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**NATION-BUILDING AND CULTURAL HERITAGE:  
A STUDY OF TURKEY AND ITS GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY**

A thesis presented

by

**Sophia E. Kyrrou**

to

The Political Science Department

in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Honors in Political Science

Trinity College  
Hartford, CT  
April 19, 2021

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This thesis is dedicated to the Greek Orthodox Christians of Turkey.

### NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

The following is a note on orthography, written by Kabir Tambar in his book, *The Reckoning of Pluralism: Political Belonging and The Demands of History in Turkey*.

“Modern Turkish is written with the Latin alphabet. Most letters loosely correspond to characters found in English, but there are a few differences. The Turkish *c* is pronounced like the English *j* as in *jam*. *J* is pronounced like the final “ge” of the French *rouge*. *C* is pronounced “ch” as in *child*. *Ş* is “sh” as in *show*. *İ* and *ı* (i.e., with and without a dot) are comparable to “ee” and “uh” respectively. *Ğ* lengthens the vowel preceding it but is not pronounced separately. Umlauts (as in *ö* and *ü*) are akin to those in German.”<sup>1</sup>

In this thesis, I use modern standard Turkish orthography in several contexts: when referencing Turkish institutions (i.e., *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*); when referencing Turkish individuals (i.e., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan); when referencing Ottomanized and Turkified versions of Islamic terminology which originate in Arabic (i.e., *devşirme*); and, when referencing certain Turkish words which are central to my thesis (i.e., *eşhās-ı mütegayyibe*).

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<sup>1</sup> Kabir Tambar, *The Reckoning of Pluralism: Political Belonging and the Demands of History in Turkey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), ix.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

In 2016, the International Criminal Court (ICC) handed down a landmark decision which ruled that the destruction of cultural heritage is a violation of human rights. The ICC case dealt with the destruction of religious and historical statues in Mali by Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, a member of the Tuareg Islamist separatist group Ansar Dine. After his 2012 destruction of nine mausoleums and the secret gate of the Sidi Yahia Mosque, which is part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage site of Timbuktu in Mali, Al Mahdi was convicted of a war crime by a unanimous ICC Chamber decision.<sup>2</sup> Issues of shared memory and collective consciousness were central to the case, and Al Mahdi's actions came to be understood not only as an attack on physical sites, but as an attack on identity and culture. This ICC decision reframed within the context of international human rights law the importance of the protection, preservation, and restoration of cultural heritage as a means of safeguarding and sustaining vulnerable identity communities around the world. Despite this paradigm shift in international law, the endangerment of cultural heritage is a worldwide phenomenon.

As recently as January 2020, former U.S. President Donald Trump, in the midst of escalating diplomatic tensions and military provocations between the United States and Iran, suggested in a press briefing that Iran's cultural sites were legitimate military targets. Trump's statements provoked sharp criticism by the international human rights experts, historians, and diplomats. Consequently, Trump retreated from his original statements, but his comments generated an international discussion about the delicate space that culture, memory, and place hold in armed and non-violent conflicts. Most specifically, the outcry over Trump's comments

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<sup>2</sup> Sebastian Green Martinez, "Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Northern Mali: A Crime Against Humanity?," *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 13, no. 5 (2010): 1073.

underscored the need for greater respect for and compliance with international legal frameworks, as well as the need to develop robust commitments to cultural heritage as a universal human rights issue of existential significance for vulnerable identity communities around the world.

This thesis will explore the linkages between nationalism and cultural heritage, analyzing the use of cultural heritage as a potent tool for building exclusivist nationalism. I will employ a case study focusing on state ideologies and policies toward ethnic and religious minority communities in Turkey, examining the long-term effect of these policies on vulnerable identity communities. In this thesis I will refer to ethnic and religious minority communities as ethno-religious minority communities. The ethno-religious minority community that is the subject of my thesis is the Greek Orthodox Christian community in Turkey. One can begin to map the effects of exclusivist state policies pertaining to cultural heritage on the survival of minority communities—in the Turkish case, policies of cleansing, homogenization, and discrimination have been the *modus operandi*, while the international human rights framework puts forth policies of democratization, pluralism, and equality. An examination of the Turkish state's appropriation and destruction of the cultural heritage sites of ethno-religious minorities is but one aspect of its violation of the human rights of these minorities.

My case study will be an investigation into state policies that are designed to eradicate and/or appropriate cultural heritage, and how these policies are not only operationalized manifestations of exclusivist nationalism, but also reinforcing tools in building exclusivist forms of nationalism. I will explore how, where minorities are concerned, the aforementioned state policies have as their singular goal the eradication of the past, suppression of the present, and circumscription of the future of these minority communities. I will also investigate Turkish



nationalist ideology and map the continuity of exclusivist Turkish nationalism throughout the *longue durée* of the history of the Turkish Republic.

I have selected Turkey as my case study for several reasons. First, there is a sizeable literature and an abundance of data on the subjects of nationalism and cultural heritage in Turkey. Yet, there has been a remarkable dearth of research on the linkages between the Turkish state's project of nation-building and the cultural heritage of Turkey's ethno-religious minorities. Therefore, my thesis will address a gap in the respective literatures on nationalism and cultural heritage in Turkey, thereby revealing the historical continuities in the Turkish statemakers' approach to the cultural heritage of the Greek Orthodox community for purposes of constructing an exclusivist form of nationalism rooted in evolving configurations of Turkish ethnicity and Sunni Islamic religion. My thesis aims to draw generalizable conclusions from the case study of Turkey, regarding the significance of cultural heritage as a tool for national identity construction and, likewise, regarding the critical importance of protecting cultural heritage of vulnerable ethno-religious communities whose sustainability and memory are endangered by state projects of homogenizing, exclusivist nationalism.

I will address the following research question in my thesis. How and why do states utilize cultural heritage policy to build exclusivist forms of nationalism or, more specifically, models of nationalism that exclude ethno-religious minorities? In answering this question, I will also address several sub-questions. First, what is cultural heritage? Second, how do states utilize policy dealing with the two types of cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) to exclude certain populations? In my case study of Turkey and its treatment of the Greek Orthodox minority population, I will examine two specific periods in Turkish history: the Atatürk period (1920 to 1938) and the Erdoğan period (2001 to present). Therefore, my case-specific question will be as

follows: How and why has the Turkish state utilized policy dealing with tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage to realize a nationalist ideology that excludes the Greek Orthodox Christian minority of Turkey?

### **Literature Review**

In order to address the aforementioned questions, I will first survey the relevant scholarly literature to provide the foundational and theoretical knowledge for my topic. In this section I present the literature through the exploration of three primary questions, examining the theoretical bases of cultural heritage. First, what is cultural heritage? Second, what are the types of cultural heritage? Third, why is cultural heritage a useful tool for states in building nationalism?

Before exploring these questions, I will first explain the choices which I have made regarding the methodology. Three primary and intersecting literatures are relevant to my topic: cultural heritage, nationalism, and cultural heritage as it intersects with nationalism. I have made a methodological choice to focus on the following two categories of the literature: one, cultural heritage by itself, and, two, cultural heritage in connection to nationalism. I am not going to devote inordinate space in this thesis to the vast general literature on nationalism. Rather, my primary focus is on how the definition of cultural heritage becomes useful to how and why states view heritage as significant, or, determinant, in nationalist political projects. I am making this methodological choice to focus primarily on those two categories because this is not a thesis solely on nationalism or solely on cultural heritage, but rather one on the linkages between nationalism and cultural heritage. And, in particular, it is a thesis that investigates how and why states use cultural heritage as a tool to build a national community that can be inclusivist or

exclusivist, and how states see cultural heritage as particularly useful in building exclusivist forms of nationalism.

I dedicate space to the literature on cultural heritage, specifically, because it is less widely-known and more recently developed than the long-standing literature on nationalism. The intersection of cultural heritage and nationalism, specifically, is one where the literature is relatively sparse and underdeveloped, having only recently expanded. For the most part, scholars have tended to focus either on nationalism or on cultural heritage, but less closely on the intrinsic connections between the two. Consequently, I will be doing largely original work, and my literature review is interdisciplinary.

Having explained my methodological choices and motivations, I will now turn to the questions posed above and address them through a survey of the relevant literature on cultural heritage, and on cultural heritage as it intersects with nationalism.

### **Defining Cultural Heritage**

What is cultural heritage and what are its two types? In this section I answer these primary questions through an exploration of the scholarly literature, looking specifically at international legal definitions of cultural heritage.

I will begin by addressing the first question, and examine how cultural heritage is typically defined. The definition put forth by Peter Cane and Joanne Conaghan in *The New Oxford Companion to Law* in 2008<sup>3</sup> is especially helpful, as it identifies what is at the crux of the idea of cultural heritage. According to Cane and Conaghan, “here is growing interest at national and international levels in developing legal means to afford protection to evidence of the human

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Cane and Joanne Conaghan, “Cultural heritage,” in *The New Oxford Companion to Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

past which is regarded as worthy of preservation. The term ‘cultural heritage’ is generally used to denote such evidence.”<sup>4</sup> Cane and Conaghan also suggest that cultural heritage can be broken down into two essential definitional parts that must be understood both in their individuality and in their symbiotic capacity. The authors state: “The word ‘heritage’ is suggestive of an inheritance: we have inherited something of value that we should preserve and pass on to future generations. The word ‘cultural’ indicates that this heritage pertains to humankind and provides evidence of human intellectual development.”<sup>5</sup>

Inherent to the definition of cultural heritage is the idea that the past, the present, and the future are all inextricably interwoven and, equally important, the idea that the past and “things” of the past should not be dismissed as inconsequential or irrelevant. In a *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* article entitled “The Ethics of Cultural Heritage,”<sup>6</sup> Erich Hatala Matthes expounds upon the significance of cultural heritage for historiography, memory, and chronicity. Matthes writes, “On the one hand, cultural heritage is about the past, as suggested by the ubiquitous framing of heritage ethics topics in terms of the question ‘Who owns the past?’ But, on the other hand, cultural heritage is just as much about the present and the future: about how culture is embroiled in contemporary moral controversies, and about what our cultural legacy will be.”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, political scientist Elizabeth Prodromou highlights the organic connections between cultural heritage, time, and history, in her analysis of the Turkish state’s cultural

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<sup>4</sup> Cane and Conaghan, “Cultural heritage.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Erich Hatala Matthes, “The Ethics of Cultural Heritage,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/ethics-cultural-heritage/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

heritage policy.<sup>8</sup> In her essay for the *Religious Freedom Institute*, Prodromou argues that international principles, norms, and mechanisms capture “the crucial significance of memory as a mechanism of the synchronic and diachronic sustainability of religious communities, whether in robust, living communities or in at-risk communities.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Prodromou specifically invokes religious communities in the context of cultural heritage policies, but the undeniable importance of cultural heritage and its bilateral policies have the potential to affect and be applied to any identity group, whether it be religious, ethnic, national, racial, or otherwise.

Here we address our second question and identify the two types of cultural heritage. Looking again to Cane and Conaghan: “Cultural heritage is commonly divided into two categories: tangible and intangible. Tangible cultural heritage comprises remains of human existence that are material, in the sense that we can touch them. Tangible remains can be subdivided into movable objects, such as paintings and antiquities, and immovable buildings, monuments, and sites. Intangible cultural heritage, sometimes referred to as ‘living heritage,’ cannot be touched, but might be seen (a dance, a performance of a play or ritual) or heard (music, or a spoken language).”<sup>10</sup> A brief review of the history of the codification of cultural heritage in international legal settings helps to elucidate the distinctiveness and importance of tangible and intangible types of cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage has been codified in a variety of international laws and treaties, and it has been developing as an idea on a broad normative level for over a century. Manlio Frigo, Professor of International and European Law at the University of Milan, notes that the

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth H. Prodromou, “Turkey’s Cultural Heritage Cudgel,” *Religious Freedom Institute*, 12 June 2020, <https://www.religiousfreedominstitute.org/cornerstone/turkeys-cultural-heritage-cudgel>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Cane and Conaghan, “Cultural heritage.”

international codification of cultural heritage laws began in 1899 at the First Hague Convention.<sup>11</sup> The first two Hague Conventions, negotiated in 1899 and 1907, were multilateral treaties which adopted norms outlined in the 1863 Lieber Code, an American Civil War document which became codified law in the United States. Because the Lieber Code dealt specifically with military conduct in periods of war, early understandings of what would eventually come to be known as cultural heritage were largely limited to the context of armed conflict.

Frigo writes, “According to an established rule of customary international law, the destruction, pillage, looting or confiscation of works of art and other items of public or private cultural property in the course of armed conflicts must be considered unlawful.”<sup>12</sup> This customary rule refers only to tangible cultural heritage, and specifically, to the protection of tangible cultural heritage in times of armed conflict. Over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, international understandings of cultural heritage expanded to include intangible forms of cultural heritage and to identify the importance of protecting cultural heritage not only in times of armed conflict, but in peacetime, as well.

The 1954 Hague Convention updated cultural heritage laws in the wake of World War II, and the 1970 Convention articulated laws for the regulation of illicit trade and ownership of cultural heritage. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention of 1972 called for the defense of cultural heritage as an “outstanding universal value”<sup>13</sup> and enacted specific protections for cultural heritage designated as world heritage of universal value. The 2003 UNESCO

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<sup>11</sup> Manlio Frigo, “Cultural property v. cultural heritage: A ‘battle of concepts’ in international law?,” *Cambridge University Press International Review of the Red Cross* 86, no. 854 (27 April 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Cane and Conaghan, “Cultural heritage.”

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage<sup>14</sup> was a major step in formalizing a comprehensive protection regime for cultural heritage. Most specifically, the Convention defined intangible cultural heritage and provided for international mechanisms of cooperation and assistance to protect intangible cultural heritage. It bears mention that elements of chronicity, memory, and sustainability were explicitly recognized in the international cultural heritage protection regimes—emblematic, in this regard, is the 2003 Convention’s specification that “...intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity...”<sup>15</sup> In sum, within the period from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the international community came to recognize the value of cultural heritage for local, national, and global communities, and articulated an interlocking protection regime for both tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage.

Having answered my first two questions through a review of the literature, it is important to highlight a conceptual weakness running through research on cultural heritage, stemming from the fact that “the term ‘cultural property’ is sometimes used synonymously with ‘cultural heritage.’”<sup>16</sup> While it is noted in the literature that the division of cultural heritage into the tangible and the intangible is one which derives from property law, the synonymizing of cultural property with cultural heritage creates a false and problematic equivalence, and therefore must be rejected.

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<sup>14</sup> “Text of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,” United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Cane and Conaghan, “Cultural heritage.”

Cultural heritage is an idea whose two parts of “heritage” and “cultural” must be recognized as two individual entities. This recognition is crucial to a proper understanding of the whole term. To equate cultural heritage with cultural property privileges *property* over *heritage*, a non-comprehensive and outdated notion which excludes the vital importance of intangible forms of cultural heritage. Indeed, the word “property” has come to be attached to both material and non-material entities but, within the context of such a nuanced and continuously-evolving term, it unnecessarily muddies the definitional waters. As mentioned above, the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions exclusively used the term “cultural property” in legal documents. Cultural property, however, was used in that context only to describe tangible cultural heritage, and broader ideas of cultural heritage which encompass both the tangible and the intangible had not yet been developed in international law.

One might look to the 1970 UNESCO Convention regarding the illicit trade and transfer of cultural heritage to more clearly understand the problems with using “heritage” and “property” synonymously. Article 1 of the Convention invokes the term “cultural property” in reference to categories of physical goods (tangible cultural heritage), defined as “property which, on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each State as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science.”<sup>17</sup> Article 2 of the Convention states that “the illicit import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property is one of the main causes of the impoverishment of the cultural heritage of the countries of origin of such

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<sup>17</sup> “*Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, Paris, 14 November 1970,” UNESCO, [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13039&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13039&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).



property.”<sup>18</sup> These articles render clear both the distinctions and relationships between cultural heritage and cultural property. Cultural property is simply one component of cultural heritage.

