

RE-READING THE PAST: TWO ARMENIAN MEMOIRS FROM THE OTTOMAN ARMY AND OFFICIAL TURKISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Abstract

The aim of my research is to analyze the position of two Armenian officers' memoir who participated the First World War in the Ottoman Army. In order to do so, I will examine the memoirs of the Second Lieutenant Kalusd Sürmenyan, who wrote a part of his book on his hometown Erzincan in 1947, and Captain Sarkis Torosyan, who published his memoirs in the Unites States of America in 1947. To accomplish the analysis of these historical texts and their context, the two research questions will direct my study: first, deals with how these officers were seen and remembered by Turkish historiography, either through their treatment or their erasure, while the second attempts to re-consider the end of the Ottoman empire turning to these two army officers themselves and expressing their memories and experiences.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgment.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
New Military History and Its Applicability on Ottoman Military Historiography	1
Chapter 1: Historical Background of Ottoman Conscription System, 1909-1919.....	5
1.1 Ottomanism As Collective Identity	5
1.2 Historical Background of Ottoman Military Mobilization, 1912-1919.....	8
Chapter 2: The Memoir of Kalusd Sürmenyan: <i>Yerzunga</i>	15
2.1 Armenian Officer Kalusd Sürmenyan and The First World War, 1914-18.....	16
2.2 Sürmenyan's and His Family Experiences' during the First World War, 1914-18.....	23
2.3 Kalusd Sürmenyan's Survival Amidst Anti-Armenian Sentiments.....	27
Chapter 3: Memoirs of Sarkis Torosyan: From Dardanelles to Palestine A True Story of Five Battle Fronts of Turkey and Her Allies and a Harem Romance.....	30
3.1 Torosyan's Journey to the Battle of Palestine.....	33
3.2 Beginning of End and Last Days in Turkey.....	35
3.3 Sarkis Torosyan's Memoir and Turkish Historiography	37
Chapter 4: Official Turkish Historiography and Archival Politics	41
4.1 Militarist ideology in the Turkish republic	41
4.2 The Discussion of the outset of 100 th Anniversary of Gallipoli and the Armenian Genocide	46
Conclusion	50
Bibliography	52

Introduction

Forgotten voices, minorities, and underrepresented figures became the subject of a new wave of writing history in the 20th century. The working class became the focus of Marxist historians who sought to examine a history of exploitation and oppression, while, on the other hand, the school of social historians in India in the 1980's used the term 'subaltern' to describe their focus of long neglected subjects.¹ This new approach to history writing had already been underway during the 1920's in France when Lucien Febvre and March Bloch at the University of Strasbourg began criticizing traditional history writing for its focus on the looming figures of history. In order to develop a new way of producing historical writing, they also sought to incorporate different methodologies into their historical research.² Their approach to history writing became known as the approach of the Annales School and it instigated a major turning point in historiographical work by producing a 'history of below'. What resulted from these various developments in history writing was a focus on cultural history and 'micro history', largely championed by Carlo Ginzburg in the 1960's.

New Military History and Its Applicability on Ottoman Military Historiography

The study of military history has also carried this same attitude in its historiography. Following World War II, warfare was recognized as a subject that entailed more than the formation of armies, tactics, weapons, and victory or defeat. Instead, the human dimension of war became a central

¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, "Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossing in a Global World", *History and Theory* 50 (2011), 188-91

² Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory*, 2. ed (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 14-7

consideration for the social science: sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, statisticians, and historians adopted new interdisciplinary approaches to the study of military history. This development followed closely with these other shifts in history writing in the 20th century which began to analyze and expose the struggles, labors, everyday practices, values, and beliefs of oft-forgotten people. Consequently, following these developments after World War II, new concepts and methodologies for analyzing the nature of war begun to develop in which the social sciences started to study the human perspective in warfare. What resulted was the historiographical approach known which shifted the focus of military history to the social and emotional conditions by examining the social context of war as well as the interpersonal relationships between soldiers. Concurrently, social scientists began to view wars in a humanistic way, leading to what is now called “new military history”. Jeremy Black explains that for New Military History, “the emphasis here is on social contexts, especially the position, experience and relationship of rank and file.”³

This thesis seeks to continue to develop this new approach to military history by examining the position, life, and experience of Armenian officers in the Ottoman army, 1912-1919. However, this task of analyzing the Ottoman military after 1909 is impeded by the lack of access to official records. Furthermore, the official Turkish historiography which was produced during the early years of the Turkish Republic also actively eliminated these religious minority groups from the military’s history. It is hard to introduce a new historical viewpoint in countries like Turkey where history writing cannot be separated from the state monopoly. It is not surprising that classical history writing erased different religious and ethnic groups from the transition from the early Ottoman Empire’s multi-religious and

³ Jeremy Black, “Military Organisations and Military Changes in Historical Perspective,” *Journal of Military History* 62 (1998). See also Yıldız Gültekin, “Bütüncül, Karşılaştırmalı ve Felsefî Bir Askerî Tarihe Doğru: Türkiye’de Askerî Tarih Araştırması ve Öğretiminin Geleceği Üzerine,” in *Osmanlı Askerî Tarihini Araştırmak:Yeni Kaynaklar Yeni Yaklaşımlar* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2012),9

multi-ethnic (Armenian, Greek, Jewish, Kurdish, Alevi, etc.) structure to the Turkification of Anatolia. Instead of using official state archival materials and relaying on this official Turkish historiography, researchers, therefore, have begun to turn to other forms of historical evidence to develop the account of these non-Muslim officers. My particular aim here, therefore, is to analyze the human dimension of the past by looking at the life, military experiences and feelings of two Armenian army officers in the Ottoman Army, Kalusd Surmenyan and Sarkis Torosyan, in an attempt to re-construct a history from ‘below’. In so doing, I will analyze the memoirs written by these two officers years after their military service. By considering these memoirs and by offering historical context, I will provide a new understanding of the history of the Ottoman military and the Armenian Genocide by taking into account the experiences and reflections of Armenian officers in the Ottoman army who experienced the Armenian genocide first hand in 1915.

The first chapter serves as a general overview of the Ottoman military history and examines the stages in which the late Ottoman political and military structures evolved during the first two decades of the twentieth century. This chapter, therefore, opens with a discussion of the ideology behind what came to be called “Ottomanism” which was an ideological attempt to unify the different religious, ethnic, and regional differences in the Ottoman army. This chapter then examines how this ideology of Ottomanism impacted the way the military conscription system functioned in the Ottoman Empire. In so doing, I examine the ways in which the political and ideological forces of the time led the Ottoman army to introduce non-Muslim military personnel into its ranks for the first time in its history. With this historical contextualization in place, I then examine the personal memoirs of two of these non-Muslim (Armenian) military officers in order to discuss how this new military mobilization was experienced by two of the Armenian officers—Kalusd Sürmenyan and Sarkis Torossian—and the ways in which they were impacted by and responded to the Armenian Genocide

which was carried out during their military service. Thus, the second chapter offer a brief biography of Kalusd Surmenyan in order to understand the content of his memoir. The third chapter follows by examining the memoir and life of Sarkis Torosyan. Towards the end of this chapter, I offer a glimpse into the recent historiographical debate that has recently erupted around the Turkish publication of this memoir. My final chapter further interrogates this historiographical question by examining the ways official Turkish historiography was inaugurated with the ideological aim of excluding the mention of non-Muslim military members in order to form a firm foundation in the form of Turkish national myths. After examining the historical foundation, I subsequently draw out the ways—due either to political, religious, or ideological motivations—that these non-Muslim offers have been actively erased from official historiography throughout the remainder of the Twentieth Century and even up to today.

Chapter 1: Historical Background of Ottoman Conscription System, 1909-1919

After the French Revolution, and with the rise of the notion of nationhood, empires across the world were faced with the problem of growing nationalist movements, particularly in response to the inequality experienced by various religious and ethnic groups within these imperial regimes. The Empire's reaction to separatist nationalist movements in the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century was similar to the responses by other imperial systems of Europe under threat of disintegration—the empire scrambled to create a unified identity which would reunite all of its dissimilar parts into a united whole, a national identity without nationhood. While previous generations living in the empire would not have conceived of their identity as being formed by the empire under which they lived—no one throughout the Empire's history, for example, conceived of themselves to be “Ottoman”—the ruling class and intellectuals swiftly tried to unify the Empire under the common identity of “Ottoman”.⁴ In so doing, they tried to eliminate differences between the religious and ethnic groups—Orthodox Greeks, Gregorian Armenians, Jews, Kurds, and Arabs—in the Ottoman territory. What resulted was “Ottomanism” (*Osmanlılık*), which was the official policy instituted for this unification.

1.1 Ottomanism As Collective Identity

Ottomanism, the notion that all of the sultan's subjects ought to be in a “brotherly union”, became a substantial issue of state policy during the end of the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808–1839) who emphasized the importance of equality in his speeches and declarations, and,

⁴ Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 18-25

in 1831, provided financial support—for the first time in Ottoman history—to the churches in Ottoman lands.⁵ This policy was then continued actively during the period of *Tanzimat* (1839–1876). To preserve the Ottoman Empire, the idea of Ottomanism aimed to reduce the influence of nationalist movements and instead spread the collective belief of belonging to the Ottoman State. Accordingly, official state policy dictated that those who lived in Ottoman territories were to be called by same name: Ottomans.⁶

As ‘Ottoman’ was an unfamiliar concept for both the people living in Ottoman territories and foreigners, questions were asked when the Empire attempted to place all of its subjects under the umbrella of Ottomanism. For instance, for foreign powers, being ‘Ottoman’ equaled being Turkish, while rural Anatolians viewed the ‘Ottoman’ identity simply as a label applicable to everyone who lived in Ottoman-controlled lands.⁷ While these differing interpretations of the term began to take hold, leading intellectuals of the time such as Ahmed Midhat Efendi and Semseddin Sami attempted to explain official Ottomanism as such:

As Ahmed Midhat Efendi once stated: “I am Ottoman. And not only an Ottoman—I am the purest of Ottomans, I am a Muslim and a Turk.” In his famous dictionary of the Turkish language, Şemseddin Sami defined *Osmanlılık* as “belonging to the Ottoman tribe and family (it could be translated also as “people and race”) or as “being a subject of the Ottoman State” (*Osmanlı kavim ve cinsine mensubiyet veya Devlet-i Osmaniye’ye tab’iyet...*).⁸

The official reform policy that became known as Ottomanism, therefore, was applied to all subjects of the Empire regardless of location or religion. In the case of non-Muslims, the state policy aimed to incorporate them into the Ottoman Empire as ‘real’ Ottomans and to focus

⁵ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, New rev. ed (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris : Distributed by St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 41-45; for further information see introduction: Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities: Armenians, Greeks, Albanians, Jews, and Arabs, 1908-1918* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014),.

⁶ Diana Mishkova, ed., *We, the People: Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe* (Budapest ; New York: Central European University Press, 2009), 50-2

⁷ Ahmad, *The Young Turks and the Ottoman Nationalities*.

