

# Agency Amidst Adversity: Civil Society and the Struggle to Preserve the Memory and Cultural Heritage of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in Turkey

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters thesis in Politics at the University of Auckland, 2023.**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how Turkish civil society organizations exercise agency and resilience in preserving and protecting the memory and cultural heritage of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in Turkey in the face of both hard and soft constraints. Despite increasing authoritarianism, state oppression, and mistrust from their Armenian counterparts, these NGOs have exhibited resilience and creatively navigated these constraints to continue their work. Through their persistence and adaptation, they have helped safeguard the heritage and memory of these indigenous minority groups. The thesis aims to provide insights into the strategies employed by these NGOs to navigate challenging circumstances and contribute to ongoing efforts for reconciliation in Turkey.

For Jean-Luc

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my amazing supervisor Maria Armoudian, this thesis would not have been possible without her help and belief in me.

I would also like to thank my amazing parents and Jean-Luc, their support means the most to me.

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## Introduction

On 14 May, 2023, the eve of the presidential elections, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan led Maghrib (sunset) prayers in Istanbul's church/museum-turned mosque, Hagia Sophia, a Greek symbol of profound spiritual significance and historic legacy.<sup>1</sup> Despite Turkey's High Council having forbidden all political parties from campaigning after six o'clock the day prior to the elections,<sup>2</sup> Erdoğan chose the former Byzantine cathedral as the final destination of his campaign rally.<sup>3</sup> This highly contested act came three years after Erdoğan's similarly controversial decision to convert the long-standing Greek Orthodox Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

The Hagia Sophia's storied history has been marred by the pervasive politicisation it has endured over time. Each transition in its status has been fraught with political implications, reflecting the complexities of identity, nationalism, memory, and religious freedom in Turkey. From the Ottoman era to the modern Turkish state, the Hagia Sophia has been a focal point and symbol of political manoeuvring, garnering both domestic and international attention.<sup>4</sup>

Located in the heart of Istanbul, it stands as a testament to the region's rich historical and cultural heritage. Built in the sixth century as a Christian cathedral during the Byzantine Empire, the Hagia Sophia later became a symbol of Ottoman conquest when it was converted into a mosque by Mehmet II in 1453.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, under the secularizing policies of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, it was transformed into a museum in 1935, representing Turkey's commitment to secularism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stockholm Centre for Freedom, "Erdoğan leads prayer at Hagia Sophia on eve of fight for political life," accessed June 22, 2023, <https://stockholmcf.org/erdogan-leads-prayers-at-hagia-sophia-on-eve-of-fight-for-political-life/>.

<sup>2</sup> Sultan Tepe, "How Erdoğan won the Turkish election: Electoral miracles of religious populism," The London School of Economics, accessed July 23, 2023, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2023/07/how-erdogan-won-the-turkish-election-electoral-miracles-of-religious-populism/>.

<sup>3</sup> Daily Sabah, "Erdoğan to conclude election campaign at Hagia Sophia," accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/elections/erdogan-to-conclude-election-campaign-at-hagia-sophia>.

<sup>4</sup> Tugba Tanyeri Erdemir, "Hagia Sophia: From a beacon of coexistence to the pretext for extremism," Ahval, accessed December 22, 2022, <https://ahvalnews.com/hagia-sophia/hagia-sophia-beacon-coexistence-pretext-extremism>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

On July 24, 2020, the Turkish state decided to reconvert the Hagia Sophia into a mosque, and was opened to receive Sunni Muslim worshippers for the first time since 1931.<sup>7</sup> The Hagia Sophia had long been at the center of political conversations prior to its 2020 conversion. For example, just before dawn on May 31 2014, over 40,000 Turkish Muslims gathered on mats in front of the Hagia Sophia calling for the historic building to be converted back to a mosque.<sup>8</sup> Erdoğan's decision sparked controversy and protests, both domestically and internationally, especially among Greeks and other Christians who saw it as a move that could impact interfaith relations. For Greeks and Orthodox Christians, the Hagia Sophia is a symbol of their historical connection to the region and their religious heritage. These communities viewed the 2020 conversion as a potential threat to the preservation and representation of their historical and cultural memory.<sup>9</sup> Speaking on the conversions, Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir, stated that the Hagia Sophia will no longer serve as the "beacon on coexistence and peace" that it once did.<sup>10</sup> Tanyeri-Erdemir argued that Erdoğan's decision to convert the building alongside his "supremacist rhetoric of conquest", has encouraged extremists and hateful ideology worldwide.<sup>11</sup>

A month after the Hagia Sophia's conversion, Erdoğan reconverted the Chora Church (also known as the Holy Saviour in Chora), into another mosque.<sup>12</sup> Just over a year later, in December 2021, Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs converted the historic Greek Hagia Sophia Church in Edirne into a mosque.<sup>13</sup>

The conversion of the Hagia Sophia and Erdoğan's decision to hold Maghrib on the eve of the election signalled a shift in Turkey's political landscape and highlighted the complex politics

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<sup>7</sup> Senija Causevic, "Hagia Sophia: turning this Turkish treasure into a mosque is at odds with its UNESCO status," *The Conversation*, accessed April 14, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/hagia-sophia-turning-this-turkish-treasure-into-a-mosque-is-at-odds-with-its-unesco-status-143372>.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Seligson, "Sacred Wisdom: An archeologist becomes a guardian of Turkey's past, and future," *Bostonia*, accessed June 22, 2022, <https://www.bu.edu/bostonia/fall14/sacred-wisdom/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ziad Jamaledine, "Hagia Sophia Past and Future," *Places Journal*, accessed January 14, 2023, <https://placesjournal.org/article/hagia-sophia-past-and-future/?cn-reloaded=1>.

<sup>10</sup> Tugba Tanyeri Erdemir, "Hagia Sophia: From a beacon of coexistence to the pretext for extremism."

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Reuters, "After Hagia Sophia, Turkey's historic Chora Church also switched into a mosque," accessed 21 December 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-religion-chora-idUSKBN25H1AZ>.

<sup>13</sup> Uzey Bulut, "The Destruction of Christian Cultural Heritage," *Providence*, accessed November 22, 2022, <https://providencemag.com/2022/02/destruction-christian-cultural-heritage-armenia-azerbaijan-cyprus-syria-turkey/>.

surrounding cultural heritage in the country, in particularly those belonging to its Christian minorities. These symbolized a broader trend of erasure of historical and cultural memory that has been unfolding in Turkey well before 1915.<sup>14</sup> This erasure has impacted the cultural heritage and identity of minority groups who have faced discrimination, displacement, and appears to be a systematic effort to diminish their historical contributions to the region. Both events serve as poignant reminders of the challenges minorities in Turkey continue to face in preserving their cultural heritage and memory, within the evolving political landscape in Turkey.

This thesis aims to analyse the politicisation of the cultural heritage of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in Turkey with a central focus on the struggle against ongoing erasure of their cultural legacy, heritage, and memory within the country. These three minority groups were selected as case studies due to commonalities that bind them; their shared religious affiliation, status as indigenous peoples of Turkey, and their shared history as victims of genocide at the hands of the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish state's efforts to deny their histories underscores the need to understand the multifaceted dimensions of the politics of cultural heritage, memory preservation, and the complex-socio political dynamics at play in contemporary Turkey, into the forefront of scholarship. By examining the struggles to preserve these three communities' cultural heritage and memory collectively in the context of the ongoing erasure in Turkey, this research addresses a significant gap in existing literature.

This thesis therefore centres its attention on the crucial role Turkish civil society organizations play in the struggle to preserve cultural heritage and memory. It will examine the work of four Turkish NGOs that are actively engaged in preserving the cultural heritage and memory of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks: Hrant Dink Foundation, Hafiza Merkezi (The Truth and Justice Memory Centre), Anadolu Kültür and the Association for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (KMKD). The core arguments presented in this thesis revolve around the ways in which these four organizations navigate the challenges posed by the Turkish state. It will examine the methods undertaken by these organizations to maneuver

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<sup>14</sup> Nanor Kebranian, "Cultural Heritage and the Denial of Genocide Law," in *The Armenian Genocide Legacy*, ed. Alexis Demirdjian (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2016) , 245-246.



within the oppressive socio-political landscape of Turkey. This study thus sheds light on the agency and resilience exhibited by these organizations in the face of adversity and oppressive structures and will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the crucial role civil society plays in preventing the erasure of the rich historical legacies, memories and cultural heritage.

As previously stated, these genocides were marked not only by the mass killing and forced deportations of the Christian population, but also by a campaign to erase their historic presence and existence in what is now modern-day Turkey. Central to this genocidal strategy was the systematic destruction of cultural heritage.<sup>15</sup> Raphael Lemkin, the originator of the term genocide, placed great importance on “the destruction of culture as a component of genocide.”<sup>16</sup> He argued that the destruction of cultural spaces, particularly houses of worship, played a central role in eradicating the identity of any collective.<sup>17</sup> For example, in the case of the Armenian Genocide, not only did the authorities and local populations vandalize and destroy churches and communal properties, but they also converted many of these sacred spaces into the likes of arsenals, artillery training grounds, barns and brothels.<sup>18</sup> As outlined by Balakian, successive generations of Turks repurposed these sites for various functions, severing their original connections to their rightful owners.<sup>19</sup> Many churches underwent conversions into mosques, restaurants, community centers, cinemas, adult cinemas<sup>20</sup> and factories.<sup>21</sup> The rest were often left in ruins, bereft of markers or names, gradually succumbing to decay.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ugur Ümit Üngör, “The Armenian Genocide: A Multi-Dimensional Process of Destruction,” *Global Dialogue* 15, no. 1 (2013): 102.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Balakian, “Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide,” *Holocaust and genocide studies* 27, no. 1 (2013): 65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Zakaria Mildanoglu, “Turks were turning Armenian churches into cinemas where they were screening porn films,” *Panorama.am*, accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2013/04/27/porno-church/531795>.

<sup>21</sup> Balakian, “Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide,” 65.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Dickran Kouymjian posed the question, “When does genocide end?”<sup>23</sup> Kouymjian argued that the genocidal process persists long after the killing stops.<sup>24</sup> This assertion appears true for Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. In addition to ongoing discriminatory practices targeting Armenians, for example, Kouymjian points to the official state policy of denial concerning the Armenian Genocide and the historical presence of Armenians in what was once known as the Armenian Plateau and cultural genocide, characterized by deliberate actions aimed at erasing Armenian cultural heritage in Turkey.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly to Kouymjian, Robert Bevan<sup>26</sup> and Armen Marsoobian argued that, a recurring hallmark of mass atrocities and genocides lies in the deliberate and systematic destruction of the cultural heritage belonging to the targeted population.<sup>27</sup> In many instances, the destruction of cultural heritage unfolds during the initial phases of genocide, serving as a prelude to the horrors that follow.<sup>28</sup> However, in some cases, the assault on cultural heritage persists far beyond the immediate period of the initial conflict.<sup>29</sup> This prolonged, ongoing erasure of cultural heritage remains a reality for the Armenian, Assyrians and Greeks in Turkey. For Marsoobian, the motivations behind the deliberate cleansing of cultural heritage, provides a means to “deny or minimize” the crimes of the past and to “erase the landscape” of any living reminders of their victims from the physical and cultural landscape.<sup>30</sup>

Many scholars such as Balakian, Marsoobian, Hovanissian and Kouymjian argued that destruction of cultural heritage is a continuation of the Turkish policy of Genocide.<sup>31</sup> For example, Kouymjian stressed that the destruction of Armenian cultural heritage as the completion of the Armenian Genocide by erasing “all Armenian cultural remains or depriving

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<sup>23</sup> Dickran Kouymjian, “When Does Genocide End? The Armenian Case,” 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Armen Marsoobian, “Breaking the Silence: Memorialization and Cultural Repair in the Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide,” in *Mass Violence and Memory in the Digital Age: Memorialization Unmoored*, ed. Eve Monique Zucker and David J. Simon (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020): p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Dickran Kouymjian, “The Destruction of Armenian Historical Monuments as a Continuation of the Turkish Policy of Genocide,” in *A Crime of Silence: The Armenian Genocide, Permanent Peoples’ Tribunal* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1985); 175.

them of their distinguishing national elements.”<sup>32</sup> Balakian argued that the remnants of Armenian culture within contemporary Turkey exist as “captive sites”, to which Armenians have “no organic or even accessible relationship”.<sup>33</sup> He stressed that the displacement from their historical land and its tangible cultural heritage, evokes a “sense of exile and longing for the past,”<sup>34</sup> becoming a “wound that can rupture” the community’s sense of what Lemkin referred to as “social and spiritual cohesion”.<sup>35</sup> For Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, this wound deepens as they continue to witness and mourn the ongoing erasure of their cultural heritage and with that their memory.<sup>36</sup> Four civil society organizations have sought to remedy this, to protect and conserve the memory of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, primarily through the preservation of their cultural heritage. This thesis studies their work and their struggles, aiming to shed light on how these organizations seek to contribute to healing historical wounds and fostering greater understanding within Turkey.

As argued by Uğur Ümit Üngör, although the Armenians were gone, because of the remaining heritage ‘in a sense they were still too present.’<sup>37</sup> In order to totally eliminate their lingering presence, a systematic effort was made to destroy their cultural heritage.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, as stressed by scholars such as Üngör and Anush Hovanissian<sup>39</sup>, erasing this heritage sought to affirm the belief that Armenians had never inhabited this region and ensured that survivors would find themselves with “nothing recognizable to return to.”<sup>40</sup> Similarly, Kouymjian argued that the presence of surviving monuments of the victims are a “great embarrassment to the perpetrators of the genocide.”<sup>41</sup> The more there are, the more challenging it becomes to rewrite history.<sup>42</sup> As this thesis will illustrate, these three factors have rendered the work

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<sup>32</sup> Kouymjian, “When Does Genocide End? The Armenian Case,” 7.

<sup>33</sup> Balakian, “Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide,” 83.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör, “The Armenian Genocide: A Multi-Dimensional Process of Destruction,” 102.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Anush Hovanissian, “Turkey: A Cultural Genocide, in *Studies in Comparative Genocide*,” ed. Levon Chorbajian and George Shirinian (Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999): 149.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Kouymjian, “The Destruction of Armenian Historical Monuments as a Continuation of the Turkish Policy of Genocide,” 174.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

of these NGOs exceptional, significant, and courageous, given the inherent risks associated with their work.

Despite the passage of time, the repercussions of the events between 1915 and 1924 continue to influence the cultural heritage and memory of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks in Turkey. The destruction of religious sites, artifacts and historical landmarks has had a profound impact on these communities' identities and their connections to the past.<sup>43</sup> As observed by Peter Balakian, the systematic and organized destruction of cultural heritage and collective identity persisted into the era of the modern Turkish republic.<sup>44</sup> For Balakian, this ongoing process of destruction has implications for how these communities maintain their deep-rooted connections to their historical narratives.<sup>45</sup> As this thesis will show, this erasure has perpetuated tensions, distrust and strained relations between different segments of Turkish society.

There is limited academic scholarship focused on the endeavors of civil society in the realm of safeguarding cultural heritage. Arguably, there is less academic attention directed towards the efforts of civil society in preserving the memory and cultural heritage within authoritarian nation-states that seek to eradicate the heritage and memory of its indigenous communities. This thesis endeavors to contribute to the literature by examining how civil society organizations operate within oppressive regimes, focusing on the strategies they employ to sustain their work, such as utilizing the digital space, and the risks they face in their work. For expelled minority groups facing or have endured cultural erasure, preserving their heritage and memory is an impossible task. Thus, this thesis highlights the vital role of on-the-ground civil society actors, especially in countries like Turkey, who can counter-act state-imposed erasure due to their access to cultural heritage.

This study delves into the ways in which civil society bridges divides, advocates for inclusivity and recognition, and paves the way for a more inclusive and reconciled Turkey that honors its multicultural heritage.

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<sup>43</sup> Balakian, "Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide," 62-63.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

As background, the Armenian Genocide (1915-1916)<sup>46</sup> occurred in the backdrop of World War I, was a systematic campaign by the Ottoman Empire that resulted in the death of approximately 1.5 million Armenians.<sup>47</sup> The Assyrian Genocide<sup>48</sup>, known to Assyrians as Seyfo<sup>49</sup>, transpired concurrently with the Armenian Genocide and claimed the lives of an estimated 250,000 Assyrians.<sup>50</sup> The Greek Genocide took place between 1919 and 1924 and resulted in the death of around one million Greeks.<sup>51</sup> These cumulative atrocities underscore the devastating toll enacted upon Ottoman Christians, with estimations suggesting that the Turkish government (Ottoman and the Republic), was responsible for the massacre of approximately 2.5 million Christians between 1894 and 1924.<sup>52</sup>

Whilst all three suffered genocides, the suffering endured by the Assyrians in particular, has largely been overlooked and forgotten internationally.<sup>53</sup> This ancient and culturally rich community found themselves subjected to the threat of complete physical erasure. As argued by Travis, the “thoroughness of the extermination” of the Assyrian people, marked by its systematic destruction, explains why their “tragedy and cultural heritage have been virtually forgotten.”<sup>54</sup> The Assyrian community’s lack of statehood, demographic strength, and limited economic and political influence, in contrast to groups like Armenians, Greeks, or even larger minorities such as Tibetans, poses significant challenges in their pursuit of recognition and protection of cultural heritage.<sup>55</sup> This makes the work being done by these four NGOs crucial to the survival of their history, heritage and memory in Turkey. The following section presents a detailed chapter outline for this thesis.

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<sup>46</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), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014): 1.

<sup>48</sup> In 1914, the Assyrian population in the Ottoman Empire stood at 500,000.

<sup>49</sup> Assyrians refer to the genocide as ‘the year of the sword’ (i Shato du Sayfo).

<sup>50</sup> Hannibal Travis, ‘The Assyrian Genocide: A Tale of Oblivion and Denial,’ in *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory*, ed. René Lemarchand (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011): 127.

<sup>51</sup> Morris and Ze’evi, *The Thirty Year Genocide: Turkey’s Destruction of Its Christian Minorities, 1894-1924*, 487.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 467.

<sup>53</sup> Travis, “The Assyrian Genocide: A Tale of Oblivion and Denial, in *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory*,” 133.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

Chapter One is a literature review covering memory, denial, cultural heritage, and the role of civil society in heritage protection. Chapter Two outlines the methodology employed in this thesis. Chapter Three delves into the socio-political landscape from 2002, when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) assumed power, to 2016, marked by the failed coup attempt. Chapter Four will analyse the four NGOs, offering detailed insights into their projects and efforts to safeguard the memory and cultural heritage of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greek communities in Turkey during the period spanning from 2002 to the failed coup of 2016. Chapter Five examines the social and political transformations following the failed coup, emphasizing the purges in civil institutions and their impact on the NGOs operations, as well as the necessary adaptations they had to make in order to continue their work. Chapter Six delves into the hard constraints imposed on civil society after 2016, shedding light on the risks involved with their work and their strategies navigating these challenging circumstances to continue their missions. Chapter Seven is dedicated to exploring the soft constraints, elucidating how these NGOs manoeuvre within this oppressive state framework and adapt their project approaches to overcome challenges. This chapter underscores the evolving nature of their work in response to the difficulties they face. This thesis then culminates in a discussion section before reaching its concluding chapter.

Throughout this thesis, I explore agency and its limitations within structures that have been constructed to stop civil society's progress. It seeks to answer the following key research questions: How do civil society organizations challenge state memory in an authoritarian state? How do they protect/preserve cultural heritage counter to the state's efforts? How do they use cultural heritage protection for peace and reconciliation? How does their preservation of cultural heritage help acknowledge history and counter the state's narrative? How do they exercise agency and navigate constraints and oppressive structures within an authoritarian state? How is agency limited? The following chapter explores the literature pertaining to collective memory, state memory, cultural heritage and memory, heritage in conflict, the role of civil society in heritage and memory preservation, and lastly Turkish denial.

## Chapter One

### Memory, Cultural Heritage, and Society: A Literature Review

Veysel Apaydin argued, memory is a complex subject within the realm of social sciences, characterised by its elusive definition and the absence of clear boundaries.<sup>56</sup> It serves as a foundational element in the formation of communities, both collective and individual identities, and imparts a sense of belonging.<sup>57</sup> As articulated by Jeff Spinner-Halev, “without memory, there is no understanding”.<sup>58</sup> Memory allows individuals and groups to construct a connection to the past, providing context and meaning to their existence.<sup>59</sup>

The term ‘collective memory’ was coined by Maurice Halbwachs in 1925.<sup>60</sup> However, it was not until the 1980s that this concept gained widespread attention among academics, largely due to growing scrutiny of established historical narratives.<sup>61</sup> This scrutiny focused particularly on the intricate relationship between “history, memory, and power” and how these narratives influenced the portrayal of repressed and marginalised groups.<sup>62</sup> In recent times, the study of memory has experienced a resurgence in academic interest, particularly in exploring how memory, especially historical narratives, is generated, consumed, transformed, and transmitted by various social groups.<sup>63</sup>

Whilst some scholars, such as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi,<sup>64</sup> have critiqued collective memory for its inherent selectiveness and contended that historiography cannot serve as a replacement,<sup>65</sup> it is undeniable that collective memory naturally involves selectivity and holds a significant role in cultural heritage. It establishes connections with the past and fosters

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<sup>56</sup> Veysel Apaydin, “The interlinkage of cultural memory, heritage and discourses of construction, transformation and destruction,” in *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage: Construction, Transformation and Destruction* (London: University College London, 2020), 14.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 14-15

<sup>58</sup> Jeff Spinner-Halev, “From Historical to Enduring Injustice,” *Political Theory* 35, no. 5, (2007): 586.

<sup>59</sup> Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *The American historical review* 102, no. 5 (1997): 1386.

<sup>60</sup> Nicolas Russell, “Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs,” *The French Review* 79, no. 4 (2006): 792.

<sup>61</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, “Social Memory Studies: From “Collective Memory” to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, no. 1 (1998): 107-108.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 95.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 101.

global links amongst various groups of people. As Stephen Humphreys argued, this shared collective memory within societies is firmly rooted in the artifacts of culture.<sup>66</sup> When this memory is destroyed, erased, or forgotten, it results in the erasure of cultural identities and social boundaries.<sup>67</sup>

Melanie Altanian contended that the dynamism of memory, whether at a collective or individual level, arises from its incorporation of real experiences and events, as well as reflections on the meaning and importance these experiences should hold in our present and future existence.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, it is the discerning process of choosing what to remember and ascribing significance to these memories that enables the construction of memory to be adaptable and receptive to change.<sup>69</sup>

Collective memory serves as the vital link between the past and present and is crucial to delve into history to gain a comprehensive understanding of how justice can be effectively established into contemporary society.<sup>70</sup> Laura Boerhout, one of the creators of the 'Memory Walk Sarajevo' project, and Barry van Driel, argued that collective identities are shaped by, and produce, shared stories, memories, and myths about the past are passed on to future generations, supporting a sense of who we are and what group we belong to.<sup>71</sup> Together, they make up the collective memory of a community.<sup>72</sup>

Spinner-Halev emphasized that for justice to prevail, it is imperative to acknowledge the collective memory of the descendants of victims.<sup>73</sup> He underscored that our identities, both individual and collective, are molded by our memories.<sup>74</sup> Embracing collective memory entails aligning oneself with the shared past of a particular group<sup>75</sup>, and this sense of

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<sup>66</sup> Stephen Humphreys, "The Destruction of Cultural Memory," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 36, no. 1 (2002): 1.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Melanie Altanian, "Archive against Genocide Denialism? Challenges to the Use of Archives in Turkish Armenian Reconciliation," *Swisspeace Working Paper*, no.1 (2017): 13.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Jeff Spinner-Halev, "From Historical to Enduring Injustice," 576.

<sup>71</sup> Laura Boerhout and Barry van Driel, "Memory walk: an interaction-oriented project to interrogate contested histories," *Intercultural Education* 24, no. 3, (2013): 213.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Spinner-Halev, "From Historical to Enduring Injustice," 576.

<sup>74</sup> Spinner-Halev, "From Historical to Enduring Injustice," 580.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.



belonging situates individuals within the broader world.<sup>76</sup> Across generations, people inherit a rich tapestry of memories, cultural customs, stories, and traditions passed down through time.<sup>77</sup> Spinner-Halev asserted that comprehending human behavior necessitates a consideration of collective memory.<sup>78</sup> Injustices persist when a collective narrative is disrupted and left unrepaired, forgotten, or when collective memory understandably breeds profound mistrust in a government.<sup>79</sup>

The primary focus of memory studies has historically centered on the collective memory of the nation. In more recent times, the processes of memory production have predominately occurred within the confines of the nation-state, where reconciling with the past was primarily viewed as a national undertaking.<sup>80</sup> Cultural anthropologist Aleida Assmann and historian Sebastian Conrad have argued that global conditions have exerted a substantial impact on the discussions about memory.<sup>81</sup> Simultaneously, memory has assumed a prominent role on the global stage and within global discourse.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, it has become imperative to investigate the intersection of memory and global developments, as comprehending the trajectories of memory now necessitates a global frame of reference.<sup>83</sup> This shift has compelled both state and non-state actors to engage with an increasingly globalised public sphere.<sup>84</sup> Assmann and Carter further contended that the values associated with counter-globalization have progressively penetrated the prevailing memory constructs of the nation-state, persistently asserting claims to moral responsibility and accountability.<sup>85</sup>

Assmann and Carter observed that memories transcend national borders, entering a “global arena through all available channels.”<sup>86</sup> This migration begins with human carriers, as memories journey from one continent to another alongside individuals.<sup>87</sup> The devastating

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad, Introduction, in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*, ed. Aleida Assman and Sebastian Conrad, 2010, Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire, UK, p. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Assmann and Conrad, “Introduction,” 2.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

impacts of war and genocide can profoundly affect individuals, leading to the fragmentation of communities and the displacement of cultural traditions and personal memories.<sup>88</sup> Consequently, heritage, memories, and traumas accompany individuals, perpetually shifting into new social groups and political contexts.<sup>89</sup>

Eric Langenbacher, an expert in Political Culture and Collective Memory Politics, asserted in his examination of the state's collective memory that, memory has assumed a prominent role in nearly every country that has endured a dictatorial regime or societal trauma."<sup>90</sup> In some instances, this focus on memory has contributed to the establishment of peace and democratic systems. Nevertheless, in contexts as diverse as Guatemala, South Africa, Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chile, and Turkey, "collective memory or traumatic episodes has become a constitutive part of efforts to come to terms with the past, rebuild societal trust, re-establish the rule of law."<sup>91</sup> In such cases, collective memory has become instrumental for civil society and human rights organizations dedicated to addressing the deep wounds within the state.

At the institutional level, there is a growing trend where memories are being transmitted and endorsed through political actors in the form of transnational networks and corporations.<sup>92</sup> UNESCO, for instance, has heightened awareness regarding the importance of safeguarding memory through the protection of cultural heritage.<sup>93</sup> The preservation and the status of cultural heritage have evolved into highly politicized topics in the face of new global challenges.<sup>94</sup> Consequently, the subject of memory has gained prominence on the political agendas of various transnational organisations, especially concerning the acknowledgment of traumatic pasts and the cultivation of shared memory.<sup>95</sup>

### **The Politics of Memory:**

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Eric Langenbacher, "Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations," in *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations*, ed. By Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 16.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Assmann and Conrad, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Assmann and Conrad, "Introduction," 3.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Halbwachs considered the authoritative role of nation-states, depicting governments in modern societies as active agents in shaping collective memory.<sup>96</sup> Consequently, the influence and authority exerted by governments impose various limitations on their citizens and steer individuals towards specific modes of thinking.<sup>97</sup> Nations and states are built upon what Altanian referred to as “functional memory”.<sup>98</sup> In essence, a specific narrative from the past is deliberately chosen and promoted as the official historical truth.<sup>99</sup> The sustainability of this constructed collective state memory hinges on the support of a controlling authority that safeguards it.<sup>100</sup> When areas of conflict evolve into “public spaces of national memory,” the politics of memory inevitably surface.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, two conflicting historical narratives emerge, leading to confrontation, heightened distrust, and a perceived need to defend one’s version of history.<sup>102</sup> As Boerhout and Van Driel have articulated, the nation-state holds a pivotal role as one of the most significant actors in the ongoing battle for control over collective memory.<sup>103</sup>

However, for every alternative memory, there exists a corresponding “counter-memory”.<sup>104</sup> Altanian argued that the longer the memories of oppressed minority victims persist, the more firmly their memory becomes established, drawing attention to the “delegitimization of power structures” in relation to the official collective state memory.<sup>105</sup>

The creation of alternative memories and historical narratives arguably present a security concern,<sup>106</sup> particularly for minority groups who have previously suffered from genocide or

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<sup>96</sup> Carikci, “The Arts of Memory: the remembrance of the Armenians in Turkey,” 96.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Assmann and Conrad, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>101</sup> Janet Jacobs, “2010 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture: Sacred Space and Collective Memory: Memorialising Genocide at Sites of Terror,” *Sociology of religion* 72, no. 2 (2011): 154.

<sup>102</sup> Dovile Budryte, Erica Resende and Douglas Becker, “Defending Memory: Exploring the Relationship Between Mnemonic In/Security and Crisis in Global Politics,” *Interdisciplinary Political Studies* 1, no. 6 (2020): 7

<sup>103</sup> Boerhout and Van Driel, “Memory walk: an interaction-oriented project to interrogate contested histories,” 214.

<sup>104</sup> Altanian, “Archive against Genocide Denialism? Challenges to the Use of Archives in Turkish Armenian Reconciliation,” 14.

<sup>105</sup> Altanian, “Archive against Genocide Denialism? Challenges to the Use of Archives in Turkish Armenian Reconciliation,” 14.

