

# The Re-contextualization of the Battle of Gallipoli through Commemorations<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The Battle of Gallipoli is central to the Turkish republican historical discourse as the final Ottoman win against the Allied Forces, and as the event that introduced the founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal, and triggered the War of Independence. Until the 2000s, the historical meaning of the Battle of Gallipoli had been beyond debate; but the Justice and Development Party has shifted the narrative from a victory based on the figure of Mustafa Kemal and his military and political leadership, to an Ottoman victory based on religious faith, thereby eroding the founding myth of the Republic. Having such strong cultural, political and religious connotations, the Gallipoli Campaign and its contemporary commemorations are and will in all likelihood be subject to interventions and alterations of various power groups. This article highlights how the latter has happened in recent Turkish history, which may also serve as a more global example.

## 1. The Gallipoli Commemoration Ceremonies

*Stop wayfarer! Unbeknownst to you this ground  
You come and tread on, is where an epoch lies;  
Bend down and lend your ear, for this silent mound  
Is the place where the heart of a nation sighs.*<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1. 'Dur Yolcu' verse, engraved on the landscape on Eceabat, Gallipoli.

The first two verses of this famous poem engraved into the landscape is the first thing welcoming every visitor to the Gallipoli Peninsula. Known by most Turks, these lines of the epic poem epitomize how the Battle of Gallipoli is remembered collectively in Turkey and what emotions this little peninsula arouses within the context of Turkish Republican history (Kant, 2015, p. 165).

The Battle of Gallipoli, which took place in Anatolia where the Dardanelles connect the Marmara Sea to the Aegean Sea in other words it is where the Asia and Europe continents meet, was

one of the bloodiest of battles fought during World War I. It was one of the last victories of the ailing Ottoman Empire and featured the first significant appearance of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkish history, as a military leader who would go on to establish the Turkish Republic. For the Ottomans, the Gallipoli victory was an end to the continuous withdrawal that had occurred since 1699 and it increased public morale, which had deteriorated especially after the Balkan Wars (Erdemir, 2008, pp. 529-531). Erdemir argues that if the Ottomans had failed to stop the enemy, the Ottoman Empire would have disappeared then. He thinks that even though the enemy invaded Istanbul after the Armistice of Mondros, this three-year delay caused an opportunity for the nation to get prepared for a "national independence war". Furthermore, like many other historians, he views the Battle of Gallipoli not merely as a part of WWI but as the National War of Independence (Erdemir, 2008, pp. 543-544).

Although there are many reasons why the Battle of Gallipoli has drawn the interest of many people from political, cultural, and historical perspectives, the high number of casualties and the fact that it marks a significant transition in Turkish history could be viewed as the most important ones. The high number of fallen in the battle makes it regarded as a tragedy and a source of nationalistic sentiments. Based on the records of the official sources of the Australian War Memorial Council, the total number of people who died in World War I 'serving their country' is estimated to vary between 9 million and 16 million. During this one of the bloodiest conflicts of all times, 515 thousand soldiers fell in the Gallipoli Campaign that took place on and around the Gallipoli Peninsula.<sup>3</sup> The loss of so many young lives on such a small piece of land makes this peninsula a theatre for one of the greatest tragedies of WW I.

As it is "the place where the heart of a nation sighs", the Gallipoli Peninsula stands at the crossroads of many crucial transitions in the cultural history of Turkey, making it a focus for the clash of controversial ideas. It occupies a place where nationalist, religious, essentialist, militarist and imperialist

discourses compete. As it has been perceived as the founding war of the Turkish Republic, it both marks the end of imperial times and the start of the nation state. For people of nationalistic tendencies, it is a front where the prologue of the Turkish Republic was written and its founding leader, Mustafa Kemal, took center stage for the first time and fought against the powers of colonialism and became the savior of the nation. Also, according to the public myth which is well known amongst Turkish society, this is the battle through which the material supremacy of the Allies was beaten by spiritualism or faith, where, according to one myth which called ‘the long white cloud (aotearoa),<sup>4</sup> Turkish soldiers were accompanied and assisted by a group of angels.

Despite the contesting discourses of various militarist, nationalist, religious or ethnic groups, each of whom claim to have the property rights over the Gallipoli Campaign, the Gallipoli Campaign could also be perceived as a rite-of-passage as it was the threshold of certain changes in cultural and political history of Turkey. In that sense, it can be easily said for the battle as a transformative ritual front where the idea of ummet of the Ottoman Empire coming from various ethnic and religious backgrounds was transformed into fellows of the modern nation of Turkey.

The remembrance practices and monuments for the martyrs of the Gallipoli Campaign are a source of sensitivity for most people in Turkey as the Gallipoli Campaign represents a unique patriotic sacrifice ingrained in the collective cultural memory. In the national narratives, the spirit displayed by the young people who lost their lives in this campaign, inspired the other citizens to fight against the forces of invading countries, which sparked the Turkish War of Independence.

Some scholars highlight the function of these national commemoration ceremonies and monuments in reaffirming state authority and legitimacy. For these scholars, commemoration monuments and practices, or pilgrimages to battlefields, are “intrinsic components of national heritage and identity” and it is the “marriage of nation and mass war” (Rusbook, 2008, p. 48).<sup>5</sup>



Figure 2. Turkish Official Remembrance Day Ceremony, Dardanelles, March 18, 2013.

The Gallipoli Campaign Commemoration ceremonies have been a locus and symbol of national unity, and the collective spirit marking the newborn Turkish Republic. Like its other examples in the world, these ceremonies are also an object of competing ideologies and ideological discourses. As an extension of the recent ideological and cultural changes in state policies, the ceremonies have also become an amphitheater for promoting new political ideologies.

