



# THE BATTLE OF GALLIPOLI: THE POLITICS OF REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING IN TURKEY

## La batalla de Gallipoli: las posturas políticas del recuerdo y el olvido en Turquía

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Differences in the competing versions of public memory for the Battle of Gallipoli have become more pronounced as we approach 18 March 2015 (in Turkey 18 March, the naval battle, marks the anniversary, not the landing of 25 April). For many decades, the official nationalist narrative portrayed Gallipoli as a “rehearsal” for or even as part of the War of Independence (1919-1922). The victory was due almost solely to the military genius of Mustafa Kemal. This public memory might have been dominant for decades, but competing versions also developed. This article will largely deal with what can be called the Islamized or “religionised” memory of Gallipoli. For some who adhere to this view, Gallipoli is where the “Turkish” soldier stopped the last Crusaders. For others, their version of the battle does not include Mustafa Kemal. Yet, both sides have something in common as they prepare to celebrate the victory. Both the nationalist and the Islamist memories ignore the possible connections to another event which is remembered on 24 April, the day before the Entente landing in Gallipoli: the order given for the deportation of Anatolian Armenians. The “celebration” for one is likely to overwhelm the remembrance and mourning of the other.



**Abstrac**

Gallipoli; Mustafa Kemal; Atatürk; remembrance; Armenians; Islam.  
*Gallipoli; Mustafa Kemal; Atatürk; recuerdo; armenios; Islam.*



**Key words**

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**Fechas**

*Las diferencias entre las versiones opuestas del recuerdo público de la Batalla de Gallipoli se han vuelto más pronunciadas al acercarnos al 18 de marzo de 2015 (en Turquía es el 18 de marzo, la batalla naval, el que marca el aniversario, no el desembarco del 25 de abril). Durante muchas décadas la narrativa nacionalista oficial representaba Gallipoli como un «ensayo» de, o incluso parte*



**Resumen**

*de, la Guerra de la Independencia (1919-1922). La victoria se debió casi prácticamente al ingenio militar de Mustafa Kemal. Este recuerdo público puede haber sido el dominante durante décadas, pero también se han desarrollado versiones rivales. Este artículo tratará en gran medida de lo que se puede denominar el recuerdo islamizado o «religionizado» de Gallipoli. Para algunos que se aferran a este punto de vista, Gallipoli es donde el soldado «turco» contuvo a los últimos Cruzados. Para otros, su versión de la batalla no incluye a Mustafa Kemal. Aún así, ambas partes tienen algo en común mientras se preparan para celebrar la victoria. Tanto los recuerdos nacionalistas como los islamistas ignoran las posibles conexiones con otro acontecimiento que se rememora el 24 de abril, el día antes del desembarco de la Entente en Gallipoli: la orden dada para deportar a los armenios anatolios. La «celebración» del uno posiblemente supere el recuerdo y el duelo del otro.*



The construction and maintenance of national identity heavily depend on the writing and recitation of selective histories of the imagined community. They are selective because certain choices or interventions are made by those who construct the national narrative about inclusion and exclusion, or about what is remembered, forgotten, marginalised, and even invented. National narratives aim to create a common past and shared hopes for the future to unite or maintain the unity of the community. The nature of the intervention is partially or perhaps even largely based on the needs of the present (Lowenthal, 1985, pp. xx, xvi). These imaginations about the past for the needs of the present are not based on history, but are actually “attempts to create history” (Geary, 2002, pp. 12, 37). Yet, since the present does not remain frozen in time, the needs of the “new” present change as well. War commemoration perhaps best illustrates these processes, including events’ shifting meanings and importance.

This article is about remembrances of the Battle of Gallipoli (1915) in Turkey, where it is commemorated not on 25 April, but on 18 March, the day of the naval battle. The Allied naval attempt to force the Dardanelles (*Çanakkale* in Turkish) strait on that day was a complete failure.<sup>1</sup> They returned, however, little over a month later on the early morning of 24-25 April for an amphibious landing. After eight months of fighting the Allies gained very little, and finally withdrew. With the last of the enemy troops escaping on 8 January 1916, the Ottomans had scored a great victory over the Allies. But while they might have won the battle, the Ottomans lost the war in 1918. The essay will examine two competing and sometimes overlapping narratives of the Battle of Gallipoli. The first is the “secular-nationalist” narrative, which dominated the public remembrance of the battle for many decades. The second is a narrative that challenges it most directly and at the popular level: the “conservative-religious” narrative.<sup>2</sup> As we approach the centennial anniversary of the battle in 2015, the differences as well as some similarities between the two narratives become clearer and I will discuss each “community of remembrance” to highlight the “competition” for the attention, allegiance and cultural values of Turkish

1 Turks refer to the Battle of Gallipoli as *Çanakkale Savaşı* (the Battle of Çanakkale). Gallipoli or Gelibolu is the name of the peninsula on which most of the battles took place; the peninsula takes its name from the town of Gelibolu near the north end of the strait. The strait between Gallipoli peninsula and the Asian land mass is the Dardanelles (or *Çanakkale Boğazı*). In quotations from Turkish originals I have kept the term *Çanakkale*.

2 Although nationalism is also very much part of this narrative, conservative Islamic themes stand out just as much. People who espouse this view generally imbue the battle or the soldiers with religious principles or bring them into conformity with religious notions.

citizens and those beyond.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the article will briefly consider the connections then and now between the battle and a dreadful event that started with a state order on 24 April 1915: the deportation of the Anatolian Armenians.