<sup>106</sup> Budryte et al., “Defending Memory: Exploring the Relationship Between Mnemonic In/Security and Crisis in Global Politics,” 7.

ethnic cleansing. In such cases, not only is the security of their homeland at risk, but so is the integrity of their memory and identity. Scholars like Dovile Budryte, Erica Resende and Douglas Becker emphasized the significance securitizing of historical memory. They argued that a “state’s history and how it is presented, interpreted, altered, and contested form an essential element of its identity.”<sup>107</sup>

In “securitized contexts,” historical memory itself becomes a “security issue” when both state and non-state actors engage in the act of “defending memory.”<sup>108</sup> In many securitized contexts, historical recollection becomes a matter of security concern.<sup>109</sup> States construct biographical narratives that are “inseparable from historical remembrance.”<sup>110</sup> They mobilize “national myths, stories, symbols, and norms” to shape the nation’s past.<sup>111</sup> The security dilemma arises when a state’s historical narrative and memory clash with that of ‘the other,’ particularly when the memory of ‘the other’ contradicts or is perceived as a threat to “our existence”<sup>112</sup> This conflict necessitates the need to defend state’s memory.”<sup>113</sup>

### **Cultural Heritage, Memory and the State:**

Veysel Apaydin contended that groups preserve and transmit cultural values through material culture and heritage.<sup>114</sup> He stressed that these elements are instrumental in forging and strengthening memory, a sense of belonging, and the construction of identity.<sup>115</sup> In a number of cases, memory is regarded as a tool that maintains a direct link to “past events and the material culture of the past”.<sup>116</sup> However, it also holds connections to the present and the future.<sup>117</sup> Many heritage sites, constructed hundreds or even thousands of years ago,

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 8.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Veysel Apaydin, “The interlinkage of cultural memory, heritage and discourses of construction, transformation and destruction,” 15.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 16.

continue to play central roles in the daily lives of contemporary communities and groups.<sup>118</sup> By safeguarding cultural heritage, memory can endure, adapt and evolve for future generations.<sup>119</sup> Never the less, the preservation of heritage necessitates the active involvement and care of citizens who live in its midst.<sup>120</sup>

It is also crucial to acknowledge, as posited by Spinner-Halev, that “the attachment of the current residents to the land...does not mean that the descendants of the people who were expelled no longer have their lives intertwined with that space”.<sup>121</sup> In many cases, the collective memory of those expelled or their dependents, may revolve around the land from which they were displaced.<sup>122</sup> Conversely, the past atrocities might represent a painful memory associated with a specific place that they either wish to not recall or are incapable of forgetting.<sup>123</sup>

Tamar Katriel noted that the recent establishment of memory studies and heritage studies as separate academic disciplines, underscored the academic interest in societal endeavors that utilize the past as a “cultural resource.”<sup>124</sup> Cornelius Holtorf emphasised that in numerous instances, cultural heritage serves as a “prerequisite for fostering appreciation of the origins, histories and cultural heritage of other cultures”.<sup>125</sup> It plays a crucial role in enabling reconciliation, dialogue and peace during post-conflict recovery.<sup>126</sup>

Helaine Silverman and historian D. Fairchild Ruggles argued that both tangible and intangible cultural heritage play a role in shaping personal and collective identities within communities.<sup>127</sup> The formation of such strong identities is inherently valuable.<sup>128</sup> However,

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Spinner-Halev, “From Historical to Enduring Injustice,” 589.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Tamar Katriel, “Memory to action,” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 9, no. 3 (2016): 264.

<sup>125</sup> Cornelius Holtorf, ‘Embracing change: how cultural resilience is increased through cultural heritage’, *World Archaeology* 50, no. 4, (2018): 641.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Helaine Silverman and D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, in *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, ed. By Helaine Silverman and D. Fairchild Ruggles, (Springer, New York, 2007): 3.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

Silverman and Ruggles also highlighted that heritage is intricately connected with identity and territory, often leading to competition or outright conflict amongst individuals and communities.<sup>129</sup> These conflicts can emerge from tensions related to indigenous land and cultural property rights, as well as disputes between ethnic minorities and dominant majorities over the authority to define and manage the cultural heritage of minority groups.<sup>130</sup>

As Silverman and Ruggles stressed, heritage possesses the dual capacity to foster unity and discord.<sup>131</sup> On one hand, it can promote education, enhance understanding of historical contexts, and facilitate communication.<sup>132</sup> However, on the other hand, it can also be wielded as a “tool for oppression.”<sup>133</sup> Silverman and Ruggles observed that the intricate nature of heritage has rendered it a challenging terrain in the context of the United Nations’ pursuit of universal human rights, presenting “urgent contemporary problem.”<sup>134</sup>

According to Apaydin, the creation of cultural heritage generates significant “values and meanings for individuals and groups.”<sup>135</sup> However, its deliberate destruction has the potential to erase memory and identity.<sup>136</sup> The erasure of people necessitates the removal of all traces of their existence and the associated memories tied to the place they once occupied. This, as argued by Robert Bevan, creates an opportunity for the construction of a “new past.”<sup>137</sup> Apaydin emphasized that this process serves as a crucial motivator for the destruction of cultural heritage, alongside oppression, establishing “hegemony over minorities,” and the acquisition or retention of power.<sup>138</sup>

### Heritage in Conflict:

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Veysel Apaydin, “Introduction: why cultural memory and heritage?” in *Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage: Construction, Transformation and Destruction* (London: University College London, 2020), 2.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*. 2nd ed. (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), 67.

<sup>138</sup> Veysel Apaydin, “Introduction: why cultural memory and heritage?” 2.

Sahera Bleibleh and Jihad Awad argued that war often comprises various objectives, one being the suppression of identity of an occupied population.<sup>139</sup> They emphasized that warfare doesn't only impact individuals; it also affects the collective narrative of their surroundings, history, culture, and identity.<sup>140</sup> Consequently, the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage becomes a component of any political struggle.<sup>141</sup>

Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959), who coined the term 'genocide',<sup>142</sup> emphasised the importance of cultural forms and artistic expression as integral components of ethnic group identity.<sup>143</sup> He regarded acts of vandalism as crimes "against world culture," recognizing that the loss of cultural heritage affects all of humanity.<sup>144</sup> According to Lemkin, there are three fundamental aspects of a human's group existence: physical survival, biological continuity, and spiritual or cultural expression.<sup>145</sup> Any assaults of these core aspects of a human group's existence can be classified as physical, biological, or cultural genocide.<sup>146</sup> Lemkin further noted that cultural genocide primarily occurs in the religious and cultural domains through the destruction of institutions and objects that serve as vehicles for the spiritual life of a human group.<sup>147</sup> This includes places of worship, objects of religious significance, educational institutions, and treasures of art and culture.<sup>148</sup>

Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir emphasised that the destruction of sites goes beyond mere collateral damage.<sup>149</sup> She argued that cultural monuments serve as "mnemonic devices conveying

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<sup>139</sup> Sahera Bleibleh and Jihad Awad, "Preserving Cultural Heritage: shifting paradigms in the face of war, occupation, and identity," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 44, (2020): 196.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Armen Marsoobian, "Breaking the Silence: Memorialization and Cultural Repair in the Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide," in *Mass Violence and Memory in the Digital Age: Memorialization Unmoored*, ed. Eve Monique Zucker and David J. Simon (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), 47.

<sup>143</sup> Peter Balakian, "Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*,". 60.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>149</sup> Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir, "Remains of the Day: Converted Anatolian Churches," in *Spolia Reincarnated: Afterlives of objects, Materials, and Spaces from Antiquity to the Ottoman Era*, ed. Ivana Jevtić and Suzan Yalman (ANAMED: Istanbul, 2018), 72.

communal memories and identities.”<sup>150</sup> Such destruction not only diminishes the influence of ‘the other’ but also asserts control, supremacy, authority and power over them, serving as a reminder that the dominating religion or group in that area holds sway over all others in that geographical context.<sup>151</sup>

Apaydin emphasised that the erasure of individual and group memory serves as a significant underlying factor behind the destruction of cultural heritage.<sup>152</sup> According to Apaydin, this deliberate destruction of cultural memory, through the obliteration of material artifacts from both the past and present, is employed as a means to subjugate individuals, groups, and communities and maintain a grip on power.<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, he argued that this tactic is frequently utilized by undemocratic nations seeking to establish dominance over minority groups, typically during periods of violent conflict and war.<sup>154</sup>

Maja Musi elucidated that the deliberate destruction of the cultural heritage belonging to a specific group on territories claimed by others serves a dual purpose: erasing all traces of past coexistence and pre-emptively thwarting any potential future claims over the now “cleansed” territory.<sup>155</sup> Additionally, Musi argued that violence directed at cultural heritage lays bare the equation employed by nationalist ideologies, which seek to construct ethnically defined group identities rooted in essentialised concepts of culture and religion intricately linked to specific territories.<sup>156</sup>

Throughout history, warfare has led to architectural casualties.<sup>157</sup> These losses often resulted from a variety of military objectives.<sup>158</sup> Bevan argued that a different kind of warfare has consistently unfolded, an intentional “war against architecture.”<sup>159</sup> The deliberate

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>152</sup> Veysel Apaydin, “Introduction: why cultural memory and heritage?” 1.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>155</sup> Musi, Maja. “The international heritage doctrine and the management of heritage in Sarajevo.” *Bosnia and Herzegovina: the case of the commission to preserve national monuments* 20, no. 1 (2014): 55.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*, 18.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.



destruction of the cultural heritage belonging to an adversary, nation or, people serves as an effective weapon for domination, terrorisation, division, or even annihilation.<sup>160</sup> The ultimate goal in this form of warfare is the “pursuit of ethnic cleansing or genocide” through alternative means, including the manipulation of historical narratives in the conqueror’s favour.<sup>161</sup> He stressed that within this context, architecture assumes a “totemic quality,” that transcends its physical existence.<sup>162</sup> Heritage embodies a repository of historical memory, providing tangible evidence that the targeted groups existence stretches far into the past.<sup>163</sup> As argued by Bevan, this evidence not only legitimises their claims in the present but also secures their enduring presence in the future.<sup>164</sup>

For example, during the Bosnian War, Bevan’s researched demonstrated how ethnic cleansing encompassed the deliberate destruction of culture with the intent to make it permanent and irreparable.<sup>165</sup> As argued by Helen Walasek, the systematic destruction of cultural and religious property emerged as a defining feature of the Bosnian War.<sup>166</sup> This destruction served the purpose of denying the existence of a collective pan-Bosnian identity.<sup>167</sup> The destructive process targeted collective memory, shared history, as well as emotional connections to places and the build environment, such as cemeteries and places of worship.<sup>168</sup> By examining the fate of buildings within the context of genocide and ethnic cleansing, Bevan revealed how the act of destroying or erecting structures could either “keep people apart or force them together.”<sup>169</sup>

Palestine has been embroiled in prolonged political conflict, leading to the destruction of its cultural heritage and natural landscapes.<sup>170</sup> As stressed by Bleibleh and Awad, over the past three decades, particularly during the uprisings of 1987 and 2000, the historic centres of

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.,17-24.

<sup>166</sup> Helen Walasek, “Cultural heirtage and memory after ethnic cleansing in post-conflict Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 101, no. 1 (2019): 278.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Robert Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*, 60.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>170</sup> Bleibleh and Awad, “Preserving Cultural Heritage: shifting paradigms in the face of war, occupation, and identity,” 197.

Palestinian cities like Hebron, Nablus, and Bethlehem have suffered direct attacks by the Israeli army, resulting in extensive destruction and irreparable damage.<sup>171</sup> They argued that the objective has been to obliterate the Palestinian memory and sever their connection to their land and history.<sup>172</sup> More recently, as reported by Richard Kurin of the Smithsonian Institution, Russia's war in Ukraine has been marked by "a strong cultural element" with Russian President Vladimir Putin using culture as a "justification and an object" of war in Ukraine.<sup>173</sup> Putin argues that Ukrainians do not have the history, culture and identity "worthy" of a national state separate from Russia.<sup>174</sup> Putin's claim that Ukraine is void of culture and history independent of Russia,

As argued by Apaydin, heritage and collective memory are intertwined at a "political level," and both concepts have frequently been manipulated to influence and suppress communities whose collective identity and sense of belonging are rooted in their heritage.<sup>175</sup> Groups that have endured violent conflicts and have subsequently displacement from their homelands are susceptible to the erasure of their cultural heritage, which in turn affects their collective memory, identity, and sense of belonging.<sup>176</sup>

### **Civil Society, Reconciliation, and Cultural heritage:**

As noted by Brigit Schwelling, although civil society is active engaged in addressing past atrocities, their contributions remain a largely understudied facet of transitional justice within scholarly research.<sup>177</sup> For decades, civil society has transformed into an influential player in the endeavor to recognize and confront past atrocities such as genocide.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>173</sup> Richard Kurin, "How Ukrainians Are Defending Their Cultural Heritage From Russian Destruction," Smithsonian Magazine, accessed April 20, 2023, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/ukrainians-defend-their-cultural-heritage-russian-destruction-180981661/>.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Veysel Apaydin, "The interlinkage of cultural memory, heritage and discourses of construction, transformation and destruction," 17.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>177</sup> Brigit Schwelling, "Transnational Civil Society's Contribution to Reconciliation: An Introduction," in *Reconciliation, Civil Society, and the Politics of Memory: Transnational initiatives in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century*, ed. Brigit Schwelling (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012) 13.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Similarly, Ernesto Verdeja stressed that limited scholarly attention has been given to individuals within civil society who are actively engaged in reconciliation efforts, their initiatives, challenges, or their interactions with the state.<sup>179</sup> Verdeja emphasised that the role of civil society in reconciliation endeavours is “fundamental”.<sup>180</sup> He contended that civil society is essential for bringing past atrocities to public attention and fostering open dialogues about them.<sup>181</sup> Debates concerning who qualifies as a victim can persist long after the violence has ceased.<sup>182</sup> In many instances, entire ethnic groups subjected to systematic violence and oppression have been stigmatized as adversaries by the state.<sup>183</sup> Civil society can challenge and counter these narratives, striving to redefine and establish an accurate discourse regarding victim groups.<sup>184</sup>

As Verdeja contended, in the pursuit of reconciliation, it is imperative to not assign blame to citizens for past or present treatment of victimised groups.<sup>185</sup> Doing so can exacerbate hostilities, deepen divisions, and impede the potential for meaningful dialogue.<sup>186</sup> Instead, Verdeja argued that focus should be on educating the public about the suffering of victims, the infringement of their rights, and the moral responsibilities that society as a whole may bear.<sup>187</sup> Civil society can arguably provide secure spaces for facilitating such discussions. Verdeja proposed that, in order to “reframe historical memory” civil society must endeavour to impart significance to, if not establish, a shared historical narrative.<sup>188</sup> However, when there are drastically opposing historical interpretations in play, civil society faces the task of averting further division and distrust within society.<sup>189</sup> “Civil society can contribute to

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<sup>179</sup> Ernesto Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree: Civil Society and Reconciliation: Reconciliation in the aftermath of political violence* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2009), 136.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-137.

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

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>189</sup> Ernesto Verdeja, *Unchopping a Tree: Civil Society and Reconciliation: Reconciliation in the aftermath of political violence*, 157.

reconciliation,” but given its vulnerability, it is important not to place unrealistic expectations upon it, said Verdeja.<sup>190</sup> Nevertheless, its strength lies in its ability to communicate.<sup>191</sup>

As will be elaborated in the following section, this thesis aims to illustrate how civil society can play an active role in the process of reconciliation by centering its efforts on cultural heritage and memory. As this thesis will demonstrate, by prioritising cultural heritage and memory as tools for addressing past atrocities and challenging historical narratives, civil society can provide a more harmonious, non-confrontation environment for the process of reconciliation to unfold.

In recent decades, there has been a significant surge of scholarly attention within the academic literature regarding the connection between civil society organizations and the state.<sup>192</sup> Yet, as noted by Jessica Leigh Doyle, there is a lack of distinct comprehensive and contextually grounded empirical research on civil society organizations, despite the inherent importance of such studies.<sup>193</sup> Arguably, there is even less academic literature dedicated to exploring the role of civil society in the preservation of cultural heritage and memory. This thesis aims to provide a valuable contribution to address and fill this scholarly gap.

Sigrid Van der Auwera and Annick Schramme observed that towards the conclusion of the twentieth century, there was a growing academic interest in civil society.<sup>194</sup> In parallel, heritage studies witnessed a surge of interest.<sup>195</sup> They contended that cultural heritage policies were no longer “the sole monopoly of sovereign states”.<sup>196</sup> The responsibility for safeguarding cultural heritage had progressively shifted towards a wider societal obligation.<sup>197</sup> Van der Auwera and Schramme argued that in our increasingly globalised world, there was a growing need for civil society to operate on a “supranational level.”<sup>198</sup> This

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Jessica Leigh Doyle, “State control of civil society organizations: the case of Turkey,” *Democratization* 24, no. 2 (2017): 244.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>194</sup> Annick Schramme and Sigrid Van der Auwera, “Civil Society in the Field of Cultural Heritage.” *Heritage & Society* 4, no. 1 (2011): 60.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

is particularly relevant because heritage politics, which were traditionally controlled by solely by sovereign states, have now transcended national boundaries.<sup>199</sup> They stressed that when heritage politics are developed and addressed on a supranational level, civil society organizations specialising in cultural heritage can serve as mediators, advocates, and sources of information for the general public.<sup>200</sup>

In regions marked by conflicts or ethnic cleansing, civil society have assumed an indispensable role in safeguarding cultural heritage and preserving collective memory. For example, as posited by Maryvelma Smith O’Neil, civil society organizations in East Jerusalem are instrumental in preserving Palestinian cultural heritage within the Old City of Jerusalem.<sup>201</sup> They achieve this by offering grassroots support and bolstering the resilience of the Palestinian residents.<sup>202</sup>

As argued by Aslı Iğsız, while UNESCO has made significant strides in safeguarding invaluable cultural heritage sites, it is not without significant shortcomings and limitations<sup>203</sup> particularly, in regions and at sites disproportionately affected by political violence, ethnic cleansing or deliberate attempts at erasure.<sup>204</sup> In such circumstances, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) assume a critical role in safeguarding and protecting cultural heritage in regions marked by violence, discriminations, and erasure attempts. In these cases, as this thesis will show, NGOs emerge as indispensable for the protection and preservation of cultural heritage that is at risk of being erased from the historical and cultural landscape.

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Maryvelma Smith O’Neil, ‘One Giant House’: Civil Society Mobilisation and the Protection of Palestinian Cultural Heritage and Identity in Al-Quds Al-Sharif,” *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 17, no. 1 (2018): 87.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Aslı Iğsız, “Roundtable: Rethinking Cultural Heritage: Introduction,” *Jadaliyya*, accessed 26, August, 2023, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/44239>.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

## Turkish Genocide Denial:

National narratives are usually centered on historical accomplishments.<sup>205</sup> These narratives play a significant role in shaping how the past is perceived, as they are continually narrated and reiterated to help citizens develop a profound sense of shared associations and common reference points.<sup>206</sup> They contribute to citizens' understanding of "what it means to be one of us".<sup>207</sup> As observed by Burke A. Hendrix, these narratives serve to instill a sense of pride amongst citizens.<sup>208</sup> Consequently, uncomfortable histories are downplayed or completely omitted, as is the case in Turkey where denial is prevalent.<sup>209</sup> For civil society in Turkey, the task at hand is the challenging endeavour of dismantling histories that have omitted injustices. This proves to be far from the straightforward, especially in a nation where the collective identity and memory are built upon a constructed historical narrative imposed by an authoritarian state.

As noted, the Turkish state maintains its official denial of the genocides perpetrated against its Christian populations. According to the official state narrative, the high casualties among Armenians and other ethnic groups during that period resulted from factors such as intercommunal violence, forced migration, disease, starvation and war-induced causes.<sup>210</sup> The state contends that there is no credible evidence supporting the occurrence of a genocide during Ottoman Rule.<sup>211</sup> Additionally, the state glorifies this historical period as the Ottomans' valiant defence of the empire against what they perceive as "encroachments of Christianity."<sup>212</sup> Furthermore, during the formative years of the Republic, numerous officials

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<sup>205</sup> Burke A. Hendrix, "Memory in Native American Land Claims." *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (2005): 772.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Armenian Allegation of Genocide: The issues and the facts," accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-armenian-allegation-of-genocide-the-issue-and-the-facts.en.mfa>.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Taner Akçam and Belinda Cooper, "Turks, Armenians, and the "G-Word," 83.

in positions of authority had been complicit in the genocides, a phenomenon aptly described by Fatma Müge Göçek, as the ‘unspoken devil’s bargain.’<sup>213</sup>

In the years following the establishment of the Republic, there were extensive nation-building policies that revolved around fundamentally divergent interpretations of genocide.<sup>214</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör, argued that the denial of genocide became a fundamental aspect of Turkey’s collective identity.<sup>215</sup> He contended that if these genocides were officially acknowledged, it could result in a significant challenging to the existing collective identity.<sup>216</sup> This challenge could entail a loss of the shared national belief that many people in Turkey hold, which provides them with a sense of “psychological security.”<sup>217</sup>

In her analysis of Serbian “denial syndrome,” Sabrina P. Ramet suggested that denial serves as a mechanism for dealing with guilt and for asserting one’s moral superiority over accusers.<sup>218</sup> Ramet employed the example of a person in denial who vehemently proclaims their innocence despite accusations.<sup>219</sup> A parallel can be drawn here with the Turkish state, which has remained caught in a cycle of evading responsibility as well as persistent denial since 1915.<sup>220</sup> Denial has, arguably, become a defence mechanism against charges of genocide.<sup>221</sup> Such accusations fuel feelings of collective national solidarity and foster a form of defensive nationalism.<sup>222</sup> Ramet characterized denial syndrome as a “dysphoric rumination,’ wherein the past is remembered in a dark and brooding manner, inhibiting any meaningful reconciliation with history.<sup>223</sup> The Turkish state appears to be ensnared in this “dysphoric rumination.”<sup>224</sup> In her analysis of modern-day Turkey, Göçek underscored the

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<sup>213</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, “Renewal and Silence: Postwar Unionist and Kemalist Rhetoric on the Armenian Genocide,” in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Sunny, Fatma Müge Göçek (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 316.

<sup>214</sup> Uğur Ümit Üngör, “On memory, identity, and genocide,” *Témoigner entre histoire et mémoire* 120, (2015): 54.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, “The denial syndrome and its consequences: Serbian political culture since 2000,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 40 (2007): 41-42.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

intrinsic connection between state control and survival.<sup>225</sup> Göçek emphasised that it is not coincidental that nation-states develop their own official historical narratives. By controlling the interpretations of the past, they can maintain their present authority.<sup>226</sup> However, the state's narrative has obstructed and continues to impede the prospects of establishing a fair and transparent democracy in Turkey.<sup>227</sup>

The entrenched collective memory in Turkey often hinders the work of civil society working to preserve and safeguard the cultural heritage and memory of minorities. Üngör contended that the Armenian-Turkish conflict fundamentally revolves around memory, Armenians strive to remember a history that Turkey would prefer to erase from its collective consciousness.<sup>228</sup> For Üngör, this conflict can be viewed as a clash between "Armenian cultural memory and Turkish political memory."<sup>229</sup>

The foundational myth of Turkey was formulated and propagated by the state, effectively silencing any "critical historical reflection" of its genocidal past.<sup>230</sup> Marsoobian emphasised that significant time and effort is invested in "engineering a collective amnesia", which contributes to the national narrative used to rationalise and glorify the actions of the perpetrator.<sup>231</sup> It precisely this "collective amnesia" that civil society organizations in Turkey, focused on human rights and the cultural heritage and memory of minorities, are striving to confront and combat through various projects. Yet, state control over media and education means that the foundational myth is consistently presented as the indisputable truth.<sup>232</sup> Student textbooks are produced by the state, and teachers are closely monitored to ensure that the government's interpretation of Turkish history remains unquestioned.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek, "Through a Glass Darkly: Consequences of a Politicized Past in Contemporary Turkey," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617 (2008): 88.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Göçek, "Through a Glass Darkly: Consequences of a Politicized Past in Contemporary Turkey," 89.

<sup>228</sup> Üngör, "On memory, identity, and genocide," 54.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid. Marsoobian, ed. By Marsoobian, 2018. 308

<sup>231</sup> Marsoobian, "Collective Memory, Memorialization and Bearing Witness in the Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide" in *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Genocide and Memory*, ed. Jutta Linder and Armen Marsoobian (Cham, Switzerland, 2018), 305-306.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 308

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.



Vahakn N. Dadrian characterized the Turkish state's systematic efforts to conceal the record of its atrocities through official denial as one of the most successful examples of such actions in the modern era.<sup>234</sup> As of 2023, Turkish denial has persisted for 108 years.<sup>235</sup> While this period is remembered as an honourable chapter in Turkish history, for Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, the trauma of genocide has become an indelible and defining element of their diaspora identity, exacerbated by the ongoing denial.<sup>236</sup> Colin Tatz, noted that with the ongoing struggle to preserve the memory of non-Muslim minorities, denialists now finding themselves increasingly on the defensive, both inside and outside Turkey.<sup>237</sup>

Richard Hovannisian argued that those who persist in denying the genocides or attempting to rationalize the atrocities have effectively set the parameters for the intersection of memory and forgetting.<sup>238</sup> Due to Turkish denial, Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, find themselves compelled to substantiate their status as victims of genocide and seek international recognition.<sup>239</sup> As Hovannisian highlighted, in this case, the victims are compelled to adhere to the rules established by the perpetrators' perspective, rather than being able to pursue and utilize their natural methods for commemorating, comprehending, educating, seeking recompense, healing, and overcoming psychological barriers to progressing toward a "state of normalcy."<sup>240</sup>

Following Hovannisian's argument, through their endeavours to safeguard and preserve Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek cultural heritage and memory, the four NGOs at the center of this thesis are not only advocating for historical truth but also for the well-being of the victims, survivors, and descendants. Thus, despite facing state oppression, their work in the

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<sup>234</sup> Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Signal facts surrounding the Armenian genocide and the Turkish denial syndrome," *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 2 (2003): 269.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Taner Akçam and Belinda Cooper, "Turks, Armenians, and the "G-Word," *World Policy Journal* 22, no. 3 (2005): 81.

<sup>237</sup> Colin Tatz, "The Conversation, Turkey, the Armenian Genocide and the Politics of Memory," *The Conversation*, accessed September 24, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/turkey-the-armenian-genocide-and-the-politics-of-memory-20747>.

<sup>238</sup> Richard G. Hovannisian, "Introduction: The Armenian Genocide, Remembrance and Denial, in *Remembrance and Denial: The Case of the Armenian Genocide*," ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, 1998, (Wayne State University Press, 1998). 16.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

realm of memory and heritage contributes to the healing process of these communities and ensures that they are not expunged from Turkish memory and history.

The following chapter provides an insight into the research methods utilised in this thesis. In addition to detailing the research methodology, this chapter also elucidates the data collection techniques, analytical frameworks, and the overall approach employed to investigate the thesis's core questions and objectives.

## Chapter Two Methodology

This case study used process tracing, document and media analysis within an opportunity structure model. It also uses a quasi-natural experiment to examine the effects of two critical events on civil society's work to protect memory and cultural heritage.

The selection of Turkey as a case study in this research is underpinned the study's objectives. First, in terms of historical significance, Turkey stands as a nation marked by the genocides perpetrated against its indigenous Christian populations at the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which it denies to this day. Such a backdrop provides a case for investigating the preservation of cultural heritage, memory and identity of those annihilated groups, despite that denial. As outlined in the introduction, the selection of Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks as case studies was based on shared characteristics, including their common religious affiliation, indigenous status in Turkey, and their shared history of victims of genocide during the Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the Turkish state's persistent denial of their histories highlights the necessity to comprehend the intricate aspects of the politics of cultural heritage, memory preservation, and the multifaced socio-political dynamics in contemporary Turkey.

The cultural heritage offers evidence for the annihilated populations' historical existence, which then justifies Turkey's oppressive state that seeks to not only erase the historical memory of its minority communities. Secondly, in terms of contemporary socio-political dynamics, over the past two decades, Turkey has experienced notable political and societal transformations. Most notably, there was a rise in civil society organizations dedicated to human and minority rights. Simultaneously, Turkey has witnessed a shift towards what can be characterised as an authoritarian state, led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.<sup>241</sup>

This confluence of factors including the coexistence of a growing civil society sector and a tightening grip on democratic institutions, presents a compelling case to research these

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<sup>241</sup> Hasan Aydın and Köksal Avincan, "Am I a terrorist or an educator? Turkish asylum seekers narrative on education rights violations after a crackdown following the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey" *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 21, no. 1 (2023): 81.

dynamics. Arguably, in terms of adaptation and resilience, Turkey is an exemplary case study for exploring how civil society organizations adapt and navigate the challenges posed by evolving political landscapes, state narratives, oppression, and authoritarianism.

Understanding how these organizations continue their work despite substantial risks and constraints is pivotal for broader discussions on civil society's role in preserving cultural heritage and memory.

**The opportunity structure:** The opportunity structure for NGOs working on the memory and cultural heritage preservation of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in Turkey has undergone significant transformations in the wake of the 2016 coup attempt and the subsequent consolidation of an oppressive authoritarian government in Turkey. This evolving environment has presented both challenges and opportunities for these organizations. Process-tracing, discussed below, enabled the researcher to examine these shifts, first in the events and then in the work of the NGOs.

Whilst the Turkish state has grown increasingly oppressive, leading to tighter constraints on civil society, NGOs have found ways to navigate around these obstacles and continue their work. Within the increasing oppression, a central focus of this thesis is examining the agency exercised by these NGOs within these structural constraints, particularly the increasingly authoritarian environment. This study will shed light on the way NGOs circumvent or adapt to the constraints and continue their work despite and amid state oppression. This will be done by examining their activities before and after two major events in what can be considered a quasi-natural experiment, discussed further below.

**Timeframe:** The findings are categorized into two distinct time periods, that are important due to the substantial political and societal transformations, beginning with 2002 to the time of this writing and demarcated by the major events mentioned above.

**A quasi natural experiment analysis of Pre- and Post- Event Dynamics:**

Additionally, the thesis uses a quasi-natural experiment by examining the dynamics before and after two significant events: first, the 2016 failed coup d'état and the 2020 Karabakh War. These events serve as critical points of analysis. The 2016 timeframe, assumes

paramount importance, as the promising trajectory of democratization came to an end in 2016 as a result of the failed coup and subsequent nation-wide purge.<sup>242</sup> The second event, the 2020 Karabakh War, is hypothesised to have an impact on the activities of civil society in Turkey due to the state's direct involvement in the conflict, openly supported Azerbaijan's full-scale military offensive against the ethnic Armenians who lived in the disputed region.

By looking before and after these two events, the constraints imposed on Turkish civil society as a direct consequence of these events will be explored, as will the strategies employed by civil society organizations to adapt and persevere in the face of oppression, and increasing authoritarianism and mistrust. This approach aids in gaining insights into the various projects undertaken by the four civil society organizations and sheds light on how they manage to sustain their operations despite the challenges posed by these events – in other words, how they exercise agency within the structural constraints.

Process Tracing: Historical analysis is integral to this research, as it seeks to contextualise the actions and strategies of the four NGOs within the broader historical backdrop of Turkey's treatment of its indigenous Christian populations. By tracing developments, policy shifts and state attitudes in chronological and thematic order within this structure before and after key events, this analysis will provide important insights into the origins and evolution of the challenges and opportunities facing NGOs, and the actions they took in their preservation efforts.

**Data collection:** Data sources for this research came from, the official websites and Instagram's of each of the four NGOs, international and Turkish human rights and cultural organizations, Google, YouTube, and academic scholarship.

The four official websites of the NGOs served as rich sources of information, housing publications related to their projects, fieldwork reports, and updates on their activities, including conferences, panels, and talks. These sources constitute the backbone of the research, providing a comprehensive view of the organizations' endeavours examined before

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<sup>242</sup> Bryan S. Turner and Zafer Yilmaz, "Turkey's deepening authoritarianism and the fall of electoral democracy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 5 (2019), 691-695.

and after the key events. Their official Instagram accounts also played a role in offering a more visual and real-time perspective on their initiatives, as they frequently shared photos, videos, and stories that complemented the data gathered from their websites.

Additionally, comprehensive web searches, including through Google and YouTube, offered supplementary data that was integrated into this thesis. This search strategy yielded a wealth of information, including online interviews, insights into their projects, and strategies they employed to navigate the challenges posed by the state. Moreover, various international NGOs and organizations played a pivotal role in providing information. This included cultural heritage focused NGOs such as UNESCO, World Monuments Fund and Global Heritage Fund. The search also encompassed an examination of international human rights organizations which included, PEN International, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Freedom House, Front Line Defenders, Reporters Without Borders, World Organisation Against Torture, International Federation For Human Rights, European Court of Human Rights, and the Committee to Protect Journalists. Turkish human rights organizations, notably the Human Rights Association and Keep The Volume Up For Rights Defenders in Turkey, established by Hafiza Merkezi, provided additional information.

