

MOTHERING THE ARMY, MOTHERING THE STATE:  
BEING A SOLDIER'S MOTHER IN TURKEY

by  
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MOTHERING THE ARMY, MOTHERING THE STATE:  
BEING A SOLDIER'S MOTHER IN TURKEY

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*To my family*

*Hadiye, Hızır, Şebnem*

*and*

*Mert*

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **MOTHERING THE ARMY, MOTHERING THE STATE: BEING A SOLDIER'S MOTHER IN TURKEY**

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Keywords: militarism, nationalism, citizenship, gender, motherhood.

This study aims to trace the notion of soldier mothering in Turkey. Based on interviews with women who have had direct contact with the army/state through the military service of their children, the study will primarily focus on how women of different backgrounds experience the notion of soldier mothering in their lives. The narratives of women on soldier mothering will be historicized and contextualized through an analysis of the roles that have been attributed to women throughout the highly militarized history of the Republic in general and of the concept of soldier mothering in particular. In addition to engaging in a feminist critique of militarism and militarization in Turkey by analyzing women's place in the gendered state discourse, this research will also engage in the (silenced) narratives of the women, more specially mothers, who are often utilized by the state in pivotal roles within the militarized discourse yet whose stories are hardly heard. While previous research on militarism in Turkey mostly focused on the impact of military service on men's lives, this study will try to trace the place of militarism in women's lives by analyzing the military service experience from the narratives of the mothers. This study argues that these women become both the 'mothers of the army' and the 'mothers of the state' with the role attributed to them in the gendered and militarized state discourse and in turn aims to see women's experience with and their reactions to the official discourse on soldier mothering.

## ÖZET

### ORDUYA VE DEVLETE ANNELİK YAPMAK: TÜRKİYE'DE ASKER ANNELİĞİ

Senem Kaptan

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Anahtar sözcükler: militarizm, milliyetçilik, vatandaşlık, toplumsal cinsiyet, annelik.

Bu çalışmanın konusu, Türkiye’de asker anneliğidir. Oğullarının askerliğiyle birlikte devletle/orduyla doğrudan temas kurmuş kadınlarla yapılmış mülakatlara dayanan bu araştırma, farklı sosyal sınıflardan gelen kadınların kendi hayatlarında asker anneliğini nasıl deneyimlediği üzerine odaklanacaktır. Kadınların asker anneliği hakkındaki anlatıları, oldukça askerleştirilmiş Cumhuriyet tarihi boyunca temel olarak kadınlara atfedilen rollerin, özel olarak da asker anneliği kavramının analiziyle tarih anlatımının içinde düşünülüp görüşmelerin yapıldığı zamandaki koşulların etkileriyle incelenecektir. Kadınların, cinsiyetlendirilmiş devlet söylemindeki konumunu inceleyerek Türkiye’de militarizm ve militarizasyonun feminist bir eleştirisini yapan bu çalışma, devlet tarafından merkezi konumlarda kullanılan fakat kendi hikayeleri nadiren duyulan kadınların (sessizleştirilmiş) anlatıları üzerinde duracaktır. Türkiye’de militarizm üzerine daha önce yapılmış çalışmalar askerliğin erkeklerin hayatlarındaki etkilerine odaklanmıştır; bu çalışmaysa askerlik deneyimini annelerin anlatıları üzerinden inceleyerek militarizmin kadınların hayatlarındaki yerini araştıracaktır. Bu çalışma, kadınların askerleştirilmiş ve cinsiyetlendirilmiş devlet söyleminde kendilerine atfedilen rollerle hem devletin hem de ordunun anneleri haline geldiklerini tartışmakla beraber kadınların resmi asker anneliği söylemine olan tepkilerini ve bu söylemle olan deneyimlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In February 2008, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) started a military operation to northern Iraq in an aim to vanquish the camps of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and eliminate the presence of the PKK in the Iraqi mountains. Twenty four soldiers were killed in the operation which lasted eight days.<sup>1</sup> On February 24, 2008 when eight soldiers were killed in the incursion, a very interesting debate took place on a widely watched popular song contest broadcast on a Turkish TV channel. The program opened with a one minute silence which the presenter announced to be for the reverent memories of the recently “martyred” soldiers in the operation.

