



**THE NEO-OTTOMAN TURN IN TURKEY'S REFUGEE
RECEPTION DISCOURSE**

**TÜRKİYE'NİN MÜLTECİ KABUL POLİTİKASINDA
NEO-OSMANLI DÖNÜŞÜM**

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ABSTRACT

Host societies typically draw boundaries towards immigrants on the basis of specific axes of diversity that are important to their self-understanding. This article analyses Turkey's self-definition and resulting treatment of immigrants in the context of the current refugee influx by evaluating choices and justifications of political decision-makers. It argues that the highlighting of religious brotherhood towards Syrian refugees and the use of religious arguments to justify hospitality point to a recurrence of religion as key variable of identification in Turkish society and provides evidence for a neo-Ottoman turn. Furthermore, it suggests that Syrian refugees in Turkey are mainly treated as temporary guests who are tolerated, rather than seen as permanent members of society. Thereby, Turkey highlights a boundary towards outsiders and protects a homogenous core, thus employing aspects of an assimilationist mode of immigrant incorporation. Overall, this research outlines how the underlying self-image can find relevance in political decision-making such as the treatment of immigrants and thus sheds light on how boundaries and social categories are created and dissolved. It furthermore provides an indication of the state of contemporary Turkish society, which constitutes a

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foundation for future assessment on the direction it might be heading.

Keywords: Refugee influx, neo-Ottomanism, diversity, social boundaries, immigrant reception.

ÖZ

Göçmen kabul eden toplumlar kendi anlayışlarına göre önemli buldukları farklılaşma eksenlerine göre göçmenlere sınır koyarlar. Bu makale, güncel mülteci akını bağlamında siyasi karar vericilerin tercihlerini ve gerekçelerini değerlendirerek, Türkiye'nin kendi kimliğini tanımlayış biçimini ve göçmenlere karşı tutumunu analiz etmektedir. Suriyeli mültecilere yönelik dini kardeşlik bağının vurgulanması ve misafirperverliği açıklarken dine atıfta bulunmasından yola çıkarak, Türkiye'de kimliğin anahtar değişkeni olarak dinin öne çıktığını ve neo-Osmanlı dönüşümün yaşandığını iddia etmektedir. Ayrıca, Suriyeli mültecilerin Türkiye'de tolere edilmesi gereken geçici misafirler olarak görüldüğünü; toplumun daimi üyeleri olarak kabul edilmediklerini öne sürmektedir. Dolayısıyla Türkiye, dışarıdan gelenlere sınır koyarken, toplumun homojen özünü korumayı amaçlamakta ve göçmenlerin toplumla kaynaşma sürecinde asimilasyonist yöntemler kullanmaktadır. Genel olarak bu araştırma, toplumun hakim öz-imgesinin göçmenlere yönelik tutumlar gibi konularda siyasi karar mekanizmalarını nasıl etkilediğini göstermekte ve toplumsal sınırlar ve kategorilerin ortaya çıkma ve çözülme sürecine ışık tutmaktadır. Ayrıca, bu makale, günümüz Türk toplumunun durumuna ilişkin ve gelecekte hangi yöne gidebileceğine dair işaretler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: mülteci akını, yeni Osmanlıcılık, çeşitlilik, toplumsal sınırlar, göçmen kabulü.

INTRODUCTION²

The onset of the current refugee influx in March 2011 marked the start of a new era of migration in Turkey (Danış, 2016: 10). During this era, Turkey has become home to almost three million refugees from Syria and turned into the

² This article is based on the master thesis that I defended at Yeditepe University, Political Science and International Relations Dept. in July 2016.

world's largest refugee host country. Current immigrant influxes have shown a number of developments, leading to new forms of immigration policies and discourses. This article outlines these developments and argues that it seems difficult to draw hard-and-fast conclusions on where Turkey is currently heading when it comes to refugee incorporation.

This article argues further that compared to previous eras, the current epoch seems to focus on religion more than ethnicity as a unifying – or dividing – factor between immigrants and the Turkish host society. Contemporary discourses no longer focus primarily on establishing ethnic unity that was key in the nation-building process following the foundation of the republic in 1923 and that continued to play a role in repeated waves of two-way, kinship-based exchange agreements until the late 1980s. Instead, the recent discourses constitute a manifestation of a development that has announced itself already in the 1990s and 2000s, in which religion is becoming more and more important in the country's self-identification and thus increasingly acts as an axis of differentiation between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' immigrants. This development becomes visible in the Islamic-conservative idea of hospitality towards Syrian refugees, which maintains that hospitality towards them is a duty towards these 'brothers and sisters in religion'. The focus on religion as a unifying factor is one characteristic of an Islamic multiculturalist approach of immigrant incorporation, in which diversity is encouraged while shared religion of Islam remains a unifying aspect of society.

While religion seems to increasingly serve as a criterion to differentiate between desirable and undesirable immigrants, the current refugee influx has also shown a general tendency to reaffirm the boundary between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Despite offering generous access to Syrians by opening the borders to them, the Turkish government has been suggesting in its rhetoric and treatment of refugees that it is tolerating, rather than accepting Syrian refugees as full members of society. It has been referring to Syrian refugees as 'guests' and implementing policies that aim at short-term incorporation of the refugees. The temporary protection regime under which Syrian refugees are received, for example, highlights the temporariness of their stay and gives them no long-term prospects in Turkey. The conception of Syrian refugees as temporary guests implies an attitude of toleration, rather than one of full acceptance into society. The idea of maintaining a barrier between the host society and newcomers points to the presence of an effort to retain a homogenous 'core society' that – rather than being typical of a multiculturalist approach – is characteristic of an assimilationist approach of immigrant incorporation.

This article evaluates approaches to immigrant incorporation that have surfaced in Turkey in the context of the current refugee influx. It asks 1) what

kind of diversity has become regarded as more desirable than others and 2) what mode of immigrant incorporation has been implemented to incorporate these refugees. Modes of immigrant incorporation encompass dominant political approaches as well as underlying ideas about the self-definition of a society, including dominant beliefs on whether a society should encourage or eliminate diversity. If a society defines itself on the basis of a stable and homogenous core, for example, it usually conceptualises its boundaries as strong and relatively impermeable to outsiders. Assimilationism is based on this idea that a strong 'core society' with shared values and habits is necessary for cohesion. Yet, if a society defines itself on the basis of its constituent groups – such as groups with different habits and norms – it is likely to encourage the presence and expression of diversity. For example, multiculturalism postulates that commonalities within individual groups, but not in society overall, are key to social cohesion. Political decisions on whether and how to incorporate immigrants are usually based on these different assumptions on social cohesion. States with an assimilationist approach seek to eliminate any difference by introducing policies that make minorities adopt markers of 'core society'. Obliging them to take culture and language classes or forcing them to live in certain designated areas are examples of such assimilationist policies. States who adopt multiculturalist policies seek to foster group cohesion by introducing policies specifically aimed at furthering minority groups' habits and norms. This might include the introduction of regulations such as to allow Sikhs to wear turbans instead of bike helmets, allow minorities to broadcast in their native languages or to allow Muslims in non-Muslim majority societies to teach Islamic religion in schools.

