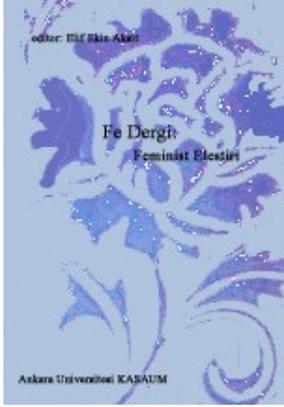


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On the Gender Aspect of Conflict in Turkey: Mothers of Soldiers who died in the conflict in the East and Southeast of Turkey between 1993 and 2006

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On the Gender Aspect of Conflict in Turkey: Mothers of Soldiers who died in the conflict in the East and Southeast of Turkey between 1993 and 2006

Burcu Şentürk*

This study is based on in-depth interviews with mothers whose sons were soldiers of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and died in the armed conflict in the East and Southeast of Turkey between the years of 1993 and 2006. The narrative of the pain that these mothers suffer after the sudden death of their sons is discussed in relation to notions of nationalism and motherhood. How do these mothers perceive their pain and motherhood, and how are these politicized? How are these motherhoods represented and instrumentalized for militarist objectives? Moreover, how are mothers who challenge the gender roles deemed appropriate for them excluded both by their own community and by the state? In addressing these questions, it is shown that militarism, joined with nationalism, engages with Connell's concepts such as hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity and reproduces rigid gender roles. It is argued that, in the context of armed conflict in Turkey, the motherhood of mothers of TAF soldiers can be understood through the concept of emphasized femininity, and the possibilities for breaking with this form of femininity are touched upon.

Keywords: Motherhood, militarism, nationalism, hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity

Türkiye'de Çatışmanın Toplumsal Cinsiyet Boyutu

Bu çalışma 1993-2006 yılları arasında Türkiye'nin Doğu ve Güneydoğusu'ndaki çatışmada yaşamını yitirmiş Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri (TSK) mensubu askerlerin anneleriyle yapılan derinlemesine mülakatlara dayanmaktadır. Bu annelerin ani bir ölümden sonra yaşadıkları acının anlatısı, milliyetçilik ve annelik kavramları etrafında değerlendirilmiştir. Bu anneler, yaşadıkları acıyı ve kendi anneliklerini nasıl algılıyorlar? Çocuklarının ani gelen ölümünün yarattığı acı ve bu acı etrafında yeniden gelişen annelikleri nasıl politikleşiyor? Sunulan bu annelikler, militarist hedefler tarafından nasıl araçsallaştırılıyor? Bunun da ötesinde, militarizmin anneler için uygun gördüğü cinsiyet rolünün sınırlarını zorlayan anneler, hem kendi cemaatlerince hem devlet tarafından nasıl dışlanıyorlar? Bu sorulara cevap aranırken, milliyetçilik ile iş birliği halinde olan militarizmin, katı cinsiyet rollerini yeniden ürettiği ve bununla birlikte hegemonik erkeklik ve öne çıkarılmış kadınlık ile kurduğu ilişki tartışılmaktadır. TSK askerlerinin annelerinin anneliklerinin Türkiye'deki çatışma bağlamında öne çıkarılmış kadınlık kavramında tartışılabileceği savunulurken, bu kadınlık biçiminin aşılabileceği imkanlara da değinildi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Annelik, Militarizm, Milliyetçilik, Hegemonik Erkeklik, Öne Çıkarılmış Kadınlık

Introduction

There is a close relationship between militarism and nationalism. This relationship centers on particular gender notions of male and female. In times of conflict, gender roles become more rigid and are placed in the service of nationalism as well as militarism. This study takes motherhood as a keyword. It examines how militarism - in its relation to nationalism - shapes the motherhood roles for mothers of dead soldiers of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF).

This study relies on the narratives of mothers whose sons died as soldiers in the armed conflict in the East and Southeast of Turkey between the years 1993 and 2006. From December 2008 through February 2010, I conducted 10 in-depth interviews with mothers of these soldiers at the Ankara Cebeci cemetery. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to two and a half hours, with most of them taking about one hour.