Examined below are the works of both professional historians and those we might classify as amateur or local historians. The latter are read or heard by the general public much more widely. First, writing as popular historians, they are more accessible. Second, some of them have newspaper columns or appear on television shows, which increase their visibility. Consequently, their words become more influential in guiding or frequently manipulating how the nation's past should be understood or remembered.

## From Ottoman Great War to Turkish Great War

Unlike other belligerents, the Ottoman Empire (Turkey after 1923) experienced wars both immediately before and after the First World War.<sup>4</sup> Rather than being a major point of crisis as in Europe, the Ottoman Great War, as catastrophic as it was, represented a middle ground between the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) and the War of Independence, or the National Struggle (1919-1923). The latter started when the Anatolian heartland was divided up and occupied by Greece, France, Italy and the UK in the aftermath of defeat in 1918. By 1919, a nationalist resistance movement developed under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal (later Atatürk), who had risen to fame at Gallipoli. In this War of Independence Greece was defeated and the others withdrew from Anatolia. This was followed by the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

In the post-1923 period, the republican political and intellectual elite, in their attempt to establish a secular nation state, rejected the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. This rejection was also visible in the developing nationalist historiography, where the War of Independence soon came to represent a clear break with the Ottoman past. Historians generally adopted either 1918 or 1923, or a date between the two, such as 1919, as the starting date for the history of modern Turkey. Thus, everything before it, including the Great War, became “pre-history” in the history of the nation-state. This vision of history quickly filtered into national textbooks. Starting in the 1923-24 school year, a course entitled *Malumat-ı Vataniyye* (National Information, or Civics) was introduced for the seventh and eighth grades, which began the history of Turkey with the War of Independence. Similarly, state-mandated middle and high school history textbooks began with the conclusion of the Treaty of Mudros in 1918. For a number of years, the Great War was mostly excluded from this history.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1930s, however, the Ottoman Great War started to make its way into the nationalist narrative and historiography in limited episodes. And the main episode of the Great War that met the suitability requirement was Gallipoli. Contradictory tendencies of inclusion and exclusion are nicely illustrated in the official *Türk Ansiklopedisi* (Turkish Encyclopedia), a project initiated in the 1940s. The *Ansiklopedi* devoted a total of five-and-a-half pages to the Great

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3 “Collective memory” is a problematic term for other reasons as well, but in this context it becomes even less useful. “Community of remembrance” comes from Worthy (2004).

4 Russia, with its revolution and civil war after the Great War, should be noted as well.

5 See Karal (1960). This book was accepted as a history textbook for high school by the Ministry of Education. It went through several editions, but no major change was made with the exception of bringing it up to date; a very similar structure is found in Şapolyo (2013). See also: Aslan (1992) and Yanıkdağ (2013, pp. 254-55) and the sources therein.

War, with a majority of that space devoted to the Battle of Gallipoli, where Mustafa Kemal is mentioned frequently. The same work included nearly six times as many pages on the War of Independence.<sup>6</sup>

The nationalist political and intellectual elite had settled on two ways to make use of the Great War in general and the Battle of Gallipoli in particular. In the republican nationalist narrative, the Great War and its resulting destruction became a dark, unfortunate, but nevertheless necessary, event that paved the way for the rebirth of the nation (Köroğlu, 2006a, pp. 45-46; Köroğlu, 2006b, pp. 224-230). How did this happen? In some ways, even before the Turkish Republic was established, the post-war Ottoman government's rulings about the Great War paved the way for how the republic viewed the war as well. After the wartime leaders (Enver, Talat, and Cemal Pashas) fled the country in 1918, the post-war government established tribunals to investigate the entry into the war and the deportation of Armenians, likely as a way to forestall the fury of the invading powers. These trials concluded that the empire had been hijacked by the above-named individuals who had pushed the empire into an unnecessary war and committed crimes against humanity by deporting and killing Armenians (Akçam & Dadrian, 2011). This theme of the "unnecessary war" and the recklessness of the wartime leadership found its way into the nationalist narrative of the Republic. Similar sentiments likely developed among the populace, who had witnessed the destruction. Thus, a line in an anonymous folk song went like this: "Stupid people believed in German promises" (Günbulut, 1999, p. 140). The "people" here are the wartime leadership. Their recklessness was turned into something more sinister in other folksongs. Though written at the end of the 1930s, several lines from the socialist poet Nazım Hikmet's epic poem about the National Struggle illustrate this very well (Ran, 1986, lines 62-73):

We saw the fire and betrayal.  
 And in the market of the bloody bankers  
 Those who sold the country to the Germans  
 and rested on the bodies of those who had died [in war]  
 now worried about their own lives.  
 And to save their heads from the people's wrath  
 they fled in the dark.  
 Wounded, tired, and poor was the nation, but  
 it was [still] fighting the most ferocious countries.  
 It was fighting still so that it was not enslaved twice,  
 so that it was not robbed twice.

Nazım Hikmet sets up a contrast between the two wars as many others had done and would do. In comparison, the War of Independence became the war that resolved the wrongs and injustices of the Great War. As one historian who aimed to show the difference put it, the War of Independence was fought, on one hand, "against conservative, reactionary, traditionalist [and...] internal opposition forces"; and on the other, it was fought "against imperialist, capitalist, colonialist and opportunist outside forces". The Great War represented the dark times, but the War of Independence "directed Turkish people towards life in a modern world", while also inspiring "rebellions of oppressed peoples" around the world (Kaymaz, 1976, p. 616). The contrast was

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6 *Türk ansiklopedisi*, s.v. "Dünya harbi, I" and "İstiklal harbi".

stark: the Great War almost destroyed the nation, but the War of Independence saved it and encouraged other people in other nations who were oppressed.