A waving Turkish flag was reflected on to the screen present behind the jury members. When it was jury Bülent Ersoy's turn to comment on the ongoing operation and say her word for the “martyred” soldiers, she criticized the death of these eight soldiers with the following words:

I agree that the homeland can't be divided, but should the mothers bear these children and see their funerals? Is this how it should be? This is not a war under normal circumstances, this is a war of mischief and mischief cannot be dealt with. Unlike you, I can't know what having a child means. I'm not a mother and can't be one, but I'm a human being. I can't understand the pain that those mothers feel as a human being, but a mother can.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I do not want to reproduce the stance I have been criticizing throughout the thesis that people are turned into mere numbers after their death during the military service by giving numbers. My aim in presenting this information is to give an idea on why the public particularly reacted to the “martyrdom” of these soldiers in Iraq. The operation which was expected to take place in Spring 2008 was realized in February 2008 under vague statements as to how long it would last. It was stated by the military that the operation could last for up to a year, but ended abruptly in eight days. The military was criticized in the media for keeping the operation so short. One common speculation made in public for the abrupt end of the operation was that the Turkish military withdrew the troops from Iraq with the order of the US. For a press note of the TAF evaluating the operation, see: [http://www.tsk.tr/10\\_AR\\_SIV/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Yayin\\_Faaliyetleri/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Aciklamalari/2008/BA\\_25.html](http://www.tsk.tr/10_AR_SIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_Basin_Aciklamalari/2008/BA_25.html)

<sup>2</sup> “Tamam vatan bölünmez, bilmem ne olmaz ama göz göre göre de bu çocukları da o zaman bütün analar doğurun, verin toprağa. Bu mu yani? Çünkü normal şartlar altında bir savaş değil bu, entrikalar bu işin ucunda, entrikayla başa çıkılmaz sayın Erkir. Bir çocuğun ne demek olduğunu ben sizler gibi bilemem.

The speech of Ersoy, uttered under the uneasy looks of the presenter, met with applause from some of the audience yet also with a sharp reaction from Ebru Gündeş, a famous singer and another jury member of the contest. Gündeş criticized Ersoy with the following words:

I wish grace to our martyrs from God and patience to their families. God willing, I hope that I will also become a soldier's mother. I hope that I will have a son so that I can send him gloriously to the army.<sup>3</sup>

At this point Gündeş received a sharp reply from Ersoy: "And then you will have his dead body returned to your hands".<sup>4</sup> Not taking notice of these remarks, Gündeş continued:

Whatever is in our fate; as a woman, I can do whatever is necessary for this state, for this nation, and for this land. Like a lion, my son would also do the same. If death is a part of our fate, we will live whatever is written on our forehead. After all, the martyrs don't die and the homeland cannot be divided.<sup>5</sup>

Ersoy was still critical and replied to Gündeş by stating that she did not agree with her since these are all cliché words which do not change anything but continue to bring tears, cries, and dead bodies of the soldiers.<sup>6</sup> The presenter, whose uneasiness during Ersoy's speech left its place to contentment with Gündeş's words, replied to Ersoy with the following statement: "But these words are the reason why this flag can still be waved Ms. Bülent".<sup>7</sup>

---

Ben anne değilim, olamayacağım da hiçbir zaman. Ama insanım, insan olarak onları o toprağa vermek, o anaların yüreğinin nasıl alev alev, cayır cayır yandığını ben anlayamam ama anneler anlar."

<sup>3</sup> "Şehitlerimize Allah'tan rahmet, ailelerine sabır diliyorum. Allah inşallah bana da asker annesi olmayı nasip eder diyorum. Anlı şanlı bir şekilde benim de bir oğlum olur da inşallah onu askere yollarım..."

<sup>4</sup> "Ondan sonra da ölüsünü eline alırsın"

<sup>5</sup> "Kaderde ne varsa; bu millet için bu devlet, bu topraklar için ne gerekiyorsa ben kadın olarak yapabilirim, benim oğlum da aslan gibi yapar. Eğer bunun için kaderde ölüm varsa, o da alınımıza yazılan neyse onu da yaşayacağız. Şehitler ölmez, vatan da bölünmez zaten."

<sup>6</sup> "Hep bunu söylüyoruz zaten, çocuklar gidiyor, ondan sonra kanlı gözyaşları, feryatlar, cenazeler, klişeleşmiş... Ben sizlere aynı fikirde değilim."

<sup>7</sup> "Ama öyle diye diye bu bayrak dalgalanabiliyor hala Bülent Hanım."