Therefore, aiming for definitional clarity, I will refrain from using the terms “cultural heritage” and “cultural property” synonymously in this thesis. I will use the term “cultural property” only as it pertains to tangible cultural heritage.

### **Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Nationalism**

Why is cultural heritage a useful tool for states in building nationalism? In this section, I will answer this third question that is central to my thesis by exploring the relevant scholarly literatures dealing with the constitutive features of nationalism.

In his article, “The Ethical Significance of Nationality,” David Miller defines nationality. While Miller does not employ the term *nationalism*, his focus on *nationality* helps to understand the legal and identity dimensions of the ideology of nationalism. According to Miller:

...nationality is essentially a subjective phenomenon, constituted by the shared beliefs of a set of people: a belief that each belongs together with the rest; that this association is neither transitory nor merely instrumental but stems from a long history of living together which (it is hoped and expected) will continue into the future; that the community is marked off from other communities by its members’ distinctive characteristics; and each member recognizes a loyalty to the community, expressed in a willingness to sacrifice personal gain to advance its interests.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, Miller identifies three major facets of nationality: shared beliefs, community, and historicity. One might recall that all of these three factors are central to understanding cultural

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<sup>18</sup> “*Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing*,” UNESCO.

<sup>19</sup> David Miller, “The Ethical Significance of Nationality,” *The University of Chicago Press*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (July 1988), 648.

heritage. Cultural heritage is the reflection of shared beliefs, serves as a tool for building and maintaining community, and expresses historicity by connecting the past, present, and future.

Thus, cultural heritage might be used as an excellent strategic tool in building nationalism, both inclusivist and exclusivist. In this context, cultural heritage has both practical and emotional value, acting as an excellent tool to shape societies.

### **Research Design**

My thesis deploys a single case study model, using Turkey as my case study. I use a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to illustrate and support my claims, as specified in the following section.

This thesis has two intersectional components. The theoretical component analyzes the relationship between nationalism and cultural heritage. The empirical component explores the project of Turkish nation-building in two historical periods and the centrality of cultural heritage to iterations of Turkish nationalism. The conceptual and empirical components of my thesis enable me to elucidate patterns of historical continuity. The demonstration of a historically continuous pattern is, in and of itself, valuable on an analytical level, but it also helps to support another claim which I am making in my thesis. That is, while Kemalism and Erdoğanism are conventionally understood as two oppositional phenomena and philosophies, they are not, in fact, oppositional. On the contrary, the philosophies mirror one another and possess the same ultimate goal: to create an exclusivist, ethnically Turkish, Sunni Muslim society that is governed by ethnically Turkish, Sunni Muslims. The critical difference between the Kemalist and Erdoğanist versions of nationalism lies not in doctrine, but in presented nation-building objectives.

Kemalists cite the need to create a “secular” state (which, according to Kemalism, is the strongest type of state) as justification for the development of cultural heritage policies which, in reality, only require minority groups to practice secularity. Erdoğanists cite the need to create a “conservative democratic”<sup>20</sup> state informed by neo-Ottomanism as justification for the development of comparable cultural heritage policies. This speaks to the importance of perception and the power of cultural heritage policies in shaping perceptions of different nationalisms.

### **Chapter Outline**

In Chapter Two, I address the first part of my case study: the Mustafa Kemal “Atatürk” period in the early, foundational years of the modern<sup>21</sup> Republic of Turkey (1923 to 1938). This chapter examines the Ottoman roots of exclusivism and provides a synoptic account of exclusivist proto-nationalism and proto-cultural heritage policies in the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the chapter addresses what constitutes Turkish identity in the Kemalist ideological tradition.

I will examine the “secularization” and “Westernization” projects of Atatürk, drawing on Turkish anthropological publications to investigate how ethno-religious minorities were portrayed by Turkish state institutions during the Kemalist period. I will also closely examine

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<sup>20</sup> Emad Y. Kaddorah, “Conservative Democracy and the Future of Turkish Secularism,” *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies* (May 2015), [https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Conservative\\_Democracy\\_and\\_Turkey\\_Research\\_Paper.pdf](https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/lists/ACRPS-PDFDocumentLibrary/Conservative_Democracy_and_Turkey_Research_Paper.pdf).

<sup>21</sup> It is important to clarify my use of the word “modern” when written in conjunction with “state”; i.e. “modern state” or “modern Republic of Turkey.” My use of “modern” in this context denotes the presence of the Westphalian model of the nation state and sovereignty. The Republic of Turkey is the “modern state” which grew out of the Ottoman Empire. In this context, I am not using the word “modern” to communicate that something is contemporary, current, or up-to-date.

the constitutional policies established in the early years of the Turkish Republic; specifically, those pertaining to cultural heritage and including cultural property, education, and language.

In Chapter Three, I will present the second part of my case: the Erdoğan period (2001 to the present). Here I will offer background on the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Erdoğan and examine the de facto Islamic theocracy which is presently in place in Turkey. I will present statistics and examples of cultural heritage erasure (for example, the conversion of churches into mosques and Islamic cultural centers). I will incorporate data from my own interviews with members of the Greek Orthodox community of Turkey to demonstrate the quotidian impact of Turkey's exclusivist nationalism and cultural heritage policies on the lived experience of ethno-religious minorities.

## CHAPTER TWO: FROM EMPIRE TO REPUBLIC

In 1894, Christians accounted for 20 percent of the population of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>22</sup> Approximately half of these Christians were Greek Orthodox.<sup>23</sup> By 1924, Christians only accounted for two percent of the population of the Republic of Turkey.<sup>24</sup> Today, Turkey is the 17<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world, with a population of 85 million people. Of these 85 million, only 89,000 are non-Muslims.<sup>25</sup> Of these 89,000,<sup>26</sup> it is estimated that there are only 1,700 to 2,500 Greek Orthodox Christians, making up 0.002% of the overall population of Turkey.<sup>27</sup>

In pondering this significant change in demographics, a student of Political Science might consider ethnic cleansing, population exchange, or emigration (out-migration) as potential factors. This student would not be incorrect in their postulations. Between 1914 and 1924,

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<sup>22</sup> Stanford Shaw, “The Ottoman Census System and Population, 1831-1814,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 3 (October 1978): 325-338.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The Ottoman Empire conducted frequent censuses following the establishment of the *Ceride-i Nufus Nezareti* (Ottoman Census Department) by Sultan Mahmud II in 1831, in the years leading up to the Tanzimat Reforms. According to the Ottoman census of 1906, there were approximately 15.5 million Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire, and there were approximately 5.4 million non-Muslims living in the Ottoman Empire. In 1914, the Ottoman Census Department reported 15 million Muslims in the Empire, while the non-Muslim population had dipped to 3.5 million. 1.7 of these 3.5 million non-Muslims were Greek Orthodox Christians.

<sup>25</sup> Benny Morris and Dror Ze’evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide: Turkey’s Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894-1924* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 42.

<sup>26</sup> For purposes of viewing a fuller picture of Turkish society, is important to note the situation of Alevis, non-confirming Muslims who reportedly constitute approximately 15 percent of Turkey’s total population. Alevis are not identified as an official minority in Turkey (unlike Christians and Jews, who were assigned official minority status in the 1982 Turkish Constitution), despite the fact that they are separate from Sunni Muslims. Alevis are also the victims of the exclusionary tactics discussed in this thesis, and their existence and situation must be recognized.

<sup>27</sup> Morris and Ze’evi, *The Thirty-Year Genocide*, 42.

400,000 to 500,000 Greek Orthodox Christians in Anatolia were killed by Ottoman and Turkish authorities.<sup>28</sup> During the same period, 1.5 million Greek Orthodox Christians in Anatolia were forcibly resettled in Greece—approximately 1.2 million were displaced during the 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey.<sup>29</sup>

Despite this trendline, there remained a measurable community of 350,000 Greek Orthodox Christians in Turkey in 1924.<sup>30</sup> Today's 1,700 to 2,500 Greek Orthodox Christians are the remnant of this historic community. What, then, accounts for this precipitous and continuous decline in the last century, when the two aforementioned factors of genocide and population exchange were absent? The development of cultural heritage policies by the Turkish state to build exclusivist nationalism provides an explanation of these numbers.

The broad focus of this chapter is the examination of the cultural heritage policies of the long Atatürk period, from 1923 to 1938, and the effect of these policies on building exclusivist nationalism in Turkey. In addressing this first part of my case study, I identify the Ottoman roots of exclusivist Turkish nationalism, provide an identification and explanation of Kemalist thought, and identify Atatürk's cultural heritage policies. In order to most effectively illustrate these intersecting issues, I have divided this chapter into three parts.

In Part I, we begin with an examination of the Ottoman foundations of the Turkish state and of Ottomanization as a proto-nationalistic philosophy and set of policy directives. In order to most effectively understand the identity-driven dynamics of Turkish society, we must recognize the legacy of Ottomanism and situate the case of Turkish state and society within a logical historical context. I provide a concise survey of the unequal structure of Ottoman

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<sup>28</sup> Morris and Ze'evi, *Thirty-Year Genocide*, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

society, and of Ottoman policies regarding ethno-religious minorities such as Greek Orthodox Christians.

Parts II and III of this chapter are complementary, in that Part II establishes the theoretical while Part III establishes the operational aspects of the Turkish nationalism of the early Turkish Republic. Specifically, in Part II, I explore Kemalism, the founding nationalist ideology of the Turkish Republic and the ideological foundation for Atatürk's cultural heritage policies. In this part we see the explicit codification of exclusivist nationalist ideology into state-produced anthropological writings and examine how Kemalism defined what it means to be "Turkish" and what constitutes "Turkishness."

In Part III, I identify Atatürk's cultural heritage policies and how they worked to strengthen exclusivist Turkish nationalism and effectively exclude and drive out Greek Orthodox Christians from Turkey and Turkish society. Furthermore, an overarching objective of Parts II and III of this chapter is to explain what Kemalist "secularism" actually meant and how it was applied on a policy level.

### **Part I: Separate and Unequal: Ottoman Roots of Exclusion**

An investigation into Turkish nationalism necessarily begins with a brief survey of Turkish history, and, specifically, a historical survey of the Ottoman Empire, which gave birth to the modern Republic of Turkey and laid the foundation for the major tenets of Turkish nationalism. It is useful to recall David Miller's identification of historicity as one of the three

major facets of nationality,<sup>31</sup> as well as the international human rights community's identification of shared history as a central characteristic of cultural heritage.

The Ottoman Empire is often described by historians, political scientists, and anthropologists as a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multicultural empire. Indeed, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other religious communities lived in the Ottoman Empire. The empire was comparably diverse in its vast array of resident ethnic groups, with Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Arabs, and Turks creating a mosaic of various identity groups.

Until recently, the dominant historiographical treatment of the Ottoman Empire equated ethno-religious diversity with equality before the law and in practice. Moreover, the elision of multi-group equality facilely assumed that all individuals in the empire enjoyed equal legal status. Taken as a whole, this long-standing historiographical perspective embedded in the phrase "multicultural" was one with a positive connotation.

This is a dangerous distortion of the historical record which omits the Ottoman state's policies of cleansing, homogenization, and discrimination against ethno-religious minorities and reframes the Ottoman foundations of Turkish nationalism through a significantly flawed lens. Furthermore, this conflation of diversity with equality in the Ottoman case aids in the promulgation of the dominant hegemonic narrative that the Turkish state implements today in their politics of exclusion and erasure.

This dominant hegemonic narrative was defined by a revision and concealment of the empirical historical record. This phenomenon of concealment has been complemented by an equally problematic conceptual disconnect between the Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic by many scholars. In Zeyno Baran's 2010 book, *Torn Country: Turkey between*

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<sup>31</sup> Miller identifies shared beliefs, community, and historicity as the three major facts of nationality.



*Secularism and Islam*, she writes: “The Ottoman sultans developed a concept of Ottoman nationality to bind their ethnically and religiously diverse subjects together. Not until the mid-eighteen hundreds, as nationalist doctrines gained momentum across Europe, did the concept of a Turkish identity began [sic.] to take shape.”<sup>32</sup>

This statement communicates a certain distance and disconnect between Ottoman nationality/identity and Turkish nationality/identity, and fails to acknowledge the fact that Turkish identity grew directly out of Ottoman identity.

Within the last quarter century, however, a critical historiographical school has emerged regarding nationalism in the Ottoman Empire and the roots of Turkish nationalism in Ottomanism. Scholars such as Taha Parla and Fatma Göçek are critiquing this state-centered, official historiography that was—not incidentally—exported and globalized into transatlantic academic and policy spaces within the broader context of Orientalism.<sup>33</sup>

The Ottoman Empire was, in reality, a deeply unequal empire, based on a system of division that included and protected ethnically Turkish, Sunni Muslim subjects, and excluded and abused non-Turkish, non-Sunni Muslim subjects. The language of nationalism which is associated with modern states was already present in Ottoman state structures and practices. As an empire governed on a broad level by Islamic jurisprudence,<sup>34</sup> Ottoman law had very different implications for different religious groups.

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<sup>32</sup> Zeyno Baran, *Torn Country: Turkey between Secularism and Islam* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2010), 14.

<sup>33</sup> There were several scholars, such as Speros Vryonis and Şerif Mardin, who rejected this conventional wisdom about the Ottoman Empire, but they were fighting against the dominant perspective. Their work has now been re-mined, reintroduced, and integrated into the broader critique.

<sup>34</sup> Haim Gerber, “Law in the Ottoman Empire,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Law*, ed. Rumeo Ahmed and Anver M. Emon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 475-492.

Ottoman society was divided along *millet*s, which were administrative groupings of separate religious populations. The Orthodox Christian millet was called the *Rum millet*, meaning “nation of the Romans.”<sup>35</sup> Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire were known as *dhimmi*,<sup>36</sup> and were subject to certain laws that did not apply to Muslims. Dhimmi were required to pay the *jizya*—a tax imposed on non-Muslims—to their respective millets.<sup>37</sup> Many scholars argue that Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire actually enjoyed a protected status, given that the Quran refers to dhimmi as “protected people.”<sup>38</sup> This so-called “protected status” did not actually protect dhimmi, but rather gave them an ultimatum: taxation, exile, or death.<sup>39</sup> Dhimmi could also renounce their faith and convert to Islam to avoid paying the *jizya*, and, in doing so, become part of the privileged Muslim population of the Ottoman Empire. Dhimmi were also forbidden from riding horses or camels, forbidden from owning weapons, and forbidden from holding public office.<sup>40</sup> Dhimmi were also required to “yield the center of the road” to Muslims, and were prohibited from giving evidence in Ottoman courts against Muslims.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, it is more helpful, in our critical examination of Ottoman history, to conceptualize dhimmi status as second-class or minority status, rather than privileged status.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Residents of the Byzantine Empire called themselves *Romei*, or, Romans, in English.

<sup>36</sup> *Dhimmi* comes from the Arabic *al-dhimmah*, which means, “people of the covenant.”

<sup>37</sup> Gerber, “Law in the Ottoman Empire,” 479.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Bat Ye’or, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians Under Islam* (New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985), 53.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>42</sup> A clarification on the use of the term “minority” in reference to the non-Muslim populations of the Ottoman Empire: Some scholars argue that applying the term minority to the status of non-Muslims is historically anachronistic, because there was no word in Ottoman Turkish which meant “minority” (the word “minority” was created in modern Turkish as *azınlık* and was introduced in conjunction with the establishment of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923). The term “minority” actually makes sense in this context, though, because, regardless of their numbers, minorities were those who were not assumed to be part of the dominant hegemonic community;

Dhimmi status and the jizya tax may ring familiar for contemporary scholars of the Middle East. Today, the Islamic State has imposed the jizya tax on Christians, Jews, and Yazidis in territories which it has captured in the Middle East.<sup>43</sup> The title of a 2014 *Forbes* article illustrated this phenomenon with a straight-forward title: “Islamic State Warns Christians: Convert, Pay Tax, Leave, or Die.”<sup>44</sup> One might look to the case of mafia-controlled areas in Italy to further understand this notion of “protection” in another context, in which citizens are required to pay taxes to local mafia groups as “protection.”<sup>45</sup> If citizens do not pay taxes to the local mafia branch, they are either killed, or flee to escape being murdered.<sup>46</sup>

We return to Zeyno Baran’s *Torn Country* to discuss another Ottoman practice pertaining to non-Muslims. In discussing the various factors which accounted for the Ottoman Empire’s nearly 500 year rule, Baran identifies the impact of Ottoman conquests and accumulation of slaves from conquered lands. She writes: “The Ottoman sultans brought European slaves to work in the Topkapi Palace as counselors and new troops (or janissaries) who served as the sultans’ personal security force.”<sup>47</sup> In her chapter-long discussion of the structure and practices of the Ottoman Empire and in the aforementioned passage about “European” slaves, Baran fails

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so, in this regard, “minority” really means “other.” The majority-minority relationship applies to law and practice, where political control and religious identity were one and the same. It is also worth mentioning that, on a numerical level, non-Muslims actually constituted a numerical majority for a certain duration in the Ottoman Empire. At the time of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, the Byzantine Empire was primarily comprised of non-Muslims.

