

Nurseli Yeşim Sünbülüğlü (eds.)

Erkek Millet, Asker Millet: Türkiye’de Militarizm, Milliyetçilik, Erkek(lik)ler

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E*rkek Millet, Asker Millet* is an initial attempt to discuss military masculinity in the Turkish context and in the greater spheres of nationalism and gender studies. The book traverses a relatively uncharted territory and compiles sixteen articles, which relate to masculinity from different perspectives with compelling arguments and well-chosen examples. Articles focus on a range of problems varying from military masculinity in Balkan wars, martyrdom, and compulsory military service, to Korea war, disabled veterans, football and the representations of masculinities in media. The book convincingly argues that masculinity is a critical issue surrounding discussions not only about war and the military but also about sacrifice, discipline, hegemony and education.

The introduction by the editor, Nurseli Yeşim Sünbülüğlü, covers the historical and theoretical framework for the analytical discussion of military masculinity, and discusses the socialization of people into a militarized culture in parallel to the rise of nation-states ably supporting the discussion with references to several theorists that led the way and flourished men’s studies. Quoting key names such as Cynthia Enloe and G.L. Mosse, Sünbülüğlü reminds that militarism is a complex social issue, which cannot be downgraded to war periods, and that the attempt to define what is normal masculinity, always comes with a discussion of militarized power since normative codes of masculinity are derived from the myth of warrior men.

First set of articles in the book has the concept “militarized nation” at their explicit focus with different time frames. In his “Soldier

Citizens and Heroic Men,” Yaşar Tolga Cora opens a discussion on the masculinity of the Turkish nation-state, taking his lead from the body politics of the pre-republican period. Güven Gürkan Öztan in his article “Militarist Tendencies in Turkey during the Construction of National Identity” carries the discussion to the early Republican times and up until the Korean War. Tebessüm Öztan in her “*Şimal Yıldızı* (Northern Star) as a Narrative of Excess” discusses the masculinity promoted in Turkey in relation to Korean War, focusing on the popular movie *Şimal Yıldızı*. Şafak Aykaç in his article “Martyrdom and the Reproduction of Militarism in Turkey” takes the war with separatist PKK at focus, and discusses how the discourses on martyrdom became tools of manipulation to enlist public support in war. Murat Belge in his “Teaching the Importance of the Military or on the Impossibility of Professional Army in Turkey” discusses how compulsory military service in Turkey has been acting as a tool to legitimize interventions of the Armed Forces in Turkish politics.

The following articles provide case studies and detailed examples on experiences of men in military. Barış Çoban in his “Hegemony of Spectacle and Militarist Masculinity,” discusses how militarized discipline is used to create prototypic men in a regime of hegemony, which he argues to be based on performance. Ayşe Gül Altınay, in her “One is not Called a Man until Completing Military Service: Compulsory Military Service, Masculinity and Citizenship” argues that education as designed in Turkey has an intention to militarize the culture, and hence the army service is an extension to a more general education in masculinity in Turkey. Ömer Turan in his article “To Stand at Attention: Experiences from the Barracks or the Anthropology of Compulsory Military Service in Turkey” discusses barracks as specific settings of discipline and ideology formation, taking his lead from an auto-ethnographic study and interviews conducted in military compounds outside zones of clash.

Shifting the focus to mothers, gay men and injured war veterans, the next four articles elaborate on the side effects of compulsory military service. Senem Kaptan’s article “Militarism in the Shadows of Cracks:

Military, Motherhood and Gender in Turkey” reminds that women are also inevitable part of the discourses on military masculinity although they are mostly excluded from the army. Alp Biricik, in his “Seventh Arrow-Militarism: On Citizenship, Indebtedness and Being Exempted from Draft” elaborates on gay men’s experiences of military service focusing on the health report often referred as “çürük raporu” (draft exempt report) expected from them for being excluded from military service. Nurseli Yeşim Sünbuloğlu in her “Fortifying Militarist Rote: Media Representations of Disabled Veterans of Wars of Korea, Cyprus and South East Turkey” focuses on newspapers and discusses the transitions of the term “ghazi” (disabled veteran) in news from the fronts, considering wars in Korea, Cyprus and South East Turkey. Salih Can Açıksöz discusses the complex problem of sacrifice in his “Construction of ‘Ghazi’ in the Context of Kurdish Issue: Hegemony, Masculinity and Disability” and looks at disabilities caused by the armed conflict.