Historians and researchers in Turkey have investigated the Gallipoli Campaign related to the political, sociological and economical aspects of its commemorations as a phenomenon (Azrić 2012; Kurnaz 2013; Bobbitt 2011). Azrić’s dissertation discusses how the Gallipoli Campaign is instrumentalized even

manipulated through the annual remembrance ceremonies by various actors in several aspects today. For Azrić, these special dates (March 18 and April 24-25) are used to affect the organizations towards its ideological belief. For example, the Justice and Development Party, together with many religious groups, highlights the Muslim character of the army of that period and argues that it was the faith of those soldiers that helped the nation get its victory (Azrić, 2012, pp. 116,117,125).

She also points out the role of the state in activities organized strictly by a top-down approach. She underlines the fact that the first state-sponsored organization took place in 1934 when the Montreux Treaty, which gave the Turkish Republic sovereignty over the Straits, was signed (Azrić, 2012, pp. 114,115). She argues that, especially beginning with 1960, politicians shaped the celebration/commemoration according to their political and ideological belief. This included stressing religious aspects, the role of Mustafa Kemal, territorial integrity or even blaming other ethnic groups for not participating in the war (Azrić, 2012, p. 124).

By the same token, in her study, Bobbitt argues that school excursions to the battlefield for children. The author of the thesis claims that the war memorials are used by the government, municipalities and local people for touristic events. She comments that one cannot feel any emotion in a graveyard when there is a souvenir shop at the entrance and says that the memorials/monuments are used less in remembrance of the martyrs and more to train people to feel unity and loyalty (Bobbitt, 2011, pp. 114-116).

## 2. Relationship between memory and identity

Areas with monuments to war casualties become popular sites of collective identity and memory, visited by millions of people from all over the world. Studies deconstructing collective remembrance practices (Bucur T. M., 2004; Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1991; Gillis, 1994; Nora, 1989; Smith A. D., 1994) mostly view war monuments as state devices reaffirming the power of the state. In most of those studies, the individual remembering is depicted as a passive participant of the remembrance activity with the state as the major actor.

The close relationship between memory and identity provides ground for a politics of identity to shape, construct or suppress things for the community to remember or forget. In this sense, the traumatic experiences of the past become popular and rich sources for a politics of identity, particularly in the form of things not to be forgotten.

In the case of Turkey, the Gallipoli Campaign, and the contemporary public ceremonies commemorating it, presents a perfect source for the discourses of identity and collective history. This also leaves the Gallipoli Peninsula with all its remembrance practices (monuments, ceremonies and visits) vulnerable to interventions by the ruling governments. Thus, both the historic site and the story revolving around the battle have been highly effective sources of community, identity and history making processes.

## 3. Constructing and Reconstructing the Past through the Monuments at Gallipoli

After the war, upon the completion of the burial and cemetery construction processes, it was time to begin erecting monuments on the peninsula dedicated to those who lost their lives in the war. This process has taken almost a century and remains unfinished. Today, with the numerous monuments, military cemeteries, cenotaphs or other memorials on it, the entire peninsula serves as

an open-air museum. Five monuments <sup>6</sup> dedicated to Commonwealth servicemen including British, Indian, New Zealander and Australian forces that served and died in the campaign were built in the first ten years following the end of the war. Interestingly, none of the current 71 Turkish memorials existed in that same decade.

A little-known fact; the first monument was erected during the battle between the years 1915 and 1916 and was made of artillery shells that had been used during the conflict. The place where the monument was erected is of significance as it was one of the original trenches. That earliest memorial had a very modest look and was in the shape of a pyramid and had been created by those who fought there. In a way, these people were the real agents-of-remembrance (Winter, 1999, p. 60) and the monument stood as a symbol displaying these people's collective memories as a reminder of what they had been through. When compared to the more recent massive stone memorials of WWI all around the world, erected by the states or other groups in power, the metal pyramid monument was the first example in Gallipoli representing what Winter called "small-scale collective memory" (1999, p. 60).



Figure 3. Mustafa Kemal in front of the earliest Metal Pyramid Monuments, 1916.

Sharing a similar fate with the actors of remembrance, the humble monument disintegrated over time due to natural causes. In the early years of the aftermath, even the disappearance of the monument might not have been noticed at all. Neither the people nor the government in Turkey had the opportunity to go back and think about commemorating Gallipoli because it was only one of six fronts that Turkey had to fight in those years, each of which had its own tragedies and deserved mourning. Moreover, the people in Turkey had another three years of fighting after WWI for their independence. Thus, Gallipoli would simply have to wait.

Among the Turkish war memorials, the Mehmetcik Monument, also known as the Canakkale Martyrs Monument<sup>7</sup>, is considered the first proper memorial dedicated to the Dardanelles/Gallipoli martyrs. It is the largest and the most remarkable memorial dedicated to the Turkish soldiers fallen at Gallipoli, and stands on Hisarlik Tepe, a spot which is undoubtedly the most eye catching spot of the peninsula. Therefore, the Mehmetcik monument with its M shape symbolizing mehmetcik (Johnny) and standing on four legs is visible from most of the peninsula. The relation between the construction of the monument and the creation of the collective

memory in Turkey has been a reciprocal process. While the monument was shaping collective memory, the monument itself was reconstructed over time. This was and is still true of the other memorials built to date.

### 3.1. 1923-1938

The peninsula had been hosting ANZAC visitors commemorating the war for a few years and Mustafa Kemal had also been invited for the international official ceremonies organized and attended by British, Australian, New Zealander and French governments. As an indispensable part of the official ceremonies, each representative would lay a wreath at his/her monument and the other countries' monuments in the area during the ceremony. When it was time to lay the wreaths at the Turkish monument, there was a crisis as there was no Turkish monument there. The original metal pyramid monument had vanished.

The confused and embarrassed Turkish representatives asked Mustafa Kemal for advice about where to lay the wreath. Gazing at the battlefields, he thought quickly and said: "you are free to lay the wreath anywhere on this land. Every inch of this land soaked with Turkish blood and is thus already a Turkish monument" (Granda, 2008, p. 197).<sup>8</sup> His statement here is noteworthy as it underlines the fact that monuments define what and how to honor the fallen and how memorials replace memory.