The modes of incorporation in response to migrant-driven diversity chiefly influence how easily and under which circumstances immigrants are accepted in a society. High importance of society's external boundaries, for example, usually means that policies ensure restricted access to society (such as by introducing limitations on who can gain citizenship or the legal right to work). When social boundaries are seen as less important for cohesion, however, this usually means that the state is more willing to grant immigrants access to rights of the majority. Richard Alba (2005) addresses these different intensities of boundaries by classifying them into "bright" (i.e. highly important) and "blurred" (i.e. somewhat less significant).

The relative brightness of a boundary can furthermore change relative to different axes of diversity – for example, ethnic difference can be a bright boundary while linguistic difference can be a blurred one. The idea that certain characteristics of immigrants are more important than others in determining whether they are seen as 'insiders' or 'outsiders' to society is common to many, if not all, immigrant host countries (Alba, 2005). Individual societies feature

boundaries of different intensity and towards different axes of diversity such as citizenship, religion, language and race. The way in which boundaries are drawn is closely connected to the way a society sees itself. For example, a society can be relatively indifferent towards immigrants' linguistic backgrounds, but at the same time emphasise the importance of ethnic coherence. Immigrants' specific characteristics can thus either work to facilitate, or to impede access to the core of society. Personal characteristics and the types of boundaries present in the host society thus work together to influence the trajectories of immigrants' incorporation into host society (Zolberg and Woon, 1999; Alba, 2005).

The connection between immigrants' axes of diversity and host society's reception has also been valid in the case of the current refugee influx. The influx has driven an increase of axes of diversity such as ethnicity, language, religion, migration channels, cultural values and legal status. This development has led to a need for the Turkish government and society to deal with the subject of diversity. Reactions to the recent refugee influx have thus revealed explicit and implicit views on such difference. This article analyses these views by asking what dominant responses to the immigrant-driven increase of diversity political decision-makers and the public have developed in the context of the current refugee influx. It conducts a historical review and analyses current responses in the framework of past events. Thereby, this research allows us to better understand the evolution of Turkey's self-identification over time, including on what basis it determines who is seen as 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. It demonstrates how the underlying self-image can influence the treatment of immigrants and thus find relevance in political decision-making. On a larger scale, this research sheds light on the theoretical question of how boundaries and social categories are created and dissolved – by defining who is deemed an undeserving trespasser and who deserves rights and support from the state.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This section outlines the evolution of responses to diversity in Turkish history. It explains how Turkey developed from a multiculturalist *millet* system with religion as the main factor of identification to a regime that placed increasing importance on shared ethnicity in addition to shared religion and that attempted to make those people assimilate who were not seen as fitting. This development means that Turkey's current responses to immigrants are influenced by both the multiculturalist model of Ottoman times, as well as the assimilationist heritage of the Kemalist tradition.

Up until the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire featured a pre-modern form of religious pluralism based on a multi-legislative *millet* model. *Millets* were religious communities on the basis of which economic, legal and administrative

issues were regulated. The *millet* system put religion at the centre of self-definition and served to categorize people. Other axes of diversity such as ethnic difference were melted into it (Çağaptay, 2006: 5). The fact that the term *millet*, originally used to describe religious communities, is nowadays used in Turkish to mean 'nation' is a further example of the close connection between shared religion and identification as a nation at the time. The Ottoman Empire under the *millet* model was open to diversity and fostered the presence of diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious groups.

In the years following the *millet* era, nationalism among the Anatolian-Ottoman population rose and was based on the idea of shared religion and ethnicity. During the *tanzimat* (reform) era, increasing administrative power was placed in the hands of Sunni Muslims. Simultaneously, there was a rise in religion-focused nationalism among Christians in the Balkans and Ottoman Muslims' immigration to Anatolia stirred increasingly nationalist sentiments (ibid: 6). The rise of nationalism was further increased when the Committee of Union and Progress and the Young Turks came to power. The government initiated two-way population exchange agreements with countries such as Bulgaria and Greece, in which Turks and Muslims were encouraged to migrate to the Ottoman Empire in exchange for non-Muslim Bulgars and Greeks leaving the Ottoman territory (ibid: 8). The increasing segregation of Muslim Turks and non-Muslim groups was a detachment from a pluralistic model of a nation made up of diverse sub-groups. Instead, it was a move towards greater affirmation of the boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' and an attempt to form a homogenous society.

The idea of religion and ethnicity as identifying factors of Turkishness were detectable in the era following the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, too, although the rise of nationalist and racist thinking meant that ethnicity became the primary marker of Turkishness. As Çağaptay argues: "[d]ue to the legacy of the millet system, the Kemalists saw nominal Islam as an avenue toward Turkishness: all Muslims in Turkey were potential Turks" (ibid: 159). Yet, while Kemalists did support the idea of a Muslim identity, they rejected the notion of faith belonging into the public sphere (ibid: 162) and feared that the introduction of Islam into politics would lead to separatism and destruct social coherence (Akkaya, 2012: 229). Ethnicity played an important role in the nation's self-identification and the treatment of immigrants. Ethnic nationalism was for example expressed in the popularity of the National History Thesis and Sun-Language theories, which maintain that Turks are a 'super-family' with superior ethnicity and genealogy (Ince, 2012: 68). In this atmosphere of perceived ethnic superiority, article no. 159 was included in the Turkish Penal

Code of 1926, which criminalises any ‘insult’ to ‘Turkishness’ and Turkish ministries. This article continues to exist (albeit in amended form) until today.