These words, which made uneasy not only the presenter of the contest but others watching the show, led to the trial of Bülent Ersoy under the Article 318 of the Turkish Penal Code, an article indicating that “alienating the public from military service” is a crime.<sup>8</sup> The indictment written against Ersoy comprised of the following:

In the conscience of the Turkish nation, due to the significance and value the Turkish nation has put on military service, the hearth of the military has been equated with the hearth of the prophet. This is why completing one’s military service, the elevated and sacred status of being a veteran and martyr provides a person and his family with a social value. The proverb ‘Every Turk is born a soldier’ has been internalized by the society since it reflects these elevated feelings.<sup>9</sup>

Ersoy was, thus, accused of insulting the ‘values’ of the Turkish nation, which, according to the indictment, esteems military service above everything else.

The case of Ersoy was also mentioned in one of my interviews where interestingly the father of the ex-soldier who we were talking about and not the mother commented on the words of Ersoy. Hamit, Gökçen’s husband, stated that Ersoy’s words were misunderstood since she cannot biologically give birth yet they, according to Hamit, were only humane reactions. Hamit said that what Ersoy wanted to draw attention to were the vain deaths taking place in the East/Southeast since what is going on is not a war and added that he wondered whether Ebru Gündeş could have said the same things if she really had a son who could be sent to the East.

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<sup>8</sup> The 155 numbered article of the former Turkish penal code was replaced by the 318 numbered one in June 1, 2005. According to article 318 of the new penal code, (1) Persons who give incentives or make suggestions or spread propaganda which will have the effect of discouraging people from performing military service shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of six months to two years. (2) If the act is committed through the medium of the press and media, the penalty shall be increased by half. <http://www.wri-irg.org/node/3554>

<sup>9</sup> “Türk Milletinin askerliğe verdiği önem ve değer nedeniyle, vicdanında asker ocağı ile peygamber ocağı eş düzeyde tutulmuştur. Bu nedenledir ki; askerliğin eksiksiz tamamlanması, şehitlik ve gazilik kavramlarına verilen ulviyet ve kutsiyet; kişiye ve ailesine toplumsal bir değer kazandırmaktadır. Her Türk asker doğar özdeyişi de; bu ulvi duyguları ifade eden atasözü olarak halk tarafından benimsenmiştir.” <http://www.savakarsitlari.org/arsiv.asp?ArsivTipID=9&ArsivAnaID=47806>

Similarly, what makes Ersoy's words such a great source of disturbance, I believe, is the parameter of who can and thus deserves to speak on behalf of the 'mothers of the nation' who have sacrificed their sons for the homeland. The solicitor who objected to Ersoy's acquittal, for example, asserted this with the following statement: "It would be naïve to evaluate the words that have been uttered to provoke the Turkish mothers by someone who cannot biologically give birth as proof of goodwill and freedom of speech".<sup>10</sup>

According to this comment, while the words of Ersoy by themselves are a source for "alienating the public from military service", the fact that Ersoy, the first transsexual singer celebrity of Turkey, cannot biologically give birth makes this situation doubly 'dangerous'. Despite the fact that the solicitor does not elaborate on how Ersoy's words can "provoke" the Turkish mothers, it is implied that women may start questioning the soldier mothering<sup>11</sup> attribute and thus also start thinking on the reasons of the death of their children, constituting a bad example for the other mothers after hearing Ersoy's 'not so naïve' comments on the operation and martyrs.

Although the words in both the initial indictment and the objection to Ersoy's acquittal seem to be consistent in themselves, there is a detail which is overlooked in all the criticisms against the statements of Ersoy. It is constantly stated that military service is an essential and unchanging characteristics of the Turkish nation yet at the same time a ubiquitous fear prevails that the same nation will be alienated from the service with

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<sup>10</sup> "Çocuk doğurma yeteneği tıbben olmayan bir kişinin, Türk annelerini bir anlamda provoke etmek anlamında kullandığı sözleri iyi niyet göstergesi ve düşünce özgürlüğünün gereği olarak değerlendirmek safdillik olacaktır"  
<http://www.savaskarsitlari.org/arsi.v.asp?ArsivTipID=5&ArsivAnaID=50315>