The very first idea of erecting a national monument at Gallipoli dates back to 1928, the year when Atatürk visited the city of Dardanelles. During his visit, some local inhabitants told him about their wish for a monument to honor the fallen at Gallipoli. This might have reminded him of his previous experience on the Anzac Remembrance Day ceremonies as he immediately asked for work on the matter (Sipahi, 2014).

To erect a monument for the fallen at Gallipoli, a project was designed and publicized nation-wide in a very short time. There was considerable public interest in the idea of building a memorial dedicated to the fallen at Gallipoli. People of all ages, professions and ethnic backgrounds from all over country donated towards the construction of the monument to honor the fallen at Gallipoli. According to the archival research carried out by Murat Kiray, a number of nationwide charity efforts were made such as free shifts offered by construction workers, blankets with monument motives knitted by women in Siirt, charity concerts given by Jewish singer Dario Moreno and a Monument Cup organized among football clubs (Sipahi, 2014).<sup>9</sup>

Despite the financial support of masses and the emotional influence that the Gallipoli Campaign had over people in Turkey, the funding generated was only enough for ten meters of the entire monument. The project had to be suspended. Unfortunately, what little was constructed by then was later destroyed by a strong storm and collapsed over time (Canakkale Şehitler Abidesi, 2014). Atatürk died in 1938 and was not able to witness the completion of the project.

### 3.2. 1938-1960

Then in the 1940s, the idea about the memorial at Gallipoli was revitalized. This time, the Ministry of National Defense was in charge of the monument. They organized a large-scale project competition in 1944. The winner was the project submitted by İsmail Utkular ve Dogan Erginbas. However, it took another ten years to start the construction of the monument mainly because of funding problems, and it was launched in April 19, 1954 (Sipahi, 2014).

For Emin Nihat Sozeri, who was a close friend of Mustafa Kemal from the army and the first military pilot during the war, the monument had deeper, more personal meaning. He overcame

all obstacles including lack of funding for the Mehmetcik Monument, which has stood as the largest Turkish memorial erected on the top of a hill <sup>10,11</sup> (Canakkale'de Tarihi Bulusma, 2003) since the 45th anniversary of 2nd Anafartalar Victory. In its entirety, the monument is 41.7 meters high. <sup>12</sup> The height of the monument is of great significance as 40 meters symbolizes the fallen soldiers at Gallipoli and the remaining 1.70 meters symbolizes Mustafa Kemal's own height. Unveiled on August 10, 1960, it was opened to the public still far from complete (Atabay, Erat, & Colakoglu, 2009, p. 18). The proposed project had included a stone Mehmetcik statue at the top of the monument and some lion figures next to it. Unfortunately, those parts of the project were never added.

Starting from the 1950s, with the introduction of multi-party politics, The Republican People's Party, whose political discourse was based on the centrality of the Gallipoli Campaign and Mustafa Kemal's deeds in Turkish history, lost its political power. This also caused state activism around the Gallipoli Campaign to decline. Providing funding for the construction of the monuments was no longer a priority of the government, now with in power (Kant, 2015, p. 153).

There is a common perception that Democrat Party had opposing tendencies with the national (republic) history and its actors (mainly Mustafa Kemal), as they highlight the separation from the Ottoman Empire, which Kant's theory echoes. However, for a long time, the Battle of Gallipoli was indeed beyond debate and kept out of political discussions. In fact, two of the most famous nationalist monuments were unveiled during governance of DP<sup>13</sup>. That is, both Anitkabir (1953) (Ataturk's Mausoleum in Ankara) and the Mehmetcik Monument (1960) were completed and opened to the public during DP's term in power (Gurpinar, 2012, p. 90).

### 3.3. 1970-1981

In the 1970s, the construction of the Mehmetcik monument representing the brave soldiers that fell during the war was still in progress. A few more parts that had been included in the original design such as cenotaphs were added to the memorial in those years. <sup>14</sup> While the long construction process of the Mehmetcik monument went on in the background, other government-led projects took place in the 1980s on the peninsula. The memorials were clearly changing.

The new monuments of the 80s were mostly designed as monoliths (kitabes) or epitaphs (yazits). In the aftermath of the military coup on September 12, 1980, a number of monoliths were constructed such as the Kanlisirt, Kucuk Arburnu, 27. Alay, the Anzac Cove and Kemalyeri Monoliths. In addition, epitaphs like Kabatepe (Gaba tepe) yaziti, Kirectepe yaziti and Kirectepe military cemetery were also built in 1980s (Universitesi, 2014).

Among these monoliths, the largest and the most famous ones, the Conkbayiri (Chunuk Bair) and Mehmetcik monoliths, stand out for a few reasons. Firstly, most of them were constructed shortly after the 12 September 1980 military coup. The first was completed in 1981 and commissioned by the general leading the 1980 military coup, Kenan Evren.

These first ones exhibit a clearly how the rhetoric around Gallipoli was molded with militarism, nationalism and martyrdom. That also provides some insight into the utilization of Gallipoli by a wide range of political ideologies in different decades.

Conkbayiri (Chunuk Bair), where these monoliths were erected, possesses a prominent character in the nationalist circle attributable to the specific battle that occurred there. Chunuk Bair was the battlefield where Mustafa Kemal ordered his

soldiers to hold tight to their bayonets and crouch down on the ground because their ammunition was depleted. That was where those soldiers fought heroically and won the battle at the cost of their lives in August (Erickson E. J., 2010, p. 52). This spot also became an international landmark pinned by Mustafa Kemal's historic photos taken in the trenches. Therefore, the monoliths on the Chunuk Bair could be interpreted as the anchors of the nation founded and its founder where he first appeared in the pages of history.