Simultaneously, the Battle of Gallipoli was selectively separated from Ottoman history and appropriated into the republican history either to serve as a “rehearsal” for the War of Independence or simply as part of it (Köroğlu, 1999). The works of literature on Gallipoli were soon included in anthologies with generic titles such as “Turkish literature and the War of Independence”.<sup>7</sup> Such appropriation is also found in juvenile literature. In *Those who gave us this land* (1975) the author traced the lives of four heroes, each of whom is introduced with a bold caption that reads “From Among the Heroes of Our War of Independence”. Of the four introduced, two heroes had served in the Gallipoli campaign and later joined the War of Independence, while the other two served only in the War of Independence (Nesin, 1988). Clearly, the important criterion was to have served in the War of Independence, but of all the Ottoman battles Gallipoli was the only one worthy of inclusion. As the stories do not clearly distinguish Gallipoli from the War of Independence, there is the implication that the two are related, or even part of the same war. The appropriation of Gallipoli into the National Struggle clearly stood outside the relations of time, or chronology, but this “fact” was less important than what was needed to unify the national community (Özkrımlı, 2005, p. 183).

The appropriation of the battle was accompanied by its rewriting and reinterpretation by some authors as well. Perhaps much more than the way he may have viewed it himself, many nationalist-secular histories represented the victory at Gallipoli as if almost solely based on the military effort and genius of Mustafa Kemal. This was partially the consequence of treating two separate stages of the battle – the naval battle and the landing – as if they were one and celebrating the Gallipoli victory on 18 March, when the Entente armada attempted and failed to force the Dardanelles. On that day, the enemy was defeated by mines and Ottoman artillery fire (Erickson, 2001, p. 79-80). As an infantry officer, Mustafa Kemal was present, but played only a supporting role. The second stage started in the early hours of 24-25 April, when the enemy landed at several locations on the Gallipoli peninsula, including at Ariburnu (Anzac beachhead), where the Anzac forces made contact with the Ottoman defenders. As military historian Edward J. Erickson puts it, Lieutenant Colonel (promoted to colonel within a month of arrival at the front) Mustafa Kemal sensed that this was no diversionary landing and committed his division to stop the attack without waiting for orders from General Liman von Sanders, who was in charge of the Fifth Army defending the area. Using official histories of the office of the Chief of Staff (TCS), Erickson (2001, p. 83) claims that “the final result of the battle probably rested on this single dramatic action”. Again, in August 1915, when the British landed at Suvla Bay with a large force, Mustafa Kemal was put in charge of four divisions to hold the enemy before the Anafarta ridgelines, which he accomplished (Erickson, 2001, p. 90-91). During the land battles, he thus showed himself to be an able commander who sometimes took the initiative.

Mustafa Kemal’s crucial role in Ariburnu and Anafartalar is undeniable. However, starting in the 1930s, there was a tendency among some authors to represent the victory at Gallipoli as being determined solely by his actions. For example, the “Foreword” to an edited collection, published by the TCS on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the battle, states: “The Çanakkale legend achieved by the exalted leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who ordered

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7 Among others, see Enginün, Kerman & İleri (1998).

'Little Mehmet' (*Mehmetçik*) "not to attack but to die," also determined the strategy of the Turkish War of Independence" (Güven, 1990, p. 1).<sup>8</sup> Thereafter a number of the fifteen essays in the collection repeat the famous order Mustafa Kemal gave upon his arrival on the scene to the soldiers who had first met the numerically superior enemy at Arıburnu: "I order you not to attack but to die." Some authors also repeat the appropriation noted above: that the battle here was "the beginning and forerunner of the War of Independence and the national uprising". (Özdoğan, 1990, pp. 161, 165). A speech given by the Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz in 2002 well illustrates the same secular-nationalist (and Kemalist) rhetoric:

Starting first with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk who wrote the Dardanelles Victory into the pages of history with gold letters, I hereby recognize all our heroes with gratitude. Despite poverty, scarcity, and other difficult conditions which characterized the battle [on our side], the victory gained at the end provided the morale, confidence, and belief for our nation to win the War of Independence. Mustafa Kemals and the Little Mehments, who formed the backbone of the War of Independence, were born in the Dardanelles. What was won at the Dardanelles is not an ordinary battle; it was really about a nation's sovereignty, future, and existence. ("Çanakkale zaferi kutlanıyor", 2002)

In this statement, the Battle of Gallipoli, while being integrated into the War of Independence, also becomes the cornerstone of the nation as it is the site where the national hero first rose to prominence. A similar view is clearly reflected in the title of a recent booklet: *Çanakkale, where the savior was born* (2014). Thus, Gallipoli becomes the metaphoric birthplace of Mustafa Kemal, who saved and gave life to the nation (Görgülü, 2014). Considering that in the earlier part of the twentieth century the official history of the nation did not initially include the Ottoman Great War, Gallipoli's meaning in the national imagination had changed tremendously by the opening of the twenty-first century.

