Religious and National Identification in the Republic of Cyprus

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MA Thesis
June 2021

ABSTRACT

Religion's role in civil society is twofold. It is a homogenizer and a provider of social cohesion, yet at the same time a disruptor of it. Religious identification in the Republic of Cyprus became the mean of separation of the two ethnic communities residing in the island. The Constitution of the Republic provides that those that are faithful members of the Greek-Orthodox Church belong in the Greek-Cypriot community, and Muslims in the Turkish-Cypriot community. This thesis is concerned with the Republic of Cyprus (Greek-Cypriot community) and aims in exploring "*How young adults in Cyprus link their religion to their sense of national identity*?" The conflation of religion and national identity in Cyprus has been, to a great extent, the product of political/nationalist imperatives. The stronger the role of religion in society, the more the members of religious minority communities can perceive their religion as an aspect that disturbs feelings of affiliation to their nation. This thesis will explore how young adults in Cyprus of ethnic and religious majority/minorities perceive their religion and how it is linked to their national identity. As an ideological system, religion is manifested in governmental structures and policy systems. National educational systems are considered key agents and homogenizers of ideological beliefs on national perspectives. As education is linked with identity formation, this thesis explored as a second research question *"What is the role of Cypriotic Religious Education in the formation of national identity?"* Previous research on religious education in Cyprus suggests that the lesson offers exclusive narratives of ethno-religious identity and fails to cultivate tolerant attitudes for students. The theoretical framework of this thesis discussed three main concepts, namely, the distinction between ethnic and civic national identity, social identity complexity and secularization. The concepts were explored and linked to Christian-Orthodoxy's historical stronghold in the Cypriot society and its influence on educational structures. In answering both research questions, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants of various religious and ethnic groups residing in Cyprus. The research employed a grounded theory approach combined with the use of narrative analysis for data collection and assessment. The key findings support that the Christian Orthodox religion does not constitute a characteristic in national self-identification, but its role for young adults is confined as a cultural element of their nation. For religious and/or ethnic minorities in the country, their difference in religion is not an aspect that disturbs feelings of affiliation to the Cypriot nation-state, yet in instances it results in societal and institutional discrimination. Religious education in Cyprus is perceived by participants as a dogmatic lesson that strongly projects the link between the Christian-Orthodox religion and the Cypriot nation-state. Former students of religious minorities argued that the structure of religious education in Cyprus, and the policy of exemption, make them realize their position as outgroups in the school community.

Keywords: Religion, religious education, Republic of Cyprus, ethnic/civic national identification, ingroup/outgroup membership, secularization

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank first, and foremost, my supervisor Dr. Fiane Konings, for the massive support and faith she has shown in me the past months. Your always creative approach has been a huge inspiration for me. I know that completing this thesis would be impossible without your encouragement, and for that, I thank you dearly.

I thank my mother, for keeping up with me and being my warmest supporter throughout this difficult year. I thank my father and my brother, for the much needed moments of emotional uplifting.

I thank my fellow classmates. Although we did not get a chance to meet in person, I believe that we have all learned and kept something from one another. Special thanks to my support group, Marta, Marina and Irina, who enriched my Erasmus University experience in every way possible.

At last, I thank my best friend Sevia, who was been the inspiration behind this thesis.

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<u>1.0 Introduction</u>

Cyprus, being a conflict affected society has struggled for decades with what is termed a religious/ethnic conflict between Greece-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots. Religion formed the basic identity formation vehicle in the nationalist strategies adopted after the independence of the island in 1960. When independence was granted, the Greek Cypriot community adopted the Greek national anthem and an Eastern-Orthodox religious leader Archbishop Makarios the third, referred to as "the ethnarch" became president. A decade later, when the Cyprus conflict of 1974 occurred, religious self-identification became the means of separation of the two communities that coexisted in the island; Helleno-Christians were Greek Cypriots forming the Southern part of the island and Muslims were Turkish-Cypriots forming the Northern part. A religious national identity in both sides was therefore constructed in order to distinguish each side form their respective "hostile neighbour or historical oppressor" (Lieven, 2000, p.125), or the rival "other" (Said, 1978).

This thesis touches solely upon the Republic of Cyprus (Southern part) and is concerned with the tension between religious and national identification for young adults in the country. Article 2 of the Constitution of 1960 provides that those that belong in the Greek community are the people of Greek ancestry who speak the Greek language, and/or people who follow the Greek traditions, and/or people *who are faithful members of the Greek-Orthodox Church* [emphasis added]. The conflation of national and religious identification is made explicit in the Constitution and is based on a previous religious identification of the Greek Cypriot ethnic community. The aim of this thesis is to examine whether the conflation of national and religious identification is still a reality for the younger generations in Cyprus, following 60 years of independence of the island and the emergence of the Cypriot nation-state. For this scope, the concepts of the distinction between ethnic and civic national identification, social identity complexity theory, and secularization will form the theoretical framework under which the current societal role of the Christian Orthodox religion in Cyprus can be understood as well as if the Christian Orthodox religion still constitutes a component in national identification.

There are many ways under which a national identity takes a religious dimension. Historical sociologist Anthony Smith (2000), in his analysis on the link between the two, identified several factors that promote a religious-based national identity. The first is through religious institutions and the nexus between religion and state, another is 'through the powerful repertoire of myths of election which religion can provide' (p.769). Collective religion is a source of social cohesion and a force of maintenance of national identities. As argued by Smith, and a phenomenon also present in the construction of the Cypriot nation-state as the first ever president of the Republic of Cyprus was a religious figure, the heroes of an ethnic community are also those of religious lore that become the founders of the ethnic community, and as they adjudicate for the authentic qualities of the nation, they proclaim a message of social qualities that is often associated with religion (Halikopoulou, 2009).

At this point, it is of great importance to contextualize the term national identity and draw the distinction between ethnic and civic national identity, as it helps in identifying the circumstances under which the term is

more likely to hold a religious dimension. For Calhoun (1993), national identity is "one genre of answers to the question of what constitutes an autonomous political community capable of self-determination" (p.387). This community is an assembly of individuals who self-identify with other similar minded people (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). Moreover, for Smith (2000), national identity functions as a reproductive mechanism of the pattern of values, symbols, traditions that compose the heritage of a nation and the latter identification of individuals with that heritage. Therefore, national identity is a concept that is realised through self-determination, based on the perception of the members of the nation about their nation, rooted in similarities and a sense of shared belonging.

The classic distinction between ethnic and civic national identity is essential in conceptualising the role of religion in a nation. Ethnic national identity is characterized by ascribed features that include a community of birth, common ancestry, and a native culture. It is realized as an exclusive organic entity that shares these ascribed characteristics (Halikopoulou, 2009). Civic national identity has a voluntary and inclusive nature, it gives emphasis on the laws and institutions, on a legal political community with a shared political will, and a civic culture that gives equal rights to the members of the nation (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). What is most important, is how the members of the community perceive their nation and identity, having either civic and/or ethnic features (not mutually exclusive concepts), and whether they realise an exclusive or inclusive character in the formation and further realisation of their nation. Zimmer (2003), in his analysis on the distinction between ethnic and civic identities identified 3 main dichotomies between the two and concluded that national identity factors such as language and religion operate in both civic and ethnic dimensions. Yet, the Church and state relationship, as well as geopolitical factors like external threats can contribute towards the understanding of national identity under ethnic terms, with religion at the core (Zimmer, 2003). The strong relationship of Church and state in Cyprus was realized long before the establishment of the Cypriot nation-state, with the Church being the foremost exponent of Greek nationalism in Cyprus during periods of external threats from British colonizers and the Ottoman Empire (Kitromilidis, 1976).

Indeed, according to Schnabel and Hjerm (2014) on their study of religion and its embeddedness in civil societies of European countries, by using the aggregate national identity per EU-member-state in 2008, stated that Cyprus scored relatively high with regard to ethnic national identity in comparison with other EU countries. Taking Zimmer's model into consideration and the weight he attributes on the Church-State relationship as well as on other geopolitical factors in establishing an ethnic national identity, this thesis will emphasize on both factors by offering a thorough historical background on the role of the institution of Church in the country of Cyprus, as well as the different external threats that the Greek-Cypriot ethnic community had faced throughout its history in order to highlight the strong historical role of religion.

Satre (1943) suggests that there are two groups of relational social identities based on group belonginess; "us" which is the we as subject and "we" as object. Eriksen puts the same analogy of "we-hood" and "us-hood".

In creating an ethnically shared identity, or a national identity this binary distinction is of vital importance. The degree of group identity cohesion is heavily dependent on institutional factors. Institutional support, be it political, religious, or economic solidifies a sense of internal solidarity or cultural commonality (Eriksen, 1995). Individual identification in a certain group becomes stronger if it is bound up in a shared sense of history including language, religion, and traditions. Durkheim's work (1912/2010) on the integrative impact of religion on individuals, communities, and civil society, suggests that individual religiosity supports national identity. For him religion provides the necessary meanings, norms and symbols that facilitate interpersonal attachment and therefore, social cohesion (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). Individual religiousness has an integrating effect on civil societies. At the same time, religion's role is twofold. As it integrates, religion also has exclusionary powers at the expense of non-believers, people who adhere to other religions rather than the recognised/majority religion of a nation or people with different value systems (Bohn & Hahn, 2002; Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014).

According to the 2019 International Religious Freedom Report (US Office of International Religious Freedom, 2019), despite constitutional protections for minority religions in Cyprus, religious-based discrimination can be experienced in society and surprisingly in governmental practices as well. For example, incidents of denial to access places of worship for Muslims were reported, a school's headmaster instructed a student to leave school and return only after she removes her headscarf, Jewish representatives reported incidents of denial of exemptions for the requirement to stun animals before slaughter or denial to grant the Chief Rabbinate the right to officiate. Jehovah's witnesses were not allowed to bury their family in municipal cemeteries managed by Greek-Orthodox Churches, and some awards in schools can only be granted with the pre-condition that the student is a Christian-Orthodox, (US Office of International Religious Freedom, 2019). Accordingly, on the individual level and experience, religious identification can affect one's feelings of affiliation to national society at large, and on a societal level religion stands as a system of shared beliefs that is furtherly inscribed into political/governmental institutions and can result in social inequalities (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). Religion can therefore promote social cohesion in civil societies, but at the same time disturb it. It can operate as a borderline of community boundaries distinguishing between "us" and "them". This thesis aims to realise how religion as a societal phenomenon, affects the sense of civic and/or ethnic national identity on the individual level of young adults, and whether it is still realised as a marker between "us" and "them".

1.2. The Relationship between Religion and Education

As an ideological system, religion is manifested in governmental structures and civil policies (Manow, 2005). The close relationship between religion and state mostly in Eastern Europe, is reflected in national constitutions and policy systems. National educational systems are considered as key sources and homogenizers of ideological beliefs on national and cultural perspectives (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). Education is strongly linked with identity (Diez, 2007), and state educational programmes are main examples in communicating-

receiving of culture in balance with the preservation of identities. State education is a main tool in the progression of sensitisation (Diez, 2007) and religion, as one of the most significant vehicles of differentiation and a stronghold in the construction of cultural and national identities, should be incorporated in state educational systems in a way that promotes tolerance and constructs the capacity of living with difference in a peaceful manner.

Pring (in Jackson, 2000) supports that schools should not aim in the homogenization of individual beliefs. Schools should constitute a safe place where all identities come together and connect by sharing their beliefs, personal and cultural values. It is important to assess the extent to which Religious Education in Cyprus (hereinafter referred to as RE), reinforced the sense of national identity of former students and towards what values that identity was cultivated. The forum of RE, as a forum of institutionalised religion, can have either negative or positive outcomes in advocating for religious and ethnic inclusion or exclusion. RE in public educational institutions in the country of Cyprus (both primary and secondary education) is regulated under the model of Confessional Compulsory RE of the Helleno-Orthodox Church with the choice of exemption for students who adhere to other religions. The confessional RE model is defined as solely teaching the beliefs and doctrines of the dominant religion (Diez de Velasco, 2007).

There is vast majority of literature (Zembylas, 2015, Loukaidis &Zembylas, 2017, Spyrou 2006, Papastephanou 2005, Emilianides, 2011) supporting that the Cypriot RE curriculum, national rituals executed in schools as well as celebrations and symbols offer "exclusive narratives of ethno-religious identity … and fail to prepare young people for peaceful co-existence and reconciliation with the 'other' (Loukaidis & Zembylas, 2017, p.181). Based on the above historical facts it can be concluded that religion played a leading role in the construction of national identity in the island of Cyprus and its role is furtherly reinforced by the confessional model of RE teaching. Cypriot academics (Zembylas, 2015, Loukaidis &Zembylas, 2017, Emilianides, 2011) when examining RE in Cyprus have mainly focused on its construction under the notion of exclusion of "otherness" and its failing capacity in promoting peace and reconciliation of the two respective communities in the Cypriot nation-state, Turkish Cypriots, and Greek Cypriots. There seems to be no empirical studies on the link of RE and national identity in Cyprus, and the extent to which such national identity is projected through RE and constructed under the division of the "we" and the "other", or if it promotes tolerance towards all ethnic and religious identities. In this thesis, the relation between RE and national identity is researched by assessing how the institution of education, as a societal institution where the Christian-Orthodox religion is manifested, can affect individual feelings of affiliation to national identity and whether it adds to "bonding within" or "bridging" the different societal groups present in the school community and in society at large.

1.3 Research Questions and Methodological Choices

 Drawing from the brief historical background provided that highlighted the strong position of the Christian Orthodox religion in Cyprus, as well as the current model of RE that is dogmatic on the Christian Orthodox religion, this thesis will explore the following research questions:

1) *"How do young adults in Cyprus link their religion to their sense of national identity".*

2) *"What is the role of Cypriotic RE in the formation of national identity?"*

The research study will follow Coleman's methodological individualism method as a way of representing the micro-macro link of religion with national identity. For Coleman (1994), societal phenomena are explicable only in terms of individuals, on the micro level. While the explanandum must be on the macro level (in this case the link between religion and national identity in the country of Cyprus), the explanation itself must be given by the level of its individual components (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). Connor (2004) supports that "identity does not draw its sustenance from facts but from perception; not from chronological/factual history, but from sentient/felt history" (p.45). When it comes to the second research question on RE, as the link between religion and national identity is explained from individual affiliation, attitudes and experiences, conclusions can be drawn on the feedback effects on the institution of education, particularly RE. In answering the research questions, twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with young adults residing in Cyprus, being former students of RE in secondary state schools. A criterion-sampling method was conducted with interviewees aged from 18-24 of different religions and ethnicities, to reflect the current multi-religious and multi-ethnic society of Cyprus.

 As for the methodological choice of this research, a grounded theory approach was employed, combined with the use of narrative analysis. The iterative process of grounded theory allowed for the collection and analysis of data to be made simultaneously, in order to identify similar segments between the data, until saturation was reached. Moreover, the choice of narrative analysis stems from the fact that the particular method is relevant where there is potential to inform positive changes to practice, policy, education and theory. In this way, possible recommendations for change of the RE doctrine could be based on life experiences of former students that were impacted by the current doctrine (Sharp, Bye & Cusick, 2019).

2.0 Historical Framework

In the present chapter, a historical task will be carried to establish the role of the Orthodox-Church in the consolidation of Greek-Cypriot national identity. After forming a historical link between the Christian-Orthodox religion and national identity, the historical influence of the Orthodox Church on educational structures will be explained. At last, the present structure and content of RE in Cyprus will be presented, to assess if RE offers an agenda that promotes the conflation of religion and national identification and towards what values former students' identity is cultivated.

2.1 Cyprus – the Role of Religion in a Conflict Affected Society

The conflation of religion in line with national identity has to a great extent been the product of political/ nationalist circumstances, with the threat of foreign rule and the role of Church as an ethnic carrier in the period of conflict. Both internal and external politics contributed to the understanding of the Greek-Cypriot national identity under ethnic terms, with religion at the core. This section analyses the relationship between religion, politics, and national identity under a historical lens. The "Cyprus Issue" as internationally addressed refers to the 1974 Turkish invasion in the island following yearlong civil unrest between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities. The Greek military organisation "Junta" attempted a coup in the island in July 1974, 14 days before the Turkish invasion. Prior to the invasion, in the violent period of the intercommunal conflict of 1963-74, the majority of Greek Cypriots residing in the north part of the country abandoned their villages and relocated in the south. Accordingly, displaced Turkish Cypriots living in the south fled their villages and repositioned in the north of the island, alongside with many Turkish settlers from Anatolia that resettled in the north with the aim of bolstering the Turkish population (Constantinou, Demetriou & Hatay, 2012). Almost five decades following the invasion, no peace agreement has been concluded between the two communities as they both operate in institutional segregation to one another.

