

# Fragmented in space: the oral history narrative of an Arab Christian from Antioch, Turkey

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**Abstract** *This study uses the case of Can Kılçksız, an Arab Christian refugee youth from Antioch, Turkey, to argue that globalization may result in fragmented families and subjectivities and can also accelerate processes initiated by modernity and the construction of national identities. Can Kılçksız and his siblings now live in Turkey, Germany, France and Finland. His life history suggests that males of Arab Christian origin from Antioch who had access to schooling are more likely to be involved in politics whereas females tend to be drawn to evangelical Christian organizations. The case also suggests that sibling ties might prove more durable in the course of transnational migration than conjugal ties. The case of Can Kılçksız shows that the time/space linked to childhood through memory can play an important role in identity construction of subjects circulating in transnational space.*

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An analysis of the oral history narrative of Can Kılçksız,<sup>1</sup> who belongs to the little-known minority community of Arab Christians in Antioch, Turkey, suggests that globalization, while constituting a rupture in many ways, may also accelerate processes initiated by modernity and the construction of national identities (Appadurai 1996). In Turkey, the current outmigration of Christians represents a form of continuity with the past, in so far as the Turkish Republic encouraged the exodus of communities not perceived as 'Turkish' since its establishment in 1923 (Hirschon 2003). This migration has increased in recent decades due to globalization, the military coup of 1980, and the conflict between the Kurdish separatist movement PKK and the state in southeastern Turkey. Whole villages of Arab Christians have moved to Europe since the 1980s.

The story of Can Kılçksız and his family shows that, while links between villages in Antioch, Turkish cities and cities in Europe are maintained by the circulation of family members, the process of spatial separation has been accompanied by the fragmentation of both families and psyches. However, this process may also make possible a new relationship with the past to allow subjects to come to terms with their contradictory positionality (Huyssen 1995). As the case of Can Kılçksız shows, the time/space associated with childhood through memory can play an important role in the identity construction of subjects circulating in national and transnational space (Pile 1996).

### **The construction of Turkish national identity**

The Turkish Republic was established upon the remains of a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multilingual Empire (Zurcher 1993). In the Ottoman Empire, identity was based primarily on religion, and while Islam was the dominant religion, non-Muslim religious communities were largely autonomous in their internal affairs. In the late Ottoman period, modernizing reforms included attempts to create an Ottoman identity to unite all subjects of the Ottoman sultan regardless of religion. However, the rise of nationalist movements and the loss of territories with large Christian populations resulted in the emergence of a Turkish nationalist movement which viewed the Muslim majority as its backbone. Reduced to the space of Anatolia by the end of the First World War, Turkey was occupied by the European powers. During the late Ottoman period, much of the non-Muslim population was either killed, forced to migrate, or otherwise left the country (Göçek 2002). During 1919–1922, a war was waged against Greek occupying forces by a nationalist movement centred around the figure of Mustafa Kemal, formerly an officer in the Ottoman army. Following the defeat of the Greek forces, an independent Turkish Republic was established on 29 October 1923.

The goal of the leaders of the Turkish Republic was to create a new Turkish identity based on a single language (Turkish) and a single imagined Turkish (ethnic) identity (Kadioğlu 1998). Although the discourse of Kemalism focused on a secular identity associated with Enlightenment values, in practice, Turkishness remained identified with Muslim heritage, which meant that non-Muslims remained second-class citizens despite the fact that they were natives of the country as well as Turkish citizens. Memories of violent conflict between local Christians and Muslims meant that this distinction or opposition has continued to influence the meaning of what it means to be Turkish over the generations. From the establishment of the Republic to the present, the population of non-Muslims, including Jews, Armenians, Orthodox and other smaller Christian communities have largely dwindled, leaving very small populations, mostly in urban areas (Dalyrmpile 1998).