These monoliths also stand out with their unique design bearing both religious and nationalist elements. While each of these tablets has a quotation of Ataturk; visually, their architectural design resembles the five fingers of a hand praying to God. Though these interpretations may vary, the design is clearly an integration of a national discourse into a religious one. That is, while quotations from Mustafa Kemal on patriotism, sacrifice and heroism help to reinforce nationalist inclinations, a symbolic religious composition like a hand reaching up to God serves to sanctify these concepts in a nationalist context.

In Islamic scripts, martyrs are perceived as some of the holiest of people and believed to be leading an eternal life as the closest neighbors of the Prophet Mohammed in Heaven. <sup>15</sup> Achieving legitimacy through cultural beliefs and religious scripts, the hand reaching up to God, in a way, glorifies the fallen's fight to defend their land against invasion. The hand praying is also a constant reminder of the sacrifice of the previous generations aiming to provoke visitors' feelings of gratitude. In a sense, through the stone tablets, the agreement of debt between the martyrs and visitors of the site is constantly re-established. This agreement of debt and sense of gratitude could be analyzed within the political philosophy of John Locke. In that a monument for the fallen erected by the state could be viewed as a notice of the "tacit agreement" between the living and the fallen (Locke, 1690, Sec 95-99). Thus, visits to the memorial area might be translated as a kind of reaffirmation of that mutual agreement or a ritual to serve the loyalty of the living. Klosko also concludes, in his theory of political obligations, "[i]ndividuals who benefit from the cooperative efforts of others have obligations to cooperate as well" (2004, p. 34).

An example of the moral obligation that the self-sacrifice of the previous generations of society should be revered is clearly presented in Mehmet Akif Ersoy's poem *Canakkale Sehitlerine* (To the Martyrs of the Dardanelles). The famous poem dedicated to the soldiers who gave their lives at Gallipoli highlights Gallipoli's sacred position in Turkish cultural history. "Even if I erected the Kaaba saying "here is you're your tomb" [...] If I built a ceiling with purple clouds for your mausoleum [...] I can't claim to have honored your memory enough" <sup>16</sup> (Kaplan, 1987; Akkus, 1999, p. 2). Every single line of the poem displays a similar glorification: No matter what the living do to honor the martyrs, the sacrifice made by them cannot possibly be paid off.

### 3.4. 1990-2002

Returning to the history of the constant evolution of the Mehmetcik monument; despite the support and sensitivity of the public and the government, the monument only achieved its current design after 1990. As a reflection of the nationalist tendencies rising worldwide, the peninsula saw a rapid increase in the profile and activities of the Anzacs marking the 75th anniversary of the Gallipoli Campaign in 1990. <sup>17</sup> That, correspondingly, triggered nationalistic tendencies in the Turkish media and refreshed the public interest in the area, which led the government at the time to take up the issue again. Between 1992 and 1995, a series of renovation projects in the battlefield areas including the 57th Regiment and Yahya Cavus, Sargiyeri and the

Ataturk Victory Monument were also initiated and funded by the Ministry of Culture (Goncu & Aldogan, 2006).

The many projects completed resourcefully in the 1990s are noteworthy in that a coalition government was in power at the time - one that included a left and right wing party.<sup>18</sup> The cooperation of opposing ideologies on Gallipoli is a perfect example about how Gallipoli was one of the few issues in which political parties agreed, since the battlefield areas and that part of the national history were widely perceived as sacred. In other words, issues around the Gallipoli Campaign seemed to be a common and uniting element at the national level.



Figure 4. Fire at the Gallipoli Peninsula Historical National Park, October 18, 2014.

The Gallipoli Peninsula has undergone endless transformation, not only due to construction or renovations on the monuments or the cemeteries, but also forest fires. Almost every year, fires break out in the forest, agricultural areas, and even the battlefields in and around the peninsula.<sup>19</sup> Governing bodies are usually blamed for the fires by various ideological groups and environmental activists. Although there might be various reasons for the fires, the current government's policies regarding the environment have led people to doubt the origin of the fires. One of the most common public beliefs is that fires are set on purpose in order to create more areas for residences, which would financially benefit the ruling government (CHP Group Grand National Assembly Research Proposal, 2005).

Once again at the top of the national agenda, the Gallipoli Peninsula was subject to a long-term progress plan including not only members of government but also the representatives of the ruling parties, Ministries of Forest, Culture and Tourism, the Chamber of Architects and the Presidency. The project competition for this plan drew 121 projects from 49 countries (CHP, 2005). In 1995, the Norwegian winning company signed a contract with Middle East Technical University (Ankara, Turkey) for a plan with the theme, peace (CHP, 2005). Surprisingly, despite the changing governments in power, the project was kept alive between 1994 and 2002 by the seven different parties that came into power. However, this grand-scale plan would take years, and a new era was about to start in the history of the Turkish Republic and the Gallipoli War Memorials.

### 3.5. 2002- PRESENT

In 2002, the Justice and Development Party, known for having an Islamic agenda and receiving significant support from non-secular Turks, came into power. Until then, the peninsula with its geographic, historic and architectural elements had been associated with the founding and founder of the Republic in public memory. Regardless of the parties and the opposing ideologies of the past 85 years' governments, it had always been a platform where all political bodies seemed to agree on, but significant changes were underway in national politics. For a beginning, all the ongoing and confirmed projects concerning the Gallipoli Peninsula were cancelled.

Diverting from the previous policies of the state, new projects had a lot of properties to make a shift in both the image and the place of the Gallipoli Campaign in the collective memory (Kant, 2015). To this end, the party launched a series of organizations, media campaigns, legislative regulations and "development projects" on the Peninsula. Opponents assert that most projects not only violated the law prohibiting any construction but also that they targeted new areas for residences and trade centers and thus were commercially motivated (CHP, 2005).