The conflict is characterised as the ultimate form of identity crisis. For the Greek Cypriot community, collective identity was highly salient. The community's history is depicted as institutionalizing such collective identity through schools and mainly churches in an effort to withstand the suppression of foreign rules. (Farmaki & Antoniou, 2017). When the island was under colonial British rule that ended with the Cypriot revolution in 1955-59, the Greek Cypriots paradoxically desired not independence as in any struggle against colonialists, but enosis, union, with the motherland Greece. The goal of enosis and ultimately inclusion in the Greek nation-state was a battle for ethnic homogeneity, yet when the island was granted independence instead of union, the craving for homogeneous identity posed as the main concern to the rising state. In 1960, when independence was granted, the Greek-Cypriot community adopt-ed the Greek national anthem and an Eastern-Orthodox religious leader Archbishop Makarios the third, became president. Any evidence of the multicultural past of the island including the minorities of Turkish Cypriots, Armenians, Maronites and Latins were marginalised and excluded

from any form of local cultural expression (Farmaki & Antoniou, 2017). The Cyprus Church had a profound influence in the formation of the Greek-Cypriot political culture as it led the struggle for national independence.

The occupation of Cyprus from the Ottoman Empire began in 1571 and resulted in a non-integrative but also non-hostile environment of Christians and Muslims coexisting next to one another. According to the Ottoman millet system different communities based on religious identification were instituted on religious autonomy and treated in accordance with their religious identity (Kizilyurek, 2002). The period of pre-nationalism was accompanied with several joint uprisings of Christians and Muslims against the higher classes that were composed of the ruling elite of Cyprus, the Orthodox clergy and Ottoman administrators. Therefore, an ethnic or religious clash had not yet emerged, rather a class warfare was the main cause of obtrusiveness.

The 19th century saw various Orthodox nations such as Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria, gaining their independence or becoming territorially disaggregated from the Ottoman Empire. A modern synthesis between the Nation and the Church was established under secular political leadership (Roudometof, 2013). Religious symbolism took the form of national symbolism, and Orthodoxy became an intrinsic part of people's national identity (Roudometof, 2005). Inevitably, with the establishment of the Greek nation in 1821, and the Greek irredentist ideology of creating a Greek-Christian Orthodox Empire, the so-called Great Idea, Greek nationalism was slowly emerging in the island of Cyprus having a great impact on the traditional coexistence of Muslims and Christians (Kizilyurek, 2002). The institution of ethnarchy was established with the Archbishop, a religious figure taking the indirect role of a national leader for the Greek Cypriot community. The wish of the Greek-Cypriot community for unification with Greece was expressed as early as 1828, when the then Archbishop of the Cypriot Church wrote to the Greek Governor Capodistria, expressing his wish of the inclusion of Cyprus in the Greek State. The letter included the following:

The foremost exponent of the spirit of Greek irredentist Nationalism in Cyprus became progressively the Greek Orthodox Church [..] The Archbishop and Bishops of Cyprus [..] never failed [..] to foster the ideals and voice the aspirations of Greek nationalism in Cyprus [..] Through the educational system, which was maintained and controlled by the Church, the nationalist ideology became the main value system into which younger generations were systematically socialised (in Kitromilidis, 1976, p.148).

During the colonial British rule (1878-1960) in the island, the Church's hierarchs became the voice of the Greek Cypriot national movement. Orthodox prelates participated in the local elections for membership in the Administrative Council, an auxiliary political body (Roudometof, 2013). Though paradoxical, since Christianity supports religious universalism, the Church became aligned with secular nationalist politics. The growth of Greek national consciousness and the emergence of a national Greek Cypriot middle class hindered the environment of cooperative action. This fusion of political and religious authority lasted in the island until 1977 with the death of Archbishop Makarios. With the passing of the Archbishop, the Republic of Cyprus was

administered under a political system where the seats of the Archbishop and the President were no longer filled in by the same person (Roudometof, 2013). A formal division between secular and religious institutions was therefore accomplished.

Despite of the Church losing legitimacy when it comes to political administration, its role remained prominent in the Greek Cypriot culture. Following the invasion of 1974, the Church endorsed its vision for the return of the Greek-Cypriot community in the Turkish-occupied North. It took a political stance by representing popular visions for the future of the island and posed as the guardian of the Greek Cypriot community in an effort to preserve its status as an institution in a briskly modernizing society. The reminder of a hostile external national threat as a strategy applied by the Church of Cyprus was quite effective in preventing or slowing down secularization processes in society. Prime signifiers of a nation such as religion remain important and salient when external threat perceptions are fostering a threatened national identity (Halikopoulou, 2009).

The Church's political role has been extensively examined and criticized by the Cypriot population and by academia. According to the European Values Study Foundation with data gathered in 2008, 70,2 % of the population felt that religious leaders have a say and influence governmental decision making and 82,4% of Cypriots believed that religious personas should refrain in influencing governmental decision making, acknowledging that the Church has considerable impact in governmental proceedings (Roudometof, 2013). Studies support (Halikopoulou, 2009; Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014) that the role of the state-religion relationship in fabricating national identities depends heavily on the stronghold of religious organizations with Church being the most prominent one. Religious plurality was always a reality in the island's history, yet modernity in the country failed to foster a unified public sphere where all religions were equal. In contrast, modernity in Cyprus resulted in internal transformations in the Greek-Orthodox and Turkish-Muslim communities. Post-1960 modernity took a multifaceted dimension and according to Roudometof (2009) modernization resulted in a division of the population in a secular slim majority, and a strong religiously conservative minority.

2.3 RE in Cyprus

The Church of Cyprus did not only serve as a political institution during the Turkish and British rule in Cyprus, but also gave considerable attention to the institution of education. In the period of the British rule, Archbishop Makarios established the Educational Council of the Ethnarchy which was the responsible institution for the coordination of educational activities in Greek-Cypriot schools (Emilianides, 2011). The Church believed that education was strongly linked to religion and the school system had the role of solely promoting the idea of unification with motherland Greece and maintaining the Greek-Orthodox spirit of the island under foreing rule (Kizilyurek, 2002). While Turkish education was associated with Islam, Greek education was associated with the Orthodox Christian religion. With the 1960 Constitution, the 3 minority religions of Latins, Armenias, and Maronite Catholics were recognized and supported in maintaining their own religious education (Emilianides,

2011). Certainly, the influence of the Church on the curriculum has decreased following the independence of the island. The Republic had followed international standards by providing secular education in all school subjects, with the exception of RE which remains dogmatic up to this date.

School in democratic societies takes the role of a socialization agent and the study of religion in schools is considered a subject in humanities (Emilianides, 2019). RE in Cyprus, follows the doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the institution of Church holds a strong political role since, the separation of Church and State is only superficial. (Zembylas, Loukaidis & Antoniou, 2019). RE in public educational institutions in the country of Cyprus (both primary and secondary education) is regulated under the same model, being: Confessional compulsory RE of the Helleno-Orthodox Church with the choice of exemption for students who adhere to other religions. The confessional RE model is defined as solely teaching the beliefs and doctrines of the particular dominant religion (Diez de Velasco, 2007).

In conflict affected societies education is a significant vehicle to legitimate a nation's position and is usually restricted to ethno-political lines (Davies, 2004). There is vast majority of literature (Zembylas, 2015, Loukaidis &Zembylas, 2017, Spyrou 2006, Papastephanou 2005) supporting that the school's curriculum, national rituals executed in schools as well as celebrations and symbols offer "exclusive narratives of ethno-religious identity … and fail to prepare young people for peaceful coexistence and reconciliation with the 'other' (Loukaidis & Zembylas, 2017, p.181). RE in Cyprus always had a political function providing narratives of ethno-religious identity (Loukaidis & Zembylas, 2017). Cypriot academics (Zembylas, 2015, Loukaidis &Zembylas, 2017, Emilianides, 2011) when examining the doctrine of RE have mainly focused on its failing capacity in promoting peace and reconciliation of the two respective communities in the Cypriot nation-state. Pring (in Jack-son, 2012) supports that schools should not aim at the homogenization of individual beliefs. Schools should constitute a safe place where all identities come together and connect by sharing their beliefs, personal and cultural values. In the multi-religious and heterogeneous society of Cyprus, it becomes important to examine the extent to which RE projected the relationship of religion and national identity, if it managed to reinforce the sense of national identity for former students and towards what values that identity was cultivated.

According to the Cypriot 1996 Curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the aim of education, amongst others, is for students to understand the apocalypse of God as a vital answer to human existence, to learn the fundamental truths of Christianity and the teachings of Jesus Christ as well as to promote the responsibilities of each citizen in the continuation of the Orthodox faith (Emilianides, 2019). The confessional/doctrinal character of RE is manifested not only from the curriculum provisions but also from the everyday religious practices during school, such as collective prayers every morning. Students from other religions are present in the classrooms during prayers but they choose to remain seated. The non-objective nature of RE and the overall structure of the educational system with its "everyday rituals" singles out and discriminates against students from other religions (Emilianides, 2019). Non-Christian Orthodox students get exempt from the

course and the principal of each school arranges for a supplementary subject to be taught while the rest of the class undertakes RE. Students from other religions abstain from receiving any kind of RE since they do not wish to be dogmatically taught the Christian Orthodox faith.

Castle (2009) argues for the importance of multicultural education in a period where there is population's movement all over the world, and its significance in a world where no nation has ever, or will ever, be completely culturally or religiously homogeneous. Cyprus forms a prominent example of a nation that has never been homogeneous, counting the multiple minorities that have lived in the island for hundreds of years. Currently, the four major minorities comprising the island's population include Turkish, Maronites, Armenians and Lat-ins. According to the National Statistics Agency of Cyprus, in 2011, 1 out of 11 citizens did not follow the recognized religion of the country (Istat "Population enumerated by religion, age, sex", 2011). In 2009, thirteen years after the 1996 RE curriculum reforms, a new syllabus was starting to be developed, following concerns about the doctrinal character of the then RE doctrine. The RE working group committee consisted of primary and secondary school teachers, inspectors specialised in RE, parent's committees, politicians, and social and religious organizations (Krasia, 2019). The reforms were completed in 2016, stating a new purpose for the new RE curriculum, a purpose to ensure that "the pupils to be taught about the Orthodox Church, the main world religions, and religious phenomena" (Krasia, 2019). Even the name of the subject was changed from "Christian Orthodox Education" to "Religious Education", showing a change in attitudes, yet only a symbolic one.

Krasia (2019), a teacher forming a member of the working group committee analysed in her PhD thesis the overall reform environment. She argued that in developing the new curriculum, prior instructions were given that *the new RE teaching should remain confessional* [emphasis added] with only minor additions of multicultural topics. No consideration was given to curriculum development theories, any academic and scientific references were excluded as well as any discussion on Human Rights principles. Even though the aim of the re-formed RE curriculum changed in text, the main aspect of teaching remained the same: the focus on Orthodox Christianity. According to the new syllabus, every lesson of RE should include and commence with a Christian-Orthodox theological text. Moreover, new textbooks were printed, yet the textbook's cover was still decorated with Christian icons, Saints and Churches. It is thus apparent that the RE syllabus remains confessional, implying that the Christian Orthodox religion is the normative religion that holds the only truth (Krasia, 2019).

Various case studies around the globe prove that RE carries a fundamental role in encountering religious and cultural diversity and identity formation. Thomas Kwan-choi Tse (2017) examined the tensions following the attempt to introduce "moral and nation education" in Hong-Kong as a form of patriotism. That meant that over half of the school's books were provided by religious bodies. He concluded that such education resulted in a very narrow understanding of Chinese identity that influenced students' perspectives on their identity. Tim McCowan (2016) reported the findings of an inter-faith programme in Melbourne, where students met with

students from other schools and religions and engaged in exploratory interfaith activities and discussions. The results pointed out that after the completion of the program students had their stereotypes dismantled and challenged the stereotypes held by others that did not participate in the program while they enjoyed learning more about other faiths. Similarly, in the research for the effects of 'Imam Hatip' schools in Turkey, which are schools that combine religious education with modern pedagogical and curriculum methods, the researchers concluded that such education helped in preventing the cultivation of "extremist" forms of Islam (Kaymakcan & Aşlamacı,2016).

The question of *"What is the role of Cypriotic RE in the formation of national identity?"* will be answered for the first time in an empirical context in Cyprus. Although inferring conclusions from literature can seem superficial in empirical studies, the consensus of previous literature on the strong link between religion and national identity in Cyprus, as well as on the subject of RE teaching, supports that the current doctrine of RE provides a framework for a strong realization of religion as conflating with students' sense of national identity. As shown in the historical chronology of national identity formation in Cyprus, religion was used as a vehicle to homogenize the Greek-Cypriot community and protect it from the threat of the enemy. The fact that Cyprus, although being a multireligious and non-homogeneous society, is still divided and "under threat" from the Turkish "enemy" can result in a cultivation of national identity through educational institutions that is still sceptical and cautious towards the acceptance of anything or anyone that does not belong in the majority religion or ethnicity.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

The present section draws on the theoretical framework of this thesis. Three distinctive concepts are analysed namely, ethnic and civic national identification, social identity complexity theory and secularization. The section concludes in Figure 1 below, where the linkages of all concepts are presented and interrelate. The aim of the theoretical framework is to provide a theoretical basis under which the above historical framework can be applied and present its influences.

3.1 Ethnic & Civic National Identification

In the individual level, identity is understood in three interactively complex dimensions; a biological one which is transmitted genetically, a cultural one which is socially transmitted and freedom which assures a person's influence over himself (Eriksen, 1995). In group level, social identities are relational, meaning that they are realised in relation to other identities. Satre (1943) suggests that there are two groups of relational social identities based on group belonginess; "us" which is the we as subject and "we" as object. Eriksen puts the same analogy of "we-hood" and "us-hood". In creating an ethnically shared identity, or a national identity this binary distinction is of vital importance. The degree of group identity cohesion is heavily dependent on institutional factors, or what is termed as identity politics. Institutional support, be it political, religious, or economic solidifies a sense of internal solidarity or cultural commonality (Eriksen, 1995).

The individual identification in a certain group becomes stronger if it is bound up in a shared sense of history including language, religion, traditions. When discussing national or religious identity in this thesis, it refers to a group identity gaining momentum by ideas of shared religion and shared nation. The link, therefore, between religious and national identity is that the fundamental ideas regarding the nation and the fundamental ideas relating to religion are interconnected to one another in supporting a particular group identity (Halikopoulou, 2009). Religion offers a framework through which the continuation and reproduction of national identity is based. Modern nationalist perspectives suggest that national identities are a modern phenomenon of the secularised world, yet they fail to acknowledge that any community identification, as ethno-symbolism suggests, is based on a previous form of connection of ethnic symbols, traditions, and ideas; thus, notions that pre-exist statehood (Smith, 2009). What is considered important in this thesis is how members of a common national identity perceive their identity either as the result of a modern construction of the nation or as a pre-existing shared bond realised and preserved by religion. Previous studies on Greek society have proved that not many Greeks accept their nation as a modern construction, therefore national identity and the nation take a prima role of pride in the country (Halikopoulou, 2009).

Smith (1991) and Zimmer (2003) draw the distinction between civic and ethnic national identities. Although it is not a clear-cut concept, the former gives emphasis on a legal political community, a civic culture and forms an inclusive community, whereas the latter emphasises on a pre-determined organic entity that carriers ascribed characteristics. In detail, Zimmer identified 3 main distinctions between the two dimensions of national

identity. The first describes the inclusive nature of a civic nation where being a member is characterised by a voluntary will, on a "daily plebiscite" (Renan in Hutchinson & Smith, 1994, p.17). On the contrary, the exclusive nature of an ethnic nation refers to attributes that cannot be chosen, they are ascribed, such as birth and ethnic descent (Halikopoulou, 2009). The second dichotomy where religion is of importance, refers to the culture-centredness of ethnic nations, that places emphasis on shared cultural bonds such as religion and ancestry. Whereas civic nations are characterised by state-centeredness and place emphasis on institutional and political structures.

The last dichotomy is strongly linked to the modern-nationalist and ethno-symbolism perspectives discussed above, since civic nationalism takes a modernist stance, concerned with a modernist conception of a nation being established as a political and cultural community. Ethno-symbolism refers to a community of identification that is based on ethnic connections such as traditions, religion, symbols that pre-existed statehood (Smith, 1991). In analogy, a realisation of one's ethnic national identity is a realisation of one's nation as an evolutionary development through history. When pre-statehood characteristics of national identity include religion, it is inevitable that in the nation-building process, a religious national identity will be reflected (Halikopoulou, 2009). A theoretical link is established between modern nationalism taking the form of civic national identity and ethno-symbolism supporting the ethnic national identity model.

Indeed, with the formation of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, the first president Archbishop Makarios remarked that "The agreements created a State but not a Nation", implying that nations are not mere political entities but rather primordial ones, fixed in history and identified through their culture, language, religion and so on (Kizilyurek, 2002). Drawing from this distinction, this research will try to assess how young adults in Cyprus perceive their national identity, under which characteristics they self-identify as Cypriots, Greek Cypriots, or other ethnicity, and if religion is perceived as a characteristic of national identification to understand if young adults show higher ethnic or civic national identity dimensions. Shulman (2004) suggests that civic nationalism is present when a person believes that what unites all or most members in a nation are features of common territory, common political principals, citizenship, representation by collective political institutions and a desire to be an active part of the nation. Ethnic nationalism suggest that what unites people in a nation are features of common ancestry, culture, religion, traditions, and race (Shulman, 2004). A person and a nation can exhibit both ethnic and civic elements, and the aggregated strengths of either can be combined in different ways.