<sup>43</sup> Nina Shea, “The ISIS Genocide of Middle Eastern Christian Minorities and Its Jizya Propaganda Ploy,” Center for Religious Freedom at the Hudson Institute, August 2016, <http://media.hudson.org.s3.amazonaws.com/files/publications/20160721TheISISGenocideofMiddleEasternChristianMinoritiesandItsJizyaPropagandaPloy.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> Kelly Phillips Erb, “Islamic State Warns Christians: Convert, Pay Tax, Leave, or Die,” *Forbes*, 19 July 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kellyphillipserb/2014/07/19/islamic-state-warns-christians-convert-pay-tax-leave-or-die/?sh=3b8b4db62c25>.

<sup>45</sup> Federico Varese, “Chapter 17: Protection and Extortion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Organized Crime*, ed. Letizia Paoli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 343-358.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Baran, *Torn Country*, 16.

to acknowledge the largest pool of slave labor used by the Ottoman Empire—that of Christian Ottoman subjects in the *devşirme* system.

First mentioned in written records in 1438,<sup>48</sup> the *devşirme* system involved the abduction of Christian boys (who were most often between the ages of eight and 20) from their families.<sup>49</sup> These boys were forcibly converted to Islam and made to be soldiers or sex slaves for the Sultan in Constantinople.<sup>50</sup> The *devşirme* system was, quite simply, institutionalized abduction, conversion, and, ultimately, forced labor or sex slavery of countless individuals based on their religious background.

Ultimately, Ottoman society was deeply divided along religious lines, with non-Muslims as second-class citizens. While, on a surface level, the Ottoman Empire gave all religious groups “autonomy” in the form of their own pseudo-administrative spaces of the millets, the actual foundational structure of the Ottoman state and law created, as Enver Ziya Karal writes, “two societies, side by side, with unequal rights.”<sup>51</sup> This inequality extended beyond dhimmi status, the *jizya*, and the *devşirme* system, and also manifested itself in policies which, when applied to the modern state system, can be characterized as cultural heritage policies and practices. More specifically, these were policies created with the intention of destroying the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Greek Orthodox Christians.

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<sup>48</sup> David Nicolle, “Devshirme System,” in *Conflict and Conquest in the Islamic World: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Alexander Mikaberidze (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 273-274.

<sup>49</sup> Gulay Yilmaz, “Becoming a Devşirme: The Training of Conscripted Children in the Ottoman Empire,” in *Children in Slavery through the Ages*, ed. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 119-134.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Enver Ziya Karal, “Non-Muslim Representatives in the First Constitutional Assembly, 1876-77,” in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. B. Braude and B. Lewis (New York: Holmes and Meyer, 1982), 387.

The Ottoman state routinely demolished Greek Orthodox churches and houses owned by Greek Orthodox people, and, while it was technically legal for the Rum millet to build churches, hyper-specific prohibitions about the locations and building specifications of churches largely prevented their construction.

The work of French Byzantinist Vitalien Laurent is particularly revealing on these issues. Laurent was the long-time editor of the *Revue des études byzantines* (Review of Byzantine Studies), which was established in 1897 as *Échos d'Orient* (Echoes of East), and is one of the oldest peer-reviewed academic journals regarding the Byzantine Empire. In a 1929 article for the journal entitled “Les chrétiens sous les sultans (1553-1592): Un recueil de documents turcs” [The Christians under the sultans (1553-1592): A collection of Turkish documents], Laurent presents a collection of Ottoman state documents (translated from Ottoman into French) from 1564 to 1585 discussing building prohibitions for churches in Constantinople, or, “*Stamboul*,” as the city is referred to in the documents.<sup>52</sup> About his findings, Laurent notes in his commentary: “Regulations with religious character include almost all sanctions taken against the non-Islamic communities...So, it is forbidden for the Christians to build [churches or other Christian structures] near bulwarks or close to mosques...”<sup>53</sup>

Given the vast quantity of mosques and fortress walls across the city of Istanbul, these specifications make it clear that the goal was to either reduce and/or eliminate physical Christian sites and structures from the geospace of Istanbul. Additionally, churches were not allowed to stand taller than mosques.<sup>54</sup> This only allowed for the building of small chapels and prevented the construction of medium- or large-sized churches or cathedrals, ultimately preventing the

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<sup>52</sup> Vitalien Laurent, “Les chrétiens sous les sultans (1553-1592): Un recueil de documents turcs,” *Revue des études byzantines* 32, no. 156 (1929): 398-406.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 399.

<sup>54</sup> Ye’or, *The Dhimmi*, 57.

construction of spaces for assembly and gathering of the Greek Orthodox population, whether for religious or other cultural purposes. This height limitation was made even more difficult given the bell and dome structures of Byzantine-style churches, and implied a series of additional complications designed to limit the use of religious and cultural heritage sites. One of the documents that Laurent includes in his article mentions this restriction on height.

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Sultan Suleiman I to an Ottoman judge and an Ottoman architect in 1565 regarding churches in Balat (a historically Greek and Jewish neighborhood in Istanbul) entitled “*Pour la démolition de l’église construite contrairement aux lois au delà de Balat Capou*” (“For the destruction of the church constructed contrary to laws hereafter of Balat Capou”):

The infidels/faithless sinners had recourse to my imperial throne to say that their church constructed beyond by Balat Capou had been closed by key and the entrance forbidden in accordance with my sacred order. And, having learnt that the church being discussed was only a home before and that the infidels/faithless by adding a floor transformed it into church, I ordered to demolish it and I loaded Ali with it. I enjoin you not to defer accompanying it on places and to demolish all houses which would exceed the others in height and not to allow that they act against my order. You will mean in the infidels/faithless that they will not have to meet any more in this home to celebrate their rituals, and it will at the same time recommend to the Muslims of neighborhood to inform [the Ottoman authorities] in case the faithless would meet in the aforementioned home or plan to construct other one.<sup>55</sup>

This excerpt is instructive in several ways. First, the letter notes the aforementioned height policy and encapsulates the disturbing normalization of an imperial state policy of destruction of Greek Orthodox churches and residences. Second, the language of the letter—for example, the reference to Greek Orthodox Christians as “infidels/faithless sinners”—communicates the clear theocratic structure of the Ottoman Empire and a theological perspective entrenched in notions of socio-religious hierarchy and power. Third, the recommendation issued by the Sultan for the

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<sup>55</sup> Laurent, “Les chrétiens sous les sultans,” 401.

Muslims in the Balat neighborhood to inform the Ottoman authorities about their Christian neighbors' potential response communicates how the Ottoman state generated social mistrust and fragmentation along communal lines, setting up Muslims as reporters of the state against their Christian neighbors.

Historian George Georgiadis Arnakis also details these Ottoman state policies regarding the construction and upkeep of churches in the Ottoman Empire in a 1944 article for *The Journal of Modern History*:

In place of their old churches [which the Ottomans had converted into mosques] the Greeks were allowed to build little, humble structures with wooden roofs. But it was not easy to get such permission. In each case a *fetva* [an Islamic decree] had to be issued by the *ulema* (doctors of Islamic theology), testifying that the new place of worship would not be obnoxious to Islam or to the state. In addition to bribing several officials, it was found necessary to distribute money among the Turkish families of the neighborhood so that they would raise no objection to the building project. In due course the *fetva* would be submitted to the sultan, who would grant a firman authorizing the petitioners to build the church and to complete it within forty days. Under such circumstances it was hardly possible for the Christians to have the right kind of church; customarily the roofing was done on the fortieth day, with nails only half driven in.<sup>56</sup>

Even the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the seat of the Orthodox Church worldwide, was victim to these policies. Arnakis writes: “The Patriarchate found shelter at first in the Panagia at Xyloporta and later in St. Demetrius. Each of these churches was a poor structure, housing a poverty-stricken organization. Finally, in 1603, St. George of Phanar became the cathedral church, and it has remained the patriarch's seat until now. It was one of the small churches which the Turks had not taken.”<sup>57</sup>

This was the general state of affairs in the Ottoman Empire for several centuries. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, two phenomena emerged that would

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<sup>56</sup> George Georgiadis Arnakis, “The Greek Church of Constantinople and the Ottoman Empire,” *The Journal of Modern History* 24, no. 3 (1952): 246.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

critically change the landscape of Ottoman and Turkish nationalism and the facade of cultural heritage policies. Living in an empire in serious decline, many young, educated, Ottoman elite became increasingly disillusioned with the absolutist, authoritarian regime of Sultan Abdul Hamid II during the last three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Many of these elites—particularly those who had studied in Western Europe—adopted the European intellectual trends of the period and imported them into the Ottoman Empire. Theories of ethnic and racial nationalism were taking on authority in Europe, and political youth movements like the Young Italy movement served as inspiration for a new conceptualization of nationhood. This confluence of people and events led to the establishment of the Young Turks. The movement was led primarily by Mehmed Talaat (“Talat Pasha”) and Ismail Enver (“Enver Pasha”), who would become the de facto leaders of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, and the architects of the Ottoman genocide against Christians.<sup>58</sup>

Meanwhile, in 1912 and 1913, the Balkan Wars provided the geopolitical complement to the Young Turks’ ideological development. By the end of the Second Balkan War, the Ottoman Empire had incurred significant territorial losses of the regions of Macedonia and Epirus, of Albania and Kosovo, and of most of the region of Thrace, losing all remaining European territories except for Constantinople and Eastern Thrace.<sup>59</sup> While these territorial losses caused structural changes, dealing the final deathblow to an already crumbling Ottoman Empire, they also produced equally serious demographic changes in the composition and identity and demographic geospace of the Empire. This period produced a crucial change in the two kinds of

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<sup>58</sup> Ronald Grigor Suny, *“They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else:” A History of the Armenian Genocide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 189-191.

<sup>59</sup> Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, “Point of No Return? Prospects of Empire After the Ottoman Defeat in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913),” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 1 (2018): 65-84.



geographies—one, a compression or truncation in the territorial geography in the empire, and a concomitant change in the ethno-religious composition and demography of the empire—that affected the consolidation of an exclusivist form of nationalism that would have direct implications for cultural heritage. This shrinking in geographic footprint carried with it a reduction of ethnic diversity in the Ottoman citizenry, and, coupled with the ethnic and racial nationalism brewed by the Young Turks, created the foundations for Kemalism, an ethnic- and race-based form of nationalism that would dictate the policies and practices of the early Republic.

Just as the Ottoman Empire, itself, dissolved, so too did the Young Turks' movement. The Balkan Wars and First World War created rifts within the Young Turks' movement, but one member of the movement would become a decisive actor in Turkish history. Eventually, Mustafa Kemal "Atatürk," an ethnically Turkish Sunni Muslim born in Thessaloniki (a city in modern-day Greece), would become the founder of the Republic of Turkey.<sup>60</sup> Kemal's impact on the nationalist project of the new state of Turkey was so determinant that Turkish nationalism and Kemalism would be used interchangeably. The reality is that the Kemalists are the byproduct, inheritors, and final articulation of the Young Turks' conceptualizations and policies, fully operationalizing the ideas of Turkification that the Young Turks had developed and begun to execute in the Christian genocide.

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<sup>60</sup> Trine Stauning Willert, *The New Ottoman Greece in History and Fiction (Modernity, Memory and Identity in South-East Europe)* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 89-112.

## Part II: State-Making and the Kemalist Theory of Nationalism

By the 1920s and 1930s, the work of the European intellectual class of the previous decades had begun to seriously influence the political space of various states and societies across the world, occupying a central space in various developing nationalist ideologies. There emerged a clear identification of the connection between territorial space, identity and culture, and state control in the nationalist projects of many dominant political parties and movements. Central to this particular model of nationalism was a common and all-important characteristic: the construction of an ideal-type citizen, who embodies the ontological, constitutive features of the nation as a whole.

Whether it was the Sabra Jew or the *Herrenrasse*, the ideal-type citizen was formulated and defined in terms of primordial, essentialist features that could be expressed in ethnic, religious, and linguistic forms. Insofar as this ideal-type citizen was understood in such primordial, essentialist, putatively immutable identity features/terms, citizens who did not possess those features were, de facto, either *other*, or *less than*, both in social hierarchies of power, and in terms of relationship to the state. Kemalism would become one of the most exemplary incarnations of this model of nationalism, codifying an ideal-type Turkish citizen in foundational Turkish state doctrine and elucidating the clear separation and inferiority of non-ideal-type Turkish citizens.

Named for its ideological founder and leader, Mustafa Kemal, Kemalism was the original dominant nationalist ideology of the Turkish Republic.<sup>61</sup> Kemalism was the foundation for various state laws and policies that would come to symbolize the fundamental ideological nature of the Republic and that are still in use today. Many in the broad historiography laud Kemalism

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<sup>61</sup> Suna Kili, "Kemalism in Contemporary Turkey," *International Political Science Review* 1, no. 3, *Political Ideology: Its Impact on Contemporary Political Transformations* (1980), 381-404.

as a chiefly positive movement and ideology—a breakthrough modernization theory that would both orient Turkey more towards the West and broadly reform and secularize Turkish state and society, creating more social cohesion and equality before the law.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the notion of *reform* was central to Kemalist philosophy and policy execution; it was under Kemalism that the Turkish state replaced Ottoman script with the Latin-based new Turkish alphabet in an effort to align with the West,<sup>63</sup> and Atatürk’s Kemalist regime supported scientific exploration and free public education.<sup>64</sup>

Such an overwhelming exaltation of the ideology, however, overlooks the deeply discriminatory and racist core of Kemalism. Just as importantly, there exists a general historiographic failure to address the paradoxical, contradictory nature of Kemalism. That is, Kemalism, itself, aimed to fashion a cosmopolitan, civilized, Western-friendly version of the Ottoman Empire in the form of the new, progressive, Kemalist Turkish Republic. In reality, many Kemalist policies—particularly secularization policies—were effectively Ottoman policies written with different language (language which was representative of the Westphalian state system). At the same time that Kemalists used nationalist policy to exclude, subjugate, and punish Greek Orthodox Christians in Turkey, the Kemalists also appropriated the very cultural heritage of the Greek Orthodox population to recover from the anointing of the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man of Europe”<sup>65</sup> at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and present a more Western-oriented Turkish Republic.

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<sup>62</sup> Kili, “Kemalism in Contemporary Turkey.”

<sup>63</sup> Yılmaz Çolak, “Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (November 2004), 68-69.

<sup>64</sup> Birsen Unal, “Education Policies during Atatürk Period,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 174 (February 2015), 1718.

<sup>65</sup> Eric Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145.

In this section, we examine the ideological foundations of Kemalism through an examination of Turkish anthropological publications. An investigation into the theory of Kemalism is necessary if we are to understand the meaning and intents of the application and operationalization of the ideology, something to which the following section is dedicated.