Along with the "nationalisation" of the battle, another feature was its Turkification as most secular-nationalist works ignore the contribution or even presence of non-Turks at Gallipoli. The Ottoman Empire was a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society even if ethnic Turks might have constituted the majority of the army (Yanıkdağ, 2013, p. 31). Arabs, who were the largest non-Turkish group to fight there, are frequently represented as unreliable or prone to desertion (Akbaş, 1990, p. 94). Non-Muslims are almost never mentioned in these kinds of accounts. Another part of the speech by Mesut Yılmaz quoted above, for example, describes those who fought as "hundreds of thousands of Turkish people who came from various parts of Anatolia with their different lifestyles, different customs, different clothes, and different intellect" ("Çanakkale zaferi kutlanıyor", 2002). But different ethnicities or religions are not mentioned. Since Gallipoli became a cornerstone of the nation and the forerunner of the War of Independence, the presence of non-Turks became difficult to explain; thus they were generally excluded collectively. Along with von Sanders, who was in charge of the campaign, there were several hundred Germans at Gallipoli (Erickson, 2001, pp. 77-81). Are they part of the remembrance of the battle? Not surprisingly, they are not; at least not in a positive way. Frequently, they are either ignored by historians or written off as having alternative agendas. For some authors, the defence plan prepared by von Sanders, with which some of the Ottomans under his command disagreed, points to a dark plan. Either directed by Berlin, or on his own initiative, von Sanders,

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8 Hereafter cited as *Çanakkale muharebeleri* when referring to other articles from this volume of proceedings.

the argument goes, had created a defensive plan that would make it easy for the enemy to land on the Gallipoli peninsula; therefore, his intention must have been to draw in the largest number of Allied troops as possible to relieve the pressure on the Western Front (Kabasakal, 1990, p. 85). Using the memoirs of Hans Kannengiesser, another German at Gallipoli, Ayhan Aktar describes the burial of artillery officer Lieutenant Hans Woermann to illustrate how the Germans have been omitted from the history of the battle. Relating that Woermann, as a soldier of the “Turkish-German alliance”, received Islamic rites – a prayer by an imam and his face was turned towards Mecca in the grave – under an Ottoman flag as he was buried in Gallipoli, Aktar (2014) writes that “Completely ignoring its allies and crying only after its own dead is a special talent that belongs to the historians of the Republic.”<sup>9</sup> His point is that while the Ottomans soldiers and officers recognised the contributions of their allies, the secular-nationalist and conservative-religious historians continue to ignore them in order to underscore the reputed “Turkishness” or “Muslimness” of the war effort.

## Islamization of the Battle

Over roughly the last two decades, a different kind of politically and culturally motivated remembrance of the battle has come to challenge the dominant secular-nationalist narrative. This new version, represented mostly by conservative-religious writers, can be said to be multi-layered, but there are some common features to this Islamization of the battle.

One outstanding feature among many of the conservative-religious accounts of Gallipoli is that they either completely ignore or go to great lengths to prove that Mustafa Kemal had little or no role to play at Gallipoli. The most common argument is that Mustafa Kemal was only a lieutenant colonel with many other officers present more senior to him. Therefore, whatever his actions, the victory cannot be attributed solely to him or to his deeds. Abdurrahman Dilipak (2012), a conservative-Islamic journalist and author of books on the republican period, asked in 2012: “Who was the commanding officer in charge in Çanakkale? Where did Mustafa Kemal stand in comparison to others in this hierarchy?” To be frank, Dilipak is not really interested in who was in command, for the answer would be a German, but only in that it was not Mustafa Kemal. If he was not in charge, then he cannot be responsible for the victory. Thus, popular writers like Dilipak would argue that Mustafa Kemal cannot become a symbol “for the Savior who was born in Çanakkale”.

Challenging the embellishments of the secular-nationalist narrative about Gallipoli sometimes leads to exaggerated assertions by the other side. The same writer argues elsewhere that Mustafa Kemal was merely a staff officer and thus had nothing to do directly with the fighting (Dilipak, 1989). Presumably referring to the false allegation that Mustafa Kemal was not in Gallipoli on 18 March, a claim which has gained some traction among conservative-religious commentators, another author asserts that Mustafa Kemal could not have played a role in the victory because he was not even present (Salihoğlu, 2011). But because he refers to the “Çanakkale victory”, without distinguishing between the two stages of the battle, he compounds the mistake by giving the impression that Mustafa Kemal was absent from the peninsula for the entire

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<sup>9</sup> Although I had been thinking about the Islamization of the remembrance of Gallipoli in conservative public discourse for some years, it was great to find confirmation (and written evidence) of some of them in Ayhan Aktar’s hard-hitting article in *Taraf* newspaper.

period. Some authors avoid mentioning Mustafa Kemal's name altogether, even when they refer specifically to the land battle. Others grudgingly admit to Mustafa Kemal's presence during this phase, but generally minimise his role in the important Anafartalar battle. One argues that he was in command of only a "reserve unit" and that he wasted soldiers' lives, or that credit for the victory at Anafartalar does not belong to him but to those who trained the units that were put under his command (Mırsiroğlu, 1992, pp. 157, 158, 161-164). It will be remembered, as we have seen, that von Sanders had placed him in charge of four divisions at Anafartalar.

If many secular-nationalists tended to give nearly all the credit to Mustafa Kemal for the victory at Gallipoli, the conservative-religious writers tend to go to the other extreme. But if not him, who was responsible for the victory? Before examining this question, we should first draw attention to one radical interpretation of Gallipoli. Some conservative-religious writers, most likely deliberately confusing the battle with the war, argue that Gallipoli was not a victory but a defeat because in the end the imperial capital of Istanbul was occupied by the British in 1918 (Dilipak, 2014). This marginal viewpoint aside, many in this group see Gallipoli as a victory even if they think Mustafa Kemal played little role. For political, nationalistic, and religious reasons the plaudits cannot be given to von Sanders as the victorious commander.<sup>10</sup> Nor, as Kadir Mırsiroğlu suggests, can credit be given to any member of the officer corps:

Even though the Çanakkale battles are a source of great honor for "Little Mehmet", it cannot at all be a source of pride for those commanding officers... Certainly, we cannot speak of the success of a cadre of officers who managed to bury four hundred thousand sons of the homeland in the hills of Çanakkale. Doubtless, the number one reason for the high battle casualties is the bankrupt system of management and command. Given this, none of the commanders there can be attributed the quality of being a "hero" or a "liberator". If anyone does so, then it cannot be anything but absolute lies and dishonesty. (Mırsiroğlu, 1992, p. 156)

The implication here is that the Ottoman soldiers collectively, rather than a single omniscient commander, were responsible for the victory. This in itself might not be a bad thing. However, it is obvious that the choice of the ordinary soldiers as victors is a political act.

