personal information will not be shared and that the data obtained from the interview will be processed and used in a manner that does not reveal my identity.

All details regarding the study were explained by the researcher, and all of my questions were answered. I consent to the interview being audio-recorded and shared with Central European University.

This research project is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ana Mijić.

Researcher Contact Information: oguz_damla@student.ceu.edu

Name of the Participant	Date	Signature

Name of the Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix B

Mülakat Soruları

(for English see below)

Mülakat Rehberi: İstanbul'da Ermeni Kimliği ve Aidiyetin Keşfi

1. Kişisel ve Arka Plan (kimlik karmaşıklığıyla doğrudan bağlantılı değil, anlatıları hazırlar)

- Bize büyüme sürecinizden ve aile geçmişinizden bahsedebilir misiniz?
- Ermeni kimliğinizin farkına ilk ne zaman vardınız?
- Bu farkındalığın oluşmasında aileniz, okulunuz veya mahalleniz nasıl bir rol oynadı?
- İstanbul'daki Ermeni topluluğuyla ilişkinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız?
- Sizin için önemli olmuş belirli kurumlar, gelenekler veya ağlar var mı?

2. Kimlik ve Aidiyet (örtüşme vs. farklılaşma ile ilgili)

- Bugünkü kimliğinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız?
- Kimliğinizin zaman içinde değiştiğini düşünüyor musunuz?
- Kimliğinizin hangi yönleri (ör. Ermeni, Türk, dini, mesleki) sizin için en merkezi?
- Ermeni kimliğinizi en güçlü hissettiğiniz durumlar nelerdir?
- Kimliğinizin daha görünür veya önemli olduğu anlar var mı?
- Daha az önemli veya arka planda hissettiğiniz durumlar var mı?

(→ Amaç burada, kimliklerin örtüşmüş ve entegre mi yoksa farklılaştırılmış ve bağlama özgü mü yaşandığını anlamaktır.)

3. Stratejiler (bölümlendirme ile ilgili)

- Kimliğinizin bazı yönlerini vurguladığınız veya geri planda bıraktığınız durumlar oluyor mu?
- Ermeni geçmişinizi öne çıkarmanız gerektiğini hissettiğiniz bir an örnek verebilir misiniz?
- Görünür kılmamayı seçtiğiniz bir durum oldu mu?
- Birden fazla kimliğin devreye girebileceği alanlarda (ör. iş, okul, arkadaşlıklar) nasıl hareket ediyorsunuz?

(→ Bu sorular, katılımcıların farklı bağlamlarda kimlikleri bölümlendirip bölümlendirmediğini, bazılarını etkinleştirip bazılarından vazgeçip geçmediğini anlamaya yöneliktir.)

4. Sosyal Bağlam ve Etkileşimler (algılanan farklılaşma ve dışsal kategorilendirme ile ilgili)

- Sizce diğer insanlar Ermeni kimliğinizi nasıl algılıyor?
- İnsanların algılarının bağlama göre değiştiğini düşünüyor musunuz?
- Kimliğiniz nedeniyle dahil edildiğinizi hissettiğiniz durumları anlatabilir misiniz?
- Dışlandığınızı, yanlış anlaşıldığınızı veya stereotipleştirildiğinizi hissettiğiniz durumları anlatabilir misiniz?

(→ Bu bölüm, dışsal tanımanın veya yanlış tanımanın kimlik karmaşıklığını nasıl etkilediğini ve farklılaşmanın başkaları tarafından dayatılıp dayatılmadığını keşfeder.)

5. Kimlik Karmaşıklığı Üzerine Düşünceler ve Modeller (entegrasyonla doğrudan bağlantılı)

- Farklı kimliklerinizin (ör. Ermeni, Türk, dini, mesleki, cinsiyet) birbirleriyle ilişkisini nasıl görüyorsunuz?
- Bunları örtüşen, ayrı veya hiyerarşik olarak mı görüyorsunuz?
- Bu kimliklerin çatıştığı veya gerilim yaşadığı bağlamlar var mı?
- Birbirini tamamladığı bağlamlar var mı?