Whereas Ottoman imperial statemakers drew on Islamic law to organize their society, the new Turkish statemakers sought to replace (and simultaneously incorporate) their Ottoman predecessor's theories with a new, scientific, state-sanctioned codex for social organization and national identity. The most clear encapsulation of this came in the form of the *Turkish Review of Anthropology*, an academic journal which was published between 1925 and 1939 by the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Istanbul, who went on to form the Anthropology Institute of Turkey.<sup>66</sup> The *Review* was the first state-funded academic journal, and served as the main method of output for the growing Turkish anthropological community. Social anthropology in Turkey developed in an "atmosphere of nationalistic purpose,"<sup>67</sup> and the primary objective of the Institute was to "contribute to the development of the Kemalist thesis of history: to research the cultural origins, historical development, and physical characteristics of the Turkish people."<sup>68</sup> The implications for cultural heritage would quickly become clear.

It is in this specific environment, then, and with these specific objectives, that anthropology, as an academic discipline in Turkey, was first developed and disseminated. The Institute simultaneously served as the perfect incubator and official intellectual legitimizer for Kemalist ethno-religious ideology and the Kemalist ideal-type citizen. As historian Nazan

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<sup>66</sup> Wolfram Eberhard, Nermin Erdentug, Bozkurt Guvenc, Paul J. Magnarella, Orhan Turkdogan, Ibrahim Yasa, and Nadia Abu Zahra, "The Development of Turkish Social Anthropology," *Current Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (1976): 265.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 265.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 265-266.

Maksudyan writes, the Institute “used willing academics to legitimize a racist type of nationalism by appealing to (and abusing) the language and methods of science.”<sup>69</sup> Under the guise of scientific rationalism and empiricism, the *Review* asked and answered several questions: Who is Turkish? What does it mean to be a Turk? Mustafa Kemal, himself, applauded the Institute on the first edition of the *Review*, and also reiterated the objectives of the Institute in a letter to the Faculty, writing: “I wish success to the institute in its valuable work which targets the aim of investigating the Turk.”<sup>70</sup> Maksudyan writes that the *Review* presented “a dominating and exclusionary discourse of Turkish nationalism, in which the ‘Turkish race’ (posited as the dominant national group) had a sense of proprietary ownership of the nation and national identity.”<sup>71</sup>

The so-called “anthropologists” behind the *Review* were, themselves, in fact, medical doctors, who had “recently begun to present themselves as anthropologists.”<sup>72</sup> Many of these doctors, such as Şevket Aziz Kansu, the director of the Institute,<sup>73</sup> studied and worked in European university laboratories and researched the connections between anatomy and physiology, race, and nationalism—the intersection of foci and phenomena that is essentially at the core of the discipline of eugenics. Kansu’s work in Paris specifically dealt with “the morphology of the skulls of Neo-Caledonians and African Negroes.”<sup>74</sup>

This state support for and application of “science” corresponded to the overall Kemalist project, not only in terms of the ideological legitimation but also in terms of the aforementioned

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<sup>69</sup> Nazan Maksudyan, “The Turkish Review of Anthropology and the Racist Face of Turkish Nationalism,” *Cultural Dynamics* 17, no. 3 (2005): 293.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 294

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>73</sup> Işın Günay and Ayşegül Şarbak, “Bibliography of Human Osteology Studies in Turkey (1930-2014),” *Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 5 (August 2015): 1003.

<sup>74</sup> Maksudyan, “Turkish Review of Anthropology,” 295.

support of science by Kemalists. This support for “science,” though, is yet another moment in which constructed perception and reality sit distantly from one another in the broad scope of Kemalism. This distance between perception and reality, however, worked purposefully for the Kemalist’s construction of an exclusivist nationalism. As Maksudyan writes:

...the understanding of science in the Turkish context was superficial. The meaning of science, scientific research, and scientific inquiry remained quite far-off to many intellectuals and political elites. Much of the effort in the field of scientific research was directly subject to the hegemony of nationalist ideology. In the context of the Republic, it was possible to attach truth to virtually anything under the disguise of a scientific argument. In fact, science was utilized by the Republican elites in a very subtle manner in order to suggest that scientific findings dictated the only right way of solving the problems; and therefore, to suppress any questioning of policies undertaken by the scientific state of Turkey. In this respect, the *Turkish Review of Anthropology* was founded to *prove* myths about the Turkish race by using positivist methods of physical anthropology. Anthropology was considered to be a perfect tool to convey in a scientific manner truths about the Turkish race that were no more than nationalist inventions.<sup>75</sup>

The first edition of the *Review* includes an article entitled “Comparative Analysis of the Turkish Race and Other Races Living in Istanbul.” The ideas and objectives of the *Review* are clear from this first article; the authors identify the Turk as “the master of the country.”<sup>76</sup> In discussing the minority populations, the authors write: “The Greeks, the Jews and the Armenians have been living here for a long time...”<sup>77</sup> This use of language creates a master-subject, host-guest dichotomy, wherein the minorities are presented as the interlopers and the Turks as the eternal masters. This sort of writing aids not only in the Kemalist mission of constructing a seemingly natural, de facto hierarchical order of Turkish society in which the minority groups are inferior, but also in the development of an alternative, non-factual account of history. The authors described ethnic Turks, or, in their writing, the Turkish race, to have the “purest

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<sup>75</sup> Maksudyan, “Turkish Review of Anthropology,” 296.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

blood.”<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, they identified the Greeks of Turkey as “the descendants of a mongrel race...the result of successive affixes and varied mixture, whose proportioning could not be scientifically established.”<sup>79</sup>

The authors also attempted to assert their ethnic/racial superiority based on physical characteristics, writing that Turks had a “more vigorous maintenance of health,” which, as Maksudyan writes, in the “context of their physical-racial anthropology simply meant that the Turks had a better genetic standing, eugenically.”<sup>80</sup> This superior “maintenance of health” conclusion was based on data collected which measured the height and weight of ethnically Turkish and ethnically Greek children in the early Republic; on average, the Turkish children were taller and heavier than the Greek children.<sup>81</sup> The authors comment on their measurements: “The crucial point is that the Turkish child always displays a much higher weight than the children of the different races, settled in Istanbul. Will this superiority be visible in adulthood?”<sup>82</sup> The expression of these physical differences on a conceptual level of “superiority” speaks to the overarching objective of the *Review* in delineating a superiority-inferiority dichotomy, in which ethnic Turks occupy the superior and ethnic Greeks occupy the inferior. The authors also connect the issue of physical characteristics to intellectual capabilities, mapping greater height and weight onto greater intelligence.<sup>83</sup>

It is also worth noting that, throughout the “Comparative Analysis” article, the data is always presented as the “Turkish race” vis-à-vis “other races.” That is, the Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Levantines that constitute the “other races” are not compared to one another

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<sup>78</sup> Maksudyan, “Turkish Review of Anthropology,” 305.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 306-307.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 311.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

independent of the Turks. This conceptualization and structural organization of data further reinforces the subjugation and othering of minority groups from the ethnically Turkish population.

The Kemalist nationalist project (master race ideology, and superiority-inferiority dichotomy) was thus carefully developed and broadcasted by the vessel of the *Turkish Review of Anthropology*. These ideas, developed under the guise of scientific authority and serious academic theorizing, created the foundational rhetoric for Kemalist ideologues. The exclusivism at the crux of Kemalism is excellently summed up by Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, who served as justice minister from 1924 to 1930, in a statement to the *Haimiyet-i Milliye, National Sovereignty Newspaper* in 1930: “This party [Kemalist Republican People’s Party], by the works it accomplished heretofore, restored to the Turkish nation its position that is essentially the master. My idea, my opinion is that...the master of this country is the Turk. Those who are not genuine Turks can have only one right in the Turkish fatherland, and that is to be a servant, to be a slave.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Part III: Cultural Heritage Policy and Nation-Building**

If the Turkish anthropological community was the ideal intellectual laboratory for the Kemalist’s exclusivist nationalist project, then it was the early Turkish state that operationalized those frameworks in the form of cultural heritage policies. Turkish cultural heritage expert Çiğdem Atakuman writes, “national identities are continuously re-configured within heritage discourses.”<sup>85</sup> In this section, we explore how Atatürk and his Republican People’s Party

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<sup>84</sup> Maksudyan, “Turkish Review of Anthropology,” 313.

<sup>85</sup> Çiğdem Atakuman, “Value of Heritage in Turkey: History and Politics of Turkey’s World Heritage Nominations,” *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 23, no. 1 (July 2010): 107.



promulgated the Kemalist-constructed Turkish national identity through cultural heritage policies which spanned the tangible and the intangible. *Atatürk Devrimleri*,<sup>86</sup> or, Atatürk's Reforms, were the policies which governed the early Republic and worked under the cover of secularization to further exclude Greek Orthodox Christians and other non-ideal-type citizens from Turkish society. One of the central foci of these reforms was cultural heritage; most notably, the reforms dealt with cultural property, education, and language.

### **Cultural Property**

As part of the transition from empire to modern state, Atatürk oversaw the creation of numerous state institutions that regulated the legal activities of various ethno-religious groups. Two major federal institutions were established which still exist today: the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (Directorate of Religious Affairs), which is often referred to simply as the Diyanet; and the *Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü* (Directorate General of Foundations), which is often referred to simply as the Vakıflar. The Diyanet replaced the Ottoman office of the Sheikh al-Islam, which was the highest Ottoman religious authority and was abolished by the *Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi* (Turkish Grand National Assembly) in 1923.<sup>87</sup>

Although the Diyanet is the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the Diyanet only actually deals with Islamic education and Islamic religious administration.<sup>88</sup> The administration of all

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<sup>86</sup> Kaya Yılmaz, "Critical Examination of the Alphabet and Language Reforms Implemented in the Early Years of the Turkish Republic," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 2, no. 1 (2011): 59.

<sup>87</sup> Ufuk Ulutas, "Religion and Secularism in Turkey: The Dilemma of the Directorate of Religious Affairs," *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 3 (May 2010): 389.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

other religious groups falls under the jurisdiction of the Vakıflar.<sup>89</sup> This distinction and separation alone are indicative of the othering of ethno-religious minorities in Turkey—while Islam, the preferred religion of the state, is attached to “religious affairs,” Christianity, Judaism, and all other religions are considered to be “foundations.”

A section of the Diyanet’s official website entitled “Establishment and a Brief History” begins with the following statement: “It is obvious that, in any case, a corporal identity is needed to carry out religious affairs pertaining to faith, which is an indispensable element of social life.”<sup>90</sup> Here the intentionality of the Kemalist’s policies is laid bare; despite the “secular” ideals of Kemalism, the Diyanet was created as an essential institution to oversee the “indispensable” role of religion in Turkish life. And yet, the apparently unquestionable importance and quotidian presence of religion in Turkish society is only valid when it is in the form of the preferred religion of the state: Sunni Islam. With the establishment and separation of the Diyanet and Vakıflar, all non-Sunni religious groups were completely and facilely excluded from the official realm of religion in Turkey, and, in the process, invalidated on a purely existence-based level.

While the mere existence and institutional separation of the Diyanet and the Vakıflar convey the other and inferior status of ethno-religious minorities in Turkey, the actual policy impact of the institutions on the destruction and appropriation of minority groups’ cultural property must also be discussed. Ottoman practices regarding ethno-religious property such as the ones discussed in Part I of this chapter served as the foundational, albeit far looser and less systematized, *modus operandi* for Kemalist cultural property policies. The Kemalists also adopted a core attitude towards cultural property from their Ottoman predecessors that was

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<sup>89</sup> Ulutas, “Religion and Secularism in Turkey.”

<sup>90</sup> “Establishment and a Brief History,” Presidency of Religious Affairs, Diyanet, last modified 28 May 2013, <https://www.diyamet.gov.tr/en-US/Institutional/Detail//1/establishment-and-a-brief-history>.

central to their policymaking method: property as a symbol of Ottoman/Turkish/Islamic conquest.

Scores of Greek Orthodox cultural properties had already been confiscated during the long Ottoman period; Orthodox churches and schools were most often converted into mosques, public toilets, stables, or residential spaces for ethnic Turks and Sunni Muslims.<sup>91</sup> With the materialization of the newfound administrative authority of the Vakıflar, however, confiscation of ethno-religious minorities' cultural property became much more systemized under the nascent Turkish state. Because cultural property belonging to non-Muslims did not fall under the jurisdictional umbrella of the Diyanet, all such property was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Vakıflar.

Vakıflar policies required that, in order for a particular group or individual to claim and possess ownership of a cultural property, the group or individual was required to present evidence of previous ownership.<sup>92</sup> This, however, was a difficult task for ethno-religious minorities, whose properties—during the long Ottoman period—were not previously registered under the Ottoman office of the Sheikh al-Islam due to the fact that they did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Islamic millets.<sup>93</sup> This specific system intentionally created difficulties for ethno-religious minority communities and was part of what anthropologist Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir calls the “very interesting grey area...that defines the Turkish cultural regime.”<sup>94</sup> As a

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<sup>91</sup> Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 231.

<sup>92</sup> Ayşe Özil, “Whose Property Is It? The State, Non-Muslim Communities, and the Question of Property Ownership from the Late Ottoman Empire through the Turkish Nation State,” *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 6, no. 6, *Ceremonies, Festivals, and Rituals in the Ottoman World* (Spring 2019): 211-235.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir. Interview by Sophia Kyrou, March 2021.

result, Greek Orthodox Christians and Greek Orthodox cultural organizations were unable to claim ownership of their rightful and historic properties.

In an interview, Tanyeri-Erdemir pointed out to me a connected difficulty that the Greek Orthodox community faced in securing ownership of their own cultural property throughout the early Republican period, citing the spillover effects of the Ottoman's genocide against Christians. Tanyeri-Erdemir describes the early Republic as "a whole country of Christian remains that don't have any owners."<sup>95</sup> Indeed, as millions of Greek Orthodox Christian subjects were murdered or forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands in Turkey, a multitude of properties, such as homes, cemeteries, orphanages, schools, chapels, community centers, and agricultural fields, were abandoned and left without owners and administrators.<sup>96</sup> In many Ottoman documents from the 1910s and 1920s detailing the issue of how to redistribute property which previously belonged to Greek Orthodox subjects, the Greek Orthodox Christians were often simply referred to as the "disappeared people" (*eşhās-ı mütegayyibe*).<sup>97</sup> The strategic use of language conveys two things about the Greek Orthodox subjects (in the Ottoman's presented and fictitious narrative): first, that they quite simply "disappeared" without explanation (i.e., Ottoman-perpetrated genocide and forcible displacement), and, second, that they somewhat voluntarily abandoned their land (i.e., being killed and forcibly displaced and thus being forced to abandon their land).

The late Ottoman administration claimed, during the aforementioned time period, that they had compiled property records (*tahsis defterleri*) on provincial bases in order to log

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<sup>95</sup> Tuğba Tanyeri-Erdemir, Interview by Sophia Kyrou.

<sup>96</sup> Ellinor Morack, "Refugees, Locals and 'The' State: Property Compensation in the Province of Izmir Following the Greco-Turkish Population Exchange of 1923," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 199.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

ownership of properties which belonged to Greek Orthodox subjects.<sup>98</sup> It is unclear what, if anything, the Ottoman state administration communicated to the Ottoman public in terms of their objectives (besides organizational) of compiling these property records. It was not clear whether the Ottoman administration intended to give the ownership rights of these newly abandoned properties to Greek Orthodox organizations such as the Ecumenical Patriarchate, based in Constantinople, or simply expropriate ownership rights for the Ottoman proto-state.<sup>99</sup> Regardless, in recent years, scholars “actually found the [property] registers to be largely fictitious.”<sup>100</sup> This communicates the true intentions of the late Ottoman administration in regards to Greek Orthodox property: to ensure no written record of previous property ownership by Greek Orthodox Christians, and thus prevent future individuals or groups from citing their ownership rights. Consequently, such properties were expropriated by the Vakıflar, becoming the de facto property of the Turkish state.<sup>101</sup> Taken as a whole, the Ottoman state constructed the legal template and institutional foundations for a discriminatory property rights regime and cultural heritage regime vis-à-vis the Greek Orthodox community that continued with the Kemalist’s establishment of the Turkish state.