The aim to build a society with ethnicity as a primary, and religion as a secondary factor of self-identification were reflected in migration policy-making. A typical example of this is the 1934 *Settlement Law*, which forms perhaps the principal document to define Turkey’s nation-building process (İçduygu & Aksel, 2013: 171). The law provides the right of asylum and immigration only to “independent or settled immigrants who are of Turkish descent and culture” (Öner & Genç, 2015: 35). People who were seen as fitting the description of being “of Turkish descent and culture” were resettled to an area that was predominantly inhabited by Kurds (Çağaptay, 2006: 160) – an act that presumably aimed at increasing the ethnically Turkish population in those areas. Immigrants who were not seen as “of Turkish descent and culture”, but who were Muslims and had native-language knowledge of Turkish were forced to settle in certain other parts of the country (Özbay et al, 2016). Muslims who did not have native-level command of Turkish were sometimes also allowed to settle in these areas, but were obliged to learn the Turkish language and ‘unlearn’ their native language. Their areas of settlement were usually rural areas and were never close to railways, highways, transit roads or places rich in natural resources – through which both assimilation and protection of these strategically important spaces was safeguarded (Ülker, 2008, 27-30). As Çağaptay (2006) argues, the 1934 Settlement Law clearly outlines the presence of different layers of Turkishness. The fact that ethnic Turks were seen as most desirable immigrants and non-ethnic Turks who were Muslims were allowed to settle only under certain restrictive circumstances demonstrates that ethnicity seems to have been the central identifying feature, while religion was a second, slightly less decisive one.

Furthermore, the law made “the assimilative mentality of the state”, which had already been detectable in previous legislation, “exceptionally clear and direct” (Ülker, 2008: 1). The Minister of Interior of the time, Şükrü Kaya, expressed the assimilationist vision of the 1934 *Settlement Law* when stating that “[t]his law will create a country speaking with one language, thinking in the same way and sharing the same sentiment“ (in Bayar, 2014). The strategic distribution of people who were not of ‘Turkish culture’ aimed at homogenising the population to form a Muslim-Turkish ‘core culture’ (Kirişci, 2000). It was furthermore an expression of distrust towards these people, who were not allowed to settle in areas that were important for national security. The obligation for non-Turkish speakers to learn the language and ‘unlearn’ theirs is a further indicator of an attempt to eliminate difference that is characteristic of an assimilationist approach.

An attempt to create a homogenous state based on shared ethnicity and religion continued to prevail throughout the following decades. In the period of the 1950s to the 1980s, two-way, kinship-based migration flows continued. For example, a wave of ethnic Turks emigrating from Bulgaria arrived in the summer of 1989, following the Bulgarian government's introduction of assimilationist policies (Öner & Genç, 2015: 25). Politicians referred to these 1989 emigrants from Bulgaria as *soydaşlar* (*kindreds*), focusing on their shared descent and culture and ultimately causing people in Turkey to accept and welcome these immigrants. During the 1980s, the Turkish state also increasingly engaged with Turks abroad (İçduygu & Aksel, 2013: 176-7). It employed a number of policies aimed at binding those people to Turkey – reflecting a continuing effort to maintain a 'Turkish' state. In 1981, Turkey introduced a law that allowed dual citizenship for the first time. Furthermore, Turkish citizens abroad were included in the new constitution of 1982, with aims such as to meet their cultural needs and facilitate their return to Turkey. Other measures to facilitate political and social participation of Turks abroad and their offspring included the introduction of the Pink Card (replaced by the Blue Card in 2009), which grants rights such as permanent settlement and employment in Turkey to people of Turkish descent who do not hold Turkish citizenship. Overall, these policies reflect the government's notion of a communal identification with ethnic Turks abroad through shared 'Turkishness' and an attempt to draw these people to Turkey to create an ethnically homogenous state (Pusch & Splitt, 2013).

In the early 2000s, both the importance of ethnicity as an axis of identification and the attempt to create a homogenous society somewhat started to lose relevance. The Justice and Development Party (JDP)'s rise to power in 2002 foreshadowed a newly emerging importance of religion and gave rise to developments towards a renewed encouragement of pluralism within a shared religion of Islam. Members of the JDP pointed to the fact that Turkey was not an ethnically homogenous state and advocated the idea of a nation that was founded on shared Islamic identity, rather than shared ethnicity (e.g. Gül, 1993: 118-20; Erdoğan, 1993: 425). With the JDP's election to power, the government reformed the existing migration regime by moving away from principles that were rooted in the Kemalist tradition. This meant to move away from the focus on shared ethnicity and to some extent also from the assimilationist mode of immigrant incorporation. The Turkish government presented a *National Action Plan for the Adoption of an Acquis on Asylum and Migration* in 2005, which promised a modernisation of the existing migration system and outlined a timetable of steps to be taken to bring its asylum system closer to that of the European Union. In addition to that, it improved certain rights of ethnic minorities, such as by establishing television stations' broadcasting in the five main minority languages: Arabic, Bosnian, Circassian, Kurdish and Zaza and setting up a state-funded

Kurdish television channel in 2009 (İçduygu & Aksel, 2013: 181). Their policies also specifically targeted Muslim minority groups. For example, the government introduced a semi-official measure to accept Alevism as a legitimate system of belief. These changes seem to suggest efforts towards multiculturalism, i.e. towards the introduction of policies aimed at furthering minority rights. While these reforms did not entirely overhaul the assimilationist mode of immigrant incorporation, it added some multiculturalist policies to it that were founded on the principle of Islamic brotherhood.

Overall, Turkey's responses to diversity have changed in two major ways in the past. First of all, the dominant mode of immigrant incorporation has developed from a multiculturalist system in which difference was largely tolerated and encouraged in Ottoman times towards an assimilationist approach that discouraged the expression of difference in the decades following the foundation of the republic. Secondly, there seems to have been a development in the society's self-identification that largely went hand-in-hand with the changing modes of immigrant incorporation. During the Ottoman *millet* system, religion constituted a key axis of diversity, while later on "ethnic Turkishness" became increasingly important as an additional identifying factor in Kemalist years. However, both of these changes in approaching diversity have been somewhat challenged since the early 2000s, when the newly elected JDP took some action to move away from ethnic favouritism towards a greater focus on religion and introduced policies to safeguard minority rights. Turkey is thus currently influenced both by an assimilationist model of immigrant incorporation that aims at founding an ethnically homogenous state, as well as by an (Islamic) multiculturalist model of immigrant incorporation that envisions plurality under the shared religion of Islam. An analysis of responses taken in the context of the current refugee influx is thus meaningful, considering these opposing legacies that are likely to influence contemporary immigrant reception that raise the question in which direction Turkey will be developing in the future.