Minorities in Turkey largely adapted to the Republican regime by outward assimilation as a route to upward mobility, performing ‘Turkishness’ in the public sphere – although the identification of Turkishness with Muslim heritage (in practice, though not in discourse) made this task more difficult for non-Muslim minorities, particularly Christians. ‘Other’ identities tended to be confined to the private sphere or silenced altogether (Neyzi 2002a). It was largely after the military coup of 1980 and the liberalization of the Turkish economy that transnational migration and internal challenges to national identity resulted in the re-emergence of submerged identities, paralleling the process of increased physical mobility and the fragmentation of communities, families and subjectivities hurled bodily into transnational space (Bozdoğan and Kasaba 1997; Yavuz 1999).

### **Antioch**

The town of Antioch (Antakya) is located in the province of Hatay in Southern Turkey. One of the earliest centres of Christianity, Antioch was historically a highly

cosmopolitan trade centre (Wallace-Hadrill 1982). Close to the present-day border between Turkey and Syria, it remains predominantly Arab in character linguistically and culturally. Integrated into the Ottoman Empire in 1516, Antioch remained under Ottoman rule until the end of the First World War, when it was occupied by the French. Unlike the rest of Anatolia, it did not become part of the Turkish Republic until 1939, when an agreement was reached between Turkey, France and Syria to this effect. At a time when Arab and Turkish nationalisms competed, Arab Christians and Armenians largely cooperated with Arab Muslims in favour of joining Syria – when Hatay became part of Turkey, Arab Christians and Armenians migrated from the region in large numbers (Altuğ 2002). Despite outmigration in recent decades, the population of Antioch still shows traces of its cosmopolitan past, which includes Christian Arabs, Alevi Arabs,<sup>2</sup> Sunni Arabs and Turkish Sunnis within a population of approximately one million. In his life story narrative, Can Kılçksız says: ‘Christians make an important contribution to the cultural mosaic that is Hatay.’

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, one of a number of acephalous or ecclesiastically independent Orthodox churches, is little known, even in Turkey (Binns 2002). Historically, Antioch was the place where believers were first called ‘Christians’. Based originally in Antioch, the See of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate was transferred to Damascus, Syria in the sixteenth century. In contrast to that of the Greek Orthodox Church of Constantinople, the liturgical language of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch is Arabic, and the congregation largely of Arab heritage (Cragg 1991; Masters 2001; Wessels 1996).

Although the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 gave non-Muslim minorities in Turkey certain rights such as that of establishing their own schools, these applied in practice to the dominant minorities in urban areas such as the Greek Orthodox of Constantinople, the Armenians and the Jews. Rural Christians such as the Arab Christians of Antioch, on the other hand, have had difficulty transmitting their religion and culture over the generations, subject as they were to the assimilationist policies of the national educational system. At the same time, many families embraced assimilation to avoid discrimination and to achieve upward mobility. Although conversion was not common (though some Orthodox did convert to Catholicism or evangelical Protestantism), the use of Turkish rather than Arabic, the use of Turkish names rather than Arabic ones, and a gradual distancing from the church became widespread.

Arab Christians in Antioch live mostly in the town of Antakya as well as in a few villages in the countryside. The majority speak Arabic and, increasingly, Turkish as well, though they consider themselves more Arab than Turkish culturally. There are distinct class differences between the Christians in town and those in villages, town Christians resembling more of a bourgeoisie with the rural Christians constituting their poorer country cousins.

A similar relationship exists between the Christians of Antioch and the Greek Orthodox of Constantinople. Because the Greek Orthodox population of Constantinople is dwindling as a result of migration to Greece, the community has difficulty finding students to maintain its schools or a congregation to attend its churches (Alexandris 1983). Today, Christians from Antioch help maintain the

churches in Istanbul, and their children attend Greek schools. This relationship is a tense one based on historical differences in class and culture between the two communities, although they have a joint interest in maintaining the Greek Orthodox Church in Turkey. When Arab Christians of Antioch began to migrate in large numbers in the 1990s, many chose to go to Greece.

