

# THE CASE OF WOMEN IN/AFTER THE BATTLE OF GALLIPOLI: AS REFLECTED IN *THE WATER DIVINER*<sup>1</sup>

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**A**nzac<sup>2</sup> is an abbreviation used to refer to the soldiers “of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) who fought at Gallipoli against the Ottoman Empire during World War I” and to remember those “who served and died in all wars, conflicts, and peacekeeping operations” and “the contribution and suffering of all those who have served”, “25 April each year” is marked as the Anzac Day. When [World] [W]ar [I] broke out in 1914, Australia and New Zealand had been dominions of the British Empire for thirteen and seven years respectively (“Anzac-Day”)... and the new federal government [in Australia] was eager to establish its reputation among the nations of the world. When Britain declared war in August 1914 Australia was automatically placed on the side of the Commonwealth. [Britain wanted] to capture the Gallipoli peninsula in order to open the Dardanelles to the allied navy forces. The ultimate objective was to capture Constantinople (now Istanbul), the capital of the Ottoman Empire, which was an ally of Germany.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an extended version of the paper presented in BAKEA Conference at Pamukkale University on 8 October 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Anzacs are also known as “Diggers” (see Hoffenberg, 112).

The Australian and New Zealand forces landed on Gallipoli on 25 April, meeting fierce resistance from the Ottoman Turkish defenders. What had been planned as a bold stroke to knock Turkey out of the war quickly became a stalemate, and the campaign dragged on for eight months. At the end of 1915 the allied forces were evacuated from the peninsula, with both sides having suffered heavy casualties and endured great hardships (“The Anzac Day Tradition”).

In the film, entitled *the Water Diviner*<sup>3</sup>, the story evolves around three Australian brothers who joined to the British army during WWI and their father’s Joshua Connor’s or Mr. Anzac’s (acted by Russell Crow) search to find their traces after the Battle of Gallipoli. The three brothers represent “about half of all the males [in Australia] aged eighteen and forty-five enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force” (Inglis, 36) and of all these males “one in five was killed” (Inglis, 36). However, the focal point of this paper will be women, though there are very few female characters in the film, as these silent heroes remaining behind the shadows of the men<sup>4</sup> act as driving forces for them.

<sup>3</sup> Readers interested in war movies and documentaries about Anzacs and the Battle of Gallipoli may also watch the ones given below to have a comparative approach; *The Water Diviner* (2014), *Çanakkale Yolun Sonu/Gallipoli:End of the Road* (2013), *Çanakkale 1915* (2012), *Çanakkale Çocukları/Gallipoli Kids* (2012), *Gallipoli from Above* (2012 Documentary), *Charles Bean’s Great War* (2010 Documentary), *Beneath Hill 60* (2010), *Gallipoli Submarine* (2008 Documentary), *Çanakkale Geçilmez/Gallipoli, the Unconquerable* (2008), *Kindli Kuzular: Bedeli Çanakkale’de öndendi/Soldiers with Henna* (2006 TV Movie), *Gelibolu* (2005 Documentary), *Gallipoli: The Untold Stories* (2005 Documentary), *Entrenched: The Making of ‘Gallipoli’* (2005 Documentary), *Revealing Gallipoli* (2005 Documentary), *Çanakkale Destani 1915/Legend of Gallipoli 1915* (2005 Documentary), *Son Kale: Çanakkale/Last Castle: Gallipoli* (2004 Documentary), *Gallipoli: Death on the Beaches* (2003 Documentary), *All the King’s Men* (1999 TV Movie), *The Lighthorsemen* (1987), *Gallipoli* (1981), *Anzac: A Nation’s Heritage* (1965 Short Film), *Çanakkale Aslanları/Gallipoli Lions* (1964), *The Other World of Winston Churchill* (1964 Documentary), *Tell England* (1931), *The Spirit of Gallipoli* (1928), *With the Dardanelles Expedition* (1916 Documentary), *Çanakkale Muharebeleri/Gallipoli Battle* (1916 Documentary), *Anafartalar’da İtilaf Ordularının Püskürtülmesi/Overthrow of Allied Forces* (1915 Documentary) [translations of the titles of all Turkish works are mine], *How Bill Arris Took the Dardanelles* (1915 Short Film), *The Hero of the Dardanelles* (1915 Short Film). (see <http://www.anzacwebsites.com/gallipoli/films.htm> & <http://www.radikal.com.tr/radikalist/canakkale-savasi-hakinda-yapilmis-farkli-turlerden-11-film-1315999>)

<sup>4</sup> Considering the patriarchal approach of neglecting mostly of women’s role in wars, “an official war historian [began] to consider [that the word *Anzac* is ] a male word, a war cry; ‘pitiless as a hurled spear. It conveys something savagely masculine, ruthless, resolute, clean driven home” (see Cutlack, 27).