2. EXPERIENCES DURING THE REFUGEE INFLUX

Having evaluated the history of self-identification and immigrant incorporation in Turkey, this article now turns to the current refugee influx, analysing reactions to the immigrant-driven increase of diversity. The analysis follows the theoretical assumptions previously discussed that societies differ both in the absolute opacity of boundaries, as well as towards which axes of difference they erect stricter boundaries than others. As previously outlined, it seeks to find an answer to the questions 1) what types of diversity seem more desirable than others in the context of the current refugee influx and 2) what the dominant mode of immigrant incorporation is. This article argues first of all that the influx

has given rise to a renewed importance of the religious identity and connectedness through shared religion, meaning that boundaries have become more 'bright' with regards to religion. The discourse towards Syrian refugees has (especially in the beginning) been one of religion-oriented hospitality and especially Sunni Muslim refugees have been treated with a welcoming attitude, while this attitude is less detectable towards other groups of Muslims. Secondly, it argues that there have been very few decisions that allow the drawing of conclusions on the dominant mode of immigrant incorporation, because the vast majority of policy decisions taken in the context of the influx have focused on finding temporary, rather than long-term solutions. Yet, a tendency of keeping Syrian refugees at an arm's length can be taken as an indicator for an assimilationist mode of incorporation, which draws a boundary between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Overall, this research thus points to two possible future scenarios for Turkey's immigrant incorporation: An increase of hospitality and appreciation of diversity (under a shared religion of Islam) could lead to policy changes based on the concept of Islamic multiculturalism, while a continuing treatment of Syrians as 'second-class citizens' could trigger a scenario in which assimilationism - and the associated objective to form a homogenous community – becomes the dominant approach.

What kind of diversity is more desirable than others?

At initial stages of the influx, most of the incoming refugees were Sunni Muslims, just like the majority population in Turkey (Ahmadoun, 2014: 3). Simultaneous to this influx, a discourse of "religion-oriented hospitality" developed in Turkey (Elitok, 2013: 3). Hospitality towards refugees was discursively linked to religious brotherhood and a bond through shared religion. The government has been referring to refugees from Syria as "*Müslüman kardeşlerimiz*" ('our Muslim brothers and sisters'). It furthermore repeatedly stressed the connection to the refugees through a shared religion. For example, in a speech held in Adana in September 2013, Erdoğan declared:

"I do not love Kurds for being Kurds. I do not love Arabs for being Arabs. I love them because just like Allah created me, he created them. Sunni and Alevi are together and siblings. Since 1071 we are one on this soil and we together are Turkey³" (in Internethaber, 2013)

Erdoğan's speech highlights his motivation for appreciating different groups such as Kurds and Arabs – namely that they share a religion with him as they were created by the same God. He argues further that he welcomes different

³ "Kürdü kürt olduğu için sevmiyorum, Arabı Arap olduğu için sevmiyorum, beni yaradan Allah onları da yarattığı için seviyorum. Sünni Alevi beraberdir ve kardeşdir. 1071'den beri bu topraklarda biriz beraberiz hep birlikte Türkiye'yiz"

denominations within Islam and sees them as an important component of the country, which has a history of Islamic pluralism. At other stages, he similarly highlighted the bond with Syrian refugees through a shared religion, declaring: “For our Syrian brothers who are asking when God’s help will come, I want to say: God’s help is near” and “You are now in the land of your brothers, so you are in your own home.” (in Lazarev & Sharma, 2016: 6).

The religion-oriented aspect of hospitality is also reflected in the finding that it is especially people who identify as religious and/or as AKP supporters who display high levels of openness towards refugees. For example, a study conducted by Ekonomik ve Diş Politika Araştırmalar Merkezi (2014: 1) finds that most AKP supporters argue that there should be a limit imposed on the amount of incoming refugees, while most supporters of the opposition parties CHP and MHP argue that refugees should immediately be returned to their countries of origin. Therein, AKP supporters take a more welcoming stance towards refugees as opposed to CHP and MHP supporters. The finding that supporters of religious political denominations are more likely to display hospitable attitudes towards refugees than supporters of secular political denominations seems to comply with the idea that hospitality towards refugees in Turkey is connected to religious belief.

This hypothesis is further supported by the finding that many people seem to see hospitality towards Syrian refugees as an ethical and religious duty. This claim was brought forward in a research of the Hacettepe University Migration and Politics Research Centre (Erdoğan, 2014: 28) and similarly in a research brief by the *Refugee Studies Centre* at the University of Oxford. The research brief, which compares the reception of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, finds that Turkey displays lower levels of social discrimination compared to the other two countries and that its inhabitants are generally willing to provide assistance to refugees (Chatty, 2015: 5). It argues that many people who are assisting in the refugee influx in Turkey are doing so based on a belief that it is both a religious and an ethical obligation to offer support. The idea that assistance to fellow Muslims is a religious duty is deeply engrained in the Muslim religion and manifested in the ‘muhacir-ensar’ relationship. ‘Muhacir’ refers to pilgrims who made the trip from Mecca to Medina, ‘ensar’ stands for Muslims in Medina who helped these arriving migrants and welcomed them as religious siblings. The concept of ‘ensar’ is important in the Muslim religion and describes a person who likes everyone and helps everyone. Based on this ancient relationship between muhacir and ensar, hospitality towards fellow Muslims from other places has such a high significance.

The finding that hospitality towards Syrian refugees has a strong religious foundation in Turkey supports the idea that it is becoming an increasingly important variable in deciding whether immigrants are 'desirable' or 'undesirable'. In the case of Syrian refugees, the shared religion has been used as a key reason to justify support for the refugees and to facilitate inclusion into society. This example supports Richard Alba's postulation that societies usually draw up boundaries between 'us' and 'them', in which certain axes of difference are seen as more important than others. The focus on religion and the way that it is used as a justification reveals a lot about the self-definition of Turkish society and demonstrates that religion seems to be a key aspect of it – a finding that is in line with neo-Ottomanism argument, which states that contemporary Turkish society bonds over shared religion, rather than over nationalistic ideas (Akkaya, 2012: 228). Instead of an emphasis on 'Turkishness' as the central feature of Turkish society, an emphasis put on religion and religious brotherhood with Syrians has been the central argument for hospitality.