### **Tokaçlı Village**

Tokaçlı is one of the few Christian villages in Antioch today. It, along with the neighbouring Christian village of Sarılar, administratively belongs to the district of Altınözü. These are the only Christian villages in a district that otherwise consists primarily of Sunni Arabs. The village is known locally as Jneydo. This Arabic word, meaning paradise, presumably refers to the natural beauty of this settlement surrounded by olive groves and grape orchards: Can refers to Tokaçlı as ‘an oasis in the desert of Altınözü’. It is common practice for non-Turkish place names to be Turkified under the Turkish Republic, just as children are encouraged to take Turkish names.

According to Can Kılçıksız, families in the village tend not to remember the past beyond several generations. As a result, there is little sense of history, whether of the Christian past, the Ottoman period or the French occupation, and little attempt to transmit knowledge from generation to generation. As Can puts it:

Most elders in the village cannot trace their lineage back beyond three generations. They can't go beyond this, and they themselves do not know why this is so. It's as if there has been a rupture, a break with the past. Little has been transmitted from generation to generation. I was really struck by this. It's as if they landed in this village from outer space. They don't have a sense of history.

This, no doubt, has much to do with the process of assimilation under the Turkish Republic. It is only in the present that members of the younger generation like Can have begun to search for their past.

At the same time, a sense of opposition between Muslim and Christian prevails, particularly among the elderly. Until recently, there was little intermarriage between Christians and Muslims: Can claims to be the first man from his village in recent memory to marry a woman of Muslim/Turkish background. In Can's own family, a story is told about his great-grandfather Mihail, according to which Mihail was hanged from a tree belonging to Muslims from which he was said to have stolen walnuts. Can believes this story reflects the underlying tension that existed between Muslims and Christians in the region. He himself remembers the events experienced in the village at the time the Turkish army invaded Cyprus in 1974. At this time, the village was surrounded by armed Muslims, local Christians prepared for defence, and a calamity was only narrowly averted. As Can puts it, ‘It is always the minorities who pay the cost of such tensions. These sorts of tensions make it difficult for the people of Hatay to live together. A balance that has been created with great difficulty can be

destroyed in a moment.’ Can also recounts that relations between Christians and Muslims became tense in recent municipal elections, as land sales to Muslims have increased the political strength of Muslims in the region.

However, despite (or because of) the history of violence between Christians and Muslims, the Arab Christians of Tokaçlı have tended to assimilate to a general Turkish identity which includes the use of the Turkish language and the adoption of secularism in order to avoid being perceived as ‘different’ and to ensure social and economic mobility for their children: ‘They do not want to be conscious of or to articulate their difference. It is sad to see that families in the village now boast about how well their children speak Turkish. This amounts to voluntary assimilation.’ Christians also tend not to emphasize their ethnic identity as Arabs, due to the distance they feel towards Syria, the identification of Arab identity with Islam, and the effects of Turkish nationalism. On the other hand, children continue to be christened because registry in the church allows them to demonstrate their status as minorities, which is particularly important to attend Greek Orthodox schools or in applying for visas to Europe.

Until the late 1970s, the population of Tokaçlı village was as high as 3000, which included twelve major families, all related. The villagers produced olives, also growing wheat, grapes, and other vegetables and fruits. To gain additional income, poorer villagers would go to the Çukurova cotton region to work as labourers in the cotton-picking season.

Until 1977, only three families in the village had children abroad. Beginning in the late 1970s, and especially following the military coup of 1980, large numbers of individuals, particularly young people, migrated to Europe, especially to Germany, France, Greece, Austria, and Norway. Potential migrants used their status as Christian minorities in Turkey to obtain visas to European countries where they settled as workers or applied for political asylum. As a result of this massive migration, the population of the village has been reduced to fewer than 500 persons, most of whom are elderly. These elderly persons now live on remittances from abroad, and land sales to neighbouring Sunni Arabs suggests that the village will become a Muslim village in the not too distant future, while a new generation of Arab Christian youth is being raised amongst communities of transnational migrants in European cities.