As the foregoing quotation indicates, a number of commentators incorrectly report or exaggerate the battle casualties. Mırsiroğlu writes that 250,000 died on the battlefield as martyrs, and an additional 150,000 died from wounds in hospitals, which brings the number of dead from Gallipoli alone to 400,000 (Mırsiroğlu, 1992, p. 293). Official statistics put the battlefield dead at just over 57,000 with some 97,000 wounded and 11,178 men missing. 21,000 of the hospitalised died. All this brings the total to roughly 78,000 dead (Erickson, 2001, p. 93). Mırsiroğlu is not alone in this exaggeration of casualties, though there seems to be a greater tendency among conservative-religious writers to report such high numbers. Ramazan Eren's *The Meaning of Çanakkale and Story of 250,000 Martyrs*, for example, went through eight printings by 2005 and the eighth printing was a "newly revised edition" which still failed to report the numbers correctly (Eren, 2005).<sup>11</sup> When the 250,000 dead started to appear more frequently in the print media in the early 2000s, the TCS, which controls the military archives, made a public

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10 M. Armağan points to Enver pasha as the hero of Gallipoli since he was the Minister of War at the time: Armağan (2011, March 20).

11 See also Eren (2002). Another writer, A. Koçak (2006), who may or may not be of different ideological bent, also reports the "martyrs" as 250,000.

correction and put the exact number of dead on the battlefield at 57,263. Yet this correction, it seems, was ignored by many, especially by those conservative-religious writers (“Çanakkale şehidi 57 bin”, 2000).

Two factors explain the tendency to report the dead at 250,000 (or more) even after official corrections. First, many “popular historians”, and even some “professional” ones, make frequent use of a “copy-and-paste” method of “history” writing without questioning their sources. Because many of the popular works are not based on original archival research, they repeat the mistakes of others, elevating them to “truth”. Second, possible myth-making about martyrdom and sacrifice might be in evidence. How could such a great battle have *only* 57,000 martyrs? Arguably, in such thinking, what makes a battle “great” are the sacrifices made: the greater the sacrifice, the greater the battle. Some of what follows might provide further clues to the meaning of greatly inflated numbers.

## 18 March as Martyrs’ Day

In June 2002 the centre-right ruling party, the ANAP, led by Mesut Yılmaz, introduced a resolution to re-designate 18 March as Martyrs’ Day; until then, 18 March was the official Çanakkale Victory Day.<sup>12</sup> The original motivation behind the re-designation was nationalist in nature: these men died for the nation in a battle that both inspired and was part of the War of Independence, which symbolised the rebirth of the nation. We saw this in Mesut Yılmaz’s statement above. However, even if he did not intend it, renaming it also gave it a more religious meaning because martyrdom itself is a religious concept tied to Islam. Later in 2002, the social conservative and Islamist party, the AKP (which is still in office at the time of writing) came to power (Parmaksız, 2012, p. 289-91).<sup>13</sup> In the subsequent years a palpable change has become visible in how Gallipoli is commemorated by conservative-religious writers and the ruling party.

Perhaps the most noticeable aspect of the post-2002 commemoration is “Çanakkale martyr tourism”, which has reached phenomenal proportions. Briefly, many municipal administrations in Istanbul, Ankara, Konya, Izmir and other cities fund free bus tours for their residents to the Gallipoli battlefields as part of their “service” to citizens. These are large undertakings. It seems that from the municipality of Selçuk in Izmir, a fifth of the population, or 105 bus loads, went to Gallipoli in a single convoy (Değirmencioğlu, 2014, p. 352-353). Although other parties’ municipal governments also participate, AKP-ruled areas tend to produce grander convoys of visitors. One municipality, among many in Istanbul, took nearly 150,000 visitors to Gallipoli in five years; the same municipality even produced a documentary (and a musical soundtrack of laments therein) about Gallipoli.<sup>14</sup> In 2008 over 200 martyr-tourism-organising municipalities were operating – probably many more today – and it was predicted that more than one million Turks would visit the battlefields in 2009 (Değirmencioğlu, 2014, pp. 352-353, 367-72).<sup>15</sup> With at least a million visitors every year since 2007, it has been estimated that by 2013 over ten per cent of the population of Turkey have taken part in martyr

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12 Officially, and more correctly, the Gallipoli Naval Victory Day, but it was simply known as Gallipoli Victory Day.

13 The ANAP had a coalition government with the DSP and the MHP.

14 The cover of the film and the soundtrack has the following inscription: “No other war was this bloody. No other piece of land carried so much (spiritual) value”.

15 See also <http://www.haberler.com/turkiye-genelinde-200-belediye-kultur-gezisi-haberi/> for further information.

tourism (Değirmencioglu, 2014, pp. 367-68). Whatever principles visitors might hold – secular, religious, or something else – visiting the graves of martyrs and hearing stories about them becomes yet another way of imagining the nation.