The Brotherhood of Militarism and Nationalism through Gender Roles

The concept of militarism recalls technology of war, conscription law, soldiers, barracks, guns, gunfire etc. However, militarism goes beyond all this: it considerably shapes the daily lives and social roles of people and their way of understanding the world. According to Rubina Saigol,¹ in its broader sense, militarism means the dominance of the militaristic way of thinking and militaristic values in society as a whole. Images, emotions,

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and ideas pertaining to the military penetrate all parts of society; as a result, violent methods appear as the only possible means of conflict resolution. While militarism refers to the dominance of militarist values, these militarist values are “imbued with a masculine image that favors violence and rigid notions of manhood and womanhood”.²

States interfere in gender relations. They have detectable gender regimes, the characteristics and transformations of which are illuminated by nationalist history and national identity politics.³ The control of women and female sexuality plays a critical role in nation-state ideology and state projects.⁴ It is very important to examine the military and militarism in the context of the nation-state and nationalism for two reasons. First, the military as the symbol of the formation of the nation-state and its pride occupies a special place in nationalist ideologies.⁵ Second, while military institutions preceded nation-states historically, the military came to play a considerable role in reshaping the family as well as femininities and masculinities with the emergence of the nation-state and related nation-building processes. Yuval-Davis⁶ sums up the relationship between military, nation, and the family as follows:

There is a rumor that Enoch Powell the first theoretician of the British ‘new right’, once defined ‘the nation’ as ‘two males plus defending a territory with women and children’. ... Nations not only are eternal and universal but also constitute a natural extension of family and kinship relations.

In such representations of nations through family and kinship relations, the family and kinship are based on a natural sexual division of labor, in which men protect the *womenandchildren*.⁷ Home is the private sphere, the place for *womenandchildren* in which men are the breadwinners feeding and maintaining the family and protecting in particular women within the family from possible enemies. Similarly, the homeland is usually identified with the female body, while men are imagined to constitute the nation and protect this female body. Thus, Najmabadi mentions that nationalist discourse often utilizes the representation of the homeland as a female body in order to build a national identity based upon the solidarity of “brotherhood” within a nation:

Modern nations have often been explicitly imagined through familial metaphors. In particular, the construction of the national community as a brotherhood (a fraternity) has pointed both to the centrality of male bonding in the production of nationalist sentiment and to the exclusion of women from the social contract. Within that contract not only were women “subject to men’s power; it also implied complementary bonds between men.”⁸

This kind of imagination presents the homeland as expressing a “fragile” and *mahrem*⁹ (forbidden) belonging of male members of a community, and this belonging is to be protected against possible attacks of male enemies. “Nation as woman expresses a spatial, embodied femaleness: the land’s fecundity, upon which the people depend, must be protected by defending the body/nation’s boundaries against invasion and violation”.¹⁰ Here, it can be argued that the protection of a territory is conventionally identified with keeping a woman honored, being responsible for her “honor”.¹¹ As Handan Koç shows, in the case of the national territory of Turkey, “the border/territory is the *namus*”, and all the oaths taken by soldiers concern *şeref* and *namus*.¹² One of my interviewees, Süleyman, an old man and a father of a dead soldier, stated while talking about enemies and TAF: “The enemy comes and rapes your wife and daughter in front of your eyes, and you will do nothing? It is impossible. If you do this, the enemy comes and abuses your women”. His narrative about the homeland is based on its protection as well as on the penetration of Turkish women’s bodies by the sexual organ of male “enemies.” Similarly, in 2002, when Eren Keskin, a lawyer and human rights activist, spoke up about rapes and sexual harassment of women by the Turkish military, famous journalist Fatih Altaylı responded to her in the following way:

Lady, you may be aware of it or not but this army also protects your perineum... The armies do not only protect countries’ borders, lands or unity. They also protect the countries’ *namus* and *iffet*. The Turkish army protects Turkey’s borders. These borders, unfortunately, extend to the perineum of our women.¹³

Hegemonic Masculinity and the Military

Hegemonic masculinity refers to a “particular idealized image of masculinity in relation to which images of femininity and other masculinities are marginalized and subordinated”.¹⁴ Since hegemony mainly evolves on a large measure of consent, for hegemonic masculinity to be sustained, many men should be motivated to support it.¹⁵ While not all men have the qualities of hegemonic masculinity, they consent to one form of masculinity being hegemonic. Thus, all men have to be positioned in relation to that kind of hegemony.