The Kılçksız family, to which Can belongs, is one of the twelve major families of Tokaçlı village. The name Kılçksız derives from the nickname in Arabic of Can’s great-grandfather, who was renowned as a wrestler (Kılçksız means ‘without any bone’, i.e. pure muscle). According to Can, family elders can trace the family back several generations at the most. His father Mihail and his mother Rahmi are cousins. After initially living with Mihail’s parents, the couple set up their own household in the village in the mid-1960s. During Can’s childhood, Arabic was the language spoken in the family. Gradually, the siblings would begin to speak to each other in Turkish. Can says: ‘Because we learned Turkish late we felt the need to speak it well. We can now boast of speaking it better than the Turks of Antakya.’ In the early 1970s, the family migrated to the town of Antakya where Mihail found work in the public sector. This would be the first in a series of migrations. The

couple raised nine children in conditions of relative poverty in the Christian neighbourhood of Antakya. Nevertheless, living in town allowed Can and his older brother Yusuf (Joseph) to get an education, although their sisters were not allowed to do so. Yusuf and Can are among the very few from Tokaçlı village to receive a university education.

In 1983, after Mihail retired, the Kılçksız family migrated to the Western Anatolian city of Izmir. According to Can, the grocery store his father opened in the Bornova district of Izmir failed because, as a Christian, he was not patronized by Bulgarian migrants who themselves had memories of negative treatment at the hands of Bulgarian Christians. Ironically, these new migrants viewed themselves as more 'native' simply because they were Muslim. Soon thereafter, Can's parents moved to France where they applied for and received political asylum, managing subsequently to also bring their children into the country through a variety of means. According to Can, potential immigrants from Turkey like his parents used political and religious discrimination in Turkey as reasons for applying for asylum:

In applying for asylum, they used my case in particular. They pleaded, 'Our children are experiencing political repression, we are experiencing religious repression.' Actually none of this can be substantiated – it is true that political repression exists, but this is experienced by everyone here. As for discrimination on the basis of religion, it is not something my parents would be aware of although I myself did sense it.

According to Can, 'Many of those who migrated to Germany live the village in Germany. We migrated from the village as well as from the mentality of the village because our family was influenced by politics.'

### **The oral history narrative of Can Kılçksız**

I interviewed Can Kılçksız as part of a larger oral history project on cultural identity in the global city of Istanbul.<sup>3</sup> Can was born in 1966 in Tokaçlı village. During his childhood, the family maintained itself on the basis of a peasant economy, which consisted primarily in producing olives. At the time Can started primary school, his family moved to Antakya, and, although they moved back and forth several times during these years, he completed primary and secondary school in town. The family lived in the Christian neighbourhood, where most families were older residents and much better off. The Christian neighbourhood and the Alevi neighbourhood were adjacent, and the two communities got on well. According to Can, although both Christians and Alevi of Antakya tend to be religiously conservative, Alevi youth in particular were highly secularized and influenced by leftist ideologies that prevailed in high schools and universities in Turkey in the 1970s (Neyzi 2002b).

Can claims that it was his 'father's adventurousness and mother's ambition' that resulted in the family's migration to town, at a time when few families had left the village. Although his father was a primary school graduate, and his mother an illiterate villager who only spoke Arabic, the couple managed to raise a family of nine

on a worker's salary. However, although Mihail, a traditionalist at heart, wished to return to the village, it was his sons who insisted that the family stay in town because they wanted to get an education. The mother's ambition was to rise within the hierarchy among the Christian families in town by marrying one of her daughters into a prominent town family. Can says that it was only much later that he understood his father's desire to go back to the village, since the village now means much more to him than it did when he was a youth: 'Those traditional values we denigrated for being backward are what makes us what we are.' Can remembers the ease he felt going to school with his friends and relatives in the village school, where he spoke Arabic freely. In Antakya, on the other hand, he was beaten by his primary school teacher for his inability to speak Turkish well – one of his first experiences of discrimination. Can recalls his teacher admonishing him: 'Aren't you a Turk? Why can't you speak Turkish?'