In a 2009 study entitled “The Story of an Alien(ation): Real Estate Ownership Problems of Non-Muslim Foundations and Communities in Turkey,” Turkish legal and human rights experts Dilek Kurban and Kezban Hatemi provide lists of cultural property and foundations in Istanbul which were seized by the Turkish government.<sup>102</sup> While the seizure of these properties

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<sup>98</sup> Morack, “Refugees, Locals and ‘The’ State,” 181.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>102</sup> Kezban Hatemi and Dilek Kurban, *The Story of an Alien(ation): Real Estate Ownership Problems of non-Muslim Foundations and Communities in Turkey* (Zurich: Tesev Publications, 2009), 40-53.

spanned from the 1930s to the 1990s, the seizure was made possible and legally acceptable by provisions in the Atatürk-era 1936 Property and Foundations Declaration.<sup>103</sup>

Kurban and Hatemi's data is a compilation of their own independent research and their collaboration with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the late Turkish-Armenian journalist and *Agos* newspaper editor-in-chief Hrant Dink.<sup>104</sup> This data details the Turkish government's seizure of 24 entire Greek Orthodox foundations (in this context, the term "foundations" is used in the manner of the Turkish state's legal designatory term discussed at the beginning of this subsection).<sup>105</sup> The foundations included schools, orphanages, churches, monasteries, and an entire district in the Balat neighborhood of Istanbul that had a high concentration of Greek Orthodox homes, chapels, and community centers.<sup>106</sup>

The data also identifies the Turkish government's seizure of almost 1,000 Greek Orthodox immovables.<sup>107</sup> In this context, the term "immovables" denotes properties which are not necessarily related to, owned by, or administered by Greek Orthodox "foundations" (i.e. a Greek Orthodox orphanage, a church under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, etc.). "Immovables" more broadly include properties owned by Greek Orthodox citizens and residents of Turkey or properties loosely affiliated with the Greek Orthodox population of Turkey. Some immovables did, however, belong to official Greek Orthodox organizations and institutions. The following is a sampling of immovables which were seized from the Balıklı Greek Hospital Foundation: "...157 houses, 26 garden houses, 21 apartment buildings, 3 buildings, 6 flats, 66 shops, 2 commercial buildings, 1 nail plant, 1 soft drink plant, 2 hotels, 1 meeting venue, 1

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<sup>103</sup> Hatemi and Kurban, *The Story of an Alien(ation)*, 40-53.

<sup>104</sup> In 2007, a Turkish nationalist shot and assassinated Dink in Istanbul.

<sup>105</sup> Hatemi and Kurban, *The Story of an Alien(ation)*, 47.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

nightclub, 1 cabaret, 2 music halls, 2 warehouses, 1 workshop, 26 pieces of land, 1 field, 2 vineyards, 2 vegetable gardens, 1 orchard, 3 cemeteries.”<sup>108</sup> These immovables were scattered across a variety of neighborhoods in Istanbul: Fatih, Beyoğlu, Şişli, Beşiktaş, Eminönü, Kadıköy, Üsküdar, Adalar, Bakırköy, Zeytinburnu.<sup>109</sup> This is only one grouping of the nearly 1,000 immovables that Kurban and Hatemi found in their research, conveying the massive scope and impact of Kemalist cultural property and foundations policies.

## Education

The Kemalists also operationalized their nationalist ideology into cultural heritage policy in the realm of the intangible. This is crystallized in the national educational system, which became a communal, public sector outpost for Kemalist state ideology. Anne-Christine Hoff, in a 2018 article for the *Middle East Forum*, describes the educational system in Turkey as “a political arm of the state ever since Atatürk founded the Turkish republic in the 1920s.”<sup>110</sup> Indeed, one of Atatürk’s major reforms was that of educational reform, most clearly articulated in the creation of a unified, state-designed and -mandated national curriculum in all public schools. The imposition of such a curriculum was made possible by the 1924 enactment of the Law on the Unification of Education.<sup>111</sup> The passing of this law had a similar state-centralizing effect as the establishment of the Diyanet and the Vakıflar; that is, the law placed all private and

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<sup>108</sup> Hatemi and Kurban, *The Story of an Alien(ation)*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 47-53.

<sup>110</sup> Anne-Christine Hoff, “Turkey Turns On Its Christians,” *Middle East Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (Summer 2018), <https://www.meforum.org/7243/turkey-turns-on-its-christians>.

<sup>111</sup> Semra Erkan, Işık Ayşe Gürşimşek, and Fitnat Kaptan, “General View of Teacher Education Policies of Turkey,” *American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education* (1997), 7, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234715074\\_General\\_View\\_of\\_Teacher\\_Education\\_Policies\\_of\\_Turkey](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234715074_General_View_of_Teacher_Education_Policies_of_Turkey).

public schools under the control of the federal government and imposed a universal state curriculum on all schools.<sup>112</sup>

One of the core features of the nationwide curriculum that the Kemalists designed and implemented was that of security courses. Security courses were mandatory for all primary and secondary school students in Turkish public schools from 1926 to 2012.<sup>113</sup> The official names of the security courses changed over time—“Military Service,” “Preparation for Military Service,” “National Defense Knowledge,” “Studies in National Security”—but the content and source material were universal and remained largely consistent.<sup>114</sup> The courses were taught by active or retired military officers who were paid by the Ministry of National Education, the Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı.<sup>115</sup> The military courses and military officers were used to present Turkish students with an image of the Turkish military as a “natural extension of national character,”<sup>116</sup> and as an instructive group on the issue of Turkishness.

Turkish cultural anthropologist Ayşe Gül Altınay provides a critical survey and analysis of the security courses in her article, “Human Rights or Militarist Ideals? Teaching National Security in High Schools.” In her investigation of the textbooks used in the military courses, Altınay finds explicitly exclusivist nationalist and discriminatory language, and the clear delineation of the “other” in Turkish society. Altınay writes:

...Examples of discrimination (particularly those based on ethnicity and religion) and of xenophobia can be found in the section that discusses Turkey’s geopolitical uniqueness, its relations with neighboring countries, and its ‘internal’ enemies, titled ‘The Games

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<sup>112</sup> Erkan et. al, “General View of Teacher Education Policies of Turkey.”

<sup>113</sup> Ayşe Gül Altınay, “Human rights or militarist ideals? Teaching national security in high schools,” in *Human Rights Issues in Textbooks: The Turkish Case*, ed. Deniz Tarba Ceylan and Gürol Irzık (Istanbul: The History Foundation of Turkey, 2004), 78.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 80.



Played Over Turkey...’ The ‘activities’ that seek to divide Turkey along the lines of race, religion or religious sect are presented as the major threats to the democratic and secular regime of the country. It is argued, over and over, throughout the textbook, that those who claim to belong to a different race are the ‘divisive elements’ (bölücü unsurlar) that promote racial discrimination in society and are supported by Turkey’s enemies [Greece, Armenia, Israel], not by the Turkish people themselves.<sup>117</sup>

The curriculum for elementary school students, specifically, includes learning about subject-specific vocabulary such as the words “struggle,” “martyr,” and “veteran.”<sup>118</sup> In her article, Altınay notes, however, that there is no mention of learning words such as “peace,” “co-existence,” “dialogue,” or “nonviolence” in the curricular teaching outlines.<sup>119</sup> The curricular teaching outlines also state that students must be informed that ethnic Turks are members of a “heroic race,” and that non-ethnic Turks living in Turkey are “internal enemies.”<sup>120</sup> Altınay elaborates on the damaging effects of security courses on Turkish youth:

They are encouraged to...fear all differences, remaining blind to the differences among their Muslim friends and treating their non-Muslim friends as categorically different (in fact, as non-Turkish); regard all dissent within Turkey as having an ‘external’ origin (and thus, non-authentic, non-Turkish)...This [educational] approach leads to the ‘securitization,’ and by extension militarization, of not only politics, but also the concept of ‘everyday life.’<sup>121</sup>

The exclusivist face of Kemalist ideology in education was not, however, limited to the realm of security courses. Until 2013, all students in all public and private primary schools (including minority-administered private schools such as Greek and Armenian schools) were required to

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<sup>117</sup> Altınay, “Human rights or militarist ideals?,” 84.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 88.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

recite the “Student Oath” (*Öğrenci Andı*) every morning.<sup>122</sup><sup>123</sup> Reşit Galip, who served as Minister of National Education from 1932 to 1933 and served as a Minister of Parliament, composed the oath, whose recitation went into practice on 23 April 1933.<sup>124</sup> The oath reads:

I am a Turk, I am right, I am hardworking, my principle is to protect young people, to respect the elders, to love my country and my nation more than my soul. My ideal is to advance and go further. Dear Grand Atatürk, I take the oath to walk without stopping towards the target you have shown us, on the path that you have opened for us. My presence is a present to the presence of Turks. Happy is the person who says ‘I am Turk.’<sup>125</sup><sup>126</sup>

Given the Kemalist ideation of “Turkishness” as an identity marker constituted solely by an individual’s ethnic identity, this oath required students who were not ethnic Turks to essentially denounce their ethnic background. Additionally, the required recitation of the oath further reinforced the militant attitude towards ethno-religious minorities which was achieved by the security courses. In a 2009 report written by international human rights lawyer Nurcan Kaya and published by the Minority Rights Group International, an Alevi-Kurdish school teacher described his childhood experience with the oath: “Every time when I was reading the oath I felt scared. It

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<sup>122</sup> The required daily recitation of the oath in all public and private schools was reinstated in October 2018 by the Council of State (*Danıştay*), Turkey’s highest administrative court.

<sup>123</sup> Nurcan Kaya, “Forgotten or Assimilated? Minorities in the Education System of Turkey,” *Minority Rights Group International*, 2009, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/49bf82852.pdf>, 26.

<sup>124</sup> Leyla Neyzi, “Object or Subject? The Paradox of ‘Youth’ in Turkey,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33, no. 3 (August 2001): 417.

<sup>125</sup> The last line of the oath, “Happy is the person who says ‘I am Turk,’” was added to the oath in 1972 to honor Mustafa Kemal, who used the phrase in his speech for the 10th Anniversary of the Turkish Republic on 29 October 1933. While the oath is no longer mandatory in schools, the last phrase is the national motto of Turkey is also printed on the Kyrenia Mountains in the illegal Turkish-occupied zone of Cyprus, continuing to serve as a symbol of ethnic chauvinism and domination.

<sup>126</sup> Kaya, “Forgotten or Assimilated?,” 26.

was read in a very militarist way, we were standing in line and one of us would screamingly read it. I was a Kurd at home and I was becoming a Turk at school, I was confused.”<sup>127</sup>

In her research, Kaya also found examples of Kemalist exclusivist thought in other contexts. A widely-used state-written linguistics textbook, for example, described the sound of the Greek language as “similar to the sound of a snake.”<sup>128</sup> A widely-used history textbook which was also written by the state, meanwhile, includes a section on ethno-religious diversity in the Ottoman Empire prior to the enactment of Kemalist policies in the modern Republic. One part of this section reads: “people [Ottomans] were dressing according to their religion, nation, profession, being urban dwellers or villagers. This has affected human relations negatively and caused disorder.”<sup>129</sup> The history textbook also states that students must strictly adhere to Kemalism: “Deviation from the Kemalist system of thought endangers democracy and the sovereignty of the nation. Therefore, in order to maintain its sovereignty, the Turkish nation should never abjure democracy.”<sup>130</sup>

## **Language**

Also in the realm of intangible cultural heritage in Kemalist Turkey is the implementation of language policies and initiatives. Several policies enacted during the long Kemalist period prohibited minority groups from speaking their native languages in public spaces, thereby aiding in the destruction of the linguistic heritage of ethno-religious minorities. A student of Turkish Republican or 20<sup>th</sup> century European history might take issue with this—were there not multiple

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<sup>127</sup> Kaya, “Forgotten or Assimilated?,” 26.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

provisions in the Treaty of Lausanne<sup>131</sup> to ensure language rights for ethno-religious minorities<sup>132</sup> in Turkey? Indeed, Articles 40 and 41 of the Treaty are as follows:

Article 40: Turkish nationals belonging to non-Muslim minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as other Turkish nationals. In particular, they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.<sup>133</sup>

Article 41: As regards public instruction, the Turkish Government will grant in those towns and districts, where a considerable proportion of non-Muslim nationals are resident, adequate facilities for ensuring that in the primary schools the instruction shall be given to the children of such Turkish nationals through the medium of their own language. This provision will not prevent the Turkish Government from making the teaching of the Turkish language obligatory in the said schools.<sup>134</sup>

Unfortunately, the Turkish state, since its inaugural Kemalist administration, has failed to comply with its responsibilities and requirements delineated in the treaty and denied its citizens their language rights. There is an erroneous notion widely present in the historiography which argues that Turkish state policies regarding language did not come into being until the ratification of the Turkish Constitution of 1982, and that the Kemalists did not participate in language prohibition. Despite the numerous amendments and revisions made to the 1982 Constitution, Article 42 of the Constitution, which explicitly prohibits the teaching of languages other than Turkish in all public and private educational institutions, remains intact and

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<sup>131</sup> The Treaty of Lausanne was a French-brokered peace treaty which negotiated the terms of the legal status of minorities in the newly established Turkish state. The treaty was signed on 24 July 1923 and went into effect on 6 August 1924.

<sup>132</sup> The Treaty only recognized non-Muslims as minorities in Turkey. This is rife with implications for the non-Sunni Muslim groups in Turkey. This is an incredibly important issue, albeit one which cannot be explored within the confines of this thesis.

<sup>133</sup> Ali Bardakoğlu, "Culture of Co-existence in Islam: The Turkish Case," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 3 (2008): 120.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

unchanged: “No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education. Foreign languages to be taught in institutions of training and education and the rules to be followed by schools conducting training and education in a foreign language shall be determined by law. The provisions of international treaties are reserved.”<sup>135</sup>

While this 1982 constitutional article *explicitly* codified the prohibition of foreign languages within the specific realm of education, exclusivist Turkish state and municipal language policies date back to the core Kemalist period of the 1920s and 1930s. In 1924, with the passing of the Law on the Unification of Education, the Turkish parliament enacted a policy which required ethno-religious minority schools to teach at least five hours of Turkish language per week.<sup>136</sup> Certain early Kemalist language policies, such as this one, corresponded with a base-level nation-building goal of using language as a national unifier (including the capacity to read national history and communicate in a shared language). Subsequent language policies, however, were implemented to silence minorities in the public sphere and build exclusivist nationalism.

Later in 1924, the municipal government of Bursa enacted a policy that prohibited people from speaking any language other than Turkish in public areas, and imposed fines on violators of this policy.<sup>137</sup> In 1926, the Turkish parliament enacted a policy which required all teachers in

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<sup>135</sup> Kutlay Yağmur, “Languages in Turkey,” in *The Other Languages of Europe: Demographic, Sociolinguistic, and Educational*, ed. Guus Extra and Durk Gorter (London: Cromwell Press, 2001), 423.

<sup>136</sup> Senem Aslan, “‘Citizen, Speak Turkish!’: A Nation in the Making,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13, no. 2 (2007): 251.