The AKP, whose political perspective could be summarized as New Ottomanism, meant to redefine the link between the nation state and the Gallipoli (Parmaksiz, 2012; Kant, 2015). Unlike the state policies until then that affirmed nation-state discourses and strengthened its founding elements, the AKP established its policies based on revitalizing historical ties with the Ottoman Empire and imperialism. By removing Gallipoli from the national foundation myth and its founding actors from the collective memory, the party in power intended to re-contextualize Gallipoli in the public memory as a part of imperial history (Parmaksiz, 2012).

## 4. Legislative changes reflecting government stance

All the legislations or projects until the 2000s had been carried out under an international commission, the priority being preserving the historical, natural or national heritage within the borders of the peninsula. To ensure the best projects, national or international competitions had been organized each time with a committee of international experts deciding the winner. The changes made to legislations concerning the peninsula through the years seem to reflect how a given government aimed to utilize Gallipoli as well.

The earliest legislation about the status of the peninsula was introduced in 1973. According to the law approved by the Council of Ministers in May 26, 1973, the area covering numerous ancient, military and historical features was designated as a "National Park" under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Environment. The official status of a "national park" indicates that it is forbidden to construct any type of residential buildings in the area<sup>20</sup> (Turkey, 2000).

The next law included minor amendments but mostly verified the status of Gallipoli as a national park and announced its name as 'the Gallipoli Peninsula Historical National Park' or 'Peace Park' on November 14, 1980 (CHP, 2005).<sup>21</sup>

In 1983, the Law Numbered 2863 Concerning the Preservation of the Cultural and Natural Assets appointed the Ministry of Culture as the authorized institution for any changes or the development of the buildings and facilities on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Furthermore, the United Nations designated the peninsula as an area of national, historical and cultural importance and included the site in the United Nations List of Protected Areas in 1997 (IUCN, 1997, p. 237).

The 2000s witnessed a new perspective which put the Gallipoli peninsula at the center of a different agenda. With the recent political practices, the peninsula was to be changed. Not only would the new projects be ones criticized for lack quality and for ignoring the historical and archeological assets of the peninsula, but the policies involving it would be utilitarian. According to the opponents of those policies and practices, the governing party perceived the forestry area, battlefields and the other historical assets in the region as sources of funding. Converting war bastions into cafes or restaurants, building toll-gates, constructing roads, parking lots or other facilities hurriedly without any value engineering or archeological research were some of the many projects that drew objections from historians,

archeologists, republicans and nationalists (CHP, 2005).

The greatest challenge limiting the scope of the governing party's projects in the 2000s was the official status of the peninsula. The previous laws had secured the borders of the GP as a national park, forbidding any decrease in its surface area. The only way was to change the status of the Gallipoli Peninsula or the directorate whose jurisdiction the peninsula was under. Thus, a new institution was founded by the government in 2014.<sup>22</sup> This time the name of the authorized institution was Çanakkale Savaşları Tarihi Alan Başkanlığı (Department Of Çanakkale Battles and Gallipoli Historical Area) (Tourism, 2014). Through this regulation, the official status of the peninsula was changed from national park to historical site, which provided the government with relative freedom for the planned construction projects.

### 5. Recontextualization of Gallipoli

The other change launched by AKP in the 2000s was about the context of the Gallipoli Campaign in national, cultural and collective narrations. Until the 2000s, Gallipoli was at the center of national narrations, which used to revolve around Mustafa Kemal and his deeds during this war. His soldiers who fought and died at Gallipoli had been publicized and included into narrations in a manner that strengthened nationalistic accounts. As part of that discourse, the public was reminded of the immense sacrifice made by thousands to defend the land to legitimize the official discourses of nationalism and the sacredness of the nation.

By basing their political discourse and political framework around the nostalgia of the collapsed Ottoman Empire, the political leaders at the ruling government of Turkey interpreted the nation formation process and its founding actors (Mustafa Kemal, Republicans, nationalists and their discursive connotations) for severing the "organic ties" with the past (Parmaksiz, 2012, p. 293). An interview conducted with Ahmet Davutoglu when he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs on September 19, 2012 clarifies the agenda against the official discourses of national history.<sup>23</sup>

Through a policy based on ummetcilik, the party hoped to embrace a wider society including Arabs or some African nations, a formula which had already failed during WWI (Atsız, 2000). However, to achieve this aim, the Justice and Development Party followed the same formula exploited earlier by the nationalist discourses: the notion of martyrdom and the fallen at Gallipoli. This time, the fallen at Gallipoli were presented as the members of another unity (ummet) and presented as an example of the Islamist, multi-national, multi-ethnic aspects of the Ottoman army.

This ideological approach of the party was also visible in the annual commemorations. When approaching the centenary of the Gallipoli Campaign, the public interest in the commemorations had clearly increased. According to the local people, nine months out of the year, almost every local municipality organized yearly free trips.<sup>24</sup> The popularity of the region was partly because its legacy provided governments with a ready-made audience for their political rhetoric. At the same time, it created a kind of obligation for governments to organize various commemorative events to meet public expectations. Thus, by organizing free public trips to the peninsula, the municipalities, most of which were governed by the party in power, aimed to reconstruct Gallipoli in their political rhetoric. To illustrate, for the 2013 commemoration ceremonies, a brand new and a wide-scope project was organized by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Within this project, the close kin of the martyrs and veterans fought at Gallipoli were funded to

attend the official ceremonies broadcasted alive. Through their physical existence and witnessing, the fact that how ordinary people of the nation were connected to that part of history and not only the founder of the nation were highlighted. It was also another way of reminding the fact that numerous families have the rights of ownership of the country founded.