A difference from the Ottoman period and the *millet* system seems to be that while this system saw all Muslims as belonging to the same nation (*millet*), reactions to the current refugee influx seem to reveal a preference for Sunni Muslims. Yet, this preference is not usually endorsed rhetorically. Instead, the Turkish government has repeatedly stressed the fact that the country will remain open to all refugees regardless of religion, language or ethnicity. The Turkish government and the *Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency* (AFAD) in Turkey have openly adopted an attitude that is friendly towards all kinds of diversity (Kirişci, 2014: 32). As AFAD maintains, "no Syrian brother is returned from the door" and "humanitarian help is provided to the people who have been affected by this tragedy and this principle must continue without any exception because of our neighborliness"⁴ (2014: 5-6). Politicians have echoed the idea of welcoming all refugees. For example, ex-prime minister Davutoğlu declared: "[w]e will stand by the Syrian people until the end of this oppression, until Syrian people regardless of their religion, sect and ethnic origin live in honour and in peace all around Syria. Our support will continue"⁵ (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2013). And as President Erdoğan maintained: "to our Arabic brothers and sisters from Syria and Iraq, our Turkmen brothers and sisters and up to Syrian Yazidis – our help extends to everyone without discriminating on

⁴ "hiçbir Suriyeli kardeşimizi kapımızdan geri çevirmemekteyiz"; "...bu trajediden etkilenen ihtiyaç sahiplerine her türlü insani yardım sağlanmakta ve güçlü komşuluk bağlarımızın bir gereği olarak bu anlayış, taviz verilmeden devam ettirilmektedir"

⁵ "Bu zulüm bitene kadar Suriye'nin her bir köşesinde insanlar hangi dinden, hangi mezhepten hangi etnik kökenden olursa olsun özgürce, onurlu yaşayana kadar onlarla beraber olacağız. Destegimiz devam edecek"

sectarian grounds. There is no discrimination in our religion”⁶ (in Hürriyet, 2014a). These utterances show that at least rhetorically, the Turkish government is welcoming all types of diversity and bears no hostility towards the refugee-related increase in diversity.

Despite this rhetoric, there is evidence to suggest that Turkey’s government and society have been mainly appreciating Sunni Muslim refugees and less so Alawites (Arab Alevis of Syria). The government’s attitude towards Alawites, who make up a considerable proportion of non-Sunni refugees in Turkey, has been quite contrary to the hospitable “brotherhood” discourse. The Turkish government has been blaming Alawites of supporting the regime in Syria and expressed distrust towards them (Kirişci, 2014: 31). Turkish officials have started referring to Syrian Alawites as *Nusayri* to distinguish them from Turkey’s Arab Alawites. Furthermore, they have started to refer to the Syrian regime as a “*Nusayri* minority regime”. Notably, the term *Nusayri* is seen as denigrating by Syrian Alawites (International Crisis Group, 2013: 20). The decision to use this as a term of reference thus bears an offensive connotation.

In addition to that, the relatively positive and hospitable attitude towards refugees that was justified on the basis of religious brotherhood and dominated especially at early stages of the refugee influx somewhat seems to have lost its relevance as the incoming refugee population diversified. Initially, the majority of refugees arriving to Turkey were Sunni Arabs from Syria, with a small number of Alawites and Turcomans (Kirişci & Ferris, 2015: 4). When ISIS captured Mosul in June 2014, about 40-50,000 people from Iraq – mostly Yazidis and Christians – fled to Turkey. Furthermore, following the fighting between the Democratic Union Party (PYD) forces and ISIS around Kobane in October 2015, around 190,000 people of mostly Kurdish ethnicity fled to Turkey. In June 2015, clashes in the Syrian border town of Tell Abyad led to an influx of another 25,000 refugees who were mostly Arabs, Kurds and Turcomans. Although the majority of incoming refugees continue to be Sunni Arabs, the ethnic and religious makeup of the refugee population significantly changed after 2014, and became increasingly diverse.

Simultaneous to this diversification process, the open-door policies towards refugees from Syria received several blows as instances of refugees being prevented from crossing the border to Turkey multiplied. When increasingly more Kurdish refugees turned up from Kobane in Syria following political turmoil around the town in late 2014, the Turkish police and military actively tried to stop them from entering the country. However, this measure lasted only

⁶ “Suriye ve Irak içinde Arap kardeşlerimize Türkmen kardeşlerimize Ezidi Süryanilere kadar ulaşıyor mezhep ayrımı yapmadan herkesin yardım ulaştırıyoruz. Bizim dinimizde ayrım yok“

for a short time until then-Prime Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu gave clear instructions to open the borders to the refugees (Hürriyet, 2014b). Nonetheless, commentators have argued that it was no coincidence that attempts to close the border were undertaken when mostly Kurdish refugees were entering the country (Kirişçi & Ferris, 2015: 4). This theory seems to be supported by the observation that police and border guards used teargas and water cannons against people in Turkey who attempted to cross over to Syria to help the Kurdish population of Kobane (Cihan, 2014) and against protesters who were dissatisfied with the government's lack of military support to Kurdish people in Syria (BBC, 2014). In line with this treatment of Kurdish refugees and their supporters, the relationship between these refugees and the Turkish state is one of distrust and has caused many Kurdish refugees to refuse to live in government-operated camps (Kirişçi & Ferris, 2015: 7).

The harsh treatment towards Kurdish refugees from Kobane comes at a time at which there are mutual suspicions due to the on-going conflict between the government and the PKK as well as pro-Kurdish groups in Turkey such as the opposition party HDP (*Peoples' Democratic Party*). Soner Çağaptay provides a compelling reason for hostility towards Kurds by connecting this hostility to Turkey's religion-based nationalism. He argues:

"Turkey is unsympathetic to the idea of Muslims, such as the Kurds, being distinct ethnic groups. This is because Turkish nationalism is assimilatory and open toward all the Muslims in the country. While many of these people have already willingly and successfully assimilated, Turkey cannot comprehend why it is difficult for the others to merge into the nation" (2006: 161)

In other words, the relevance of the Muslim identity in Turkish society works to trigger hostility towards those Muslim groups who identify as separate from the majority, such as in the case of the Kurdish population. Çağaptay's hypothesis is in line with an utterance by Erdoğan in as early as 1993, in which he argues that rights for Kurdish people should be safeguarded within a framework of "shared faith" and "something resembling the Ottoman states [*millet*] system" (Erdoğan, 1993: 422). This utterance seems to reveal a desire to create a religion-based identity to which Kurds are expected to assimilate.

In addition to this active prevention of (mostly Kurdish) refugees from crossing into Turkey, there has recently been a general development of increasing border security to prevent refugees from entering Turkey. As *Human Rights Watch* reports, the last two border crossings in Turkey were closed in March 2016, only allowing people with urgent medical needs and the fraction of Syrians with valid travel documents to enter the country. Syrian refugees now typically cross at night with the help of smugglers by having to walk through

minefields in the border area. The *Human Rights Watch* report further notes instances at which border guards have shot refugees and smugglers trying to enter Turkey. According to the report, this practice has recently led to the death of five people, including a child and serious injury of 14 more people. Although the truth of the report was denied by a member of the Ministry of Interior (in Yeğinsu & Shoumali, 2016), the fact that the Turkish government has failed to allow the UN to visit the border region to investigate the situation seems to increase suspicions of intentionally keeping out refugees.