A thorough review of scholarship in the form of books and articles relevant to this thesis was also conducted. Many of these scholarly works were evaluated based on the time frames in which they were authored, aligning with the specific periods under examination.

YouTube played a pivotal role in resourcing data. Each of the selected NGOs dedicated YouTube channels offered a multimedia perspective of their work. This included video content featuring project updates, zoom conferences, panels, and interviews, all of which provided valuable supplementary material to enrich the findings. Another comprehensive search was conducted on YouTube using specific keywords related to the cultural heritage of minorities in Turkey and the four chosen NGOs. This yielded a number of videos from international NGOs, news channels, human rights organizations, and independent film and documentary makers. These videos included interviews with members of these NGOs, videos about the NGOs and in-person and zoom conferences and discussion panels.

By combining information from these diverse sources, this research aims to present a thorough analysis of the strategies and activities undertaken by these NGOs despite their challenging socio-political landscape.

### **Why 2002?**

The ascent of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power in 2002 marked the inception of a transformative era in Turkish politics.<sup>243</sup> Concurrently, Turkey's aspiration for European Union (EU) accession catalysed extensive efforts to align with the EU's principals including human rights, minority rights, and freedom of expression. As will be explained further later in this thesis, this period fostered optimism domestically and internationally, with many envisioning a potential transition towards a more democratic state characterised by enhanced freedom of expression and the rise in civil society. The establishment of Anadolu Kültür, created by Osman Kavala, a central figure in this study, stands out as a pivotal moment, being the first NGO created with the focus on memory and cultural heritage in Turkey. This period serves as a compelling vantage point to dissect the agency, resilience and adaptability of these organizations in the face of these challenges, shedding light on their strategies for safeguard cultural heritage and memory in an oppressive environment.

### **The selection of the four NGOs:**

The four NGOs: Anadolu Kültür, Hrant Dink Foundation, Hafiza Merkezi and KMKD, represent the entire universe of Turkish cultural heritage and memory NGOs that focus on Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. Each of these organizations actively engages in on-the-ground fieldwork, works to protect heritage sites, and plays a vital role in raising awareness within Turkish society about the heritage that the state has seemingly sought to claim as its own. Moreover, all four NGOs came into existence during the initial period under examination, coinciding with the ascent of the AKP and the emergence of civil society organizations committed to human rights (see Table 1). Furthermore, all four NGOs have had to adapt and navigate the ever-changing political and social terrain, spanning from the era of democratisation to the post-failed coup period characterised by the ascent of an authoritarian state and the implementation of repressive policies.

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<sup>243</sup> Bashirov Galib and Ihsan Yilmaz, "The AKP after 15 years: Emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 9 (2018): 1816.

**TABLE 1. The Four NGOS**

<b>NGO</b>	<b>Date Established</b>	<b>Focus</b>
Anadolu Kültür	2002	Cultural and artistic exchange as a means of overcoming prejudice, elicit dialogue and collaboration, with an emphasis on cultural diversity
Hrant Dink Foundation	2007	Development of a culture of dialogue, empathy and peace with a focus on cultural diversity
Hafiza Merkezi	2011	Peace, democracy and coming to terms with past human rights violations in Turkey
Association of the Protection of Cultural Heritage (KMKD)	2014	Documenting and assessing at risk cultural heritage

The following chapters comprise the findings of this thesis. The subsequent chapter explores the political and social landscape in Turkey, commencing in 2002 and culminating in the events of the failed coup d'état in 2016.



## Chapter Three Background

### The Rise of Civil society and Memory Politics in Turkey:

After decades of mostly silence, conversations addressing taboo topics, such as the Armenian Genocide, began to open up following the 2002 election of the Alliance for the Public with the Justice and Development Party (AKP), in conjunction with the liberalization efforts associated with its campaign for European Union (EU) membership.<sup>244</sup> The AKP campaigned as a refreshing alternative, in contrast to the prevailing political establishment, which the public held liable for corruption and an economic downturn.<sup>245</sup>

Embracing principals such as democracy, liberalism, rule of law, human rights, pluralism, social peace and justice, civil society and secularism<sup>246</sup>, the AKP presented an optimistic vision of what “Muslim Democracy” could look like.<sup>247</sup> Scholars such as Ayhan Kaya<sup>248</sup>, Ihsan Yilmaz and Galib Bashirov, argued that the AKP “pragmatically” incorporated democratic ideals into their governance as a means of maintaining their grip on power.<sup>249</sup> Leveraging the process of democratisation to their advantage, the AKP effectively portrayed itself as a champion of democracy to garner the support of the European Union and citizens who sought change from the prevailing status quo in Turkey.<sup>250</sup> The early democratic reforms implemented during the early years of the AKP rule were grounded in universal values which included the safeguarding of minority rights, the promotion of religious freedom and the celebration of cultural diversity.<sup>251</sup>

This transformation on Turkey’s legal and political landscape departed from an authoritarian-like rule towards a more democratic orientation.<sup>252</sup> According to Turkish political scientist

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<sup>244</sup> Paul Kubicek, “Faulty Assumptions about Democratization in Turkey,” *Middle East Critique* 29, no. 3 (2020): 245.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Ayhan Kaya, “Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity,” *Southern European Society and Politics* 20, no. 1 (2015): 53.

<sup>247</sup> Yilmaz and Bashirov, *The AKP after 15 years: emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey*, 1816.

<sup>248</sup> Kaya, “Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity,” 53.

<sup>249</sup> Yilmaz and Bashirov, “The AKP after 15 years: emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey,” 1816.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Kaya, “Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity,” 54.

<sup>252</sup> Kaya, “Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity,” 53-54.

Cengiz Aktar, this shift created a “more liberal environment” wherein civil society actors, journalists, politicians and human rights activists found the freedom to adopt positions that were less constrained by the previously taboo aspects of the national narrative.<sup>253</sup> In this newly opened space, they could now openly challenge the state-sanctioned memory and narrative of Turkey.<sup>254</sup> Moreover, this shift led to resurgence of minority issues in the public sphere, as the more open and societal landscape provided an avenue for their discussion and advocacy.<sup>255</sup>

This shift towards a more democratic direction fostered a permissive environment that facilitated the emergence of an active civil society in Turkey.<sup>256</sup> Prior to this transformation, as stated by Taner Akçam and Belinda Cooper, the state and civil society in Turkey had expressed a growing divergence, a process resembling the final stages of communism in Eastern Europe.<sup>257</sup> The prospect of EU accession essentially lifted the longstanding “curtain of silence” that had shrouded Turkish society since the founding of the Republic.<sup>258</sup>

In 2002, the Turkish government embarked on a series of political and human rights reforms aiming at aligning with the Copenhagen political criteria.<sup>259</sup> It was understood that fulfilling these criteria would pave the way for the EU to commence accession negotiations. Concurrently, on the international stage, the recognition of the Armenian genocide gained momentum.<sup>260</sup> By 2010, nineteen nations had formally acknowledged the genocide, thereby intensifying the scrutiny on Turkey’s historical denial.<sup>261</sup> Whilst Turkish recognition of the Armenian Genocide was not a formal precondition for EU membership, it exerted considerable pressure on the state to address its human rights violations, a fundamental requirement for EU accession.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Cengiz Aktar, “Memory Revisited in Turkey,” 2.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> Taner Akçam and Belinda Cooper, “Turks, Armenians, and the “G-Word,” 81.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>259</sup> Yilmaz and Bashirov, “The AKP after 15 years: emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey,” 1816.

<sup>260</sup> Taner Akçam and Belinda Cooper, “Turks, Armenians, and the “G-Word,” 81.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> Taner Akçam and Belinda Cooper, “Turks, Armenians, and the “G-Word,” 81.

As highlighted by Jennifer M. Dixon, the Kurdish conflict in southeastern Turkey played a pivotal role in bringing the Armenian question to the forefront of public discourse.<sup>263</sup> The ongoing conflict strained human rights and the rule of law,<sup>264</sup> providing a more permissive climate for Turkish civil society to question state policies the Kurdish community.<sup>265</sup> This burgeoning activism presented another avenue for civil society actors, journalists, academics and activists to delve into issues related to minority rights and their historical narratives within Turkey.<sup>266</sup> The endeavours of civil society emerged as the driving force behind the critical engagement with both Turkey's past and present realities.<sup>267</sup> During this period, Turkey witnessed a surge in civil society organizations dedicated to minority causes, as highlighted by scholars such as Bilge Yabanci,<sup>268</sup> Ayça Ergun,<sup>269</sup> Metin Heper and Senem Yildirim.<sup>270</sup>

However, resistance to discussing topics related to human rights and sensitive topics related to Turkish history persisted,<sup>271</sup> primarily from Turkish ultra-nationalist groups. For example, in 2005, a group of Turkish scholars and academics, critical of the state's official historiography, organized a conference to discuss the events of 1915.<sup>272</sup> Both the European Union and the participants in the conference perceived it as an opportunity for Turkey to confront its most delicate historical issues and as a test of the state's commitment to permitting open discourse.<sup>273</sup> As stressed by Ronald Grigor Suny and Fatma Müge Göçek, this conference aimed to break through longstanding barriers that had hindered research on the "tragedies of the late Ottoman period", and kept communities "frozen in hostility".<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Jennifer M. Dixon, "Defending the nation? Maintaining Turkey's Narrative of the Armenian Genocide," *South European Society and Politics* 15, no. 3 (2010): 475.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 475-476.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 468-476.

<sup>268</sup> Bilge Yabanci, "Turkey's tamed civil society: Containment and appropriation under a competitive authoritarian regime," *Journal of Civil Society* 15, no. 4 (2019): 285.

<sup>269</sup> Ayça Ergun, "Civil Society in Turkey and Local Dimensions of Europeanization," *European Integration* 32, no. 5 (2010): 508.

<sup>270</sup> Metin Heper and Senem Yildirim, "Revisiting civil society in Turkey," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 7.

<sup>271</sup> Ronald Suny and Fatma Müge Göçek, Introduction: Leaving It to the Historians, in *A Question of Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, Fatma Müge Göçek (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 7-8.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ronald Suny and Fatma Müge Göçek, "Introduction: Leaving It to the Historians," 3.

In response to these developments, then Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gul criticised Turkey, remarking, “There is no one better than us when it comes to harming ourselves”.<sup>275</sup> Meanwhile, then Prime Minister Erdoğan, expressed support for open discussion on the Armenian issue stating, “We have opened our official archives to those people who claim there was genocide...We do not want future generations to live under the shadow of continued hatred and resentment.”<sup>276</sup> Erdoğan’s statements were widely interpreted as a perceived as a symbolic gesture by Turkey to confront its persistent denial of the genocide issue.<sup>277</sup>

The conference, ‘The Ottoman Armenians During the Era of Ottoman Decline’, organized by historians from three prominent Turkish Universities: Boğaziçi, Sabancı, and Bilgi, faced significant obstacles.<sup>278</sup> Originally scheduled for May 2005 at Istanbul’s Boğaziçi University,<sup>279</sup> it was postponed due to “pressure, threats and slander” by state officials.<sup>280</sup> Then Minister of Justice, Cemil Çiçek, accused the organizers of “treason”<sup>281</sup>, likening it to “stabbing Turkey in the back”.<sup>282</sup> The court eventually prohibited the conference from taking place at both Boğaziçi and Sabancı University<sup>283</sup>, with the Turkish Lawyers Union playing a central role in the case.<sup>284</sup> The court’s decision was seen as part of a broader campaign orchestrated by ultranationalists who opposed Turkey’s accession to the European Union.<sup>285</sup> Prime Minister

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<sup>275</sup> Jon Hemming, “Armenian Genocide Conference in Turkey Again Delayed,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, accessed January 06, 2023, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/1578587.html>.

<sup>276</sup> Amberin Zaman, “Turkey urges study of genocide claims,” The Seattle Times, accessed January 06, 2023, <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/turkey-urges-study-of-genocide-claims/>.

<sup>277</sup> Amberin Zaman, “Turkish Leader Calls for Study of Genocide Debate,” Los Angeles Times, accessed January 06, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-mar-09-fg-turkey9-story.html>.

<sup>278</sup> Arend Jan Boekestijn, “Turkey, the World, and the Armenian Question,” *Transatlantic Policy Quarterly (TPQ)* 4, no. 4 (2005): 2.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ronald Sunny and Fatma Müge Göçek, “Introduction: Leaving It to the Historians,” 7.

<sup>281</sup> Robert Parsons, “Turkey: Court Bans Conference On Armenian Massacre,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, accessed January 02, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1061631.html>.

<sup>282</sup> Ronald Sunny and Fatma Müge Göçek, “Introduction: Leaving It to the Historians,” 7.

<sup>283</sup> Hürriyet, “Istanbul police disperse students commemorating 1915 massacres,” accessed January 06, 2023, <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/istanbul-police-disperse-students-commemorating-1915-massacres-81534>.

<sup>284</sup> Amberin Zaman, “Turkey blocks genocide conference,” The Baltimore Sun, accessed January 02, 2023, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-2005-09-23-0509230420-story.html>.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

Erdoğan “condemned” the ruling, emphasising the importance of free expression and democratic values.<sup>286</sup>

To avoid any perception of applying additional political pressure during EU negotiations, the conference organizers initially planned to schedule the event after the Turkish-EU accession talks set for October 2005.<sup>287</sup> However, the AKP government insisted on holding the conference in September 2005.<sup>288</sup> Göçek argued that the state aimed to demonstrate to the EU that such a ground-breaking conference could take place in Turkey.<sup>289</sup>

The conference ultimately took place on September 24-25, 2005, hosted by Bilgi University in Istanbul.<sup>290</sup> Despite the presence of around one hundred ultra-nationalist protesters outside, attendees within the conference hall engaged in discussions about Armenian, Greek and Assyrian life prior to 1915, the circumstances surrounding the genocides, international media coverage at the time, and the demographic engineering orchestrated by the Young Turks.<sup>291</sup> In conjunction with the conference, the Turkish state’s announced its plans to restore the Armenian church on Akhtamar Island.<sup>292</sup>

The restoration of the tenth-century Armenian Church of the Holy Cross (915-21 CE) on Akhtamar Island on Lake Van, exemplifies the intricate interplay between politics, cultural heritage, and religion in Turkey.<sup>293</sup> In 2005, Prime Minister Erdoğan announced the state’s commission to renovate the church.<sup>294</sup> Whilst seemingly a cultural and historical preservation effort, the decision was embedded within a broader political context during Turkey’s EU

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<sup>286</sup> Robert Parsons, “Turkey: Court Bans Conference On Armenian Massacre.”

<sup>287</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek, *Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 388.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Sunny and Göçek, “Introduction: Leaving It to the Historians,” 7.

<sup>291</sup> Bianet, “Armenian Conference Held in Defiance of Court,” accessed January 06, 2023, <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/human-rights/67779-armenian-conference-held-in-defiance-of-court>.

<sup>292</sup> Stephen Kinzer, “Courting Europe, Turkey Tries Some Soul-Cleansing,” *The New York Times*, accessed December 22, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/04/weekinreview/courting-europe-turkey-tries-some-soulcleansing.html>.

<sup>293</sup> Heggner Zeitlian Watenpaugh, “Preserving the Medieval City of Ani: Cultural Heritage between Contest and Reconciliation,” *University of California Press on behalf of the Society of Architectural Historians* 73, no. 4 (2014): 544.

<sup>294</sup> Bilgin Ayata, Tolerance as a European Norm of an Ottoman Practice, *KFG Working Paper*, no.41 (2012): 12.

accession period.<sup>295</sup> Some interpreted the renovation as a step towards improving Armenian-Turkish relations, whilst others deemed it a calculated move to shape domestic and international perceptions of Turkey.<sup>296</sup> Scholars such as Defne Över<sup>297</sup>, Alaettin Carikci<sup>298</sup>, and Bilgin Ayata, interpreted the renovation as a strategic use of cultural heritage to project an image of tolerance and multiculturalism to the international community.”<sup>299</sup>

The presence of the Turkish flag on the site and the prominent display of images of Mustafa Kemal at the “museum’s” opening ceremony, led many critics to perceive the restoration as another manifestation of Turkification, not genuine efforts to address the Armenian historical legacy in Turkey.<sup>300</sup> The state also altered the place-name by adopting the Turkified version, *Akdamar*, instead of the Armenian, *Akhtamar*.<sup>301</sup> Additionally, the church’s name, Surp Hatch (Holy Cross), is absent, and the term “Armenian” is seldom found in Turkish references to it.<sup>302</sup> Furthermore, as argued by Peter Balakian, the state’s refusal to allow the restoration of a cross on the church’s roof until 2010 also raised concerns about its commitment to “Christian symbol, Armenian identity, and the entire history of the region.”<sup>303</sup> Some critics, such as Turkish journalist Cengiz Çandar, accused the state’s restoration efforts of engaging in “cultural genocide.”<sup>304</sup>

In 2010, the Turkish state took the historic step of allowing Mass to be performed inside the church, marking the first time in 95 years since the genocide.<sup>305</sup> However, this decision was primarily a response to international pressure and was limited to once a year, as emphasized

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>296</sup> Seyhan Bayraktar, “The Politics of Denial and Recognition: Turkey, Armenia and the EU,” in *The Armenian Genocide Legacy*, ed. Alexis Demirdjian (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 205.

<sup>297</sup> Dene Över, Cultural Tourism and Complex Histories: The Armenian Akhtamar Church, the Turkish State and National Identity,” *Qualitative Sociology* 39, no. 2 (2016): 174.

<sup>298</sup> Carikci, “The Arts of Memory: the remembrance of the Armenians in Turkey,” 96.

<sup>299</sup> Bilgin Ayata, 2012, “Tolerance as a European Norm of an Ottoman Practice,” 3.

<sup>300</sup> Balakian, “Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide,” 73.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Watenpaugh, “Preserving the Medieval City of Ani: Cultural Heritage between Contest and Reconciliation,” 544.

<sup>305</sup> Harout Ekmanian, “Detailed Report: The Mass in Akhtamar, and What’s Next,” *The Armenian Weekly*, accessed January 22, 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2010/09/30/detailed-report-the-mass-in-akhtamar-and-what-s-next/>.

by Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh.<sup>306</sup> In reaction to the Mass, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) led hundreds of Muslims in prayer at the eleventh-century Armenian Orthodox Ani Cathedral.<sup>307</sup> That same year, police ordered a group of Armenian children visiting from Armenia, to leave for lighting candles, singing, and praying.<sup>308</sup>

Watenpaugh argued that these government initiatives coincided with a period of “unprecedented deliberation” within Turkish civil society regarding the nation’s origins and contemporary history, often centered around cultural heritage.”<sup>309</sup> She maintained that during this time, an ongoing and fiercely debated discourse within civil society challenged the core principals of official Turkish historiography, including the concept of a monolithic Turkish identity.<sup>310</sup>

As outlined by Murat Somer, during the initial years of AKP rule, many Turkish scholars believed that the country was progressing towards successful democratization, aiming to establish a “consolidated pluralistic democracy.”<sup>311</sup> During this period, Turkey gained international recognition as a model for other Muslim nations.<sup>312</sup> However, perspectives began to change within a few years. For instance, in 2005, the government introduced Article 301, discussed below, which prohibited insulting the Republic of Turkey. Additionally, in 2011, political scientists Metin Hepeer and Senem Yildirim noted that many secularist groups in Turkey accused the AKP of concealing their hidden agendas whilst professing support for secularism and democracy.<sup>313</sup> As the political landscape evolved, it became increasingly evident that the introduction of Article 301, marked a significant turning point in Turkey’s approach to freedom of speech and the treatment of historic issues.

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<sup>306</sup> Watenpaugh, 544.

<sup>307</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Turkish Nationalist Pray in Ancient Armenian Cathedral,” accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/Turkish-Nationalists-Pray-In-Ancient-Armenian-Cathedral/2174492.html>.

<sup>308</sup> Nanore Barosoumian, “Armenian Kids Made to Leave Soup Khatch Church in Akhtamar,” accessed January 22, 2023, <https://armenianweekly.com/2010/08/21/armenian-kids-made-to-leave-sourp-khatch-in-aghtamar/>.

<sup>309</sup> Watenpaugh, 528.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Murat Somer, “Understanding Turkey’s democratic breakdown: old vs. new and indigenous vs. global authoritarianism,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 481.

<sup>312</sup> Kubicek, Paul. Faulty Assumptions about Democratization in Turkey, *Middle East Critique* 29, no.3 (2020) 245-257.

<sup>313</sup> Martin Heper and Senem Yildirim, “Revisiting civil society in Turkey,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 8.

## Article 301:

Article 301<sup>314</sup> “prohibits the denigration” of the Republic of Turkey and can result in imprisonment of up to two years for violators.<sup>315</sup> Its enforcement significantly restricted freedom of speech, particularly regarding discussions related to the historical and contemporary treatments of minorities.<sup>316</sup> This allowed the government to maintain its denial of both past and present violations of minority rights.<sup>317</sup> Göçek saw this law as a critical element in the state’s efforts to protect the “fragile political boundaries of Turkish nation-state legitimacy”.<sup>318</sup> It is worth noting that the EU insisted on the revision or removal of Article 301 as a prerequisite for Turkish accession.<sup>319</sup>

Public statements addressing the Armenian Genocide, seen as violations of Section 301, led to the detention of prominent Turkish figures, including journalist Hrant Dink and acclaimed novelists Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak.<sup>320</sup> In 2005, Nobel laureate Pamuk faced charges under Article 301 for his comment, “One million Armenians and 30,000 Kurds were killed in these lands and nobody but me dares talk about it.”<sup>321</sup> In 2006, Shafak was prosecuted for insulting Turkishness under Article 301, due to her novel, *The Bastard of Istanbul*<sup>322</sup> which told the story of an Armenian left behind during the genocide.<sup>323</sup> Both Pamuk and Shafak were later acquitted.

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<sup>314</sup> Replaced Article 159 which was created prior to the Republic, stipulated that those who “overtly insults or vilifies the Turkish nation” will be “punished by one to six years imprisonment”. Due to its lack of definition of what it means to vilify, it was revised and replaced with Article 301.

<sup>315</sup> Josh Cook, “The Process and Problems of Redefining Turkishness: Article 301 and Turkish Identity,” *Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies* 27, no. 3 (2010):15-22.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek, “Through a Glass Darkly: Consequences of a Politicized Past in Contemporary Turkey,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 617, no. 1 (2008): 90.

<sup>319</sup> Cook, 15.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>321</sup> The New York Times, “Popular Turkish Novelist on Trial for Speaking of Armenian Genocide,” accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/16/world/europe/popular-turkish-novelist-on-trial-for-speaking-of-armenian.html>.

<sup>322</sup> Richard Lea, “In Istanbul, a writer awaits her day in court,” *The Guardian*, accessed August 04, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/jul/24/fiction.voicesofprotest>.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*



On 19 January 2007, Hrant Dink (1954-2007), the Armenian-Turkish editor in chief of the first bilingual Turkish-Armenian newspaper *Agos*, was assassinated outside of his office<sup>324</sup> by a 17-year-old ultra-nationalist.<sup>325</sup> Dink was renowned for his unwavering advocacy of human rights, minority rights, freedom of speech, and Turkish-Armenian reconciliation.<sup>326</sup> He approached Armenian issues within the broader context of Turkey's democratization process,<sup>327</sup> believing that upholding human rights and freedom of expression for all Turkish citizens was equally as important as securing public acknowledgment of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>328</sup> Dink's challenges to ethnocentric boundaries that prioritized the rights of ethnic Turks made him a perceived threat to the Turkish nation,<sup>329</sup> and he was tragically targeted and killed "in the name of nationalism," according to Göçek.<sup>330</sup>

Prior to his assassination, Dink had reportedly received around 26,000 death threats, as documented by Turkish media.<sup>331</sup> His writings and advocacy on critical issues in Turkey, like human rights and democratization, made him a prominent target for prosecution and threats from ultra-nationalists who branded him a "traitor".<sup>332</sup> In one notable instance in 2004, Dink claimed in an article that Sabiha Gökçen (1913-2001), the adopted daughter of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, had Armenian roots.<sup>333</sup> Faced with the threats he received in response to the article, he acknowledged the need to be cautious, stating, "I had to know my boundaries...I had to be careful...Or else, it could turn out badly for me. Now I was the target".<sup>334</sup>

Hrant Dink had long been a target of state sanctions. On three separate occasions, he faced indictment for allegedly insulting Turkishness under Article 301.<sup>335</sup> In 2002, he was charged

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<sup>324</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek, "The 2007 Assassination of Hrant Dink through the Lenses of History, Memory and Emotions," *Zeitschrift für Religions – und Geistesgeschichte* 70, no. 2 (2018): 149.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Göçek 2014, p. 385.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 386.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Göçek, 2018, 160.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Johnisa Tate, "Turkey's Article 301: A Legitimate Tool for Maintaining Order or a Threat to Freedom of Expression," *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 37, no. 1 (2008): 200.

<sup>333</sup> Göçek, "The 2007 Assassination of Hrant Dink through the Lenses of History, Memory and Emotions," 149.

<sup>334</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "Why was I targeted?" accessed March 14, 2022, <https://hrantdink.org/en/hrant-dink/hrant-dink-articles/728-why-was-i-targeted>.

<sup>335</sup> Tate, "Turkey's Article 301: A Legitimate Tool for Maintaining Order or a Threat to Freedom of Expression," 200.

under Article 159 of the previous Turkish penal code (now article 301)<sup>336</sup>, for discussing the exclusion he felt from the Turkish national anthem.<sup>337</sup> In 2005, he prosecuted under Article 301 for his 2004 article, 'Get to Know Armenia',<sup>338</sup> which detailed the Armenian Genocide and its impact on the Armenian community.<sup>339</sup> The sentence from the article, "The clean blood that will fill the vacuum of poisonous blood emerging through the lack of the "Turk" is present in the noble vain that will be established by the Armenian with Armenia", was singled out and interpreted as an insult to Turkish identity".<sup>340</sup> In 2006 Dink faced prosecution for the 2002 speech under article 301 and was ultimately acquitted.<sup>341</sup> Dink's final encounter with Article 301 occurred shortly before his assassination in January 2007. In September 2006, he faced charges of 'insulting Turkishness' for remarks he made to Reuters news agency about the events of 1915,<sup>342</sup> where he referred to it as a genocide.<sup>343</sup> This led to a six-month prison sentence, and despite the escalating threats, he was denied police protection.<sup>344</sup> He was prepared to take his case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR),<sup>345</sup> and in 2010, the ECHR ruled that the Turkish state had failed to safeguard Dink and had violated his right to life.<sup>346</sup>

According to Lorenzo D'Orsi, Turkey had a history of political assassinations with impunity for perpetrators.<sup>347</sup> However, the reaction to Hrant Dink's assassination was different. Large demonstrations saw the Turkish public expressing their anger, shame and grief openly.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Refworld, "Turkey: Article 301: How the law on "denigrating Turkishness" is an insult to free expression, accessed March 23, 2023, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/44c611504.pdf>.

<sup>337</sup> Göçek, Denial of Violence: Ottoman Past, Turkish Present, and Collective Violence against the Armenians, 1789-2009, 389.

<sup>338</sup> PEN America, "Hrant Dink," accessed November 22, 2022, <https://pen.org/advocacy-case/hrant-dink/>.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "Who is Hrant Dink," accessed March 14, 2022, <https://hrantdink.org/en/hrant-dink/3565-who-is-hrant-dink>.

<sup>341</sup> Göçek, "The 2007 Assassination of Hrant Dink through the Lenses of History, Memory and Emotions," 389.

<sup>342</sup> Amnesty International, "Turkey: Prosecution of journalist is harassment," accessed December 22, 2022, [https://web.archive.org/web/20070930223824/http://amnesty.org.uk/news\\_details.asp?NewsID=17117](https://web.archive.org/web/20070930223824/http://amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=17117).

<sup>343</sup> Amnesty International, "Turkey: Journalist targeted yet again," accessed December 22, 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/eur440172006en.pdf>.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Göçek, "The 2007 Assassination of Hrant Dink through the Lenses of History, Memory and Emotions," 149.

<sup>346</sup> Turkish Minute, "Slain journalist Dink commemorated in Istanbul on 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his murder," accessed December 22, 2022, <https://turkishminute.com/2022/01/19/in-journalist-dink-commemorated-in-istanbul-on-15th-anniversary-of-his-murder/>.

<sup>347</sup> Lorenzo D'Orsi, Moral Thresholds of Outrage: The March for Hrant Dink and New Ways of Mobilizing in Turkey, *Conflict and Society: Advances in Research 4*, (2018): 41.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

People from diverse backgrounds expressing solidarity with Dink,<sup>349</sup> with over 100,000 people marching in Istanbul during his funeral procession,<sup>350</sup> chanting and holding signs proclaiming “We are all Hrant, we are all Armenians”.<sup>351</sup> Elif Shafak described the funeral as a healing moment “that united people of all walks of life, ideologies and ethnicities, and showed the whole society and the world that we can mourn together”.<sup>352</sup> Turkish officials, including then Prime Minister Erdoğan, condemned the killing as a “shot against Turkey”.<sup>353</sup> National newspapers<sup>354</sup> and military officials also denounced the assassination.<sup>355</sup>

Hrant Dink’s assassination marked a turning point for civil society organizations in Turkey.<sup>356</sup> It catalysed the creation of numerous groups and initiatives aimed at combating inequality, censorship and oppression.<sup>357</sup> Collective action in Turkey was organized around the “emotional mnemonics that arose from Dink’s assassination.”<sup>358</sup> Long-suppressed issues related to human rights, minority rights, freedom of expression and cultural differences came to the forefront.<sup>359</sup> Dink’s assassination prompted many to scrutinize Turkish memory and the “state imposed amnesia” surrounding the Armenian Genocide as well its treatment of minorities.<sup>360</sup> Among these developments, in 2007, following his assassination, the Hrant Dink Foundation was established.

Even after Dink’s assassination, charges under Article 301 related to the Armenian Genocide continued. Turkish journalist Temel Demirer was sentenced under Article for his comments a

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Elif Shafak, “Popular Fiction,” in *Writers as Public Intellectuals: Literature, Celebrity, Democracy*, ed. Odile Heynders (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 162-163.

<sup>353</sup> Maureen Freely, “Why they killed Hrant Dink.” *Index on Censorship* 36, no. 2 (2007): 19.

<sup>354</sup> Michael Gunter and Dirk Rohtus, “Special Report: The Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement,” *Middle East Critique* 19, no. 2 (2010): 160.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

<sup>356</sup> Özlem Belçim Galip, “The Politics of Remembering: Representation of the Armenian Genocide in Kurdish Novels,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 30, no. 3 (2016): 466.