Empirically, both dimensions of civic and ethnic attachment to the nation can be realised at the same time, they do not form two mutually exclusive concepts. National identity in Cyprus is better understood under the ethnic model, with the main focus of identity in Cyprus being the identification with the respective ethnic community of Greece in the form of "Greek Cypriotism" (Loizides, 2007). According to data gathered by the European Values Study in 2008 and as later analysed by Schnabel and Hjerm (2014), Cyprus scored relatively high regarding ethnic national identity in comparison with other EU member states, yet the civic dimension was

also present. This thesis will be confined to young adults and will assess both ethnic and civic dimensions to understand how younger generations perceive their affiliation to the Cypriot nation-state.

Undoubtedly, Cyprus exhibits some civic elements as a nation. The 1960 Constitution recognises Maronite Catholics, Armenian Orthodox and Latins as religious group minorities. Those religious groups are exempt from taxation except on commercial activities and are granted governmental subsidies for cultural and educational events. Moreover, the Constitution prohibits religious discrimination and specifies that all religions are equal before the law. It protects the right of changing one's religion and prohibits the use of force in preventing one's change of religion. The members of the Republic are all legal citizens and can define themselves in territorial terms. Yet, at instances inclusion and equal rights can be defined in religious or ethnic terms. According to the 2019 International Religious Freedom Report (US Office of International Religious Freedom, 2019), despite constitutional protections for minority religions, religious-based discrimination can be experienced in society and surprisingly in governmental practices as well. For example, incidents of denial to access places of worship for Muslims were reported, a school's headmaster instructed a student to leave school and return only after she removes her headscarf, Jewish representatives reported incidents of denial of exemptions for the requirement to stun animals before slaughter or denial to grant the Chief Rabbinate the right to officiate. Jehovah's witnesses were not allowed to bury their family in municipal cemeteries managed by Greek-Orthodox Churches, and some awards in schools can only be granted with the pre-condition that the student is a Christian-Orthodox, (US Office of International Religious Freedom, 2019). Accordingly, on the individual level and experience, religious identification can affect one's feelings of affiliation to society at large, and on a societal level religion stands as a system of shared beliefs that is furtherly inscribed into political/governmental institutions and can result in social inequalities (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014).

3.2. Social Identity Complexity

The theoretical concept of social identity complexity supports that an individual's degree of social identity complexity depends on "the degree of overlap perceived to exist between groups of which that person is simultaneously a member" (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). As analysed by Roccas and Brewer, when ingroup members of a group are defined by different dimensions of categorization that overlap only partially, those who are ingroup members of one dimension are in the same time outgroup members of another. Under these circumstances an individual constructs their subjective sense of social identity by trying to merge his relationship to various nonconvergent ingroup memberships (Goalwin, 2018). Thus, in understanding one's own social identity, one must recognize and interpret information about his ingroups. This cognitive process can lead to a realization of either low or high social identity complexity. Low complexity is understood as multiple identities "are subjectively embedded in a single ingroup representation" (Roccas & Brewer, 2002, p.93). High complexity "involves acknowledgment of differentiation and difference between ingroup categories" (Roccas & Brewer,

2002, p.93). If a person perceives the groups in which he belongs as having the same members, then the less is his degree of social identity complexity. For individuals with low levels of identity complexity, his ingroups must share all relevant characteristics of identity to be member of the ingroup, whereas for individuals with high levels of identity complexity, his ingroups are people who share any salient dimension of identity, not all characteristics have to be the same.

Previous research (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Goalwin, 2018) has shown that openness, tolerance for uncertainty and difference are strongly correlated with higher levels of complexity and an open, more loose idea of group memberships. People with high levels of complexity are more tolerant to differences and to members of the outgroup. In analogy, lower levels of complexity are correlated with little experience with diversity, fear, closure, and ingroup threat that results in the hardening of the boundaries of own's social ingroups (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Goalwin, 2018). Individuals with low degree of social complexity are more likely to show intolerant attitudes towards difference. Roccas and Brewer (2002) suggest that a major influence on the perceptions of social identity complexity is threat to one's social ingroup because it results in a more homogeneous perception of the ingroup and a stronger realisation of the difference between the outgroup. Therefore, ingroup threat affects the ways in which people of the ingroup view people who are believed to belong outside of the membership of that ingroup. Social structures that treat equally the members of ingroups and outgroups are considered to have high perceived group equality, whereas low perceived equality is related to different treatment towards ingroups and outgroups and a stronger realization of the outgroups' lower position in social structures (Roccas and Brewer, 2002).

Cyprus, being a conflict affected society has experienced major ingroup threats, the biggest being the nationalist politics of Turkey that resulted in the 1974 invasion. The historical framework offered a brief historical analysis to highlight the conditions that lead to low levels of social identity complexity for the Greek-Cypriot community, mainly influenced by external threats, religion, and the prominent role of the Church during and post the era of conflict. The historical explanation helps to understand the ways that members of the Greek-Cypriot community conceptualized their own individual and group identity under ethnic and religious terms. Ethnicity and religion were synonymous and for one to be a member of the Greek-Cypriot community, he should also be a member of the Helleno-Orthodox Church. The historical anadromy lead to a conclusion of characteristics that form low levels of social identity complexity, attributed to ingroup threat and the conflation of religion and national identity with Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots struggling to reconceptualize a collective identity.

Yet, national identities as a dimension of social identity, are always evolving and their change is influenced by multiple local and global factors. Change is a vital component for the continuation of national identities. To last and survive, they must change and adapt to new realities. The Cypriotic society is currently experiencing a deep cultural revolution and as Prof. O'Doherty (quoted in Halikopoulou, 2009) stated:

If there is one thing known with certainty [..] it is simply this: that a culture is something lived, not pickled; and life means change [..] I mean far reaching changes in the self-image of our people, the transition from a horizontally unstratified society to a highly stratified one, from a lived Christianity to a post-Christian society, the switch from national to international interest [..] from acceptance of traditional values and beliefs to their total rejection [..] and all this on one or two generations. (p.110).

National identities are challenged by modernisation, secularization, and globalization. The extent to which they can change and adapt is determined by internal and external factors, geopolitical and economic situations. Cyprus accession in the European Union in 2004, the rapid economic development of the island, the wave of immigrants and its commercial character as a major Mediterranean tourist hotspot, have brought many challenges to the conservationist conception of a conflating national and religious identity. This thesis is focused on how young adults who have not experienced the reality of external threat and the era where religious institutions functioned as official political structures but rather live the reality of globalization and modernisation, understand, and perceive this conflation of religious and national identity.

3.3 Secularization

Secularization is a pivotal element in examining the role of religion and its current conflation with national identity. Although very hard to define, secularization refers to "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the dominance of religious institutions and symbols (Hardiman & Whelan, 1998, p.70). Even though indicators of secularization can be elusive, Wilson (1982) suggests that secularization can be measured under 4 indicators. The indicators include the degree of church attendance, the rise in numbers of non-religiously affiliated members of society, the decline in religious professionals and lastly, but most importantly, tendencies that show the decline of the role of religion in the operation and organisation of civil and political life. The researcher conceptualised secularization in lines with Wilson's model, and furtherly operationalised it into interview questions on the level of individual religiousness of young adults, the degree of church attendance and the current perceived Church-state nexus, to assess the perceived degree of secularisation tendencies in Cyprus. The higher realisation of secularisation in society, the lower the realisation of religion as conflating with national identity.

3.4. Theoretical Framework Connections

Figure 1. below is created to show the connections between the three concepts mentioned in the theoretical framework. The ethnic and civic models of a nation function as concepts that influence the social identity complexity and perceived group equality of members of the nation, as well as secularization tendencies. Ethnic national identification is dependent on factors such as birth, ethnic descent, ancestry, and cultural factors as religion. If religion is considered by participants as a factor in national identification, then it leads to low social identity complexity, since for one to be a member of the nation he should automatically be a member of the dominant religion. If an ethnic nation has religion at the core, then it leads to low secularization tendencies

since religion can be a factor that influences social and political structures. In a civic model of fair political structures, where ethnic minority members of the nation can identify themselves as Cypriots under territorial terms rather than identifying with their respective ethnic background, social identity complexity is positively influenced. Moreover, for religious minority members of the civic nation, the perceived group equality is considered higher if they feel as equal members of society. In a civic model that is characterized by fair political and social structures, secularization tendencies are higher since such structures are independent from religious influences.

Figure 1.
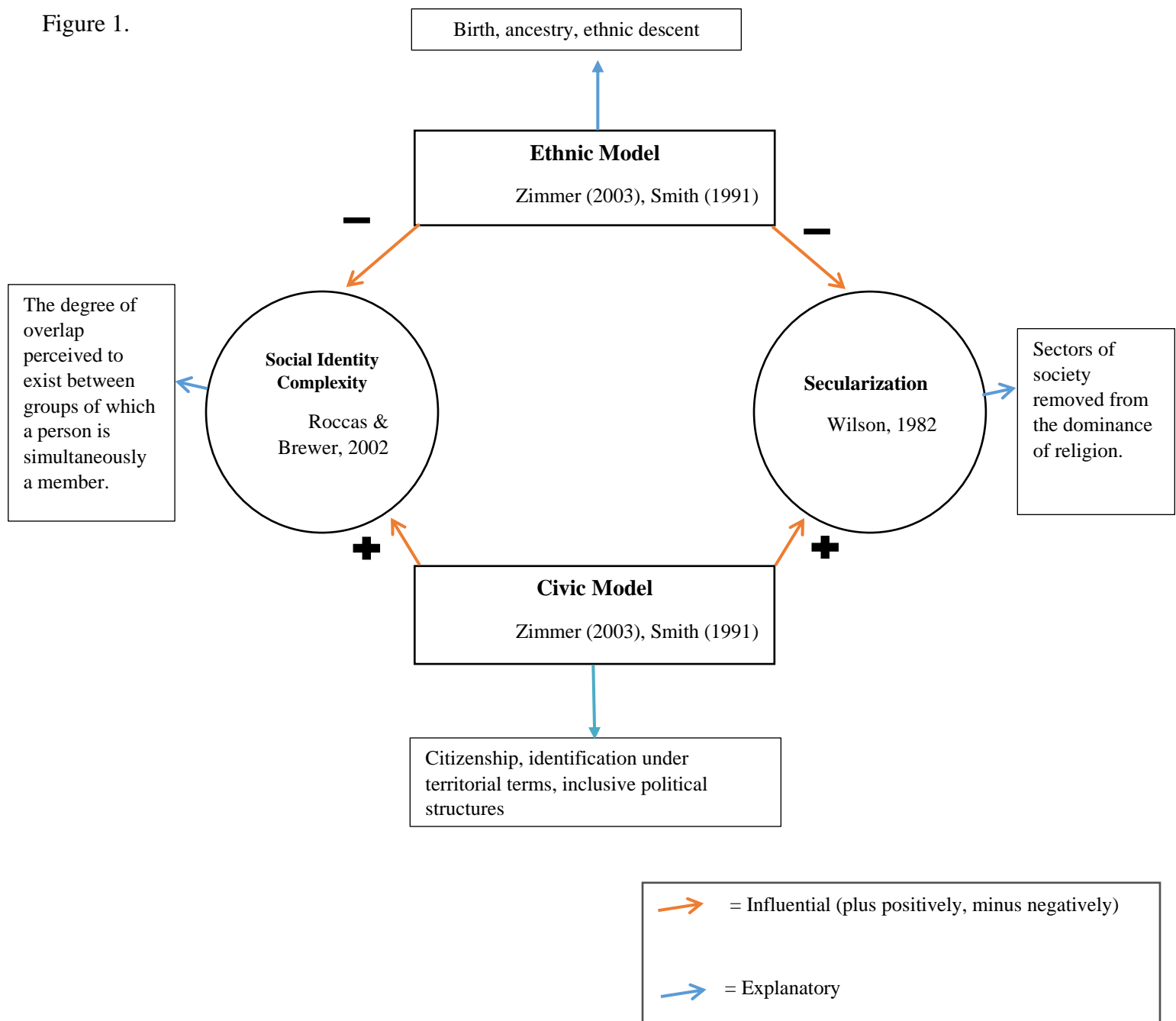
4.0 Methodology

The research questions of *"How do young adults in Cyprus link their religion to their sense of national identity"* and *"What is the role of Cypriotic RE in the formation of national identity"* are of qualitative nature and demand for an in-depth understanding and expression of the relationship of religion and national identity on the individual level. The present chapter will explain the chosen methodology of this thesis, by drawing on the research design, sampling procedure, operationalisation of the theoretical concepts shown in Figure 1. into interview questions, as well as the chosen methods of data analysis that was made according to the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework and shown in Figure 1.

4.1 Methods & Sampling Procedure

Both research questions are of qualitative nature since they demand for a constructionist, interpretative approach, that can explain phenomena from the interior (Lewis & McNaughton ,2013). The research study followed Coleman's methodological individualism method as a way of representing the micro-macro link of religion with national identity. For Coleman (1994), societal phenomena are explicable only in terms of individuals, on the micro level. While the explanandum must be on the macro level (in this case the link between religion and national identity in the country of Cyprus), the explanation itself must be given by the level of its individual components (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). Connor (2004) supports that "identity does not draw its sustenance from facts but from perception; not from chronological/factual history, but from sentient/felt history" (p.45).

Therefore, a highly structured method of approach was not of fit for the aim of this research. The questions were explored using in-depth semi-structured interviews with young adults, former students in secondary public education in Cyprus, aged 18-24 representatives of different religions and ethnicities. Semi-structured interviews are considered a blend of closed- and-open ended questions that are often followed by a why or a how. The conversation can easily meander around the pre-determined questions of the interview guide and delve in unforeseen issues (Adams, 2015). That was exactly the aim of the research, since by talking about national, ethnic, and religious issues each person has its own stories and personal experiences to share, all depended on his/her personal ascribed characteristics but also on the way he/she self-identifies and relates himself/herself to others. When it comes to the sub-question, as the link between religion and national identity is explained from individual affiliations, attitudes and experiences, conclusions can be drawn on the feedback effects on the institution of education, particularly RE.

In the sampling procedure, a criterion sampling method was employed for interviewing young adults in a comparative way setting out the following criteria:

1) Young adults who experienced higher secondary education in state schools in Cyprus
2) Young adults confined to 18-24 years old

3)   Young adults who are considered as ethnic majority and adhere to the majority religion and undertook RE (Greek Cypriots who are Christian Orthodox)

4)   Young adults who are considered as an ethnic minority but adhere to the majority religion and undertook RE (for example Russians, Georgians etc, who are Christian Orthodox)

5)   Young adults who are considered an ethnic majority but adhere to a minority religion and got exempt from RE (for example Greek Cypriots who are Jehovah's witnesses or atheists, etc.)

6)   Young adults who are considered an ethnic minority and adhere to other religions and got exempt from RE (for example Muslims, Protestants etc).

It must be noted that the terms minority/majority refer to a numeral characteristic, where majority accounts for more than half of the national society and minority less than half. Accordingly, during the interviews the terms majority and minority were defined in this theoretical way, yet the researcher made the distinction between theory and empirical, felt experiences that determine if one feels part of the majority or minority. This distinction proved important in understanding if a difference in religion or ethnicity are factors that disturb participants' membership in the Cypriot society. Criteria 3-6 of the sample classification are shown in Figure 2. Each criterion category is assigned a group number to avoid confusion.

 Figure 2.

Ethnic Majority - Religious Majority Group 1	• Participants whose both parents are Cypriots • Participants who adhere to the Christian Orthodox religion
Ethnic Majority – Religious Minority Group 2	• Participants whose both parents are Cypriots • Participants who adhere to other religions rather than Christian Orthodoxy
Ethnic Minority – Religious Majority Group 3	• Participants whose one or both parents are foreign • Participants who adhere to the Christian Orthodox religion
Ethnic Minority – Religious Minority Group 4	• Participants whose one or both parents are foreign • Participants who adhere to other religions rather than Christian Orthodoxy

Different religions transmit different ideas of truth and socialise their members accordingly so a nation can be formed. This nation due to its homogeneity becomes morally exclusive of non-religious members (Dingley, 2009). The above classification and distinction of ethnic and religious majority/minority could help the researcher to understand the felt indicators that determine one's national identity and if a difference in religion is a factor that refutes an individual's feeling of belonging in the Cypriot nation-state. When it comes to the research question of RE, the sample classification helped in evaluating the impact of RE in promoting a national identity that is inclusive or not to those who do not adhere to the dominant religion. It proved helpful in assessing the tie between faith and national belonging and in explaining the way in which RE serves or not the needs of a multireligious society. Therefore, the researcher attempted to understand how the doctrine of RE, as well as the various Orthodox rituals happening in schools, cultivated former students' beliefs of their nation and their sense of national identity, their degree of tolerance and receptivity from others has been affected. Moreover, different comparisons could be performed with the sample classification. For example, young adults who are part of ethnic minorities but adhere to the Christian Orthodox religion (Group 3) can have different views on national and religious identity conflation and on religious acceptance as a way of smoother integration in the Cypriot society than those who belong both in ethnic and religious minorities (Group 4).