The recent prevention of refugees crossing into Turkey is likely due to several reasons. The first reason is that the measures were taken in a context in which the refugee population was becoming increasingly diverse in their religions and ethnicities and can thus be seen as an attempt to prevent these diverse populations from entering Turkey. This explanation provides evidence for the claim that religious and ethnic diversity constitute 'bright' boundaries in Turkey. A further explanation is that there has been growing fear of terrorists entering the country in the aftermath of a number of attacks in Ankara and Istanbul in early 2016 and in Suruç in July 2015. This fear has first inspired an increase in security measures at border crossings in order to channel migration to the official points and later on led to closure of the official border points. Furthermore, the growing number of incoming refugees at later stages of the influx could have sparked hostility and a perception of economic competition towards refugees and thereby furthered anti-refugee sentiments. The latter explanation is supported by the observation that anti-refugee sentiments have become more prevalent in almost all major host societies as the influx progressed. While there is thus evidence to claim that the 'religious brotherhood' discourse has given way to less hospitable attitudes as the refugee population developed from being overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims to becoming more ethnically and religiously diverse, this change in attitude is not necessarily exclusively based on hostility towards diversification through the refugee population.

The claim that Turkey is increasingly identifying itself as a monoreligious society is, however, also highlighted by evidence that the country has increasingly been stressing the Sunni aspect of Turkish identity throughout the refugee influx (Kirişci, 2014: 31). A prominent example took place after the twin car bomb explosions in Reyhanlı, after which then Prime Minister Erdoğan lamented the death of the 52 people by saying that "[o]ur Sunni citizens were killed". Notably, five of the people who were killed were Syrians and thus included in his conception of being "Sunni citizens". Erdoğan's comment was widely criticised for focusing on the Sunni religion as the central aspect of identity. In the context of the 'religious brotherhood' rhetoric towards Sunni

refugees and suspicion towards Alawites, this focus on the Sunni aspect of Turkish identity thus supports the idea that Sunnism, rather than Islam, is increasingly becoming the basis on which boundaries of Turkish society are drawn.

An emphasis on the shared Sunni identity has also been expressed in the government's hesitation to grant rights to religious and ethnic minorities. In 2013, the Turkish government introduced a *Democratic Reform Package* that allows the wearing of headscarves in public professions, abolishes the nationalist student pledge and allows mother-tongue education in private schools. Yet, the package was highly criticised for “intentionally activating the longstanding fault lines separating religious and secular Turks — and most dangerously the divide between the country's Sunni majority and its Alevi minority” (Karaveli, 2013: 1). The policy changes were referred to as “completely cosmetic” (Çalışkan in Letsch, 2013). Alevis are still denied funding for construction of religious buildings and are not allowed exemption from Sunni Islamic religion classes at school. Thus, the *Democratic Reform Package* was criticised for offending both secularists and Alevis (Karaveli, 2013). This example further suggests that Turkey does not only seem to be focusing more and more on its Muslim identity, but more specifically on its Sunni Muslim identity. Notably, the focus on the Sunni identity seems to be different from the idea that all Muslims form one *millet*, or nation, that was prevalent in Ottoman times, as this system focused on Islam as the common identification, and largely ignored differences within Islam.

The idea that the shared Sunni identity is an especially important factor in the country's self-identification is also supported by findings of Lazaref and Sharma (2016), in which the researchers conduct surveys with male respondents from Gaziantep and Istanbul. The researchers prime part of the respondents by pointing out that most Syrian refugees are Sunnis before they pose interview questions and prime another part of the respondents by highlighting that most Syrian refugees are Muslims. The results of the study suggest that those people who were primed to think about the Sunni identity of the refugees display more accepting attitudes towards them, as well as greater willingness to make charitable donations and to display greater support for refugees in general. Those who were primed to think of them as Muslims, however, were found to be likely to be willing to make donations, but not likely to score high on the other indicators (9-10). The authors explain the increasingly positive attitudes of those people who received the ‘Sunni prime’ by hypothesizing that the prime redirects prejudice towards refugees toward a new out-group (particularly towards Syrian Alawites that are associated with the Assad regime) and that the Muslim prime, on the other hand, creates a less salient outgroup because virtually all Syrians

and Turks are Muslims (2). On a larger scale, a focus on the Sunni identity of the Turkish 'core' society thus seems to have larger potential to draw a line between an 'ingroup' and an 'outgroup', which might serve to explain the highlighting of the Sunni identity in the context of the current refugee influx.

What is the dominant mode of immigrant incorporation?

While the previous paragraphs have established which kind of diversity has surfaced to be more desirable than others in the context of the current refugee influx, the following paragraphs turn to the question how diversity has been dealt with, i.e. what modes of immigrant incorporation have dominated in the context of the current refugee influx. As previously discussed, Turkey's approach in dealing with immigrants has predominantly been an assimilationist one, although steps towards Islamic multiculturalism have been taken in the early 2000s. Historically, Turkey's assimilationism has included measures such as to spread out immigrants with regards to their chances of assimilation and to force them to learn Turkish while 'unlearning' their first language. Until today, the assimilationist approach seems to be a key component of Turkey's guiding principle of how to deal with refugees. This approach has neither been significantly extended, nor annulled by the current refugee influx. At initial stages of the influx, Turkey's guiding principle in dealing with the refugee influx and the influx' associated increase in diversity was to provide emergency relief. The Turkish government focused on providing short-term aid and assistance to refugees, who were mostly accommodated in camps. It collaborated with Turkish NGOs such as the *Turkish Red Cross* and with the *Disaster and Emergency Presidency of Turkey* (AFAD), whose task is to operate in cases of emergency (İçduygu, 2015: 9). The government created a 'zero point delivery' system in which aid shipments were delivered to Syrian borders crossings, where they would be picked up by humanitarian workers from Syria and distributed in camps. This measure seemed to aim at keeping Syrians in their country and solving the problem 'on site'. It furthermore seemed to have been based on the assumption that the conflict in Syria would soon end and result in the fall of the Syrian Assad regime. In line with this assumption, Turkey did not initially register Syrians and officially used the term 'guests' to refer to them – a concept that seems to imply that they are both welcomed and seen as temporary visitors (İçduygu, 2015: 7). Although academics and NGOs have harshly criticised this terminology, government officials and agencies largely continue to use the term 'guests'. As Öner and Genç point out, "[a]ll speeches made by the government officials, all reports released by the government authorities and even the name of the regulation that applies to Syrians have reminded or connoted 'the expected temporariness' of the Syrian migration to Turkey" (2015: 29).