In town, the two older boys Yusuf and Can rapidly distanced themselves from the church, becoming increasingly radicalized as they became involved in leftist politics in high school: 'I went to school in Alevi neighbourhoods. The left was dominant in my high school. I began to give up religion. It was also a reaction to my father's attempt to make us go to church. We hardly understood the sermon in Arabic.' The three older girls, Janet, Şemsa and Yesra, had a different experience in town from their male siblings. Because the patriarchal culture of Arab Christians restricted their physical mobility and ability to acquire an education, their only means of escape from the confines of the home was the church. Initially close to the Orthodox Church, the sisters would gradually convert first to Catholicism and later to evangelical Protestantism, which provided them with a more contemporary interpretation of religion compared to the archaic, hierarchical and patriarchal Orthodox Church. As Can puts it:

My father did not send my sister to school. She was a girl waiting for the prince on the white horse who never arrived. Those who wanted to marry her were not the kind she desired; she did not want to go back to the village. My sisters could tell the family 'I am going to church' and leave the house. The church was their window into the world which took them in.

Although missionary activity among Christians in Anatolia is not new (Kieser 2001), the spread of evangelical Christianity is a contemporary transnational movement that deserves a study in its own right.

Despite the fact that he had to work while going to school – he remembers working at a painters', a radio repair shop and a record shop – Can succeeded in the competitive university entrance exams and moved to the capital city of Ankara in 1983 to study at the University of Ankara. Can claims that minorities like Alevis and Arab Christians tend to be more ambitious, with Alevis in particular competing favourably in educational institutions with Sunni Muslims. Can's brother Yusuf was also studying in Ankara, and the two brothers roomed together. After a couple of years, despite the protests of their father, they managed to bring their sister Janet to live with them as well. It was while living in Ankara that Can and his siblings were

twice forced to vacate the apartment they had rented because the neighbours 'discovered' that they were of Christian origin. These experiences marked Can and his siblings emotionally, as they feared being physically attacked for being 'different'.

After the military coup of 1980, the general repression and crackdown on the left had meant that leftist activities had died down in the universities. Gradually, however, groups began to re-emerge and reorganize, and both Can and his brother became involved in student political activities in their respective faculties. In 1986, Can was arrested for allegedly belonging to an illegal leftist organization, experiencing severe torture after which he spent six months in prison before being released. Although students who were leftist sympathizers were routinely tortured, Can believes that his identity as a Christian resulted in his being singled out in particular – for him, the fear he felt as someone perceived as an outsider or 'other' could not be compared to that felt by his Muslim friends, who, though they may have been seen as 'traitors to the country', were not viewed as outsiders or as 'agents of foreign powers': 'If a certain critique is made by a Muslim or Turk, at most he will be seen as a traitor. But if a Christian says the same thing the reaction will be much more severe and he will be viewed as a fifth column.'

Since his torturers could not distinguish between one Christian denomination and another, Can was classified either categorically as *gavur* (non-believer or heathen, a derogatory term for Christian) or as 'Armenian': 'Unconsciously they are thinking, "he is not one of us". To experience this fear is altogether different.' In addition, Can's case was publicized by the right-wing/Islamist media where he was represented as a leftist student activist of Armenian origin and referred to as 'Kılıksızyan'.

While in prison in Ankara in 1986, Can transferred to the university in Izmir, where he began to study after his release. This is where he met his wife Sevil, a medical student of Muslim/Turkish background. Married in 1989, the couple had a son, Jean-Michel, in 1992. After marrying, Can and Sevil visited Can's family in France, and considered moving there. They decided to return to Turkey, largely for reasons having to do with Sevil's medical career, and between 1993 and 1996 Can worked for a pharmaceutical company in Istanbul. He later quit this job because he claimed he could not live the regulated life of a company employee. He was doing a variety of part-time jobs and taking care of his son when I interviewed him in 1997.

By the time of our third interview, in 1999, Can had taken his family back to France, where he applied for and received political asylum. In Europe, despite the seeming freedom and opportunities provided by the welfare state, Can saw the state of alienation into which migrants fell and the racism to which they were subjected. During his time in France, Can continued to communicate with me through letters. In a letter he wrote to me from a suburb of Paris on 27 April 1998, he says: 'I'm making the rounds here with a friend, who speaks to me with seeming enthusiasm, and I listen with seeming enthusiasm. There is a distance of one centimetre between us, yet I sense that we are kilometres apart. Without exception, my experience with everyone I encounter here is similar.'