<sup>137</sup> Ayşe Hür, “Türkiye’nin ‘Öz Dil’ Zorbalığı Serüveni” [“Turkey’s ‘Self Language’ Bullying Adventure”], *Haksöz Haber*, 26 February 2012, <https://www.haksozhaber.net/turkiyenin-oz-dil-zorbaligi-seruveni-28018h.htm>.

minority schools to have Turkish as their native language.<sup>138</sup> In the same year, the Turkish parliament passed a law which prohibited corporations from using any language other than Turkish in any corporate correspondence.<sup>139</sup> The Settlement Law of 1934 banned people whose mother tongue was not Turkish from establishing villages or districts.<sup>140</sup>

The Citizen, speak Turkish! (*vatandaş Türkçe konuş!*) campaign is one of the most notable examples of these policies on the national level. The campaign, which aimed to “eradicate the public visibility and audibility of non-Turkish languages,”<sup>141</sup> was initiated by the Law Faculty Student’s Association at Istanbul University on 14 January 1928.<sup>142</sup> This campaign affected a significant portion of the population of Istanbul; according to the Turkish national census of 1927, approximately 28% of the population of Istanbul did not have Turkish as their native language.<sup>143</sup> Among this group, Greek was the language with the highest number of native speakers (92,000 people).<sup>144</sup> In her article, “‘Citizen, Speak Turkish!’: A Nation in the Making,” Turkish political scientist Senem Aslan details the development of the campaign and highlights the active role and contributions of the Kemalist state in the campaign. Aslan writes:

In their congress, the students [in the Law Faculty Student’s Association at Istanbul University] claimed that speaking in a language other than Turkish meant not recognizing Turkish law and sentiments and that those who do not speak Turkish could not be regarded as good citizens. Within the association, they formed a separate committee for the organization of the campaign, which started officially after the Ministry of Interior granted permission. In the following days, the Turkish Hearths invited the leaders of the students to discuss the campaign, and they formed a “Commission for the Protection and Expansion of Turkish Language” within the Hearths to teach Turkish all over the country and to inspect schools to ensure that there was proper Turkish education. On 26 January

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<sup>138</sup> Aslan, “‘Citizen, Speak Turkish!’”, 251.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 246.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 250.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

1928, the Commission decided to arrange meetings with the owners of newspapers published in foreign languages to ask for their support. Celal Sair Bey, a member of the board of directors of Turkish Hearths, met with the mayor of Istanbul who promised to help the campaign. The Ministry of Education offered 1000 Turkish liras in support of the campaign. As the state's support of the campaign indicates, the students' initiative was in conformity with the official language policy. The spread of a common and standardized national language had been one of the main concerns of the state elite from the beginning of the Republic.<sup>145</sup>

The campaign, which, as Aslan notes, was a cooperative effort of the students at Istanbul University and the Kemalist state, quickly spread beyond Istanbul. A local newspaper in Izmir published an advertisement for the campaign in 1928 that read: "Citizen, do not make friends with or shop from those so-called Turkish citizens who do not speak Turkish. We request from our lady citizens who work as telephone operators: Please immediately cut off conversations in Greek and Latino [sic]."<sup>146</sup> Signs bearing the statement, "Citizens! Let's speak Turkish. Speaking Turkish is a national duty. A Turk speaks Turkish," were hung in busses, trolleys, theatres, and restaurants across Istanbul, Izmir, and Edirne.<sup>147</sup> Rifat Bali, a Turkish author and advocate of ethno-religious minorities in Turkey, said that "speaking in a language other than Turkish had become nearly impossible in public during the campaign because of the risk of verbal harassment and even physical attack."<sup>148</sup> Many newspaper editors published columns during throughout the campaign stating that, as long as the Turkish state allowed ethno-religious minorities "to have separate schools, orphanages, and charitable foundations, their inclusion into the Turkish nation would be impossible."<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Aslan, "'Citizen, Speak Turkish!'", 251.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 255.

The campaign continued successfully into the 1930s; in 1935, İsmet İnönü, the Prime Minister of Turkey, dedicated a speech to the issue of exclusively speaking Turkish. İnönü stated: “From now on we will not keep quiet. All citizens who live with us will speak Turkish.”<sup>150</sup> By 1936, the municipal governments of Ankara, Adana, Diyarbakır, Kırklareli, Edirne, Lüleburgaz, and Tekirdağ had also enacted policies which fined anyone who spoke a language other than Turkish in public.<sup>151</sup> Atatürk, himself, stated in a 1931 speech: “A person who says he belongs to the Turkish nation should in the first place and under all circumstances speak Turkish. It is not possible to believe a person’s claims that he belongs to the Turkish nation and to Turkish culture if he does not speak Turkish.”<sup>152</sup>

The nationalist ideology and tangible and intangible cultural heritage policies of the Kemalists were massively successful in destroying the presence of the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey. The Kemalist state’s appropriation, expropriation, and destruction of Greek Orthodox properties not only weakened the institutional strength and capabilities of Turkey’s Greek Orthodox community, but also erased much of the cultural and historical record of the community in Turkey. The Kemalist state’s villainization of Greek Orthodox Christians in the national educational system, and elimination of the Greek language in the public space not only silenced the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey, but rendered Greek Orthodox Christians non-existent to their fellow Turkish citizens. The ideology and policies of the Kemalists, which made it impossible for ethno-religious minorities to actualize their identities in both the public square and the private sphere, have been maintained and, in many cases,

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<sup>150</sup> Soner Cagaptay, *Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* (London: Routledge, 2006), 59.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 60.

<sup>152</sup> Rifat N. Bali, “Chapter 5: The Politics of Turkification During the Single Party Period,” in *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Postnationalist Identities*, ed. Hans-Lukas Kieser (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 44.



expanded upon. Despite this continuity in exclusivist nationalism and cultural heritage policies, Turkey's exclusivist nationalism has been adapted by a new ideologue: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

### CHAPTER THREE: REVIVAL OF EMPIRE

The election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his conservative populist Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, or, AKP) was initially understood as a break from the “secular” Kemalist nationalism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Just as importantly, the election of Erdoğan sparked hope that Turkey was ushering a new era of democratic ideals. Erdoğan, who had served as mayor of Istanbul from 1994 to 1998 and co-founded the AKP in 2001, was, with his party, elected Prime Minister of Turkey in 2003.<sup>153</sup> In a May 2003 article for the *New York Times Magazine*, Deborah Sontag profiled Erdoğan and his pathway to the premiership:

Tayyip Erdoğan was an experiment for Turkey with ramifications that went well beyond Turkey. As a devout Muslim with an Islamist past who had nonetheless evolved into a modern, pro-Western democrat, Erdoğan had the potential to set a powerful example for the region. If he could ease Turks into a less hostile separation of mosque and state, if he could help Turkey undertake long-overdue democratic reforms, then perhaps one day he would exemplify a way in which Islamic faith and democratic principles not only coexisted but also collaborated.<sup>154</sup>

Two decades, one attempted military coup, and countless human rights violations later, any hope surrounding Erdoğan and his leadership has decidedly disappeared. In August 2020, *The Guardian* published an article entitled, “Erdoğan is both a bully and a menace. Europe ignores him at its peril.”<sup>155</sup> In March 2021, Eurasia Group founder and president Ian Bremmer, writing for *Time Magazine*, penned an article entitled, “How Erdodan’s Increasingly Erratic Rule

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<sup>153</sup> “Turkey Profile - Timeline,” BBC World News, last modified 24 June 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17994865>.

<sup>154</sup> Deborah Sontag, “The Erdogan Experiment,” *New York Times Magazine*, 11 May 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/11/magazine/the-erdogan-experiment.html>.

<sup>155</sup> Simon Tisdall, “Erdoğan is both a bully and a menace. Europe ignores him at its peril,” *The Guardian*, 16 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/aug/16/erdogan-is-both-a-bully-and-a-menace-europe-ignores-him-at-its-peril>.

in Turkey Presents a Risk to the World.”<sup>156</sup> In November 2020, former Erdoğan ally and current Turkish political opposition leader Ahmet Davutoğlu went so far as to say that the Turkish President was “more dangerous than Covid-19.”<sup>157</sup>

Currently, Erdoğan—who consolidated his presidential powers following a controversial constitutional referendum in 2016<sup>158</sup>—has few supporters both domestically and abroad. Similar conclusions have been reached regarding Erdoğan’s nationalist ideology and complementary cultural heritage policies. In a Center for American Progress report on Turkish nationalism in the Erdoğan period, the authors cite “Turkey’s current brand of populist nationalism...and conservative nationalism.”<sup>159</sup>

Despite this general consensus on Erdoğan’s brand of nationalism and cultural heritage policies, a consensus is still absent about whether his nationalism and policies constitute a rupture or a continuity in the *longue durée* of Turkish history. The articulation of the past two decades as an explicitly religious form of nationalism with authoritarian politics has been characterized by some as a break with the “secular” nationalism and democratic regime of the Kemalists. In fact, a more careful analysis, based on my critical review of both Kemalist and Erdoğanist nationalism, illustrates that there are very important elements of continuity. These

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<sup>156</sup> Ian Bremmer, “How Erdogan’s Increasingly Erratic Rule in Turkey Presents a Risk to the World,” *Time Magazine*, 4 March 2021, <https://time.com/5943435/turkey-erdogan-increasingly-autocratic/>.

<sup>157</sup> “Turkey’s Erdogan more dangerous than Covid-19, says former ally,” *The National*, 2 November 2020, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/turkey-s-erdogan-more-dangerous-than-covid-19-says-former-ally-1.1103850>.

<sup>158</sup> “Recep Tayyip Erdogan gets the power he has long wanted--at a cost,” *The Economist*, 22 April 2017, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/04/22/recep-tayyip-erdogan-gets-the-power-he-has-long-wanted-at-a-cost>.

<sup>159</sup> John Halpin, Max Hoffman, and Michael Werz, “Turkey’s ‘New Nationalism’ Amid Shifting Politics,” *Center for American Progress*, 11 February 2018, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2018/02/11/446164/turkeys-new-nationalism-amid-shifting-politics/>.

elements of continuity are most clearly expressed in a reiteration of nationalism as highly exclusivist in ethno-religious terms. Erdoğan's nationalism is simply a reconfiguration of Kemalist nationalism.

Writing for the *Jewish News Syndicate*, Efrat Aviv discusses how Turkey's current exclusivist nationalism and cultural heritage policies are not a departure, but rather a continuation, of its historic record in the aptly-titled article "Turkey continues to honor its racists." Aviv writes:

In November 2020, the Istanbul metropolitan municipality, led by Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), named a park in Istanbul after Hüseyin Nihal Astız. Astız (1905-1975) was an unabashed racist anti-Semite, Turkey's most prominent Nazi sympathizer and one of the most controversial figures in the history of Turkish political thought...Naming public spaces after ultra-nationalist or racist figures is not new in Turkey. In 1998, Fenerbahçe Stadium, a football arena located in the Kadıköy district of Istanbul, was named after Fenerbahçe's legendary chairman (1934-1950) and Turkey's fifth prime minister, Şükrü Saracoğlu [Saracoğlu was also a famed anti-Semite and Nazi sympathizer].<sup>160</sup>

The broad focus of this chapter is an exploration of the intersection of the nationalism and cultural heritage policies of the Erdoğan period, from 2001 to the present, and the effect of this intersection on the Greek Orthodox minority community in Turkey. In this chapter, I also identify elements of ideological and policy continuity to demonstrate how Erdoğanist nationalism is, in fact, a continuation of Kemalist nationalism operating under a reconfigured brand. In the same fashion as my previous chapter, I have divided this chapter into three parts.

In Part I, we begin with an exploration of the exclusivist nationalism developed by Erdoğan and his ruling AKP party. Erdoğan's nationalist ideology, which hereafter will be identified as "Erdoğanism," can essentially be understood as neo-Ottomanism, focusing heavily

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<sup>160</sup> Efrat Aviv, "Turkey continues to honor its racists," *Jewish News Syndicate*, 26 January 2021, <https://www.jns.org/opinion/turkey-continues-to-honor-its-racists/>.

on the role of religion in the public square and using political Islam as a potent tool in cultivating this new nationalist project. The AKP's approach to the Erdoğanist nationalist project has been aggressive and has, in turn, led to the massive and rapid proliferation of exclusivist nationalist cultural heritage policies.

These policies are the focus of Part II. In this section, I provide quantitative data which maps the decrease in properties belonging to ethno-religious minorities, and explore the property cycle of appropriation, expropriation, and conversion which has become common under the Erdoğan regime.

In Part III, I explore the impact of these policies and the Erdoğanist nationalist project on Turkish society. Specifically, I provide segments from interviews I conducted with members of the Greek Orthodox community of Istanbul to explore the lived experience of ethno-religious minorities in contemporary Turkey and illustrate the climate of impunity in which ethno-religious minorities live.

### **Part I: Reconfiguring Separate and Unequal: Erdoğanism**

There has emerged a popular trend in the unfolding historiography of the Erdoğan period to compare Erdoğan and his ideology to Atatürk and his own ideology. As the prevailing historical narrative has presented Kemalism as a largely positive secularist ideology that effectively nullified the issue of religious difference and discrimination in Turkish society, a complementary narrative has emerged painting Erdoğanism as antithetical to Kemalism. That is, Erdoğanism is a problematic Islamist nationalist ideology that threatens to destroy the Turkish Republic's secular legal and civil tradition. This juxtaposition has been presented by experts and amateurs alike. In a 2013 article for *The National Interest* entitled "Erdoğan, the Anti-Ataturk,"

author Aram Bakshian Jr. includes a quote from an interviewee in Turkey. The interviewee describes Erdoğan as: “...a strange joke played on Turkey by history. If Kemal Atatürk had had an evil twin, it would have been someone exactly like Mr. Erdogan. Most of his views are mirror opposites of Atatürk’s, but he is the first overwhelming larger-than-life figure in Turkish public life since the Ghazi [Atatürk] himself.”<sup>161</sup>

Elliot Ackerman penned a 2016 article for *The New Yorker* entitled “Atatürk Versus Erdoğan: Turkey’s Long Struggle,” presenting a similar view of Atatürk and Erdoğan as opponents whose ideologies are antithetical to one another. Ackerman touches on a connected issue: Erdoğan’s self-distancing from Atatürk. Ackerman writes: “He [Erdoğan] views himself as the father of a new Turkish identity, one aligned more closely with its Ottoman past, its Islamic heritage.”<sup>162</sup> Ackerman is correct in his extrapolation of Erdoğan’s identity construction. Erdoğan has, indeed, crafted a specific image of himself and his ideology as a neo-Ottoman, Muslim sultan—an identity which differs vastly from Atatürk’s own identity construction as a secular, edified, ally of the West. This difference between Erdoğan and Atatürk’s constructed identity images and accompanying leadership styles should not, however, be conflated with a difference in core ideological values and policy objectives.

Erdoğanism is a departure from Kemalism inasmuch as it is presented with a religious rather than secular face, and as it is implicitly focused on religious identity rather than ethnic identity. The core of the ideologies and accompanying policies, however, which promote an exclusivist nationalist vision of Turkey, remain consistent. As B. Ali Soner writes:

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<sup>161</sup> Aram Bakshian Jr., “Erdogan, the Anti-Ataturk,” *The National Interest* no. 127 (September/October 2013): 62.

<sup>162</sup> Elliot Ackerman, “Atatürk Versus Erdoğan: Turkey’s Long Struggle,” *The New Yorker*, 16 July 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/ataturk-versus-erdogan-turkeys-long-struggle>.

...problems related to democracy and pluralism have in fact originated more from the monist designations of the Turkish secularist establishment rather than from the Islamist colour of the current political and social sphere...both Islamism and the Turkish secularist establishment have failed to recognize social diversity in general, and to accommodate non-Muslim religious, educational and organizational needs in particular. It was in this sense that a political party's relation with Islamism or the establishment is bound to define in the Turkish context its policy approach towards non-Muslim minorities.<sup>163</sup>

And so one can understand Kemalism and Erdoğanism not as two warring ideologies, but rather simply as two sides of the same coin.