The motivation behind the protection of the homeland and women can in part be associated with hegemonic masculinity, which in turn is encouraged by militarism. In the context of this research, I argue that the military is a prominent institution supporting hegemonic masculinity which reshapes soldiers in line with the latter. The military is an institution where a group of men dominates a large group of other men and where a specific form of masculinity dominates other types of masculinities. Since the military service is obligatory for all male citizens in Turkey, all men are taught to obey the hegemonic form of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity cannot be considered apart from militarist values such as using violence in solving problems or protecting one’s subordinates. Based on narratives she obtained through interviews, Selek¹⁶ lists some features of hegemonic masculinity, which imply patterns that guide all men:

The men whose hegemony has been acknowledged have to seem powerful, tough, successful, honest, and serious. His body size has to fit the norms of physical aesthetics. If it is needed, he should be able to use violence, but he also has to love and protect the ones who are subjected to him. That is, he has to decide when to “love” and when to “beat” (*Sevmesini de dövmesini de bilmeli*).

Although it is impossible that all men acquire the features of hegemonic masculinity, they are generally encouraged to aspire to it, and men generally assess their masculinity in reference to hegemonic masculinity. While the military in Turkey has the capacity to reach all male citizens, military service transforms them into “real men” who subordinate others and approve of hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, “through the military service men became acquainted with the state apparatus and their citizenship”.¹⁷ Thus, the military service plays an important role in shaping both masculinity and citizenship of male members of the national community. In brief, due to its capacity to reach each individual, every male citizen learns about the features of hegemonic masculinity and reshapes his masculinity in relation to it.

It is stated in section 5 article 72 of the 1982 Turkish constitution that the national service is both a right and a duty of each Turk. However, the fact that women are excluded from this duty and right proves Najmabadi’s¹⁸ argument that the construction of national community as solidarity of brothers relies on the centrality of the bond between men and the exclusion of women from the social contract.

For a man to fulfill his manhood in the patriarchal community, as a breadwinner for his household, he is obliged to do his national duty, military service. The military service constitutes a hurdle for young men, since it is almost impossible for them to fully participate in social life before completing their military service.¹⁹ This is the reason behind the typical postponing of marriage and the difficulty of getting a stable and well-paying job before the military service.²⁰ In brief, in the case of men failing to do the military service, it becomes an obstacle for them to fulfill their expected roles as breadwinners.

The military service is construed as both a service to the state and as a “right” of the male citizen. The “right” aspect of the military service recalls its function in defining the hegemonic form of masculinity. It is seen as “a rite of passage to manhood, and those men who have not been through it are made to experience a ‘lack’”.²¹

Furthermore, doing military service and defending the territory of the nation can be associated with protecting women’s honor. As mentioned earlier, the military service is an indispensable part of manhood, as men are expected to protect their women’s *iffet* as well as their homeland against attacks of other men. In that sense, it is not surprising that soldiers are taught that “the gun is your wife.”²² Manhood is always in danger and needs to be protected from possible challenges and attacks of other “males” and enemies. It can be suggested that masculinity can be maintained and protected as long as men can control women’s bodies and protect the motherland from other men’s sexuality²³ as combatants or male members of the nation. If men fail in their “manhood,” in the sense of controlling both women and the national territory, their women or the women of the nation face the danger of losing their *iffet*, while men may be perceived as *namussuz*. Thus, as Higate and Hopton²⁴ suggest, there is a reciprocal relation between militarism and masculinity. As practices of controlling and protecting are usually seen as indispensable elements of masculinity, it can be argued that no man must be deprived of fulfilling his masculinity by performing the military service – consequently, it is a *right of every Turk*.