The researcher's initial purpose was to interview students who are currently taking RE on higher secondary education, aged 15-18. Yet, after a thorough reconsideration of what the researcher wishes to achieve and what is the aim of the thesis, the current age group of 18-24 was selected. The reason being that first, young adults during this age have already formed their character and personality, thus are considered responsible members of society and can comprehend all layers of factors that contribute to their national identity fabrication. During this age, a young adult becomes politically curious and takes a critical stance towards "the given", and "the ascribed". The second reason for choosing this age group is ethical considerations that could significantly slow down the interviewing process. Students aging from 15-17 are considered minors under the eyes of the law, therefore a consent form from the parents and students was necessary, accompanied with a thorough explanation of the purpose of this thesis to parents in order to consent for their child to participate. Since the researcher decided to resort to the age group of 18-24, this study took a retrospective turn in answering the sub-question. Retrospective studies are mostly used in medical research and are frequently questioned for their reliability. However, as Bar-El et al. (2010) study on the evolutions of secularization suggests, there is no reason to assume that people have difficulty recalling their religious backgrounds and religious activities cannot be easily confused with other activities. When it comes to young adults that were exempt from RE, an almost daily practise that they had to go through in their 12 years of public education, it is also hard to assume that they have forgotten how they have experienced exemption or possible occasions of discrimination and indifference in the school community.

For the sampling procedure, the study also employed a snow-ball sampling technique for accessing the participants. Such a technique required participants to provide the researcher with the contact information of other participants. The process was repetitive until the re-quired target sample was met (Noy,2008). Snowball sampling is also suitable for accessing closed communities. People belonging in religious denominations rather than the recognised religion of Cyprus, are often known and in close contact to each other. Access to one of these communities was gained after the researcher was introduced to the first participant through a common friend. After commanding the first interview, trust was effortlessly established between the two and the interviewee was willing to introduce more people with his religious background because he felt that the study was a chance to hear their voices and views on religious and ethnic discrimination issues, as well as on the dogmatic teaching of RE. Moreover, the researcher resorted to the social media platforms of Facebook and Instagram that were proven particularly helpful in connecting with participants. After the researcher posted about the research in these platforms the response from participants of each group was immediate.

As per the research design, due to Covid-19 circumstances, face to face interviews were considered impossible. Consequently, the interviews were conducted through the online platform of Zoom. On the one hand, online interviews constitute a limitation, since face to face interviews allow for a more comprehensive understanding not only of spoken words but also of body language, which is important in illustrating the interviewer's ability to discern things such as irritation, puzzlement, or confusion (Bryman, 2012). Yet, the interviews were conducted with the help of audio and visual settings and body language was easily observable. The main limitation faced, and as Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) found, face to face inter-views tend to make participants talk longer, therefore at times the researcher felt as forcing the conversation or even interrupting it by giving vocalised responses to encourage the participants to elaborate (Irvine, Drew & Sainsbury, 2012).

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted, 5 in each category (see above criteria 3-6). The demographics of each participant are shown in Appendix 2. The interviews lasted 30 minutes the shortest and 80 minutes the longest, resulting approximately in a total of 13 hours. All interviews were recorded, transcribed in the original language, Greek, and then summarised and coded in English. Due to the fact that translating a text might result in a loss of meaning that is best understood and expressed in the original language, the interviews were not translated for the analysis of data but only for the purpose of quotation in this paper. The bilingual character of the research was overseen carefully. When transcribing, the language of the participants was not adjusted, nor paraphrased, to secure the validity of the findings (Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

4.2 Operationalization

The historical framework touched upon three concepts in the context of Cyprus: National identity formation, religious identity conflation with national identity and the confessional RE teaching in Cyprus 'public secondary schools. Moreover, the theoretical concepts of the distinction between civic and ethnic national

identity, social identity complexity and secularization were discussed in the theoretical framework. These concepts were later operationalised and converted into interview questions as shown in Appendix 1. The aim of the interviews was not to make the link of religion and national identity too direct by drawing on historical facts, but rather to see how interviewees empirically link the two. The operationalization procedure followed the connection of the theoretical concepts as shown in Figure 1. Therefore, with the interview questions the researcher tried to establish the elements relating to religion that contribute towards an ethnic or a civic understanding of the Cypriot nation-state.

The theory of social identity complexity is operationalised under 2 dimensions and draws influence from the previous research of Verkuyten and Martinovic (2012) on the intersection of ethnic and religious group identification for immigrants. First, to understand the degree of low or high identity complexity interviewees were asked if they believe that being a member of the Greek-Cypriot community one must adhere to the Christian Orthodox religion. The higher the extent that they hold this statement to be true, the lower the social identity complexity (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012). Moreover, for participants of ethnic minorities, social identity complexity was relevant in the way they self-identify as Cypriots, Greek Cypriots or with their respective ethnic background. Second, to assess the perceived group equality as a factor influencing the degree of social identity complexity, interviewees were asked first to define the groups in which they feel that they belong, if they feel part of the majority or the minority of the Cypriot society, and under which characteristics they realise their membership in either. Moreover, when it comes to the research question that focuses on RE, perceived group equality was assessed by questions on the experience of students in the school community and with the policy of exemption, to understand if people of their ethnic or religious group are treated equally with majority outgroups. National identity, as realised by individuals embraces emotional dimensions such as loyalty and commitment that are based on similarities. Interviewees were asked to define their national identity and under which characteristics they identify as Greek-Cypriots, Cypriots or another ethnicity. Therefore, perceived group equality can hinder the relationship between social identity complexity based on the factors of religion and ethnicity (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012).

The theoretical division between ethnic and civic national identity is linked to the above operationalisation on the concept of social identity complexity. As shown in Figure 1, when perceived group equality is high, the nation is more likely to show civic elements of inclusive social and political structures. Accordingly, when social complexity is high, an individual is more likely to show civic elements of national identification. Here, the sample classification that includes interviewees from religious minorities (Group 2, 4) was particularly helpful in determining the exclusive or inclusive character of the Cypriot nation-state, and if a difference in religion is a factor for the strong construction of ingroup and outgroup memberships. Religion's prominence in a nation and its inclusion as a factor of national identification is linked with the ethnic dimension. According to Smith (1991) and Zimmer (2003), ethnic national identification emphasises on a pre-determined

organic entity and is based on birth and ethnic descent, whereas civic national identification gives emphasis on institutional and political rights. To comprehend the division of ethnic/civic, interviewees were asked what is meant to be a Greek Cypriot, Cypriot, or other ethnicity (depends on how they self-identify), where their perception as being either is based, and if religion is perceived as a characteristic of national identification. The answers were later coded based on Zimmer's (2003) three main dichotomies model of the ethnic/civic division. When it comes to perception of the nation under ethno-symbolism or as a modern conception of the nation, interviews were asked what they believe is the role of religion for their nation, and how it is linked to the Cypriot culture. For example, by drawing on religion as a factor that distinguished their community and supported the nation-building process of the Republic of Cyprus the ethno-symbolism perspective is shown.

Secularization tendencies based on the role and power of religion in the current social affairs of Cyprus was operationalised under the perceived institutional cooperation between state and religion, giving emphasis on the institution of Church. Interviewees were asked about their feelings on the institution of Church and what is its role in the current social/ political affairs. Here the researcher could understand the perceived degree of governmental secularization, since the closer the state-religion relationship the less the degree of secularization (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). Moreover, the perceived degree of secularization was operationalised following Wilson's indicator model (1982), based on the levels of fulfilment of religious duties from young adults, the intensity of their individual religiousness (if there are interviewees that are non-religiously affiliated) and the aforesaid indicator of the role of Church in political and social life. For people of religious minorities, the freedom to express their religion and the existence of an organized religious community are considered factors of secularization. Moreover, such indicators are also considered elements of a civic nation that has inclusive political and social structures. In this way, and as shown in Figure 1, high secularization tendencies are linked with the civic model of the nation.

When it comes to the second research question of RE, RE teaching was operationalised with different questions for former students who undertook RE and those that got exempt for obvious reasons. It is important to treat religion as a phenomenon that goes beyond individual religiosity especially when the sense of social inclusion in the civil society is in focus. The researcher considered the membership in the school community for interviewees that got exempt as a factor that can influence their feelings of affiliation to the Cypriot society, based on their positive or negative experiences. Social complexity theory was of relevance here, since by being an ingroup in the school community but also an outgroup in RE teaching, participants' sense of social identity complexity could be influenced. By being an outgroup member, you are automatically treated differently. Here the interviewees were asked about their experience with exemption and how they were being approached by peers and the educational system in general. For those who belonged in the majority religion and undertook RE, questions about the content and structure were asked, followed by a question on why they believe that RE is the

only non-secularized subject currently in schools. Their answers could hinder an understanding of the politics behind RE teaching based on the projection of the link between religion and the nation.

4.3. Data Analysis & Ethical Considerations

      In terms of data analysis, the research question required a contextual analysis of the data to comprehend the ways in which the participants understood the relationship of their national and religious identity. A grounded theory approach was employed in both collecting and analysing the data. Data coding and analysis was done with the help of Atlas.ti software. The iterative process of grounded theory provided for the collection and analysis of data to be made simultaneously. The work of Strauss and Glaser (1968) as noted in Bryman (2012) indicates the original guidelines under which the developed theory should be able to predict, explain, and provide a perspective on behaviour and effect, which is the aim of this study. Accordingly, axial coding was based on the operationalization of theoretical concepts by relating data to one another and constructing code linkages. Comparing, constructing, and noting down exceptional cases were some of the analytical strategies used. Within the results the researcher has divided and made explicit the answers of interviewees who belong to the majority religion and those who do not, since their experiences and understandings vary to a great extent. Furthermore, in securing the validity of the theory generated, any interpretation of the data was according to the perspectives and voices of the young adults heard (Bryman, 2012). Yet, any generalisation regarding the current relationship of religion and national identity as well as on the effect of RE remained confined to the time, setting, amount and ethnic and religious background of the participants interviewed.

      In unfolding views on the research question on RE, the use of narrative analysis was employed for data collection and analysis. Narrative analysis is relevant where there is potential to inform positive changes to practice, policy, education, and theory. In this way, possible recommendations for change of the RE doctrine can be introduced based on life experiences of former students that were influenced by the current doctrine (Sharp, Bye & Cusick, 2019). Allen (2007) exemplifies 4 narrative analytic techniques. One of them is thematic narrative analytics, which was employed in the thesis. Thematic analytics refer to the analysis of the content of a story, a memory, that can help the researcher to determine the moments of a personal experience that are noteworthy and meaningful. From there, the researcher was able to develop themes from the content of the narratives on RE teaching or exemption and compare the personal stories of the interviewees to find similarities or differences.

      The participants at the beginning of each interview were given full details on the scope of this research, they were informed that the conversation will be recorded and asked to sign a consent form which ensures their anonymity and protection of personal data. Religion and nationality/ethnicity are delicate matters. Discussions on either can result in a conversation of a political note. For an interviewee to feel free to express his critical thoughts, trust must be established between the researcher and the interviewee. The interviewees were not asked

if they wish to remain anonymous or not instead, anonymity was pre-determined by choice of the researcher. By ensuring the participant's anonymity, the likelihood that the participants would provide more candid information increased, thus the interviewees are described as Anon(x) in the following section (Bryman, 2012). Ethical considerations included the non-identification of communities that might be vulnerable, such as ethnic or religious minorities, and the maintenance of confidentiality and privacy of the data collected (Loue, 2017). The researcher ensured the participants that no harm will be done to their communities and that they should utilize the research as a stand for their voices to be heard.

5.0 Results

Participants interviewed showed diverse levels of awareness on the historical and current role of religion for their nation. They showed both ethnic and civic national identity dimensions in their answers and they either understood the construction of the Cypriot nation-state as a process where religion was used as a political imperative for division, or religion as an intrinsic characteristic of the Cypriot culture. The categorization of the data resulted in 6 categories and 4 subcategories. The categories are shaped in line with the theoretical concepts presented in Figure 1. The concepts of ethnic and civic national identification, as well as the ethnic and civic elements of the nation as expressed by participants, form categories *1 – 3*. The first category is based on the theoretical concept of ethnic and civic national identification and shows that both dimensions are present, but heavily dependent on the ethnic and religious ascribed characteristics of participants. Category *2* is connected to the ethnic element of the Cyprus nation-state that places religion as a component of culture-centeredness. Category *3* discusses how participants perceive the current model of RE that projects the link between the Christian Orthodox religion and the Cypriot nation-state, with participants referring to factors as misinformation on other religions, the reminder of external threat during RE and confessional teaching. Category *3* is also considered as an element of ethnic nations that try to uphold their distinctive cultural components, in this case religion, as a vital ingredient for the nation through educational institutions.

The fourth category offers an analysis on secularization tendencies in Cyprus, followed by two subcategories on the level of individual religiousness of participants which shows high secularization tendencies (4.1) and the strong Church-State nexus which negatively affects secularization tendencies (4.2). The category and sub-categories on secularization suggest that the strong Church-state nexus had a negative influence on the level of individual religiosity of participants. The fifth category touches on the concept of social identity complexity and suggests that participants do not believe that by being a Greek-Cypriot or Cypriot one must be a Christian Orthodox. The following subcategories relating to social identity complexity refer to the school community as a constructor of religious ingroup and outgroup memberships (5.1), as well as on the policy of exemption as a factor of low perceived group equality in the school community (5.2). The sixth category offers a description on the desired model of multifaith RE as provided both by religious ingroup and outgroup members. According to participants, multifaith RE can be the stimulus in growing tolerant attitudes towards religious outgroups. Yet, participants argued that in the current social and political affairs in Cyprus such a model will bring opposing reactions from Church, governmental officials, and the highly religious members of society. At last, the findings support that the Christian-Orthodox religion was and will always be an intrinsic part of the Cypriot culture, but it is no longer connected with nationalistic practices and does not constitute a major part in national self-identification as it used to. Yet, a difference in religion is still a factor that can disturb feelings of affiliation to the Cypriot society.

Figure 1 illustrated the connection between the theoretical concepts and was utilized for the operationalization of concepts as well as for data analysis. Figure 3 below, presents the updated version of Figure 1., enriched with the criteria that influence each concept and form the results' categories. Since the results suggest that both ethnic and civic national identification is present in participants, as well as both ethnic and civic elements in the Cypriot nation-state, in Figure 3. a third model is added, one that combines both dimensions. The results suggest that both ethnic and civic dimensions combined have a negative impact on secularization tendencies, because the ethnic elements of the Cypriot-nation state prevail its civic elements. Moreover, the results suggest that in an ethnic/civic model, social identity complexity is higher for participants because they can identify under both dimensions. Yet, perceived group equality remains low since the ethnic elements of religious culture-centeredness, the strong state-religion relationship, and the dogmatic model of RE, contribute to religious minorities being treated differently.

Figure 3.
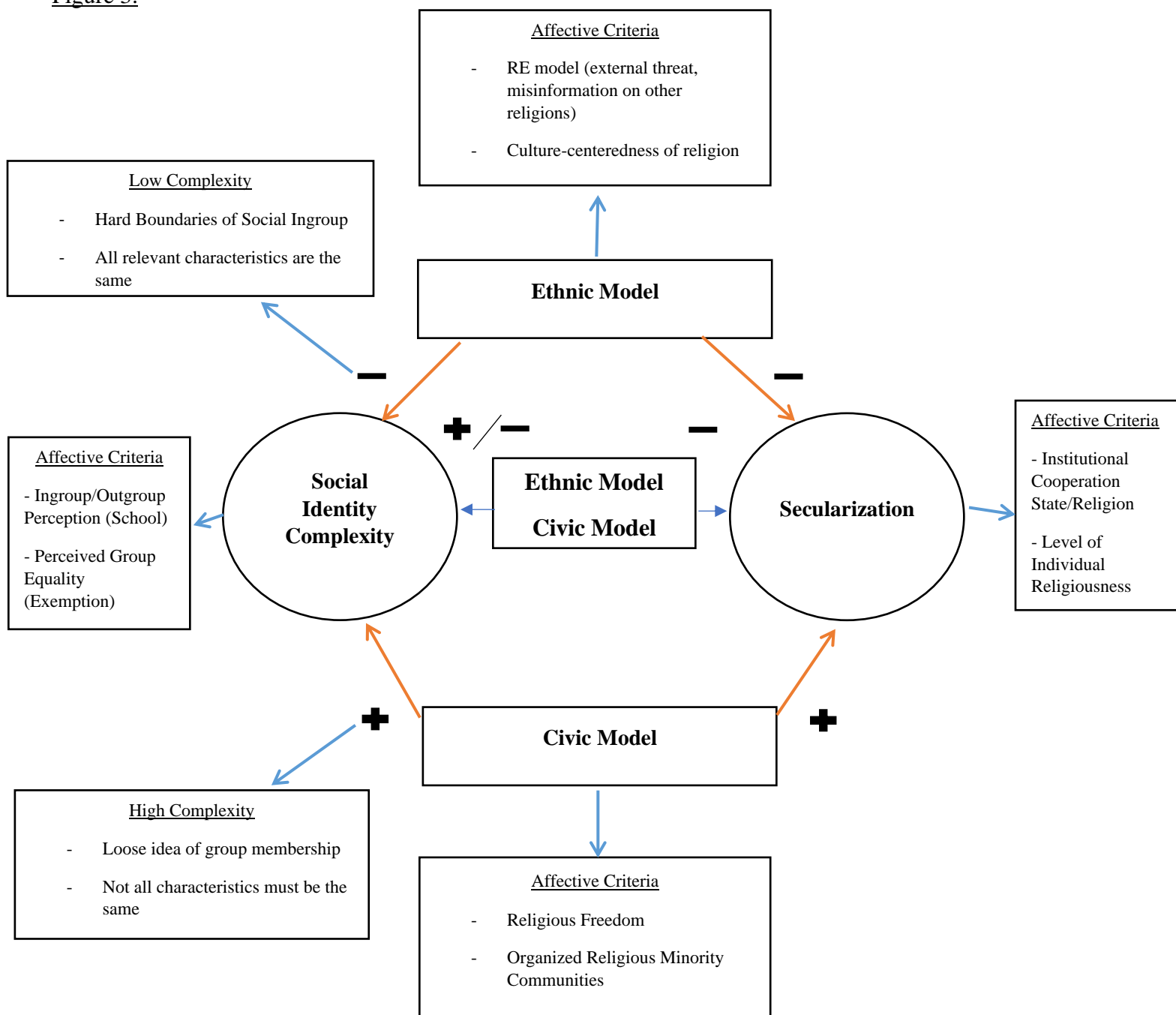
5.1 Ethnic and Civic National Identification

The graph of the sample classification is provided in Figure 2. The ascribed characteristics of ethnicity and religious background of participants were important in their national identification under ethnic or civic terms. The results support the proposition that in a country both ethnic and civic elements are present (Schnabel and Hjerm (2014) and are translated in the way that a person self-identifies but also heavily dependent on his ascribed characteristics, whether he/she belongs in ethnic and/or religious minorities.