Given the number of participants, martyr tourism has become an “industry” requiring more battlefield guides, and maybe even bus companies and drivers. Presumably, some long-time guides continued to do their job, but the attraction of financial gain resulted in new, self-appointed guides who pitched their stories about the battle according to the ideological or religious leaning of the visitors. Consequently, in 2004 the TCS liaised with the Ministry of Culture to introduce certification and a ten-day training course for Gallipoli guides (“Çanakkale’yi sertifikalı rehberler anlatacak”, 2004). The training may have curbed some of the worst excesses, but it seems that some popular works on Gallipoli still contain stories with conspicuous ideological and religious agendas. Although publications by the TCS on the battle regularly feature stories of the bravery of “Turkish” (not Ottoman) soldiers, the heroic legends some religiously-leaning books relate leave the realm of documentary history and enter that which its critics call *hurafe*: incorrect religious belief based not on the Quran, but on superstition and legends (Görgülü, 2014, pp. 58-59). We will call them religious legends.

Critics accuse the authors of these publications of exploiting visitors’ religious sensibilities. The religious legends are many and wide-ranging, but it will suffice briefly to highlight a few. For example, a number note that the Prophet Muhammad was present (in spirit) to assist the “Turkish side” (Uğurluel, 2005, pp. 141-154). According to some authors, he appeared before Cevat Pasha, the Fortified Area Commander of Gallipoli, in a dream with specific instructions about where to place the last remaining twenty-six mines just before the naval battle (Görgülü, 2014, p. 59; Uğurluel, 2005, pp. 146-54, 199-200; Vakkasoğlu, 2004, pp. 56-57; Güzel, 1996, p. 54).<sup>16</sup> These were the mines largely responsible for the sinking of large ships on 18 March. Sometimes these books have chapter titles such as “Intervention of Spiritual Dynamics”, or “Supernatural Phenomena at Çanakkale” (Uğurluel, 2005, p. 175). Taking their cue from an early-twentieth-century conservative writer and poet, Mehmet Akif, who wrote poems about Gallipoli, various works compare the Ottomans fighting in Gallipoli to the early Muslim soldiers who fought along with the Prophet in the battle of Badr (13 March 624) (Vakkasoğlu, 2004, p. 180; Uğurluel, 2005, p. 131). One story describes how a white cloud or fog landed on a group of enemy soldiers and lifted them away (Vakkasoğlu, 2004, p. 158; Güzel, 1996, p. 48; Hurç, 1999, pp. 76-77).<sup>17</sup>

In recent years, a new kind of religious-political association developed between the battle and specific aspects of Islam. Since 2012, the AKP’s Istanbul headquarters has organised an annual fast-breaking event during the month of Ramadan, which takes place at Gallipoli. Because Ramadan is based on the Islamic lunar calendar (354 days), it moves every year in relation to the Gregorian calendar. In 2012, Ramadan started in late July, not a significant date for the battle. Yet, in this event, the title of which translates as “Fast breaking programme with martyrs’ menu”, thousands of believers broke their daytime fasting by eating only what the Ottoman soldiers in

*Given the number of participants, martyr tourism has become an “industry” requiring more battlefield guides, and maybe even bus companies and drivers*

16 Güzel writes that Allah appeared to Cevat pasha in his dream.

17 Güzel (1996, p. 48) notes other places where this story appears. Academic Ramazan Hurç (1999, p. 76-77) also relates the same story, and many others.

Gallipoli allegedly ate. The menu at the event was simple: rye bread, bulgur soup, and water.<sup>18</sup> Ayhan Aktar calls this the discourse of “poverty and deprivation”, since he suggests that the troops enjoyed a more substantial daily military ration in Gallipoli: bread, stew, bulgur pilaf, dried broad beans, along with occasional dried fruit, nuts and more (Aktar, 2014; “Binlerce kişi 57. alay’ın menüsüyle iftar yaptı”, 2012).<sup>19</sup> We know that soldiers in Gallipoli, especially officers, sometimes complained of the monotony of their rations. It is also possible that during heavy fighting units had to do with skimpy rations. However, fast-breaking, based on a deliberately meagre daily ration, is an intentional way of representing and memorialising the exceptional as the normal.<sup>20</sup> In the process of sponsoring acts like “fast-breaking” or “martyr tourism”, political parties or governments become memory makers; the people are the consumers.

Politicians have also contributed to the Islamization of the Battle of Gallipoli. In a 2013 speech, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the prime minister at the time, asserted: “The Crusades are not nine centuries in the past! Do not forget, Çanakkale is a Crusade as well. Back then, there were those with us on our side: from Syria, from Egypt, from Bosnia, from Kosovo” (Aktar, 2014; “Erdoğan: cevabını halk verecek”, 2013). Politicians, and the popular historians who use similar imagery, may not worry too much about historical details, but behind Erdoğan’s statement lie two issues that undermine his assertion.<sup>21</sup> First, while the Ottomans declared jihad for political reasons during the Great War, it is doubtful that, allied with Christian powers like Germany and Austria-Hungary, Ottomans themselves viewed the attack on Gallipoli as a Crusade. Second, though his statement is an improvement over those who suggest that only Turks fought, he still only included Muslims. Non-Muslim Ottomans fought at Gallipoli. Lieutenant Mehmed Fasih, who fought at Lone Pine (Kanlısirt), frequently mentioned the names of his comrades-in-arms in his war diary; along with Abdulhalim the Bosnian and Agathi the Syrian Arab, he writes of Peştamalciyan Efendi the Armenian in the front trenches (Mehmed Fasih, p. 153).