⁸ Mishkova, *We, the People*, 48

on being Ottoman instead of using their religion to form their identity. However, this task faced significant hurdles because the minority communities, or *millet*s,⁹ defined themselves first and foremost by their own religious and ethnic identities. As Roderic Davison details in *Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century*, “He was a Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Gregorian Armenian, Jew, Catholic, or Protestant before he was a Turk or Arab, a Greek or Bulgar, in the national sense, and before he felt himself an Ottoman citizen.”¹⁰

As the Ottoman Empire embarked upon the Ottomanist project to unify the separate religious and ethnic communities, the state utilized the press in the Tanzimat period to produce propaganda to advance its ideology. The first newspaper —*Takvim-i Vekayi*— was published in Istanbul in 1831, with both the local and national content controlled by the state. The publication served primarily to inform the minority groups regarding the new state laws and policies. Additionally, after the Decree of 1867 the private newspapers and non-Muslim newspapers were also brought under state control. As such, the press played a significant role in the promotion of Ottomanist ideas during the Tanzimat period.¹¹

The official Ottomanist propaganda focused on equality: equality in taxation, equality in the eye of the court, equality in social standing, and equality in treatment. The Sultan made contact directly by becoming visible in the society to show his power with the people to bring a message of belonging to the ‘fatherland’ and sharing a kinship as ‘living brothers’ (*kardeşçe*).¹² This unification project announcing the Ottoman state’s fair treatment of its non-Muslim subjects

⁹In the Ottoman Empire, *millet* was used to describe a religious community. Today it is used to describe ethnic communities.

¹⁰ Roderic Davison, “Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century” 59, no. 4 (1954): 844–64.

¹¹ Doğan Gürpınar, *Ottoman/Turkish Visions of the Nation, 1860-1950* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 165-170

¹² Mishkova, *We, the People*, 52-7

served to convey to the European powers an atmosphere of justice and equality for all in the Ottoman Empire.

1.2 Historical Background of Ottoman Military Mobilization, 1912-1919

The French Revolution (1789–1799) not only instituted a new notion of nationhood into the political imagination, as we saw above, but it also produced new forms of the modern army system and new concepts for military mobilization. Using these new concepts—especially mobilization—on the 23rd of August, 1793, all able-bodied French men were conscripted into the French Army for the protection of their *levee en masse* (nation). As observed by Jean Jacques Rousseau in his *Social Contract*, “Every citizen became a soldier to perform their civic duty, not for the profession.” The conscription system was then systematically organized during the reign of Napoleon (1769-1821), within the Napoleonic Wars in the 18th century. The French Revolution and subsequent the Napoleonic Wars, therefore, drastically reformed military organizations and strategies. The influence of Napoleonic warfare first was seen in the American Civil War, and in the 19th century the system was again shaped by the Prussian military structure which increased the number of soldiers and instituted compulsory military service; as a result, the Prussian model reshaped the relationship between the state and society. What resulted, therefore, was the reality that any male civilian could become a state official enlisted in the military.

These developments swiftly made their way to the Ottoman Empire and during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II (1808-39) new reforms were introduced. Along with significant military reforms, Sultan Mahmud II also instituted reforms which included European-style clothing, architecture, legislation, and institutional organization. While many reform processes in the Ottoman Empire took decades to develop, Erik J. Zürcher explains that “with the creation of a

European-style army and a bureaucratic apparatus, supported by modern educational facilities, a large measure of effective central control over the empire was established, but it took another 50 years to do it.”¹³

In the 19th century, the conscription system was symbolic of society’s loyalty to the state. In the 19th century, therefore, conscription was used around the world—by countries such as Germany, Russia, Japan, and the Ottomans—as a tool to develop nationalism. Furthermore, conscription was a significant actor for the 19th century military modernization project. Accordingly, for almost every country in Europe, the conscription system was the most significant development for military service.¹⁴ The Ottoman military system bore resemblance to the European military style by instituting a change from a military volunteer system to a conscription system.

In the 19th century, the Tanzimat military reforms ushered in the modern Ottoman army. However, because of certain internal dynamics and distinctive problems of the Ottoman Army, such as the distrust of non-Muslim citizens, the new military system did not fully do away earlier military practices and instead restricted non-Muslims from entering the army. After the Young Turk Revolution in July 1908¹⁵, the constitution of 1876 was reconsidered, and the following year the Ottoman Empire declared all Ottoman subjects eligible for military service. This was the first time in Ottoman history that non-Muslims were allowed to serve in the military. On the 7th of August 1909, a new conscription system was officially announced which entailed that all male

¹³ Ibid.p: 57

¹⁴ Daniel Moran and Arthur Waldron, eds., *The People in Arms: Military Myth and National Mobilization since the French Revolution* (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).8-33

¹⁵ The Young Turk Revolution (July 1908) of the Ottoman Empire was when the Young Turks movement restored the Ottoman constitution of 1876 and ushered in multi-party politics in a two stage electoral system (electoral law) under the Ottoman parliament.

Ottoman subjects between the ages of 15 and 30 years old were eligible for conscription in October of that year. This sparked much debate in the Ottoman Parliament over constitutional rights and the system of military conscription. For instance, Ottoman Armenian deputy, Ohannes Vartkes who became a parliament member in 1908, described the responsibility of military service as “an honor for the non-Muslim communities.”¹⁶ One of the meeting about the conscription in the Ottoman parliament on 29th of July, 1909 an Ottoman Armenian deputy, Krikor Zohrab, emphasized with the significance of the subject based on fraternity, unification and consequently equal military service for all Ottoman subjects.¹⁷ When one of the deputies opposed the idea of non-Muslims being included in the military service, and argued that non-Muslims must pay the tax instead of doing the military service, Zohrab responded, “In this case they must not be Ottomans until the end of their lives!”, and continued his argumentation:

...Let's not consider this as an issue of finance. My Sublime friends! This is an issue of fraternity, an issue of politics. We consider and feel it this way and it is wrongly assumed that we are being stingy not to give money for the defense of the fatherland. We want to give our blood for our fatherland. While we are touched by this feeling, to say that “you are attempting to be exempt from the military due” is not a true evaluation of our spiritual state. We know what is the most harmful thing for the country today. With the legislation we made here, we want to establish a feeling of fraternity with which this country can only find security. This feeling of fraternity will be brought about first of all by quickly making the military service a duty to be personally performed... The most ancient duty of Ottomanism is this. It is a thousand times more important than the budget. Today, we want to remove all of this partitioning for all of this country. We are working to prohibit such things as ethnicity, nationality, and so on. We want to live together. And it is necessary to die together in order to learn how to live together¹⁸

¹⁶ Diana Mishkova, ed., *We, the People: Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe* (Budapest ; New York: Central European University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Murat Koptaş, “Armenian Political Thinking in the Second Constitutional Period: The Case of the Krikor Zohrab” (MA, Boğaziçi University, 2005), 120

¹⁸ Meclisi Mebusan Zabıt Ceridesi: Devre: I, İctima Senesi: 1, Cilt: 5: 13 Haziran 1325 Tarihli Yüz Birinci İnikattan-16 Temmuz 1325 Tarihli Yüz Yirminci İnikada Kadar (Ankara: TBMM Basimevi, n.d.), p. 189; “Hülase, ölünceye kadar onlar Osmanlı olmamalı!” Ibid., 191; “(...) Biz bunu bir mesele-i maliye diye telaki etmeyelim. Rüfeka-yı kiram! Bu mesele, bir uhuvvet meselesidir, bir siyaset meselesidir. Biz böyle telakki ve böyle hissediyoruz ve biz bugün vatanın müdafaası uğrunda para mı esirgiyoruz zannolunuyor. Biz vatanımız için kanımızı vermek istiyoruz. Biz bu his ile mütehasis olduğumuz sırada siz bedel-i askeriden muaf olmak için gayret ediyorsunuz demek bizim ahval-i ruhiyemizi doğru olarak muhakeme etmek değildir. Bugün bu memleket en ziyade

With the new conscription system of 1909, all male Ottoman subjects between the ages of 15 and 30 years old, regardless of their religion were drafted. The Balkan Wars, therefore, was the first time when the Ottoman Ottoman Muslim and non-Muslim soldiers fought together for the sake of the Ottoman Empire. At this critical historical moment, Muslim and non-Muslim soldiers and officers were required to be present to support the Ottoman state and the continuation of the empire. The Ottoman historian Eyal Ginio emphasized the importance of the Balkan Wars for creating the Ottoman nation in his article “Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913)”. He writes, “The Balkan Wars can be seen as the first true war in the name of and for the benefit of the Ottoman nation.”¹⁹ According to Fikret Adanir, the Balkan Wars was the first military instance which applied the idea of Ottomanism. Ottomanism, he writes, “had to transform a pre-modern empire comprising multiple religious denominations into a multiethnic state.”²⁰ The Ottoman elites realized that the conscription system was critical in unifying the multi-ethnic and multi-religious Ottoman population. This system was the most important aspect for the creation of the ‘Ottoman Nation.’ Even with this awareness, the Ottoman military system never fully became multi-ethnic and multi-religious.

hangi cihetten mutazarrırdır, biz bunu biliriz. Burada yaptığımız kanunlar içinde her vakit uğraştığımız bir hiss-i uhuvvet teessüsü içindir ki, bu memleket yalnız onunla selamet bulabilir. Bu hiss-i uhuvveti evvel be evvel vazife-i askeriye bilfiil ifa etmek noktasından isticale ile meydana getireceğiz. (...) Osmanlılığın en akdem vazifesi budur. Bütçeden 1000 kat daha mühimdir. Bugün bütün bu memleket için bu tefrikaları kaldırmak istiyoruz. Kavmiyet, milliyet vesair birtakım bu gibi şeyleri menetmek için uğraşıyoruz. Biz beraber yaşamak istiyoruz. Beraber yaşamak cihetini öğrenmek için de beraber ölmek lazımdır.” After these impressive monitions, Tahir Bey, the deputy of Bursa (CUP) appreciates Zohrab: “Bu bedel-i askeri meselesinde Zohrab Efendi’nin mücerret teyid-i uhuvvet-i Osmaniye nokta-i nazarından irad ettikleri ifadat şayan-ı takdirdir.”

Quote found in Ibid.,120-1

¹⁹ Eyal Ginio, “Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913): Awakening from the Ottoman Dream,” *War in History* 12, no. 2 (2005): 125–55.

²⁰ Fikret Adanir, “Non-Muslims in the Ottoman Army and the Ottoman Defeat in the Balkan War of 1912-1913,” in *A Question of Armenian Genocide: Armenians and Turks at the End of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). 113.

With the massive defeat of the Balkan War of 1912-1913 this newly integrated army and the notion of multi-religious assimilation was criticized. Public discourse began to blame the military defeats on the non-Muslim military members and a lack of Islamic adherence overall. The Ottomanism dynamism of the CUP revolution, therefore, was very short lived, and religious difference soon proved to be a much more powerful unifier than coexistence and tolerance. As a result of the defeat of the Balkan wars, Ottomanism was abandoned and was replaced by a Turkish nationalism which mobilized along Turkish-Islamic lines. On January 3rd, 1914, after the Balkan defeat, Enver Pasha was appointed Minister of War and he swiftly began making drastic reforms. Enver Pasha dismissed 1,300 military officers in the Ottoman army in the first months of 1914.²¹ The Unionist government justified this by suggesting that these officers were approaching retirement age, were lacking competence, or were disrupting modernization. Significantly, as seen in the table 1, non-Muslim officers' retirement number—particularly, Armenian—increased between the years of 1914-1915. Here, the question can be asked whether the Unionist government had forced them into retirement or the lack of confidence in the military leadership pushed them to choose retirement for themselves.