The opening scene of the movie starts with the mother of the three Anzac soldiers, Lizzy (Elizabeth) who is introduced to the audience while trying to repair a pair of old shoes pertaining to her lost son in the Battle of Gallipoli, and scolding her husband being able to find water, but not their sons. Then, she insists on her husband's going to boys' bedroom to read them stories (namely *Arabian Nights*) before they fall asleep. In a few seconds, we as audience perceive that Lizzy (acted by Jacqueline McKenzie) denies the fact that all of her three sons are lost in the war and she pretends that they are still living with them in their farm in Australia. However, one day, no longer able to endure the pain of losing all her sons, early in the morning she goes to the lake outside their house and commits suicide trying to drown herself. Elizabeth in the movie represents all the "good women who... in their own mild way sent many a man [husband, brother or son] to the recruiting stations" (Scott, 317) and then who regret it.

Parallel to this, in Ottoman lands, a Turkish woman, called Ayshe (acted by Olga Kurylenko) is also in denial and she refuses her husband's death in the Battle of Gallipoli. She tries to behave as if her husband, Turgut were still alive and therefore refuses to wear black mourning costumes and postpones to reveal the bad news to her young son called Orhan (acted by Dylan Georgiades).

Looking at both women on both parties, we can argue that when it becomes difficult to face harsh realities such as the loss of loved ones, the women in *the Water Diviner* tend to have "escapist attitudes" so that they can cope with their sufferings and continue to survive. In other words, both women find "shelter in the past" by living in the past, not in the present.

Having lost her wife besides his sons, Joshua Connor decides to leave home to follow his sons' traces. At his wife's grave, he promises that sooner or later, he will find their traces. In the scenes prior to the burial scene, Church as a religious institution is questioned. The Priest does not want to bury Lizzy in the Church cemetery on account of her suicide. For Joshua, Lizzy's being a regular Church-goer was enough to deserve to be buried in the sacred land of the Church yard. Though, the priest thinks that it is not appropriate to bury her in the Church yard, he accepts to

welcome her corpse into the Church yard in exchange for Joshua's car, sort of forced donation.

In Joshua's conversation with the Priest, "the loyalty to the king and country" (*The Water Diviner*) is emphasized and the personal sacrifices are encouraged for the well-being of the communities and countries or in Prof. Shweder's words, "the ethics of community" is privileged upon "the ethics of autonomy" (see *Morality and Health*). Here, we as audience and as critics, see how religious institutions preach war, rather than peace, at times of crisis during the peak of colonialism.

Likewise, literature is also used as a tool to encourage people, especially young people to go far away lands and to colonize them for the sake of British Empire. In the movie, the mystical Orient narrated to the boys through the passages from *Arabian Nights*. These stories are not only for fun, but also for enticing young boys to go far and Anglicize other people and lands. And when the time comes, these three Australian brothers as expected from them join the Army "for fame and name" and also "for principles" (*The Water Diviner*) without any hesitation. Joshua explains to Sergeant (acted by Cem Yılmaz) in the train scene that "[They] fought [in Gallipoli] for principle, and not for a matter of land.

In this dialogue, it is again revealed that it is not a matter of life and death, but just as a result of the extension of British colonial policies, Anzacs are sent to Gallipoli. Neither their life nor their country was in danger; they were used as tools to spread British colonialism<sup>5</sup>. When this fact strikes Joshua's attention, it was too late.

Overall, the film questions the concept of heroism, loyalty to the king and asks the question if it is really worth losing many lives in return for false promises of being a hero in the eye of the British Empire. In doing so, it forces the audience to think critically about British values, as did some of the British War Poets by questioning war in their poetry, and makes the audience aware of the possibility of alternative perspectives rather than invading other countries in the

<sup>5</sup> In the movie, a very famous English game, which is associated with English colonialism, cricket is also referred to and Joshua teaches how to play cricket to Turkish soldiers in the train.

name of king/patriotism. Hence, it questions the dark side of human nature with all its violent and brutal tendencies. To cut a long story short, it helps us to extend our understanding of human nature and in this paper, we will try to focus on the effects of war on the female psyche (as part of the human nature) and scrutinize the female perspective on war.