Soldiering, which becomes a test of manhood and of the internalization of militarist practices, transforms men into combatants who are already ready for killing and being killed. Indeed, soldiering depends on the existence of such a “test”²⁵ for assessing manhood. Since this test requires “being ready for killing as well as for being killed”, martyrdom is its main element:

Many masculinities in the world’s varied cultures are constituted in the practice of fighting: to be a real man is to be ready to fight and, ultimately, to kill and to die. That for which men are often asked by their leaders to sacrifice themselves is the safety and honor of women and children.²⁶

The Southeastern and Eastern parts of Turkey are risky zones for soldiering because of the armed conflict between the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the TAF. The families of soldiers who serve the military in these risky zones as a result of the military lottery are tremendously upset and anxious about the lives of their children. However, sometimes the sons are more relaxed than their parents, and some volunteer to do their military service in the dangerous zones. Three out of ten mothers and two fathers of Turkish soldiers in my research mentioned that their sons were willing to do their military service as commandos in areas of armed conflict. According to them, their sons did not value soldiering in safe areas and appreciated fighting against the PKK and even martyrdom. Beyhan, a mother of a soldier who died in Hakkari in 1997 at the age of 18, said that “*he registered himself as a commando. His father made a great effort to prevent him doing so. But [my son] always prayed, “my god, make me a martyr not a veteran’.*” Another mother of a dead soldier of the TAF declared: “*Before his military service he had said that “I will not serve the military here [non-conflict regions of Turkey], I will go to Hakkari, Şırnak and bring the heads of PKK members.”*”

In addition, when these young men were proposed such an opportunity to go to a safe place, they got angry. Their parents told me that their sons had rejected offers of help which would have provided them a more peaceful period of military service. For these soldiers, being a soldier and a commando in risky zones is an indicator of their manhood and proves that they have the capacity to defend their territory as the male members of the nation. Thus, preventing them from this would harm their manhood and reduce their sense of power related to their masculinity. Hacer, whose son died in Çukurca during the armed conflict, reported her son’s words as follows: *I am a Turkish citizen and a Turkish soldier. I volunteer to die for this land and flag. I do not want to retard my military service or become a draft-dodger. I was born for this land. This flag and this land are sacred for me. I will fulfill my mission.*”

Aynur’s son, who died in the conflict between the PKK and the TAF, was also offered help and rejected this as follows: “*I am a young and brave man, I am 1.89. I am the son of this land, I will bring you the heads.*”

To sum up, it has been argued that serving in the military is a major element of identity construction in the lives of young Turkish men as well as a rite of passage to both citizenship and manhood. The common expression “*Every Turk is born to be a soldier*” means that - soldiering is legal duty and right of every Turkish men. This service is a right since it is related to both citizenship and manhood of male members of the national community. As the narratives of the families of Turkish soldiers have shown, these soldiers consider their military service as a central element of their manhood as well as their nationality. They prove their manhood and loyalty to their nation by fighting against the PKK, despite the risk of death.

Emphasized Femininity and Motherhood from the Perspective of Militarist Values

At first sight, the armies might appear as a zone reserved for men just because of their physical visibility in the militaries. In many countries, the military service as combatants does not extend to female citizens. However, this does not totally exclude women from a militarist way of constructing gender identities and roles. In Turkey, although women are excluded from the military service as national duty, the military and militarism should not be seen as sites where women are completely absent due to a gender-based division of labor in war times.

In the introduction to this article, it was mentioned that militarism emphasizes “rigid notions of manhood and womanhood”.²⁷ Through the military service, every male citizen is taught a hegemonic masculinity that men are encouraged to aspire to. However, the emphasis on hegemonic masculinity in the military does not mean that the social roles for women and femininities are *not* patterned by militarist values. The femininities of women are assessed in relation to both militarist values and hegemonic masculinity.

While the hegemonic form of masculinity entails the subordination of other masculinities, its main feature is the subordination of women as well as femininities. Thus, while men are subordinated to hegemonic masculinity, they approve that women are to be subordinated by men. As Pateman argues, male dominance does

not only produce a hierarchy among men - different and unequal masculinities are always defined in relation not only to one another but also to women.²⁸

As in the case of masculinity, in the realm of femininity one type of femininity is highlighted, and women assess their femininity in relation to this idealized type. In any culture, maintaining masculine behavioral ideals can only be accomplished by constructing ideals of femininity; these femininities are supportive of and complementary to hegemonic masculinity.²⁹ According to Connell,³⁰ there are two kinds of processes for the construction of femininity: compliance with or resistance to this dominance. According to Connell, the former one is called “emphasized femininity” and plays a role in preventing other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation. The other femininities resist hegemonic masculinity.