	1909–1913	1914–1915	1914–1919
Armenian	40	86	3
Greek	18	39	1

²¹ Ginio, “Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913): Awakening from the Ottoman Dream.” 163

Jewish	21	27	1
Other Christians	11	37	4
Total	90	189	9

Table 1: Non-Muslim Retirement ²²

Moving away from the ideology of Ottomanism which sought to unify the multiplicity of differences that existed in the Empire, CUP rule instead introduced, for the first time, the notion of the ethnically homogenous nation-state into the Ottoman political taxonomy. This homogenous ‘Turkishness’ ultimately blossomed into a strong political force which led to the independence war and which produced the Turkish Republic. The historiography from the early stages of the Turkish Republic, therefore, was used to bolster and promote the notion of the homogeneity of the Turkish state. This led to an intentional erasure these non-Muslim soldiers and officers from the official Turkish historiography of the 20th century.

Therefore, the task of the remainder of this thesis is to retrieve and illuminate the history and personal accounts of these non-Muslim officers who have been pushed from the pages of the official Turkish history books. In so doing, I will investigate the personal memories of two of these non-Muslim officers as they recorded them in their self-published memoirs. I will do this in order to offer a glimpse not only of the changes of military strategy of Ottomanism but also in order to examine broadly the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim minorities within Turkey’s historical past. Therefore, in the following chapter I will first discuss the Armenian

²² During my research of General Directorate of State Archives of the Prime Ministry of the Republic of Turkey, I analyzed 800 retirement, appointment and medal documents of non-Muslim officers. Accordingly, I made the table of retirement by using these documents.

officer Kalusd Sürmenyan's memoir to demonstrate how Armenian officer fought for the Ottoman Army during the First World War in the Caucasian front.

Chapter 2: The Memoir of Kalusd Sürmenyan: *Yerzinga*

In chapter 1, I analyzed how the conditions of mobilization and defeat during the Balkan War of 1912-1913 and the Caucasus campaign of 1914 pushed the state to become more centralized, authoritarian and nationalist.²³ Moving on from the historical and structural background introduced in chapter 1, the following two chapters address the human dimension of the Ottoman mobilization experience and Armenian deportation during the First World War. In the first chapter, I examined the systematic ways the mobilization of manpower and military conscription was carried out in the Ottoman army. In the following two chapters, conversely, I will examine how this new military mobilization was experienced by two of the Armenian officers—Kalusd Sürmenyan and Sarkis Torossian—who took part in this historic mobilization process by analyzing the memoirs that they drafted to record their memories. Thus, these chapters aim to explore not only what Sürmenyan and Torossian experienced during the war, but also how they served to manage the challenges of particular discrimination and the ways they were affected by and responded to the experience of the Armenian Genocide and the mass deportation of Armenians.

In the official Turkish historiography of the 20th century, memoirs and first-hand accounts of high ranking Muslim officers were carefully chosen by Enver Pasha, the de facto commander-in-chief of the Ottoman army. After the fall of the Ottoman army, the Turkish Republic produced their official account which would glorify the Turkish victory at Gallipoli.²⁴ I will examine this traditional

²³ Mehmet Besikci, *The Ottoman Mobilization of Manpower in the First World War* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1

²⁴ Mesut Uyar, "Remembering the Gallipoli Campaign: Turkish Official Military Historiography, War Memorials and Contested Ground," *First World War Studies*, 2016.

historiographical question in depth in the final chapter, but for now it is important to point out that the accounts of other lower ranking officers and specifically the account of minorities was intentionally neglected.²⁵ This ‘neglect’ has not only skewed the way the past is considered, it also produced a further erasure from national historiography of the history and experiences of minority communities. In this sense, Sürmenyan’s memoir is a valuable document. Distinguished from other accounts of Ottoman lieutenants or junior officers, it is important precisely because it was written by a low ranking Armenian officer, about whom little else is known. Because of his personal account, Sürmenyan’s memoir adds a unique historical perspective of Armenian society and offers a complex experience of the genocide. It is neither Turkish national history, nor Armenian diasporic historiography.²⁶ Because of his perspective—both being an affected by the state law, while at the same time, being a state official—his memoir offers an intricate, first-hand account of the *Tehcir* Law and its effects. At the same time, his memoir provides a glimpse into Armenian daily life, Ottoman-Armenian relations, and army life.

2.1 Armenian Officer Kalusd Sürmenyan and The First World War, 1914-18

The Ottoman Second-Lieutenant officer (after 1917, he became Lieutenant), Kalusd Sürmenyan (1890-?), served in the Ottoman Army during the First World War. He began his army career as a second lieutenant in the Caucasian front and stayed in the army even after the Armenian deportation law passed in 1915.²⁷ After this Armenian deportation law, *Tehcir* Law,

²⁵ For example see; Sermet Atacanlı, *Atatürk ve Çanakkale’nin komutanları*, 2015; Cemal Paşa and Alpay Kabacalı, *Hatıralar: İttihat ve Terakki, I. Dünya Savaşı anıları*, Alpay Kabacalı, *Talât Paşa’nın anıları*, 2007; Slade Adolphus et al., *Müşavir paşa’nın Kırım Harbi Anıları*, 2012 (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yay)

²⁶ See for the Nationalist Turkish historiography: Yusuf Halaçoğlu, *Sürgünden Soykırıma Ermeni İddiaları* (İstanbul: BKY,2006) ; Emre Kongar, *Tarihimizle Yüzleşmek* (İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2016); Birsan Karaca, *Sözde Ermeni Kırımı Projesi*, (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2006)

²⁷ The *Tehcir* Law—deportation or forced displacement—or the official name by Turkish Republic "Sevk ve İskân Kanunu" (Relocation and Resettlement Law) was a law passed by the Ottoman Parliament on May 27, 1915 authorizing the deportation of the Ottoman Empire's Armenian population. . The bill was officially enacted on June

was passed, Sürmenyan was not dismissed from the army but was instead appointed to passive mission while his family was deported to Syria. In 1947, he published a book called Yerzinga, [Erzincan], named after his hometown, which was first published in Armenian in the city of Baghdad. This book, which was about the city of Yerzinga through Sürmenyan's memories, also contained a remarkable chapter on Sürmenyan's experience in the Ottoman army which was titled "K. Sürmenyani Huşeri" ["The Memoirs of Sürmenyan"].²⁸ Second-lieutenant Sürmenyan published his memoirs, first as part of a book about his hometown Erzincan in 1947²⁹ and later in 1967 a different version under the title *Turkish-Armenian Soldiers and Military [Service] First in the Turkish then in the Armenian Armies*.³⁰ The first version mainly deals with Kalusd Sürmenyan's experience and service in the Ottoman army until the end of the First World War. Whereas, the second version, which was published in 1967, concentrated heavily on Sürmenyan's service in the Armenian army after 1919, a topic which occupies only a few pages in the first one.

Kalusd Sürmenyan was born in 1890 in Erzincan, Turkey. He was one of the first Armenian students to study in the Ottoman Military College between 1909-1912. Sürmenyan fought in the Ottoman Army during the First World War in the Caucasian battle. During the Armenian Genocide in 1915, he was withdrawn from active service and given a passive position in the Ottoman Army. However, while he served in his role in the Army, his family was forced

1, 1915 and expired on February 8, 1916. The resettlement campaign resulted the massive massacre. Today known as Armenian Genocide. The bill was officially enacted on June 1, 1915 and expired on February 8, 1916.

²⁸ I use Turkish translation of memoirs instead of relying on the original Armenian version because I do not possess the necessary Armenian reading competency. In here, I will use the Turkish translation which was edited by Yaşar Tolga Cora in 2015. Kalusd Sürmenyan and Yaşar Tolga Cora, *Harbiyeli bir Osmanlı Ermenisi: Mülâzım-ı Sâni Sürmenyan'ın savaş ve tehcir anıları*, 1. basım (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015)

²⁹ Kalusd Sürmenyan, *Harbiyeli bir Osmanlı Ermenisi Mülâzım-ı Sani Sürmenyan'ın Savaş ve Tehcir Anıları*. Ed. Yaşar Tolga Cora. (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2015). Because of the lack of English translation, I use the first version which edited by Yaşar Tolga Cora, all translations used below will be my own.

³⁰ Ibid., 40

to deport from Erzincan to Syria. Throughout this process, he stayed in the Ottoman Army and went to Batumi with Ottoman Army at the end of the First World War where he started to write his memoirs in 1918 with what he said was his ‘fresh memory’. After staying 2 years in Armenia and serving in the Armenian military, Sürmenyan and his wife moved to Baghdad after Armenia became part of the Soviet Union in 1920. Here, Sürmenyan’s memoir was published in two different versions during two different periods of his life. The first version, which I will use as my primary source for this chapter, was published in 1947 under name: *Yerzinga*. This version mostly covered his experiences’ in the Ottoman Army, the second version was published 20 years later in 1967 and it was about his activities’ in the Armenian Army after 1918.

This memoir shows a divided life: on the one hand, Sürmenyan felt proud about being an Ottoman officer, while, at the same time, he expressed his deep desperation at the reality of the Armenian people and his inability to help the situation that they faced. The memoir, therefore, exhibits a man both reflecting on the experience of mass deportation, while at the same time lamenting his personal regret about losing the dignified position of being an Ottoman officer.

As I approach these memoirs, I will address how memory is negotiated through the trauma of the Armenian genocide and how the experience of genocide has been remembered and represented in his writings. Sürmenyan claims to have begun writing his memoir with fresh memories while he was in Batum with the Turkish army in 1918. But as the memoirs includes a short section of his life after 1918, it must have been finished later.³¹ The memoir also includes anecdotes told by other people to support his accounts or have a more coherent narrative.

While the question as to what motivated the writing of the memoir remains opaque, this chapter will attempt to answer the following concrete questions: How did Kalusd Sürmenyan

³¹ Surmenyan devoted 5 pages on his life in Armenia in the memories of 98 pages in total.

become an officer? What was his experience as an Ottoman-Armenian officer at the World War I (1914-1918), particularly during and after the deportations and massacres of Armenians began in mid-1915? What were the effects this had on his family and how did he manage to survive in the Ottoman Army? Lastly, where does his story fit within our limited knowledge about Ottoman-Armenian officers during the World War I and what else can we find out about them?

Kalusd Sürmenyan was born in Erzincan in 1890; his grandfather was Kaspar Ağa whose ancestors had migrated from the region of Sürmene on the Black Sea coast, hence their family name was Sürmenyan (meaning those who came from Sürmene). The *Annuaire Oriental*—an 18th century record of both Istanbul and Anatolian traders—produces some information about the Sürmenyan family.³² Here, the Sürmenyan brothers were listed among the important traders in the early 1890s, and in early 1900s. Arshag Sürmenyan, who would be his father or another relative, was listed as one of the two shoe-traders in the city. Kalusd Sürmenyan married with Asdğig Sarrafyan the daughter of another well-known shoe trader family—Sarrafyan—in 1914 in Erzincan.