Within this project entitled Biz Degil miydik<sup>25</sup> (Wasn't it us?), nearly a hundred of the grandchildren of the soldiers who fought at Gallipoli were funded to join the ceremonies in the province and were welcomed as guests of honour by the Prime Minister of the time, Erdogan, and other statesmen. Among this group, the Kurdish, African and Arab attendees were the most visible with their traditional outfits<sup>26</sup> to the thousands gathered in the stadium. While Turgut Kacmaz who is one of the most well-known figures of the Gallipoli due to being the son of last surviving veteran of the Gallipoli was making his speech in front of his father's monument at the 57th Infantry Regiment Cenotaphs for the press, it was only Ferfure Akyol in her traditional Kurdish outfit who accompanied him in front of the cameras. The multi-ethnic and multi-national dimensions of the campaign were visually highlighted both by these newly created public images and by the banners welcoming these attendees in Kurdish, Arabic or other languages. Governor Tuna added "banners will be in Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic to reach all the people across the country. He highlighted that it is symbolically important to address everybody in their mother tongue" (Guler, 2013).



Figure 4. Cenotaphs for the 57<sup>th</sup> Regiment.

For anyone who might miss the visual emphasis at the event, then Prime Minister clearly stressed the non-Turkish components of the Ottoman army in his speech. He justified their rhetoric against the nation state by utilizing the sacredness of the concept of martyrdom. He said;

*The tens of thousands of martyrs resting right here haven't died. They will live on forever. The martyrs here are not the members of a single race. They are the architects of a great nation. The martyrs are the heroes that shaped our understanding of a nation. They are the children of people from all over Turkey, the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa," emphasizing the multi-ethnic character of the soldiers who fought against occupying powers at Çanakkale.*

By highlighting the multi-ethnicity of the fallen, he continued, "There are Turks here at this cemetery, and Bosnians, and Kurds. There are people who believed in the same values. Çanakkale is a victorious page in our history, but it is also a light for us today." (Turkey commemorates martyrs slain at Çanakkale battle, 2013).

As mentioned previously, there is a strong bond between the Gallipoli Campaign and the concept of martyrdom. The law

concerning the official day of martyrs passed in 2002 also supported that association of Gallipoli. Until 2002, there used to be various remembrance days dedicated to remember the martyrs or veterans of specific wars (i.e., WWI, War of National Independence, Cyprus Peace Operation, South Eastern Operations, etc.). With the law in 2002, March 18th became a day for a celebrating a national victory as well as a National Commemoration day for all martyrs and veterans who fought for Turkey. This change also reinforced the connection between the public perception of martyrdom in Turkey and its primary association with the Gallipoli Campaign (TBMM, 2002).

Parmaksiz argues that in this way, the concept of martyrdom has lost its martial dimension and become civilian. Indirectly, it caused a loosening of the ties and associations between war and martyrdom, helping the Gallipoli Campaign be planted into a more civilian context war (2012, pp. 293-294). For the Justice and Development Party who is claimed to have an issue with Turkey's Republican-militaristic image (Shaoul, 2012), the amendment eased the process of transforming Gallipoli into a more civilian context; from a day to honor the military founders of the Republic to a day for remembering everyday civilian people who fought in wars. Thus, the idea that the Gallipoli battle should be analyzed as part of the history of the empire that collapsed and its multi-national policies became more visible.

In addition to the recent changes in political discourses and the structure of the official remembrance ceremonies related to Gallipoli, the monuments on the peninsula were to change, as well (Bobbitt, 2011). Seemingly insignificant changes on the memorials can make a great impact on individuals by re-shaping the collective memory. Thus, the memorials on the peninsula have become tools for the governments' neo-ottomanist policies just as they were for earlier governments.

In some ways, these newly created civilian public figures (embodied in Turgut Kacmaz and Ferfure Akyol) symbolizing the ummet (multi-ethnic and multi-language society of Ottoman Empire) were gradually replacing the national image of a nation born "on the shores of Gallipoli"<sup>27</sup> founded by the Mehmetcik image embodied by Mustafa Kemal in his uniform and Corporal Seyits.

The new cemetery created in 2007 is a good example of new policies replacing previous ones. In 2007, a symbolic cemetery was constructed on a huge parking lot and a pine tree forest (Atabay, Erat, & Colakoglu, 2009, p. 27). In terms of its impact; in great contrast with the gigantic design of the Mehmetcik Monument, these fiber-glass gravestones the same height as an average person create a sense of closeness between the dead and the visitors. Each tombstone states the names, ranks and hometowns of 36 martyrs. The names of the 60,000 martyrs engraved on the fiber-glass serve as a reminder of the high cost of war in terms of lives lost, and the collective debt to the dead and the expectation of a similar sacrifice should the time come.

Like the monoliths of the 80s in the shape of a praying hand, the rose garden of the 2000s is another religious symbol utilized by the governing political authority of the time. In Islamic literature and cultural narrations in Turkey the flower of rose and its smell are frequently associated with the Prophet Mohammed (Karakas, 2013; Mevlevi, 2013). Although claimed to be unreliable, the hadith about Prophet Mohammed's ascending to the sky and a drop of his perspiration giving life to a red rose is a widely-accepted belief among Muslims. Thus, a rose garden in honor of the martyrs creates or strengthens the association between the sacred (martyrs) and the holy (prophet), a bond already created by the scripts in holy book of Quran.

Although the current rose garden is a recent design and has replaced a former symbolic cemetery, the organization of the current cemetery bears some similarities to the previous one. On

the tombstones in the previous cemetery, the names, ages and the hometowns had been engraved to support the state's narration that people from different cities of Anatolia fought together as one body and formed the state. On the walls of the Mehmetcik Monument, the names of the dead were classified based on their hometowns. Organizing the names in such a way enables visitors to connect people from a wide range of places into a 'nation', therefore reinforcing the feelings of unification (Bobbitt, 2011, p. 42). The inscriptions on the latter symbolic cemetery utilized the same idea of sacrifice but with a slight difference. The cities on the inscriptions were not limited to those in Anatolia.