He notes that being Christian makes no difference in France, where foreigners are treated as outsiders regardless of their ethnic/religious origin, despite the fact that it is easier for individuals of Christian origin to apply for residence:



You are completely isolated socially. In Turkey, isolation is due to repression, but here, where all doors seem open, not a step can be taken. It is as if a deathly spell is cast over everyone. The youth in particular are influenced by racism. They approach you with suspicion if you are a foreigner. You don't have much of a chance of making a place for yourself in this society. First you have to struggle economically, then you are faced with the problem of language. You keep asking yourself, 'Why?' You live here exactly what you lived in Turkey, you are a minority here also, nothing is changed. Being a Christian has no value. You just escape from one place to another.

Can later returned to Turkey because his wife chose to return, realizing the difficulty of working in France as a foreign doctor. Can maintains his status as resident in France, where he has established a textile atelier with his sister Şemsa. He remains ambivalent about remaining either in Turkey or in France. He wants to keep his options open, particularly in view of the fact that legal residence in France may provide opportunities for himself and for his son in the future:

I cannot abide the relations between people there. And I cannot accept being treated as a second-class citizen. The language I speak best is Turkish, my favourite poet is Nazım Hikmet. It feels like I am leaving my roots behind. But perhaps I will go in the end. For, as those who are minorities know, when you are looking for a job here, if you do not hide your identity, your chances are always reduced. And you are constantly under threat. You never know when right-wing and conservative elements will choose to attack you. For example, I never know when my child might be singled out in a Turkish school for having a name like Jean-Michel. These are the kinds of anxieties you have, which might constitute reasons for leaving, but you may have the same kinds of experiences there. As national economies shrink, foreigners become the main target in Europe.

Although Can left the space where religion is recorded on Turkish birth certificates empty on his son's birth certificate, he has nevertheless had Jean-Michel christened and registered by the church because his son may need to demonstrate his status as a minority in the future, which would help him migrate to Europe.

Comparing his experience to that of his four younger siblings who were raised mostly in France, Can feels that he is better off. His younger siblings directly experienced the problems of immigrants faced with racism, ostracism and lack of a community to call their own. As a result, they turned to consumerism, drugs, manipulation of the social security system and various other means to survive in the competitive, violent culture of second-generation migrants:

The generation which immigrated has been truly lost. Their only concerns are money, sex, image, cars and so on. They are thoroughly isolated, with no relationship to the French. My younger brother says, 'I did not create this system. Therefore we need to make life hell for those who did.' He has managed to live for years without working at all.

In telling his life story, Can constructs the story of his family and of his own life on the basis of an opposition between tradition and modernity. He says that the experience of modernity was largely a negative one, both for the village of Tokaçlı and for himself, as nationalism and the rise of a consumer society could only bode ill for a minority of peasant origin. Can says that modernity – which includes the experience of transnational migration – destroyed his family, which became completely fragmented. His parents have divorced, and of his siblings, almost every one has divorced at least once: ‘Our family lived intensely the conflict between tradition and modernity. It is as if a bomb exploded within the family, and it fragmented into pieces in space.’

Today, the family is torn apart, with different members residing in different countries. While Can’s mother Rahmi remains in France (and dreams of moving to Canada), his father Mihail has returned to Antakya: ‘My father says, “I was a plane tree that withered away”.’ The three eldest daughters, Janet, Şemsa and Yesra, who moved to Germany upon marrying German evangelical Protestants, have become heavily involved in this transnational movement (Şemsa and Yesra had previously been married to Turkish Muslims). Yusuf, who lives in Finland, is also married to an evangelical Protestant, whom he met through his sisters. The four youngest siblings, Nasra, Apo, Hülya and Dilber are in France. Nasra and Hülya both married and divorced Arab Christians from Antioch. Dilber married and divorced a Lebanese Christian, and Apo married, divorced and reunited with a woman of mixed North African/French background.