According to Sürmenyan's memoir, he had two family members, Kirsag and Mihrtad, who were members of Armenian General Benevolent Union and the Tashnakstyun Party. Kirsag was a member of Erzincan branch of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, which was established in 1906 by Boghos Nubar Pasha and Mihrtad was a member of Tashnakstyun's *Gaydzak* group in Erzincan.³³ This indicates that Kalusd Sürmenyan came from a well-known Armenian family in the city with economic and political connections. At the same time, it shows

³² Sürmenyan and Cora, *Harbiyeli bir Osmanlı Ermenisi*.,12

³³ *Ibid.*, 13

that his family also had Armenian revolutionist or nationalist members.

According to Kalusd Sürmenyan's memoir, he graduated from Central Armenian School (Getronagan Varjarian) in 1905 at the age of 15, and started high school in Erzincan where he was the only Armenian student. After the declaration of the Second Constitution—which, as we saw, allowed non-Muslim officers into the Ottoman army—he entered the military middle school exam in Erzincan. Because of the fact that he had graduated from the state middle school, Sürmenyan was, according to his account, more successful in the entrance exam than other Armenians. Because of his scores, he enrolled as a final-year student in the military middle school. After graduation, he continued the military high school in Erzincan, and in 1910 Sürmenyan went to Istanbul and started studying at the Ottoman Military College (*Harbiye Mektebi*). He graduated from Military College as a Second-Lieutenant in summer 1912.³⁴ Sürmenyan mentioned that he graduated from Military College with the other non-Muslims, he was not the only one.

Below, I have listed the names and birth places of non-Muslim according to Sürmenyan's memoir:

Table 2: The First Armenian Graduates of Ottoman Military College in 1912

Karnig Navasartyan	Bolis/ Istanbul
Melkon	unknown
Harutyun (Cavalry)	Tokat

³⁴ Ibid., 40-2

Vahe Çoburyan	Bolis/ Istanbul
Ohannes	Maraş
Rupen	Samsun
Kalusd Sürmenyan	Yerzinga/ Erzincan
Ohannes Aginyan	Sebestia/ Sivas

As discussed in the chapter 1, at the beginning of the Second Constitutional Period in 1908, military service as a permanent profession became possible for Armenian, Greek, and Jewish citizens in the Ottoman empire through the new conscription efforts. This table shows us that many Armenian and other non-Muslim societies were eager to join the Ottoman Army. In addition to Sürmenyan's name, the Armenian newspaper *Antranik*, also mentioned in 1909 six Armenian youth enrolled in the Military High School in Sivas.³⁵ Ayhan Aktar who studies Armenian the memoir of Sarkis Torosyan's, lists the Armenian military officers who enrolled in the Military High School after 1908. Armenians named Onnik Kundakyan, Vağinag Meskoyan, Kirkor Sarafyan, and Şahen Tatikyan all enrolled in the Military High School in 1909 as boarding students. In the Military College, twelve students or 1% of 1,200 students were composed of non-Muslims. In 1912, eight Armenians, including Sürmenyan, graduated from the Military College and joined the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars.³⁶ Therefore, the militarist propaganda

³⁵ Ohannes Kılıçdağı, "Sarkis Torosyan'ın Açması Gereken Yol," in *Tarih, Otobiyografi ve Hakikat Yüzbaşı Torosyan Tartışması ve Türkiye'de Tarih Yazımı* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2015), 224

³⁶ Ayhan Aktar, "Yüzbaşı Torosyan Tartışması Yahut 'Alaturka' Tarihçiliğinin Açmazları," [The discussion of Captain Torosyan or the Dilemma of 'Alaturca' historiography] in *Tarih, Otobiyografi ve Hakikat* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2015).

in the Armenian media might have influenced Sürmenyan's decision to enroll the Military College. According to Ohannes Kılıçdağı's research on the Armenian media, the Ottoman-Armenians had supported military service as a duty for defending the "homeland", in the very same way that Turkish-Ottomans did.³⁷ Sürmenyan's first intention, therefore, was to defend the rights of Armenian society in the Ottoman army by becoming an army officer. At the same time, Sürmenyan, just like other non-Muslim officers, considered being an officer in the Ottoman Army a privilege and perused this new opportunity with pride. He writes, "in Turkey, as it was in Germany, officers belonged to a privileged class. They were lofty and were considered to be noble to a certain degree. In reality, it was stunning, or, as it is said, "those were the times".³⁸

In this way, he talked about the military in a positive way which leads one to conclude that a career in the army was very appealing to Sürmenyan. He was not unique in his way of thinking: as we know, many Young Turk officers,³⁹ and also some Arab officers in the army, came from lower and middle classes but were able to attain power through their position in the army.⁴⁰ While Sürmenyan's socio-economic status was not low, his ethnicity, which left him in a relatively un-privileged position particularly in public offices, offered no access to military service before 1908. Thus, his motivation for joining the army might have stemmed both from political motivations that are connected to his being an ethnic Armenian, and also his career aspirations which were shared by all Ottoman officers seeking higher ranks and further power. In this way, his career in the military service became a way to acquire personal dignity and social

³⁷ Bülent Somay, ed., *Tarih, otobiyografi ve hakikat: yüzbaşı Torosyan tartışması ve Türkiye'de tarihyazımı*, 1. baskı, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi yayınları Tarih, 508 55 (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015)., 218-25

³⁸ Sürmenyan and Cora, *Harbiyeli bir Osmanlı Ermenisi.*, 56-69

³⁹ Ohannes Kılıçdağı, "The Bourgeois Transformation and Ottomanism among Anatolian Armenians after The 1908 Revolution" (Unpublished MA, Bogazici University, 2005).

⁴⁰ Fîrûz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, The Making of the Middle East Series (London: Routledge, 1999)., 34

mobility in the broader Ottoman society.

2.2 Sürmenyan's and His Family Experiences' during the First World War, 1914-18

After his graduation in June 1912 from Military College he was commissioned to the 4th Army in Erzincan but shortly after, his regiment was sent to Çatalca, East Trace, due to the Balkan Wars 1912-1913. As mentioned in chapter I, the Balkan Wars were the first military application for the idea of Ottoman identity, As one of the first graduate from Ottoman Military School, Sürmenyan served for the Ottoman Army in the Balkan Wars as an Armenian officer. The Ottoman Empire announced the mobilization on 2nd of August 1914 for the First World War I and, at the same time declared their neutrality. However, on 30th of October, Enver Pasha, Minister of War, declared that the Ottoman Empire was entering the First World War with the Central Powers. There were two main fronts: Gallipoli and Caucasian for Ottoman Empire. The Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire were the central opponents in the Caucasus Campaign. Later on, the armies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia entered the campaign on the side of Allies. The campaign extended from the South Caucasus to the Armenian Highlands region, and reaching as far as Trabzon, Bitlis, Mus and Van. Therefore, in the Ottoman state and afterwards supported by traditional Turkish historiography, the Armenian Genocide is linked with the Armenian actions in this campaign. In the sense of Sürmenyan's position was being in the Caucasus front is significant to criticize Turkish traditional historiography.

After the declaration of mobilization and the declaration of World War I, Sürmenyan was sent to the Black Sea coast to defend Samsun-Giresun line. Afterwards, he was in village the Tortum-Oltu, in Erzurum region, line in the Caucasian front where he commanded a platoon (*takım*) and got wounded in a small-battle around Oltu.

After this part of his life, the memoir involved the most devastating part of his life. Following a defeat at Sarıkamış as an Armenian officer he was not disarmed unlike Armenian soldiers but was appointed to passive missions, first as a junior-officer in the labor battalions in Sansa valley, in Erzincan. In mid-May 1915, the deportation also began for the wealthy families of Erzincan—Sarkis Der Stephan, Arzumanyan, Çaycıyan—, despite all bargaining attempts between the Armenian religious leaders and chief mufti, all wealthy Armenian families had to leave the city in 2 days.⁴¹ After their deportation, Kalusd Sürmenyan was also appointed to Garin/Erzurum. He was not allowed to take his family—mother, wife, sister and his sister’s children—with him.⁴²

The news of the deportation of his family reached him while he was in Erzurum. The *Menzil Müfettişi* [Field Inspector] of the 3rd Army Ziya Bey appointed him to the post of commander of the 8th Camel Caravan at Erzincan in order to let Kalusd Sürmenyan take care of his family closely. However, he could not arrive there on time, and taking the sergeant of the 8th caravan with him, he pursued his family on the deportation route and found them in Agn/Egin. Kalusd Sürmenyan called this period of his life, between May 1915- Erzincan and March 1916 an “absolute odyssey”. In this period, he searched for his family and on the way, he witnessed a variety of atrocities committed against Armenians and his mother died during the Armenian deportation. Although he was an Ottoman officer he could not do or did nothing to save the deportees, something which he either regrets implicitly or prefers to be silent: “...but I was consoled as well and such a great consolation to save members of my family, not one but

⁴¹ The wealth families of Erzincan deported on 18th and 21st of May. See Raymond Kevorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: Tauris, 2011), 309. In the Sürmenyan’s memoir, he wrote: “in the beginning of May...” Sürmenyan and Cora, *Harbiyeli bir Osmanlı Ermenisi.*, 57. According to Rumi Calendar the dates, which were given from Sürmenyan, suits on the early stage of May, or Sürmenyan misremembered.

⁴² Sürmenyan and Cora, *Harbiyeli bir Osmanlı Ermenisi.*, 57-58

seven.”⁴³

On the other hand, Sürmenyan, in Egin, was arrested on the accusation of instigating rebellion among the deportees and was sent to the court-marshal at Harput. Although, during his trial Kalusd Sürmenyan was still considering of his military career. When he was taken to trial at *Harput* at the Marshal court, he said: “..But the court sentenced me to the lowest term possible. Despite that, I took it to the appeal and with some evidences that showed that I am right, I demanded full acquittal. I thought this trial would be a stain on my career and hinder my advancement.”⁴⁴ Here, Sürmenyan underlined his position and its benefits in the disadvantaged conditions. This sentence context is significant to understand his ideas of being in the military in the whole narratives. He emphasized every small situation which he used his position in the Army. To reach the officer position for an Armenian was not easy task in the Ottoman Army, particularly during the Armenian Genocide, because of this his narratives constructed around this ‘privileged’ position and under-privileged position at the same time.