As the scholars highlight, the *Temporary Protection Regulation* is firmly based on the idea of temporariness. However, compared to the initial 'zero point delivery' system and other ad hoc measures, it does signal a step towards longer-term planning. The regulation allows Syrians to remain in Turkey until conditions in Syria are safe for them to return, but excludes the possibility of permanent settlement for Syrians. It originally maintained that Syrians cannot count time spent in Turkey under the *Temporary Protection Regulation* towards the five years of uninterrupted stay in Turkey that are necessary to apply for Turkish citizenship⁷. While the regulation officially puts no restriction on their length of stay, the name and central idea of the regulation clearly focus on the temporary nature of the Syrian refugees' stay. Thereby, the regulation stresses the idea that Syrians are seen as temporary immigrants, not as full members of society and not even as fully acknowledged refugees. Despite being a grand gesture of hospitality, the introduction of the regulation simultaneously constitutes an effort to retain a homogenous 'core society' by making Syrians' stay temporary and conditional. As Şenay Özden argues: "[n]ot being granted refugee status is an important factor that increases the vulnerability of Syrians who have fled their country for political and humanitarian reasons" (2013: 5). She argues further that many Syrian refugees are unhappy with the 'guest' status because it makes their stay in Turkey unpredictable. Essentially, the status means that they do not have any right as the state can decide to deport them any time. The dominant approach to deal with Syrian refugees has thus been to offer them generous, but temporary and conditional access to society.

The conferral of Syrians with a guest status constitutes a way to put Syrians in their place (Erdoğan, 2014: 22). Syrians are tolerated, rather than seen as full members of society. As Kaya explains: "tolerance involves an asymmetrical, paternalistic relationship between a sovereign party and a subaltern in such a way that the former unilaterally grants tolerance to the latter as an act of benevolence" (2013: 75). Tolerance involves drawing boundaries between who is tolerated and who is not. This decision involves an exertion of authority, which puts the person who is tolerating into a position of power. As Özden (2013: 5) adds, the attitude of toleration of refugees can also breed negative public opinion and serve to reaffirm the idea that refugees are outsiders, based on the categorisation as being 'the ones who are tolerated'. The attitude of toleration

⁷ Despite the strong religious affinity, the idea of accepting Syrians as full citizens is not widely supported in Turkey (Erdoğan, 2014, p. 5; Kirişçi, 2014, p. 21). There seem to be a number of reasons for that. One of them is perceived economic competition, such as resentment towards the enormous costs associated with the refugee influx, the belief that rent prices are rising and wages decreasing because of competition by Syrian labour force (İçduygu 2015, p. 10). A further reason is the multiplicity of rumours such that Syrians are given salaries by the Turkish government or that they are taking away jobs from the host population. The rumours about Syrian refugees might also be due to the government's poor communication about official policies towards Syrians (ibid).

seems to be a further factor that implies that Syrian refugees are not seen as members of 'core society' and, despite being generally allowed to enter the country, kept at an arm's length.

The concept of 'toleration' is further underlined by the fact that refugees in Turkey are often left in the dark about their future and receive little information about rights and services. According to statistics from the NGO *Hayata Destek* (Support to Life), 71% of Syrian refugees claim that they lack information on the rights and services available to them. This uncertainty is not only detectable among Syrian refugees, but also among other refugee groups in Turkey. Kristen Biehl, in her paper "governing through uncertainty" discusses the concept of "protracted uncertainty" as a principle that governs the treatment of refugees in Turkey and that is "characterised by indefinite waiting, limited knowledge, and unpredictable legal status" (2015: 57). Already before the refugee influx, but also throughout it, refugees have been left in a limbo situation and at the mercy of the system. The lack of clarity and communication seems to be a further factor that serves to humble refugees.

The *Temporary Protection Regulation* and the existing asylum policies currently govern the mode of immigrant incorporation in Turkey, and to offer superficial and temporary incorporation only. Turkey has been criticised by scholars and by the international community for not sufficiently dealing with questions of integration such as the introduction of measures for the long-term inclusion of refugees into society, including, for example, to teach refugee children Turkish (Erdoğan, 2014: 5-6). As Kirişci and Ferris maintain: "What is still lacking is indeed a comprehensive policy to guide this integration process and also mobilize public support for it. Such a policy inevitably will have to go beyond the letter and spirit of the Temporary Protection Circular and focus on how to make Syrians a permanent part of Turkey" (2015: 15). The need for formal integration is evident considering that informal integration has already begun. The public as well as politicians are increasingly reaching awareness about the idea that refugees in Turkey are 'here to stay' and that it is necessary for them to learn Turkish in the long term (ibid: 11). It is estimated that about 150,000 babies have been born to Syrian refugees in Turkey until September 2016 (Daily Sabah, 2016) and the number of intermarriages with Turkish citizens is increasing day by day. In the near future, Turkey will have to develop a strategy of how to incorporate refugees in the long-term. President Erdoğan's announcement on July 2016, during the writing of this article, that Syrian refugees will be eligible for Turkish citizenship foreshadows the possibility of such long-term inclusion in the future. Yet, it is not yet clear under which circumstances Syrian refugees will be able to obtain citizenship. The lack of comprehensive policy responses and long-term planning means that it is difficult

to draw conclusions on the dominant mode of immigrant incorporation directly from policy decisions, but that such inferences can only be made on the basis of implicit assumptions that the host society has about itself and the immigrant-driven increase of diversity.

Despite the lack of an overarching policy approach, there have been a number of small, almost cosmetic, policy changes towards integration of refugees throughout the influx. One of these changes concerns the provision of education to Syrian refugees. The Ministry of Education implemented a reform in which it brought all Syrian schools under its supervision (Kirişçi & Ferris, 2015). This was meant to pose a halt to the problem that Syrians often had the choice between Syrian-run schools that offer an Arabic-language curriculum and charge a certain amount of money or entering regular Turkish schools in which they often face language barriers and bullying. The decision to improve access to education of Syrian children can be seen as a way of easing their entry and acceptance into society. This is a gesture of hospitality, but also a preventive measure aiming to hinder young Syrian refugees' from becoming a threat to security. As a Turkish education official maintained: "without a chance of education, they risk falling victim to radical and terrorist groups" (ibid: 11) – implying that this decision also springs from the perceived need for protection of society.