Central to the Kemalist project was the instrumentalization of the intersection of state policy and exclusivist identity politics. The pursuit of this intersection has come to hold a central place in the Erdoğanist project, as well; Erdoğan has cultivated the connection between state cultural heritage policies and Islam and created both an instrument and a symbol of domination. Erdoğan's project of identity domination is one that cuts across cultural, economic, and political levels, but also expands beyond the realm of the domestic and into the international. It is for this reason that Erdoğan's exclusivist nationalist project can truly be deemed "neo-Ottoman." Historian Alan Mikhail illustrates the neo-Ottoman nature of Erdoğan's nationalism in a 2020 *Time Magazine* article, specifically comparing Erdoğan's grand nationalist project to that of the Ottoman Empire's ninth sultan, Selim I. Mikhail writes:

Selim died 500 years ago in 1520. It was during his lifetime that the Ottoman Empire grew from a strong regional power to a gargantuan global empire. For Erdogan, this sultan from half a millennium ago serves his contemporary needs. Selim in many ways functions as Erdogan's Andrew Jackson, a figure from the past of symbolic use in the present. Selim offers a template for Turkey to become a global political and economic power, with influence from Washington to Beijing, crushing foreign and domestic challengers alike. He helps Erdogan too to make his case for Islam as a cultural and political reservoir of strength, a vital component of the glories of the Ottoman past, which he seeks to emulate in contemporary Turkey against the dominant elite secularism that has reigned since its founding. We should be wary of Erdogan's embrace of Selim's

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<sup>163</sup> B. Ali Soner, "The Justice and Development Party's policies towards non-Muslim minorities in Turkey," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 24.

exclusionary vision of Turkish political power. It represents a historical example of strongman politics that led to regional wars, the attempted annihilation of religious minorities, and the monopolization of global economic resources.<sup>164</sup>

As Mikhail warns, this particular type of nationalism—entrenched in a broader master plan with objectives of exclusion in all sectors, hegemony, and domination—is one which should cause observers to take pause and proceed with immense caution. It is within this vein that the Erdoğan regime has molded a new, neo-Ottoman ideal-type citizen. This ideal-type citizen is, first and foremost, a devout Sunni Muslim, who is also ethnically Turkish and turned away from Europe and the West. The non-ideal-type citizen, on the other hand, is, first and foremost, religiously non-Muslim, and is also ethnically non-Turkish and is turned towards Europe and the West.

The Erdoğanists' nationalist theory is not codified in the same way that the Kemalists was in the *Turkish Review of Anthropology*. Instead, direct media statements have served as the thought space in which Erdoğan and the AKP have elucidated their nationalist ideological doctrine. In a 2014 television interview that took place during Turkish national election season, Erdoğan, who was, at the time, running for President, lamented his political opponents' questioning of his own ethnic background. In his complaint, Erdoğan identified the superior-inferior dichotomy at the center of his own nationalist ideology. *The Washington Post* published Erdoğan's statement: "I was called a Georgian. I apologize for this, but they even said [something] worse: They called me an Armenian."<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Alan Mikhail, "Why Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Love Affair with the Ottoman Empire Should Worry The World," *Time Magazine*, 3 September 2020, <https://time.com/5885650/erdogans-ottoman-worry-world/>.

<sup>165</sup> Adam Taylor, "Is 'Armenian' an insult? Turkey's prime minister seems to think so," *The Washington Post*, 6 August 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/08/06/is-armenian-an-insult-turkeys-prime-minister-seems-to-think-so/>.



## Part II: Cultural Heritage Policy as Reconquest

If one examines Turkey's contemporary cultural heritage regime, they will find that exclusivist Kemalist ideology and exclusivist Kemalist-era policies are deeply embedded in the fabric of current laws. Many Kemalist policies are still in practice and have not received any revisions: it is still notoriously difficult for ethno-religious minority organizations to obtain building permits for churches and other religious and cultural buildings and sites;<sup>166</sup> the daily recitation of the Turkish Student Oath is still required<sup>167</sup> in all public and private schools,<sup>168</sup> and the language policies of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as Article 42 of the 1983 Constitution are still intact.<sup>169</sup>

Erdoğan and the AKP, while maintaining the most exclusivist of Kemalist policies, have enacted a new wave of exclusivist nationalist cultural heritage policies reflective of their heavily Islamist, neo-Ottoman project. In this section, I explore two facets of the AKP's policies, namely: "positive" state policies that paradoxically broaden and deepen protections for cultural heritage for the AKP ideal-type majority (religiously Sunni Muslim, ethnic Turks) while reinforcing the second class status of the country's non-majority, ethno-religious citizens; and "negative" state policies illustrating the increased discrimination and subjugation of AKP non-ideal-type citizens (religiously non-Muslim, non-ethnic Turks). In my examination of "positive" policies, I provide a brief overview of the mounting role and strength of the Diyanet in Turkey, as well as the exponential and disproportionate increase of Islamic cultural heritage properties in

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<sup>166</sup> "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Turkey," U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/turkey/>.

<sup>167</sup> Recitation of the Student Oath was indefinitely suspended in 2013, but was reinstated in 2018.

<sup>168</sup> "Court rules Student Oath should be reinstated in Turkey," *Ahval*, 18 October 2018, <https://ahvalnews.com/education/court-rules-student-oath-should-be-reinstated-turkey/>.

<sup>169</sup> "Constitutional Right to an Education: Turkey," Library of Congress, last modified 30 December 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/constitutional-right-to-an-education/turkey.php>.

Turkey. In my examination of “negative” policies, I examine cases of reconversion of Greek Orthodox churches into mosques, with a focus on the major cases of Hagia Sophia and the Chora Church.

### **The Diyanet**

Given the Erdoğanist focus on Sunni Islam and, specifically, with Sunni Islam as a political tool of the state, it is helpful not only to identify the numerical changes in the cultural property and institutions of Turkey’s ethno-religious minorities, but also to examine the numerical changes in the cultural property and institutions of Turkey’s Sunni Muslims—the preferred community of the Erdoğanist state.

The shift to an explicit Sunni Islamic nationalism has come to dominate the Turkish public sphere since the AKP’s rise to power. Emblematic and instructive are Erdoğan’s various moments of Quranic recitation coupled with nationalist speeches on major Muslim and Turkish holidays to see this phenomenon in action.<sup>170</sup> One might also look to Mehmet Görmez, the current president of the Diyanet, who led “national unity rallies in [Quranic] prayer” in the wake of the failed 2016 military coup.<sup>171</sup>

However, it is the Turkish state’s explicit policies regarding the Diyanet, itself, that most starkly reveal the shifting place of religion and Islam in Turkish state and civil society. Since 2006, the Turkish government has more than quadrupled the Diyanet’s budget<sup>172</sup>—in 2016, the

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<sup>170</sup> Zeynep Bilginsoy, “Turkish President recites Muslim prayer at the Hagia Sophia,” *Associated Press*, 31 March 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/2094e57d4eb74a16b375d307e9de5b8c>.

<sup>171</sup> Anadolu Agency, “Millions gather in Istanbul for historic democracy rally,” *Daily Sabah*, 8 August 2016, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2016/08/08/millions-gather-in-istanbul-for-historic-democracy-rally>.

<sup>172</sup> Svante Cornell, “The Rise of the Diyanet: the Politicization of Turkey’s Directorate of Religious Affairs,” *The Turkey Analyst, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies*

Diyaret budget was a whopping 6.48 billion Turkish lira.<sup>173</sup> The 2020 budget increased to 11.5 billion Turkish lira (1.4 billion U.S. dollars at current currency rates).<sup>174</sup> Currently, the budget of the Diyanet surpasses the individual budgets of the Turkish Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Energy and Natural Resources, Culture and Tourism, Industry and Technology, and Environment and Urban Planning.<sup>175</sup> This comparison communicates a clear hierarchy of the Turkish state's priorities. The Erdoğan regime has also overseen a 58% increase in employment for the Diyanet (the number of Diyanet personnel rose from about 74,000 in 2002<sup>176</sup> to about 117,000 in 2017<sup>177</sup>).

In 2013, the Turkish government also funded the launch of a Diyanet television network and radio station, which have since operated seven days a week, 24 hours a day.<sup>178</sup> The network and station provide programming on a variety of topics which go beyond the confines of Islamic theology; Muslim religious scholars lead programming on Turkish national history, world history, and politics, all through the lens of political Islam.<sup>179</sup>

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*Program*, 9 October 2015, <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/463>.

<sup>173</sup> Neşe Karanfil, "Intelligence, religious affairs set to take huge share of Turkey's 2016 budget," *Hürriyet Daily News*, 13 October 2015, <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/intelligence-religious-affairs-set-to-take-huge-share-of-turkeys-2016-budget---89761>.

<sup>174</sup> "Turkish state religious body's budget dwarfs seven key ministries," *Ahval*, 19 May 2020, <https://ahvalnews.com/directorate-religious-affairs/turkish-state-religious-bodys-budget-dwarfs-seven-key-ministries>.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Mine Yildirim, "Turkey: The Diyanet - the elephant in Turkey's religious freedom room?" *Refworld*, 4 May 2011, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4dc24d952.html>.

<sup>177</sup> Zulkiflar Dogan, "'Spying imams' spark new crisis between Europe, Turkey," *Al-Monitor*, 24 February 2017, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/02/turkey-europe-new-crisis-spying-imams.html>.

<sup>178</sup> "2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Turkey," U.S. Department of State.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the Turkish state's passing of Law 6002 in 2010 placed ownership of all new mosques within the jurisdiction of the Diyanet (many pre-existing mosques were owned by Islamic foundations, which were not required to report to the federal government).<sup>180</sup> It is also helpful to map the exponential increase of mosques in Turkey as a backdrop against which one can best understand the inverse phenomenon in the case of ethno-religious minority properties.

Between 2007 and 2017 alone, nearly 10,000 new mosques were built in Turkey,<sup>181</sup> resulting in a total of 88,021 mosques in Turkey in 2017.<sup>182</sup> This constitutes an almost 13% increase in total mosques across Turkey within a mere decade. This number does not include the mosques which were under construction at the time of the aforementioned data gathering in 2017. Since 2017, many more mosques have been built in Turkey. Many new mosques in Turkey today, however, are not new constructions. On the contrary, these spaces are churches which the Erdoğan regime has converted into mosques. The conversion of churches into mosques is not a new phenomenon—this was common practice in the Ottoman Period—but it is a method which the Erdoğan regime has adopted with an alacrity absent since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. While Kemalist nationalism and cultural heritage policies were exclusivist and discriminatory, they were decidedly more overtly geared towards issues of ethnicity than issues of religion (at least on an explicit, *de jure* level). Erdoğanist policies, on the other hand, have focused far more on religion as an identity marker, and this is crystallized in the case of religious property policies.

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<sup>180</sup> “Establishment and a Brief History,” Diyanet.

<sup>181</sup> “Turkey 2018 International Religious Freedom Report,” U.S. Department of State, 17, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/TURKEY-2018-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

During the same period in which the Turkish state has so significantly increased cultural heritage protections and development opportunities for Sunni Muslim cultural heritage sites, the state has done the exact opposite for Greek Orthodox cultural heritage sites, reinforcing the shift towards an ethno-religiously hegemonic and exclusivist model of nationalism. The striking disproportionality of these policies is perhaps most illustrative in the well-known cases of the 2020 reconversions of the Church of Hagia Sophia and the Chora Church into mosques.

### **Hagia Sophia and Chora Church**

Built in 537 by Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, Hagia Sophia, the Church of Holy Wisdom, is widely regarded as the pinnacle of Byzantine art and architecture, and the symbol of Christendom at its zenith. Apart from its renown as the world's largest edifice for centuries, Hagia Sophia was the most revered church in Christendom before the Great Schism of the 11th century, and the spiritual hearth of global Orthodox Christianity. Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque (*Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i Şerifi*, the Holy Mosque of Hagia Sophia the Grand) during the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, and converted into a museum by the Kemalists in 1935. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985,<sup>183</sup> Hagia Sophia has long been lauded as a feat of architecture, a masterpiece of art, and a paragon of universal cultural heritage.

Much to the dismay of the international community, the Turkish government reconverted Hagia Sophia into a mosque on 10 July 2020. On 24 July, the 97<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of

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<sup>183</sup> Gareth Harris, "Turkish government on collision course with Unesco over turning Hagia Sophia into mosque," *The Art Newspaper*, 3 July 2020, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/turkish-government-on-collision-course-with-unesco-over-hagia-sophia-mosque-initiative>.

the Treaty of Lausanne, Muslim prayers were held in Hagia Sophia.<sup>184</sup> During a televised broadcast announcing the prayer date, Erdoğan stated that the prayers would be “done at Hagia Sophia as part of conquest festival [the annual Turkish state event celebrating the Fall of Constantinople].”<sup>185</sup>

Despite the flood of attention surrounding the Summer 2020 reconversion (a search of “Hagia Sophia 2020 Conversion” yields 414,000 results on Google), Erdoğan and the AKP began orchestrating Hagia Sophia’s reconversion years ago. In 2005, the Association for the Service of the Historical Foundations and the Environment filed a lawsuit to the Turkish Council of State petitioning that Hagia Sophia be reconverted.<sup>186</sup> The lawsuit was rejected, but the same petition was filed again in 2016.<sup>187</sup>

Many news outlets incorrectly reported that 24 July was the first time in 86 years that Muslim prayers were held in Hagia Sophia.<sup>188</sup> In fact, Erdoğan recited the first verse of the Quran during a prayer service in Hagia Sophia on 31 March 2018, dedicating the prayer to the “souls of all who left us this work as inheritance, especially Istanbul’s *conqueror*.”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> “Muslim prayers in Hagia Sophia for first time in 86 years,” *Al Jazeera*, 24 July 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/24/muslim-prayers-in-hagia-sophia-for-first-time-in-86-years>.

<sup>185</sup> Ragip Soylu, “Turkey goes back to the future as Hagia Sophia set for Islamic prayers,” *Middle East Eye*, 29 May 2020, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/quran-recitation-conquest-hagia-sophia-istanbul>.

<sup>186</sup> Isil Sariyuce and Emma Reynolds, “Turkey’s Erdogan orders the conversion of Hagia Sophia back into a mosque,” *CNN*, 26 July 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/10/europe/hagia-sophia-mosque-turkey-intl/index.html>.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> Muslim prayers in Hagia Sophia for first time in 86 years,” *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>189</sup> “Turkish President Erdoğan recites Islamic prayer at the Hagia Sophia,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, 1 April 2018, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-recites-islamic-prayer-at-the-hagia-sophia-129594>.

At the 24 July prayer service, Diyanet head Imam Ali Erbaş delivered a sermon with a sword in hand.<sup>190</sup> *Duvar English* reported, “Two green flags were also hung on the pulpit of the mosque as a symbol of conquest.”<sup>191</sup>

While the Chora Church does not possess the same physical grandeur of Hagia Sophia, it is a comparably significant piece of Greek Orthodox cultural heritage—the church’s famed Byzantine mosaics and frescoes date back to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century and are some of the oldest surviving icons of the Palaiologan style and era.<sup>192</sup> Byzantine art history expert Robert Ousterhout described the Chora Church as “Second in renown only to Hagia Sophia...[Chora] holds some of the Byzantine world’s most astounding frescoes and mosaics.”<sup>193</sup>

Located in Edirnekapı, a historically Orthodox Christian and Jewish neighborhood of Istanbul,<sup>194</sup> the church was built in the early Byzantine period during the 4<sup>th</sup> century and was converted into a mosque (and renamed *Kariye Camii*, or, Kariye Mosque) at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century following the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople.<sup>195</sup> In 1945, the Kemalists designated the mosque a museum,<sup>196</sup> and the museum opened to the public in 1958 under the

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<sup>190</sup> “Turkey’s top religious authority head delivers Friday sermon at Hagia Sophia with a sword in hand,” *Duvar English*, 24 July 2020, <https://www.duvarenglish.com/politics/2020/07/24/turkeys-top-religious-authority-head-delivers-friday-sermon-at-hagia-sophia-with-a-sword-in-hand>.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> “About Chora,” Chora Museum, <https://www.choramuseum.com/>.

<sup>193</sup> Robert G. Ousterhout, *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1988).

<sup>194</sup> Selma Aykazıcı Özkoçak, “Two urban districts in early modern Istanbul: Edirnekapı and Yedikule,” *Urban History* 30, no. 1 (2003): 26-43.

<sup>195</sup> Reuters Staff, “After Hagia Sophia, Turkey’s historic Chora church also switched to mosque,” *Reuters*, 21 August 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-religion-chora/after-hagia-sophia-turkeys-historic-chora-church-also-switched-to-mosque-idUSKBN25H1AZ>.