According to the sample classification, 10 out of 20 interviewees were part of ethnic minorities (Group 3, 4). Ethnic minorities were considered as participants whose both parents are foreign, or participants whose one parent is foreign. What has stood out as a quantitative indicator, is that out of the 10 only 1 termed himself/herself as a Greek Cypriot, whereas others were self-defined as Cypriots (6), foreign (1), or mixed (2). The fact that they have excluded the Greek ethnic dimension in their national identification, shows a civic national identity dimension since by being of ethnic minorities they do not draw on the ethnic-cultural dimension of Greek-Cypriotism but define themselves under territorial terms. When considering Zimmer's distinction of ethnic and civic national identification, the civic model does not draw on historical factors that pre-existed statehood but is rather focused on national political and civil structures. Ethnic minority participants who defined themselves as Cypriots (6) and not with their respective ethnic backgrounds showed their affiliation to the Cypriot nation-state as the country where they belong and feel included.

When asked what characteristics make them feel Cypriots the answers revolved around the fact that they were born and raised in the country, they have Cypriot citizenship, that the way they behave has a lot of Cypriotic characteristics, that they speak the Greek language, they have pride in the Cypriot nation-state, and they are willing to fight for the country they were raised in. There was no mention of religion from Christian-Orthodox participants of ethnic minorities (Group 3) as a characteristic that contributes to their identification as Cypriots. Moreover, participants from ethnic and religious minorities (Group 4) did not refer to religion as an obstacle in their national identification as Cypriots or a characteristic that disturbs feelings of affiliation to the Cypriot nation-state. Anon17 made a reference on his religious philosophy when asked why he feels Cypriot and expressed his pride as a Cypriot under the following statement:

"I can define it under religious terms. Your homeland is the place where you were born and raised. I am a first generation Cypriot and if I go back to my parents' homeland I will be (name) the Cypriot. This does not exclude the fact that my roots come from there, but in many instances because I am also involved in politics, someone can say something negative about Cyprus and I cannot get over that, it bothers me, I feel personally attacked. I belong to this country, that is why it bothers me [..] As Cypriots we should start accepting that anyone can define himself the way he wishes!"

Participants whose both parents are Cypriots but belong in religious minorities (Group 2), all (5) identified as Cypriots and none as Greek Cypriot, possibly showing that they comprehend the ethnic national identification dimension of the Greek-Cypriot community with a connection to the Christian-Orthodox religion. As Zimmer (2003), Smith (2001) and Shulman (2004) suggested, religion as a national characteristic is an aspect of ethnic national identification. In contrast, participants that belonged both in ethnic and religious majority (Group 1), all except 1, identified as Greek-Cypriots. These phenomena suggest that the ethnic national identity dimension is present in people who adhere to the Christian Orthodox religion but not to participants of religious minorities who are still of Greek-Cypriot ancestry. However, participants that identify under ethnic terms did not refer to religion as a component of their national identification. Instead, historical factors were discussed to show the relationship with the ethnic motherland Greece, by arguing that the first inhabitants of the island were Greeks (ancestry), that in Cyprus the Greek language is spoken (culture) and the Cypriot national anthem is the same as the Greek national anthem (ethnic symbols). Therefore, ethnic national identification for young adults does not draw on religious considerations but rather on ancestral and cultural aspects.

Minorities in Cyprus relate themselves to the civic dimension of national identity, whereas those of both ethnic and religious majority expressed the ethnic dimension by identifying as Greek-Cypriots. Their answers suggest that those who are not Christian Orthodox do not recognise the ethnic element in their national identification. The ethnic dimension in Cyprus is historically related to the motherland Greece, and ethnic/religious majority participants included this dimension on the way they self-identify. The fact that only 1 participant that belonged in ethnic and/or religious minority self-identified as Greek-Cypriot further supports that for minorities the civic dimension is of relevance in their self-identification because they identified themselves only under territorial and citizenship terms. Civic national identity is related to a feeling of inclusion in civil life and to a country that is receptive and treats equally the minorities that exist in its society. The majority of participants of ethnic minorities (6 out of 10) identified as Cypriots and only 1 according to his ethnic background. Moreover, the fact that in theory those participants identified themselves as minorities but empirically felt as part of the majority were positive indicators of their affiliation with the Cypriot nation-state.

The following categories present elements of the Republic of Cyprus that led to either an ethnic realization of the nation or a civic realization. Elements that refer to a civic realization are provided by participants of ethnic and/or religious minorities, whereas elements that refer to the ethnic dimension are provided by participants of ethnic and/or religious majority. According to the participants and in line with Zimmer's model (2003), when it comes to the ethnic elements of the Republic of Cyprus that relate to religion, participants referred to considerations such as the strong Church-State nexus that led to religion being a prominent component of culture-centredness, the confessional character of RE and the reminder of external threat during RE. These factors exhibited how religion fosters an exclusive character of the Cypriot society and of educational institutions towards religious minorities. In contrast, civic elements of the Republic of Cyprus

included considerations such as religious freedom and the existence of organised religious minority communities.

5.2. Culture-centredness of Religion

The present category helps to highlight the strong societal role of religion and its projection as a component of national identification that influences the way young adults experience the link between the two. As the nation-building process of the Cypriot nation-state was based on a religious distinction between Christian Orthodox and Muslims, current religious institutions, educational structures, and the highly religious members of society try to uphold this distinction. Participants realize this attempt, and the stronghold of religious institutions in the country as well as their intrusion on social/political affairs, and this is where they attribute their personal alienation from the Christian-Orthodox religion and from the institution of Church. The role of religion for the Christian Orthodox participants has to do with the way they have grown up and nurtured, on the cultural element of religion rather on their personal religiosity level. They understand that religion will always be an intrinsic part of the Greek-Cypriot culture but is no longer connected with nationalistic practises and does not constitute a major characteristic in national self-identification as it used to, even if political and educational institutional structures try to promote the opposite.

Therefore, even if religion used to be a factor in national self-identification this is no longer the case. The balance has shifted from older generations, which according to interviewees are what keeps religion alive in the country, to younger generations that see religion as a vehicle for political division. Moreover, participants mentioned that the idea of religion as a factor in national self-identification is outdated and can result in a very narrow construction of the self that is not tolerant towards others. As Anon16 supported:

"If a kid grows up with the idea that the Christian Orthodox religion is the only religion to exist or the only true religion, this will affect the way that he thinks. Let me tell you a personal example. My ex did not care that I was Muslim, yet his/her parents were opposed to our relationship because of my religion. Yes, we parted after that. Imagine if kids in this country continue to grow up with these ideas in mind. We live in 2021, you take a plane, and it costs cheaper than a bus trip to Nicosia (capital of Cyprus). If we stay close minded, nothing will change, we will stay racists, we will fall behind."

Religion stands on the podium in the Cypriot society, whether you are truly religious or not, it is an intrinsic part of culture. If one does not follow the majority religion, and by one the researcher refers to those you are of Greek-Cypriot ancestry, he/she is automatically termed as a non-deserving member of society. Even Cypriot citizens who are not truly religious can have hostile reactions towards those who used to or could be ingroup members and choose another religion. Religion becomes a social label of a "correct citizen" and if one does not follow it, he/she is automatically seen differently. Anon12, who used to belong in the Christian-Orthodox religion but deliberately choose to stray away and become a Jehovah's Witness offered some

disturbing examples of the way she was treated by her family, her closest friends, and peers, who as she argued they were not even religious.

"I had many job rejections because I am a Jehovah's Witness. How can I explain this? [..] it is not that my religion can in any way affect my job, but when you go somewhere you feel obliged to disclose that you are a Witness, because if they find out later, they can kick you out. I have been through these things (..) if you are a Witness, you are automatically termed as something bad."

Schnabel & Hjerm (2014) had characterised civil societies as providers of conditions for civic engagement and the social space to organize the interests of citizens. However, such societies are still shaped by cleavages, political inequalities, and differences in the access to resources and social positions. Such differences in the Cypriot society are still (in instances) shaped between "us" and "them" under religious boundaries. Zimmer's (1998) second dichotomy of ethnic and civic national identities refers to the culture-centredness of ethnic nations that place emphasis on shared cultural bonds such as religion. When a person is automatically excluded from a job opportunity or feeling forced to disclose his/her religious background beforehand, it shows how the Cypriot society is not completely cultivated into inclusive institutional structures but rather exhibits ethnocentric elements based on religious discrimination. The historical supportive relationship between state and religion in Cyprus has resulted in religion being an internal component of the self-understanding of the ethnic nation that gives different chances of civil participation and in being an active community member.

5.3 Current RE model

The current category touches upon the current model of RE as a component that predicts an ethnic understanding of the nation through the projection of the link between religion and national identification. Results draw on whether RE had an impact on the sense of national identity for former students and towards what values that identity was cultivated. This section will distinguish between former students that undertook RE and those who got exempt. Out of the Christian-Orthodox participants (Group 1, 3), 1 refused to take RE in his/her second year of higher secondary school because he/she was antithetical to the way the lesson was taught. He/she described his/her experience on both RE learning and being exempt, therefore he/she is included in both categories. Out of the 10 participants of religious minorities (Group 2, 4), 5 deliberately choose to undertake RE in higher-secondary school even if it was not based on their religion, because by learning the dominant religion they could better understand the Cypriot culture. Another reason was that they believed that learning other religions despite their own could broaden their horizons. Therefore, out of the 20 participants 15 undertook the lesson at a point in their life, and 6 experienced the process of exemption at a point in their life.

Previous literature suggested that the RE curriculum offers exclusive narratives of ethno-religious identity and does not prepare young people for a peaceful coexistence with the 'other' (Loukaidis & Zembylas, 2017). The results of this research support this proposition but argue that former students even if taught

dogmatically on their own religion and did not learn how to respect other religions during RE, have still expressed liberal and tolerant attitudes to the researcher, showing that RE's effect was not influential for young adults. All participants viewed RE as an indifferent, boring lesson where no one, even the teacher, pays actual attention. They think it is useless to be dogmatically taught on a religion that you already follow, since it does not offer any general, academic knowledge about society at large. RE was termed as a one-sided lesson, an absolute lesson, that destroys students when it comes to religions. It fails to teach how to respect all communities and other religious minorities. Anon6 made a very interesting statement on the dogmatic nature of the lesson:

"It is the same as doing art but being taught how to draw only with the red colour".

They all recalled the content as the history and ethics of Christianity, that does not even help in reinforcing the faith of students in their religion and fails to provide existential answers. Participants recalled the age of 15-18 as a life phase where they got curious about their existence and looked for answers. The fact that such answers could not be given during RE is a fact that frustrated them, so they ended up not paying attention during classes. Anon2 argued that:

(The lesson) "Should be more specific on the reasons we believe. Not just learning the history of Christianity. The lesson should prove that what we believe in is the right thing to believe."

All participants remembered that they had been briefly taught on other religions but only in comparison with Christianity. The majority of participants when asked on what religions they have been taught mentioned only Islam, some Buddhism and others said that they do not remember since it was only a brief mention. Anon9 stated that he/she recalled "we did something on Islam, and about yoga .. that is not a good thing to do". Here, the opinions of former students of religious minorities who undertook RE were particularly important since they argued that misinformation was provided on their religion in multiple instances. Muslim participants suggested that during RE there were always "special" mentions of Islam, as the negative "other". Anon16 stated that:

"I remember that they always mentioned the Turks for some reason, or Islam, in a very negative manner. They were giving very untrue examples, not based anywhere. For example, that a Muslim who dies goes to heaven and he will have 7 wives there, that he will go kill himself in order to go to heaven, or that Muslims change someone's religion under the threat of a sword."

When looking back participants understand education's politicization effect with the constant realisation of external threat (the Turks) during history, literature or RE. The link of religion as a protector of the nation was constantly projected during these subjects. Anon16 referred to instances where his classmates thought he was a Turk because he told them he is Muslim.

"I remember on the school notebooks the saying "I do not forget" with a picture of Kyrenia (Turkish occupied city) on the side. A kid will instantly think that a Turk is the enemy. And then everyone who was different, the kid thought he is a Turk, thus he is bad. For example, do not be friends with him, he doesn't speak your language, he has a different name and religion [..] they singled out students in school".

Diez (2007) argued that education is strongly linked with identity and is a key source and homogenizer of ideological cultural and national beliefs. The results suggest that the communication and receiving of culture in schools does not function under complete impartial structures but is still influenced by political imperatives. In these political imperatives the indirect projection of the Christian-Orthodox religion is included. Religion on the societal level of education projects feelings of national identity, first by the reminder of external threat which reinforces nationalistic feelings, and second as a way to keep the current students, future adults, an exclusive Christian Orthodox homogeneous entity.

When interviewees were asked why they believe that RE is the only non-secular subject currently in schools the conversation, as expected, took a political turn, connecting it to the discussions made on the influence of Church in education. The politics that underlie the educational system were profoundly understood on the subject of RE. Some participants argued that at the time of teaching they did not comprehend all the layers that influence education, but now that they look back, they can point out such issues, validating the choice of the researcher in resorting to the age 18-24 for participants. For participants, RE is serving as a way to stay close to Church by fostering favourable attitudes towards the Christian Orthodox ingroup and unfavourable attitudes towards religious outgroups. Participants argued that RE teaching projects the relationship of religion and national identity by promoting that a correct Cypriot citizen is the one that belongs to the Christian-Orthodox religion, whoever is an Orthodox is a friend, and those who are not are enemies. A participant (Anon20) explicitly stated the word "nationalism" as the political interest that RE is serving. Anon1 who forms part of the religious and ethnic majority expressed the thought that RE is a means to keep the population under a united entity but also a way to keep religious minorities isolated. He/she stated:

"The truth is [..] I believe that RE causes the opposite of what it should. It can keep me and you united, that we are Christians and Cypriots, but me and a Muslim [..] no, it does not teach me how to keep us united. And I believe that the true meaning of religions is that we are humans, equal, and we should not single out anyone for whatever reason. Thus, RE teaching does not keep us united in any way [..] You know, it is much easier to control a society that is politically divided, than a society that exists in harmony".

The critical statements made towards the doctrinal character of RE were many and all participants of the ethnic and religious majority (Group 1) (except Anon2, who believed that RE teaching should only serve the majority and help in the continuation of the Greek-Cypriot traditions and culture) realized the projection of the Christian Orthodox religion as a component of their national identity during RE classes and its ethnocentric character. The national component of RE was understood as an attempt for religious homogenization, based on the adverse examples and misinformation on other religions, the reminder of external threat, as well as the discussion of social issues under religious norms.

<u>5.4 Secularization</u>

Wilson's (1982) secularization model distinguished 4 indicators of secularization tendencies. The indicators include the degree of church attendance, the rise in numbers of non-religiously affiliated members of society, the decline in religious professionals and lastly, tendencies that show the decline of the role of religion in the operation and organisation of civil and political life. The results will touch upon the level of individual religiosity of participants as an indicator of high secularization tendencies and on indicators that show the hesitant decline of the role of religion in the operation and organisation of civil and political life as an indicator of low secularization tendencies. The level of individual religiosity of participants is termed as low, since although participants defined the religious community that they belong, 6 of them argued that they are currently atheists, or follow scepticism. For the ones that have faith in their religion, they argued that they do not fulfil their religious duties as often, such as praying or Church attending. The strong Church-state nexus present in the country of Cyprus is seen as a factor that negatively influences the religiosity level of participants.