For Can, his lost childhood associated with the stone walls of his old family home – but not the village in the present (‘The village is only a village in geographic terms. Modern life has entered the village’) – represents a lost paradise which he can only experience through memory. He also realizes that he only appreciates his village because he cannot live there again as a peasant:

I love my village. A different feeling pervades me when I find myself on Antakya’s soil. But the empty streets make you feel sad. You look at the stone walls of every house you pass by. You think of what those walls have witnessed. The walls of my school or of our old house seem like a part of my body, like my son himself. Those walls are witness to my childhood, but now they are witness to the destruction of the village. My school is empty, the water fountains are dry, and the village remains there like a cemetery.

The following poignantly expresses Can’s feeling of fragmented subjectivity:

Only I can represent myself, no one can represent me. But I am not even sure that I can represent myself, for I cannot *be* myself in many contexts. What matters is not that I live disguising my difference – that is easy. The question is whether we can live together despite my difference. Can you accept me, or do you try to change me? If you change me, my existence will have no meaning.

He adds:

I could have been anything but I ended up as nothing. I could not stand wearing a tie. I no longer had the will to say 'Good morning' to people. I wish I had remained a farmer in the village, but I would perhaps not have understood this without having lived the city. I do not want to be anything, I only want to be myself. But I cannot be at peace with myself. Constantly this struggle, this fragmentation, constantly asking 'What am I?'

Can's relationship with his village is also fraught with conflict: 'The only place for me is my village but it is no longer what it used to be. And I can no longer be a farmer. I wish I could raise my child in my village.' The questions Can's seven-year old son asked him when they visited Tokaçlı village after living in France (where he struggled to learn French) demonstrate that Can's anxieties about his identity are being transmitted to the next generation:

In the village, Jean-Michel asked me, 'Father, how come the children here speak a foreign language?' I said, 'This is not a foreign language, it is our language.' He said, 'If this is Turkey, why are they speaking Arabic? And if you are Arab and that makes me an Arab, then why can't I speak Arabic?'

## **Conclusion**

Today, Can Kılçksız and his eight siblings live variously in Turkey, Germany, France and Finland. Their spouses include Finns, Germans, French, Turkish Muslims and Arab Christians. As Can's narrative shows, men and women may have different options and strategies in the migration process, and relations between siblings may prove more resilient than conjugal ties. Whereas both men and women of Can's generation tended to reject their ethnic, religious and linguistic heritage while growing up, males who had access to schooling often became involved in politics while females were more likely to join evangelical Christian organizations as young adults – this suggests different options available to men and women linked to differential access to the public sphere.

As the story of Can Kılçksız demonstrates, the experience of the Arab Christians of Antioch is the experience of being a minority in both place of origin and place of migration. In point of fact, many experience greater alienation in the places they migrated to in the hopes of a better life. This study suggests that while transnational families may be viewed as an adaptive strategy in some cases, globalization may also result in fragmented families as well as subjectivities.

This case also suggests that studying transnational migration necessitates closer attention to questions of memory and subjectivity (Bahloul 1996; Crang and Thrift 2000; Huyssen 2003). For Can Kılçksız, regardless of where he resides today, his identity is bound up with the space of his native village in Antioch, as it is conjured up in his memory. It is possibly this, more than belonging to a particular family or

community that represents to him what he is, and what he would like to transmit to the next generation as embodied in his son Jean-Michel.

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## Notes

1. Pronounced 'Djan', Can is the Turkish name Can Kılçksız goes by, rather than his Arabic name, Hanna (John).
2. The Alevi are a heterodox Muslim group; see Olsson et al. (1998).
3. I recorded three interviews with Can Kılçksız on 5 March 1997, 13 April 1997 and 26 August 1999. This project included interviews with individuals from different ethnic/religious backgrounds and investigated the meaning of 'Turkishness' (Neyzi 1999).

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