<sup>11</sup> The Turkish term which I have been using as "soldier mothering" in English corresponds to *asker anneliği*. The English translation does not exactly cover the meaning of this term which means being a soldier's mother; I use the present English translation throughout the thesis as a correspondence to the Turkish saying of being a soldier's mother.

the words of one single person. A very crucial question, then, arises from these concerns: If the Turkish nation is one which embraces its military so much; if the Turkish nation, in other words, is a “military-nation”, then why is there a constant fear that this nation will be disheartened to abandon its innate characteristics with one single ‘intervention’? Why would mothers, upon the words of Ersoy, be “provoked” to abandon their roles of raising citizen-soldiers for the country and why would men be refusing to serve in the military, to protect and die for their homeland? If, as constantly uttered, “every Turk is born a soldier” then why would this change overnight with one single criticism?

I agree with Ayşe Gül Altınay (2004a) that the widespread belief that the Turkish nation is a military-nation is a myth constructed in the founding years of the Turkish Republic and sustained through rigorous means of militarization. It is, thus, exactly the fact that the Turkish nation, rather than *being* a military-nation, is *imagined* as a military-nation which creates the ubiquitous fear that the Turkish public may be “alienated from military service” at any time, thus, producing and perpetuating mechanisms of strict control of images and utterances which may distort this picture. This is why Ersoy’s words pose a ‘threat’ to this order which is both militarized and gendered.

Imagining the nation as a military-nation presupposes that the citizens of this nation have certain essential roles, which implies that not only the nation itself but also its citizens are imagined to fit into certain forms of femininities and masculinities. The militarized order in the Turkish case imagines the women to be loyal wives, sacred mothers, and women warriors (Altınay 2008). While the last aspect is the least expected and encouraged, the former aspects define ‘proper womanhood’. Thus, women are, more than anything else, expected to become the mothers of the nation who will bear

and raise citizen-soldiers who will in turn be responsible for protecting and fighting for the country. It is, then, true that “militarism needs a gender ideology as much as it needs soldiers and weapons” (Burke 1994).

The gender ideology in the Turkish case previously mentioned defines women as mothers and men as soldiers. Women who become the mothers of these potential citizen-soldiers are expected to prepare their children to military service, their “duty to the homeland”, be proud of their departure, and remain dignified if they are “martyred” during a conflict. Due to the ongoing conflict between the TAF and the PKK since 1984, soldier mothering in Turkey has come to be equated with being a mother of a martyr. The mothers of the “martyrs” have regularly appeared in the press crying in front of their children’s caskets uttering the saying “I bestow my son to this land” (*Vatan sađolsun*)<sup>12</sup> yet never questioning the political or military processes that led to their son’s death.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, although every woman was regarded as a potential mother to raise the future citizen-soldiers, soldier mothering appeared in the press only in relation to the mothers of the martyrs.

What happened, then, to the ‘ordinary’ soldiers’ mothers whose children left for and returned from their military service? Who were these women? Why were their voices hardly ever heard? Aiming to search for the answers to these questions, this thesis set out to explore how women from different social backgrounds who were transformed into soldiers’ mothers with their sons’ enlistment experienced their son’s

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted at this point that the English translation of this saying does not exactly correspond to its Turkish meaning. While the saying does refer to bestowing one’s son to the homeland, it also refers to the ‘insignificance’ of this death when compared to the other big aim of preserving the perpetuity of the nation. The Turkish saying is, thus, an amalgamation of bestowing one’s son to the homeland yet bestowing him for the sake of the perpetuity of the nation.

<sup>13</sup> This practice continued to be so until very recently when mothers, and in certain cases fathers, started to object to their son’s vain death in the conflict zone and uttered the saying “I do not bestow my son to the homeland” (*Vatan sađolsun demiyorum*). The utterances of these women were ‘justified’ by the press by stating that they are going through a trauma due to their son’s death and thus they have an ‘unstable’ psychology which makes them utter these words.

military service and mothering. While my primary motivation was to listen to the personal stories of these women, another significant issue was how they situated themselves vis-à-vis the official discourse on soldier mothering.

This study, therefore, aimed to explore the meaning and repercussions of being a mother of a soldier in Turkey by addressing some of these questions: In what ways is the official discourse on compulsory military service and gender roles related? How and in what roles does the state discourse utilize women? How has been the historical development of the official discourse on military service, citizenship, and soldier mothering? How do women themselves react to this discourse? Where and how does the official discourse on compulsory military service and soldier mothering appear in the narratives of the soldiers' mothers? How do the women's narratives perpetuate and/or challenge the state discourse? How is the temporality between the women's state before and after their sons' military service structured in relation to citizenship and mothering? Where do the concepts of gender, politics, and citizenship overlap in relation to the official discourse on soldier mothering and the narratives of the soldiers' mothers?