Emphasized femininity is compatible with hegemonic masculinity because it is focused on accommodating the interests and needs of men. It is visualized in mass media and also supported culturally and ideologically.³¹ It is distinguished from hegemonic masculinity insofar as all forms of femininity in society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men. Thus, the identity of masculinity differs from femininity in the sense of being institutionalized as a power practice.³² For this reason, “there is no femininity among women that has the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men.”³³ However, the second type of femininity does not conform to hegemonic masculinity and might challenge the objectives of the latter. Emphasized femininity plays an important role in preventing this form of femininity from becoming visible.

While militarism collaborates with hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity represents compliance with this kind of relation and contributes to the continuation of hegemonic masculinity. In the kinds of gender relations supported by militarist values as well as nationalist projects, men are given the role of breadwinner as the head of the household. Men are recruited by the military, acquainted with the state, made ready for “real manhood”, and returned to their home as the head of the family. Women’s primary responsibility in turn is assisting men as heads of the household and keeping the household. Women are expected to be good mothers and spouses who know about hygiene rules, caretaking, and house keeping and who give birth and raise their children in line with nationalist ideology.

According to Connell,³⁴ although the features of emphasized femininity are linked to the home and bedroom, they are also very public. It can be suggested that raising children, motherhood, and being a “good” spouse are related to the private sphere and defined through households. However, as “the personal is the political,” all these concepts also have direct political connotations. Women, as the mothers of the nation, are expected to raise children for the nation and to teach them how to be good citizens.³⁵ “Education starts at the family” is a common expression, and it is primarily the task of women to educate their children. In order to fulfill this task, women have to be loyal to the nation and bring up their children as “suitable for a militarist, nationalist and patriarchal structure.”³⁶ The mothers are reminded to nurture the children and teach them what “our ways” are.³⁷ In having such a mission, women’s reproductive capacities defined in the private sphere, are articulated to a wider national political context.

This division of labor based on biological sex differentiations can be understood as a sphere on which hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity depend. “Men by physique and tradition are there to protect women, children, and the nation, often also represented as the motherland. Through this retelling, women are readied to sacrifice their husbands and sons, men to sacrifice their lives.”³⁸ As Enloe³⁹ argues, cultural constructions of masculinity in different societies have been dependent on celebrating men as soldiers. This construction also requires a simultaneous elevation of women as mothers-of-soldiering sons, thus valuing women chiefly for their maternal sacrifices for their nation.

In the political context of conflict between the PKK and TAF in Turkey, the soldiers of the TAF are represented as the defenders of the honor of the Turkish nation against the “traitors”. Besides, the mothers of these soldiers are portrayed as the mothers of the Turkish nation who raised loyal citizens for it. Through their motherhoods, these women are expected to support their sons’ mission as the protectors of the “motherland”, and they become “mothers as objects of wars who contribute to the continuity of warlike/militarist activities.”⁴⁰ The crucial point is that “as long as women perform those conventional roles, militarism and nationalism can totally control social practices.”⁴¹

Here, I argue that the representation of “mothers of martyrs” is compatible with Connell’s notion of emphasized femininity insofar as the femininity of these mothers is promoted by cultural, political, and ideological practices and supports the hegemonic forms of masculinity encouraged by militarism.

Although emphasized femininity cannot introduce a set of hegemonic values and hold power over other types of femininities, it tries to prevent other femininities from being visible. Moreover, since emphasized femininity is the most supported form, there is hierarchy among femininities in which the emphasized form is the “good” femininity and others are the unwanted, “deviant” ones. For example, during my research, the mothers of soldiers emphasized their difference from the mothers of “terrorists of the PKK” in terms of raising their children. Their argument is that the mothers of “terrorists” do not know how to raise a good child and that they even do not know the names of all their children. For example, İsmi, a mother of a TAF soldier, said:

“Why do these children throw stones at the police? A child is educated at home. At their homes, these children are taught to throw stones at the police and to burn the vehicles. Why aren’t our children like them? How do we educate them? Since their very early ages, we have taught them about the military and Atatürk”.