In addition to reforms in the education sector, there have also been efforts to open parts of the economy to formal employment for Syrians. While Syrians had already been authorised to seek employment under the *Temporary Protection Directive*, they were only authorised to work if they had a valid passport and residence permits and if the employer was able to prove that no Turkish person could do the job instead – a limitation that was difficult to circumvent in practice (Kirişçi, 2014: 21). A new regulation facilitates Syrians' access to the labour market by abolishing this proof of precedence. It allows refugees who have been in Turkey under the temporary protection status for six months to apply for a work permit in the province in which they first registered, given that the number of refugees at any given workplace does not exceed 10% of the workforce. The inclusion to the job market seems to be an important step of recognising the permanent nature of the refugees' stay in the country. However, this hospitable act of recognition is somewhat challenged when considering that the work permit regulation seems to have been strongly based on an attempt to keep the qualified labour force in the country and prevent it from migrating on to Europe. This motif was made explicit by Deputy Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan, who defended the decision claiming "[i]f we hadn't issued the work permits, the qualified labour force would have gone to other countries" (in ibid). Thus, this political decision can be seen mainly as an economic policy move.

Overall, these examples show that there have not been any major policy-changes that govern the incorporation of refugees from Syria in the long-term. Yet, the short-term responses that have been taken suggest that future policies will be governed by a discourse of *goodwill* and *toleration* that places refugees at the mercy of the tolerator. It furthermore points to the presence of a strong discourse of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and an idea that there is a ‘core society’ that needs to be protected to outsiders. The conceptualisation of Syrian refugees as second-class citizens seems contrary to an idea of Islamic multiculturalism, which highlights the need to provide rights to minorities. Instead, the drawing of a sharp boundary to distinguish insiders from outsiders is an indicator of a more assimilationist mode of immigrant incorporation.

3. CONCLUSION

This article responded to the questions 1) what kind of diversity has surfaced as desirable over others and 2) what mode of immigrant incorporation has been adopted by Turkish authorities in the context of the refugee influx. It has presented evidence to suggest that, similar to the *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire, religion seems to continue to be perhaps the most important axis of difference along which individuals are classified. This seems to be somewhat of a change from Kemalist periods, in which ethnicity had become the key axis of identification. Yet, perhaps different from the *millet* system, classification nowadays is strongly based on the idea that Sunni Islam is the religion of the ‘core culture’ and that members of other religions are the ‘others’. During the refugee influx, hospitality towards refugees had a strong religious basis and the perception of Syrian refugees as brothers and sisters in religion caused many people to accept them as new members of society. This basis for justification reveals that religion seems to be a key component of self-identification. Embedding this into Richard Alba’s theory, religion comprises a key axis of diversity along which insiders and outsiders are defined in contemporary Turkish society. The finding that religion is becoming an increasingly important basis of identification in Turkish society supports the idea of neo-Ottomanism as a larger political development in contemporary Turkey (e.g. Akkaya 2012).

Turkey seems to be heading towards an increasingly religious basis of self-identification and the current refugee influx seems to have provided momentum to manifest the Islamisation of society that had already been slowly developing in previous years. Its focus on Sunni Islam as the most desirable form of Islam presents a new and more exclusive basis for religious identification. If this path continues, it could increasingly be used as a basis for the exclusion and suppression of those immigrants who do not fit into Sunni Muslim identity.

Although the current president of Turkey R. T. Erdoğan claimed in 1993 that the Kemalist focus on ethnicity led to a “racist official ideology” which maintained that “Turkey is for the Turks” (425), the religious favouritism which is increasingly fostered under the current regime is no less exclusionary than its predecessor.

This research has furthermore shown that ethnicity, too, continues to be a key factor of identification and a strong boundary-marker between inside and outside. This has become visible in the instance in which the mostly Kurdish refugee population in Kobane seems to have been discouraged from entering into the country and where its supporters were violently kept from protesting. Yet, as previously outlined, there might be a religious basis for this opposition, based on resentment towards Turkish Kurds’ unwillingness to merge into society under the premise of shared religion (Çağaptay 2006: 161). However, the example also seems to suggest that ethnicity continues to constitute a key marker of Turkish society and a ‘bright’ boundary towards outsiders in Richard Alba’s terms (2005). This might be due to the fact that the current government finds it difficult to fully remove the nationalism of the past. As Akkaya argues: “the governing party in Turkey (...) seems to have difficulties to conduct a sound foreign policy amongst the Muslim Middle Eastern States by removing aside Turkish nationalism and merely focusing on religious brotherhood and neo-Ottomanism” (2012: 228).

In addition to that, much of the opposition towards the refugees has been based on political affiliation, where Alawites are for example accused of supporting the Syrian regime. Ultimately, this is another example of how the axes of difference and the way that boundaries are drawn in Turkish society are strongly intertwined, where religious, ethnic and political difference cannot always be strictly separated from one another. In contrast to that, there has been little hostility towards refugees on the basis of other axes of diversity. The fact that most refugees arriving to Turkey in the context of the current refugee influx did not share a common language with the host population, for example, could have been a divide, but did not in fact seem to lead to many difficulties (Chatty, 2015: 4; Güney & Konak, this issue).

Furthermore, this article has established that reactions to the current refugee arrival represent the presence of an implicit line between ‘core society’ and those who do not belong to it. Syrian refugees have been mainly treated as temporary guests, rather than full members of society. The temporary protection regulation, for example, highlights this aspect and fails to grant them permanent rights that could manifest membership to society. The temporary status of Syrian

refugees implies that they are provisionally tolerated and therein placed at the mercy of the tolerator, rather than seen as full members of society.

Overall, it seems difficult to draw hard-and-fast conclusions on where Turkey is currently heading when it comes to refugee incorporation. Having been strongly criticised for failing to develop approaches on the long-term incorporation of refugees, Turkey is currently under pressure to develop such strategies and therein choose for a path to take. The fact that refugees have so far been ‘tolerated’ but not seen as full members of society, paired with the finding that there is quite significant opposition against certain groups of refugees that are not deemed to ‘fit’, suggests that such future policies could include assimilationist principles aimed at protecting the ‘core’. Yet, the rhetoric of ‘Islamic brotherhood’ and the hospitality implied in the decision to open the borders to Syrian refugees also suggests that the assimilationist principle might not be a hard-and-fast one. It is unlikely to go as far as to force resettlement and forgetting of the native language as used to be a practice in the past.

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