<sup>357</sup> Deniz Günce Demirhisar, “Emotion and Protest in Turkey: what happened on 19 January, 2007?” Open Democracy, accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/emotion-and-protest-in-turkey-what-happened-on-19-january-2007/>.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

day after Dink's assassination.<sup>361</sup> He stated that Hrant was murdered "not only because he was Armenian but because he expressed the reality that a genocide took place" in Turkey.<sup>362</sup> Demirer called on Turkish intellectuals to "commit" the same crime as Dink by acknowledging the genocide, warning that failing to do so would make them complicit in Hrant's murder.<sup>363</sup> That same year, editor-in-chief of liberal newspaper, *Taraf*, Ahmet Altan,<sup>364</sup> was indicted under Article 301 for an article dedicated the victims of the Armenian Genocide,<sup>365</sup> titled '*Ah Ahparik*' (Oh, My Little Brother in Armenian). The accusation was made by the ultranationalist Great Union Party (BBP) in Ankara, who claimed Altan depicted the Republic as "genocide-seekers, barbaric and immoral".<sup>366</sup> In 2008, while Erdoğan declared Turkey's commitment to "fully realizing freedom of expression,"<sup>367</sup> Demirer faced indictment under both Articles 301 and 216.<sup>368</sup> In his subsequent trial, he stated, "There has been an Armenian genocide in this country. The state killed Hrant Dink."<sup>369</sup>

### Gezi Park Protests and the Prelude to the Failed Coup D'état:

The Gezi Park Protests erupted in late May 2013, initially as peaceful demonstrations against the state's plan to redevelop Istanbul's Gezi Park into a shopping mall. However, they quickly evolved into nationwide protests that brought broader issues into the forefront, transcending beyond the fate of Gezi Park.<sup>370</sup> Protestors voiced concerns related to freedom of speech, human rights, police brutality, and perceived authoritarian tendencies of the state.<sup>371</sup> These

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<sup>361</sup> Hetq, "Turkish Journalist Again Charged with Violating Article 301: The state killed Hrant Dink," accessed May 22, 2022, <https://hetq.am/en/article/24443>.

<sup>362</sup> Erol Önderoglu, "Writer Demirer on Trial for "Armenian Genocide"," Bianet English, accessed February 22, 2023, <https://m.bianet.org/english/minorities/105355-writer-demirer-on-trial-for-armenian-genocide>.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Erol Önderoglu, "Writer and Journalist Ahmet Altan Charged With Insulting Turkish Nation," Bia News Center, accessed April 23, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080913202515/http://www.bianet.org/english/kategori/english/109701/writer-and-journalist-ahmet-altan-charged-with-insulting-turkish-nation>.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Amnesty International, "Turkey: Decriminalise Dissent – Time to deliver on the right to freedom of expression," accessed May 14, 2022, [https://www.amnesty.be/IMG/pdf/turquie\\_libertesfondamentales.pdf](https://www.amnesty.be/IMG/pdf/turquie_libertesfondamentales.pdf).

<sup>369</sup> Elif Akgul, "Another 301 Trial for Journalist Demirer, SCOOP World, accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1303/S00138/another-301-trial-for-journalist-demirer.htm?from-mobile=bottom-link-01>.

<sup>370</sup> Sezen Yalçın, "Civil Society in Turkey's Shrinking Political Space," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (2015): 82-83.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

events marked a significant period of citizen activism, catalyzing discussions on democracy, human rights and the role of civil society in Turkey.<sup>372</sup> As noted by Gökçe Sanul and Bas van Heur, the impact of the 2013 Gezi Park protests cannot be overstated.<sup>373</sup> The protest revealed that marginalised groups now included not only ethnic and religious minorities, but also artists, journalists, scholars, environmentalists and human rights activists.<sup>374</sup>

The protests also marked a turning point in the trajectory of the AKP government towards authoritarianism. The protests highlighted the importance of neoliberal urbanism and historic reconstruction in the state's vision for reshaping Turkish society.<sup>375</sup> Nevertheless, what received less attention were the AKP's policies related to the management of cultural heritage.<sup>376</sup> Then Minister of Culture and Tourism, Ömer Çelik, emphasised the preservation of cultural heritage in Anatolia.<sup>377</sup> However, Çelik's overt denial of the Armenian Genocide demonstrated that certain fundamental aspects of the Turkish state's narrative concerning its indigenous communities, especially Armenians, remained entrenched in denial rhetoric.<sup>378</sup>

Harutyun Marutyan argued that the Turkish state's denialism was strategically crafted to align with humanitarian statements for its political objectives.<sup>379</sup> For instance, on April 23, 2014, just a day before the 99<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, then Prime Minister Erdoğan offered "condolences" to the descendants of those who "suffered" due to the "events of 1915".<sup>380</sup> However, Erdoğan's refusal to use the term "genocide" and his characterization of it as "shared pain,"<sup>381</sup> exemplified the Turkish state's ongoing efforts to

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 83-84.

<sup>373</sup> Gökçe Sanul and Bas van Heur, "Spaces of openness: Urban citizenship and cultural infrastructures of common life in Istanbul," *City* 22, no. 5-6 (2018): 804.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., p. 805.

<sup>375</sup> Watenpaugh, "Preserving the medieval city of Ani: Cultural Heritage between Contest and Reconciliation.", 543.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Harutyun Marutyan, "The Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust: Trauma and Its Influence on Identity Changes of Survivors and their Descendants," in *Armenian and Jewish Experience between Expulsion and Destruction*, ed. Sarah M. Ross and Regina Randhofer (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 188.

<sup>380</sup> The unofficial translation of the message of H.E. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the then Prime Minister of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, on the events of 1915 (23 April 2014), Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accessed January 14, 2023, [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkish-prime-minister-mr\\_-recep-tayyip-erdogan-published-a-message-on-the-events-of-1915\\_-23-april-2014.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkish-prime-minister-mr_-recep-tayyip-erdogan-published-a-message-on-the-events-of-1915_-23-april-2014.en.mfa).

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

“mitigate the trauma” of the genocide.<sup>382</sup> The speech was viewed by some as an “important step”<sup>383</sup> towards Armenian-Turkish reconciliation but criticised by others as a “non-apology”.<sup>384</sup>

In a statement given to *Agos*, Professor Richard Hovannisian characterised the speech as a mere “diplomatic exercise,”<sup>385</sup> emphasising that it echoed previous statements by the Turkish state, framing Armenian suffering as a part of a shared experience.<sup>386</sup> Göçek argued that the timing of Erdoğan’s statement, just a day before the 99<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, was influenced by the approaching centennial of the genocide and the anticipated global backlash against the ongoing state denial.<sup>387</sup>

In the year prior to the failed coup, the Turkish state openly denied the genocides. For example, in 2015, after Pope Francis commemorated the “first genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,”<sup>388</sup> during Sunday mass in Saint Peter’s Basilica, Erdoğan warned him not to “repeat this mistake”.<sup>389</sup> Around the same time, the European Parliament condemned Turkey’s ongoing denial of the Armenian Genocide and called on Ankara to recognize it.<sup>390</sup> Erdoğan responded that such pleas would fall on deaf ears, as accepting responsibility would be a “sin”.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Marutyan, “The Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust: Trauma and Its Influence on Identity Changes of Survivors and their Descendants,” 188-189.

<sup>383</sup> Fiona Hill, Kemal Kirisci, Andrew Moffatt, “Armenia and Turkey: From Normalization to Reconciliation, Brookings,” accessed January 4, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/armenia-and-turkey-from-normalization-to-reconciliation/>.

<sup>384</sup> Fatma Müge Göçek, “Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan’s Non-Apologies to the Armenian and Kurds,” *E-International Relations*, accessed January 4, 2023, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/07/07/turkish-prime-minister-erdogans-non-apologies-to-the-armenians-and-kurds/>.

<sup>385</sup> Marutyan, “The Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust: Trauma and Its Influence on Identity Changes of Survivors and their Descendants,” 188.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 188-189.

<sup>387</sup> Göçek, “Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan’s Non-Apologies to the Armenian and Kurds.”

<sup>388</sup> Ishaan Tharoor, “Turkey says the pope is part of an ‘evil front’ because he used the word ‘genocide,’” *The Washington Post*, accessed January 8, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/15/turkey-says-the-pope-is-part-of-an-evil-front-because-he-used-the-word-genocide/>.

<sup>389</sup> BBC, “Turkey’s Erdoğan condemns Pope over Armenia genocide.” accessed January 4, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32309044>.

<sup>390</sup> Tharoor, “Turkey says the pope is part of an ‘evil front’ because he used the word ‘genocide’.

<sup>391</sup> *Hürriyet*, “Turkish President Erdoğan snubs 1915 vote at European Parliament,” accessed May 14, 2022, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-snubs-1915-vote-at-european-parliament-81074>.

The next chapter analyses the four Turkish NGOs of this thesis, examining their inception until the 2016 failed coup d'état. This exploration aims to elucidate the reasons for each NGO's formation, their objectives, the nature of projects, and the challenges they faced during this period.

## Chapter Four

### The Four NGOs: Their Journey from Inception to 2016 Failed Coup

All four NGO studied in this thesis: Anadolu Kültür, Hrant Dink Foundation, Hafiza Merkezi, and KMKD, were established during the EU accession period, the first in 2002 and the final in 2014. All four focus on cultural heritage as a significant part of their work in the promotion of understanding, preserving history and fostering dialogue between communities. The rest of this thesis examines these organizations, their strategies, and analyses how they shifted in the face of structural challenges, including Turkey's authoritarian turn. The official websites of all four NGOs are accessible in both Turkish and English. Hafiza Merkezi additionally offers Kurdish, and Anadolu Kültür provides certain publications in Kurdish. Notably, the Hrant Dink Foundation's website is also accessible in Eastern and Western Armenian. Offering content in English reflects their commitment to reaching audiences beyond Turkey, enlightening an international audience about their mission and activities.

**Anadolu Kültür:** Founded in 2002 by Osman Kavala, Anadolu Kültür is a non-profit cultural organization with a focus on expanding Turkey's cultural landscape.<sup>392</sup> Kavala, a recognized businessman, philanthropist, and human rights advocate, envisioned the organization as a catalyst for cultural exchange, dialogue and mutual understanding.<sup>393</sup> Anadolu Kültür's core belief is that cultural and artistic interactions can foster dialogue, breaking down regional differences and dispelling prejudices.<sup>394</sup> The organizations approach views cultural diversity not as a source of conflict but as a valuable asset. Anadolu Kültür uses culture and art to emphasise cultural rights, celebrate diversity, raise awareness about Anatolia's rich cultural heritage, reintegrate suppressed histories into the collective memory, and facilitate dialogue channels, particularly with Armenia, Armenians, and the diaspora.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Özlem Kaya and Pinar Ögünç, "Chess, Hide-and-Seek and Determination: Civil Society in Difficult Times," Anadolu Kültür, 2020, 5, <https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/36-our-publications/989-chess-hide-and-seek-and-determination-civil-society-in-difficult-times/>.

<sup>393</sup> Anadolu Kültür, "About Us," accessed April 23, 2022, <https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/33-about-us/>.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Anadolu Kültür, "Our Works," accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/34-our-works/>.



During the EU accession period, Anadolu Kültür focused on cultural initiatives that facilitated collaboration between Turkish and Armenian participants. These projects served as platforms for dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual understanding by recognizing common histories, historical wounds, and addressing pre-existing prejudices. These initiatives aimed to challenge established historical narratives for a more inclusive historical memory. The organization anticipated lasting impacts, with connections and relationships fostering long-term change. Some of these projects, shown in Table 2, are discussed next.

**TABLE 2: Anadolu Kültür Heritage and Memory Projects**

Project Title	Date	Type of project	Aim/Purpose
Diyarbakır Sanat Merkezi (Diyarbakır Arts Centre)	2002	Arts Centre	Arts center
Merhabarev	2006	Fieldwork and exhibition	Photography project
Depo	2009	Exhibition/cultural space	Contemporary arts space
Adult Education and Oral History: Contributing to Armenian Reconciliation'	2009-2010	Education- oral history	Oral history research to promote reconciliation
Moush, sweet Moush: Mapping Memories from Armenia and Turkey	2009	Cultural heritage workshops	Explore Moush through the memories of locals and those connected to the region
Restoration of the 'Mother of God Cathedral and the Holy Saviour Church' at Ani	2009	Fieldwork	Cultural preservation project at Ani
Armenian Voices of Istanbul	2011	Oral history project	Bridge the knowledge gap between Armenian and Turkish societies by sharing contemporary experiences of genocide survivors, fostering an inclusive environment for future cooperation
Ani in Context	2013	Fieldwork/workshop	Preservation of Ani
Mush: Architectural Heritage at Risk	2014-2022	Fieldwork	Collaboration with KMKD

Documentation and Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Anatolia	2015-2016	Fieldwork	Collaboration with KMKD on cultural heritage across various regions of Turkey
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One of Anadolu Kültür’s earliest project, ‘Merhabarev’<sup>396</sup>, a combination ‘merhaba’ (hello in Turkish) and ‘barev’ (hello in Armenian),<sup>397</sup> brought together photographers from both communities for a joint exhibition that travelled across Anatolia, Europe and the Caucasus.<sup>398</sup> Turkish photographers worked in Yerevan, while Armenian photographers explored Istanbul through their lenses.<sup>399</sup> During the project’s implementation, EU accession was in its initial phases, marking it as a groundbreaking initiative.<sup>400</sup> However, the project faced challenges as tensions arose from conflicting historical narratives surrounding the topic of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>401</sup>

Despite trust related challenges, Anadolu Kültür preserved in projects fostering collaboration between Turks and Armenians. The initiative ‘Adult Education and Oral History: Contributing to Armenian Reconciliation’<sup>402</sup> aimed at reconciliation through oral history research.<sup>403</sup> Twenty university students, ten from each country, underwent oral history training in Armenia.<sup>404</sup> Led by Professor Hranush Kharatyan-Araqelyan in Armenia and Professor Leyla Neyzi in Turkey, research teams then conducted over 100 interviews, in both Turkey and Armenia, exploring “postmemory” and how individuals interpreted generational narratives.<sup>405</sup> The findings were later published as short essays in, ‘Speaking to One Another: Personal Memories of the Past in Armenia and Turkey.’<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Anadolu Kültür, “Merhabarev,” accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/34-our-works/196-merhabarev/>.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, *Public Talk: The Role of Civil society in Turkey- Armenia Relations*.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Leyla Neyzi and Hranush Kharatyan-Araqelyan, “Speaking to One Another: Personal Memories of the Past in Armenia and Turkey,” Institut für Internationale Zusammenarbeit and Des Deutschen Volkschochschul-Verbandes (dvv international), 2010, 7.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

Over time trust developed in the ongoing projects. For example, the project, ‘Moush, sweet Moush: Mapping Memories from Armenia and Turkey’<sup>407</sup> focused on the city of Moush in Turkey, once home to a large Armenian community.<sup>408</sup> It included three camps, with twenty students from Armenia and Turkey, engaging in workshops on oral and local history and photography.<sup>409</sup> Participants conducted interviews with local residents in Moush, exploring the region’s history and cultural heritage.<sup>410</sup> Subsequently, they travelled to Armenia for interviews with locals connected to Moush.<sup>411</sup> The project aimed to reconstruct Moush’s history through personal narratives, fostering dialogue by pairing participants from Armenia and Turkey.<sup>412</sup> Similarly to ‘Merhabarev,’ tensions arose due to conflicting historical narratives regarding the Armenian Genocide.<sup>413</sup> Nevertheless, the projects publication noted that trust grew as participants began to see each other not merely as “Armenian” or “Turkish” but as fellow “human beings.”<sup>414</sup>

Establishing trust with Armenian locals was challenging, especially when sharing memories of 1915.<sup>415</sup> The challenges intensified when these narratives had to be conveyed to Turkish participants.<sup>416</sup> Armenian locals sought the Turkish participants’ stance on the genocide, probing for expressions of remorse or recognition.<sup>417</sup> Despite the confrontational nature of these questions, they were seen deemed essential to the broader “peacebuilding process.”<sup>418</sup> The project underscored a fundamental principal: “True reconciliation is not possible without acknowledging history and without dialogue”.<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Lusine Kharatyan, ed., *Moush, Sweet Moush: Mapping Memories from Armenia and Turkey* (Bonn: The Institute for International Cooperation of the German Education Association, 2013), 6.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., 6- 7.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid. 119.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 4.

In the first decade of Anadolu Kültür, cultural and language rights took precedence, while the subsequent ten years has focused on cultural heritage. The first fieldwork dedicated solely to heritage protection concerned the medieval Armenian city of Ani.<sup>420</sup> In 2009, Anadolu Kültür, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and World Monuments Fund, began to restore the Mother of God Cathedral and the Holy Saviour Church at Ani.<sup>421</sup> During this period, Kavala and Minister of Culture and Tourism, Ertuğrul Günay<sup>422</sup>, actively worked towards securing Ani's inclusion in the UNESCO Heritage List. This government initiative coincided with a period of deep introspection within Turkish civil society, marked by extensive discussions on the nation's origins and modern history, often expressed through the lens of cultural heritage, as noted by art historian Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh.<sup>423</sup> Kavala stressed the project's importance in preserving global heritage, with its potential to serve as a bridge for improving Turkish-Armenian relations.<sup>424</sup> In 2012, the Turkish state announced its inclusion of Ani in its "tentative list" of sites eligible for future inscription on the UNESCO heritage list.<sup>425</sup>

The project was followed by 'Ani in Context' an international workshop, organized in collaboration with the World Monuments Fund and the Norwegian institute for Cultural Heritage (NIKU).<sup>426</sup> The workshop brought together a group of international experts, with the aim of documenting the rich history and diverse cultural influences that had shaped the region,<sup>427</sup> as well as assess the current state of these sites and their potential for preservation.<sup>428</sup>

Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the monuments at Ani have been neglected and internationally damaged, a process characterised by Watenpaugh as "cultural

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<sup>420</sup> The medieval Armenian Kingdom of Ani was the capital of Armenian between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries before been appropriated by the Ottoman Empire in 1579 and later abandoned and left to erode in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>421</sup> World Monuments Fund, "Ani Cathedral," accessed December 4, 2022, <https://www.wmf.org/project/ani-cathedral>.

<sup>422</sup> Served as Minister of Culture and Tourism for the AKP between 2007 and 2012.

<sup>423</sup> Watenpaugh, "Preserving the Medieval City of Ani: Cultural Heritage between Contest and Reconciliation," 528.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Anadolu Kültür, "Ani in Context," accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/34-our-works/180-ani-in-context/>.

<sup>427</sup> Ani in Context Workshop, 4.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

genocide.”<sup>429</sup> Despite being exploited by the state for tourism, the Armenian aspect of Ani’s history is downplayed in its signage despite.<sup>430</sup> Furthermore, the profound sense of loss is accentuated by Ani’s proximity to the present-day border with the Republic of Armenia.<sup>431</sup> Thus, these initiatives at Ani bear political significance by adopting a nuanced approach to cultural heritage, moving beyond state narratives. Through active participation in restoration and pursuit of UNESCO Heritage list inclusion, they contribute to wider national discourse on Turkey’s origins and history, acknowledging diverse cultural influences. Furthermore, the emphasis on global heritage preservation acts as a diplomatic gesture, fostering improved Turkish-Armenian relations. These initiatives play a role in safeguarding the memory and cultural heritage of Armenians by recognising and preserving tangible cultural remnants, as well as providing an alternative perspective to historical narratives, contributing to a more inclusive and informed societal understanding.

### **Depo and the Role of Cultural Institutions in Memory and Heritage Preservation:**

In 2009, Osman Kavala founded Depo, a cultural hub in Istanbul, under Anadolu Kültür’s umbrella. Depo is dedicated to culture, arts, and critical discourse,<sup>432</sup> with a focus on highlighting marginalized histories<sup>433</sup> and addressing politically sensitive topics.<sup>434</sup> It serves as a platform for exhibitions and public programs that address these delicate issues.<sup>435</sup>

Gökçe Sanul and Bas van Heur emphasised the vital role of cultural spaces like Depo, particularly in regions where issues of equality and freedom are in question.<sup>436</sup> These cultural

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<sup>429</sup> Watenpaugh, “Preserving the Medieval City of Ani: Cultural Heritage between Contest and Reconciliation,” 535.

<sup>430</sup> Balakian, “Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide,” 82.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

<sup>432</sup> Depo Istanbul, “About: Depo Istanbul,” accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.depoistanbul.net/en/about/>.

<sup>433</sup> Gökçe Sanul and Bas van Heur, “Spaces of openness: Urban citizenship and cultural infrastructures of common life in Istanbul,” *City* 22, no. 5-6 (2018): 813.

<sup>434</sup> Özge Ersoy, “Truth or Dare? Curatorial practice and artistic freedom of expression in Turkey,” In *Curating Under Pressure: International Perspectives on Negotiating Conflict and Upholding Integrity*, edited by Janet Marstine and Svetlana Mintcheva (London: Routledge, 2021), 136.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Sanul and van Heur, “Spaces of openness: Urban citizenship and cultural infrastructures of common life in Istanbul,” 802.

organizations hold significant political functions.<sup>437</sup> They provide support for marginalised communities seeking to reclaim their public presence, create spaces for coexistence,<sup>438</sup> contribute to cultural infrastructure development, and impact the construction of a national identity in Turkey.<sup>439</sup>

Executive director of Anadolu Kültür and program coordinator of Depo, Asena Günal, highlighted Depo’s unique privilege of openly addressing Turkey’s most contentious political issues, including the Armenian Genocide.<sup>440</sup> This freedom is largely attributed to Osman Kavala’s status as an independent civil leader without state affiliations.<sup>441</sup> Depo’s exhibitions delve into the collective memory of both minority groups and the broader Turkish population, often challenging the official state narrative. This role is crucial in subtly countering denialism, serving as a platform for reconciliation, fostering understanding, facilitating dialogue, and advocating for the acknowledgement of suppressed historical events. What follows is an overview of Depo’s exhibitions, as seen in Table 3, prior to the failed coup, addressing these issues:

**TABLE 3: Depo Memory and Cultural Heritage Exhibitions**

Exhibition	Date	Artist	Subject/Purpose
Burning Eyes: Memories of the Armenians	2011	Antoine Agoudjian	Photography exhibition devoted to the history and suffering of the artists Armenian ancestors
Horovel	2011	Erhan Arik	Preserving the stories and memories of Armenian decedents of victims and survivors of the genocide
Never Again! Apology and Coming to Terms with the Past	2013	Created by Depo	Focused on nations confronting the past and apologizing
Bearing Witness to the Lost History of the Armenian Family: Through the Lens of the Dildilian Brothers, 1872-1223	2013	Armen Marsoobian	The story of Marsoobian’s own family told through the photographs that survived the genocide

<sup>437</sup> Sanul and van Heur, “Spaces of openness: Urban citizenship and cultural infrastructures of common life in Istanbul,” 802.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 803- 803.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 805.

<sup>440</sup> Ersoy, “Truth or Dare? Curatorial practice and artistic freedom of expression in Turkey,” 136.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

Both Agoudjian and Arik's exhibitions shared a common theme of challenging Turkey's official history regarding the Armenian Genocide. Agoudjian's photographic exhibition explored his own people's history,<sup>442</sup> conveying the profound suffering resulting from the denial of the genocide.<sup>443</sup> Arik's exhibition featured interviews with Armenian descendants of genocide victims and survivors from Turkey and Armenia, underlining the importance of preserving collected memory.<sup>444</sup> The exhibition 'Never Again! Apology and Coming to Terms with the Past' focused on confronting historical injustices and the act of apologizing,<sup>445</sup> showcasing international cases of addressing past atrocities.<sup>446</sup> It encouraged Turkish people to gain a broader understanding of historical wrongs, reflect critically on Turkey's past, and engage in public discussions on reconciliation.

Armen Marsoobian's exhibition, one of the largest at Depo during this period, recounted his family's story through a collection of photographs that had survived the Armenian genocide.<sup>447</sup> This extensive exhibition, with over 150 photographs, spanned four different Turkish locations in 2013.<sup>448</sup> The exhibition aimed to challenge collective amnesia regarding Armenians in contemporary Turkey,<sup>449</sup> focusing on the profound loss of a once vibrant Armenian community rather than emphasizing the violence of 1915.<sup>450</sup> Marsoobian selectively used the term 'soykırım' (genocide).<sup>451</sup> However, while it was included in the exhibitions in Istanbul, Ankara and Diyarbakir<sup>452</sup> it was intentionally omitted from the

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<sup>442</sup> Depo Istanbul, "Antoine Agoudjian -Burning Eyes: Memories of the Armenians, accessed November 4, 2022, <https://www.depoistanbul.net/en/event/exhibition-burning-eyes-memories-of-the-armenians/>.

<sup>443</sup> Christian Makarian, "Demons still exist in Türkiye, angels too," L'express, accessed November 4, 2022, [https://www.lexpress-fr.translate.google.com/monde/les-demons-existent-toujours-en-turquie-les-anges-aussi\\_985158.html? x tr sl=fr& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc](https://www.lexpress-fr.translate.google.com/monde/les-demons-existent-toujours-en-turquie-les-anges-aussi_985158.html? x tr sl=fr& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc).

<sup>444</sup> Depo Istanbul, "Erhan Arik- Horovel," accessed November 8, 2022, <https://www.depoistanbul.net/en/event/exhibition-horovel/>.

<sup>445</sup> Depo Istanbul, "Never Again! Apology and Coming to Terms with the Past," accessed December 4, 2022, <https://www.depoistanbul.net/en/event/exhibition-never-again-apology-and-coming-to-terms-with-the-past/>.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Armen Marsoobian, "Breaking the Silence: Memorialization and Cultural Repair in the Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide," in *Mass Violence and Memory in the Digital Age*, ed. Eve Monique Zucker and David J. Simon (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), p. 55.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid. 56-61.

exhibition in Merzifon due to its more conservative and nationalistic atmosphere.<sup>453</sup> The Turkish media largely welcomed the exhibition. For example, Hürriyet’s article, ‘Exhibition reflects dark period of Anatolian history’, acknowledged the exhibition’s presence in Turkey,<sup>454</sup> emphasizing Marsoobian’s intention to highlight the rich cultural past and forgotten history of Armenians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>455</sup>

In 2015, commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian genocide, Depo directed its attention towards exhibitions centred on this event.<sup>456</sup> As emphasised by Günel, the focus was on prioritising the narratives of descendants of genocide victims and survivors.<sup>457</sup> She elaborated that these events centred on sharing the personal stories of those affected by past atrocities, enabling the audience to establish a deeper connection.<sup>458</sup> Günel believed that these stories opened up new avenues of communication that were previously stifled by official discourse, making it challenging for people to access and engage with these narratives.<sup>459</sup> The exhibitions, which are found in Table 4, will now be discussed.

**TABLE 4: Depo Memory and Cultural Heritage Exhibitions (2015-2016)**

Exhibition	Date	Artist	Subject
Without knowing where we are headed	2015	Nalan Yırtmaç	The 250 Armenian intellectuals deported in 1915
In Memoriam, April 24	2015	Organized by the Depo team	Commemoration Concert
Embroideries	2015	Anita Toutikian	Storytelling of a survivor
The Power of Emptiness	2015	Norair Chahinian	Absence of Armenian presence
Wishing Tree	2015	Hale Tenger	Homage to victims of the Armenian Genocide
Bizzat Hallediniz	2015-2016	Babil Association	Telegrams of Talat Pasha
Left Over	2016	Aris Nalci	Memory tour
1915	2015-2016	Diana Markosian	Revive memories of a lost homeland
Earth and Stones: What Remains	2016	Katherine Holle	The passing of time and cultures through heritage

<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Hürriyet, “Exhibition reflects dark period of Anatolian history,” accessed January 12, 2023, <https://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/exhibition-reflects-dark-period-of-anatolian-history-45807>.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Express.am, “As If Nothing Has Ever Been Said Before Us: April Art in Istanbul,” accessed December 4, 2022, <https://eexpress.am/en/2015/04/30/as-if-nothing-has-ever-been-said-before-us-april-art-in-istanbul.html>.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid.



The initial exhibitions ‘Without knowing where we are headed’ and ‘In Memoriam, April 24’, were dedicated to commemorating the 250 Armenian intellectuals forcibly deported to concentration camps on 24 April 1915<sup>460</sup>, marking start of the Armenian Genocide by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP).<sup>461</sup> The exhibitions curated by Toutikian, Chahinian, Nalci, and Markosian and Holle, revolved around themes such as the loss of homeland, cultural and memory erasure, survivors of the genocide, and collective memory narratives. As part of this commemorative effort, Anadolu Kültür erected a ‘Wishing Tree’<sup>462</sup> in Istanbul’s Taksim Square.<sup>463</sup> Participants were encouraged to hang strips of fabric on the tree<sup>464</sup> as a tribute to the victims and survivors of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>465</sup> The exhibition ‘Bizzat Hallediniz’ utilized official historical documents, including an analysis of around 5,000 telegrams exchanged with and by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Talat Pasha,<sup>466</sup> throughout 1915,<sup>467</sup> revealing orders for the annihilation of the Armenian people.<sup>468</sup>

Commemorating the centenary of the Armenian Genocide through exhibitions by Armenians, specifically dedicated to the genocide, is significant for safeguard the memory and legacy of Armenians in Turkey. These exhibitions contributed to diversifying narratives and fostering a more nuanced understanding of the past. Additionally, the presence of these exhibitions in Turkey plays a crucial role in preserving the memory of Armenians within the country, facilitating a dialogue that extends beyond the official narratives and contributing to a more inclusive historical memory.

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<sup>460</sup> Depo Istanbul, “Without knowing where we are headed,” accessed November 12, 2022, <https://www.depoistanbul.net/en/event/exhibition-without-knowing-where-we-are-headed/>.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> The Wishing Tree was constructed by Turkish contemporary artist Hale Tenger.

<sup>463</sup> Armenian Weekly, “Istanbul: ‘Wishing Tree’ Art Ritual to Honor Victims, Survivors of Genocide,” accessed November 4, 2022, <https://armenianweekly.com/2015/04/15/istanbul-wishing-tree/>.

<sup>464</sup> Each strip of fabric had a note written by diaspora Armenians who came to Istanbul for the centennial commemoration.

<sup>465</sup> Istanbul: ‘Wishing Tree’ Art Ritual to Honor Victims.

<sup>466</sup> Talat Pasha (1874-1921) was the chairman of the Union and Progress Party (CUP), Minister of Interior Affairs and one of the main perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide.

<sup>467</sup> Depo Istanbul, Bizzat Hallediniz, accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.depoistanbul.net/en/event/exhibition-bizzat-hallediniz/>.

<sup>468</sup> Taner Akçam, *Killing Orders: Talat Pasha’s telegrams and the Armenian genocide* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 9.

Moreover, offering a platform for Armenian diaspora artists to exhibit in Turkey is crucial in building trust with Armenia. These exhibitions addressed the disconnection many Armenians have endured from their homeland since the genocide. By providing a space for these artists to share their perspective and cultural expressions in Turkey, it signals a willingness to engage with the Armenian diaspora and acknowledge the historical trauma that has led to their displacement. This act offers a sense of recognition and understanding, contributing to the broader objective of building trust between Armenian and Turkey.