*In the small cemetery more soldiers' names are set in stone and beneath each one is shown the year of their birth name of their hometown. Moving slowly amongst them, visitors are quickly reminded that the Ottoman Empire of 1915 was much larger and more cosmopolitan than the Anatolian territory that today forms modern Turkey. The dead came from far afield, from Mesopotamia, the Hejaz and the Caucasus, yet they fought together as one people to protect the thing that was central to them all: their homeland. (Steel, 1990, p. 24)*

Despite the agenda of balancing the military power in politics, the redevelopment of the memorial site in 2000s, the items utilized are not very different from the ones utilized by the nationalists. To illustrate, there are stone serpus figures placed as tombstones in the rose garden created in 2007. The headgear of the Ottoman army uniform reminds visitors that it was the Ottoman Empire then. The selection of a militaristic item as a tombstone to serve the purpose of the governing body's neo Ottomanism rhetoric is not so different than earlier statues of Mustafa Kemal in his military uniform once used by the political ideologies supporting a nationalistic discourse.

Visitations to the Peninsula help to turn abstract collective memories into concrete personal experiences. Thus, the places seen and honored play a significant role in constructing a collective memory in line with the ideology of the governing authority. According to local historian Kenan Celik, visitors to the peninsula before the 2000s would be brought to the Mehmetcik Monument, Corporal Seyit monument, the museum of Mustafa Kemal's house in Salonica, the monoliths where Mustafa Kemal ordered his soldiers to hold on to their bayonets and the place where he was shot in the chest during the battle as popular spots. That is, the audiovisual experience of the earlier visitors would be shaped around the centrality of Mustafa Kemal's life and his military memories in the Gallipoli Campaign. However, more recently, the cenotaphs of the 57th Regiment, the Rose Garden and the new symbolic cemetery of fiber-glass tombstones are the new routes visitors are taken/directed to. Unless they ask for a customized visit to the landmarks related to the Mustafa Kemal, the new popular tours skip the spots popular for nationalists.

It is clear that the selection of stories to be told and places to dwell on or skip are the main devices for rewriting the history of the Gallipoli campaign. The route and the narrations accompanying the visits are highly ideological instruments. In the 2000s, with a new regulation in the 2010s, a new project involving the raising and employment of a group of tourist guides called alan rehberi (field guide) were launched. According to the Research Proposal submitted to the Turkish Grand National Assembly, these newly trained professionals were recruited to serve a more religious agenda and to narrate a different version of past in a way to re-contextualize Gallipoli to exclude Mustafa Kemal from the collective memory.

It does not seem that the Gallipoli Peninsula will be off the

agenda of governments any time soon. Its centrality in Turkish history has rendered it vulnerable to constant redevelopments or reconstructions. In the long history of the restorations and regulations of the 'sacred' area, today almost nothing authentic is left from the battlefields of 1915. Rather, it is now more of a symbolic site where different versions of the past have been contested, constructed one on another and displayed.

## Endnotes

- 1 This study is based on the author's unpublished dissertation thesis entitled "An Ethnographic Study on the Notion of Martyrdom in Turkey Reflected on the Commemorations of the Gallipoli Campaign, WWI" submitted to Graduate School of Social Sciences, Yeditepe University.
- 2 From the poem "To a Traveller" (Bir Yolcuya), written for the fallen in the Gallipoli Campaign by poet Necmettin Halil Onan (translation by S. Tanvir Wasti).
- 3 There is disagreement on the number of the casualties of the conflict, usually due to classifications. In this study, the numbers shown in the records of Military Affairs of Turkey and Australia are used (<http://www.awm.gov.au/atwar/ww1.asp>, 1980).
- 4 Buket Uzuner's *The long white cloud: Gallipoli*. (2004) is an epic novel referring to that mystical story revolving around the Gallipoli Campaign.
- 5 To learn more about the functions of the war memorials see Ken S. Inglis (1998), *Sacred Places: war memorials in the Australian landscape*, Melbourne, The Miegunyah Press ; and, A. Hamilton, (1990) 'Monuments and memory', *Continuum: the Australian Journal of Media & Culture*, vol. 3, no. 1 ; for the digger spirit, P. Lindsay (2003) , *The Spirit of the Digger: then and now*, Sydney, Macmillan, 2003, cited by Peter Rushbook (1945) *Lest We Forget: The Kapooka Tragedy 1945 in History of Education Review*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2008, pp. 48-55 Charles Sturt University.
- 6 By the end of 1923, all memorials belonging to the Allied Powers, including the cemeteries, had been constructed. (The Helles Memorial (1924), The Lone Pine Memorial (1915), Hill 60 (1915), Chunuk Bair (1923), Twelve Tree Copse (1920)).
- 7 Mehmetcik Monument is interchangeably used with Canakkale Şehitler Aniti (Monument to the Martyrs of the Dardanelles) in the written and oral narrations. In this work, the term Mehmetcik Monument is preferred.
- 8 The text is excerpted from the memories narrated by Cemal Granda who was the life time waiter of Atatürk and translated by the researcher.
- 9 Archives of Milliyet Gazetesi is a rich source for the historical background of the monument. There is also news about the donations of Presidents, famous singers like Zeki Muren, Müzeyyen Senar, celebrities renting out their luxurious cars as public vehicles, etc. Murat Kiray's photo exhibition displays the news and photos of the state of the historical monument form different years (<http://www.canakkalenrehberi.com/?Syf=18&Hbr=641833&/%C3%87anakkale-Sava%C5%9Flar%C4%B1nda-%C5%9Fehit-d%C3%BC%C5%9Fen-binlerce-Mehmet%C3%A7ik-an%C4%B1s%C4%B1na-1954-1960-y%C4%B1llar%C4%B1nda-Gelibolu-Yar%C4%B1madasi%C4%B1-Tarihi-Milli-Park%C4%B1nda-41,7-metre-boyunda-in%C5%9Ffa-edilen-%C5%9Eehitler>), accessed May 11, 2015.
- 10 Actually, the place had a historical significance for only the Allies as it was the place where French forces fought.
- 11 For further details, the interview with Emin Nihat Sozeri could be read on (<http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2003/03/17/262839.asp>), accessed May 17, 2015.
- 12 Atatürk, for the fallen died in action at the Gallipoli Campaign, said "the rights of the Canakkale heroes cannot be paid even if a 40-meter-high monument was built for them". Thus, the 40 meter in the monument symbolizes the fallen soldiers at the Gallipoli Campaign and 1,70 that is the Atatürk's own height, is added to 40 meters, borrowed from the personal website of Salih Saydam, an amateur

photographer (first highlight belongs to the original text, second highlight belong to the researcher).