Thus, the mothers of members of the PKK are presented as uneducated mothers. According to mothers of TAF soldiers, as the mothers of “martyrs,” they know how to raise children suitable for the Turkish nation and society. For them, their sons were good citizens and died for the Turkish nation because of their good motherhood. The mothers of the nation, as discussed earlier, are expected to sacrifice their own reproductive capacity for the objectives of the nation, and they are expected not to complain about this situation and not to challenge the reason of state. If mothers of TAF soldiers fail to obey this demand, they are no longer acknowledged as the “mothers of the nation.” For example, in 2006, when Burak Okay, a TAF soldier, died in an armed conflict between the PKK and TAF, his mother’s speech was quite different from the customary. She said: “My son has never fired a shot in his life. How does he protect the territories? My son is a child, he is my child, I do not bestow my son for this land. He was not martyred; he was in an unknown war.”⁴²

In contrast to the “usual” mother of a martyr, Burak Okay did not wear a headscarf, had blond hair, and wore a fashionable blouse and trousers. Rather than appearing as a “poor” mother who “sacrificed” her son for the sake of the nation, she was opposing the way recruitment was done and was challenging the “merit” of fighting the “enemy” and of sacrificing young people for the sake of the nation. After her speech, which did not support the TAF’s and Turkish State’s actions, the prime minister did not send her his condolences.

Moreover, during my field research, I learned that some mothers were excluded from the community of “mothers of martyrs” due to their “unacceptable” forms of behavior. Some of the mothers of TAF soldiers told me that there are others who do not welcome TAF members in their houses and challenge them when they meet at the cemetery. According to the mothers in my sample, it is impossible to understand the motivation behind this behavior.

In addition, for the mothers of dead soldiers, it is totally impossible to come together with the mothers of PKK guerillas since they are seen as the mothers of the “terrorists” and “traitors” who killed innocent soldiers. One of the ten mothers in my sample however said that if she were given the chance, she would meet with the mothers of PKK members. She thought that the PKK guerillas participated in this armed organization due to the lack of their families’ education. Her reason for wanting to meet with their mothers was to warn them and teach them how to raise a son. Thus, it can be suggested that the different motherhoods and femininities also constitute obstacles for mothers of PKK members and of Turkish soldiers to come together. It can be said that the motherhood of TAF soldiers shaped around the concept of emphasized femininity is supportive of hegemonic masculinity highly promoted by the militaristic perspective. While their motherhood appears as the emphasized form of femininity, this kind of femininity also prevents other types of femininities and motherhoods, such as of mothers of PKK members and of mothers of TAF members who oppose the state’s militarist ways, from being visible.

“From Sparta, where a mother “reared her sons to be sacrificed on the alter of civic necessity” (Elshtain 1992:142) to South Africa, where white women were exhorted to bear “babies for Botha” (McClintock 1991:110-11), women have been admonished to fulfill their “duty” by bearing sons to fight for and daughters to care for the Motherland.”⁴³ In brief, “mothers of martyrs” are expected to be selfless women who sacrifice their sons for the defense of the national land. These mothers obey the rules of the state as well as of the military and do not call the military to account for sending their children to the heart of fire. Instead, they want their dead sons to be revenged, a demand which is utilized for the legitimization of military operations in Southeastern Turkey or in Iraq. Thus, the femininity of these mothers is instrumentalized for dealing with the Kurdish problems through the use of violence. While the manhood of male citizens is shaped by defending Turkish territory against the PKK and sacrificing their lives for the sake of the nation, their mothers are expected to support militarist policies and to consider the “martyrdom” of their sons as legitimate.

As a Conclusion: Ruptures in Militarist Gender Constructions

Although militarism reproduces rigid notions of femininities and masculinities and although hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity nurture militarism, we can still talk about some ruptures in these constructions.

As discussed earlier, the military service in Turkey is considered to have a “right” aspect. At the same time, this service is formally defined through the “duties” of male citizens to the state. The state has to take measures to meet the requirement for soldiers. The military service can be taken as a test for masculinity; however, perceiving the military service as a test for masculinity will in itself not mobilize sufficient numbers of men to do military service. For example, the General Staff declared that the number of draft-dodgers in Turkey has already exceeded 200.000.⁴⁴ Although the military service is strongly promoted and seen as an indispensable part of manhood, it must be an enforced duty if a sufficient number of men are to be gathered to do this service, due to the army’s need for human resources.⁴⁵ Thus, it is argued here that despite the prominent discourse on masculinity and its relationship with the military, other controls and forces are required to persuade sufficient men to do their military service.