**Hrant Dink Foundation:** In 2007, following the assassination of Hrant Dink, Rakel Dink (Dink’s widow) established the Hrant Dink Foundation with the mission continuing his legacy by promoting cultural diversity, democracy, inter-cultural dialogue, human rights and peace in Turkey with a particular focus on Armenian-Turkish relations.<sup>469</sup>

During this period, the organization prioritized arranging conferences, workshops and panels that brought together Turkish and international scholars, civil society members, archeologists and heritage experts. These events, summarized in Table 5, aimed at challenging the state’s historical narrative by highlighting the enduring legacy of minorities in Turkey, with a focus on cultural heritage. Some of the earliest examples included, ‘Revealing and Advocating the Multicultural Heritage of Anatolia’ workshop which put a spotlight on the intangible cultural heritage of non-Muslims communities in Turkey.<sup>470</sup> The symposium ‘Cultural Heritage in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey’ addressed topics including cultural heritage, cultural politics, architecture, performing and visual arts, and the everyday life of diverse Anatolian cultures spanning the Ottoman era into the Republic.<sup>471</sup> Notably, the ‘Social and Economic History of Mardin and Region’ conference, centered on the history, cultural heritage, memory, and everyday life of the Assyrian community in the Mardin region during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> The Global Network Defending and Promoting Free Expression, “Rakel Dink,” accessed December 22, 2022, <https://ifex.org/faces/rakel-dink/>.

<sup>470</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “Practicing the Past: Intangible Cultural Heritage Today,” Hrant Dink Foundation, accessed December 18, 2022, <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/cultural-heritage/365-practicing-the-past-intangible-cultural-heritage-today>.

<sup>471</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “Cultural Interactions in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey,” accessed January 22, 2023, <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/history-program/228-cultural-interactions-in-the-ottoman-empire-and-turkey>.

centuries.<sup>472</sup> The conference also incorporated testimonies from Assyrians who survived the genocide.<sup>473</sup>

**TABLE 5: Hrant Dink Foundation Memory and Cultural Heritage Projects**

Project Title	Date	Project type	Aim/Purpose
Social and Economic History of Adana and the Region	2008	Conference	Armenian legacy in the region of Adana
Armenian Architects of Istanbul in the Era of Westernization	2010	exhibition	Forgotten Armenian architects who helped shaped Istanbul in the 19 <sup>th</sup> and early 20 <sup>th</sup> centuries
Cultural Interactions in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey	2010	Symposium	The influence of culture on the everyday life in the Ottoman and modern era
Adana 1909: History, Memory, Identity from a 100 Year Perspective	2010	Workshop	Dedicated to the Adana massacres: understanding the atrocities and cultural destruction through Armenian sources
Social and Economic History of Diyarbakir and Region	2010	Conference	The history of violence, pogroms and genocide against minorities in the region
History and Memory Research Fund	2010	Fund	Supports research into the events of 1915 and how they are remembered
Habap fountain restorations	2011	Restoration	Restoration of two historic fountains in the village of Habap, considered sacred by the Armenian communities who lived there until 1915
2012 Declaration: The Seized Properties of Armenian Foundations	2011-2012	Research project	Property ownership challenges faced by Armenian foundations in Istanbul
Social and Economic History of Mardin and Region	2012	Conference	The social history of the Mardin region
Islamized Armenians	2013	Conference	Armenians forcibly Islamized during the Armenian Genocide
Turkey Cultural Heritage Map	2014	Heritage Map	Repository of the cultural heritage of Armenian, Greek, Jewish, and Syriac communities across Turkey

<sup>472</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “Social and Economic History of Mardin and Region,” accessed January 22, 2023, <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/history-program/145-social-and-economic-history-of-mardin-and-region>.

<sup>473</sup> Ibid.

A Civilization Destroyed: The Wealth of Non-Muslims in the Late Ottoman Period and Early Republican Era	2015	Conference	History of wealth expropriation and destruction of non-Muslims
Kayseri with its Armenian and Greek Cultural Heritage	2015	Fieldwork	Collaboration with KMKD: Documenting Kayseri's sociocultural past, through its Armenian and Greek heritage
23.5 Hrant Dink Memory Site	2015	Memory site	Site of Dink's assignation outside the original Agos offices.
Heritage: Concepts, Questions, and Example from Turkey	2015	Workshop	Community participation in heritage preservation and the challenges of cultural heritage projects in Turkey
Topographies of Memory II: From Eastern Europe to Turkey Protecting Cultural Heritage	2015	Panel	Collaboration with KMKD on the urgency of protecting and revitalizing cultural heritage
Topographies of Memory: Exchanging Knowledge and Best Practices	2016	Panel	Innovative approaches to preserving cultural heritage, such as the role of digital technology

Fieldwork and establishing a foundation for future academic study on the non-Muslim cultural heritage of Turkey was a priority during this period. Most notably, the creation of the Turkey Cultural Heritage Map represented the first comprehensive repository of Armenian, Greek, Syriac, and Jewish cultural heritage in Turkey.<sup>474</sup> By 2015, the map featured data on 4,500 Armenian, 4,000 Greek, 700 Syriac, and 300 Jewish cultural heritage sites.<sup>475</sup> Recognizing the critical role of local knowledge in sustaining cultural heritage, the Hrant Dink Foundation initiated its first fieldwork project during this period. Collaborating with the newly established KMKD, the Kayseri fieldwork project sought to explore the social and cultural history of region through the remnants of its Armenian and Greek communities.<sup>476</sup> The project involved risk analysis, assessment reports, and survival recommendations for these monuments, grappling with challenges such as the scarcity of sources on the Greek and

<sup>474</sup> Kayseri with its Armenian and Greek Cultural heritage, 15.

<sup>475</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "Revealing and Advocating Multicultural Heritage of Anatolia."

<sup>476</sup> Kayseri with its Armenian and Greek Cultural Heritage, 15.

Armenian history of Kayseri.<sup>477</sup> This initiative addressed historical oversights, reclaiming historical memory in overlooked Anatolian regions through the integration of research findings with local historians, thus establishing a foundation for future academic study.<sup>478</sup>

**Hafiza Merkezi (*Hakikat Adalet Hafiza Merkezi*):** In 2011, Meltem Aslan<sup>479</sup> and team of lawyers, journalists and human right activists established the Truth and Justice Memory Centre (Hafiza Merkezi).<sup>480</sup> The organization aims to apply a “transitional justice transitional framework” to address Turkey’s complex history of violations and injustices.<sup>481</sup> Its primary focus is on forced disappearances in Turkey, seeking to uncovering past human rights violations, foster a collective memory, and support survivors in their quest for justice.<sup>482</sup> Hafiza Merkezi is simultaneously committed to revealing concealed aspects of Turkey’s history and initiating a dialogue for “reconciliation and healing”.<sup>483</sup> Its projects, discussed below, are summarized in Table 6.

In 2013, Hafiza Merkezi initiated ‘Memorialize Turkey’ with the aim of consolidating various memorialization efforts that contribute to democratizing the memory space in Turkey.<sup>484</sup> This project challenges the prevailing “exclusive, nationalist and one-dimensional” national memory.<sup>485</sup> The project’s original concept was proposed by Belinda Cooper, a professor at Columbia University’s Institute for the Study of Human Rights, following her participation in the organizations 2011 Istanbul workshop on Memorialization.<sup>486</sup> ‘Memorialize Turkey’ primarily focuses on memorialization efforts for “groups and individuals who have suffered harm or rights violations” in the late Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey over the past century.<sup>487</sup> Each project is presented with an overview explaining its significance to

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<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> Meltem Aslan served as Executive Director of Anadolu Kültür from 2009 to 2018.

<sup>480</sup> Tan Tunali, “Stories that need to be heard: Meltem Aslan”, accessed May 22, 2022, <https://www.hrdstories.org/defenders/meltem-aslan>.

<sup>481</sup> Ibid.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid.

<sup>483</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, “Why Hafiza Merkezi?” accessed August 14, 2022, <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/why-hafiza-merkezi/>.

<sup>484</sup> Memorialize Turkey, “About the Project,” accessed April 22, 2023. <https://memorializeturkey.com/en/about-project>.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid.

Turkey’s collective memory and includes sections on scope, purpose, impact, and challenges. Currently, the Memorialize Turkey website showcases 37 projects. Examples of the cultural heritage projects on the site include the restoration of the Armenian Surp Grigos Church in Diyarbakir in 2008, the Akhtamar church in 2005, and the ongoing ‘Faith and Culture Park’ project, which focuses on renovating Assyrian churches in the Mardin region.

**TABLE 6: Hafiza Merkezi Memory and Cultural Heritage Projects**

Project Title	Date	Type	Aim/Purpose
Memorialize Turkey	2013	Memorialization project (website)	Site for memorialization projects in Turkey
Regional Network for Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past Project	2015-2016	Reconciliation project	Contribute to historical dialogue and reconciliation efforts in the Caucasus and Middle East
Istanbul Sites of Memory Walking Tour	2016	Memory Walk	Discover hidden stories, history and heritage of non-Muslim communities of Istanbul

In June of 2016, a month prior to the failed coup (discussed later), Hafiza Merkezi hosted its second annual summer training program in Istanbul, part of its ‘Regional Network for Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past’ initiative.<sup>488</sup> The program featured seminars and workshops with international experts specializing in historical dialogue, reconciliation, peace, human rights and transitional justice.<sup>489</sup> For example, upon invitation from Hafiza Merkezi, Anadolu Kültür’s Asena Günal organized the ‘Istanbul Sites of Memory Walking Tour’, which visited sites of social and historical significance.<sup>490</sup> The sites chosen conveyed stories of the “social and cultural life’ of non-Muslims, experiences of minority and human rights violations, and movements for democracy and reconciliation.<sup>491</sup> For instance, İstiklal Street featured historically important buildings like the Hafia Triada Greek Orthodox Church

<sup>488</sup> Regional Network for Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past, “Lecture Notes: 2016 Summer Training Program (June 130-18), accessed December 22, 2022, <https://dealingwiththepast.org/event/lecture-notes-summer-school-on-historical-dialogue-and-dealing-with-the-past/>.

<sup>489</sup> Regional Network for Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past, “About: Regional Network for Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past,” accessed December 22, 2022, <https://dealingwiththepast.org>.

<sup>490</sup> Regional Network for Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past, “Lecture Notes: 2016 Summer Training Program (June 130-18).”

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

and Surp Yerrortutyun Armenian Church, reflecting the city's multicultural past. The tour concluded at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, which had been a detention center for Armenian intellectuals deported on 24 April 1915, the official start date of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>492</sup> Hafiza Merkezi observed that the tour served to activate suppressed memories, commemorating past sufferings and acknowledging ongoing struggles.<sup>493</sup>

**KMKD (Kültürel Mirası Koruma Derneği):** In 2014, Osman Kavala and Ismail Yavuz Öksaya established the Association for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (KMKD)<sup>494</sup> to document, assess, protect and preserve abandoned, neglected and at-risk cultural heritage.<sup>495</sup> The organizations research and fieldwork, led by teams of experts, aim to raise awareness about threatened cultural heritage, ensuring its enjoyment by future generations. KMKD emphasizes that this heritage was created by all Anatolian communities, contributing to Turkey's historical richness.<sup>496</sup> This work, particularly concerning Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians, resists the erasure of these groups' collective memories in Turkey. Its projects, discussed below, are summarized in Table 7.

KMKD's inaugural fieldwork study 'Mush: Architectural Heritage at Risk,' convened experts from Armenian and Turkey in 2014 (and in 2022) as part of a long-term research project aimed at examining heritage in different time periods.<sup>497</sup> The documentation effort focused on 28 at-risk structures and sites, emphasising the cultural legacy created by Armenians over centuries.<sup>498</sup> The initiative aimed to raise awareness and public recognition about Mush's significance within Anatolia's diverse cultural heritage.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> Free Osman Kavala, "Osman Kavala is awarded the European Archaeological Heritage Prize 2019," Free Osman Kavala, accessed September 4, 2022, <https://www.osmankavala.org/en/statements-about-osman-kavala/739-osman-kavala-is-awarded-the-european-archaeological-heritage-prize-2019>.

<sup>495</sup> KMKD, "About KMKD," accessed April 21, 2022, <http://kmkd.org/en/about-kmkd/>.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> KMKD, "Mush Architectural heritage at risk," Accessed April 22, 2023, <http://kmkd.org/en/mush-architectural-heritage-at-risk/>.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

**TABLE 7: KMKD Memory and Cultural Heritage Projects**

Collaboration Partner	Title	Date	Type	Aim/Purpose
Anadolu Kültür	Mush: Architectural Heritage at Risk	2014-2022	Fieldwork/workshops	Assessment of Anatolia's at risk heritage in Mush
Hrant Dink Foundation	Topographies of Memory II: From Eastern Europe to Turkey Protecting Cultural Heritage	2015	Panel	The urgency for the protection, preservation, and revitalization of cultural heritage
Hrant Dink Foundation	Kayseri with its Armenian and Greek Cultural Heritage	2015	Fieldwork	Fieldwork on the region of Kayseri
Anadolu Kültür	Documentation and Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Anatolia	2015-2016	Fieldwork	Documentation of at risk and abandoned structures in Kayseri, Adana, Elazığ, Niğde, Bursa and Artvin

A year later a similar project began, conducting research in six Turkish cities resulting in the assessment of 130 Armenian, Assyrians, and Greek structures.<sup>500</sup> These reports detailed the history of the structures and their current condition of the structures, as well as photographs, risk assessments and recommendations to mitigate future damage.<sup>501</sup> Some of the structures assessed included some of the oldest Armenian, Greek and Assyrian cultural sites in Turkey, including the Church of Taxiarchis (780-797) in Bursa, recognized as the world's third oldest Orthodox church,<sup>502</sup> and the severely damaged seventh century Church of the Holy Mother of God (Surp Asdvadzadzin) in Elazig, the last remaining church of the now destroyed Tadem Monastery.<sup>503</sup> Given the vulnerabilities faced by many of these structures, including abandonment, vandalism, and the risk of collapse, these fieldtrips and subsequent publications play a pivotal role in informing strategies to mitigate future damage, ensuring the continuity and appreciation of Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek cultural heritage and memory in Turkey.

<sup>500</sup> Assessment Report on Cultural Heritage: Kayseri, Adana, Izmir, Elazig, Niğde, Bursa, 8.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid., 563.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid., 328-333.



In 2016, following the failed coup d'état, the strategies employed by these four NGOs to safeguard the cultural heritage and memory of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks underwent significant changes to adapt to the state's crackdowns. The following chapter will explore the hard constraints imposed on these organizations during this period and will examine their efforts to navigate within this increasingly oppressive environment in order to sustain their work.

## Chapter Five

### Adapting Civil Society: The Response of NGOs to the failed 2016 Coup d'État

In 2016, after 14 years in power, the AKP government, led by Erdoğan, eroded Turkey's reputation as a "model western-style democracy".<sup>504</sup> Scholars such as Julius M. Rogenhofer<sup>505</sup>, Zafer Yılmaz, Bryan S. Turner, Hasan Aydin and Köksal Avincan<sup>506</sup> concurred that Turkey's democratic progress had stagnated after the failed July 2016 failed coup d'état.<sup>507</sup>

Erdoğan declared the failed coup a "gift from God"<sup>508</sup> inciting a nationwide purge of civil institutions and political opponents.<sup>509</sup> As Hasan Aydin and Köksal Avincan stated, this purge included arbitrary arrests and killings, suspicious deaths of individuals in custody, enforced disappearances, as well as the detention, torture, and imprisonment of tens of thousands of perceived enemies of the state.<sup>510</sup> Targets encompassed civil society members, human rights advocates, journalists, academics, politicians, and judges.<sup>511</sup> Michael M. Gunter observed that the failed coup allowed Erdoğan to advance his authoritarian agenda and eliminate remaining opponents within his sphere of influence.<sup>512</sup> This juncture marked the consolidation of power for Erdogan to transition Turkey into a full-fledged autocracy, driven by Islamic sentiment.<sup>513</sup>

Under the pretext of alleged ties to terrorist groups, the AKP dismissed more than 130,000 civil servants,<sup>514</sup> leading to their permanent exclusion from the public sector and passport

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<sup>504</sup> Julius M. Rogenhofer, "Anti-democratic Populism in Turkey after the July 2016 Coup Attempt," *Populism* 1, no. 2 (2018): 116.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Aydin, and Avincan. "Am I a terrorist or an educator? Turkish asylum seekers narrative on education rights violations after a crackdown following the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey," 78.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Michael M. Gunter, "Erdoğan and the Decline of Turkey," *Middle East Policy* 23, no. 4 (2016): 126.

<sup>509</sup> Aydin and Avincan, 'Am I a terrorist or an educator?', Turkish asylum seekers narrative on education rights violations after a crackdown following the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey," 78.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Michael M. Gunter, "Erdoğan and the Decline of Turkey," 126.

<sup>513</sup> Hasan Piker, "A Comprehensive Guide to the Failed Turkish Coup D'état: The How, The Why, And What's Next," HuffPost, accessed October 3, 2022, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-comprehensive-guide-to-the-failed-turkish-coup-detat\\_b\\_578d555ae4b05e7343a68b48](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/a-comprehensive-guide-to-the-failed-turkish-coup-detat_b_578d555ae4b05e7343a68b48).

<sup>514</sup> Stockholm Center for Freedom, "78 post-coup purge victims or their family members have died by suicide since 2016: report," accessed 21 February, 2023, <https://stockholmcf.org/78-post-coup-purge-victims-or-their-family-members-have-died-by-suicide-since-2016-report/>.

confiscation.<sup>515</sup> dialogue their names to the social security database hindered their employment prospects.<sup>516</sup> Coupled with travel restrictions, unlawful arrests, and imprisonments, these measures caused considerable hardship for these individuals and their families.<sup>517</sup> Simultaneously, a crackdown occurred against journalists, authors and politicians who had previously acknowledged the Armenian Genocide or advocated for minority rights. Figures like Armenian-Turkish politician Garo Paylan,<sup>518</sup> Turkish politician Canan Kaftancıoğlu,<sup>519</sup> and Hasan Cemal, the grandson of Ottoman military leader, Ahmed Djemal (Cemal Pasha),<sup>520</sup> faced accusations under Article 301 for allegedly insulting Turkishness.

After the failed coup, a constitutional referendum in 2017 triggered a shift in Turkey's political system, moving from a parliamentary to a presidential system, eliminating the role of Prime Minister.<sup>521</sup> This transition granted extensive powers to Erdoğan, termed as "executive presidency."<sup>522</sup> These powers allowed him to bypass parliamentary procedures, enact broad anti-terror laws via executive decrees,<sup>523</sup> establish and oversee ministries, appoint and remove civil servants without parliamentary or judicial approval.<sup>524</sup> Scholars like Zeynep Atalay, Aydin and Avincan<sup>525</sup> argued that these constitutional changes marked Turkey's departure from democracy and the onset of an authoritarian rule.<sup>526</sup> The consequences included a significant decline in civil liberties, freedom of association, and freedom of

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<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Tenkil, "Eagean Sea and Meric River Deaths," accessed May 22, 2023, <https://tenkilmemorial.org/en/category/eagean-sea-und-meric-river-deaths/>.

<sup>518</sup> Ayla Jean Yackley, "Turkey opens criminal probe of Armenian lawmaker for 'insulting' speech," Eurasianet, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://eurasianet.org/turkey-opens-criminal-probe-of-armenian-lawmaker-for-insulting-speech>.

<sup>519</sup> Mina Tumay, "Canan Kaftancıoğlu Will Not Walk Alone," IMPAKTER, accessed July 14, 2023, <https://impakter.com/canan-kaftancioglu-will-not-walk-alone/>.

<sup>520</sup> Ruken Tuncel, "Journalist MP candidates react to colleagues being arrested in Diyarbakir, Bianet, accessed April 14, 2023, <https://m.bianet.org/english/politics/277924-journalist-mp-candidates-react-to-colleagues-being-arrested-in-diyarbakir>.

<sup>521</sup> Aydin and Avincan, "Am I a terrorist or an educator? Turkish asylum seekers narrative on education rights violations after a crackdown following the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey," 81.

<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 78-81.

<sup>526</sup> Zeynep Atalay, "Authoritarian neoliberalism and Islamist civil society in Turkey," in *Civil Society and the Global South*, ed. P. Kamruzzaman (London: Routledge, 2018), 176.

speech.<sup>527</sup> The state's crackdown on democratic institutions and erosion of the rule of law allowed the AKP to govern with limited constitutional checks.<sup>528</sup>

The shift towards authoritarianism led to the adoption of the term 'Erdoganism' among scholars and journalists.<sup>529</sup> 'Erdoganism,' as described by Ahmet Insel, characterizes a regime that not only disregards established rules but readily crafts new ones according to its needs.<sup>530</sup> Its most conspicuous effects involve the misuse and oppression within the judiciary and the erosion of legal security.<sup>531</sup>

The declaration of a State of Emergency on July 20, 2016, followed by its symbolic lifting on July 18, 2018, marked a significant period in Turkey's recent history.<sup>532</sup> However, the legacy of state-driven oppression and harassment, as argued by Aydin and Avincan, continues to cast a long shadow over Turkish civil, legal, and political life, persisting unabated to this day.<sup>533</sup> Civil society organizations, including those discussed in this thesis, have faced a harsh and enduring environment of repression. Both Anadolu Kültür<sup>534</sup> and Hafiza Merkezi noted an increase in the violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms following the failed coup and subsequent state of State of Emergency.<sup>535</sup>

These measures have resulted in the four NGOs facing arrests, legal action, funding challenges, and death threats, which will be detailed in the chapter on hard constraints.

As authoritarianism and repression in Turkey have continued to rise, the country has emerged as a hostile environment for civil society.<sup>536</sup> The World Justice Report of Law Index

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<sup>527</sup> Ibid.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

<sup>529</sup> Bashirov Galib and Ihsan Yilmaz, "The AKP after 15 years: Emergence of Erdoganism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 9 (2018): 2.

<sup>530</sup> Ahmet Insel, "What exactly is Erdoganism?" Open Democracy, accessed March 29, 2022, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/what-exactly-erdoganism/>.

<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Aydin and Avincan, "Am I a terrorist or an educator?' Turkish asylum seekers narratives on education rights violations after a crackdown following the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey," 80.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>534</sup> Elden and Levin, *Swedish Aid in the Era of Shrinking Space*, 1.

<sup>535</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, "Strengthening Advocacy for Peace In Turkey," accessed October 22, 2023, <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/calisma/strengthen-peace-advocacy-turkey/>.

<sup>536</sup> Elden and Levin, *Swedish Aid in the Era of Shrinking Space*, 1.

2022 ranked Turkey 116<sup>th</sup> out of 140 in terms of its 'Overall Rule of Law'.<sup>537</sup> This assessment, based on principles of law like accountability, just law, open government, and accessible and impartial justice, highlighted Turkey's shortcomings in freedom and justice.<sup>538</sup> Turkey scored the lowest among Eastern European and Central Asian countries,<sup>539</sup> with scores of 134 out of 140 in 'Fundamental Rights',<sup>540</sup> 135 out of 140 in 'Constraints on Government Powers',<sup>541</sup> and 114 out of 140 in 'Civil Justice'.<sup>542</sup> Asena Günal, the Executive Director of Anadolu Kültür, remarked that these figures have become an integral part of life for civil society, influencing their experiences and daily existence.<sup>543</sup>

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, Turkey detained 84 journalists between 2016 and 2022, ranking second only to China in the number of imprisoned journalists.<sup>544</sup> Åsa Eldén and Paul T. Levin argued that suppressing independent and critical journalism directly threatens democracy by limiting advocacy, report dissemination, and highlighting rights violations, all essential aspects of their work.<sup>545</sup> Repression of academia by the state disproportionately affects rights-based civil society organisations, as many members are academics, exacerbating the overall impact on civil society's effectiveness.<sup>546</sup>

As of May 2022, Turkey had 121,976 registered civil society organisations.<sup>547</sup> However, it is important to note that rights-based organisations, despite their increased presence, constitute a small fraction of the total civil society landscape.<sup>548</sup> In 2022, only 1.25% of these organizations, totalling 1,534, were officially registered for human rights and advocacy in Turkey, according to data from the Directorate General for Relations with Civil Society.<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> World Justice Project, "Türkiye," accessed January 22, 2023, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2022/Turkey/>.

<sup>538</sup> World Justice Project, "What is the Rule of Law?" accessed March 14, 2023, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/about-us/overview/what-rule-law>.

<sup>539</sup> World Justice Project, "Türkiye."

<sup>540</sup> Ibid.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid.

<sup>543</sup> Kaya, Özlem and Pinar Ögünç, "Chess, Hide-and-Seek and Determination: Civil Society in Difficult Times," 5.

<sup>544</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, "Explore CPJ's database of attacks on the press," accessed March 14, 2023, [https://cpj.org/data/?status=Imprisoned&start\\_year=1992&end\\_year=2022&group\\_by=location\\_sorted](https://cpj.org/data/?status=Imprisoned&start_year=1992&end_year=2022&group_by=location_sorted).

<sup>545</sup> Eldén and Levin, *Swedish Aid in the Era of Shrinking Space*, 62.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

The Brussels-based NGO, Solidarity with OTHERS, which defends and promotes human rights in Turkey and beyond,<sup>550</sup> reported 92 cases of public servants taking their own lives since the post-failed coup purges.<sup>551</sup> Their report, ‘Suicides in the OHAL Period -Gravestones as Evidence of Genocide,’<sup>552</sup> revealed that the suicide rate among those affected by the purges, was 35 percent higher than the general suicide rate reported by the Turkish Statistical Institute.<sup>553</sup>

State-imposed travel bans, and passport confiscations drove many civil servants and their families to desperate measures, including attempting to escape Turkey by boat. For example, in September 2019, a boat carrying 18 civil servants and their families capsized on the Aegean Sea as they sought refuge in Greece, resulting in seven fatalities, including five children.<sup>554</sup> These incidents underscore the dire consequences of the post-failed coup purge and its impact on the lives of civil servants and their families in Turkey.

This is the environment to which these four NGOs worked post-2016. The following chapter will explore the hard constraints imposed on the four NGOs after the 2016 failed coup. It will analyze the challenges and constraints they encountered during this period, including arrests, imprisonments, death threats, and funding challenges. The chapter will demonstrate how these NGOs navigated these hard constraints and the strategies they employed to persist in their efforts to safeguard the cultural heritage and memory of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in Turkey.

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<sup>550</sup> Solidarity with OTHERS, “About Us,” accessed April 23, 2023, <https://www.solidaritywithothers.com/about-us>.

<sup>551</sup> Solidarity with OTHERS, “Deaths,” accessed April 23, 2023, <https://www.solidaritywithothers.com/deaths>.

<sup>552</sup> The report was created by two victims of the 2016 purge, Rafet Irmak and Aziz Yıldırım.

<sup>553</sup> Solidarity with OTHERS, “Deaths.”

<sup>554</sup> Tenkil Museum, “Mustafa Kara,” accessed July 22, 2023, <https://tenkilmemorial.org/en/tenkil-veritabani/mustafa-kara/>.

## Chapter Six

### Navigating the Hard Constraints

This chapter explores the shifts that arose after the coup attempt in Turkey, the constraints that were imposed on civil society, and the ways that these four NGOs navigated these hard constraints. The chapter aims to show three elements related to the politics of memory and cultural heritage: first, the effects of regime-threatening events, such as a coup, on the work of civil society. Secondly and thirdly, the agency and limitations of agency within certain structural constraints.

Following the 2016 coup attempt, civil society organizations committed to preserving the cultural heritage and minority faced significant challenges. The state of emergency declared in 2016 resulted in increased government control and restrictions on civil society. These measures granted authorities more power to suppress dissent, limit freedom of expression, and hinder the activities of civil society.<sup>555</sup> The four NGOs encountered four major hard constraints: arrests and prosecution, funding, legal action and death threats. To navigate these constraints and continue their work, these NGOs adopted new strategies, such as establishing websites, YouTube channels and social media presence, utilising technology for digital tours focused on cultural heritage and memory, and organizing workshops to educate and train local communities in cultural heritage preservation.

Due to the government crackdown, a number of civil society organizations were forcibly closed down.<sup>556</sup> As of 2023, Freedom House has reported that since the failed coup, the state has shuttered approximately 1,500 non-governmental organizations dedicated to human rights causes.<sup>557</sup> Whilst the four NGOs under discussion in this thesis have managed to remain operational, their activities have been closely monitored, constrained, and subjected to harassment, according to Freedom House.<sup>558</sup> Confronted with restrictive legislation enacted by the state, vilification through state-controlled and aligned media outlets and

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<sup>555</sup> Freedom House, "Freedoms in the World 2017: Turkey," accessed June 15, 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2017>.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Freedom House, "Freedoms in the World 2023: Turkey," accessed October 24, 2023, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2023>.

<sup>558</sup> Freedom House, "Freedoms in the World 2023: Turkey."

intimidation and harassment by state authorities, these NGOs have adapted to the changing landscape while steadfastly pursuing their missions.

Following the failed coup, the operational focus of the four NGOs remained consistent. Ongoing fieldwork projects continued without altercation, and there were no observable attempts to censor topics or discussions at conferences. However, a noticeable shift was observed by the adoption of the digital space, particularly YouTube, enabling the dissemination of their activities such as conferences, to a wider audience both within and beyond Turkey. These YouTube channels serve as archives for their memorialisation endeavours, preserving and sharing narratives, discussions, and initiatives that commemorate and document critical aspects of the cultural heritage and memory of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. These initiatives, featured in Table 8, are discussed below.

**TABLE 8: Post Failed-Coup Memory and Cultural Heritage Projects**

NGO	Project Title	Date	Project Type	Aim/Purpose
Hrant Dink Foundation	Critical Approaches to Armenian Identity in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	2016	Conference	Understanding what has shaped contemporary Armenian identity
Hrant Dink Foundation	The Social, Cultural and Economic History of Van and the Region	2016	Conference	Rediscover the history of the region
Hrant Dink Foundation	Adana: With its Armenian Cultural Heritage	2016-2018	Fieldwork	Heritage of Adana
Hrant Dink Foundation	Develi: With its Armenian Heritage	2016-2018	Fieldwork	Heritage of Develi
Hrant Dink Foundation	Sivas: With its Armenian Cultural Heritage	2016-2018	Fieldwork	Heritage of Sivas
KMKD	Documentation and Promotion of the Syriac Intangible Heritage in Mardin Region	2017-2019	Fieldwork	Syriac heritage in Mardin
KMKD	Kültürel Mirasın Korunmasında Kapasite Geliştirilmesi (KORU)	2017-2020	Fieldwork/workshops	Heritage preservation training



Anadolu Kültür	Poetry of Stones Ani: An Architectural Treasure on Cultural Crossroads	2018	Exhibition – toured Istanbul, Ankara and Kars, Yerevan and Oslo.	Exhibition on the medieval Armenian city of Ani
Hrant Dink Foundation	23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory	2019	Memory center	Serves as a space for workshops, events, and research, promoting sharing and reflection
Hrant Dink Foundation	Social, Cultural and Economic History of Kayseri and the Region	2019	Conference	Histories of the Armenian and Greek communities that once lived in the region
Hrant Dink Foundation	Memory Sites, Memory Paths Towards Another Future	2019	Conference	Dealing with challenging historical legacies and memorialization efforts.
KMKD	The Southern Islands of Marmara: Documentation and Risk Assessment of Architectural Heritage	2019-2020	Fieldwork	Documentation of Greek cultural heritage
Anadolu Kültür	20 years of Sharing Culture and art: Anatolian Cultural Conversations	2022	Panels	Celebration of 20 years of Anadolu Kültür

**Hafıza Merkezi:** In the ensuing months following the failed coup, all four NGOs persisted in their work, despite the associated risks. Director of Hafıza Merkezi, Murat Çelikkan acknowledged that amidst such challenging circumstances, the primary objective of the organization had become to stay afloat, a “primary goal shared by many other organizations” in Turkey.<sup>559</sup> Çelikkan emphasised that in response to the post-coup environment, Hafıza Merkezi devised new strategies in order to continue their activities.<sup>560</sup> However, he underlined that the organization remained committed to its work “without losing its focus and its priority” in the realm of human rights.<sup>561</sup> For example, Hafıza Merkezi uploaded lecture notes and full video coverage of presentations from their previously mentioned 2016 summer training program, ‘Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past, to their website.<sup>562</sup>

<sup>559</sup> Hafıza Merkezi, *Truth Justice Memory Center, Activity Report 2015-16*, 8.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Hafıza Merkezi, “Historical Dialogue and Dealing with the Past – Summer School 2016,” accessed April 22, 2022, <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/lecture-notes-historical-dialogue-and-dealing-with-the-past-summer-training-2016/>.