The Islamization of the battle by the conservative-religious narrative has gone some way to challenge the previously dominant narrative and remembrance of the same event by secular-nationalists. This narrative indeed sees Gallipoli as a “crusade”. If the war was against Islam, then it must have been defended by Muslim believers who were there to protect their religion – not the nation as the secular-nationalists argue. By citing examples of soldiers’ religiosity and religious miracles, this narrative reclaims the victory as the result of Muslim “Turkish” soldiers’ faith-based endurance and military prowess. Thus, they become like the “lions of the battle of Badr”. Consequently, non-Muslim Ottomans and Germans – with their different faiths – who fought on the same side must be ignored to justify the crusade image. If Gallipoli was a victory

*In a 2013 speech, Erdogan asserted: “The Crusades are not nine centuries in the past! Do not forget, Çanakkale is a Crusade as well”.*

18 Similarly, and strangely, Güneş (2006, p. 371) at the very end of an article on Mehmet Akif’s poems on Gallipoli, gives “Food Rations for 1917”, for no apparent reason. Why Gallipoli in 1917? We do not know. The ration list is supposed to belong to a company of the Forty-Third Regiment. He lists four seemingly “random” days out of the whole year; on these days the soldiers of the company had very little to eat according to the list. No one doubts that Ottomans were not well supplied and many soldiers suffered food shortages as my own research shows. Yet these four days give the misleading impression that this was a fair representation of their diet for the entire year. Or worse, the company ate only four times during 1917.

19 No doubt, there were some good days and some bad days in terms of food supplies.

20 However, we should add that there were significant food shortages, and even hunger, among Ottoman soldiers in the eastern Anatolian front during certain periods. Soldiers at Gallipoli were much better supplied and fed.

21 The crusades theme appears in a number of works: Vakkasoğlu (2004, pp. 59-63), Şama, (2012, p. 137). The latter work has been printed twenty-five times, which testifies to the appeal of such works for certain sections of the populace. While it also features many religious explanations and quotations from the Quran, it does not attack Mustafa Kemal.

achieved by the faithful peasant soldiers, then the secular-nationalist version about Gallipoli being the first stage of the national struggle for independence, which established the secular state, is disrupted. Similarly, if God's Prophet appears to Cevat Pasha with advice on military tactics, or white clouds swallowed up enemy soldiers, then the battle was won only with divine intervention, not by the military genius of Mustafa Kemal as the other side would have it.

While acknowledging that there may be groups of people who straddle both viewpoints, and others, we are clearly looking at different communities of remembrance that are at odds with each other. The dispute between the two communities of remembrance of Gallipoli also starts to take on a different shape; it is about whether religion, or the nation, was being defended. Arguably, it is also no longer *only* about challenging the crucial role assigned to Mustafa Kemal, or whether Gallipoli was a rehearsal for the War of Independence, but about two different ways of imagining the community. One is a secular nation whose roots were planted in Gallipoli, where the national hero was "born"; the other is a decidedly Islamized (but still Turkish) nation, whose heroes are the faithful soldiers. However, despite their differences, the two communities also share some things in common – one of which is a willed amnesia about the wartime fate of the Ottoman Armenians.

## Gallipoli and the Ottoman Armenians

Some scholars have pointed to another reason for the increased interest in the centennial anniversary of Gallipoli. While 18 March marks Gallipoli's anniversary as Martyrs' Day for Turkey, 25 April is Anzac Day. Yet on 24 April 1915, the day before the Allied forces landed on the peninsula, and some four months after a major defeat against the Russians in eastern Anatolia, the Ottoman state issued orders for the deportation of Anatolian Armenians. Even though what happened next came in escalating steps, the relationship between the events of 24 and 25 April is not, according to Taner Akçam, the foremost Turkish scholar on Ottoman Armenians, accidental. He writes that "It was no coincidence that the Armenian genocide took place soon after the Sankamış disaster and was contemporaneous with the empire's struggle at Gallipoli". This was just when the empire's continued existence seemed most uncertain (Akçam, 2006, p. 152). As he acknowledges, there was real fear initially that Armenians, perceived as internal enemies, would assist the Allies in the dismemberment of the empire. He also points to the escalating radicalisation of decisions made about Armenians, and other Christian populations, living in the empire. He writes that it became a "do or die" issue in the minds of the political leaders. But, once the deportation decision was made on 24 April, the wartime leadership did not intend for the deportees to reach their destination in the deserts of Syria, where they would not have survived long under inhospitable conditions in any case. Instead, the leadership's aim became the ethno-religious homogenisation of Anatolia through the annihilation of Armenians (Akçam, 2004, pp. 44-56; Akçam, 2012, p. 449). As Akçam (2004, p. 183) writes, the scholarly estimates of the number of the dead range between 600,000 and 1.5 million (Dündar, 2011, pp. 276-77, 282; Dündar, 2013, p. 377-79). What happened to the Ottoman-Armenians remains a controversial topic in Turkey. Once a taboo subject, the number of academics and lay people who generally accept the scale of the destruction of Ottoman-Armenian community has grown. While smaller numbers call it "genocide", the term "ethnic cleansing" seems to be more acceptable in most eyes (Suny & Göçek, 2011, p. 10).