As mentioned earlier, in the grave of his wife, Joshua promises to find the traces of their sons and leaves Australia to go to Gallipoli. First, he comes to Istanbul and stays in a hotel run by a widow called Ayshe. When she learns that Joshua actually wants to go to Gallipoli, her face immediately fades and she calls Gallipoli as "ghost-town" since there is not a sign of life there after the Battle.

Joshua gets in touch with the British Ministry of Defence, but his request to find the track of his sons encounters official obstacles and he is asked to go back to his home, to Australia. Upon failing getting help from the British authorities, he feels desperate and at this critical moment, Ayshe guides him and informs him that he does not need English documents since some of the fishermen may take him to Gallipoli. After having learned his loss of wife, she begins to have empathy with him and does not see him as an enemy any longer. Their experience of losing their spouses turns out to be a mutual point to establish a bond between them in the following days. When Joshua is about to leave for Gallipoli, Ayshe's son, Orhan asks him to find his father there, too.

Upon his arrival there, Major Hasan (Binbaşı Hasan acted by Yılmaz Erdoğan) offers help as he knows the region very well, but when they go to the battle-field, Joshua has an overflow of feelings and attacks Major Hasan by saying: "You killed my sons". "You sent them here", replies Major Hasan.

The question raised in the minds of the audience here is what are they doing in Anatolia, when there is no border issue and no threat from Ottomans to Australians? In that sense, this fighting scene between Joshua and Major Hasan and the following dialogue scene enacts to be very meaningful. What urges Joshua to send all his sons to Gallipoli? Therefore, it is Joshua to put the blame on, if somebody

should be held responsible for the death of his sons, not Major Hasan, who is trying to defend his people and protect his country from imperial invasions.

During Joshua's visit to Imperial War Grave Units in Gallipoli in 1919, he learned that 2.000 Anzacs and 7.000 Turks died during the war in *Kanlı Sirt* (Lone Pine) in 1915. He is informed that soldiers do not have a grave, but put all together into a dig covered with lime. Joshua is determined to get the corpses of his sons back and bury them next to their mother<sup>6</sup> at home, so he continues his searches in the battle field. Here, we see that though Lizzy is dead, her influence continues on Joshua and she gives a shape to Joshua's thoughts and actions and tries to bring the family members<sup>7</sup> together like they were in the past.

English authorities are not happy with Joshua's search in Istanbul and Çanakkale and want to make sure that he goes back home, but he does not want to. Ayshe helps him to escape from British officials. In Ayshe's and Lizzy's case, we see that women are initiators of action, it was Lizzy, who urges Joshua to find their sons and it was with Ayshe's help that he finds the way to go to Gallipoli and to escape the British officials. So, both women, one Australian, the other Turkish, despite coming from different racial, religious and cultural backgrounds, act here as "brains and guides" to show the way to men metaphorically as well as literally. Moreover, the stereotype of women as "care-takers" and "nourishers" is observed in *the Water Diviner*, Lizzy takes care of Joshua and her sons, while Ayshe takes care of her father, Dr. Ibrahim with dementia (acted by Salih Kalyon), her son and later Joshua.

Considering the times Ayshe lives, she is a very conscious Ottoman woman about her femininity, her role and power both in her immediate family and in the hotel, she is running. Therefore, she knows how to play with the social norms, when it is necessary. For instance, she refuses to wear black mourning clothes and in that way, she can lead a free life, untouched by the restrictions put on the lives of widows. And like any other

<sup>6</sup> In regard to the different attitudes of mothers and sons towards wars and heroism to have a look at Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* might be very interesting and enlightening.