Besides, although soldiering, in particular in risky zones, has become a test for manhood and although mothers are proud of their sons who passed away in the conflict, people try to pull strings in order to enable their sons to have a peaceful military service. During my interviews, all the mothers of dead soldiers told me that they were shocked when they learned that their sons will be sent to the conflict regions in the Southeast or East of Turkey. They also said that they tried to pull strings to prevent their sons from doing service in these areas.

Moreover, these mothers defined the death of their sons as injustice. According to them, the sons of “ordinary” people are sent to conflict regions while those of “privileged” ones enjoy their military service as a holiday. In this point, they feel that they are the excluded and ignored children of the state and begin to question the legitimacy of the state and the conflict. Nine of the ten mothers of dead soldiers declared that they would not say “*Vatan Sağolsun*”.⁴⁶ For these mothers, the homeland must be defended against the enemy; however, they also stated that their children died for nothing. For example, Nuriye, whose son was drowned in Hakkari said “They say homeland, which homeland? While all enjoy their life, I caress the graveyard of my son.” Ayten, whose son died in the conflict in Van, supported her: “Why should I say *vatan sağolsun*? I am so hurt.”

In my view, the ruptures between the constructions and the realities of masculinities and femininities can provide hope for challenging militarism and the continuity of armed conflict between the PKK and TAF. The controversy in the perspective of these mothers may indicate that they can also be articulated by a peace discourse.

- ¹ Rubina Saigol, “Militarizasyon, “Ulus ve Tolpumsal Cinsiyet: Şiddetli Çatışma Alanları Olarak Kadın Bedenleri” in *Vatan, Millet, Kadınlar*, eds. Ayşe Gül Altınay, İstanbul İletişim Yayınları ,2004) 217.
- ² Yakın Ertürk, “Turkey’s Modern Paradoxes Identity Politics, Women’s Agency, and Universal Rights” in *Global Feminism Transnational Women’s Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights* eds. Ferree, Myra Marx and Tripp, Aili Mari (NewYork and London: NewYork University Press 2006) .
- ³ Deniz Kandiyoti, *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar Kimlikler ve Toplumsal Dönüşümler*. (İstanbul : Metis Yayınları) 1999.
- ⁴ Kandiyoti, *Cariyeler, Bacılar, Yurttaşlar*,
- ⁵ Ayşe Gül Altınay and Tanıl Bora. “Ordu, Militarizm ve Milliyetçilik” in *Milliyetçilik: Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce Volume 4*, ed. Tanıl Bora (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları 2002), 153.
- ⁶ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & nation* (London, Thousand Oaks, California : Sage Publications, 1997) 15.
- ⁷ Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The Militarization of Women’s Lives* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000) 90.
- ⁸ Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Sevgili ve Ana Olarak Erotik Vatan: Sevmek, Sahiplenmek, Korumak” in *Vatan, Millet Kadınlar* eds. Ayşegül Altınay (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2000).
- ⁹ *Mahrem* has two different meanings. In its first sense, it refers to the forbidden that should not be revealed to anyone. In its second meaning, it refers to a person that is not allowed to marry (Dictionary of Institution of Turkish language www.tdk.gov.tr).
- ¹⁰ Peterson, V. Spike. “Gendered Nationalism: Reproducing “Us” versus “Them” in *Woman&War Reader*. ed. Lorentzon, Lois Ann and Turpin, Jennifer (NewYork and London: New York University Pres, 1998) 44.
- ¹¹ It is important to touch on the several meanings and usages of the word “honor” in Turkish in order to gain a holistic perspective of the nation and masculinities and femininities in the context of Turkey. In the Turkish language, there is more than one word for honor. However, each of these refers to different attributions. For example, for “being responsible for the honor of a woman,” the word *iffet* is mostly used. This word cannot be used for a man, since this usage of honor only refers to the sexuality of a woman. In that sense, being without *iffet* (*iffetsiz*) for a woman refers to her failure to keep her “chastity” and to control her sexuality. This meaning is more or less the same for the word *namus*, which is also translated to English as honor. However, in contrast to *iffet*, *namus* can be used both for males and females. Its usage is also different from the ones of *şeref* and *onur*, which are the other possible translations of honor in Turkish. While *onur* and *şeref* are related to the self-respect of someone (www.tdk.gov.tr), *namus* refers to the sexuality of a woman and of a man’s ability to keep his women under control in terms of sexuality. If a woman has a free style of sexuality or if a man fails to control his women’s sexuality, they are referred to as *namussuz* (dishonored). In the context of this study, it is important that the protection of the territory in the context of the nation-state is usually narrated through the concepts of honor in the sense of *iffet* and *namus*.
- ¹² Ruşen Çakır, *Türkiye’nin Kürt Sorunu* (İstanbul: Metis Yayınları 2004).
- ¹³ http://www.fatihaltayli.com.tr/content.cfm?content_id=4533
- ¹⁴ Frank J. Barrett, “The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy.” in the *Masculinities Reader* ed. By Stephen M. Whitehead & Frank J. Barrett (Malden: University of California Pres, 2005) 179.
- ¹⁵ R.W. Connel, *Gender and power: Society, the person, and sexual politics* (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Pres 1987), 185.
- ¹⁶ Pınar Selek, *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2008) 125.
- ¹⁷ Ertürk “Turkey’s Modern Paradoxes”, 87.
- ¹⁸ Najmabadi “Sevgili ve Ana Olarak Erotik Vatan”, 118.
- ¹⁹ Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The myth of the military nation: Militarism, gender, and education in Turkey*, (New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
- ²⁰ Altınay, *The myth of the military nation*, 67.
- ²¹ Altınay, *The myth of the military nation*, 82.
- ²² Selek, *Sürüne Sürüne*, 2008.
- ²³ “The sexuality of the other men” is mentioned by Handan Koç in her interview.
- ²⁴ Paul Higate and John Hopton, “War, Militarism and Masculinities” in *Handbook of Studies of Men and Masculinities*, ed. S. Kimmel, M., Hearn, J., Connell, R.W. (London: SAGE Publications, 2005) 434.
- ²⁵ Serpil Sancar, *İmkansız İktidar* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009) 155.
- ²⁶ Cynthia Cockburn, “The Gendered Dynamics of Armed Conflict and Political Violence” in *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, ed. Moser, Caroline and Clark, Fiona C. (London: Zed Books, 2001) 20.
- ²⁷ Ertürk “Turkey’s Modern Paradoxes”, 3.