<u>5.4.1 Individual religiousness</u>

The results support the suggestion that there is a difference between religion on the individual level and religion as a shared belief system that is inscribed into cultural frameworks, institutions, and civil life (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). Participants argue that religion is an intrinsic part of the Cypriot culture and an intrinsic part of growing up. Yet, almost all participants (except 2, Anon 2 & 3), stated that even if they were nurtured in learning how to fulfil their religious duties, such as prayers, Church going, and confessions to priests, as young adults they do not fulfil their religious duties as often. In fact, the only occasion for Church going is during religious holidays such as Easter and Christmas. Participants who belong in the majority religion, of either ethnic minorities or the ethnic majority, showed that their religiosity level is quite low, especially when compared to older generations. The answer to the question of "Do you follow any religion", on multiple occasions was "I am supposed to be a Christian Orthodox". As Anon6 stated:

"No one wants to be a dark spot on a white paper. Even from our families, but this has to do only with the image, we are not true Christians. You want to belong somewhere, because nationally you are classified in a religion, your race is classified under that religion".

The generation gap between older generations (parents, grandparents) and the generation of the participants was highlighted constantly. For all participants, it is the older generations that keep the institution of religion alive. For those that felt the rigour of the war, the intercommunal conflicts with Muslim-Turkish Cypriots and experienced external threat have tightened up to religion as a way to realise their membership in the Greek-Cypriot community. Their daily life was based on religion, Sundays were for Church going and family gatherings afterwards. This strong in-group construction is comprehended by participants, who feel members of the in-group but have been ascribed this membership without questioning. Participants find it particularly hard to

engage in religious conversations with their families and older members of society and show more liberal attitudes towards religious pluralism. As Wilson's (1982) model suggests, the rise in numbers of non-religiously affiliated members of society, as well as the low degree of church attendance for young adults, are indicators of high secularization tendencies in the Cypriot society and an indicator for a future shift of the strong societal role of religion in the country.

5.4.2 Institutional Cooperation of State-Religion / Church-State Nexus

Participants argued for a strong Church-State nexus currently present in Cyprus that negatively influences secularization tendencies. The powerful relationship between state and Church is seen as an element of ethnic nations (Zimmer, 2003) that try to uphold the recognised religion's supremacy in the current social and political affairs. Participants were asked their opinion about the stronghold of religious carriers or institutions in the country. The first religious institution discussed was the institution of the Cyprus Church. Participants of religious minorities were also keen in discussing the role of the Cyprus Church in the current social/political affairs, since they are informed members of society and have participated in many discussions on the role of the Church with their Christian Orthodox friends. Moreover, for participants of religious minorities, the answer of their "Church" as a religious carrier was also mentioned in all interviews, showing a dimension of a civic nation where religious minorities are free in worshiping their religion and form organised communities that have access to spaces of worship.

The first observation that was common amongst all participants is Church's influence on social matters. The influence was attributed to the fact that the Church itself realises its descending role in the Cypriot society, and that becomes a stimulus for "trying harder to establish its presence" (Anon1). Participants realize the political effort in increasing the level of secularization in the nation, and Church's standing as a disruptor in secularization efforts. They argued that the Cypriot governmental state is not one of a religious regimes. However, depending on the power of the Church during the island's history as well as in the nation-building process, the Church's status remains sacred for a considerable percentage of the population. With the Church's freedom to publicly express its opinions on social matters, a religious philosophy is shaped around controversial social issues for the highly religious people. As Anon7 argued:

"For example, now with the huge controversy going around abortions, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, divorce [..] religion and the Church have a massive impact in shaping opinions".

Those issues carry a political note as well as a social one. Amongst the participants, there was absolute consensus on the political involvement of the Church in areas that are not under the Church's territory. Although in theory there is absolute separation of Church and State in the Constitution, the head of the Church, the Archbishop, is more often seen as a religious figure with political standing. As participants argued, if the head of Church has such political involvement, then the whole status of the Church is seen as such. The researcher

noticed that the discussion with Christian Orthodox participants on their perception on the institution of Church was way more critical and took a political character, than with non-Christian Orthodox participants. Those of religious minorities were hesitant at first to express their thoughts on the institution of the Church of Cyprus, because they feared that they could be seen as biased, or harsh against the majority religion of the country. Christian Orthodox participants referred to some local events that shook the Cypriot society such as sexual scandals in which clerks were involved, the scam with passport schemes that members of the Church were involved in and so on. The overall perception on the institution of Church can be summarised under a statement of Anon5:

"I personally do not like priests nor the Church. I refuse to believe that the Archbishop is the biggest businessman of the country. There is a lot of gold, a lot of money in the Church".

The adverse perception on the institution of Church has had an effect on the personal religiosity level of some participants that have caused them to stray away from Church and from religion in general. The Church, as argued, is losing its influence in the younger generations, because young adults are more educated, more informed than their predecessors, and they became reactive and opposed to the Church, as well as those that fanatically support the institution. Wilson's (1982) most accurate indicators of secularising tendencies are those that illustrate the separation of religious institutions from political ones, or the descending role of religion for the operation and organisation of the political and social system (in Halikopoulou, 2009). Moreover, as Halikopoulou (2009) argues, the role that the state-religion relationship plays in shaping collective identities is heavily dependent on the stronghold of religious organizations. In the case of young adults in Cyprus, the researcher noticed a reverse effect. The fact that the state-religion relationship is so strong in Cyprus as well as the social and political standing of the Church, has resulted in young adults shaping a collective identity that strays away from religion and disrupts their affiliation to the Christian Orthodox community. Schnabel and Hjerm (2014) found that religious institutions matter for individual feelings of affiliation to a larger national community. In this thesis, the results suggest that the Church, as a religious institution, indeed influences feelings of affiliation to the national community but in a negative turn. Therefore, the stronghold of religious institutions in Cyprus as an indicator of low secularization tendencies has negatively influenced the level of individual religiosity of young adults which forms an indicator of high secularization tendencies.

The final issue that prompted the discussions was the influence of Church on education. All participants noticed an influence on education. For some Christian Orthodox participants, this influence was positive (for Anon2, Anon3, Anon8), whereas for the rest such influence was seen as unacceptable for a self-declared secularised state. What the researcher noticed to be fascinating, was the fact that amongst the interviewees only 1 participant made a reference to the historical role of the Church in educational matters, by mentioning the Greek Struggle for Independence in 1821 and the subsequent effect it had in education in Cyprus under nationalistic imperatives. The rest of the interviewees drew on the current influence of the Church on education which was

termed as "indirect" instead of direct. This indirect role is translated under school rituals such as collective prayers every morning, Church attendance 3 or 4 times a year, sanctification on the first day of school, and priests as teachers of RE. The influence on education was furtherly mentioned as Church's recent public interventions on school events. Participants mentioned the article published in a school magazine from a student criticising the dogmatic role of RE, where Church intervened and denounced the student's opinion, or the recent publication of art works made by a school art teacher that pictured Jesus in a controversial way. The Church intervened and requested the dismissal of the teacher from school. Participants were aware of these occasions and argued that "the Church has more power on education than it should". (Anon14).

5.5 Social Identity Complexity

The theoretical framework touched upon social identity complexity as the subjective realization of oneself based on his/her group memberships and in the way he/she interprets information about his/her ingroups. Low complexity refers to ingroup memberships where members share all relevant characteristics. High complexity refers to ingroup memberships where members share only some characteristics (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Participants that belong in ethnic and religious minorities (Group 4) but termed themselves as Cypriots, are considered as individuals with a higher degree of social identity complexity because they belong in groups that do not share all relevant characteristics. Most participants argued that although in theory they are considered as part of a minority community in the country, in practise they have rarely experienced instances that made them feel as such. In fact, school was termed as the main place participants of ethnic and religious minorities felt as outgroups. Perceived group equality as analysed in the following subcategories of "Ingroup/Outgroup Construction in School" and "Exemption as Low Perceived Group Equality", shows how perceived group equality can influence the degree to which participants feel as ingroups or outgroups.

The main interview question that could hinder the degree of social identity complexity for religious majority participants (Group 1, 3), and the strong or weak construction of ingroups and outgroups based on religion, was whether participants believed that for one to be a Greek-Cypriot he should be a Christian Orthodox. The proposition that a Greek Cypriot is synonymous to a Christian-Orthodox does not hold true for participants. Considering the sample classification, it was expected that Cypriots who adhere to other religions (Group 2) will contradict this statement, as well as other Christian-Orthodox participants who are of ethnic minorities (Group 3). Focusing on the answers of participants from both ethnic and religious majority (Group 1), they have argued (except Anon2) that the proposition holds true only in the way that the Cyprus state recognises itself as a Christian-Orthodox country. This has resulted in the implication that whoever in appearance looks Cypriot is automatically a Christian-Orthodox. As Halikopoulou (2009) argued, when religious cleavages are not salient in civil societies due to the religious homogeneity that exists, religion tends to be a silent or quasi self-evident

component of the nation. This observation was expressed by Anon11, who forms part of the ethnic majority but adheres to the religious minority of Jehovah's Witnesses.

"I am Cypriot, I look Cypriot, so everyone implies that I am a Christian Orthodox. When I tell them that I am a Jehovah's witness, they get curious. They believe that is more normal for someone to be an atheist than having a different religion in Cyprus."

The implication of the Christian-Orthodox religion is even connected to everyday subconscious acts. Some regular mentions were Christian sayings, doing the cross before eating or when you pass by a church. It shows that religion has inserted itself into the daily life of the everyday man, even if that man is not necessarily religious. This was furthermore related to ways of behaving according to religious societal norms, and most participants comprehend the link of national identification and religion under this cultural aspect and not with meaningful faith in Christianity. The majority of participants expressed the thought that Cypriots are not truly religious, and by religious they meant that the Cypriot society in sum does not enhance the positive values that Christianity teaches such as love, tolerance and acceptance. Participants of ethnic and religious majority exemplified this thought by referring to the strong cultural/societal hold of religion in Cyprus that results in a superficial understanding of religion. This "forced" dimension is said to be a reason for their alienation with religion. Participants from religious minorities were particularly descriptive in this issue offering personal stories of prejudice and religious discrimination. Anon16, with an ethnic and religious minority background clearly stated:

"The majority of Cypriots that I have met are not truly religious. No one believes in his religion. Even if they say that they are Christian Orthodox, if they knew what Christianity or Orthodoxy really means they would not do the things that they do."

Religion's twofold role has been made explicit: it is still a homogenizer and meanwhile an exclusive component for those who are not part of the dominant congregations (Bohn & Hahn, 2002). Yet, even for participants that form part of the dominant congregations, they do not see religion as a way of homogenization but as a disruptor of it. What the researcher thought was important is the use of "them" instead of "we" when referring to the Christian Orthodox community. In this way they made clear that they distinguish themselves from their ingroups that behave adversely towards minorities. The theory of social identity complexity becomes relevant in this instance. Within the ingroup of Christian Orthodoxy, members perceive themselves as outgroups, by distinguishing between "us" and "them" when it comes to certain hostile behaviours. In turn, the "us" and "them" is often a dividing line between older and younger generations.

5.5.1 Ingroup/Outgroup Construction in School

School was termed as an important religious carrier for Christian-Orthodox former students, and as an environment that affects the perceived group equality for non-Christian former students that constructs ingroup

and outgroup memberships. Indeed, participants of the ethnic majority but of religious minorities (Group 2) perceived school as the only societal environment where they realized their difference from the rest of the students who belong in the same ethnicity. For participants of both ethnic and religious minorities (Group 4) school was termed as an experience that often made them realize their singularity. What was important was that their singularity and difference was not mainly realized by the behaviour of their classmates, but from the structure of the educational system that is heavily dependent on the Christian-Orthodox faith.

The projection of the dominant religion in school is shown through the different rituals, such as collective prayers every morning, Church attendance, sanctification on the first day of school or even the presence of priests in schools. Participants of religious minorities highlighted some events that are engraved in their head as unpleasant experiences in the school community during religious rituals. Most have mentioned experiences in primary school that made them realise that they differ from a very young age. Anon13, who is of ethnic majority but religious minority, stated that "especially in primary school, it was particularly hard .. it was the beginning you know; I had no idea what was going on. Afterwards, I got used to everything, it was not that uncomfortable". Anon16, who belongs in ethnic and religious minority, described an incident where he/she felt attacked. He/she explained:

"It was the time for the morning collective prayer. I stood up, to show respect for the Christian-Orthodox religion but I did not do the cross at the end. The teacher got angry at me because I did not do the cross. I explained that I am Muslim, and then she did not believe me and insisted on me doing the cross. It was very hard at times, but these instances mean nothing [..] I expected to go through them".
Such instances disturbed the perceived group equality for non-Christian participants and made them realise their position as an outgroup in the school community. Such participants showed a great degree of liberal attitudes, and respect towards the Christian-Orthodox religion. As religious and/or ethnic outgroups they showed a higher degree of social identity complexity which made them more tolerant to difference as they have themselves experienced what it means to differ.

Christian-Orthodox participants (Group 1, 3) had different opinions amongst them when it comes to religious rituals in school. On the one hand, out of 10 participants, 3 argued that such rituals are important in the continuation of tradition in society, and they must be executed because they serve the majority of the school community. Out of the 3 participants that highlighted the role of rituals in the continuation of tradition, only 1 referred to the role of rituals in reinforcing the Christian-Orthodox faith and helping at a personal level. The role of religion as a part of culture and tradition was made explicit in the school community through rituals, yet it has resulted in the mechanical execution of such rituals by former students. The use of the word "force" was also present in religious majority participants when talking about Church visits during school or being present during sanctification. Furthermore, 7 out of 10 participants argued that such rituals are just a way to make the students "remember" their ingroup membership in the Christian-Orthodox religion and further supported that school

should not be a place where someone exercises his/her faith; faith is a personal matter. They termed such rituals as a way of subconscious political influence that is happening in schools, combined with the one-sided teaching of RE.

"You go to school to create a complete personality. A complete personality cannot be created when you constantly learn and do things with a political or religious influence". (Anon1)

5.5.2 Exemption as Low Perceived Group Equality

Questions on the policy of exemption were asked to every participant, whether he/she belongs in the majority religion or not. The purpose was to understand how former students who undertook the lesson viewed students who did not (how they viewed the outgroup) and how students that got exempt experienced exemption. At first, exemption was seen as a democratic policy for all participants, since as they argued no one should be compelled to be confessionally taught on a religion that he/she does not follow. As it is a democratic policy at the same time is a policy that functions as a stigma in the school community, something argued both by participants who undertook the lesson and those who did not. In fact, the main instance where participants from other religions felt as outgroups in the school community was during RE where they should either move to a different class and be taught a lesson that they have already been taught like maths, or history, or have a vacant hour. When participants were asked why someone gets stigmatized when he gets exempt the answers provided revolved around the fact that religion is still a factor of discrimination in the school community. The view is summarised under the statement of Anon2:

"Someone gets stigmatized because he does not take RE. They will always point him out and say that this person is the one that does not take the lesson, he is not a believer like us. Especially when you are a kid, you cannot really understand that everyone can believe in whatever God they want to believe, that there are so many religions existing in your country".

Moreover, Anon12 who belongs in the ethnic majority but adheres to a minority religion supported that the stigmatization that revolves around exemption has resulted in bullying in multiple instances.

"The truth being told; I belong to a religion where 90% of students get exempt. I have heard many instances in my religious community where students that got exempt were stigmatized by the school community, and that stigma has resulted in bullying [..] I am now thinking that my own country does not include me in its educational system".

Students who got exempt were asked to explain what they had to do at the hour of exemption. All of them argued that the educational system was disinterest in providing additional teaching to a subject that either relates to religions in general, or that has to do with societal issues. At the hour of exemption students argued that they were supposed to visit another class but instead they just had a vacant hour, wandering on the school yard, because no one really cared what those students were doing during exemption. At the start of the school

year, during the first 2 or 3 months, students were still waiting for the officiation of exemption from the Ministry of Education, and they were obliged to stay in class during RE until exemption was issued. Most students argued that during their school years they were delighted to have a vacant hour, yet as they look back, they felt that the system was discriminating against their knowledge since other students had the chance to learn, whereas they did not. Anon3, argued that the policy of exemption shows indifference from the system towards religious minorities:

"Indifference, that's it. For me, if I were during my school years, I would be delighted to have a vacant hour, but now that I reflect on it, I go to school to learn, to acquire knowledge, not to sit on the bench and eat a sandwich. The system should have provided for additional knowledge for those that get exempt".

For participants of ethnic minorities (Group 3, 4), high perceived group equality can be related to positive affiliations with the nation-state and a higher degree of national identification instead of ethnic identification with their respective ethnic background. Public regard and equal treatment have been found to be associated with a higher degree of national identification instead of ethnic identification (Verkuyten & Reijerse, 2008). Positive perception in the host society can tell people that they are equal members of society and treated equally. Although the model of RE and the policy of exemption were regarded as showing low levels of perceived group equality between religious minorities and the religious majority, 4 out of 5 students of ethnic and religious minorities self-identified as Cypriots and not with their ethnic background. Participants from ethnic and/or religious minorities argued that in theory they are a minority but empirically they feel as the majority in civil life. School posed as the only space where they felt as a minority due to religious rituals, the format of RE, and the policy of exemption. In fact, the argument that the main occasion where they felt singled out was during their school years shows that educational institutional discrimination is not enough to influence their affiliation to the Cypriot nation-state. A difference in religion is not a factor that disturbs their feelings towards the nation-state, furtherly supporting that following the Christian-Orthodox religion is no longer a main criterion in national identification, despite institutional efforts of the projection of the link between the two.