After Sürmenyan’s arrest, he accounts his family was forced to continue the deportation road and arrived in Arabgir where Sürmenyan managed to convince an officer to save his family and settle them there. This was probably after Enver Pasha’s order of exempting the families of Armenian officers in August 1915.⁴⁵ After his three months prison sentence in Harput, he was re-assigned to his post in Sansa. As the cities in the Ottoman east began to fall to the Russians, he was first assigned to *Kemah*, Erzincan and then to Sivas and from there to the training center (*talimghah*) in *Zile*, Tokat Province, Turkey. Sürmenyan remembers his time in Zile, as peaceful,

⁴³ Ibid., 73

⁴⁴ Ibid., 87-90

⁴⁵ Mesut Uyar, “Ottoman Arab Officers between Nationalism and Loyalty during the First World War,” *War in History* 20, no. 4 (2013): 526–44., 533

easy, and probably best period both in terms of life quality and the prestige he had. He said, after listing the good things about life in Zile: “Despite the fact that we were Armenian, we were enjoying all the rights of officers...There were nine officers above me. It is true that we were young and robust. But Turks knew how to make use of us. They recognized our rights and were using us at the greatest degree possible.”⁴⁶ He stayed there for more than a year with many other Armenian officers including Vahan Pastermadjian and in 1917 he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and decorated with a Medal of War.⁴⁷ As the Ottoman army marched eastwards once again after the Russian withdrawal from the war, Kalusd Sürmenyan and Vahan Pastermadjian ended up in Batumi at the end of 1917. They stayed in Batumi with the Ottoman Army until the Armistice of Mudros. However, Sürmenyan did not give specific information of his Batumi experiences. From where he did not return after the armistice but with Lieutenant Pastermadjian he passed to Armenia after the Armenian-Georgian war to fight in the newly established Army of the Republic of Armenia. Sürmenyan wrote as such:

We arrived in Armenia on May, 1919 and participated the celebrations of the first anniversary of Armenian Republic on 28th of May that seemed fascinating. We, me and Pastermadjian, thought about where we are today, contrasting where we were 2 years ago. There is an Armenian Army, there are Armenian Ministers, everything you could see is labeled as Armenian.. I was so happy. Just 2 years ago, we felt so desperate and hopeless in the Turkish hell. Today, we are in our ‘homeland’. The reality we were experienced seemed astonishing. Just like a dream. The alteration was quite unbelievable.⁴⁸

In the sense of this quote, Sürmenyan was hopeful from Armenia and being proud of Armenian Army. Until this part of memoir, he hadn’t specifically talked that how he was uncomfortable in the Ottoman Army or with the Ottoman military authorities. Here,

⁴⁶ Sürmenyan and Cora, *Harbiyeli bir Osmanlı Ermenisi.*, 108

⁴⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁸ Ibid.112 [Ermenistan’a 1919 mayısında girdik ve Ermenistan Cumhuriyeti’nin birinci yıldönümündeki, 28 Mayıs’taki muhteşem kutlamalara katıldık. İki yıl önce neredeydik, şimdi neredeyiz, diye düşünüyorduk biz bize. Ermeni bir ordu, Ermeni bakanlar, her yanın Ermeni. İnsan mutluluktan çıldırıyordu. İki yıl önce Türk cehennemindeydik, umutsuz, çaresizdik, bugün vatanımızdayız. Gerçek bize inanılmaz geliyordu. Sanki rüya idi, meydana gelen değişimi akıl almıyordu.]

Sürmenyan's expectations from Armenia and Armenian Army clearly demonstrate itself. However, after the Sovietization of Armenia Sürmenyan, once again, had to escape from the Armenian Army. Once again, he became a 'marginalized' officer in the army. During the Soviet occupation, several officers and soldiers discriminated from the Armenian Army. He first registered for Bolshevik Army after the occupation and later found a way to escape from army. After very long journey with his sister, wife and sister's sons, they settled in Baghdad in 1922 where he stayed until the end of his life, worked first as a teacher, then as a merchant and later as the director of the Armenian National School there with his family.

2.3 Kalusd Sürmenyan's Survival Amidst Anti-Armenian Sentiments

Kalusd Sürmenyan's experience of the deportations distinguished him not only from Muslim officers in the army but also from hundreds of thousands of Armenians who lost their lives during the Armenian Genocide. I am underlying that his experience of the First World War and the deportation of his family was due to the fact that he was an Armenian who was able to survive during the Armenian Genocide and saved his family during the deportation. However, his experiences bring us to the last point, that is why did he stay in the Ottoman army and/or how did he manage to survive?

There might be couple of interrelated reasons behind this. At the primary aspect, Kalusd Sürmenyan seems to be a submissive character. He knew the only way to increase his and his family's chance to survive, if there was any, was to keep a low profile. In the memoirs, he openly mentions his weakness behind his failure to rebel but not against the state or the army as institutions but against those who deported his family despite orders of the contrary. Interestingly enough in his memoirs in 1947 he does not mention any Armenian officers who deserted from

the Ottoman army although he talked about those who were killed by the Kurdish bandits.⁴⁹

Although his narrative conflicts with traditional Turkish historiography common-sense perceptions and expectations about Armenian society, Kalusd Sürmenyan was loyal to his uniform before and after 1915.

Second, Kalusd Sürmenyan, as a graduate of Military College and as an officer who fought and was wounded in Sarıkamış, shared *esprit de corps* with his comrades. This is obvious as Sürmenyan was constantly assisted by other officers throughout his ‘*odyssey*’. As mentioned Fuat Ziya Bey as *Menzil Müfettişi* in his assistance to Sürmenyan, although I have to emphasize that he was no other than the director of the Military School in Erzincan in the period when Sürmenyan was a student there. There were other Muslim officers, both junior and senior who helped Kalusd Sürmenyan at different capacities, namely lending him money or minding the personal properties of his family during deportations or relocating him from a civilian prison to military one, or help his family in Erzincan, Arabgir or Salsa.

Finally, the last reason might be the lack of well-trained officers in the Ottoman Army in the context of the war, assigning Armenian officers to passive positions rather than killing them might be considered as a better use of manpower for the beleaguered Ottoman Army. By the end of the First World War, the Ottoman army had been drastically diminished and educated officers were in short supply; therefore, the army, itself, needed all possible resources to make the army stronger. This might be also the reason behind why Kalusd Sürmenyan took the lowest term of sentence in the court-marshal like the case of Arab junior-officer, Lieutenant Mehmet Serif Al-Faruki. Al-Faruki was arrested while he was planning to join the army of the Sherif Hussein bin

⁴⁹ Ibid.,73-81

Ali who was the commander of Arab Revolt in 1916. Al-Faruki, however, was sent to the Gallipoli front after his trial. Both cases show us that Ottoman Army needed to have even their so-called 'enemy' officers in the Ottoman Army.

Chapter 3: Memoirs of Sarkis Torosyan: From Dardanelles to Palestine A True Story of Five Battle Fronts of Turkey and Her Allies and a Harem Romance

Sarkis Torosyan was born in 189⁵⁰1 in Kayseri, in the village of Everek. His family was an Armenian peasant family. He attended the local Armenian Parochial School. Sarkis Torosyan wanted to become an officer in the Ottoman Army, after the constitution law passed in 1909, Torossian began his military education in Edirne and after 3 months training in Germany, he was sent to Gallipoli battle. During the Armenian Genocide, his family was massacred as a result, he changed his side at the end of war. During the Turkish Independence War (1919-23) Torosyan deported to the U.S and his memoir was first published in 1947 in New York in English. On 17th of August, 1954 at the age of 63 he died in New York.

After his graduating from parochial school, he wanted to be in the Ottoman Army and enrolled at military school in Edirne. During his education, he became very close friends with a military student named Muharram, whose father was an Ottoman pasha. As a result of this friendship, Torosyan earned the pasha's trust and loyalty. In 1914, Torosyan and Muharram graduated as Second Lieutenants from the Military College and they were immediately assigned to serve within the army's artillery division that was preparing for war. Accordingly, they were sent to Essen, Germany for three months where the Krupp military training camp was located. The main aim was to train and prepare young cadets for the upcoming First World War.

On his return, at the outset of the First World War, Torosyan was sent to the Gallipoli campaign or the 'Battle of Canakkale' as an artillery officer at Ertuğrul (fort no.1)⁵¹, which

⁵⁰ There are two different birth dates in the sources: 1891 and 1893. In here, I am using Aktar's date.

⁵¹ Ayhan Aktar, "A Rejoinder: The Debate on Captain Torossian Revisited," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 279–91, doi:10.1080/14623528.2016.1262500., 4-5

guarded the entrance of the Dardanelles. The Gallipoli campaign, which continued between April 25, 1915 and January 9, 1916, was the bloodiest campaign for the Ottoman Army during the First World War – and its only victory.⁵²

Torosyan participated in the war as an Ottoman officer with his best friend Muharram who was badly wounded and subsequently died on September 29, 1915. Torosyan fought not only in the naval campaign, but also in Gallipoli land battles specifically during the summer of 1915. Here, he received the State Courage Medal⁵³ in person from the Minister of War Enver Pasha. In the context of the Gallipoli campaign, Torosyan's narrative of the Gallipoli battle is extremely heroic and egocentric. On the one hand, his arguments and analysis of the battle demonstrate that he had comprehensive knowledge about the battlefield. On the other hand, the main criticisms from the anti-Torosyan side⁵⁴ have pointed to the battle descriptions and Ottoman State War Medal document.

In May 1915, Torosyan was requested to go to the Minister of War in Istanbul – a day that he calls traumatic: “I sat unmoved. I did not know what to say. So, this was to be the end of the road of adventure; the reward of loyalty, of sounds of professional services.”⁵⁵ However, in Istanbul, Torosyan encountered Enver Pasha's compliments and was appointed to the 8th Artillery Division. Consequently, he took three weeks off before starting his new tour of duty.

⁵² Edward J. Erickson, *Ordered to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War*, Contributions in Military Studies 201 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001), 94. Edward Erickson analyzed the frame of dimension of the battle: “the eight months campaign resulted in massive casualties, estimated to have topped the quarter million figure on each side, one of the bloodiest campaigns in the First World War.”

⁵³ I would like to mention that there is no medal called the Ottoman State War Medal. Aktar also mentioned in the introduction of the book *From Dardanelles to Palestine - A true story of five battle fronts of Turkey and her allies and a harem romance* that he might have made a mistake about the name of medal. The correct one is *Osmanlı Devleti Harp Madalyası* [Ottoman State War Medal]. [WAIT YOU SAY THERE IS NO SUCH THING]

⁵⁴ There are two groups in the Torosyan truth or fiction debate: pro-Torosyan and anti-Torosyan, named by themselves.

⁵⁵ Sarkis Torossian, *From Dardanelles to Palestine A True Story of Five Battle Fronts of Turkey and Her Allies and a Harem Romance* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1947), 62.