<sup>7</sup> Connor family's keenness to follow traditions and loyalty to established British values are also observed in the names of the family members since all the family members are named after either historical or biblical figures; Joshua, Edward, Lizzy/Elizabeth, Arthur, Edward (after Queen Elizabeth, King Arthur, King Henry etc).

happily married woman, not like a widow, she can celebrate his son's circumcision ceremony by dancing and by throwing a party with her friends. All her carefree manners touch on the nerve of her brother-in-law, Ömer (acted by Steve Bastoni) who is expecting to have her as a second-wife and to inherit<sup>8</sup> the hotel in the name of protecting her and her son, Orhan. One day, he couldn't help asking Ayshe: "Why aren't you in black clothes?", "I am not sure if my husband is dead" answers she. Upon this answer, "You are an Ottoman woman and you can't pretend to be a European woman" and "You know what is expected of you" says Orhan's uncle to his mother. In other words, it means that Ayshe should give her consent to be his second wife. She is very determined not to obey his wishes and she declares that he will never have her and the hotel. And she attempts to slap his face, but he reacts back and they begin to have a fight.

Hearing the screamings, Joshua comes to rescue Ayshe. Surprisingly enough, she becomes angry with him and wants him to stay out of this family issue. Joshua and Uncle keep fighting and Uncle runs away by shouting to Ayshe: "Is he, whom you want, the enemy [he refers to Joshua here]?".

Afterwards, Joshua offers help to Ayshe in the following words: "I can help you, I raised three kids. That is the right thing to do". This help offer turns Ayshe mad and she could not help uttering these words: "You think, you and your army have always done the right thing. You have left Orhan fatherless and me with these choices [to lead a lonely life or to marry a brother-in-law]".

This scene is very enlightening, indeed. If the flow of events is taken into consideration, it is seen that Ayshe has every reason to be angry with Joshua, if Anzacs would not have attacked Gallipoli for their so called principles, Orhan's father would not have died, but would have lived with Ayshe and Orhan together and none of these problems and conflicts would have been faced by Ayshe.

Only after some time of thinking and re-evaluating the events, Joshua understands the whole situation. In the next scene, Ayshe apologiz-

<sup>8</sup> It is stated during a class that "Marriages with cousins and relatives is very common in Turkey to keep the land and money within the same family lineage". ("Problems In the Study of Sexuality Course Notes" The University of Chicago, Spring 2011)

es and Joshua declares humbly that “[he is] to blame. [He] put stupid concepts such as heroism, loyalty to God, King/dom in [his] sons’ mind”. This moment can be seen as a kind of awakening in the movie. Losing his sons because of the war, witnessing the post-war traumas and sufferings of other people cause changes in the way how he evaluates loyalty, heroism and patriotism<sup>9</sup>. In relation to that it is stated that “Australian Imperial Force” was unique as it “had been composed entirely of volunteers” (see Inglis 52) and this historical fact is conveyed to the audience with the help of Joshua’s three sons; all of them do volunteer to join the Army to go to the war in *the Water Diviner*.

Later in the movie, Orhan’s Uncle calls his friends to help him beat Joshua in order to take revenge. Luckily enough, Joshua runs away on time to join the Turkish forces to go to Gallipoli. In these fighting scenes, it is very obvious that being a woman, Ayshe becomes “a matter of honour issue”. Like in many other patriarchal societies, in Ottomans, too, women and land are supposed to be protected by men and no foreigner should come close to them not even with the claims of protecting them. In colonial studies, land and women are likened to each other in terms of their fertility, sacredness etc.(see *Black Skins, White Masks*) and *the Water Diviner* makes use of this cliché, too.

As time passes, it is found out that one of Joshua’s sons, Arthur (Ryan Corr) has not died, but has been taken as a captive and it is very likely that he is in one of prisoner camps in Afyon. Relying on this clue, he travels a bit further and finds Arthur. Arthur confesses that he feels guilty of not being able to protect his brothers and let them die in the battle. At this scene, Joshua says to Arthur; “I did not move even a finger to stop you and that day I killed you all”. Here, he becomes the mouthpiece of many Anzac fathers and expresses in a way their feelings. The scenes of the death of the brothers are given with minute detail and Henry (Ben O’Toole) calls his mother, when he is crying out of pain. We learn that Henry is shot and losing huge amount of blood, he wants to end his suffering, but being a pious young soldier he believes that he will not be welcomed in Heaven if he commits suicide. So, he

<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Hoffenberg also suggests that the experience of Gallipoli changed Australians’ perceptions not only of war, but also of their settler culture and its nationalist expressions in individual and collective levels (see page 111).

says to Arthur: "I cannot commit suicide as they won't accept me into Heaven, so you [Arthur] will do it for me. Kill me!"

These painful events make things clearer in Joshua's mind and he questions again his values and British imperialism, which he once believed deeply. Hereby, his naive belief in British imperialism and colonialism shatters sufficiently deeply.