(→ Bu sorular, Roccas & Brewer'in dört modeliyle doğrudan ilişkilidir: kesişim (örtüşme), baskınlık (hiyerarşi), bölümlendirme ve birleşme (entegrasyon).)

6. Açık Düşünce (holistik kimlik entegrasyonu ve anlamlandırma)

- Bugün sizin için aidiyet ne anlama geliyor?
- Aidiyet anlayışınız zaman içinde değişti mi?
- Bazı alanlarda diğerlerine kıyasla daha güçlü bir aidiyet hissi duyuyor musunuz?
- Geleceğe bakıldığında, Türkiye'deki Ermeni topluluğu için hangi umutlarınız veya kaygılarınız var?

(→ Bu son bölüm, kimlik karmaşıklığını yaşam deneyimi ve geleceğe yönelik anlamlandırma ile bütünleştirir, katılımcılara yapısal kategorilerin ötesinde düşünme alanı verir.)

Interview Guide: Exploring Armenian Identity and Belonging in Istanbul

1. Personal and Background ***(contextual grounding, not directly linked to identity complexity but sets up narratives)***

- Can you tell me about your upbringing and family background?
    - How did you first become aware of your Armenian identity?
    - What role did your family, school, or neighborhood play in shaping this awareness?
- How would you describe your connection to the Armenian community in Istanbul?
    - Are there particular institutions, traditions, or networks that have been important for you?

2. Identity and Belonging ***(relates to overlap vs. differentiation)***

- How would you describe your identity today?
    - Do you feel that your identity has changed over time?
    - Which aspects of your identity (e.g., Armenian, Turkish, religious, professional) feel most central to you?
- In which situations do you feel your Armenian identity most strongly?
    - Are there moments when it becomes more visible or important?
    - Are there situations where it feels less relevant or backgrounded?

(→ The aim here is to understand whether identities are experienced as ***overlapping*** *and integrated or* ***differentiated*** *and context-specific.)*

3. Negotiation and Strategies ***(relates to compartmentalization)***

- Are there situations where you emphasize or downplay certain aspects of your identity?
    - Can you give an example of a moment where you felt the need to highlight your Armenian background?
    - What about a situation where you chose not to make it visible?

- How do you navigate spaces where multiple identities might come into play (e.g., work, school, friendships)?

*(→ These questions probe whether respondents **compartmentalize** identities in different contexts, activating some while suppressing others.)*

4. Social Context and Interactions *(relates to perceived differentiation and external categorization)*

- How do you think others perceive your Armenian identity?
    - Do you feel people's perceptions change depending on the context?
- Can you describe situations where you felt included because of your identity?
- Can you describe situations where you felt excluded, misunderstood, or stereotyped?

(→ This section explores how external recognition or misrecognition affects identity complexity and whether differentiation is imposed by others.)

5. Reflections and Models of Social Identity Complexity *(directly tied to integration)*

- How do you see the relationship among your different identities (e.g., Armenian, Turkish, religious, professional, gender)?
    - Do you see them as overlapping, separate, or hierarchical?
    - Are there contexts where these identities come into conflict or tension?
    - Are there contexts where they complement each other?

*(→ These questions explicitly map onto Roccas & Brewer's four models: **intersection** (overlap), **dominance** (hierarchy), **compartmentalization**, and **merger** (integration).)*

6. Open Reflection *(holistic identity integration and meaning-making)*

- What does belonging mean to you today?
    - Has your understanding of belonging changed over time?
    - Do you feel a stronger sense of belonging in some spaces than in others?
- Looking ahead, what hopes or concerns do you have for the future of the Armenian community in Turkey?

(→ This final section synthesizes identity complexity into lived experience and future-oriented meaning-making, giving participants space to reflect beyond structural categories.)