Moreover, he got a telegraph from his mother and learned that his family was not deported due to his position in the Ottoman Army. In February 1916, this positive atmosphere started to change for the Torosyan family, and Sarkis Torosyan couldn't get any news from Kayseri. Finally, one more time, he reached the governor of Everek through the Minister of War and learned that his family had been deported 'accidentally' to Syria just like the Sürmenyan family. Although in the text Torosyan mentioned a law that did not exist in the Ottoman archives, he declared that Armenian officers' families were not going to be deported in 1915.⁵⁶ After all the desperate efforts that Torosyan had made, he was disappointed and mad at the Ottoman government, specifically at Talaat and Enver Pasha. Accordingly, he wrote a letter to his brothers who lived in the US and demanded their loyalty to the Anatolian Armenians:

"I suggested that it seemed to me that unless the Allies forsook the Turkish front entirely I did not see how the Turks could hold out much longer. And I assured them that in my opinion the Allies would not do this but would harass the Turks on all sides and squeeze them in, but never take Constantinople. I stated that I believed there would be panics in the foreign offices of England and France if such a thing happened. My suggestion was that they acquaint all Armenians in America with the true conditions of their countrymen in Turkey and that efforts be made to organize an Armenian Legion of volunteers to return and vindicate our people."⁵⁷

For the first time, Torosyan mentioned that his only hope was for the American Embassy to send this letter to his brothers without it falling into the hands of the Turkish authorities. After spending the summer and fall in the Gallipoli battle, Torosyan transferred to Macedonia and later on to the Romania battle in 1916 with his ideas of revenge.⁵⁸

In the beginning of December 1916, Minister of War recalled and rehabilitated all the strongest military units to support the Eastern front which had been under heavy Russian attacks.

⁵⁶ In the text, the name of law is: 'Müstesna Kanunu' [Exceptional Law], however, there is no such a law. We just know that Enver Pasha emphasizes the *decision* declared that Armenian officers' families were not going to be deported.

⁵⁷ Torosyan, *From Dardanelles to Palestine A True Story of Five Battle Fronts of Turkey and Her Allies and a Harem Romance*, 113-14.

⁵⁸ Torosyan and Aktar, *Çanakkale'den Filistin cephesi'ne*.

As there was no further need of the Ottoman Army in the battle of Romania, 51st division and artillery battalion which Torosyan commanded was one of these units. On his way back to Istanbul, Torosyan met with Major Nuri Bey [real name is Nuri Yosuf], who originally came from an Arab noble family and served in the 14th Army corps and similarly struggled with Ottoman policies. Nuri Yosuf shared his ideas with Torosyan: “I have waited and intrigued a long time for this bejaish (transfer) to the Palestine. At my first opportunity I shall desert and gather an army of my people and I shall entekam⁵⁹ (revenge), Captain, very swiftly I hope.”⁶⁰ These common thoughts brought them together in the front of Palestine.

3.1 Torosyan’s Journey to the Battle of Palestine

When he fought in the campaign of Mosul, in 1917, on Christmas Eve Torosyan had a week off for the Christmas holiday with three other friends. During the holiday, Torosyan learned that several hundred Armenian refugees were living in a camp near Tel-ul Halif where he found his sister, Baizar. Baizar informed him that their family had been deported from Kayseri:

On November 5th, the kaymakam of Everek sent a message to our home with news that you had been killed in the battle of the Dardanelles. Since we no longer had the protection of your name...Father felt that we could leave that night, but within an hour an officer and three guards returned and we were obliged to accompany them...The journey from Everek to Sis, was more difficult and we reached a detention camp in Islahieh in the morning by noon we were on our way again and no one knew where. After five miles or so, we were suddenly ordered to wait and the next thing I knew was the roar of guns.⁶¹

His sister’s story marked a significant turn for Torosyan’s revenge thoughts, for at this point he began to consider not just leaving the Ottoman army but also considered revenge and thoughts about Nuri Yosuf’s plans and the position of Arab nationalism. Before leaving for the

⁵⁹ In the text, entekam [intikam] was written in Turkish.

⁶⁰ Torossian, *From Dardanelles to Palestine a True Story of Five Battle Fronts of Turkey and Her Allies and a Harem Romance*, 128-9.

⁶¹ Ibid.,147- 52

Palestine front, Torosyan had to leave his sister in Tel-ul Halif because of security problems which she would have faced on a journey back to Istanbul.

On February 3, 1918, he was sent with his unit to the Palestinian front. During this journey he realized that he might have an opportunity to join the Armenian national independence movement which got an additional Armenian legion from the United States of America.⁶² However, first he started to think about how he could reach Nuri Yosuf to join and support the Arab uprising. In the meantime, the Arab revolt or the Great Arab Revolt, which took place between the 6th of June, 1916 and October 1918, was an issue for the Ottoman Empire. There is a general consensus that Arab officers of the Ottoman Army played an active role in the beginning of the Arab Revolt and Ottoman defeat in the Arab region to the French and British power in the First World War. Uyar writes: “according to this view, Ottoman Arab officers were ready to collaborate with Britain and France in their struggle for independence from the Ottoman rule from the very beginning.”⁶³ The Arab Revolt was declared on June 8, 1916 by the main character of the uprising—Sharif Hussein bin Ali—with the aim of achieving independence from the Ottoman Empire and unifying the Arab nation.⁶⁴

According to Torosyan’s memoir, Nuri Yosuf was one of the significant Arab officers in the Ottoman Army who was one of the main organizers of the Arab nationalist revolts. I couldn’t confirm this specific bit of information through any other sources, but in the preface of Torosyan memoirs Aktar also mentioned Nuri Yusof and his family’s struggle with the Unionists,

⁶² Ibid., 157-8

⁶³ Uyar, “Ottoman Arab Officers between Nationalism and Loyalty during the First World War.”, 527

⁶⁴ For detailed information about the Arab Revolt and Arab officers’ influence in 1916 see, Ibid., 533., T.E Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 44-60., George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement*, (Beirut: Librairie de Liban, 1969), Ariel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914-23* (London: Routledge, 2002), 64-72. Sean Meehan, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2010), 304-6.

specifically with Cemal Pasha. Aktar underlined the importance of the role that the Arab officers played in the Arab Revolt in 1916 specifically because of the struggle between Unionist.⁶⁵ On the Palestine front, Torosyan connected with Arab nationalists and was found by Nuri Yosuf in Nablus on August 12, 1918, at which point he started to work for the Arab revolt during the last push of General Allenby, and commanded the Arab horsemen against his old comrades. His narratives of Arab revenge covered one whole chapter and gave us a very detailed description of the battle. According to him, he played a significant role because of his knowledge of the Ottoman Army: he claimed that he was the one pointing the right directions to find the Ottoman Army. He concluded that T.E Lawrence, known as Lawrence of Arabia, was not a significant character for the Arab revolutionists.⁶⁶ “Captain Lawrence to my knowledge did nothing to foment the Arab revolution, nor did he play any part in the Arab military tactics. When first I heard of him he was a paymaster, nothing more.”⁶⁷ On October 1, 1918 British and Arab forces entered Damascus and conquered the city. A few days later Emir Feisel, Arab Commander-in-chief, entered the city as well. According to the memoir, Sherif Emir Feisel was not only a conqueror but also was the avenger for noble Arab leaders who were hanged by martial law during the Cemal Pasha era.⁶⁸

3.2 *Beginning of End and Last Days in Turkey*

⁶⁵ See for the names of active Arab officers, Youssef Aboul-Enein, “History of the Syrian Arab Army”, *Infantry*, (November-December, 2005), 20-25.

⁶⁶ See for further information, Neil Faulkner, *Lawrence of Arabia's war: the Arabs, the British, and the remaking of the Middle East in WWI*, London: Yale University Press, 2016.

⁶⁷ Torosyan, *From Dardanelles to Palestine A True Story of Five Battle Fronts of Turkey and Her Allies and a Harem Romance.*, 188-98. [Benim bildiğim kadarıyla, Yüzbaşı Lawrence, Arap ihtilalini hızlandıracak bir şey yapmadığı gibi, Arapların uyguladığı askeri taktiklerin belirlenmesinde de bir rol oynamamıştır. Lawrence’ın adını ilk kez, bölgede mutemet olarak görev yaptığına ilişkin duymuştum.]

⁶⁸ Cemal Pasha, Governor of Damascus and Commander-in-chief of 4th Army, commanded lots of arrests at the end of 1915 and in the beginning of 1916. Lots of Arab nobles were hanged in the center of Damascus. Because of this, he was known as *Al-Saffah*, “the Blood Shedder”.

November 4, 1918, was a new page for Torosyan's life. He left the Arab military forces when he got the information about the Armenian volunteers from America, who were in Damascus and Beirut. He wanted to join the volunteers and put his energy to fight for the Armenian society. He found his brothers in the legion of Armenian volunteers in Beirut where he stayed two months before going to Iskenderun (historically known as Alexandretta, it is a city and the largest district in the Hatay Province on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey). His brothers went to Cilicia. During this time, particularly by signing the Armistice of Mudros on October 30, 1918 Torosyan was very hopeful for the future of Armenian society because of the French rule of the region. At the same time, these legions were under the rule of the French Army. According to the Armistice of Mudros, Cilicia – Turkey's Southern Anatolia – was to be under French control. Accordingly, Armenian volunteer legion and Torosyan joined the French legions in the region.

He wrote:

Cilia breathed of freedom there. The streets in the cities and villages were crowded and every day was a festive day. The Turkish Empire seemed disintegrating. Since the signing of the Armistice the region around Adalia was occupied by Italians, Smyrna by Greeks and Constantinople was practically in the hands of the Allies.⁶⁹

However, after a while the positive climate became more complicated for him. According to him, the Allies failed to agree with each other, so they provided weapons to the Turkish bandit forces which gathered around Mustafa Kemal in Anatolia. In here, therefore, his narratives are significant because they are at odds with traditional Turkish historiography. He wrote

“Conditions grew worse. The French continued to play their triple game. Sometimes they openly assisted the Turks; then again a little help would be extended the Armenians; upon occasion their own interests became paramount and then both Turks and Armenians would be threatened and coerced and played one against the other.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Torossian, *From Dardanelles to Palestine A True Story of Five Battle Fronts of Turkey and Her Allies and a Harem Romance.*, 202

⁷⁰ Ibid., 206.

In the last part of his memoir, Torosyan underlined his dissatisfied, ineffectual and desperate position in the French legion. His disappointment mainly was due to being the game between diplomacy and warfare. One of the main underlined issues in the last part of his memoir is to be an officer. In his view, the Armenians lost this war not because of the weakness of the army but due to diplomacy.⁷¹ At the same time, he was also disappointed with the Armenian National Union with which he spent the very last period his life in Turkey. Before leaving for the United States with his brothers, he joined the Armenian National Union in February, 1920 and stayed until he and his brothers all agreed that the ‘Armenian defense’ had lost. According to American immigration records, Sarkis Torosyan registered himself on December 23, 1920 on Ellis Island. His ticket was paid for by the French Legion and he indicated that the last city where he lived was Adana, Turkey.⁷² According to his granddaughter, he told his story in Armenian and the typist wrote the text in English, meaning that there was another person in the writing process.⁷³

3.3 Sarkis Torosyan’s Memoir and Turkish Historiography

The recent Turkish translation and publication of Torosyan’s memoir in 2012 sparked an active debate and exposed a deep neglect in Turkish historiography of non-Muslim officers in the Ottoman army. In chapter four, I offer a historical account of how this neglect was intentionally produced by official army historiography at the beginning of the Turkish Republic, and I will also examine how this neglect continues to persist through to the present. However, before analyzing the historical trajectory of this absence in official Turkish historiography, here I will briefly discuss the recent debate that arose around Torosyan’s memoir.