5.6 Alternative Model of Multifaith RE as the desire of Ingroups and Outgroups

The present category offers the opinions and desires of religious ingroups and outgroups towards an alternative model of RE that can accommodate all students. Previous research on the importance of multi-faith education suggested that RE carries a fundamental role in encountering religious and cultural diversity that helps in dismantling and challenging religious stereotypes (McCowan, 2016; Kaymakcan & Aslamaci, 2016). Moreover, studies on dogmatic RE that promotes nationalism suggested that such education results in a very narrow understanding of national identity that influences students' perspectives of their social identity (Kwan-choi Tse, 2017). The present results suggest that 18 out of 20 participants wished to be taught on multi faith

religious education, not as a form of confessional teaching, but as general world knowledge that could help them in their future life as adults. The model of multifaith RE was not proposed by the researcher, but rather was a proposal of most participants when asked what their ideal form of RE is. They believed that multifaith education could help them in a personal and social dimension.

The personal value of multi faith RE relates to knowledge that can help students in their personal choice of religion. The societal value of multi faith RE could contribute to a more open and tolerant society that promotes respect and reduces racism. Out of 20 participants, only 3 believed that RE teaching cannot have this impact since it cannot correct the "brain-washing" done within the family or by the media. On the other hand, the majority of participants argued that students at the age of 15-18 just need a stimulus that will make them question their ascribed characteristics and see beyond stereotypes. They viewed multifaith RE as a way to keep religious minorities and the majority connected and united because by knowing about the positive aspects of other religions, or their daily rituals, you can respect them and understand them. This was termed important for interviewees as they argued that there are plenty of religious minorities in Cyprus, they form people they socialise with and the ignorance of their religious values or habits can be an obstacle in forming a substantial connection with them. As argued by Anon1:

"I believe that the fact that we do not even know that Muslims are taught on love and solidarity the way that we are taught plays a major role .. because a man is generally afraid of the "different", especially when he does not know what that "different" is."

However, the majority of interviewees that adhere to the majority religion argued that this multi faith RE should be introduced in later stages of school, during higher secondary education, in order to avoid confusion. School's role in cultivating and learning the Christian-Orthodox religion is important. If students were to be taught on multifaith RE from primary school, they could get confused as to what their identity is. Participants offered various desired models of RE teaching. The majority of answers included RE teaching as multifaith education in the form of workshop/seminar, combined with a discussion on social issues. Another suggestion was compulsory multifaith RE where religions are taught the way geography is taught, and students can learn the religions of the world, without a confessional character. In general, the desire for multifaith RE was consensual between the majority of interviewees. Only 3 interviewees argued that school is not responsible to teach other religions, and that RE should follow the majority religion. This answer was also provided by a participant who overall showed inclusive and liberal attitudes. When asked why he believes that RE should only follow the majority his answer revealed the belief that the reactions of the Church or the Ministry of Education on a multifaith model will be way too adverse, for such a model to ever be established.

"As an open-minded person I will tell you that RE should include other religions. As a Cypriot I will tell you that it should not."

The researcher then asked him what he believes as an open-minded Cypriot.

"You go tell the Ministry of Education, those 65 year olds that sit in the office for 40 years, comfortable in their routine [..] They will tell you that is a difficult procedure to change a school subject, there are practical considerations in adding a subject that is not even acceptable by the rest of society [..] and then go explain to the Church that we must have freedom of speech and expression [..] and then go explain to every minister and theologian that someone will teach Buddhism in school [..] How do you see that? For me that's a utopia." (Anon7).

The same concern was also expressed by other participants, who believed that the reactions from the highly religious members of society, as well as the Church and government will be opposing to the proposal of a multifaith model. It is evident from the results that political and Church influences on education are so intrinsic that implementing a model of multifaith RE is currently impossible. The current discussion can be linked to the previous discussion on the role of Church in education, and the perceived politics that underlie the educational system.

6.0 Conclusion & Discussion

The historical framework of this thesis argued for a conflation of the Greek-Cypriot national identity with the Christian Orthodox religion. This conflation has been to a great extent the product of nationalistic/political imperatives. The constant external threat that the Greek-Cypriot community had faced and the role of the institution of Church as the foremost exponent of Greek nationalist practices instigated a Greek-Cypriot community that was tightly bound to the Christian Orthodox faith for the realization of its homogeneity. Under foreign rule, the Cyprus Church' considerable attention to the institution of education promoted the idea of unification with motherland Greece and attempted to maintain the Greek-Orthodox spirit of the island via educational institutions. Church's influence in political/civil life and in education has undoubtedly decreased following the independence of the island and the latter fulfilment of religious and political offices by different people. The historical framework was latter analysed in light of the theoretical framework under the concepts of ethnic/civic national identification, social identity complexity and secularization.

Regarding the distinction between ethnic and civic national identification as offered by Zimmer (2003) and Smith (2001), previous research (Hjerm, 2014; Loizides, 2007) suggest that the ethnic dimension of national identification in the form of Greek-Cypriotism is most prominent in Cypriots than the civic dimension, yet the civic dimension is also present since both dimensions can be understood at the same time. The ethnic elements relating to religion of the Cyprus nation-state are associated to instances of institutional religious discrimination towards minority religions. The civic dimension is relevant as the ability to identify oneself under territorial terms, thus with the Cypriot nation-state and under the constitutional declaration that all religions are equal before the law. The theory of social identity complexity suggests that a major influence on the perceptions of social identity complexity is threat to one's social ingroup that results in a more homogeneous perception of the ingroup (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The historical framework offered a brief historical analysis to highlight the conditions that lead to low levels of social identity complexity for the Greek-Cypriot community, mainly influenced by external threats, religion, and the prominent role of the Church during and post the era of conflict. The historical explanation helps to understand the ways that members of the Greek-Cypriot community conceptualized their own individual and group identity under ethnic and religious terms. Moreover, based on Wilson's (1982) indicators of secularization tendencies, following the nation-building process of the Republic of Cyprus and the prominent role of the Cyprus Church in social and political affairs, as well as in influencing educational structures, secularization in Cyprus remained low.

Change is a vital component for the continuation of national identities. The extent to which they can change and adapt is determined by internal and external factors such as geopolitical and economic situations (Smith, 2000). Such factors have brought many challenges to the conservationist conception of a conflating national and religious identity in Cyprus. This thesis focused in how young adults who have not experienced the circumstances mentioned in the historical framework understand and perceived the role of religion in their national identification, by answering the research question of *"How do young adults in Cyprus link their religion to their sense of national identity".* Moreover, in understanding the effect of religion in the perception of national identity for young adults, the current model of RE was considered, as a source and homogenizer of ideological beliefs on national and cultural perspectives (Schnabel & Hjerm, 2014). For this purpose, the second research question of *"What is the role of Cypriotic RE in the formation of national identity"* was answered. Conclusions are drawn by the findings and explained in light of the concepts mentioned in the theoretical framework.

The findings suggest that for ethnic and religious majority participants, the Christian Orthodox religion does not constitute an element in their national identification. Perceptions on the conflation of the Christian Orthodox religion and the Greek-Cypriot community have changed, since as participants argued the stronghold of the Christian Orthodox religion in Cyprus is solely realized throught religion's cultural standing. The cultural-centerdness of religion supports an ethnic understanding of the Cypriot nation-state since it is a factor that upholds the prominance of Christian-Orthodoxy over other religious minorities. The Cypriot nation-state is still shaped by religious cleavages and religious boundaries between "us" and "them", and as participants argued the supporitive relationship between religion and state results in different chances of civil participation and in being an active member of community for people that do not follow the dominant congregations. Therefore, even if religion does not constitute a factor in national self-identification it is still a disruptor of equal social structures.

The current model of RE is viewed by participants as a component that shows the ethnic understanding of their nation, throught the dogmatic teaching of the Christian Orthodox religion, misinformation provided on other religions, and the reminder of external threat. The findings of this thesis support previous studies on the ethno-centric nature of RE in Cyprus (Loukaidis & Zembylas, 2017, Emilianides, 2011). However, RE teaching was not an influential actor in young adults that althought they realized RE's projection of Christian Orthodoxy as a vital element of the Cypriot nation-state and an as indication of a "correct citizen", they argued that RE has only a minor influence in the understanding of their national identity under the cultural element discussed above.

The above ethnic elements present in Cyprus have a negative influence on secularization tendencies. The fact that the Christian Orthodox religion is inscribed into cultural frameworks, institutions and civil life, makes the Christian Orthodox religion a mere label for the Cypriot society. As Schnabel & Hjerm (2004) argued there is a difference between religion on the individual level and religion as a shared belief system inscribed in political and civil structures. Halikopoulou (2009) argues that the role that the state-religion relationship plays in shaping

collective identities is heavily dependent on the stronghold of religious organizations. In the case of young adults in Cyprus, this thesis argues towards a reverse effect. The fact that the state-religion relationship is so strong in Cyprus as well as the social and political standing of the Church, has resulted in young adults shaping a collective identity that strays away from religion and disrupts their affiliation to the Christian Orthodox community. Therefore, although the level of personal religiosity is low, the strong religion-Church-state nexus showcases that the Cypriot-nation state is not that secularized since sectors of society are not completely removed from the dominant religion.

The suggestion that a Greek Cypriot is synonymous to a Christian Orthodox does not hold true for young adults in the country. The statement holds true only in the way that the Cyprus state recognises itself as a Christian-Orthodox country. Therefore, participants showed high levels of social identity complexity since they argued that for being a member of the Cypriot nation-state one does not have to share the characteristic of Christian Orthodoxy. Religion was termed as a characteristic that constructs ingroup and outgroup memberships. This ingroup/outgroup construction was showcased by Christian Orthodox participants in a novel way, since they perceived themselves as outgroups in their religious community by distinguishing between "us" and "them" when it comes to certain hostile behaviours against religious minorities.

The ingroup/outgroup realization by religious and/or ethnic minority participants was mainly experienced in the school community, and through the policy of exemption. The school environment was seen as a place where the perceived group equality is low based on religious group distinctions and the structure of the educational system that is heavily dependent on the Christian-Orthodox faith. Yet, even if group equality in school was low and the outgroup membership of religious minorities was realized under educational structures, religious and/or ethnic minority participants argued that although in theory they belong in a certain minority of the Cypriot society, in practise they feel part of the majority. This statement is a positive indicator of a growing religious tolerance in the Cypriot society and shows how Christian-Orthodox educational structures cannot shake the affiliation of minorities with the Cypriot nation-state. The fact that religious ingroup and outgroup members have expressed their desire for a multifaith model of RE shows how young adults in Cyprus comprehend the current structure of RE as promoting a very narrow understanding of religion and the nation, and fails in bonding all religious groups. As the findings suggest, young adults are opposed to the ethnosymbolic character of the current RE model in Cyprus and demand for more inclusive educational structures.

Future research reccomedations on RE in Cyprus can include experimental seminars of multifaith RE education for students in secondary school, to assess if multifaith RE can dismantle religious stereotypes that exist in the Cypriot society. Moreover, future research on the link between religion and national identification can be conducted on different minority religions in Cyprus and explore which religious groups have higher affiliation feelings to the Cypriot nation-state.

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<u>Appendix 1. Interview Guide</u>

1) Demographics.

Religious Identity:

2) What does religion mean to you?

3) Do you adhere to any religion?

4) (If yes) How often do you practise your religious duties? (Church going, praying etc), and why do you or you do not practise them?

5) Through which vehicle did you learn to practise such duties?

National Identity link with religion:

6) How would you define your national identity?

7) What does it mean to be a Greek-Cypriot (or any other ethnicity)?

8) Define the community/group in which you belong.

9) Do you consider yourself a part of the minority or the majority?

10) (Being either) How do you relate yourself to the majority or minority?

11) Do you think that religion and national identity share common properties?

Religious Education:

12) Tell me your experience as a student of RE.

13) What does RE provide you?

14) What is your opinion on the content and structure of RE?

15) What is the role of RE in providing citizenship education?

16) How does RE contribute to the understanding of the Greek-Cypriot culture?

17) What is your view on the policy of exemption?

Exemption from Religious Education:

18) Tell me your experience as a student who gets exempt from RE.

19) Do you wish in participating in any form of RE teaching?

20) If yes, what would your ideal form of RE be.

Appendix 2. Demographics

Number	Age	Sex	Education Level	National self-Identification	Religious Identification
Anon1	20	Female	University	Greek Cypriot	Christian-Orthodox
Anon2	22	Male	University	Greek Cypriot	Christian-Orthodox
Anon3	21	Male	University	Cypriot	Christian-Orthodox
Anon4	20	Female	University	Greek Cypriot	Christian-Orthodox
Anon5	21	Male	University	Greek Cypriot	Christian-Orthodox
Anon6	24	Male	University	Cypriot	Atheist
Anon7	21	Male	University	Greek Cypriot	Christian-Orthodox
Anon8	22	Male	University	Cypriot	Christian Orthodox
Anon9	20	Female	University	Mixed	Christian Orthodox
Anon10	19	Female	University	Mixed	Atheist
Anon11	24	Female	University	Cypriot	Jehovah's Witness
Anon12	24	Female	University	Cypriot	Jehovah's Witness
Anon13	19	Female	University	Cypriot	Jehovah's Witness
Anon14	19	Female	University	Cypriot	Jehovah's Witness
Anon15	22	Female	University	Cypriot	Jehovah's Witness
Anon16	24	Male	Higher Secondary Education	Cypriot	Muslim
Anon17	21	Male	University	Cypriot	Muslim
Anon18	23	Female	University	Foreign	Muslim
Anon19	22	Male	Higher Secondary Education		Muslim

Anon20	18	Male	Higher Secondary Education	Cypriot	Muslim

Anon1

Anon1 self-defines as a Christian Orthodox and a Greek Cypriot. She does not attend church, nor does she pray that often. She believes that religion should be applied in everyday life by small acts of kindness. She terms herself as empirically belonging in the majority, and that life is way easier for her because of that. She loves her country and Greece, but she does not have strong patriotic feelings. She believes that the role of religion for the nation is summarised under the three most important things in life, namely the nation, religion, and family and that for Greeks and Cypriots one cannot exist without the other since it is very rare to meet someone who is a Greek Cypriot and not a Christian Orthodox. She believes that the conflation of Greek Cypriots and Christian Orthodoxy is still a fact in the Cypriot society however, this perception is slowly changing due to the new generations that are more liberal, with globalisation and the abundance of information. Currently, the role of religion for her can be summarised under its cultural aspect, traditions, and customs. She argues that the Church is losing its influence in social and political life and that is the reason why the institution is trying so hard to establish its presence in society. She sees religion and the Church as an intruder in education, especially through RE's dogmatic teaching, and believes that this policy exists in order to keep the majority united and the minorities apart.

Anon2

Anon2 self-defines as a Christian Orthodox and a Greek Cypriot. He terms himself as a true believer, however he does not attend Church going. He feels part of the majority in population terms. He believes that throughout history the Greek Cypriot identity was defined more by religion than ethnicity and that the two were interrelated in the past yet, as years go by, he notices a disassociation of religion and the nation because more people stray away from religion and have more liberal attitudes (he sees that as negative). He believes that the institution of Church takes a politicised role and is a business for profit. When it comes to RE he believes that it was an indifferent lesson that teaches only the history of Christian Orthodoxy. He wished for RE to be more focused on why we believe by giving answers on a spiritual level, and that the structure and content of the lesson is valuable in serving the majority of the population who are Christian Orthodox and is a tool to keep young adults who are straying away from religion closer to Church. He does not wish to be taught about any other religions because he believes that learning other religions is something extra that does not provide any useful knowledge except for young adults who wish to live abroad.

Anon3

Anon3 self-defines as a Christian Orthodox and a Cypriot. He attends weekly Church going and prays daily. He feels part of the majority and he terms the minorities as communities with a different religion or ethnicity. He

believes that religion's role in civil life is very prominent and is an intrinsic part of growing up. He realized the Church's political role and its strong ties with governmental officials. When it comes to the institution of education, he believes that the everyday religious practises should exist to serve the Christian Orthodox students yet, he sees such practises as a way for non-Christian students to feel left out. He experienced RE as a lesson where history of Orthodoxy is being taught with no room for critical thinking. He wished for the lesson to be more substantial on the reasons why to believe in Orthodoxy. The content of the lesson does not help in projecting the true values of Christianity such as love and tolerance. At first, he argued that he does not wish to be taught about other religions because he does not want to change his beliefs, which are the same as his family's. As the conversation continued, he argued that in fact by learning other religions he could connect easier with people from those religions. He further argued that a multi-faith RE is an impossible scenario since many adverse reactions will be raised from clerks, governmental officials and highly religious people.