- [http://salihsaydam.com/Canakkale\\_En.html](http://salihsaydam.com/Canakkale_En.html), accessed July 26, 2013.
- 13 DP (Demokrat Parti) stands for Democrat Party
  - 14 For the construction of cenotaphs, a national project contest was announced to public in 1983 through the newspapers. However, there is not much information for the results of the contest. <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Gelibolu%20Yarimadasi%20Tarihi%20Milli%20Parki>, accessed May 22, 2015.
  - 15 See chapter on martyrdom for the scripts from the holy book of Quran. (Quran 3:157-169, Oxford World's Classics edition).
  - 16 The original poem follows as:  
"Bu, taşındır" diyerek Kabe'yi diksem başına;  
Ruhumun vahyini duysam da geçirsem taşına;  
Sonra gök kubbeyi alsam da, rida namıyla,  
Kanayan lahdine çeksem bütün ecramiyle;  
Mor bulutlarla açık türbene çatsam da tavan;  
Yedi kandilli Süreyya'yı uzatsam oradan;  
Sen bu avizenin altında, bürünmüş kanına,  
Uzanırken gece mehtabı getirsem yanına,  
Türbedarın gibi ta fecre kadar bekletsem;  
Gündüzün fecr ile avizeni lebriz etsem;  
Tülenen mağribi, akşamları sarsam yarana...  
Yine bir şey yapabildim diyemem hatıranı".
  - 17 See newspaper headlines about the Anzacs visiting Turkey in the 1990s  
[http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ayse\\_hur/23\\_nisan\\_24\\_nisan\\_25\\_nisan\\_yildonumu\\_muharebeleri-1343737](http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ayse_hur/23_nisan_24_nisan_25_nisan_yildonumu_muharebeleri-1343737) Accessed Aug 24, 2014. The web archive of Milliyet Gazetesi is quite rich: <http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/Anzaklar/> Accessed May 25, 2015.
  - 18 In those years, the government was composed of a coalition of Social Democratic People's Party (SHP) and True Path Party (DYP).
  - 19 The web is quite rich in news about fires on the Peninsula. One is here: (<http://www.haberler.com/tarihi-gelibolu-yarimadasi-nda-korkutan-yangin-6602505-haber/>) Accessed on May 23, 2015.
  - 20 Resolution number: 7/6477
  - 21 The text was excerpted on May 10, 2013 from the official page of New Zealand government for ANZAC which was "launched to coincide with the 90th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings in 2005" to provide the members of the public with some "available information about Anzac Day and material that can be used in Anzac Day events. This site provides some of that information, and also features an interactive adaptation of a guidebook to visiting Gallipoli" (<http://www.anzac.govt.nz/gallipoliguide/>).
  - 22 The regulation for the foundation of the (Directorate of Dardanelles Wars Historical Site)- "Canakkale Savaşları Tarihi Alan Başkanlığı Kurulması Hakkındaki Kanun" was legislated on June 28, 2014 and publicized on Resmi Gazete numbered 29044.
  - 23 See *Hurriyet Gazetesi* published on September 12, 2012. The original statement by Davutoğlu is as follows: "19. yüzyıl ideolojisi olan ulusçuluk Avrupa'da feodalite ile bölünmüş yapıları bütünleştirdi. Bizde ise tarihten gelmiş organik yapıları dağıtarak geçici, suni karşıtlıklar ve kimlikler ortaya çıkardı. Hepimizin bu ayrıştırıcı kültürle hesaplaşma zamanı geldi. (...)" <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/21483551.asp> accessed June, 13 2015. (Highlights belong to the author).
  - 24 Kenan, Guide, male, tourist guide, the Dardanelles. March 2013.
  - 25 The other slogan of this project was "1915 Kahramanlarının Torunları Çanakkale'de Buluşuyor".
  - 26 For the last three years, on every occasion related to the Remembrance of the Gallipoli Campaign in Turkey which was organized by the AKP, Ferfure Akyol the Kurdish attendee (according to some news she is from Batman, in others she is from Silvan, Diyarbakir [http://www.istanbulburda.com/ferfure\\_akyol\\_ile\\_turgut\\_kacmaz.htm](http://www.istanbulburda.com/ferfure_akyol_ile_turgut_kacmaz.htm) 1) has become an indispensable part of the remembrance events (<http://www.trthaber.com/video/omur-dedigin-canakkale-ozel->



yayini-15431.html).

During the evening gathering of "1915 Kahramanlarının Torunları Canakkale'de Bulusuyor" at Akyol Hotel, Dardanelles on the Remembrance Day 2013 in a very informal atmosphere, before Feriye Akyol talked, the Governor Tuna made a public announcement that she was going to talk in her native language and a translator (who had been hired to be ready at the meeting) would help her to understand the questions where the entire audience speaks Turkish. To my surprise, she had been speaking in Turkish throughout that day (Field study notes, March 18, 2013, Akyol Hotel, City of the Dardanelles).

- 27 The expression is borrowed from the news headline "Peace Ambassadors: Our nation was born on the shores of Gallipoli" about "four of the great-grandsons of ANZACs (...) in Turkey for the Peace Ambassadors project launched by the AK Party which aims to bring the grandchildren of the war together." [http://www.todayszaman.com/national\\_peace-ambassadors-our-nation-was-born-on-the-shores-of-gallipoli\\_136746.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/national_peace-ambassadors-our-nation-was-born-on-the-shores-of-gallipoli_136746.html), accessed June 07, 2015.

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