⁷¹ Ibid., 205-7

⁷² Torosyan and Aktar, *Çanakkale’den Filistin cephesi’ne.*, 290

⁷³ Aktar, “A Rejoinder.”, 7-8

In 1993, the Turkish sociologist Ayhan Aktar discovered Torosyan's published memoir, *From Dardanelles to Palestine*, while he was at Harvard University as a visiting researcher. He found the book in the personal library of Prof. Heath W. Lowry and immediately wanted to publish a Turkish edition, but according to Aktar "the political environment in Turkey made it impossible."⁷⁴ In 2012, Aktar finally edited and published a Turkish translation by Gizem Şakar of the text and provided a long introduction titled 'Nobody mentions Captain Torosyan'.⁷⁵ Before publishing Torosyan's memoir in Turkish, however, Aktar published a newspaper article for *Taraf* in 2010 which told about Torosyan's life and his memoir. On the 10th of April, 2010 the historian Halil Berktaş responded to Aktar with his own newspaper article titled "Torosyan and Canakkale" which was also published in *Taraf*.⁷⁶ Here Berktaş claimed that what was written by Torosyan was the product of his imagination, and was not grounded in historical reality. Soon after, the historians Edhem Eldem, Hakan Erdem, Taner Akcam, Robert Fisk and Joseph A. Kechichian joined the debate. This debate consisted of two sides with Edhem Eldem, Hakan Erdem and Halil Berktaş, on the hand, claiming that the text contained historical errors. Hakan Erdem and Halil Berktaş both argued that the whole memoir, including his family story, war experiences, and his deportation to the US were fabricated.⁷⁷ Eldem also identified that Torosyan's publication also included a false reproduction of a document allegedly issued by Enver Pasha in recognition of Torosyan's bravery. Eldem writes:

Suffice it to say that both documents contained an impressive number of spelling, grammatical, lexical, syntactical and linguistic mistakes, compounded by factual errors, a very poorly imitated signature of Enver Pasha and, overall, the use of a document format that simply did not exist in the Ottoman military

⁷⁴ Ibid., 2

⁷⁵ Torosyan and Aktar, *Çanakkale'den Filistin cephesi'ne*. In this chapter, I will use the original version and Turkish translation of memoir together.

⁷⁶ Unfortunately, after the last coup attempt on 15th of June, 2016, lots of newspapers including *Taraf* were closed because of their connections with Gülen movement. Because of this, I am not able to give newspaper articles link in the footnote.

⁷⁷ Y. Hakan Erdem, *Gerçek ile Kurmaca Arasında Torosyan'ın Acayip Hikayesi* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2012).

bureaucracy. To top it all off, both documents, although allegedly produced hundreds of miles and two years apart by two distinct offices, were written in the exact same hand, and repeated the same mistakes.⁷⁸

On the other hand, Ayhan Aktar and Taner Akçam answered these criticisms by putting the stress not on the historical accuracy of every element of the text and instead argued for the texts relevance because it presented the memories and experiences of a non-Muslim officer during the end of the Ottoman army. They argued that Eldem's focus on the specificity and composition of the document occludes the fact that this memoir is one of the only accounts that we have of the experience of these officers. Simply because the document may have some historical inaccuracies, does not discount the text itself as being a wealth of knowledge about this period. Aktar writes that Eldem's chief mistake was to focus on the documents' inaccuracies instead of considering what the document might mean for our understanding of history. He writes:

Edhem's main mistake is to reconstruct the course of history based on the documents' inconsistencies. Instead of placing these documents into a larger historical perspective, he writes a history of Torossian based solely on these two documents. It is obvious that I categorically differ from Edhem on the matter of how we should evaluate these documents and what aspects we should emphasize when talking about Torossian's story. My argument is the following: it is extremely problematic to take the mistakes in grammar and typography as definite proof that the documents are total fabrications. Moreover, it is erroneous to disregard the historical information contained in the documents.⁷⁹

Akçam's also asks not whether the documents are fraudulent, but what might have been the motivation behind this fraud. Furthermore, Akçam writes, "the documents may have been produced with the full knowledge of the commanders in question with the aim of saving Torosyan's life."⁸⁰ Here, my position would be similar to Akçam's: even if the documents and

⁷⁸ Edhem Eldem, "A Shameful Debate? A Critical Reassessment of the 'Torossian Debate,'" *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 258–73, doi:10.1080/14623528.2016.1262495.,3-4

⁷⁹ Taner Akçam, "Everything Makes Sense Once given Context," *Journal of Genocide Research* 19, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 274–78, doi:10.1080/14623528.2016.1262497.

⁸⁰ Taner Akçam, "A Short History of the Torosyan Debate," *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 345–62, doi:10.1080/14623528.2015.1062287.

some of the specific details found therein were invented by Torosyan, we can still use the material because it offers us an ‘eye witnesses’ account from a perspective that broadens our understanding of the historical context. The key, for me, is not whether or not the text can be historically verified. Instead, in the following chapter I will address the historical reasons for why there is not better documentation of these non-Muslim officers. In the early years of the Turkish republic, official state historical accounts eliminated any mention of non-Muslim officers and prevented access to historical records which might have aided our understanding of these officer’s lives and experiences. In addition to this problem of the official Turkish historiography’s erasure is the fact the Turkish Armed Forces Archives still restricts many of the vital documentation needed by researchers to provide a more nuanced picture of the ethnic or religious minorities who were part of the Ottoman or Turkish military. Because of the lack of historical sources and available information, therefore, these memoirs are essential for developing a better understanding of these forgotten figures.

Chapter 4: Official Turkish Historiography and Archival Politics

As we saw in the previous chapter, a problem that is faced when attempting to develop a historical account of non-Muslim officers in the Ottoman army is a lack of historical documentation and evidence. In light of this fact, my reconsideration of Ottoman and Turkish military history which identifies and exposes the history and experience of non-Muslim officers must rely on the few historical resources that are available. That is why in the previous two chapters I have discussed the memoirs of two of these non-Muslim officers. The aim of this final chapter, however, is to shift away from these memoirs and instead identify why and how these non-Muslim officers were neglected from official historiography during the early stages of the Turkish Republic. Thus, this chapter will provide a historical examination into the official Turkish historiography and will look at the ways in which this historiography continues to restrict contemporary historical work.

4.1 Militarist ideology in the Turkish republic

Following the First World War (1914-19) and the Turkish Independence War (1919-23), the new Turkish republic was brought about by and later structured around a militarist system. In its early years, the Turkish state remained fragile as the new nation sought to recover and develop itself.⁸¹ It achieved stability partially by intertwining militarism with a new myth of Turkish nationalism and raising the military's history and victories to an almost mythic level. Ayse Gul Altinay points this out in her book *The Myth of Military Nation* which examines the way nationalism and militarism work together in Turkey. She writes, "militarism as an ideology is

⁸¹ Mesut Uyar, "Remembering the Gallipoli Campaign: Turkish Official Military Historiography, War Memorials and Contested Ground," *First World War Studies*, 2016,

intertwined with nationalism, as well as militarization as a process that shapes culture, politics and identities in Turkey"⁸². In the early years of the Republic, the military and militarist ideology was actively forged by the armed forces which produced and published the official Turkish historiography. Here, the official history surrounding the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Turkish Republic was published by the Turkish Armed Forces's ATASE Publications. By creating official historiography, the Turkish state and the military sought to produce myths around which they could forge a new Turkish state identity. This myth-based Turkish historiography, central to the foundation of the early republic, focused on the one Ottoman victory of Gallipoli in the First World War as the birth of the Turkish Republic. In order to forge this foundation, however, they considered this Ottoman army victory a "Turkish victory". Some common accounts from this historiography, for example, suggest that the battle of Gallipoli in the First World War was won in part because of a valiant soldier who lifted a 276 kg shell; another account tells of how Mustafa Kemal, as an Ottoman army officer, survived a gun shot when his pocket watch obstructed a bullet.⁸³ To this end, they created what Claude Lévi-Strauss might have classified as "myths". In fact, Lévi-Strauss determines that historiography is one of the significant determinant element in creating 'myths' in our modern times.

Lévi-Strauss explains that "a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time [...] But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is

⁸² Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of Military Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3 Altınay writes that the state and military power also influenced public discourse by introducing significant sayings such as: "The popular saying, 'Her Türk asker doğar (every Turk is born a soldier) is repeated in daily conversations, school textbooks, the speeches of public officials and intellectuals, and is used as a drill slogan during military service."

⁸³ Suavi Aydın, "Otobiyografi Nasıl Okunur?: Bateviye Tarihçiliğın Açmazlarına Dair," in *Tarih, Otobiyografi ve Hakikat: Yüzbaşı Torosyan Tartışması ve Türkiye'de Tarihyazımı* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2015), 149-52.

everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future” Lévi–Strauss explains elsewhere that now history has begun to replace mythology because it “fulfils the same function.”⁸⁴ Michael Michalis further examined the relationship between a myth-based historiography and the formation of nationalism. He formulated this connection by stating that the “...mythical construction of the past served nationalism since [the] ‘nation used history in order to create a memory.’”⁸⁵

With the rise of the Turkish Republic, there was strategic effort to sever historical ties with the Ottoman past and instead forge their own historical foundations. This was achieved partially by the publication of official military history published by the Turkish Armed Forces’s ATASE Publications.⁸⁶ This publication wing of the military was first founded during the Ottoman Empire in 1916 by Enver Pasha, the same person who allegedly signed Torosyan’s paperwork. Its aim was to provide the official Ottoman history of the First World War after the Gallipoli battle. According to Mesut Uyar, military personnel were encouraged to keep diaries and compile regular notes describing their battle field experiences in order to provide a historical account of the battles. Enver Pasha then set out to write an official military history of the Gallipoli campaign by compiling a small number of officers to produce the official account.⁸⁷ While diaries of non-Muslim officers were not used by Enver Pasha, knowing that the officers were encouraged to produce personal accounts and diaries might lend some credence to the historical claims made in the two memoirs examined above.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and with the beginning of the Republic in 1923, this

⁸⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning*. (London: Routledge, 2001), see specifically chapter 4 ‘When Myth Becomes History’.