While seeking answers to these questions, I have benefited from the critical research conducted on the interconnections of militarism, nationalism, and gender. I have particularly made use of the literature at the international level on the construction of military service and gendered citizenship (Feinman 2000; Kerber 1987; Moon 2005); motherhood and antimilitarism (di Leonardo 1985; Dietz 1985; Ruddick 1980 and 1990); and women's place in militarization at the transnational level (Enloe 2000). The literature which I utilized on Turkey involved research on the place that the Turkish Army holds within the political sphere, daily life, education and thus the shaping of the identities of men and women (Altınay 2003, 2004 and 2009; İnel and Bayramoğlu 2004; Parla 1998; Selek 2008; Şen 1996 and 2000); the militarized aspects of the school

textbooks (Altınay 2003, 2004b and 2009; Kancı 2008); and motherhood and militarism (Aslan 2008; Çağlayan 2007; Gedik 2008; Sancar 2001).

Previous research on militarism in Turkey although fruitful is mostly limited with the production of masculinities within the context of compulsory military service. Although recent scholarship (Altınay 2008; Gedik 2006) has dealt with the place of women in relation to the antimilitarist movement, I believe that the literature on gender and militarism is still a pristine area with topics waiting ahead to be discovered. Recently, young researchers (Aslan 2008 and Gedik 2007) have discussed militarism and motherhood in both the Turkish and Kurdish cases, where they have analyzed how the image of the ideal mother is created in the state discourse and how it is utilized to exalt some women, the mothers of the martyrs, as the ‘mothers of the nation’ while rendering the ‘other mothers’, the Mothers of Peace, “abject”.

This thesis benefits from both of these researches and complements them by presenting an analysis of the soldiers’ mothers who are ‘in between’, neither exalted like the mothers of the martyrs nor otherized like the Mothers of Peace. By analyzing the narratives of the soldiers’ mothers on military service, citizenship, state, motherhood, and gender and also discussing their thoughts about the mothers of the martyrs and the Mothers of Peace, this thesis tries to elucidate how the soldier mothering discourse is constructed, maintained, and supported by the state and how mothers challenge and/or contribute to the perpetuation of this discourse.

### **1.1. Reactions to the Research**

I initially aimed to start my research by contacting my friends and relatives in order to find soldiers’ mothers from my social network. It took me a lot of time, however, to literally start contacting people to ask whether they knew anyone who had

conducted their military service in the East. There were two main reasons for this. First of all, I was discouraged by the initial reactions to the research by the people to whom I had mentioned my thesis. Nobody seemed to know anyone who had conducted his service in the East. My friends who got back to me, on the other hand, only knew people who lived outside of Istanbul, which was of no use for me since I was only interviewing people who lived in Istanbul due to logistic reasons. The second reason was the negative reactions I received from people and the difficulty of explaining why I was particularly interested in this topic. People wanted to know why I wanted to write a thesis on military service and told me that maybe I should consider changing topic since I may not be able to find enough women to speak with. Some people said it would be ‘dangerous’ to engage in such an antimilitarist endeavor, although I had not indicated whether or not I had an antimilitarist stance. One friend, for example, asked me what I intended to achieve with the outcome of this research and whether the questions that I had prepared for the mothers were “provocative or not”. Most people, on the other hand, did not regard the research as a topic ‘worth analyzing’.

I finally managed to reach people through my social network who enabled me to contact the mothers of their friends, who then also directed me to other mothers. The initial reactions which I thought I had surmounted, however, also showed up after reaching my prospective interviewees. The obstacles at this point were twofold. First, I could not convince some of my participants that they were ‘really suitable’ for my research since they stated that their son’s place of deployment was not the East, although geographically their sons were sent to the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. One of the women with whom I talked a couple of times, but could not get together for the interview, said: “Well, what can I tell you my dear, Erzurum cannot really be seen as a part of the East”. I also encountered the same reaction from two interviewees whose

sons had conducted their military service in Gaziantep: “It is not quite in the East, is it?”. The boundaries of the East and West, which I had thought to be clear and intact, therefore, proved to be both vague and flexible.