²⁸ Cockburn “The Gendered Dynamics,” 16.

²⁹ Cynthia Enloe, “All the Men are in the Militias, All the women are Victims: The Politics of Masculinity and Femininity in Nationalist War’s, in *Women & War Reader* ed. By. Lorentzon, Lois Ann and Jeniffer, Turpin (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998) 54.

³⁰ Connell, *Gender and power*.

³¹ Connell, *Gender and power*.

³² Tayfun Atay, “‘Erkeklik’ en çok erkeği ezer”.*Toplum ve Bilim*, 101 Güz 2004.

³³ Connell, *Gender and power*, 187.

³⁴ Connell, *Gender and power*.

³⁵ For example, on the 3rd February of 1923, Atatürk said in Izmir that “the primary mission of women is motherhood”. This motto of Atatürk is written on the wall of a maternity ward in Ankara. It is not just a simple coincidence that this motto is chosen for the wall of a maternity ward where mostly pregnant women who will be mothers visit.

³⁶ Esra Gedik, *Ideological ambivalence of motherhood in the case of "mothers of martyrs" in Turkey* (MA Thesis, METU, 2008) 45.

³⁷ Cockburn, “The Gendered Dynamics.”

³⁸ Cockburn, “The Gendered Dynamics,” 19.

³⁹ Enloe, *Maneuvers*, 54.

⁴⁰ Gedik, *Ideological ambivalence*, 44.

⁴¹ Gedik, *Ideological ambivalence*, 62.

⁴² <http://bianet.org/bianet/bianet/84772-bu-aci-bitsin-lubnana-asker-gondermeyin>

⁴³ Peterson, “Gendered Nationalism,” 42.

⁴⁴ <http://arama.hurriyet.com.tr/arsivnews.aspx?id=-54111>

⁴⁵ Enloe, *Maneuvers*.

⁴⁶“ I do bestow my son to the nation.”