⁸⁵ N. Micheal Michalis, “History, Myth and Nationalism: The Retrospective Force of National Roles within a Myth Constructed Past,” in *Nationalism in the Troubled Triangle* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 150

⁸⁶ see full publications from 1939 to present: <http://www.tsk.tr/Content/pdf/yayinlar/genelkurmay-atase-daire-baskanligi-yayin-katalogu1.pdf>

⁸⁷ Uyar, “Remembering the Gallipoli Campaign, 8

publishing effort of the military continued to develop its official military history but this time under the service of the new Turkish Republic and with the aim of producing a Gallipoli myth which would present it as Atatürk's military success. In 1931, the Ministry of Education produced a new history textbook for high school students which was simply called *History (Tarih)*. This textbook only devoted a few pages to the First World War, but the section on the Gallipoli campaign focused on the sacrifice of Turkish soldiers and exemplified the military talent of Atatürk. As the official Turkish State history sought to distinguish itself from its Ottoman past, it showcased this military victory as a "Turkish" victory, while the Ottoman defeats were blamed on Ottoman leadership and on the misguided efforts of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multinational failure. Uyar writes:

the Gallipoli myth assumed a new form in which 'Turkish' soldiers replaced the more multinational Ottoman or Anatolian troops and Atatürk became the commander who led them to victory. Gallipoli, unlike other campaigns, became the first defence of the motherland, although it carried no more significance than that.⁸⁸

With increased political control and strong censorship, the early Republic sought to control the historical narrative of Gallipoli with the military publications remaining the only avenue for the dissemination of this history. As the republic developed over the subsequent decades, the official military history continued to produce a more nuanced account of the First World War, and while Gallipoli continued to be placed at the center of this narrative, there was little effort to make this a central element of national remembrance, nor was there any effort to examine the non-Muslim efforts in this campaign. However, in 1960 the state officially produced The Dardanelles Martyrs' Memorial (Çanakkale Şehitler Abidesi) to commemorate the soldiers who died in the First World War. According to Uyar, during the 1960s and 70s, the Gallipoli campaign slowly gained more attention as political turbulence produced a regained sense of nationalism. This came to a head when General

⁸⁸ Ibid, 6.

Kenan Evren, the president who gained power through the military coup on September 12th, 1980, “sought to reinvigorate the official ideology with new symbols, myths and history” around Islamic and traditional values.⁸⁹ Uyar writes,

The most important outcome of this ideological change from the perspective of this article was the formulation and dissemination of a new myth: ‘the Turkish soldier as a defender of faith’. Schools became the main centres of dissemination and history textbooks began to highlight heroic episodes from Turkish military history, heroes (most anonymous apart from Atatürk) and martyrs. This changing ideology and perspective saw the history of the late Ottoman period suddenly gain prominence. Similar to the myths of the First World War period, the Turkish soldier, as well as being a patriot and nationalist fighter, once again became the defender of Islam. The Gallipoli campaign appeared to represent an ideal intersection of Turkish nationalism and Islam, providing impetus to the movement to declare the peninsula a sacred place.⁹⁰

By forging this Islamic-nationalist ideology, the official state historiography continued to eliminate the non-Muslim figures from history. Because memorials and historical accounts focused on the ‘martyrs’ who died during this war, those non-Muslim military personnel who died during their service were eliminated from this history because, according to the official state policy of the time, only a Muslim can be considered a martyr.⁹¹

However, in the five-volume catalogues of “Şehitlerimiz” [Our Martyrs] edited by the Turkish General Army Publication in 1998, held at the Center for Islamic Studies (ISAM) in Istanbul, non-Muslim soldiers who were killed are listed among these ‘martyrs’. In the early 2000’s, however, when the Turkish General Army digitalized the list of ‘Our Martyrs’, ‘our’ non-Muslim ‘martyrs’ disappeared from the Turkish General Army list. Here, by using ISAM’s original copies of catalogues, I have found the names of 120 non-Muslim soldiers who died

⁸⁹ Ibid, 12.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 15.

⁹¹ The concept of martyrdom occupies a significant place in Islam. The Arabic word for martyr is “*shahid*” (pl. *shuhada*), and in the Qur’an it means “witness”. In this context, martyrs are those who sacrifice their lives in order to demonstrate the depth of their belief in Allah, and who, as a result, are rewarded in the afterlife for their sacrifice. For more on this topic see David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, 1. ed, Themes in Islamic History (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007).

during the First World War. These names were subsequently left off of the digital copy found on the official Ministry of National Defense website.⁹² Based on the ISAM's original copies, there are also listed five fallen officers who are non-Muslims. Their names are as follows:

Gendarmerie Lieutenant Arakil Efendi bin Tüfenkciyan Menyans [birthplace]
Antalya [date of birth] 1290 [place of death] Anafartalar Battle date of death
[11.06.1915]

Pharmacist Lieutenant Vasil Efendi bin Yani serving in the 27th Regiment 1st
Battalion [birthplace] Edirne [date of birth] 1292 [place of death] Sultan Murat Hanı

Lieutenant Artin Kalusd serving in the 26th Division 76th Regiment [place of
birth] Eskişehir [place of death] Kale Central Hospital [date of death] 15.05.1915

Lieutenant İsak Magardıç serving in the 76th Regiment 3rd Battalion 10th
Company [place of birth] Kastamonu [date of death] 07.09.1917

Doctor Kasabyan Efendi Bin Dikran Bedros serving in the 15th Army 19th
Division 77th Regiment 3rd Battalion [place of birth] Kocaeli [date of birth] 1295 [place
of death] Galicia Battle

4.2 The Discussion of the outset of 100th Anniversary of Gallipoli and the Armenian Genocide

In 2006, there was a series of newspapers articles which addressed the question of non-Muslim martyrdom. The most significant article was published in *Hürriyet* in 2006 by Sefa Kaplan. Kaplan interviewed religious scholars and clergy about the question of non-Muslim martyrs. He interviewed professor Hayrettin Karaman and the former head of the Religious Affairs Administration, Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz. Karaman suggested that the concept of

⁹² See for digitalized 'Şehitlerimiz' web-site:
http://uyg.tsk.tr/SehitYakini_Kullanici/Sehitlerimiz.aspx?verification=KapsamVeAmacOkundu

‘motherland martyrs’ for non-Muslim could be applied to those who died in the Gallipoli battle of 1915.⁹³ He clarified his opinion: “in the religious sense we cannot consider non-Muslims to be ‘martyrs’, however, the concept of ‘motherland martyrs’ has been used for over a century. Certainly, non-Muslim soldiers who died in the Gallipoli war are considered ‘motherland martyrs’.” On the other hand, Yılmaz argued that non-Muslims couldn’t be a ‘martyr’ because martyrdom, itself, is an Islamic concept.

Between 2012 and 2015, the question of non-Muslims ‘martyrs’ again occupied a significant place in the Turkish media, academia and the state. The discussion became more visible at the outset of 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli Battle and the Armenian Genocide in 2015. Here contemporary alternative history-writing publications sought to highlight the memories of low-ranking officers as official Turkish historiography returned to this topic. And yet, Official state Turkish historiography and the General Army continues to disregard the roles and death of non-Muslim officers in the Gallipoli battle. Because of the Gallipoli victory was used as the birthplace of the Turkish nation and was included in narratives as the victory of the brave Turkish Army, the existence of non-Muslim officers in the same army continues to damage this nationalist narrative. In contrast, narratives of Armenians who collaborated with the Russian enemy in 1915, particularly in the eastern part of Empire, continue to be the official way of discussing Ottoman-Armenian history from this period.

At the outset of the Gallipoli ceremonies in 2015, the discussion of non-Muslim martyrs became a popular subject in the Turkish state discourse when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan invited Armenian President Serzh Azati Sargsyan to the 100th year anniversary of the Gallipoli Battle on 24th of April, 1915. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu,

⁹³ Ayhan Aktar, “Yüzbaşı Torosyan’ın Hayaleti,” in *Tarih, Otobiyografi ve Hakikat: Yüzbaşı Torosyan Tartışması ve Türkiye’de Tarih Yazımı* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2015), 128-9

emphasized that along with the many other ethnic groups who fought in the ranks of the Ottoman military, the Armenians also fought at Gallipoli in the press conference on the 16th of January, 2015. Therefore, including Çavuşoğlu, the official explanation to this invitation was that “we fought together in Gallipoli. That’s why we have extended the invitation to Sargsyan as well.”⁹⁴ Not surprisingly, President Sargsyan refused the invitation due to its convergence with the memorial day of the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide on the 24th of April, 2015 which Sargsyan had previously invited President Erdoğan to attend. In an official statement, Sargsyan write on the Armenian state web-site both in Armenian and Turkish, he mentioned Torosyan and other non-Muslims officers who fought in the Ottoman Army in the First World War. The Armenian President’s response shows us that the Arminian president knew about the debate surrounding Torosyan and purposely used his name in his speech to respond to Turkish authorities and academics who has been neglected the role of non-Muslim officers.

His official statement reads:

Dear Mr. President,
I received your invitation to participate in the events dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli battle. Truly, the World War I is one of the most terrific pages in human history that claimed the lives of millions of innocent people and left the fate of many others broken. Participating in the battle of Gallipoli was Armenian artillerist of the Ottoman troops, Captain Sargis Torosyan, who devoted his life to the protection of the Empire and was awarded military honors by the Ottoman Empire for his deeds. Meanwhile, the wave of massacre deliberately planned and perpetrated by the Ottoman Government did not spare even Sargis Torosyan. Among the 1.5 million Armenians killed in the Genocide were his parents, while his sister died in the Syrian Desert.⁹⁵

However, at the 100th anniversary of Gallipoli, the ceremony began with a reading from the Qu’ran and Surah al-fatihah and President Erdoğan’s speeches, which he gave both in Istanbul and Çanakkale, did not mention anything about the non-Muslim soldiers who fought.

⁹⁴ Deniz Zeyrek, “Turkey Invites Armenian President to 100th Anniversary of Gallipoli War,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, January 16, 2015, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-invites-armenian-president-to-100th-anniversary-of-gallipoli-war-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=77002&NewsCatID=510>.

⁹⁵ Siranush Ghazanchyan, “Armenian President Responds to Turkish Invitation,” *Public Radio of Armenia*, January 16, 2015, <http://www.armradio.am/en/2015/01/16/armenian-president-responds-to-turkish-invitation/>.

Conclusion

In addition to the problem of the official state discourse which jettisons the history and experiences of these non-Muslim officers, researchers who deal with this topic are often restricted from archival access in Turkey. The *ATASE* archives contain a trove of Ottoman military documents; however, the Turkish Military Service allows only a very few number of academics to access this material. Additionally, the archives of the Ministry of National Defense are not open to the public. These Ottoman and Early Republic documents should be considered a part of the public record, and to achieve this, the government should insist that the military service opens the archives to whomever wishes to access them. Because this archival access is not available, and because these histories have been intentionally and institutionally excluded, the memoirs of Sürmenyan and Torosyan provide us with a rare glimpse into the history and struggles faced by the non-Muslim officers who straddled the line between their allegiance to the state and their connection to their own Armenian community. In this way, I have followed the historiographical tendency to view ‘history from below’ and have followed Ayhan Aktar in shedding further light onto this period in a process which he calls a ‘reawaking of memory’. The primary mission of history, therefore, must not be neglected while touching upon “*res gestae*.” History grants us the possibility to free the past via an analysis of historical events. The opportunity to liberate history would be missed if our point of view about history is affected by a certain ideology, and especially by a political power. On this point, alternative history writing needs to bring to light the facts and narratives which might run contrary to the accepted mainstream historical narrative; this thesis seeks to emphasize that an alternative view of the past is possible, and can be accomplished by approaching the historical events with a critical viewpoint. Therefore, in addition to the task of reviving and reevaluating the memory of these non-

Muslim officers, I have also sought to identify the historical and systematic restrictions that continues to eliminate this discourse from official Turkish historiography. Therefore, on the one hand this thesis has served both to identify the history of the underrepresented but it also seeks to address the power structures that have long kept these voices in the dark.

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