Apart from these, I also encountered people who did not want to talk and refused to talk about their son’s service despite the assurance that this will be a confidential interview. A friend of mine, for instance, tried to convince the mother of his best friend on such ground and was rejected. Although her son was initially located elsewhere, he was sent to Diyarbakır after he had a conflict with the commander of his initial unit and was having hard times at his new unit. The mother, therefore, did not want to talk about his son’s service until it was finished. Another mother, whose son was in Şırnak, commented on my thesis: “What can I say to you? I mean all the mothers share the same view. Can’t you interview one person and generalize the conclusion?”. While the words of this mother can be said to have been uttered due to her unwillingness to conduct an interview about his son’s military service, I believe that they are significant in reflecting the general assumption that women as mothers “all share the same view” and thus are not ‘worthy’ of talking to, an assumption which this thesis is trying to question.

In addition to these, there were cases of young men who first offered help, but then decided that they could not bother their mother with the research. One such contact to whom I was directed by a friend said: “I can’t help you with your thesis, but I’ll still ask the people around me who have done their service in the East. Your handicap is the fact that you’ll be speaking with the mothers. If it were the soldiers, you’d find a thousand people, or even the fathers would do, but no one would want to make their

mother remember those days”.<sup>14</sup> A similar comment was made by men who asked me whether they would be suitable for the research since they “did not have any traumatic memories” and had not participated in an operation. I had not particularly asked my friends to get in touch with people who had been involved in a military operation or had gone through a trauma. Interestingly, however, the East was always mentioned and thought of as a place of trauma and horror. In this sense, it was only the memories of the ‘traumatized’ people that were ‘worth’ talking about yet the others were ignored by the people to whom I had mentioned my research. What I cared more about, however, was uttered by one of my interviewee’s son during a very similar conversation we were having on this issue: “Doing one’s service in the East is by itself a big experience”. This thesis engages in an analysis of how this “big experience” is lived by the mothers.

## **1.2. Research Methodology**

When I was thinking about conducting a qualitative research based on interviews with soldiers’ mothers what initially came to my mind were the mothers of the people who had conducted their service in the East/Southeast. The East came to my mind as a geographical area with seemingly clear and strict boundaries. It had, on the other hand, been the scene of a violent yet invisible conflict for the past 25 years. Soldiers were being sent to the ‘battlefield’ but no particular significance was put on their return. In other words, no one seemed to be interested in how they had survived or what they had gone through while in the East. The news that seemed ‘worth’ mentioning were that of the “martyrs” and their proud but grieving mothers, demonstrated as the ‘exemplary mothers of the nation’. This is why I wanted to see how the mothers of the ‘ordinary’ soldiers experienced their son’s military service. As previously mentioned, I did not

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<sup>14</sup> Personal communication; January 7, 2009.

particularly seek to interview women whose sons had been in a conflict. Rather, I thought that going to and being in the East was a significant experience in itself.

I had tried to avoid falling into the trap of associating the East solely with trauma, just like it was done by the people I had contacted. As time passed and as I started finding contacts for the interviews, however, I realized that the way I imagined soldiering in the East was very similar to the connotations that it brought to the minds of the people I contacted. From here on, I shifted my focus from such a standpoint and started to question what the “East” meant and how it was perceived by the mothers. The reason why I regard the “East” as a “big experience” is that it seems to appear in the mothers’ narratives and the narratives of the ex-soldiers I have talked to outside of the research as a journey that can be made to the farthest possible place in Turkey. The “East”, in this sense, is where the boundaries are stretched, tested, and reconsidered. It is, according to my observations with people’s experiences, also the place which is wanted to be forgotten the most when the issue at hand is the military service experience. This is why I particularly wanted to delve into what the “East” means and how it is represented.

Apart from this, one particular concern while trying to find interviewees was social and economic class. I wanted to interview women from different social backgrounds to observe how these women experienced their son’s enlistment and whether their narratives changed according to their social and economic status. I also aimed to analyze how they perceived the “East”, which I, as previously mentioned, just like the women I interviewed, initially thought of only as a fixed territorial entity and not an imagined construction which could have different connotations and implications for different people.