The final three papers broaden the problem of militarism so that it exceeds the confines of the military. Tanıl Bora discusses football as a political, nationalist and militarist medium in his “Masculinity, Militarism and Nationalism in Football: Single Goal”. Nazan Üstündağ in her “Pornographic State-Erotic Resistance: General Economy of Kurdish Male Bodies” discusses the construction of Kurdish identity taking her lead from specific historical settings such as the infamous Diyarbakır prison. Arus Yumul in her “Taking Rojin up in the Mountains or Militarism, Woman and Humor” looks back with a gender sensitive approach to the article written by a well-known columnist in 2009, in which he used a sexually offensive language objectifying the Kurdish popular singer Rojin.

Overall, the volume provides an integrated entrance into the problem of militarist masculinity in Turkey, which has been mostly taken for granted, and initiates a critical look at previously taboo subjects such as the clashes in South East Turkey, unidentified deaths in barracks, draft exempt reports obtained by providing graphic ‘evidences’ of homosexual relationships etc. in a joint effort. Although a thoroughgoing

and combined discussion theory-wise on masculinity is missing in the volume, except in the introduction by the editor, there are provocative swipes in the articles which add on to each other, bringing together the individual agendas of the articles to form a generalized critical perspective required in an edited volume.

Some very interesting critical twists are created unintentionally or they appear in secondary comments, which are made in passing. Nurseli Yeşim Sünbülüoğlu, for example, raises a theoretical question in her contribution on media appearances of war veterans without privileging it, by her use of the term “nationalist militarism”. Is there a militarism that is not almost already nationalist? Defending territories and defending “a nation” are two different dimensions of war; however, inasmuch as the protection of territories relates to the protection of an “imagined community” conscious of its unity (i.e. the Ottoman Empire) there is a meaningful overlap. Hence, although Sünbülüoğlu devotes her critical attention to war veterans, the question whether there is a more “nationalist” militarism in post-Ottoman Turkey settles on table as an open debate, haunted by the continuities between the Empire and the nation-state.

Likewise, Nazan Üstündağ, opens a baffling discussion in her article on Kurdish men that relates to horrible memories of Diyarbakır prison during post-coup period following the military intervention that took place in September 12, 1980 by resembling the Diyarbakır prison to the “uterus of state” producing Kurds. The metamorphosis of the state in the article from a violent masculine agent of torture and castration that aims to annihilate Kurdish men to a feminine agent of reproduction, producing impaired and traumatized Kurdish masculinities is a challenging swing, which invites questions on the “gender” of the state. Senem Kaptan’s ironic definition of motherhood as a kind of military service in civil life, which is supported with a quote by Susan Zeiger referring to the similarities of ideal soldier to ideal mother in her article on gender dynamics of militarism, is also stimulating, and invites further discussions. The book has its strength in such moves into blurred areas of gender.

Erkek Millet, Asker Millet is a successful attempt to force militarism out of the confines of the military, and also masculinity out of the confines of men. The book successfully shows the political imperatives beneath the creation of militarist masculinities and gives a sufficient historical depth to the concept considering the Turkish history. It also makes persuasive arguments about the failures of the education system, drafting system, media ethics etc. when the complex issue of gender is at stake. Anyone researching or studying masculinities, nationalism and military in Turkey would find it a valuable initial attempt to discuss crucial issues surrounding these very complex phenomena.

An apparent gap in the volume to strengthen the arguments, however, is the issue of literature. Although the volume addresses textbooks used at schools, media representations and movies while discussing masculinities, an article that discusses literature produced in Turkey from the perspective of men's studies is missing. With some observations on fictive literature, the book could have gone further in the critical analysis of masculinities since literature provides the nuanced medium where it becomes possible to speak aloud about otherwise intimidating stories. It could also have given more attention to the issue of religion, to give a fuller picture of masculinities in Turkey. Religion is not entirely absent in the book; but it is not given a thorough analysis.

Nonetheless, articles in this book make important points on masculine/militarist power and hegemony, and open challenging discussions about several issues such as body, discipline, sacrifice etc. which makes *Erkek Millet, Asker Millet* a significant contribution to men's studies. The critical effort to deconstruct the dynamics beneath nationalisms, militarization and masculinities in Turkey is vital to propose a bold shift from a long history of gender conflict and political inequalities.

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