This effort gave individuals within Turkey and abroad, access to educational resources and information, demonstrating their commitment to their mission.

**The Hrant Dink Foundation:** The Hrant Dink Foundation continued its activities after the failed coup, focusing on organizing conferences and panels related to the preservation of Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek cultural heritage and memory. For example, it hosted the international conference, ‘Critical Approaches to Armenian Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.’<sup>563</sup> A month later, it organized another conference, ‘The Social, Cultural and Economic History of Van and the Region.’<sup>564</sup> These conferences gathered international experts to discuss the history, heritage and memory of these minority groups in Turkey.<sup>565</sup> During this period, the Hrant Dink Foundation launched its official website and YouTube channel, allowing it to upload the conference panels, as well as conferences held prior to the failed coup, for both local and international audiences. This digital initiative aimed to broaden the reach of their discussions and make them accessible to a wider audience.

**Anadolu Kültür and KMKD:** Despite the crackdown, Anadolu Kültür and KMKD continued their previously discussed joint project, ‘Documentation and Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Anatolia,’ which had been initiated prior to the failed coup.<sup>566</sup> As stated, the project’s objective was to assess the current state of abandoned monuments at risk of deterioration and aid in their preservation.<sup>567</sup> Both organizations continued documenting and evaluating 130 monuments associated with Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks.<sup>568</sup> Subsequently, the project’s findings and results were published on the official websites of both NGOs, ensuring accessibility to Turkish and international audiences.

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<sup>563</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “Critical Approaches to Armenian Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” accessed April 22, 2022,

<https://hrantdink.org/en/activities/projects/history-program/329-critical-approaches-to-armenian-identity-in-the-21st-century>.

<sup>564</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “The Social, Cultural and Economic History of Van and the Region,” accessed April 22, 2022, <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/history-program/327-the-social-cultural-and-economic-history-of-van-and-the-region>.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid.

<sup>566</sup> KMKD, “Documentation and Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Anatolia,” accessed April 22, 2022, <http://kmkd.org/en/documentation-and-protection-of-the-architectural-heritage-of-anatolia/>

<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

However, not all pre-failed coup projects persisted. For instance, following Armen Marsoobian's 2013 exhibition, talks had begun with the mayor of Merzifon to honor and acknowledging the memory of Armenians in the town.<sup>569</sup> Plans to revitalize the former Armenian quarter,<sup>570</sup> including the improvement of signage for the two remaining Armenian churches<sup>571</sup> and integrating Quick Response (QR) codes for smartphone users to access historical information, including photos from the Dildilian collection, came to a halt following the 2016 failed coup as a result from the political instability.<sup>572</sup>

Until approximately mid-August 2017, the four NGOs continued with their activities despite government suppression. It was around this time that they encountered their first significant crackdown marked by the imprisonment of one of their members. Subsequently, they encountered arrests and prosecutions, attempts to curtail funding, legal action, and death threats. Günal of Anadolu Kültür noted that this period marked a significant escalation in state oppression directed at cultural and arts-focused initiatives.<sup>573</sup> She stressed that ongoing threats, arrests, and other pressures have made it progressively more challenging to focus on initiatives related to cultural heritage, reconciliation, and memory studies".<sup>574</sup> However the four NGOs exercised agency in how they carried on with their projects dedicated to heritage and memory. These are discussed below.

### **Arrests and Imprisonment:**

On 14 August 2017, founding member and co-director of Hafiza Merkezi, Murat Çelikkan was convicted and sentenced to 18 months in prison<sup>575</sup> under the Anti-Terror Law Article 7(2), ostensibly for his for his participation in a campaign for press freedom in Turkey.<sup>576</sup> Two

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<sup>569</sup> Marsoobian, "Breaking the Silence: Memorialization and Cultural Repair in the Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide," 65.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> Bianet, "Asena Günal Awarded Franco-German Human Rights and Rule of Law Prize," accessed January 22, 2023, <https://bianet.org/english/human-rights/217215-asena-gunal-awarded-franco-german-human-rights-and-rule-of-law-prize>.

<sup>574</sup> Asena Günal, "Neither Just, nor Legal; The Case of Osman Kavala."

<sup>575</sup> Front line Defenders. "Murat Çelikkan Convicted Under False Charges." Accessed May 22, 2022.

<https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/murat-celikkan-convicted-under-false-charges>.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

months later, he was released on probation.<sup>577</sup> Following his release, Çelikkan emphasised that the ultra-nationalist and conservative atmosphere in Turkey posed significant challenges for any civil society group dedicated to advocating for rights.<sup>578</sup> He noted that these organizations' staff were frequently subjected to physical assaults, both by civilians and security forces.<sup>579</sup> Çelikkan contended that the assault on civil society, through legal actions, trials, economic regulations, governmental oversight, and condemnation by public officials, posed formidable challenges for independent civil society organizations, including those representing minority groups.<sup>580</sup>

Roughly two months later, on October 18, 2017, Osman Kavala, the founder of Anadolu Kültür, was arrested.<sup>581</sup> Two weeks following his detention, Kavala was charged with being the “mastermind” behind the 2013 Gezi Park protests (discussed in chapter three) and for allegedly organizing the 2016 failed coup.<sup>582</sup> These charges led to his indictment under Article 312, which pertains to the use of force and violence aimed at undermining the government of the Republic of Turkey, or preventing it, in part or in full, from fulfilling its duties.<sup>583</sup> He further faced charges under Article 309, which relates to attempts to abolish, replace or obstruct the constitutional order of the Republic of Turkey through force and violence.<sup>584</sup>

The arrests of Çelikkan and Kavala instilled an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty within civil society. However, the four NGOs remained resolute in their commitment to safeguarding the heritage and memories of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. They turned to technology and local engagement as key strategies to persist in their work. This involved organizing workshops aimed at training local communities in cultural heritage preservation, harnessing

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<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

<sup>578</sup> Jennifer Pampolina, “Interview with Human Rights Defender Murat Çelikkan, Winner of the 2018 international Hrant Dink Award,” Netherlands Helsinki Committee, accessed November 20, 2022, <https://www.nhc.nl/interview-with-turkish-human-rights-defender-murat-celikkan/>.

<sup>579</sup> Ibid.

<sup>580</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>581</sup> Expression Interrupted!, “Osman Kavala,” accessed November 20, 2022, <https://www.expressioninterrupted.com/osman-kavala/>.

<sup>582</sup> Keep the Volume Up For Rights Defenders in Turkey, “Osman Kavala,” accessed 10 June, 2023, <https://www.sessizkalma.org/en/defender/osman-kavala>.

<sup>583</sup> Asena Günel, “Neither Just, nor Legal; The Case of Osman Kavala,” The New School, accessed 14 May, 2022, <https://blogs.newschool.edu/tcds/2021/12/10/neither-just-nor-legal-the-case-of-osman-kavala/>.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

the memories and narratives of locals and utilizing memory works and oral history projects to advance their preservation initiatives.

**KMKD:** Post-arrests, KMKD prioritised local education and training efforts focused on conserving the heritage of minorities in Turkey. The collaboration with Edinburgh World Heritage on the ‘Kültürel Mirasın Korunmasında Kapasite Geliştirilmesi’<sup>585</sup> (KORU) project aimed to develop skills, knowledge, and capacity necessary for local heritage preservation. The cities chosen for the project, Mardin, Antakya, Istanbul and Edinburgh,<sup>586</sup> were historically characterized by multiculturalism and their notable heritage sites. By engaging diverse groups in workshops tailored to cultural heritage protection, such as journalists, historical property owners, teachers, local government personnel, tourist guides, stonemasons, carpenters, architects and urban planners,<sup>587</sup> the project aimed to cultivate skills and induce a shift in attitudes.<sup>588</sup> Documented through surveys, training session, and student summer camps, this initiative not only focused on preserving physical structures but also instilling a sense of value and care for the diverse heritage within these cities.<sup>589</sup> This approach intended to foster a more inclusive and invested approach towards heritage conservation in Turkey. These activities were documented in videos and published on the KMKD YouTube channel for Turkish and international audiences.

During this period, KMKD utilized technology to safeguard cultural heritage through projects such as ‘The Southern Islands of Marmara: Documentation and Risk Assessment of Architectural heritage’ and ‘Documentation and Promotion of the Syriac Intangible Heritage in Mardin Region.’ These initiatives focused on documenting and disseminating cultural practices, assessing risks, and developing preservation strategies in the respective regions.<sup>590</sup> Digital tools like photogrammetry for 3D models and 360-degree panoramic views were employed to create comprehensive representations of architectural and intangible cultural

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<sup>585</sup> Translates to Capacity Building in Cultural Heritage Protection.

<sup>586</sup> KMKD, “Heritage Skills Build Peace and Capacity,” accessed August 22, 2022, <http://kmkd.org/en/heritage-skills-build-peace-and-capacity/>.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid.

<sup>588</sup> Ibid.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> KMKD, “Documentation and Promotion of the Syriac Intangible Heritage in Mardin Region,” accessed March 22, 2023, <http://kmkd.org/en/documentation-and-promotion-of-the-syriac-intangible-heritage-in-mardin-region/>.

elements.<sup>591</sup> Dedicated websites for each project enable interactive engagement with documented heritage, serving as repositories for cultural preservation. Additionally, this technology facilitates the documentation of the current state of structures, ensuring their conditions are captured for future reference in case of any potential damage.<sup>592</sup>

In addition to technology for preservation, the project in the Southern Islands of Marmara gathered data on local memory to assess the community's relationship to the cultural heritage, examining their values and attitudes.<sup>593</sup> This information, obtained through questionnaires and interviews, was consolidated into a detailed report accessible through the project's website.<sup>594</sup> This provides insight into how the local community perceive the cultural heritage, aiding in better tailoring preservation efforts to their needs and sentiments.

**Hrant Dink Foundation:** Following the arrests, the Hrant Dink Foundation shifted its focus in cultural heritage fieldwork towards memory walks and oral history projects as part of broader cultural heritage initiative. Emphasizing the stories of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greek communities, the foundation engaged locals in narrating their cultural heritage through streets and sites. For instance, the fieldwork projects: 'Adana: With its Armenian Cultural Heritage,' 'Develi: With its Armenian Heritage,' and 'Sivas: With its Armenian Cultural Heritage,' aimed to revive the historical narratives of these communities in the respective cities, relying on-site fieldwork, oral history interviews, and literature from Turkey and Armenia.<sup>595</sup> Offering guided tours through these cities, these publications resurrect the memory of monuments, cultural sites and neighborhoods that once existed, through the collective memories of local residents.

Technology remained instrumental in safeguarding the memory and cultural heritage of minorities in Turkey. The previously discussed 'Cultural Heritage Map' was updated to introduce multimedia content, including 360-degree photos, videos, and audios, providing a

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<sup>591</sup> KMKD, "The Southern Islands of Marmara: Documentation and Risk Assessment of architectural Heritage," Accessed October 3, 2022, <http://kmkd.org/en/the-southern-islands-of-marmara-documentation-and-risk-assessment-of-architectural-heritage/>.

<sup>592</sup> Ibid.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid.

<sup>595</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, *Develi with its Armenian Cultural Heritage*, 15.

comprehensive view of the 10,000 cultural heritage sites documented.<sup>596</sup> Users can explore the sites and their surroundings through audiovisual stories.<sup>597</sup> Beyond tangible heritage, the map incorporates findings on intangible heritage, locating places where Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks lived during the Ottoman and Republican periods.<sup>598</sup> Incorporating technology allows for the revival of collective memory, contributing to a greater understanding of the historical and contemporary legacy of these communities.<sup>599</sup>

Social media also continued to play an important role in educating audiences within and outside of Turkey on the memory and heritage of Armenians in Turkey. As an illustration, the organization hosted Armen Marsoobian, who delivered a talk emphasizing the importance of memory work in safeguarding and preserving Armenian culture, heritage, and language, all of which confront the threat of “near destruction”.<sup>600</sup> Marsoobian’s presentation live-streamed on Facebook, attracting an audience of over 830 viewers.<sup>601</sup> This recording was later made available for extended dissemination through the organization’s YouTube channel. This strategic use of technology contributes to the broad dissemination of crucial discussions surrounding cultural preservation, amplifying their impact and fostering a more inclusive dialogue.

**Depo:** Following Osman Kavala’s conviction in 2017, Depo briefly self-censored due to the chilling effect from his ongoing criminal investigation and detention without trial.<sup>602</sup> That year, Depo postponed an exhibition depicting daily life in Kurdish regions of Turkey,<sup>603</sup> marking the first time legal counsel was sought for an exhibition.<sup>604</sup> Concerns about potential legal charges and risks to Kavala’s detention led to this decision.<sup>605</sup> Despite this instance of

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<sup>596</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “Meet the renewed Turkey Cultural Heritage Map!” accessed May 22, 2022, <https://hrantdink.org/en/activities/projects/cultural-heritage/12-turkey-cultural-heritage-map>.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Ibid.

<sup>599</sup> Ibid.

<sup>600</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “Presence and Absence: Accountability and Memory in the Aftermath of 1915,” accessed January 22, 2023, <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/history-program/1988-presencing-an-absence-accountability-and-memory-in-the-aftermath-of-19151>.

<sup>601</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “Yitik Olanı Var Etmek: 1915’in Ardından Mesuliyet ve Hafıza.”

<sup>602</sup> Ersoy, Truth or Dare? Curatorial practice and artistic freedom of expression in Turkey,” 137.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid.

self-censorship, Depo remained committed to addressing taboo subjects like the Armenian genocide and its legacy in Turkey.<sup>606</sup> For example, following the inclusion of the medieval Armenian city Ani into the World Heritage List in 2016, Anadolu Kültür and Depo organized an exhibition to commemorate this historic achievement. The exhibition, ‘Poetry of Stones Ani: An Architectural Treasure on Cultural Crossroads’, served as a testament to cross-border collaboration, uniting experts from Armenia and Turkey, including archaeologists, art historians, restoration architects, and photographers.<sup>607</sup> The exhibition travelled both within Turkey and internationally, bring attention not only to the heritage of Armenians but also provided a counter-narrative to the state’s efforts to erase this history. In doing so, it became a significant act of resistance and a testament to the enduring importance of preserving and presenting cultural heritage.

**Hafiza Merkezi:** The initiatives by Hafiza Merkezi, akin to the Hrant Dink Foundation’s efforts, shifted its approach toward memory tours and oral history whilst leveraging the digital space. The ‘A City that Remembers: Space and Memory from Taksim to Sultanahmet,’ project is comprised of a book and virtual tour.<sup>608</sup> By utilizing the digital space, this project introduces an unconventional perspective on the city’s history, emphasising hidden narratives from the Ottoman Era and Republican Turkey, involving appropriation, violation and injustice.<sup>609</sup> Offering an “unofficial tour” and an “unofficial history” through the interactive map on the website, it grants visitors and residents access to lesser-known facets of the city’s past.<sup>610</sup> permitting visitors to explore the city’s past. This alternative approach contributes to redefining the narrative of Istanbul beyond the boundaries of official state stories, shedding light on the experiences and histories of minorities in the city.<sup>611</sup> Through these endeavours, the project aims to safeguard and amplify the cultural memory and heritage of

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<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Depo Istanbul, “Poetry of Stones, ANI: An Architectural Treasure on Cultural Crossroads, accessed October 3, 2022, <https://www.depoistanbul.net/en/event/poetry-of-stones-ani-an-architectural-treasure-on-cultural-crossroads/>.

<sup>608</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, “A City That Remembers: Space and Memory, From Taksim to Sultanahmet: About,” accessed August 22, 2023, <https://hatirlayansehir.hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/about/>.

<sup>609</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, “A City That Remembers: Space and Memory, From Taksim to Sultanahmet,” accessed August 22, 2023, <https://hatirlayansehir.hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/>.

<sup>610</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, “A City That Remembers: Space and Memory, From Taksim to Sultanahmet.”

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.



underrepresented communities in Turkey, diversifying the collective understanding of the city's past.

### **Continued Targeting of Kavala and Wider Civil Society:**

After being acquitted and released on March 20, 2020, Kavala was again arrested, this time on espionage charges in accordance with Article 328 (political and military espionage).<sup>612</sup> Almost eight months later, Kavala faced another indictment, this time under Articles 309 and 328.<sup>613</sup> He was accused of managing activities purportedly designed to sow social disintegration, with a focus on citizens from Kurdish, Armenian, Greek, Christian, Jewish, Assyrian or Yezidi backgrounds.<sup>614</sup> Kavala's alleged crimes revolved around his efforts to maintain the events of 1915 on the public agenda.<sup>615</sup> Additionally, the state accused him of lobbying against Turkey on the international stage by raising allegations related to the "so-called" Armenian genocide, Günal.<sup>616</sup> Finally, the state accused Kavala of attempting to turn Armenians living in Turkey against the government, primarily through Anadolu Kültür's projects.<sup>617</sup> Despite an order from the European Court of Human Rights for Kavala's immediate release, the state refused to comply.<sup>618</sup>

In the eyes of Günal, Kavala's arrests and prolonged detention serve as stark examples of the troubling politicisation of Turkey's judiciary system.<sup>619</sup> She contended that the state had resorted to a practice of crafting charges tailored to target specific individuals, often employing conspiracy theories rather than adhering to the principal of reason and legality that should guide a fair judicial process.<sup>620</sup>

Günal argued that Kavala had long been a target of the state due to his solidarity with minorities,<sup>621</sup> advocacy for human rights, civil society and the initiatives led by Anadolu

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<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid.

<sup>614</sup> Ibid.

<sup>615</sup> Günal, "Neither Just, nor Legal; The Case of Osman Kavala."

<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> Ibid.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.

<sup>620</sup> Günal, "Neither Just, nor Legal; The Case of Osman Kavala."

<sup>621</sup> Ibid.

Kültür.<sup>622</sup> Notably, Kavala’s reconciliation projects with Armenia demonstrated the feasibility of such efforts within Turkey, even in the face of state oppression.<sup>623</sup> However, Günal highlighted that the state’s practice of criminalising civilian democratic activities, and punishing individuals and institutions associated with them posed a significant threat to civil society, culture, and the arts.<sup>624</sup>

In 2018, a year after Kavala’s first arrest, an investigation into Anadolu Kültür<sup>625</sup> led to the detention of thirteen activists closely associated with Kavala,<sup>626</sup> eight of whom held high level positions in the organization. The rest were academics and human rights activists.<sup>627</sup> These detainees faced charges of “creating chaos and mayhem” and alleged involvement in efforts to overthrow the state.<sup>628</sup>

The Turkish state’s crackdown on civil society also extended its reach to encompass prominent international organizations, including The Open Society Foundation, which funded numerous human rights projects in Turkey. In parallel with Kavala’s arrest and the detention of the thirteen activists, Erdoğan levelled accusations against businessman and philanthropist George Soros and his foundation, implicating them in allegedly orchestrating the 2013 Gezi Park protests.<sup>629</sup> Media outlets in Turkey closely aligned with the state, such as Sabah, drew upon reports from “financial crime investigators” to assert that Soros’s foundation had

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<sup>622</sup> Ibid.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> France 24, “Turkey ‘detains’ Academic linked to jailed activist,” accessed January 02, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/20181116-turkey-detains-academics-linked-jailed-activist>.

<sup>626</sup> Deutsche Welle, “EU condemns arrests in Turkey,” accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-calls-on-turkey-to-release-13-people-arrested-for-links-to-gezi-park-protests/a-46335311>.

<sup>627</sup> Deputy Chair of Anadolu Kültür Executive Board, Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi, Anadolu Kültür Executive Board member, Ali Hakan Altınay, Executive Director of Anadolu Kültür, Asena Günal, former Director General of Anadolu Kültür and Co-Director of Truth Justice Memory Center; Meltem Aslan, film producer, coordinator of the Armenia-Turkey Cinema Platform in Istanbul and consultant at Anadolu Kültür, Çiğdem Mater, former staff member of İstanbul Bilgi University’s NGO Research and Training Unit, Yiğit Aksakoğlu, former staff member of Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation, Hande Özhaçeş, civil society workers and employees of Anadolu Kültür Bora Sarı, Ayşegül Güzel and Filiz Telek, rights defender Yusuf Cıvır, Professor Dr Betül Tanbay, from the Department of Mathematics at Boğaziçi University and member of Academics for Peace, alongside Professor Dr Turgut Tarhanlı, Dean of the Faculty of Law of İstanbul Bilgi University and Professor of Human Rights Law.

<sup>628</sup> France 24, “Turkey jails academic after raids over imprisoned philanthropist,” accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/20181118-turkey-jails-academic-after-raids-over-imprisoned-philanthropist>.

<sup>629</sup> Ali Kucukgocmen, Gulsen Solaker, “Soros Foundation to close in Turkey after attack by Erdogan,” Reuters, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-soros-idUSKCN1NV1KL>.

facilitated financial transfers to Anadolu Kültür with the alleged intention of supporting the nationwide dissemination of the Gezi protests.<sup>630</sup> These reports claimed that approximately 1.9 million Turkish liras had been transferred for this purpose between August 2011 and April 2017.<sup>631</sup> Notably, Erdoğan insinuated, without mentioning Kavala by name, that “The person who financed terrorists during the Gezi incidents is already in prison...Who is behind him, the famous Hungarian Jew Soros”.<sup>632</sup> The Turkish state and government-aligned media continue to refer to Kavala as the “Soros of Turkey”, underscoring the mounting challenges faced by civil society organizations operating within the country.<sup>633</sup>

Two days after Erdoğan publicly accused Soros, of attempting to “divide and destroy” the nation, the Open Society Foundation made the unprecedented decision to close its offices in Turkey.<sup>634</sup> The foundation stated that the relentless attacks had rendered it impractical to continue their support for civil society groups, academics, and individuals advocating for a “democratic and open society in Turkey”.<sup>635</sup> Patrick Gaspard, then President of the Open Society Foundation, expressed the organization’s ongoing willingness to collaborate with “future partners” in Turkey who shared their mission.<sup>636</sup> Notably, among the thirteen individuals who were detained, Ali Hakan Altınay, a board member of Anadolu Kültür, had served as the Open Society Foundation’s director in Turkey at the time of his arrest.<sup>637</sup>

### **State Targeting of Conferences:**

Arrests, imprisonments, investigations and cutting funds represented a few facets of the hard constraints faced by civil society organizations in the aftermath of the coup attempt. Notably, there was also a significant shift in the treatment of conferences and discussions on

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<sup>630</sup> Daily Sabah, “Detained tycoon Osman Kavala linked to FETÖ coup attempts,” accessed April 26, 2022, <https://www.dailysabah.com/investigations/2017/10/25/detained-tycoon-osman-kavala-linked-to-feto-coup-attempts>.

<sup>631</sup> Ali Kucukgocmen, Gulsen Solaker, “Soros Foundation to close in Turkey after attack by Erdogan,” Reuters, accessed September 18, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-soros-idUSKCN1NV1KL>.

<sup>632</sup> Ibid.

<sup>633</sup> Zeynep Rakipoglu, “Turkish president calls for respecting court’s verdict on Kavala,” Anadolu Agency, accessed December 20, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkish-president-calls-for-respecting-court-s-verdict-on-kavala/2574842>.

<sup>634</sup> Kucukgocmen and Solaker, “Soros Foundation to close in Turkey after attack by Erdogan,”

<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

<sup>636</sup> Ibid.

<sup>637</sup> Keep the Volume Up For Rights Defender in Turkey, “Hakan Altınay,” accessed March 22, 2023, <https://www.sessizkalma.org/en/defender/hakan-altinay>.

previously sensitive topics, a departure from the relatively open climate during the EU accession process. In the post-coup era, the Turkish state began to target such events, often leading to their forced cancellations. One such instance occurred in 2019 when the Hrant Dink Foundation organized the conference, ‘Social, Cultural and Economic History of Kayseri and the Region.’<sup>638</sup> This conference explored the histories of the Armenian and Greek communities that had once thrived in the region, shedding light on the rich cultural heritage they had contributed.<sup>639</sup> Originally planned to take place in Kayseri, the conference faced a ban imposed by the Kayseri Governorship.<sup>640</sup> Consequently, the organization relocated the conference to Istanbul.<sup>641</sup> However, as part of the growing trend, on the event of the event, the Şişli District Government prohibited it from proceeding with no clear justification for its decision.<sup>642</sup>

Despite these obstacles, the organization took a resourceful approach to disseminate the information planned for the conference. They published the book, ‘Conference on the Social, Cultural and Economic History of Kayseri and the Region’, which included sixteen of the papers originally prepared for presentation at the conference.<sup>643</sup> The strategic publication effectively circumvented attempts to suppress the release of information. It illustrated the foundation’s resilience in the face of state oppression, highlighting its commitment to preserving Armenian and Greek memory and heritage in the region. This forced closure was part of a growing trend, as emphasized in a report by Hafiza Merkezi. This report highlighted that governors and district governors were increasingly resorting to the “the practice of

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<sup>638</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “New Book: “Conference on the Social, Cultural and Economic History of Kayseri and the Region”, accessed December 22, 2022, <https://hrantdink.org/en/announcements/3843-new-book-conference-on-the-social-cultural-and-economic-history-of-kayseri-and-the-region>.

<sup>639</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “Call for Papers: Conference on the Social, Cultural and Economic History of Kayseri and the Region,” accessed December 02, 2023, <https://hrantdink.org/en/announcements/1872-conference-on-the-social-cultural-and-economic-history-of-kayseri-and-the-region-call-for-papers>.

<sup>640</sup> Horizon, “Turkey bans scientific conference organized by Hrant Dink Foundation,” accessed December 19, 2022, <https://horizonweekly.ca/fr/turkey-bans-scientific-conference-organized-by-hrant-dink-foundation/>.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

<sup>642</sup> Bianet, “Hrant Dink Foundation Conference on Kayseri Banned in Istanbul As Well,” accessed December 19, 2022, <https://bianet.org/english/minorities/214636-hrant-dink-foundation-conference-on-kayseri-banned-in-istanbul-as-well>.

<sup>643</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “New Book: “Conference on the Social, Cultural and Economic History of Kayseri and the Region.”

issuing prohibition of demonstration and activity decisions,”<sup>644</sup> which included conferences among other events.<sup>645</sup>

### Death Threats:

Hard constraints on Turkish civil society’s activities do not solely emanate from the state; they also originate from other sectors of society, including ultra-nationalistic individuals. For instance, on May 29, 2020, the Hrant Dink Foundation publicly disclosed a death threat that it received via email, which said, “We may turn up one night, when you least expect it,”<sup>646</sup> echoing past threats directed at Hrant Dink prior to his assassination.<sup>647</sup> Additionally, the email accused the foundation of propagating “tales of fraternity,” demanding that all its members leave Turkey,<sup>648</sup> and explicitly threatened harm to Rakel Dink and the foundation’s lawyer.<sup>649</sup>

The foundation expressed a sense of duty to “remind the authorities” of their obligations and to highlight the gravity of the prevailing climate.<sup>650</sup> The foundation took successful legal action against two individuals who had sent threatening messages via Instagram and email.<sup>651</sup> In 2022, both were sentenced to 2.5 years and two years in prison, respectively.<sup>652</sup> One of the foundation’s legal representatives drew attention to the similarities between the current circumstances and those that preceded the murder of Hrant Dink.<sup>653</sup> In response, they called upon the authorities to change their rhetoric and conduct, emphasizing the importance of establishing channels for dialogue and avoiding behavior that might embolden assailants and

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<sup>644</sup> Banu Tuna, Emel Atatürk Sevimli, Esra Kiliç, Melis Gebes and Özlem Zingil, *Keep the volume up Intimidation policies against rights defenders 2015-2021*, 92.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid.

<sup>646</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, “Public Statement: About the threat to the Hrant Dink Foundation,” accessed 22 March, 2023, <https://hrantdink.org/en/announcements/2414-public-statement>.

<sup>647</sup> Ibid.

<sup>648</sup> Ibid.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid.

<sup>650</sup> Ibid.

<sup>651</sup> Bianet, “Two Suspects Who Threatened Hrant Dink Foundation Face up to 26 Years in Prison,” accessed January 08, 2023, <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/minorities/225629-two-suspects-who-threatened-hrant-dink-foundation-face-up-to-26-years-in-prison>.

<sup>652</sup> TRT HABER, “Threatening case against Hrant Dink Foundation: 2 defendants sentenced to prison,” accessed January 08, 2023, <https://www-trthaber-com.translate.goog/haber/gundem/hrant-dink-vakfina-tehdit-davasi-2-saniga-hapis-cezasi-691365.html? x tr sl=tr& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc>.

<sup>653</sup> Hikmet Adal, “Attacks are not Isolated, Another Threatening Message Sent to Hrant Dink Foundation,” Bianet, accessed 20 January, 2023, <https://bianet.org/english/human-rights/225057-attacks-are-not-isolated-another-threatening-message-sent-to-hrant-dink-foundation>.

perpetuate a culture of impunity.<sup>654</sup> The organization remained committed to their work and later that year launched KarDes, an app dedicated to the history and heritage of minorities in Turkey, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

### **State Efforts to Curtail NGOs:**

During this period, a discernable pattern emerged as the state sought to curtail the activities of civil society organizations. This section delves into strategies employed by the Turkish government to restrict, silence, and in some instances, dismantle these integral components of civic engagement. Central to this effort was the deployment of legislation such as the Law on the Prevention of the Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (No. 7262), officially effective from December 31, 2020.<sup>655</sup> This legislation has garnered apprehension among prominent human rights organizations, marking a key juncture in the state's efforts to exert control over civil society dynamics.

The law confers significant powers to various government authorities, for instance, it grants the Minister of Interior to suspend employees and halt the operations of organizations under investigation for terrorism-related activities.<sup>656</sup> Furthermore, it empowers the President to seize the assets of organizations suspected of providing financial support to terrorism and mandates prior approval for the collection of online donations.<sup>657</sup> These provisions have elicited substantial concerns from prominent human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Freedom House, International Federation for Human Rights, and the Council of Europe.<sup>658</sup> Collectively, they have perceived this law as a tool of intimidation, wielded against civil society and human rights defenders in Turkey for their work.<sup>659</sup> Although none of the four NGOs have had this law applied against them, its enactment was intended to foster a culture of fear and create a chilling effect within civil society, according to Yusuf Can,

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<sup>654</sup> Hikmet Adal, "Attacks are not Isolated, Another Threatening Message Sent to Hrant Dink Foundation."