I interviewed twenty women in a course of five months from December 2008 to April 2009. All contacts were reached through the snowball sampling method, which I believe enabled the diversity that I had desired to attain while beginning the research. After making initial contact through acquaintances, I personally contacted all the women in order to propose a meeting date and time. Apart from three interviews, where two were conducted at the interviewees' office and one at a café chosen by the interviewee herself, all interviews were realized in the homes of the interviewees. Although slight deviations took place in some of the interviews regarding the projected date and time, all interviews were conducted when and where the interviewees wanted them to be. Conducting interviews at the interviewees' homes was at times difficult in terms of logistics since they lived in various different districts of Istanbul ranging from places such as Maçka, Gayrettepe or Yedikule to places like Ümraniye, Kartal or Küçükçekmece. However, I think that it was also a fruitful experience since it enabled me to experience and share a part of their life and their living space, at least for a certain while.

My main concern before starting the interviews was the age gap that would exist between me and the mothers. I was nervous that my interest in the topic may meet with prejudice since I myself am not a mother. In other words, I feared that I could not establish dialogue with the mothers as I thought they would think that I may not understand their experiences being a young woman. I, thus, thought that the prevalent age gap would become an obstacle. I realized later that my concern was unnecessary. All of the mothers were very welcoming and sincerely shared their memories and thoughts with me. Some chose to talk less, omit certain questions whereas other talked more mentioning cases which I had not thought of before, providing me with novel ground to further my research and discuss these points in the prospective interviews.

I conducted semi-structured, open-ended, and in-depth interviews with the participants. Although I had previously prepared a list of interview questions and had them with me at the interviews, I did not strictly follow the order of the questions or ask the exact same questions on the list.<sup>15</sup> Some questions were at times skipped; some which I had not initially thought of were added; thus, the questions were tailored according to each interview. I modified the initial structure of the questions, which I felt were a little vague, after a couple of interviews since I experienced difficulty in conveying some of them to the interviewees. Questions like “Do you think that there is a specific ‘performance’ expected from the soldiers’ mothers in places like ceremonies or TV programs?” or “What would you like to say as a soldier’s mother if you were interviewed by a program related to soldiering?” were hard to convey since I had difficulty in explaining what I was trying to say when I was asked what I “really meant” with these questions. I also wanted to modify the questions since they provided me with more about how women perceived politics, military service, and citizenship yet were not very helpful in bringing up their own experiences, something which I was more interested in listening to and discussing. Therefore, I tried to ask questions that related more to their son’s military service, their memories, and how they had experienced that particular time period.

At the end of each interview, I kindly asked my interviewees to answer a questionnaire which comprised questions that I did not include in the interview, like their age, job, income etc.<sup>16</sup> Although I regarded these questionnaires solely as statistical material, the reactions given by interviewees to certain questions were also thought provoking on how they regarded certain concepts. Most of the interviewees, for

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<sup>15</sup> For the list of questions, see Appendix A.

<sup>16</sup> For the questionnaire, see Appendix B.

example, were surprised with the questions on their mother tongue, religion, and ethnicity. The typical reaction was “Well, of course it’s [the mother tongue] Turkish” or “Religion? It’s Islam, of course”. The taken for grantedness of Turkish and Islam being the ‘natural’ language and religion was also something which appeared regarding the ethnicity question. At certain instances, I had difficulty explaining what I meant by ethnicity or ethnic identity. Most of the interviewees said or wrote “None” (*Yok*) as the answer to the ethnicity question. Although one interviewee replied by saying “Ethnicity? Well, we’re Turk, of course”, she still wrote down “None”. One interviewee asked me whether being Alevi “counted as” ethnic identity on which I told her that she could write down whatever she felt comfortable saying. Another interviewee asked me and thought for a while whether she should write “Bosnian” since her father was Bosnian yet decided to write “I have sympathy for Bosnians since my father came from Sarajevo”. One interviewee asked me what she was supposed to write down as the answer. I knew that she was Armenian before I contacted her, but I said “If you would ask me, I would write down Bosnian so if you think you have an ethnic identity that you would like to write down that would be fine”. She then decided to write down the answer that she had given to me “Armenian, but it doesn’t matter that much”. The questionnaire, thus, turned out to be an interesting tool for me to also consider my thoughts on religion, ethnicity, and language, which, I believe are things that most people in Turkey take for granted.