Will the centennial remembrance of Gallipoli and celebration of the victory overwhelm the remembrance of, and mourning for, the Armenians in 2015? This is the aim of the Turkish gover-

*Will the centennial remembrance of Gallipoli overwhelm the remembrance of, and mourning for, the Armenians in 2015? This is the aim of the Turkish government*

nment (Aktar, 2014, p. 13).<sup>22</sup> Pointing to the statements of politicians as evidence, Ayhan Aktar asserts that the state has been creating a narrative of Turkish suffering with the intention of comparing the trauma of the Turks and Armenians. On 25 April 2011, Ahmet Davutoğlu (Aktar, 2014; “Davutoğlu: 2015 yılını dünyaya tanıtacağız”, 2011), the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, stated:

We will show the whole world what 2015 is all about. We will present it as the anniversary of a nation’s glorious defense, as Çanakkale resistance, not as the anniversary of genocide as some have suggested by allegation and slander.

Two weeks later, referring to something he called “just memory”, he asserted: “We should not have only a single memory [of 1915]... 1915 might be the year of deportations for them, but for us it is the year of Çanakkale. It is the year of Sarıkamış” (Akçam, 2010). A statement by the director of the official Turkish Historical Society is just as telling:

When we mention 2015, everyone should remember Çanakkale not the Armenian problem. [The] Armenian problem is in reality a part of Çanakkale. If there were no battle of Çanakkale, or if England and France had not come to invade Çanakkale, there would have been no Armenian problem... If they had not come, there would have been no war and no deportation in Anatolia. (Aktar, 2014; “Prof. dr. Metin Hülagü: Musul ve Kerkük’ü alabilir”, 2013)<sup>23</sup>

But musing about what may or may not have happened under different conditions, or practicing counterfactual history, will not get us very far.

In critiquing what he calls the discourse or narrative of comparative suffering, Aktar (2014, p. 13) asks: “can there be any believability factor to these “bright” ideas either in Turkey or outside?” He predicts that “foreigners will only smile wryly at this nonsense”, but it is “difficult to know who will believe it in Turkey”. Aktar is undoubtedly correct about those outside Turkey. However, one wonders if the real object of “Çanakkale 2015” might be the domestic audience, even if the politicians continue to refer to world opinion.

To conclude, although the secular-nationalist narrative might have dominated remembrance of Gallipoli for decades, since the early 2000s the conservative-religious narrative seems to have gained significant momentum. No doubt, part of this has to do with the long years of AKP administration. Political regimes have always used “history” in their attempts to influence how the past should be remembered. The regimes of the 1930s and 1940s (and beyond, of course), when the secular-nationalist narrative took shape, cultivated that version. In similar vein, the ways in which the conservative-religious writers remember, forget and rewrite the narrative of Gallipoli is compatible, or even shaped by, the social and political objectives of the ruling AKP regime.

Often, the remembrance and commemoration of Gallipoli by popular writers and politicians in Turkey is not based on “real” events. Instead, they attempt to *create* a history that meets certain political and social agendas. If only because it turns to religious legends to explain and make sense of the battle, the conservative-religious narrative seems to fit more firmly into this description. That narrative has challenged the primacy of Mustafa Kemal’s actions in the battle

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22 See also Zeybek (2014, pp. 165-169).

23 I have added a sentence from the original newspaper statement. It seems that Winston Churchill also drew a connection between Gallipoli and the fate of Armenians in his *The aftermath*, as cited in Zeybek (2014).

in order to disrupt the link between the War of Independence and Gallipoli: the latter being the site that is said to have given rise to a national hero. In contrast, the conservative-religious writers constructed a version of Gallipoli adorned with religious legend and portraying the real heroes of the battle as the faithful Turkish Muslim soldiers.

Each narrative represents a community of remembrance about Gallipoli and something beyond. What Turkish citizens choose to remember, forget, and rewrite are about imagining a certain kind of national community, both in the past and into the future. Each side looks for ways to explain the sacrifices of the martyrs in a meaningful but also politically expedient way, even if these sacrifices are sometimes exaggerated or presented out of context. Did the martyrs sacrifice themselves in a battle that gave birth to a hero who established a secular republic? Or did they sacrifice themselves for a religious cause? Gallipoli might have inspired the War of Independence for the secularists, but Islam inspired Gallipoli and its real heroes for the conservative-religious groups.

Both narratives seek to erase the reality of the Ottoman Empire as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious political society, even if an unequal one, by turning Gallipoli into a Turkish or Muslim (but still Turkish) battle. Indeed, rejection or acceptance of what happened to Anatolian Armenians, given that many young Armenian men served in places like Gallipoli, is also about how and what kind of a Turkish nation is to be imagined by each side.

## Epilogue

In the weeks leading up to 18 March 2015, the centennial Turkish anniversary of Gallipoli, interesting developments took place in Turkey regarding the forthcoming commemoration of the battle. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that he had invited the leaders of 102 countries, including the president of Armenia, Serj Sarkisian, to Gallipoli for the centennial anniversary. The letter to Sarkisian seems to have made reference to Armenians having fought on the same side – an official acknowledgment that non-Turks and non-Muslims fought at Gallipoli. This commemoration, however, would not take place on 18 March, which had marked the Turkish anniversary for many decades, but on 24 April (Çevikcan, 2015). Erdoğan's invitation to Sarkisian elicited a firm response from the latter: "I [had] invited you to visit Yerevan on April 24, 2015 to honor the memory of the innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide together. We have no tradition of visiting a guest without receiving a response to our own invitation" ("Armenia's Sargsyan rejects", 2015). It seems that as world leaders ponder which event to attend, the commemoration of Gallipoli on 24 April this year promises to interfere with the remembrance of, and mourning for, Ottoman Armenians more than ever before.

*In the weeks leading up to 18 March 2015 President Erdogan announced that he had invited the leaders of 102 countries, including the president of Armenia*

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