<sup>655</sup> Amnesty International, "Turkey: Terrorism financing law has immediate 'chilling effect' on civil society," accessed January 02, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/4864/2021/en/>.

<sup>656</sup> Ibid.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid.

<sup>658</sup> Council of Europe, "Turkey," accessed January 02, 2023, [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2021\)023cor-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2021)023cor-e).

<sup>659</sup> Ibid.

Coordinator for the Middle East Programme (MEP) at the Wilson Centre.<sup>660</sup> He explained that anti-terrorism laws and security measures within civil society have been intentionally manipulated to label both individuals and organizations as “terrorists.”<sup>661</sup> This classification is often employed to characterize their work as “divisive” and as potentially threatening to national security.<sup>662</sup>

In 2021, the Turkish Trade Ministry filed a lawsuit demanding the “dissolution” of Anadolu Kültür<sup>663</sup> and threatened to dismantle the organisation, despite Kavala having been incarcerated for over three years.<sup>664</sup> The lawsuit alleged that Anadolu Kültür, originally registered as a commercial enterprise, was functioning as a non-profit entity and relied on donations and grants.<sup>665</sup> According to article 210 of the Turkish Commercial Code, this was perceived as conflicting with public order in the business field.<sup>666</sup> State-owned and affiliated news outlets repeatedly accused Kavala of soliciting donations<sup>667</sup> under the pretence of a foundation, and his advocacy work was portrayed as a front for financial transactions allegedly orchestrated by George Soros.<sup>668</sup> One report asserted that 1.8 million Turkish liras had been transferred from the Open Society Foundation to Anadolu Kültür between 2011 and 2017.<sup>669</sup>

Anadolu Kültür contended that the lawsuit, the first of its kind in Turkey, appeared to have been “created” to target the organization.<sup>670</sup> Despite a Financial Crimes Investigation Board

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<sup>660</sup> Yusuf Can, “Reinvigorating Civil Society in Turkey’s Electoral Autocracy,” Wilson Centre, accessed January 02, 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/reinvigorating-civil-society-turkeys-electoral-autocracy/>.

<sup>661</sup> Ibid.

<sup>662</sup> Ibid.

<sup>663</sup> Hakim Bishara, “Turkey Targets Osman Kavala’s Arts Organization in Unprecedented Lawsuit,” Hyperallergic, accessed August 22, 2022, <https://hyperallergic.com/622473/turkey-targets-osman-kavalas-arts-organization-in-unprecedented-lawsuit/>.

<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

<sup>665</sup> Ibid.

<sup>666</sup> Bianet, “Trade Ministry files suit for closure of Osman Kavala’s Anadolu Kültür,” accessed November 20, 2022, <https://bianet.org/english/law/239394-trade-ministry-files-suit-for-closure-of-osman-kavala-s-anadolu-kultur/>.

<sup>667</sup> Osman Ozgan, “Termination Case against Kavala’s company from the ministry: Osman ‘Havala’,” Yeni Safak, accessed August 26, 2023, <https://www.yenisafak-com.translate.googleusercontent.com/translate/gundem/kavalanin-sirketine-bakanliktan-fesih-davasi-osman-havala-3598730? x tr sl=tr& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc& x tr hist=true>.

<sup>668</sup> Ibid.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid.

<sup>670</sup> Anadolu Kültür, Information Note on the Lawsuit ‘Created’ for Anadolu Kültür,” accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/35-announcements/1290-information-note-on-the-lawsuit-created-for-anadolu-kultur/>.

(MASAK) inquiry that found no irregularities, the state initiated another investigation into Anadolu Kültür's alleged involvement in the Gezi Park protests.<sup>671</sup> In its press release, Anadolu Kültür emphasized, "Detailed information about Anadolu Kültür's projects and activities in various cities around Turkey, which aimed to foster dialogue through art and culture, that touched the lives of many artists and thousands of audiences, can be accessed on our website."<sup>672</sup> Former government members expressed support for the organizations work. Ertuğrul Günay, the former Minister of Culture and Tourism, who had collaborated with Kavala on the restoration of Ani, stated, "Anadolu Kültür has provided important services in the cultural field with its activities... since its establishment".<sup>673</sup> Günay argued, "An injustice done to Anadolu Kültür would be an injustice to the culture of our Anatolia..."<sup>674</sup> In the face of persistent government oppression, Anadolu Kültür continued its work on preserving the heritage and memory of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks which shall be further explored in the following chapter.

In 2021, Hafiza Merkezi organized the talk, 'The Role of Civil Society in Turkey-Armenia Relations,' convening members of Armenian and Turkish civil society to discuss "the present, past and future role" of civil society in Turkey-Armenia relations. At the event, Asena Günal highlighted the significance of culture in fostering reconciliation and emphasized the importance of Armenian-Turkish collaboration on heritage projects and acknowledged the challenges faced by Anadolu Kültür as well as its achievements. Günal also acknowledged the severe restrictions imposed on Turkish civil society, including the imprisonment of figures like Kavala, and how these constraints affect relations with Armenia and the diaspora. The event was webcasted through the Hrant Dink Foundation YouTube page.

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<sup>671</sup> Bianet, "Trade Ministry files suit for closure of Osman Kavala's Anadolu Kültür," accessed November 20, 2022, <https://bianet.org/english/law/239394-trade-ministry-files-suit-for-closure-of-osman-kavala-s-anadolu-kultur>.

<sup>672</sup> Anadolu Kültür, Information Note on the Lawsuit 'Created' for Anadolu Kültür."

<sup>673</sup> SUSMA24, "An injustice done to Anadolu Kültür would be an injustice to the culture of our Anatolia," accessed December 4, 2022, <https://susma24.com/en/index.php/an-injustice-done-to-anadolu-kultur-would-be-an-injustice-to-the-culture-of-our-anatolia/>.

<sup>674</sup> Ibid.



## Life Sentence of Osman Kavala:

On April 25, 2022, Osman Kavala and seven other human rights activists were handed severe prison sentences. Kavala, who had already endured 1637 days of imprisonment, received a life sentence without the possibility of parole.<sup>675</sup> He was convicted under Article 312, for allegedly attempting to overthrow the government.<sup>676</sup> Additionally, former and current members of Anadolu Kültür's Executive Board, including Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi, Ali Hakan Altınay, Mine Özerden, and advisor to Anadolu Kültür, Çiğdem Mater, along with human rights defenders Mücella Yapıcı, Tayfun Kahraman and Can Atalay, were sentenced to eighteen years in prison.<sup>677</sup> All four NGOs, through their websites, social media channels, and various public engagements, expressed solidarity and raised objections to the life sentence given to Kavala and the extended sentences for his fellow civil society members. Hafıza Merkezi labelled the decision as an "unconscionable attempt to silence the entire civil society," and emphasised the state's obligations to protect human rights under the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.<sup>678</sup>

Following Kavala's life sentence, Anadolu Kültür persisted in its operations despite the chilling effect of the sentencing. Notably, to commemorate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Anadolu Kültür, it organized the event '20 years of Sharing Culture and art: Anatolian Cultural Conversations.' The event comprised of five panels and interviews involving members of civil society, politics, academia and broadcasting.<sup>679</sup> It addressed themes significant to Kavala and the foundational principals of Anadolu Kültür such as cultural dialogue, memory, local cultural politics, heritage preservation, cultural diversity and rights. The event also delved into the challenges faced by civil society organizations in the cultural domain. One panel specifically explored the collaborations between Anadolu Kültür and artists, cultural workers, and civil society

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<sup>675</sup> Keep the Volume Up for Rights Defenders in Turkey, "Mine Özerden," accessed January 02, 2023, <https://www.sessizkalma.org/en/defender/mine-ozerden>.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid.

<sup>677</sup> Anadolu Kültür, "Anadolu Kültür's statement on the unlawful decisions in Gezi Trial," accessed July 02, 2022, <https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/35-announcements/1510-anadolu-kulturs-statement-on-the-unlawful-decisions-in-gezi-trial/>.

<sup>678</sup> Hafıza Merkezi, "Our statement on the unlawful verdict in Gezi Trial," accessed July 02, 2022, <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/our-statement-on-the-unlawful-verdict-in-gezi-trial/>.

<sup>679</sup> anadolukultür\_, "Years by Sharing Culture and Art."

organizations from Armenia, highlighting the relationships cultivated over the two decades.<sup>680</sup>

In a 2023 interview with Deutsche Welle (DW), Osman Kavala argued that his life imprisonment symbolized the government's tactic to convey a stark warning to civil society activists in Turkey against involvement in activities perceived as "disruptive" by the government.<sup>681</sup> Kavala also emphasized the pivotal role of art and heritage, noting how they facilitate the construction of "mental and emotional bridges", fostering "contemplation and discussions of issues of political content in a non-antagonistic atmosphere.

This chapter has illustrated how the NGOs persisted in their efforts to preserve the memory and cultural heritage of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks despite state oppression. They adopted new strategies to navigate these hard constraints by establishing websites, YouTube channels and a strong social media presence. These organizations harnessed technology as a tool to safeguard cultural heritage, creating digital tours to counter state narratives and training local communities on cultural heritage preservation and the significance of these heritages within Turkey's shared cultural context.

Persisting within existing hard constraints, the four NGOs faced added challenges in 2020 due to the impact of the Karabakh war, the focus of the forthcoming chapter. This next section will examine the soft constraints emerging from the 2020 war, delving into the strategies deployed by the NGOs to navigate these constraints to sustain their ongoing efforts.

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<sup>680</sup> anadolukültür\_, "Meeting: Dialogue: Hope - Diversity in Turkey."

<sup>681</sup> Linda Vierecke, "Turkish activist Osman Kavala: Exclusive interview from jail," Deutsche Welle (DW), accessed June 2, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/turkish-rights-activist-osman-kavala-an-exclusive-interview-from-prison/a-65526221>.

## Chapter Seven

### Navigating Soft Constraints

This chapter explores the shifts that arose following the 2020 Karabakh war, the constraints that were imposed on civil society, and the ways that these four NGOs navigated these constraints. The chapter aims to show three elements related to the politics of memory and cultural heritage: first, the effects of geopolitics in the region, in this case the war which Turkey supported, on the work of civil society. Secondly and thirdly, as with the previous chapter, the agency and limitations of agency within certain structural constraints.

In addition to the hard constraints discussed in Chapter Six, the four NGOs contended with what might be considered soft constraints. In this case, some of these constraints arose from the 2020 war over the disputed region of Nagorno Karabakh (known as Artsakh to Armenians), an Armenian-populated region that had been indigenous to Armenians for thousands of years.<sup>682</sup> The 2020 Karabakh War impacted the activities of the NGOs due to the Turkish state's direct involvement in the conflict, openly supporting Azerbaijan's full-scale military offensive.<sup>683</sup> This was compounded by an oppressive authoritarian environment, as outlined in the previous chapter. The war itself did not affect the NGO's staff directly, however it constrained civil society from carrying on their missions related to restoration of historical memory, heritage, and reconciliation. This chapter will examine the soft constraints that arose in the aftermath of the war: the breakdown of trust, challenges in collaboration, and backlash from Armenia, Armenians and the diaspora, and the ways in which they navigated these constraints by engaging Turkish youth, prioritizing social media and technology, and continuing to challenge the state narrative through conferences, workshops and memory walks.

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<sup>682</sup> Patrick Donabedian, "The History of Karabakh From Antiquity to the Twentieth Century," in *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geo-Politics of Nagorno-Karabakh*, ed. Levon Chorbajian, Patrick Donabedian and Claude Mutafian (London; New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1994), 51-52.

<sup>683</sup> Armenpress, "Azerbaijan bombarding Artsakh's civilian settlements including Stepanakert city," accessed July 14, 2022, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1028922/>.

## Aftermath of War:

The war waged by Azerbaijan with Turkey's help claimed the lives of over 5,000 soldiers and displaced thousands.<sup>684</sup> Russian intervention led to a ceasefire on November 9, 2020, effectively ending the war<sup>685</sup> and leaving Artsakh's Armenian cultural heritage under Azerbaijani control.<sup>686</sup> Since gaining control of Artsakh, the Azerbaijani government has denied Armenians of their cultural rights and heritage,<sup>687</sup> raising concerns about the preservation of their cultural heritage. Because of Turkey's direct involvement in the conflict, providing Azerbaijan with military, armed drones<sup>688</sup> and Syrian mercenaries,<sup>689</sup> the NGO's plans faced obstacles, not the hard constraints, such as imprisonment and arrest of the previous chapter, but softer ones. Turkey's actions marked the first instance in over a century where Armenians were confronted with significant Turkish aggression,<sup>690</sup> which triggered a sense of vulnerability and anxiety within Armenia and the Armenian diaspora, exacerbated by the resurgence of discourse about the Armenian Genocide.<sup>691</sup> Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan expressed these sentiments when he tweeted, "Turkey returned to the South Caucasus...to continue the Armenian Genocide".<sup>692</sup>

The 2020 war amplified the pre-existing political pressure on Armenians in Turkey, intensifying concerns about being targeted.<sup>693</sup> For example, two months prior to the war, photographs circulated of a man reciting the Adhan, the Muslim call to prayer, in the

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<sup>684</sup> BBC, "Nagorno-Karabakh conflict killed 5,000 soldiers," accessed May 24, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55174211>.

<sup>685</sup> Andrew E. Kramer, "Armenia and Azerbaijan: What Sparked War and Will Peace Prevail?" The New York Times, accessed January 22, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/armenian-azerbaijan-conflict.html>.

<sup>686</sup> Official Website of the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Artsakh, "AD HOC PUBLIC REPORT THE ARMENIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE IN ARTSAKH (NAGORNO-KARABAKH): CASES OF VANDALISM AND AT RISK OF DESTRUCTION BY AZERBAIJAN," accessed March 22, 2023, <https://artsakhombuds.am/en/document/792>.

<sup>687</sup> Trend News Agency, "Israeli expert emphasizes need to suppress any attempts of Armenia to appropriate Azerbaijani culture," accessed July 18, 2022, <https://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/3428354.html>

<sup>688</sup> Reuters, "Turkey backs Azerbaijan, says Armenia should cease provocations," accessed March 22, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/turkeys-says-armenia-should-cease-provocations-with-azerbaijan-2022-09-13/>.

<sup>689</sup> Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe, "Humanitarian consequences of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan/ Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," accessed February 22, 2023, <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/29483/html>.

<sup>690</sup> Hrag Papazian, "Turkey and 'Turks' in Postwar Armenia: Anxieties, Meanings, and Politics After the 2020 Karabakh War" *Ethnopolitics* (2023): 6.

<sup>691</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>693</sup> Memorialize Turkey, "Restoration of Akhtamar Island," accessed May 22, 2023, <https://memorializeturkey.com/en/memorial/restoration-akhtamar-church>.

Armenian Akhtamar Church,<sup>694</sup> whilst showcasing graffiti he had written on the church's walls.<sup>695</sup> It read: "Raising the Adan in the church's sanctuary has brought life back to it."<sup>696</sup> Hafiza Merkezi contended that such actions aimed to dissuade both the Turkish government and civil society from engaging in memorialization efforts and to discourage Armenians from asserting their collective rights.<sup>697</sup> A 2021 Freedom House report noted that non-Muslim communities in Turkey, particularly Armenians, had become increasingly subjected to hate speech in 2020.<sup>698</sup> Turkish-Armenian MP Garo Paylan expressed concerns that the surge in nationalism and racism triggered posed a threat to the safety of Armenians in Turkey,<sup>699</sup> creating an atmosphere reminiscent of past anti-Armenian pogroms, raising alarms within the Armenian community.<sup>700</sup>

The state further contributed to the fear. For example, that same year, Erdogan publicly stated, "We do not allow terrorist leftovers of the sword in our country...Their number has decreased a lot, but they still exist."<sup>701</sup> The term "leftovers of the sword" referred to survivors of the Christian genocides.<sup>702</sup> Its usage not only insulted survivors but also posed a threat to the safety of Turkey's dwindling Christian community".<sup>703</sup> The following sections will explore the soft constraints placed on the four NGOs following the September 2020 war and how these organizations adapted to pursue their mission.

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<sup>694</sup> Ibid.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid

<sup>696</sup> Ibid.

<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

<sup>698</sup> Freedom House, "Freedom in the world 2021: Turkey," accessed January 20, 2023, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkey/freedom-world/2021>.

<sup>699</sup> ARAB NEWS, "Armenians feel uneasy in Turkey, says Turkish MP," accessed May 22, 2023, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1743071/middle-east>.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

<sup>701</sup> On May 4, 2020, Erdoğan used the term "Leftover of the sword". This is a derogatory Turkish term used to refer to the survivors of the Christian massacres and genocides that targeted Armenians, Assyrian Greeks. As outlined by Genocide Watch, it does not represent a denial of genocide but rather it declares the pride of the perpetrators for the slaughter and near total erasure of Christians.

<sup>702</sup> Uzey Bulut, "Turkey: Erdogan uses "leftovers of the sword" Anti-Christian hate speech," Genocide Watch, accessed November 20, 2022, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2020/05/11/turkey-erdogan-uses-leftovers-of-the-sword-anti-christian-hate-speech>.

<sup>703</sup> Ibid.

## Navigating the Soft Constraints and Re-building Trust:

The swift erosion of trust between Armenia, Armenians, the diaspora and Turkish civil society in the aftermath of the 2020 war is exemplified by the following instance. In early 2020, Anadolu Kültür announced 'The Future of Future', a collaborative project developed alongside curators from Armenia and Turkey.<sup>704</sup> The project aimed to engage young artists from Turkey, Armenia, and the diaspora interested in exploring the artistic and social histories of both countries, bridging their complex pasts and envisioning a shared future.<sup>705</sup> However, the outbreak of the 2020 war led to the project's termination, as the organization recognized that Armenian trust in Turkish society, on every level, has been severely eroded.<sup>706</sup>

Amid the outbreak of the war, Armenian artists withdrew their applications, and curators shifted their focus towards relief efforts related to the conflict.<sup>707</sup> Anadolu Kültür faced criticism from the Armenian community due to Turkey's direct involvement in the war.<sup>708</sup> The Director of the National History Institute of Armenia discouraged artists from applying to Anadolu Kültür's project during an interview, undermining the organizations efforts.<sup>709</sup> Günel stated that this reaction was disheartening, considering Osman Kavala's imprisonment was linked to his reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts with Armenia.<sup>710</sup> However, Anadolu Kültür recognized the need to rebuild trust with Armenia and Armenians in this challenging climate.<sup>711</sup>

Given the crackdowns and other hard constraints discussed in the previous chapter, Günel stressed the importance for civil society organizations adapting to the difficult environment.<sup>712</sup> This adaptation included openly expressing support for Armenia during the war. Anadolu Kültür had prepared an announcement to show solidarity with Armenia,

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<sup>704</sup> In collaboration with the Gulbenkian Foundation.

<sup>705</sup> <https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/35-announcements/1021-open-callbr13291329-ff-gg/>.

<sup>706</sup> YouTube talk with Hrant Dink Foundation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-dAnjXn9FY>.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

<sup>708</sup> YouTube talk with Hrant Dink Foundation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-dAnjXn9FY>.

<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid.

<sup>711</sup> Ibid.

<sup>712</sup> Ibid.

advocate for peace, and express opposition to Turkey's involvement in the war.<sup>713</sup> However, this became challenging due to Osman Kavala's second indictment, which accused him of "espionage activities by promoting relations with Armenia".<sup>714</sup> These accusations against Kavala posed a significant risk for Anadolu Kültür, which was already a target of the state.<sup>715</sup> Günal stressed that the mounting pressure on civil society further complicated their efforts, ultimately resulting in the decision to withhold the statement of solidarity.<sup>716</sup>

On May 7, 2022, the exhibition, 'Hrant Dink: Here and Now', was unveiled in Yerevan, Armenia, marking the fifteenth anniversary of Dink's assassination.<sup>717</sup> This exhibition centered on the life and activism of Hrant Dink, exploring themes of memory, justice, and minority rights in Turkey.<sup>718</sup> Alongside the exhibition, the panel 'A Dialogue Between Art and Memory', took place, featuring Asena Günal of Anadolu Kültür and Turkish artist and filmmaker Sena Başöz, who helped create the 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory.<sup>719</sup> The panel discussed how art and culture, artists and cultural actors can address traumatic histories and serve as bridges between people.<sup>720</sup> However, activists interrupted the event, leading to its cancellation.<sup>721</sup> These activists raised concerns about the 2020 Karabakh War, criticising Turkish civil societies response. They carried signs that read "Civil Society can't mask the monstrosity of the state," and "Your silence during the 2020 war spoke volumes".<sup>722</sup> As previously mentioned, whilst a message of solidarity was drafted, the organization prioritised its safety, but this decision was not publicly disclosed. The incident serves as an example of the eroding trust in Turkish civil society and the pervasive pressure for self-censorship to which the NGOs reacted.

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<sup>713</sup> Ibid.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

<sup>715</sup> Ibid.

<sup>716</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation. *Public Talk: The Role of Civil society in Turkey- Armenia Relations*.

<sup>717</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "Hrant Dink: Here and Now' exhibition in Yerevan," accessed January 12, 2023, <https://hrantdink.org/en/activities/projects/turkey-armenia-relations-programme/3694-hrant-dink-here-and-now-exhibition-in-yerevan>.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid.

<sup>719</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "Talk: A dialogue between art and memory," January 22, 2023, <https://hrantdink.org/en/activities/projects/turkey-armenia-relations-programme/3828-talk-a-dialogue-between-memory-and-art>.

<sup>720</sup> Ibid.

<sup>721</sup> 168.am news and analysis, "Group of Activists Disrupts Event Dedicated to Turkish-Armenian Relations," accessed January 2022, <https://en.168.am/2022/08/01/43819.html>.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

Osman Kavala wrote from prison the foreword for the report, 'What's Next? Civil Dialogue Work in Armenia and Turkey After the Second Nagorno Karabakh War in 2020'. Kavala acknowledged that Turkey's active involvement in the war against Armenia had a detrimental impact on Turkish NGOs working to normalize relations.<sup>723</sup> He highlighted the "trust issues" that emerged between Turkish and Armenian civil society organizations due to the perception in Turkey that Azerbaijan's actions were justified countermeasures.<sup>724</sup> In this challenging post-war context, Kavala emphasized the importance of civil society organizations shifting their focus towards peacebuilding and reconciliation.<sup>725</sup> The report, authored by Armine Avetisyan, Ihsan Karayazi and Kübra Zeynep Sariaslan, conducted a short-term study featuring online interviews with civil society members engaged in Armenian-Turkish relations.<sup>726</sup> The findings revealed that during this period, the trauma of the Genocide resurfaced in Armenia, leading to a deterioration in how Armenians viewed Turkish people and Turkey.<sup>727</sup> Armenian civil society expressed disappointment in the perceived lack of support from Turkish civil society, especially with Turkey's backing of Azerbaijan in the war.<sup>728</sup>

Post-war panels held by the NGOs highlighted civil society's challenges and emphasized the involvement of Turkish youth in reconciliation efforts and projects addressing the historical treatment of minorities. These discussions recognized the impact and influence of social media and technology, highlighting their crucial role in heritage preservation and emphasizing the need to integrate and leverage these tools accordingly. For example, the 'Civil Society asks: What awaits civil society in the near future?' panel tackled challenges in the current socio-political climate, emphasizing engaging Turkish youth to sustain the legacy of civil society in the human rights and cultural sphere.<sup>729</sup> Speakers recognized the youth's affinity with technology and social media,<sup>730</sup> underscoring the need to educate, grant

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<sup>723</sup> Armine Avetisyan, Ihsan Karayazi and Kübra Zeynep Sariaslan, "What's Next? Civil Dialogue Work in Armenia and Turkey After the Second Nagorno Karabakh War in 2020," accessed October 3, 2023, <https://whatisnext.blog>, 6.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid.

<sup>725</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>727</sup> Ibid.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>729</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, *Civil Society asks: What awaits civil society in the near future?*

<sup>730</sup> Ibid.



responsibilities, empower, and encourage their active participation and ideas.<sup>731</sup> Similarly, the ‘Perception of the Past and Imagination of the Future Among Turkey’s Youth’ panel delved into the younger generation’s connection with historical narratives, their pursuit of truth, and challenges in researching sensitive topics, including the Kurdish issue and the Armenian Genocide.<sup>732</sup>

Technology, particularly the development of apps and interactive sites featuring memory walks and cultural heritage elements also emerged as important tools for the NGOs after the 2020 war. These user-friendly apps provide inclusive platforms for people unable to physically visit heritage sites, including diaspora members. As digital repositories, they preserve aspects of cultural heritage from the erosive passage of time and offer educational resources about historical events, traditions, and cultural practices. Digital memory walks bridge geographical gaps, enabling individuals to explore their cultural lineage and historical origins. Moreover, these digital resources present diverse perspectives and historical narratives, a significant endeavor in a society where access to historical truths has often been obstructed by the state. The projects are detailed in Table 9.

**Table 9: Post-Karabakh War Cultural Heritage and Memory Projects**

NGO	Project Title	Date	Project Type	Aim/Purpose
Anadolu Kültür	The Future of Future	2020	Exhibition	Collaborative exhibition for Armenian and Turkish artists
Hafiza Merkezi	Strengthening Advocacy for Peace in Turkey’ project	2020-2024	Workshops, fieldwork, panels	Peace process activities for Turkish youth
Hrant Dink Foundation	KarDes	2020	App	Personal tour guide for people who wish to discover the multicultural legacy and multi-layered fabric of Turkey
Hafiza Merkezi	Memory and Youth project	2021-2022	Workshops	Turkish youth memory project
KMKD	Edirne	2021	Fieldwork	Heritage documentation

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

<sup>732</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, “Strengthening Advocacy for Peace In Turkey,” accessed October 22, 2023, <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/calisma/strengthen-peace-advocacy-turkey/>.

KMKD	Edirneheritage.com	2021	Website	Documentation and risk assessment of the architectural heritage of Edirne
Hrant Dink Foundation	23.5 Hrant Dink Memory Site	2022	Interactive site	Virtually tour the 23.5 Hrant Dink Memory Site
Hrant Dink Foundation	Istanbul 1914-1922: War, Collapse, Occupation, and the History of Resistance	2022	Conference	The history of non-Muslim communities between 1914 and 1922
Hrant Dink Foundation	Civil Society asks: What awaits civil society in the near future?	2022	Panel	The future of civil society in Turkey
Hrant Dink Foundation	<i>Culture and art for co-existence</i>	2022	Panel	The roles of arts, culture, and civil society organizations in advocating for co-existence, and cultural diversity harmoniously
Hrant Dink Foundation	The transformative power of collective memory: Why is memory work important?	2022	Panel	The role of the digital space to educate and preserve memory and cultural heritage
Hafiza Merkezi	Perception of the Past and Imagination of the Future Among Turkey's Youth	2022	Panel	Turkish youth with a focus on human rights and civil society
Hafiza Merkezi	Memory and Youth II	2022-2023	Workshops	Turkish youth memory project
Anadolu Kültür	Ani Mobile Application	2023	App	To introduce the archeological site of Ani and its surroundings to a wider audience
Anadolu Kültür (Depo)	Broken Memories	2023	Exhibition	Andréas Lang exhibition on abandoned cultural heritage in Turkey
Hrant Dink Foundation	Minority Rights in the Centennial of the Republic	2023	Conference	Where do minority rights stand in Turkey?

The following section will detail how the four NGOs navigated these soft constraints, particularly by engaging Turkish youth and utilizing technology and social media to continue their work preserving the memory and cultural heritage of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in Turkey.

## Engaging Turkish youth in reconciliation efforts:

The active involvement of Turkish youth in cultural heritage and memory initiatives holds relevance, as evidenced by the concerted efforts of these NGOs. These initiatives, launched in the aftermath of the 2020 war, shared a common objective: to fortify civil society's role in advocating for peace and reconciliation with Armenia and Armenians, to inspire the younger generation to partake in these endeavors. These projects centered on the cultural heritage, memory and history of minorities in Turkey, utilizing them as a means to facilitate peace and reconciliation. This involvement allowed Turkish youth to uncover the hidden and contemporary legacies of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks hidden beneath the current map of Turkey. Engaging Turkish youth in understanding and acknowledging the historical legacies of these communities can contribute to a more informed and empathetic approach. By recognizing and addressing these hidden legacies, it can pave the way for a more inclusive and reconciliatory dialogue between the two societies, fostering a foundation for trust and mutual understanding in the aftermath of the conflict.

For instance, Hafiza Merkezi initiated two peace and reconciliation projects with a focus on engaging and educating Turkish youth. The 'Strengthening Advocacy for Peace in Turkey' project,<sup>733</sup> aimed to enhance civil society's peace advocacy capacity, foster institutional collaboration, and encourage youth involvement in peace-related initiatives<sup>734</sup> through workshops, training sessions, and study visits.<sup>735</sup> The 'Memory and Youth' project aimed to prompt discussions among Turkish youth on global and Turkish memory work and contemporary challenges.<sup>736</sup> It sought to enrich contemporary discourse by examining historical contexts, the impact of remembering and forgetting, and diverse social memory through workshops like 'Confronting the Past in Turkey,' 'Spaces of memory and the politics

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<sup>733</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, "Strengthening Advocacy for Peace In Turkey."

<sup>734</sup> Ibid.

<sup>735</sup> Ibid.

<sup>736</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, Memory and Youth, accessed January 14, 2023, <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/calisma/hafiza-ve-genclik/>.

of space,’ and ‘Repressing the Past/Dialogue of Different Representations,’ examining the past’s influence on contemporary society.<sup>737</sup>

### Education Initiatives:

As has been stressed, in the aftermath of the 2020 war, rebuilding trust with Armenia and Armenians became imperative for these NGOs. One significant aspect was focusing on education initiatives, namely educating Turkish youth about the cultural heritage and historical and current legacies of Armenians in Turkey. To achieve this, they organized fieldtrips to provinces that were once home to Armenian communities and where remnants of their cultural heritage is still evident today. This initiative helps bridge historical divides, fosters empathy, and provides a tangible connection to the shared cultural history of these communities, in the hopes of establishing trust.

For instance, as part of the ‘Strengthening Advocacy for Peace in Turkey’ project, Hafiza Merkezi launched the ‘Spatial Memory of Divided and Conflict-affected Cities: Diyarbakir and Nicosia’ initiative.<sup>738</sup> It organized two workshops to “trace the spatial memory of both cities”.<sup>739</sup> Both cities were chosen for their ability to “sustain multicultural life practices during conflict-affected times”.<sup>740</sup> Diyarbakir, with its rich historical heritage, has been home to various cultures throughout history.<sup>741</sup> This project served as a platform for Turkish youth to engage with the challenges posed by “divided, conflict affected cities”.<sup>742</sup> Central to these workshops were memory walks conducted on location reflecting the “multicultural life and conflict”.<sup>743</sup> Participants, equipped with cameras, engaged in these memory walks and shared their experiences in “reconstructing urban memory” through personal narratives and story-

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<sup>737</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, “Atölye Programı: Mart-Temmuz 2021,” accessed December 22, 2022, <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Hafiza-ve-Gençlik-Atölye-Programi-2021-1.pdf>.