<sup>196</sup> “About Chora,” Chora Museum.

name “Kariye Museum” (*Kariye Müzesi*). In the 1980s, the building was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site.<sup>197</sup>

In November 2019, the Turkish Council of State ordered that the museum be reconverted into a mosque,<sup>198</sup> and, in August 2020, the building’s official status was changed to a mosque.<sup>199</sup> Although the flurry of news surrounding the Chora’s reversion into a mosque began with the Council of State’s 2019 ruling, the process of reconverting Chora into a mosque had been underway since the early Erdoğan period, mirroring the measured planning of the AKP regarding the reversion of Hagia Sophia. The Association of Permanent Foundations and Service to Historical Artifacts and Environment, a Turkish state organization, filed a lawsuit to challenge Chora’s status as a museum in 2005, requesting that Chora be reconverted into a mosque.<sup>200</sup> In August 2020, Greek President Katerina Sakellariopoulou called the Turkish government’s reversion of Chora into a mosque an act of “symbolic violence,”<sup>201</sup> highlighting the potency of cultural heritage as a tool of either inclusion or oppression.

The reversion of these Orthodox churches into mosques is not merely significant as a change in the function and use of historic, world-famous cultural property. Rather, the Turkish state’s reversion of these churches into mosques is best understood as the most recent episode in the Turkish state’s historically continuous use of cultural heritage to build exclusivist nationalism.

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<sup>197</sup> Reuters Staff, “After Hagia Sophia, Turkey’s historic Chora church also switched to mosque.”

<sup>198</sup> “Turkey re-converts Istanbul’s Chora church museum into a mosque,” *Ahval*, 21 August 2020, <https://ahvalnews.com/chora/turkey-re-converts-istanbuls-chora-church-museum-mosque>.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Uzay Bulut, “Turkey: Greek Chora Church to be Converted into a Mosque; Is Hagia Sophia the Next?” *Greek City Times*, 18 November 2019, <https://greekcitytimes.com/2019/11/18/turkey-greek-chora-church-to-be-converted-into-a-mosque-is-hagia-sophia-the-next/>.

<sup>201</sup> “Chora Church conversion an act of ‘symbolic violence,’” *Ekathimerini*, 28 August 2020, <https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/256360/chora-church-conversion-an-act-of-symbolic-violence/>.



The international response surrounding this reconversion episode is instructive in its own right, revealing the deeply-ingrained errors in thinking regarding the continuity of Turkey's exclusivist nationalism and cultural heritage policies. In a July 2020 opinion piece for *The Washington Post* entitled "Converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque is an act of cultural cleansing," famed Byzantinist Judith Herrin writes: "By serving as a museum, Hagia Sophia, a vast, 1,500-year-old structure that previously served as a church and then a mosque, represented the essence of Istanbul, a place where world-changing empires and religions conflicted and intersected but whose monuments and artifacts can be enjoyed by all. Friday's ruling marks a symbolic end to this legacy of tolerance."<sup>202</sup>

Even Herrin, a world-renowned scholar whose expertise is predicated upon a nuanced, comprehensive understanding of the fate of Byzantine artifacts in both the Byzantine and post-Byzantine periods, falls victim to the erroneous notion that the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic have created, over time, a "legacy of tolerance." Surely, the long and copiously recorded history of the Turkish state's systematic destruction of the cultural heritage of ethno-religious minorities does not constitute a "legacy of tolerance." Unfortunately, Herrin's written expression of her misguided understanding of the Turkish cultural heritage regime was not unique in the plethora of Summer 2020 thought pieces regarding Hagia Sophia's reconversion.

An article published in October 2020 by the *Global Security Review* was titled: "Turkey Uses Medieval Score-Settling To Justify Its Hagia Sophia Conversion."<sup>203</sup> While Turkey's acts

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<sup>202</sup> Judith Herrin, "Converting Hagia Sophia into a mosque is an act of cultural cleansing," *The Washington Post*, 15 July 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/07/15/converting-hagia-sophia-into-mosque-is-an-act-cultural-cleansing/>.

<sup>203</sup> Philip Kowalski, "Turkey Uses Medieval Score-Settling To Justify Its Hagia Sophia Conversion," *Global Security Review*, 1 October 2020, <https://globalsecurityreview.com/turkey-uses-medieval-score-settling-to-justify-hagia-sophia-conversion/>.

of reconversion certainly clash with the international legal norms of the modern day, they should not be situated within the context of a “Medieval” method of policy-making and governance; in the Turkish case, these policies are representative of the modern Turkish Republic of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. UNESCO stated that it “deeply regrets” Turkey’s conversion of the World Heritage Site, writing: “Hagia Sophia is an architectural masterpiece and a unique testimony to interactions between Europe and Asia over the centuries.”<sup>204</sup> UNESCO’s conceptual reconfiguration of Hagia Sophia as a symbol of positively-inflected cross-cultural “interaction”—and one which is presented through the lens of a problematically Huntingtonian over-simplification of division between two entire continental entities—clouds the reality of the Turkish state’s designation of Hagia Sophia as a symbol of violent Turkish conquest.

If anything, the Hagia Sophia and Chora reconversions should not have elicited widespread shock amongst the global intellectual circles, but rather a confirmation of what was already clear. In her *Washington Post* article, Herrin identified the decision to reconvert Hagia Sophia into a mosque as “scandalously dangerous and bigoted.” The reconversion decision was dangerous and bigoted, indeed, but perhaps not so scandalous when set against a backdrop of staunchly unwavering historical continuity.

### **Part III: Voices from Turkey’s Greek Orthodox Community: Living in a Climate of Impunity**

The data makes clear the success of the Turkish exclusivist nationalist projects—of both the Kemalist and Erdoğanist varieties—and the more specific success of using cultural heritage as a tool through which to achieve these projects. With the appropriation, expropriation, and destruction of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, Turkey’s Greek Orthodox

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<sup>204</sup> “UNESCO statement on Hagia Sophia, Istanbul,” UNESCO, last modified 7 October 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-statement-hagia-sophia-istanbul>.

population is nearing extinction. There is one question which cannot, however, be explicitly answered, and whose answer can only be inferred from such data. What is the real quotidian impact of such nationalism and such policies on the lived experience of the vulnerable group in question (the Greek Orthodox Christians of Turkey)?

Quantitative data is certainly instructive and essential in delineating trends, but, given the emotional and all-encompassing power and effect of cultural heritage, I felt it vital to also obtain first-hand qualitative and experiential data from members of the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey. For this reason, I conducted unstructured interviews with three Greek Orthodox Christians who have lived or worked in Turkey, and who all self-identify as members of the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey. Although this number of interviews and individuals is certainly small, the Greek Orthodox community in Turkey is also small—it is helpful to recall that only 1,700 to 2,500 Greek Orthodox Christians remain in Turkey today. The voices of the individuals who I interviewed give expression to the climate of impunity that has been created through Turkey's policies of exclusivist nation-building and state control over cultural heritage.

All of the individuals who I interviewed insisted, for purposes of personal security, on remaining completely anonymous in this thesis—even those individuals who no longer live or work in Turkey. All of the individuals began by describing the general climate in Turkey. Three common themes emerged: to live as a Greek Orthodox Christian in Turkey is to constantly live in fear, to feel that one is constantly being surveyed by the Turkish state, and to feel that one is viewed as a threat to and by the Turkish state.

A former Greek Orthodox employee of the Ecumenical Patriarchate who lived in Istanbul for several years (Interviewee A) told me about the impact of Erdoğanist nationalism and cultural heritage policies on his everyday life. Interviewee A recounted an episode that occurred at the

beginning of his tenure in Istanbul: he recalls noticing a Turkish man “staring harshly”<sup>205</sup> at him and his cross, which he was wearing around his neck. Interviewee A told me that he felt “nervous” in that moment, and the impact this had on him: “I said, alright, I’m not gonna wear this [the cross] anymore. So I didn’t wear my cross the rest of the time I was in Turkey.”<sup>206</sup> Interviewee A told me that that episode made him far more aware of and fearful about his status as an at-risk and endangered minority: “[after that] whenever I was in a taxi, I never said that I was from the Greek minority.”<sup>207</sup>

Interviewee B, a Greek Orthodox resident of Istanbul (who is also a Turkish citizen and speaks Turkish) told me about a similar episode and succession of events. One day in late 2016, when Interviewee B was walking in Istanbul, where he has lived for nearly two decades, he was cornered by a group of three young Turkish men who noticed the cross he was wearing around his neck. The men spit at him, ripped his cross off his chest, and pushed him to the ground, calling him a “filthy Christian.”<sup>208</sup> After being pushed to the ground, he noticed that a group of police officers were “standing across the street, watching and doing nothing except for chuckling at what they had just seen.”<sup>209</sup> That assault prompted him to stop wearing his cross in public.<sup>210</sup>

I ask Interviewee B how this episode made him feel; he tells me, “It was terrifying, but not shocking. Here [in Turkey], even if we [Greek Orthodox Christians] speak Turkish and carry a Turkish passport, we are not treated like ‘real’ Turks. And it is not surprising that other Turks

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<sup>205</sup> Interviewee A. Interview by Sophia Kyrou, March 2021.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Interviewee B. Interview by Sophia Kyrou, February 2021.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

would not see us that way—our government, after all, tells them that our people and our culture do not deserve respect.”<sup>211</sup>

Interviewee C, who was a prominent leader of the Greek Orthodox community in Istanbul for over a decade, also cites this climate of fear and discrimination. He says: “You always feel threatened. I mean, when we’re doing *Pascha* [Orthodox Easter] and we’re outside,<sup>212</sup> the thought was in our mind every time: *Okay, what happens if someone bombs us now? What happens if someone comes in shooting?* Or, when we go out for Theophany:<sup>213</sup> *What happens if we’re attacked by the Islamists or the Grey Wolves* [the far-right, neo-fascist Turkish political organization affiliated with Turkey’s far-right Nationalist Movement Party]?”<sup>214</sup>

Interviewee C told me that he was also scared to wear a cross or Orthodox Christian religious dress: “I personally would not wear anything [Christian]. I was scared of being attacked by nationalists or fundamentalists. It did not feel like a safe place to wear anything like that [Christian religious dress] in. It is an anti-Christian type of culture.”<sup>215</sup> Interviewee C also described the position of Greek Orthodox organizations in Turkey: “The discrimination was *always* there. In terms of the laws and everything. And there is the feeling like, somehow, as an institution, we were a suspicious group of people that was like a thorn in the side of the state. When dealing with the government, you always immediately feel that you’re ranked number two or number three in society and that you’re under close watch.”<sup>216</sup> I asked Interviewee C to

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<sup>211</sup> Interviewee B. Interview by Sophia Kyrou.

<sup>212</sup> Certain portions of Orthodox Christian Easter services are conducted outside.

<sup>213</sup> Theophany is the Orthodox Christian celebration of Epiphany, and, in Istanbul it is celebrated outside at shores the Bosphorus.

<sup>214</sup> Interviewee C. Interview by Sophia Kyrou, March 2021.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

elaborate on the feeling of being under close watch. Interviewee C responded: “It doesn’t *feel* like you’re being watched. You *are* being watched.”<sup>217</sup> Interviewee A also pointed this out: “As a Greek Orthodox Christian in Turkey, you always know that you need to be looking over your shoulder. You always assume that someone is watching or listening.”<sup>218</sup>

After telling me about this general climate and experience of fear, discrimination, violence, and surveillance, all of the individuals whom I interviewed identified an interesting connection between state cultural heritage policies and treatment of minorities. As the Turkish state enacted more cultural heritage policies that were detrimental to ethno-religious minorities and reflected exclusivist nationalist ideals, there was more open hostility towards minorities from Turks in the nationalistic “majority” (i.e. ethnic Turks and/or religious Sunni Muslims).

I ask Interviewee B if the treatment of Christians and non-ethnic Turks has changed in the past two decades. He tells me: “Yes. Of course. As Erdoğan has become more powerful and completed more of his plans, everyday life is always becoming more difficult, and our rights are always disappearing. Everyday, the government takes away another church from us. Everyday, they make a new law that makes it impossible for us to take care of [sustain and renovate] the churches. Now, we have almost nothing that is ours. We cannot do anything about it, and other Turks are happy to see us suffer.”<sup>219</sup>

Interviewee A speaks to a similar trend: “As time went on, I had to make more accommodations to my everyday life. You have to make small corrections in your everyday lived experience to avoid any sort of conflict.”<sup>220</sup> Interviewee C told me of his increased

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<sup>217</sup> Interviewee C. Interview by Sophia Kyrou.

<sup>218</sup> Interviewee A. Interview by Sophia Kyrou.

<sup>219</sup> Interviewee B. Interview by Sophia Kyrou

<sup>220</sup> Interviewee A. Interview by Sophia Kyrou.

“anxiety and panic”<sup>221</sup> as Erdoğan and the AKP intensified their exclusivist nationalist project, and described the feeling of leaving Turkey: “Each time I would fly out [of Turkey], it felt like a huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders. It was something that I would always feel right when we took off, and the feeling got stronger each time. For years and years, it was like, *Thank God.*”<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Interviewee C. Interview by Sophia Kyrou.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

As I write this conclusion, Turkey is at a critical juncture. Ill-advised foreign adventurism in Syria and Iraq, maritime and airspace aggression towards Mediterranean neighbors Greece and Cyprus, and involvement in the 2020 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh underscore Turkey's rogue state behaviors. Turkey's economy continues its five-year economic crisis across all metrics, including a precipitous drop in the value of the Turkish lira, concomitant crises in the finance and banking systems, and rising unemployment and lack of public confidence in the government's economic policy. Meanwhile, Turkey's sharp decline in its human rights performance has contributed to the country's regime transformation towards authoritarianism, summarized in the most recent 2021 *Freedom House* report that ranks Turkey as the 32<sup>nd</sup> most "un-free country in the world."<sup>223</sup> The Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) 2020 end-of-year global survey of jailed journalists ranked Turkey as second in the world for the highest number of jailed journalists, narrowly following China.<sup>224</sup>

CPJ reported its findings on Turkey:

"CPJ found 37 journalists imprisoned [in Turkey] this year...authorities continue to arrest journalists – and their lawyers...In the weeks leading up to CPJ's census, Turkish authorities arrested at least three journalists working for pro-Kurdish outlet Mezopotamya News Agency for their critical coverage, including Cemil Uğur, who alleged in a story that military personnel detained and tortured two villagers and threw them from a helicopter; one later died. (Turkish officials said the civilians were injured resisting arrest)."<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> "Turkey: Freedom in the World Country Report 2021," *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2021>.

<sup>224</sup> Elana Beiser, "Record number of journalists jailed worldwide," *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 15 December 2020, <https://cpj.org/reports/2020/12/record-number-journalists-jailed-imprisoned/>.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*



Turkey's continuing hard shift in the direction of authoritarianism, expressed in its foreign policy, political economy, and measures of civil and political liberties, has, in many ways, reinforced all of the non-democratic features of Kemalist and Erdoganist versions of exclusivist nationalism. At the same time, these conditions are also reinforcing Turkey's exclusivist nationalist project: on the domestic level, Turkey's economic crises have led the AKP to default to hyper-nationalist rhetoric; on the foreign level, Turkey's foreign policy adventurism has been articulated in terms of exclusivist nationalism and instrumentalized as an opportunity to justify the export of Turkey's exclusivist nationalism. In both regards, this confluence of events suggests that cultural heritage policy will continue to be used in a manner to reinforce the Turkish state's exclusivist nationalist project and justify Turkey's complementary cultural heritage policies. As a consequence, the further endangerment of the Greek Orthodox community of Turkey and of Turkey's other ethno-religious minorities is inevitable.

The Turkish case is simply one paradigmatic piece of a broader emerging trend: authoritarian regimes across the world are molding forms of exclusivist nationalism that place ethno-religious minorities at risk, and these regimes increasingly turn to cultural heritage policy as a concrete and visual manifestation and operationalization of that exclusivism.

On the eve of the centennial of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the impact of Turkey's exclusivist nationalist project and cultural heritage policies is thrown into sharpest relief—nearing extinction, the Greek Orthodox citizens of Turkey are the living example of the potentially lethal symbiosis of cultural heritage and exclusivist nationalism.

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