Anon4

Anon4 terms herself as a Christian Orthodox and a Cypriot. She believes that religion in everyday life should be expressed in the mind and body and not through Church going. She self-defines as Cypriot, but she also argues that the Republic's relations with Greece are excellent and she understands the historical role of Greece for the Cyprus nation-state. She defined the majority of society as Christian-Orthodox Greek Cypriots. She argued that she related herself to minorities with respect and tolerance. She believes that a Greek-Cypriot or Cypriot does not have to be a Christian-Orthodox anymore and this is something seen frequently in new generations that have independent will. She sees a descending tendency of religion in society and believes that people over 60 are the ones who keep the institution alive. She sees the institution of Church as an institution revolved in many social and political scandals and that its role should be strictly confined to ecclesiastical duties. She believes that RE is a lesson where only Christian Orthodox students can be present since a student with a different religion or an atheist should not be obliged to be dogmatically taught in Orthodoxy. She herself has studied different religions and she pointed out how RE can create wrongful stereotypes on Islam. She thinks that if students were taught on other religions, they would grow tolerant and respectful attitudes towards minorities and that RE should be the agent that corrects misinformation and stereotypes rather than support them.

Anon5

Anon5 self-defined as a Christian Orthodox and a Greek Cypriot. He thinks that religion has to do with the way one grew up and nurtured. He does not fulfil his religious duties since he believes that it is not a necessary component of being faithful. He argues that in the current social affairs if one terms himself as a Greek Cypriot, they automatically term him as a fascist because the meaning of nationalism has changed. He defines himself as Greek Cypriot based on historical considerations since the first inhabitants of the island were Greeks. He believes that during the intercommunal conflicts it was not only religion that separated the two communities but

politics. He sees himself as a member of the majority given his characteristics. Religion's role for the nation is how members of society have grown up. He believes that the Christian Orthodox religion is not a factor in defining yourself as Greek-Cypriot although in the past this was a fact. He argued that there are many people that believe in the Greek-Cypriot nation but are not faithful members of the recognised religion. Religion has nothing to do with how one defines his ethnicity. He has adverse feelings for the institution of Church and sees its politicised role in social and political matters. He thinks that in Cyprus there is still a religious ideology on social issues like homosexuality and abortions. For him, the current RE model is old-fashioned and provides for one-sided teaching.

Anon6

Anon6 was born abroad and moved to Cyprus when he was 9. Yet, he terms himself as a Cypriot because as he argued he has personality characteristics of the Cypriot society, he speaks the language, and he has family in the country. He has experienced racism in Cyprus, but he believes that the Cypriot society is not that racist, that people are tolerant towards minorities. He defined himself as a person who follows scepticism or an atheist and he believes that the world would be more peaceful if no religions existed. He believes that nationality should not be connected with religion because religion is something chosen and not a geographical factor. For him, the Christian Orthodox religion in Cyprus is manifested in a cultural way through traditions, customs and symbols. He believes that Cypriots are Christian Orthodox just on the labels, they are not true believers. He sees RE as a lesson that destroys students when it comes to religions because it is unacceptable for a young adult to finish school and have no knowledge on the world's religions. He links RE with politics in the way that the country needs you to be religious in order to control you. In theory he terms himself as a part of the minority, yet empirically he feels as part of the majority because he speaks the Greek language, and he has family in Cyprus. He believes that the institution of education as well as RE fail to prepare a young adult for the outside world and also fail to provide the means under which a young adult can socialise with people of other religions. Cypriot young adults are so embedded in the Cypriot culture that struggle when they go abroad. He believes that if RE provided multi-faith teaching then it would be a stimulus for young adults to be more open-minded.

Anon7

Anon7 is half-Cypriot and half from another country. He self-defines as a Christian Orthodox and as having a mixed nationality. He sees religion as a cultural factor in the Cypriot society that moves the moral beliefs of society and controls the population. He believes that having the same religion as the majority of the country is a way of smoother integration in society. He referred to instances of ethnic and religious bullying in Cyprus that he was present, but he refers to such behaviour's as individual cases. He realised a positive change in the Cypriot society, a shift of balance towards more liberal attitudes. For him, the institution of the Church is corrupted and intrudes in social life more than it should. He believes that the Church projects the link between the Cypriot

nationality and the Christian Orthodox religion by advocating that a correct citizen is a Christian Orthodox. He sees the conflation of national identity and religion because Christianity is part of the cultural heritage of the people of Cyprus. Yet, he believes that this conflation weakens as the years go by. He experienced RE as a dogmatic lesson where the history of Orthodoxy is being taught and he wished for a multi-faith model of RE. However, he termed this effort as a utopia due to the mentality of people in governance and the reactions of the Church. He believes that subconsciously in Cyprus we are programmed to believe in one entity and as the country expands in international affairs, with tourism and the economic development, the Cypriot society is slowly showing more tolerant attitudes towards other cultures.

Anon8

Anon8 was born and raised in Cyprus, however both his parents are foreign. He self-defines as a Christian Orthodox and a Cypriot. He identifies as Cypriot because he was born and raised in the country and respects the country that hosts him. He is a faithful member of the Christian Orthodox religion, and he believes that religion has nothing to do with fulfilling religious duties, religion is faith and strength. He feels as part of the majority although his ethnicity is different. He believes that religion's role in civil life is descending yet he realises the politicised function of the institution of Church as an intruder in social matters and in education. He believes that RE does not have a proper content and structure in order to reinforce students' faith in Orthodoxy. Although he defines himself as a true believer, he felt indifferent in learning about Christianity due to the content of the lesson. He does not wish to be taught in other religions because he believes that it will lead to confusion as to what to believe in. However, he realises the positive outcome that multi-faith RE can have in society in terms of respect and tolerance.

Anon9

Anon9 has one parent from Cyprus and the other from a different country. She self-defines as Cypriot because she was born and raised in the country, she speaks the language, and she is nurtured in the Cypriot culture. She is baptised as a Christian Orthodox however, she ended up being an atheist. She believes that what one believes is heavily dependent on his family and on societal, geographical considerations. She sees school as a religious carrier where one is obliged to learn the Christian Orthodox religion through RE and through everyday religious practises. She sees religion's role in the Cypriot society as prominent and manifested in cultural traits, such as symbols, everyday sayings, and religious events that she terms as social events. For her, the institution of Church has a politicised standing and manipulates the meaning of religion for its own interests. Church also functions as an intruder in educational matters as manifested in everyday practises and RE. She believes that in the current globalised world and in the heterogeneous society of Cyprus such practises can shake feelings of affiliation to the Cypriot nation-state for those who belong in religious minorities. She sees RE as a way to keep the majority

united, following the same trait after the Turkish invasion where external threat was high, and religion was used as a way to fanaticize the population against the hostile other.

Anon10

Anon10 has one parent from Cyprus and the other from a different country. She self-defines as a Cypriot with Greek ethnicity and a Christian Orthodox. Growing up she empirically felt as a part of the minority due to her difference in ethnicity however, as a young adult she feels part of the majority. She does not believe that the historical conflation of the Christian Orthodox religion and the Greek Cypriot ethnicity is still valid, because the way society interacts with religion is very different than what it used to be. For her people are not truly religious nowadays. However, she sees Orthodoxy as an intrinsic part in the Cypriot culture and as an influencer in social issues' controversies that leads to close-mindedness. She argued that RE supports this closed-mindedness since the lesson has a confessional character that fails to advocate for religious pluralism, tolerance, and respect. She argued that on multiple occasions during RE the Christian Orthodox religion was compared to Islam often with misinformation, to show that Orthodoxy is the only correct religion. She wished for multi-faith RE because she believes it is a way to learn other cultures and reduce religious and racial discrimination.

Anon11

Anon11 self-defines as a Cypriot and a Jehovah's Witness. She feels that religion is hope in moving on with life but at the same time is a label that stigmatizes and distinguishes people. She feels that her religion makes her a part of the minority, because through that she feels different from the rest of society. She felt this difference since a very young age, from kindergarten where kids should do the cross and morning prayer, and she did the cross with them without knowing that her religion does not include this religious practise. As she grew up in primary school, she reported instances that were stigmatizing for her such as times where she should kiss a priest's hand which as a child, she did not have the courage to reject. She expressed the thought that she shows a different aspect of herself when she is around people of her religious background, and people who adhere to the Christian Orthodox religion. She belongs in two groups as she expressed; the one where she is a Jehovah's witness and the other where she is Cypriot. When it comes to the school environment, she argued that other students around her did not discriminate on her difference in religion, but rather the discriminating aspect came from the everyday religious practises and the policy of exemption. She sees the institution of the Church as having a greater impact on people than the government itself but in a negative manner since more people stray away from religion because of the Church. She does not believe that for one to be a Cypriot he should also be a Christian Orthodox as it was in the past, because people are now travelling, they learn new cultures, they read and get informed. For her the Christian Orthodox religion is more of a label in the Cypriot society rather than true personal faith.

Anon12

Anon12 self-defines as a Cypriot and a Jehovah's witness. She was raised in the Christian Orthodox religion but at the age of 19 she decided to change her religion following a personal study on religions. After changing her religion, she felt as a minority in the Cypriot society, because as she argued, when she tells people that she is a witness they react, she lost all her friends and her close-ties to their family. After that she realised that religion is Cyprus is more of a social label rather than true faith, because she could not understand how her friends who were not even religious pushed her away when changing her religion. Her religion stood as a factor for loosing job opportunities too. She was present during RE and she sees the lesson as a failed attempt to teach for religious plurality and respect. Moreover, she referred to instances where the policy of exemption functions as a stigma in the school community and resulted in bullying. She believes that the Head of the Cyprus Church is heavily involved in political matters as well as in education. She argues that the everyday religious practices should continue because they serve the majority of the population, yet students from other religions should have a different treatment and not be obliged to be present.

Anon13

Anon13 self-defines as a Cypriot and a Jehovah's witness. She believes that being Cypriot and adhering to another religion rather than the Christian Orthodox is accepted in 2021, especially in younger generations where nobody pays much attention to religion. Theoretically she terms herself as part of the minority, but empirically she feels as part of the majority when it comes to civil life. The only space where she felt a minority was during school years due to the policy of exemption, the fact that she did not participate in school celebrations and through the everyday religious practises. Moreover, she argues that the school environment was never hostile against her. She sees a descending role of religion in the Cypriot society due to younger generations that show more liberal attitudes. She believes that the Cyprus Church is involved in social and political life more than it should and intervenes in educational matters. She argues that the policy of exemption from RE made her feel awkward especially during the first days of the school years, and it was discriminating against her knowledge.

Anon14

Anon14 self-defines as a Cypriot and a Jehovah's witness. She argues that a difference in religion does not make her feel as a minority in the Cypriot society. The only place where she felt different was during school years because she understood that she stood out in some parts and had to do things differently than others. Examples were exemption, religious rituals in schools as well as school celebrations. She witnessed racism and bullying in school not towards her, but towards people from other ethnicities. She argues that the Christian Orthodox religion is manifested in society under a cultural aspect, and even if someone is not a true believer or an atheist, he will still take part in religious celebrations for example. She believes that the Church holds a political standing

and because of that is losing its influence especially in young adults. When it comes to education, she argues that the Church's influence is manifested in the content of RE and the everyday rituals. During exemption, she felt nervous and awkward at first, because the educational system was indifferent as to what students that were exempt had to do during that vacant hour. She argues that if RE had a multi-faith, cultural character she would be more than willing to participate and educate herself on the religions of the world, however such a model will bring adverse reaction from the Church and the religious association of Cyprus.

Anon15

Anon15 self-defines as a Cypriot and an atheist. Her family has nurtured her in being a Jehovah's Witness, yet she chose to not get baptised. She terms herself as part of the minority, because she did not meet many people that were not baptised nor adhere to any religion. However, she argued that the fact that she does not have any religious label is a factor that "saved" her from racism or discrimination because Cypriots are more hostile towards someone who has a different religious label. She realizes the conflation of national and religious identification in Cyprus but only its historical function. She does not believe that this holds true nowadays, especially in young adults and the generations to come. She got exempt from RE even if she does not adhere to a different religion, because she refused to be confessionally taught on a single religion that could influence her personal choice of being non-religious. Because of that, she realises her difference in the school community during the hours of exemption, and as she argued she finds it unacceptable that her own country does not include in its educational system people with her characteristics.

Anon16

Anon16 self-identifies as a Cypriot and a Muslim. Both of his parents are from a foreign country, and he was born abroad. He identifies as a Cypriot because he was raised in Cyprus, he speaks the Greek language from a very young age, he was in military service and as he argued he will fight for the country that raised and hosted him. He believes that if his religion was a Christian Orthodox it would be easier for him to integrate in the Cypriot society. He has experienced bullying, racial and religious discrimination and he expressed that when people hear his name and religion, they automatically believe that he is a Turk. He argues that even from primary school children are cultivated into believing that a Turk is the enemy, and this results in the belief that whoever looks a little darker is a Turk, thus the enemy. However, he defines himself as a part of the majority of the population since the Cypriots he met are not truly religious. He sees a descending tendency of the role of religion in the Cypriot society especially in younger generations that now believe in science and have more options than their predecessors. Although a Muslim, he decided that he wanted to participate in RE because he was curious about the religion of the country that he lives. He remembers being taught misinformation on Islam and many inferences to Turks as the negative other during RE. He argues that the policy of exemption should not exist

because in that way students are being singled out, instead a multi-faith model of RE should be provided in schools as a stimulus to combat racism.

Anon17

Anon17 self-identifies as a Cypriot and a Muslim. Both of his parents are from a foreign country. He was born and raised in Cyprus, he was in military service, and he argues that when discussing politics he feels the urge to support the political institutions of Cyprus and feels attacked when they undermine the Cyprus nation-state. He does not want to be defined as part of the majority or minority of the population since he believes that even in considering every Greek Cypriot who is a Christian Orthodox, they will also have differences amongst them. He believes that racism in Cyprus has been the result of media misinformation, politics, and lack of education. He believes that in 50 years, when the old generations will cease to exist, the institution of the Church will cease to exist as well. For him, the older generations that went through the horrors of the war and lived under British colonialism are the ones that keep the Christian Orthodox religion alive. Although a Muslim he chose to participate in RE, as he finds no point in having a vacant hour where no education is received. He sees the positive value of multi-faith RE both in a personal and social level, and he believes that especially with the Turkish issue, students will understand that not all Muslims are Turks. However, he believes that parents, the Church, and state-officials will react to such a model.

Anon18

Anon18 self-identifies as a Muslim and as a foreign. She came to live in Cyprus when she was 10, and as she argued the first years of her life in Cyprus were particularly hard. When she went to public primary school, she experienced bullying because she could not speak the Greek language. As she argued, religion was not a factor in bullying but rather her ethnicity was. She relates herself to the minority and she argues that daily there are moments where she feels that she does not belong in the Cypriot society. She argues that Cypriots have no idea about the religious habits of Muslims even if they live side by side with them and she often felt peer pressure to eat or drink during fasting. She sees the role of religion in Cyprus as weak, especially in younger generations. Although a Muslim she chose to participate in RE because she believes that by learning other religions you can understand other cultures. She remembers that during RE misinformation about her religion was provided. She believes that if multi-faith RE was taught in schools, respect and tolerance would be cultivated towards her religious community.

Anon19

Anon19 self-defines as a Cypriot and a Muslim. Both of his parents are immigrants, but he was born and raised in Cyprus. He self-defines as a Cypriot because by being born in the country he has gained behavioural characteristics of the Cypriot society, he is currently in military service in Cyprus and as he argues he will fight

for the country that he was born in. He believes that Cypriot see all Muslims are fanatic followers of their religion and this is a stereotype cultivated under political imperatives and media misinformation. He sees the Christian Orthodox religion as influencing only the older generations and losing its influence in young people. He was a student that got exempt from RE and during the school years he actually enjoyed having a vacant hour. However, by looking back now he sees exemption as a policy that discriminates against a student's knowledge because it does not provide for additional teaching on a new subject. He argues that if multi-faith RE was provided in schools he would be willing to participate because he sees the social value in learning other religions and cultures as a way of smoother coexistence in the Cypriot society.

<u>Anon20</u>

Anon20 self-defines as a Cypriot and a non-believer Muslim since he was baptised as a Muslim but no longer follows the Islamic religion. Both of his parents are foreign, he was born abroad but raised in Cyprus from a very young age. He terms himself as a Cypriot because the way he behaves is in line with the Cypriot culture. From a very young age he had some rough years, especially in the school environment because he did not look Cypriot, or the way he used to behave was different from the rest of the kids. He had trouble fitting in and he was often bullied mainly for his ethnicity and not so much for his religion. He believes that in Cyprus a fear towards Muslims is cultivated and that Cypriot believe that whoever is a Muslim is simultaneously a Turk and a terrorist. He argues that Cypriots do not comprehend the meaning of religious freedom and they are ignorant as to how many religions exist in the world. He got exempt from RE but he was still present during RE teaching so he could express his opinion on the content of the lesson. He argued that the content was heavily based on the Christian Orthodox faith with only brief explanations of other religions. He finds it unacceptable that so many religious groups in Cyprus exist and students are not academically taught in any of them. He noticed many instances where misinformation was provided about his religion.

Appendix 4. Codebook