<sup>738</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, “Spatial Memory of Divided and Conflict-affected Cities: Diyarbakir and Nicosia,” accessed May 20, 2023, <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/spatial-memory-of-divided-and-conflict-affected-cities-diyarbakir-and-nicosia/>.

<sup>739</sup> Ibid.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid.

<sup>742</sup> Ibid.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid.

telling.<sup>744</sup> These experiences and insights were compiled into a video presentation published on Hafiza Merkezi's website and YouTube channel.<sup>745</sup>

As part of the Memory and Youth II project, Hafiza Merkezi organized a group of Turkish youths to visit Vakıflı Köy, one of Turkey's few remaining ethnic Armenian villages, to gain valuable insights into the region's cultural history.<sup>746</sup> This on-site engagement offered a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and heritage of minority communities. Through this first-hand encounter, Turkish youth could better appreciate and comprehend the significance of these communities' cultural legacies. It becomes a tangible connection that aids in preserving and acknowledging the memory and cultures of minorities in Turkey, fostering a more comprehensive understanding and respect for these marginalised aspects of Turkey's history.

#### **Youth Empowerment: Assumed Roles within Civil Society:**

Integral to this educational initiative was the active engagement of Turkish youth in roles typically fulfilled by longer serving civil society members. These responsibilities included documenting heritage, preparing reports, conducting interviews, and contributing to the enhancement of projects and websites associated with the cultural heritage and memory of minority groups in Turkey. Encouraging young individuals to assume these roles and collaborate with NGOs committed to safeguarding Armenian culture, heritage, and memory inside and outside Turkey plays a pivotal role in the effort to rebuild trust with Armenia and Armenians. Educating Turkish youth and involving them in civil society activities and specific responsibilities offers them a direct and participatory means to understand, appreciate, and contribute to the preservation of Armenian cultural heritage and memory, all of which is key to the long-term goal of rebuilding trust.

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<sup>744</sup> Ibid.

<sup>745</sup> Ibid.

<sup>746</sup> Ece Toksabay, "Turkey's last Armenian village fears for its future," REUTERS, accessed May 22, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-last-armenian-village-fears-its-future-after-quake-2023-02-25/>.

For example, as part of the 2022 Memory and Youth II project<sup>747</sup>, participants redesigned and updated the Memorialize Turkey website to encourage proactive participation in memorialization projects.<sup>748</sup> It involved revising existing content, incorporating new material, and improving the documentation of diverse memorialisation aspects.<sup>749</sup> This revamped platform also served as a space to capture and archive the experiences and reflections of individuals and groups engaged in memorialization efforts.<sup>750</sup>

Central to enhancing the Memorialize Turkey website, participants conducted interviews with workshop organizers and contributed essays inspired by their fieldtrip experiences.<sup>751</sup> One essay, titled ‘Impressions from the Antakya Field Trip’ as part of the 2022 Memory Youth Project, vividly recounted the visit to Vakıflı Köy.<sup>752</sup> The essay conveyed deep emotions related to the “richness of Armenian culture”<sup>753</sup> and highlighted the historical injustices endured by the ancient city, such as the loss of cultural heritage and the conversion of churches into mosques, along with the gradual disappearance of the Armenian language.<sup>754</sup> It emphasised the challenges presented by Turkey’s narrowing democratic space in the Presidential system and stressed the importance of remembering past hardships.<sup>755</sup> Additionally, it recognized Turkey’s diverse geographical and cultural landscape, dispelling the notion of a homogenous homeland and acknowledging the presence of various ethnic groups and religions.<sup>756</sup>

Another essay published following the war, titled ‘Houshamadyan: A Monument that revives Ottoman Armenian Life,’ was based on an interview between one of the project’s

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<sup>747</sup> Was made up of sixteen participants between the ages of 20 and 30 years old.

<sup>748</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, “Memory and Youth – II,” accessed May 22, 2023, <https://hakikatadalet.hafiza.org/en/calisma/memory-and-youth-ii/>.

<sup>749</sup> Ibid.

<sup>750</sup> Ibid.

<sup>751</sup> Ibid.

<sup>752</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, “Antakya saha gezisinden izlenimler,” accessed January 22, 2023, <https://hakikatadalet.medium.com/antakya-saha-gezisinden-izlenimler-58a1ce9f4562>.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid.

<sup>756</sup> Ibid.

participants and Arlet İncidüzen, a member of the Houshamadyan team.<sup>757</sup> The interview revealed that a large portion of the site's engagement came from Turkey, reflecting a growing interest among some in Turkey to explore their nation's Christian heritage.<sup>758</sup> The Berlin based non-profit association, Houshamadyan, established in 2011 by historian Vahé Tachjian, sought to "reconstruct and preserve the Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire through research".<sup>759</sup> This digital archive offers an immersive experience into the social and cultural existence of the Ottoman-era Armenians, offering photographs, vintage film footage, archival materials, correspondence, unpublished notes, and official documents.<sup>760</sup> As a collaborative platform, it invites visitors to contribute "memory objects" like photographs, memoirs, and books to expand its repository and safeguard memories.<sup>761</sup> Houshamadyan's integration into the updated Memorialize Turkey website underscores its role in addressing Turkey's historical past.<sup>762</sup>

### **Utilizing Technology for Memorialization: Exploring technological Approaches to Commemoration:**

As described earlier, the development of cultural heritage apps, with a specific focus on the heritage of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, emerged as a vital countermeasure to the state's deliberate erasure and neglect of these communities' histories and memories. In a climate where the state either disregards or actively works against the commemoration of these marginalized groups, technology remained central to the mission of heritage preservation. These apps, by virtue of their accessibility and interactive nature, transcend the constraints of traditional commemoration methods, ensuring that the cultural heritage and memory of these groups are preserved. By harnessing technology, these initiatives offer an immersive and engaging medium for storytelling, combining visual elements, oral histories, and expert insights. This approach fosters a comprehensive understanding of the past while

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<sup>757</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, "Houshamadyan: A monument that revives Ottoman Armenian Life," accessed January 22, 2023, <https://hakikatadalet.medium.com/huřamadyan-osmanlı-ermeni-yařamını-canlandırır-bir-anıt-5cf118cf445f>.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid.

<sup>759</sup> Houshamadyan, "What is Houshamadyan?" accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.houshamadyan.org/introduction/what-is-houshamadyan.html>.

<sup>760</sup> Ibid.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid.

<sup>762</sup> Hafiza Merkezi, "Houshamadyan: A monument that revives Ottoman Armenian Life."

inviting broader public participation in the preservation of these memories. Thus, these cultural heritage apps represent a dynamic and inclusive method for safeguarding the heritage, memory, and history of these communities, which is particularly significant in the face of state-driven efforts to erasure or obscure their existence.

Hrant Dink Foundation: The Hrant Dink Foundation introduced the mobile application KarDes to present the collective memory, comprehensive narratives, and diverse stories of Turkey.<sup>763</sup> Users can explore the historical layers of Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, including over 900 multicultural buildings in Istanbul<sup>764</sup> and nearly 200 in Ankara.<sup>765</sup> The app offers more than 30 memory tours, each providing a unique journey through the past.<sup>766</sup> In its first week, KarDes was downloaded by 8,000 individuals,<sup>767</sup> with a promotional video on Twitter gaining nearly 500,000 interactions and approximately 200,000 views,<sup>768</sup> showcasing the interest for preserving cultural heritage and city memories.

KarDes also serves as a repository of seventy oral history interviews with local residents, allowing listeners to immerse themselves in neighbourhood stories and recollections.<sup>769</sup> The app includes over 1,000 photographs, enabling individuals to envision themselves walking through these historic areas.<sup>770</sup> Alongside acknowledging existing structures, it sheds light on those lost to history. Conversations with former residents helps resurrects suppressed memories, and breathes life into the sites and structures once integral to these landscapes. Although many of these structures no longer physically exist, listeners can visualise their past

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<sup>763</sup>Gunsu Durak, "KarDes is in Ankara: The trace of the city can be followed step by step," *Gazete Duvar*, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www-gazeteduvar-com-tr.translate.goog/kardes-ankarada-kentin-izi-adim-adim-takip-edilebiliyor-haber-1569615? x tr sl=tr& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc& x tr hist=true>.

<sup>764</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "Discover Istanbul with KarDes mobile application!," accessed 21 December 2022, <https://hrantdink.org/en/activities/projects/cultural-heritage/2177-discover-istanbul-with-kardes-mobile-application>.

<sup>765</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "New Content from KarDes: Ankara," <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/cultural-heritage/3820-new-content-from-kardes-ankara>.

<sup>766</sup> <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/cultural-heritage/4004-new-content-from-kardes-i-zmir-tours>.

<sup>767</sup> Vartan Estukian, Multicultural Istanbul is now in your pocket, *Agos*, Accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www-agos-com-tr.translate.goog/tr/yazi/23476/kardes-ile-cokkulturlu-istanbul-artik-cebinizde? x tr sl=tr& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc>.

<sup>768</sup> Ibid.

<sup>769</sup> Hrant Dink Founation, "Discover Istanbul with KarDes mobile application!"

<sup>770</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "KarDes memory tour workshops," <https://hrantdink.org/en/bolis/activities/projects/cultural-heritage/2422-kardes-memory-tour-workshops>.



appearances and understand their significance to the Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks who inhabited these cities.

The app's Research Coordinator, Mehmet Polatel, highlighted one of the foundations key objectives: unveiling the obscured parts of these cities hidden by official history.<sup>771</sup> Atom Saska, the Project Coordinator of the Hrant Dink Foundation Cultural Heritage team, acknowledged the project's challenges, including the scarcity of surviving structures and the reluctance of some locals to discuss the painful traumas of the past.<sup>772</sup> The organization utilizes social media, particularly the Foundation's Instagram, to promote KarDes. They post updates and provide examples of app content, including photographs, eyewitness testimonies, and information about specific sites and historic events. For example, they highlighted the 1916 Ankara and 1922 Izmir Fires, which had a devastating impact on Christian neighbourhoods in these cities.<sup>773</sup>

**Anadolu Kültür:** With funding provided by Kavala while he was incarcerated,<sup>774</sup> Anadolu Kültür introduced the Ani Mobile Application for sharing, exploring and visualising the history of the historic Armenian city, Ani, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the present day.<sup>775</sup> The app's development involved experts from Armenia, Turkey and the United States who had participated in workshops held in Yerevan, Istanbul and Kars.<sup>776</sup>

As argued by Watenpaugh, Ani has become a focal point for preservation efforts and a symbol of memory politics in modern day Turkey.<sup>777</sup> It holds international significance as an architectural masterpiece and is revered by Armenians globally as a sacred place

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<sup>771</sup> Özgür Duygu Durdur, "Osman Kavala's dream come true: trilingual mobile application for Ani," *Gazete duvaR.*, accessed June 14, 2023, <https://www-gazeteduvar-com-tr.translate.goog/osman-kavalanin-hayali-gercek-oldu-ani-icin-uc-dilli-mobil-uygulama-haber-1623290? x tr sl=tr& x tr tl=en& x tr hl=en& x tr pto=sc& x tr hist=true>.

<sup>772</sup> Ibid.

<sup>773</sup> Hrantdinkfoundation. "I can't turn back."

<sup>774</sup> Özgür Duygu Durdur, *Osman Kavala's dream come true: trilingual mobile application for Ani.*

<sup>775</sup> Ibid.

<sup>776</sup> Anadolu Kültür, Ani Mobile Application, accessed August 23, 2023, <https://www.anadolukultur.org/EN/34-our-works/178-ani-mobile-application/>.

<sup>777</sup> Watenpaugh, "Preserving the Medieval City of Ani: Cultural Heritage between Contest and Reconciliation." 460.

representing nationhood and sovereignty.<sup>778</sup> However, although Turkey's official culture and tourism discourse recognizes some cultural groups in its modern identity, it fails to acknowledge Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in its conceptions and celebrations of Turkish heritage, identity, and history.<sup>779</sup> For example, since its designation as a World Heritage Site in 2016, Ani has witnessed a surge in tourism, with 66,200 visitors in 2021.<sup>780</sup> Yet, official information boards at the site omit Ani's Armenian heritage. The Ani app fills this gap by providing comprehensive insights into the city's Armenian history, ensuring that its memory endures despite the state's attempt to erase it.

The Ani Mobile Application when launched opens with a satellite image of the city's comprehensive map, encompassing the 45 surrounding structures. Users can click on icons to navigate to specific locations, including monuments, structures, rivers, valleys, or villages, both existing and those that have vanished over time. The app features a quiz to challenge users' knowledge and includes expert-narrated historical information.<sup>781</sup> Dedicated sections on Ani's epigraphy and the Armenian alphabet are also included.<sup>782</sup> Ismail Yavuz Özkaya, Chairman on the board of KMKD, described Ani as a "living being," emphasizing its cultural and historical significance, highlighting that it is more than just a collection of ruins but a repository of memories and heritage demanding preservation and recognition.<sup>783</sup>

Anadolu Kültür, similarly to the Hrant Dink Foundation, uses social media to promote its app. It regularly shares updates on both the Anadolu Kültür and Ani application Instagram accounts to assist users exploring the app.<sup>784</sup> Instagram serves as an informative platform. For example, it featured a segment of an interview with Çağla Parlak, Project Coordinator of the app,<sup>785</sup> on Artı TV an independent channel unaffiliated with the Turkish state.<sup>786</sup> The projects' goals, including fostering dialogue and cooperation with Armenia and Armenians,

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<sup>778</sup> Ibid.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid., 472.

<sup>780</sup> Daily Sabah, "Turkey's ancient city Ani visited by 34,500 tourists in 2 months," accessed January 02, 2023, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/tourism/turkeys-ancient-city-ani-visited-by-34500-tourists-in-2-months>.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

<sup>783</sup> Özgür Duygu Durdur, "Osman Kavala's dream come true: trilingual mobile application for Ani."

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

<sup>785</sup>

<sup>786</sup> Online-Television, "Artı TV online – Television live."

and the significance of digital applications in cultural heritage and memory preservation, were addressed.<sup>787</sup>

### **Interactive digital spaces:**

As emphasised in this chapter, after the 2020 war, the digital space became a vital tool for civil society in educating and building awareness about the memory and cultural heritage of minorities in Turkey. These platforms also offer interactive features such as virtual tours, archives, and multimedia resources, which enable users to connect with the history and heritage of Armenian, Greek, and Assyrians. Similar to the apps, these platforms transcend physical limitations, allowing individuals to explore, engage, and immerse themselves in the historical and contemporary legacies of these minority communities in Turkey.

For instance, on the third anniversary of the 23.5 Hrant Dink Memory Site, the Hrant Dink Foundation introduced a three-dimensional virtual tour of the location. This tour allows users to virtually explore and engage in activities available at the site, providing an immersive experience that simulates physical presence. Visitors can educate themselves on Hrant Dink's life and mission and explore rooms dedicated to non-Muslim history and culture in Turkey. For example, the corridor showcases events in Turkish history between 1996-2007 with corresponding *Agos* news stories and headlines, emphasising significant developments for minorities etched into the collective memory.<sup>788</sup> The Atlantis Civilization Room delves into Dink's childhood growing up as an Armenian in Turkey and highlights the cultural heritage of non-Muslim communities in Turkey.<sup>789</sup> Visitors can hear stories about the Armenian Children's Camp in Tulza,<sup>790</sup> which holds symbolic significance as it played a crucial role when Anatolia was left devoid of Armenian schools after 1915.<sup>791</sup> Orphaned and underprivileged Armenian children coming to Istanbul received their education at this camp, where approximately 1,500 children, including Hrant and Rakel Dink (Hrant's widow), once lived.<sup>792</sup>

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<sup>787</sup> Ani.application. Çağla Parlak, Project Coordinator of."

<sup>788</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "Story of 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory."

<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> Hrantdinksiteofmemory, "You can visit the 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory."

<sup>791</sup> Uygur Gültekin, "#StopDemolitionOfKampArmen," *Agos*, accessed March 22, 2023, <https://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/11433/stopdemolitionofkamparmen>.

<sup>792</sup> Ibid.

The couple later assumed responsibility for the camp, caring for numerous Armenian children before it was seized by the state in 1983.<sup>793</sup>

The virtual and interactive online space continued to play a crucial role in documenting cultural heritage assessed during fieldwork. For example, in 2021 KMKD launched [edirneheritage.org](http://edirneheritage.org), a dedicated platform for archiving their extensive documentation and risk assessments of architectural heritage within the province of Edirne. Visitors can find the publication, 'Edirne: Architectural Heritage at Risk', which summarizes fieldwork conducted between 25 July and August 6, 2021. The publication encompasses the examination of 49 Armenian and Greek structures, a risk matrix and a province-wide study aimed at assessing architectural history and identifying the current state of at-risk heritage.<sup>794</sup> As it did in its previously discussed documentation of Syriac heritage in Mardin and the Southern Islands of Marmara (table X/chapter 6), KMKD harnessed digital technologies to bolster archeological documentation. This involved creating 360-degree panoramic recordings of structures, developing digital models and utilizing photogrammetry to amalgamate on-site data into 3D models and panoramic images.<sup>795</sup> In doing so, visitors to the site can now take interactive tours, both inside and outside the structures, with the goal of raising awareness about cultural heritage and project sustainability.<sup>796</sup> This digital inventory creates a meaningful space for the commemoration of Armenian and Greek heritage in Turkey, ensuring that this cultural legacy has a place to exist and thrive, which is paramount to preserving its memory for generations to come.

Over nearly two decades, the four NGOs actively fostered a trustful relationship with Armenia, Armenians, and the diaspora. However, the 2020 Karabakh disrupted this relationship, eroding much of the hard-earned trust. This chapter outlined how the NGOs navigated these soft constraints that emerged, ensuring their continued efforts to preserve the cultural heritage and memory of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in Turkey.

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<sup>793</sup> Hrant Dink Foundation, "Who is Hrant Dink," accessed March 14, 2022, <https://hrantdink.org/en/hrant-dink/3565-who-is-hrant-dink>.

<sup>794</sup> Edirne Heritage, "Edirne: Documentation and Risk Assessment of Architectural Heritage," accessed October 23, 2023, <http://edirneheritage.org/en/edirne-documentation-and-risk-assessment-of-architectural-heritage/>.

<sup>795</sup> Edirne Heritage, "Digital Inventory," accessed October 23, 2023, <http://edirneheritage.org/en/digital-inventory/>.

<sup>796</sup> Ibid.

A crucial strategy involved engaging Turkish youth in group projects focused on cultural heritage, historical and collective memory, reconciliation and peace activism. As this chapter exemplified, this educational approach empowered the youth to conduct fieldwork, research, assume roles in civil society, and partake in cultural fieldtrips within and beyond Turkey. Leveraging social media and technology remained pivotal in heritage and memory preservation, manifesting in apps, interactive sites, 3-D photographs, and memory walks. This adaptive use of technology and youth engagement became essential for the NGOs to sustain their heritage preservation efforts and rebuilt trust with Armenia and Armenians amidst shifting geopolitical contexts. The following section will discuss this thesis's findings, their contributions to the existing literature and their potential for future scholarship.

## Discussion Section and Conclusion

This thesis fills a gap in the literature by offering in-depth insights into the dynamics of cultural heritage preservation NGOs operating in oppressive state structures. With a focus on Turkey as the case study, it sheds light on how these civil society organizations counter state-sanctioned erasure of indigenous people's memory and heritage in the face of both hard and soft constraints.

In the aftermath of the 2016 failed coup, these organizations navigated hard constraints such as arrests, imprisonment, attempts to shut down organizations and conferences, funding challenges and death threats. Followed by the 2020 Karabakh war, they faced a complex socio-political environment marked by breakdown of Armenian trust in Turkish society, leading to the cessation of collaborative cultural projects and restrictions on expressing solidarity with Armenia. Notably, the indictment of Osman Kavala on charges related to espionage with Armenia heightened these constraints, as it put him, other civil society members and organizations at risk. Despite these oppressive conditions, the four Turkish NGOs that were the focus of this thesis, Anadolu Kültür, Hrant Dink Foundation, KMKD, and Hafıza Merkezi, exhibited resilience, exercising agency by adapting and navigating constraints to continue to preserve the memory and cultural heritage of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks.

Additionally, key contributions and findings highlighted the strategic use of technology as a repository for cultural heritage preservation. This encompassed initiatives such as online tours to uncover forgotten histories, the developments of apps accessible to both Turkish and international audiences to discover the heritage and legacies of minorities, and the creation of interactive sites with 3D representations of heritage sites. Technology proved instrumental when key members of civil society such as Osman Kavala were imprisoned. Kavala continued to play a role remotely, making statements and participating in projects through digital means. Social media platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, served as educational tools, hosting live-streamed conferences and serving as repositories for educational materials that reached audiences within and outside Turkey.

Local stories became a crucial component in this preservation effort, woven into memory tours, oral history initiatives in apps, and in conducting fieldwork. By documenting the memories and stories of local residents, civil society aimed to bring back the memory of cultural heritage sites and rediscover lost histories in regions once home to Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. Additionally, initiatives were undertaken to educate and train local communities on heritage preservation as well as the importance of minority heritage to Turkey's landscape and memory.

Despite the challenges post-Karabakh war, which led to the cessation of collaborative projects with Armenia and Armenians, civil society pivoted to engage Turkish youth in cultural initiatives. This involved training them in heritage preservation, taking them to areas with significant Armenian heritage, and encouraging the participation in roles traditionally associated with civil society. This educational approach aimed to foster an understanding among Turkish youth of Armenians as integral to Turkey's landscape and shared history, countering the state's attempts to erase these identities from collective memory.

These findings contribute to the broader understanding of the ways in which civil society navigates constraints and exercises agency in order to continue their work to safeguard the collective memory and cultural heritage of indigenous communities within authoritarian regimes facing the erasure of their memory and heritage.

These findings contribute to the existing literature on civil society's role in safeguarding collective memory and cultural heritage within authoritarian regimes, particularly in the context of erasure faced by indigenous communities. The study provides nuanced insights into the strategies employed by civil society organizations in Turkey, operating in an increasingly oppressive socio-political environments marked by both hard and soft constraints. It further emphasises the connection between the politics of memory and cultural heritage.<sup>797</sup> The case of Turkey illustrates the ongoing struggle over memory within a state construction on the deliberate denial of 'the other.' Notably, the denial of the genocide against its Christian populations stands out as a compelling case, exemplifying the deep-

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<sup>797</sup> Apaydin, "The interlinkage of cultural memory, heritage and discourses of construction, transformation and destruction," 15.

seated influence of the politics of memory on a nation's collective memory. The research underscores that cultural heritage, especially in the case of indigenous groups such as Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, emerges as a central battleground in the ongoing struggle for memory. However, in the face of state attempts to efface legacies and heritage, cultural heritage also becomes a powerful instrument for resistance. The preservation of cultural heritage by civil society thus becomes not just an act of safeguarding the past by a resilient force of defiance against historical negation and erasure.

This thesis builds on recent scholarship highlighting the role of cultural monuments as "mnemonic devices conveying communal memories and identities."<sup>798</sup> Focusing on Turkey's erasure of Armenian, Assyrian, and Greek cultural heritage, the study applies the theoretical framework, illustrating how destruction functions as a tool for asserting control within an authoritarian regime, as previous scholars such as Tugba Tanyeri-Erdemir and Veysel Apaydin have found.<sup>799</sup> The findings provide specific insights into how erasure operates in Turkey, enriching the discourse on the intersection of the erasure of cultural heritage, collective memory, and identity amidst state-sponsored suppression.

This study also built on previous scholarship that explored the targeting and politicization of heritage and collective memory, particularly in the context of communities facing erasure.<sup>800</sup> Existing literature has argued that heritage and collective memory are often manipulated at a political level to influence and suppress communities rooted in their heritage.<sup>801</sup> The study builds on this foundation by offering a nuanced exploration of the ways in which political manipulation operates in the specific context of Turkey, focusing on erasure attempts against its Christian minorities. Furthermore, the study aligns with existing literature in emphasizing that deliberate destruction and erasure create an opportunity for the construction of a "new past."<sup>802</sup> However, it goes further by illustrating, through the Turkish case, how this construction is actively pursued by authoritarian regimes and resisted by civil society groups.

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<sup>798</sup> Tanyeri-Erdemir, "Remains of the Day: Converted Anatolian Churches," 72-73.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid.

<sup>800</sup> Bleibleh and Awad, "Preserving cultural heritage: Shifting paradigms in the face of war, occupation, and identity," 196.

<sup>801</sup> Silverman and Ruggles, "Cultural Heritage and Human Rights, in Cultural Heritage and Human Rights," 3.

<sup>802</sup> Bevan, *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War*, 67.



The literature has given limited attention given to individuals within civil society actively engaged in reconciliation efforts and their interactions with the state.<sup>803</sup> Thus this study contributes by providing a detailed examination of how civil society organizations adapt to both hard and soft constraints in an authoritarian environment.

Whilst much has been written on Turkish genocide denial, this study sheds light on the role of civil society organizations particularly those employing cultural heritage as a tool for dialogue on the denial of historical atrocities. This fills a void in the literature, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the actors involved in shaping narratives around challenging histories like genocide. Furthermore, my research extends existing scholarship regarding the reconciliatory role of civil society by highlighting the role cultural heritage plays in fostering dialogue.<sup>804</sup> By emphasizing that cultural heritage creates a safer space for dialogue, this thesis illustrates a potentially constructive approach to discussing sensitive topics. This adds depth to the literature by showcasing how civil society, through cultural heritage, can initiate conversations, challenge pre-existing prejudices, and ultimately foster reconciliation.

Existing literature stresses that the Turkish state's systematic efforts to conceal the record of its atrocities through official denial as one of the most successful examples of such actions in the modern era.<sup>805</sup> The contributions lie in the detailed examination of the continued struggle to preserve the memory of non-Muslim minorities, revealing how denialists face increased scrutiny and defensiveness within and outside Turkey.<sup>806</sup>

Existing scholarship highlights the entrenched role of the state in formulating and disseminating Turkey's foundational myth, suppressing critical historical reflection on its genocidal past.<sup>807</sup> Emphasizing the state's investment in engineering collective amnesia, this research exhibits the efforts of civil society organizations in Turkey, particularly those focused

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<sup>803</sup> Verdeja, "Unchopping a Tree: Civil Society and Reconciliation: Reconciliation in the aftermath of political violence," 136.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 136- 159.

<sup>805</sup> Dadrian, "The Signal facts surrounding the Armenian genocide and the Turkish denial syndrome," 269.

<sup>806</sup> Tatz, "The Conversation, Turkey, the Armenian Genocide and the Politics of Memory."

<sup>807</sup> Marsoobian, "Collective Memory, Memorialization and Bearing Witness in the Aftermath of the Armenian Genocide," 305-306.

on indigenous and minority cultural heritage, to confront and combat this amnesia. But this, as shown here, comes with structural challenges.

While aligning with existing literature acknowledging the shift in responsibility from sovereign states to broader societal obligations,<sup>808</sup> my findings underscore that NGOs not only carry responsibility of safeguarding cultural heritage but are also crucial contributors to reconciliation and peace-building efforts. This nuanced understanding of civil society's agency adds a valuable dimension to the existing discourse on heritage preservation.

Future research could compare across diverse authoritarian states to unveil and reveal how variations on civil society organizations adapt strategies to preserve heritage and memory in diverse political landscapes. By exploring cases beyond Turkey, researchers can uncover commonalities and disparities in the approaches taken by civil society organizations, shedding light on the contextual factors that shape their strategies. Understanding the nuances of adaptation across various authoritarian regimes is essential for developing comprehensive frameworks and tailored investigations that address the unique dynamics present in different political environments. Furthermore, the digital activism in this context necessitates an in-depth investigation into the technological hurdles faced by civil society, such as state-imposed restrictions on online content and surveillance measures aimed at stifling dissent.

Delving into the realm of digital activism and technology's role in heritage preservation presents another promising avenue for future research. A more nuanced investigation into the challenges and opportunities that civil society organizations face in leveraging digital platforms can uncover the intricacies of navigating state censorship and surveillance. This is essential for identifying effective strategies and tools that can empower civil society in utilizing technology as a resilient and impactful means for heritage preservation within oppressive environments.

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<sup>808</sup> Van der Auwera and Schramme, "Civil Society in the Field of Cultural Heritage," 59-60.

Exploring the long-term effects of cultural heritage preservation, particularly regarding civil society initiatives involving Turkish youth, is imperative for gaining a comprehensive understanding of societal transformations. The findings of this thesis, which predominantly focused on short-term effects, lay the groundwork for a deeper exploration into the enduring impact of initiatives targeting younger generations. Additionally, investigating the global influence on local initiatives may illuminate the impact of international support on the effectiveness of civil society endeavors in preserving heritage and memory.

### **Conclusion:**

This thesis has examined the agency exhibited by Turkish civil society organizations dedicated to preserving and protecting the memory and cultural heritage of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks in the face of escalating authoritarianism, state oppression, and post-war mistrust among their counterparts. Despite the constraints imposed, these NGOs have demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and a steadfast commitment to their mission.

Analysing two significant events—the failed 2016 coup and the Karabakh war—highlighted the ways in which these organizations exercised agency and adapted their strategies in response to evolving challenges to continue their crucial work. The persistence of these NGO’s work becomes particularly significant in the context of the Turkish state’s denial and narrative regarding the genocides, making it challenging to shift the prevailing narrative within the country. The ongoing erasure of cultural heritage adds urgency to the mission of preserving the memory of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks. The Turkish state’s denial of their historic presence further intensifies the importance of these civil society efforts, countering a narrative that seeks to erase the very existence of these communities from the lands they once called home.

Drawing on the insights of scholars like Kouymjian<sup>809</sup> and Balakian<sup>810</sup>, who emphasize the link between the destruction of cultural heritage and the continuation of genocidal policies, this thesis underscores the crucial role these NGOs play in preventing the erasure of memory.

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<sup>809</sup> Kouymjian, “The Destruction of Armenian Historical Monuments as a Continuation of the Turkish Policy of Genocide,” 175.

<sup>810</sup> Balakian, “Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide,” 83.

The displacement from historical lands and the tangible cultural heritage creates a profound sense of exile and longing for the past, contributing to the rupture of social and spiritual cohesion within these communities. This wound deepens for Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, as they not only witness but also mourn the ongoing erasure of their cultural heritage and, with that, their memory. The longing for a connection to their historical roots intensifies, contributing to a profound sense of exile and a yearning for a past that is increasingly at risk of being lost.

In the words of Edward Said, the battle for a remembered presence is fundamental for colonized people, and these NGOs are central to this struggle against memory erasure.<sup>811</sup> Their work becomes a vital contribution to the collective historical reality of Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, countering the rewriting of history and asserting their rightful place in the narrative of the lands they once inhabited. In essence, the mission of these NGOs is not just about preserving the memory of the past but ensuring a more just and inclusive future for all humanity.

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<sup>811</sup> Edward Said, "Palestine: memory, invention and space," in *The landscape of Palestine: equivocal poetry*, ed. Abu-Lughod, R Heacock and K Nashef (Birzeit: Birzeit University Publications, 1999) 12.

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