

Globalising the Christchurch Shootings: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Gallipoli and Invasion

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Never let a bloody and opportune crisis pass. In New Zealand, there is talk about gun reform after attacks on two Christchurch mosques left fifty dead. There have been remarks made in parliament about unchecked white supremacy growing with enthusiastic violent urge in Australasia. In Turkey, the approach has shifted into another gear: the canny, even menacing exploitation by Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The election campaign is in full swing.

Spending his time, as he often does, whipping up audiences at rallies into feverish states, the sometimes shrill leader hits form when he dons the gear of the fully fledged demagogue. With the massacre still fresh, and the unavoidable insinuations from the Christchurch shooter about the mortal dangers posed by Islam, both current and historical, the platform was set.

Using footage from the Christchurch attack as part of his campaign show, Erdoğan promised that he was on guard against anti-Islamic forces and keen to hold the shooter to account. He also found reference to Gallipoli – site of much slaughter between the Australian New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) and Turkish forces in 1915 – irresistible. “What business did you have here? We had no issues with you, why did you come all the way here?” He [already](#) had the reason: “we’re Muslim and they’re Christian.” As for those who came to Turkey with anti-Islamic sentiments, the promise was stern: they would be sent back in coffins “like their grandfathers were” during the Gallipoli campaign.

Senior aide Fahrettin Altun was left with the [task](#) of adding ill-concealing camouflage: the President’s “words were unfortunately taken out of context”, reassuring those coming to ancient Anatolia that “Turks have always been the most welcoming & gracious hosts to their #Anzac visitors.” A [translation](#) of what Erdoğan is meant to have said was quickly issued, though the thrust was similar. The difference here was the speech’s stress against the shooter and those of his ilk, with an unmistakable promise for retribution against any malcontents. “Your ancestors came and saw us here. Then some left on their feet, some in coffins. If you come here with the same intentions (to invade our land) we will be waiting and have no doubt we will see you off like your ancestors.” Softening the waspish blow slightly, Erdoğan also spoke of Gallipoli (Çanakkale) as both “the symbol of the dream of peace we all share, and the brotherhood that grows from common sorrows.”

As a gathering of the press on March 20, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison [considered](#) the remarks by Erdoğan to be “highly offensive to Australians, and highly reckless in this very sensitive environment.” The reason was rather elementary for the prime minister: the Turkish leader had attacked the sacred nature of the ANZAC tradition, insulting their

“memory” and violating “the pledge that is etched in the stone at Gallipoli, of the promise of Atatürk to the mothers of our ANZACs.” Travel advisories to Turkey might have to be updated; the Turkish ambassador would be rebuked.

Morrison’s understanding, and, for that matter, that of many Australians, shows the latent contradiction inherent in the ANZAC tradition. Having invaded the Ottoman Empire in a daring, foolish and ultimately catastrophic enterprise in 1915, the Allied forces of the First World War, which did have a significant contingent of fresh faced Australian and New Zealand soldiers, were treated in death far better than most.

The slain ANZACs, in particular, were given soothing balm and reassurances by the victorious Turks. In 1934, a [tribute](#) was made by Atatürk, one that inscribes the Kemal Atatürk Memorial on Anzac Parade in Canberra:

“Those heroes that shed their blood and lost their lives... You are now lying in the soil of a friendly country. Therefore rest in peace. There is no difference between the Johnnies and the Mehmets to us where they lie side by side here in this country of ours.”

Having removed the boundaries of difference between the men, the Turkish statesman posits a maternal image, one intended to reassure mothers that their lost sons had become the offspring of another land, to be cherished and remembered in their death. Images of soil and earth abound. “You, the mothers who sent their sons from faraway countries, wipe away your tears; your sons are now lying in our bosom and are in peace. After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well.”

These sons had a mission; they had attacked a sovereign entity as part of a great power play. Winston Churchill, then Britain’s First Lord of the Admiralty, felt that knocking the Ottoman Empire out of the First World War was just the ticket to break the murderous stalemate on the Western front. To that end, the ANZACs had merely been another set of invaders in the service of empire. Instead of gloating, Atatürk showed a measure of modesty and humility.

Erdoğan should never be accused of such restraint and composure, just as the cult of ANZAC cannot be accused of being wholeheartedly receptive to the Turkish perspective of the Gallipoli campaign. For the Australian and New Zealand dead, their sacrifice is given the ghastly cellophane of freedom; they did so to protect liberties held sacred. It would be far more appropriate to see the Turkish effort as one for freedom. As Erdem Koç [ruefully penned](#) in 2015,

“Had the hundreds of thousands of young men not joined the army and headed to Gallipoli, and the bravery displayed on the frontlines not happened, it’s without doubt modern Turkey would not have been formed.”

Did the Turkish leader have a point on Australian laxity in dealing with the shooting? For Morrison, misrepresentations had been taking place on “the very strong position taken by the Australian and New Zealand Governments in our response to the extremist attack in New Zealand that was committed by an Australian, but in no way, shape or form, could possibly be taken to represent the actions, or any policy or view of the Australian people.”

Morrison fumed that his response had been appropriate and swift, those of an “open, tolerant society, accepting all faiths and peoples”, embracing “our Muslim brothers and sisters in New Zealand and in Australia, quite to the contrary of the vile assertion that has been made about our response.”

Morrison’s programmed retort – Australia as tolerant, open, embracing – jars with the reaction within Australia in various, irritable circles. Waleed Aly, who wears academic, journalistic and broadcasting hats depending on the occasion, [explained](#) with regret on his program, *The Project*, that there was “nothing about Christchurch that shocks me.” Its ordinariness proved the most threatening of all.

Remarks from the tetchy, reactionary Senator Fraser Anning were then cited, ones insisting that the Christchurch killings were a product, not of white nationalist mania but permissiveness towards Islamic fascism and the tendencies of those who follow Allah. The comments were not part of the shooter’s manifesto, Aly noted, but placed upon “an Australian parliament letterhead”. As he continued to urge:

“Don’t change our tune now because the terrorism seems to be coming from a white supremacist. If you’ve been talking about being tough on terrorism for years, and (on) the communities who allegedly support it, show us how tough you are now.”

Polemical and polarising comments will continue; there may even be retaliatory attacks to add to the bloodletting. It is not just jealousy that doth mock the meat it feeds on; hatreds will do just as nicely, ensuring that the Johnnies and the Mehmeds shall part ways, man barricades and fill the coffins.

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