Yet, inspite of all the bitter and painful experiences characters go through, there is still hope for life and water becomes the symbol of life and hope in the movie as the title also suggests. Generally speaking, a water diviner tries to find the traces of water for himself and his people so that they can survive. In line with this, the images in relation to water such as well and river are used to stand for life in the movie. Interestingly enough, Joshua and Arthur escape from Greek gangs through a well, which has a connection to a river. Then through a water-tunnel they go out and they find life by swimming until their arrival to the river. Hence, they find life through water again and again.

Another hopeful and lively moment in the movie is the coffee-serving-scene towards the end of *the Water Diviner*. Eventually, Ayshe is ready to forget about the past and to move on in her life. She makes a very sweet coffee<sup>10</sup> to reveal her feelings for Joshua and serves it to him by saying everything is hidden in the coffee. Having exposed to Ottoman-Turkish culture long enough, he sees that she likes him and this scene might be taken as a sign of a new beginning, new lives in a new place. Furthermore, the antagonism between Turks and Australians melts away and turns into friendship as we witness in the case of Joshua, Major Hasan and Ayshe. Likewise, in one of the commemoration of Anzac Day in USA, Bülent Atalay (President of Atatürk Society of America, Fredericksburg, VA) declares that "the soldiers in the opposing camps became kindred spirits of sorts because of the shared misery of those trenches [in Gallipoli]. As a defining event in their respective histories, the three modern nations of Australia, New Zealand, and Turkey, have also come to regard each other with admiration and respect" (8). Thus, as in line with the flow of the historical events and the mutual feelings on both Turkish and Australian side, the movie ends in a hopeful and friendly atmosphere.

<sup>10</sup> Cup-reading is also touched upon in the movie and shown as part of Turkish culture.

At the end of the film, it is stated that the film is dedicated to those “who remain lost and nameless” and we suggest that this dedication may also cover female heroes like Lizzy and Ayshe, who endure all the sufferings during and after the wars<sup>11</sup> (See *Lysistrata*) silently with dignity. Hence, women are associated with “peace, sacrifice, justice, patriotism, [love]... and grief” (Inglis, 42) as usually it is done in war studies.

As a conclusion, though war-studies are mainly a masculine area, women also play a substantial role during and after the wars and hopefully, this paper based on *the Water Diviner* will help us to give all the due respect, women deserve in the war studies or as a more positive term in peace studies.

### Genişletilmiş Özet

#### *Son Umut* Filminde Çanakkale Savaşı'nda Ve Sonrasında: Kadınların Durumunun Tasviri

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Anastasios ve Andrew Knight tarafından kaleme alınan ve Russell Crowe tarafından yönetilen *Son Umut* filmi Çanakkale Savaşı'na odaklanırken, sömürge hükümetlerini ve savaş-çığırkanlığı yapan dini kurumları da sorgulamaktadır. Kaos atmosferinde, masum insanların sömürgeci, emperyalist güçlerin tuzaklarına düşerek sömürgeciliğin maşası haline geldiği görülmektedir. Filmde de gösterildiği üzere, Kilise ve sömürgeci yönetimler tarafından verilen emirler doğrultusunda birçok Avusturyalı erkek hiç sorgulamadan ve hiç tereddüt etmeden cepheye gitmiş; kadınlar ve çocuklar da onların dönüşlerini beklemiştir.

Genellikle kadınların savaş filmlerinde ve savaş çalışmaları alanında çok sesi duyulmasa da, ve çoğunlukla da görünmez olsalar da, aslında savaş sırasında ve sonrasında, nüfusun savaştan en çok etkilenen kesimi kadınlardır. Kadınların savaş kaynaklı sorunlarını ve ızdıraplarını açıkca dile getirdikten sonra, bu çalışmanın esas amacı *Son Umut* filmindeki iki anne karakteri; Eliza Connor (3 Anzak askerinin annesi) ve Ayşe (bir Türk askerinin eşi) üzerinden yola çıkarak, hem Türk hem de Avusturyalı kadınların duygu ve düşüncelerine yer vererek, kadınların savaş sırasında ve sonrasındaki durumlarını incelemektir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: Çanakkale Savaşı, sömürgeci güçler, Anzaklar, Son Umut, savaş/barış çalışmaları*

<sup>11</sup> About the impacts of war, you might have a look at the play *Lysistrata* as well.

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