The shortest interview lasted for half an hour whereas the longest one was close to two hours. Although I did at times feel that I could have asked more questions in my initial interviews after conducting a couple of interviews and comparing them to the previous ones, I was content with the overall experience and the interviews since sometimes a shorter interview enabled me to think more on my research than a longer

one. All of the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by me. I asked for the permission of my interviewees' before I started recording and assured them that I would be the only one listening to the interviews. I did not take notes during the interviews, but I kept interview reports about my impressions related to the interview after the meeting had taken place.

### **1.3. Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of three main chapters. In the first chapter, I provide a brief theoretical background and analyze how my research fits into the literature on militarism and motherhood in Turkey. I demonstrate the construction of gendered identities with the foundation of the Turkish Republic and analyze how these gendered identities are transformed into militarized ones with certain roles attributed to men and women. I analyze the cultural construction of military service as an 'ordinary' thus very thinkable aspect of everyday life and compare this with the unthinkability of the "East" as a place of service. While setting the theoretical framework for the rest of the thesis, this chapter also aims to demonstrate how the narratives of my interviewees fit into, reproduce and perpetuate the official discourse on soldier mothering. Benefiting from Marsha Marotta's (2005) formulation of the concept of "MotherSpace", I analyze the discursive constructions of women who the military projects as the mothers of the nation and further reflect on the social and cultural implications of the concept of "MotherSpace" for the identity constructions of women. Developing and further discussing the concept of "MotherSpace", I analyze the responses of the participants in relation to Sara Ruddick's (1980) argument on "maternal thinking" while also cogitating on the silences which prevail the narratives regarding military service.

In the second chapter, I delve more into the relationship between the compulsory military service practice and the implications of being deployed to the “East”. I juxtapose the perception of the “East” and its unthinkability with the ubiquitous acceptance and positive perception of military service. Taking “East” as both a land which has physical boundaries yet at the same time a spatial vagueness in terms of where these boundaries start or end, I discuss the connotations and perceptions of the “East”, its lines and limits vis-à-vis the construction and absence of the West. Further highlighting the construction of the myth of the military-nation, which I mention in the first chapter, I also discuss the relationship between the “culturalization” of the military service practice and the social and cultural implications of conducting military service in the “East”.

In the third and final chapter, I briefly talk about how military service is perceived by the mothers and their sons based upon my observations during the six interviews which were also accompanied by the ex-soldiers. Analyzing the tensions between the narratives of the ex-soldiers and the mothers, to the possible extent, I discuss how the perceptions of the military and military service are constructed for the mothers. By building upon Deniz Kandiyoti’s formulation of the “patriarchal bargain”, I further discuss the relationship that is constructed by women regarding the official discourse on soldier mothering and analyze the possibilities of extending, subverting, or transforming the “MotherSpace” assigned by this discourse. Finally, I analyze the repercussions of the tensions which appear in the mothers’ narratives as the “perpetual fissures” of this soldier mothering experience and reflect on its implications.

## CHAPTER II

### AMBIVALENT ENCOUNTERS: GENDER, CITIZENSHIP, AND MILITARY SERVICE

In July 2007, a month after the Turkish Chief of Staff stated that “terror events” will be escalating starting from May 2007 at a press conference, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) published a press statement on their web site and declared that the “sublime Turkish nation should demonstrate its social resistance reflex against these terror events”.<sup>17</sup> Although this statement met with a negative reaction from most of the columnists in daily newspapers, academics, and NGOs, a series of demonstrations took place all over the country, reflecting the desire of the Chief of Staff, in order to “curse terror”.<sup>18</sup>

During the same month, seven women from Ayvalık, a small town in the Aegean coast of Turkey, applied to the Military Recruitment Office expressing their desire to be enlisted for military service.<sup>19</sup> These women, whose ages ranged from 30 to 50 and whose names were kept confidential on their request, indicated that the current state of Turkey is tremendously grave. In their explanation regarding their application, they stated that they “as women and people who raise soldiers” wanted to show a reaction to terrorism and the ongoing conflict first and foremost as women and with “womanly sensitivity” (*kadın hassasiyeti*) since “sitting at home” was not something they saw fit at

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<sup>17</sup> The announcement can be found on the web site of the Turkish Armed Forces: [http://www.tsk.mil.tr/10\\_ARSIV/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Yayin\\_Faaliyetleri/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Aciklamalari/2007/BA\\_13.htm](http://www.tsk.mil.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_Basin_Aciklamalari/2007/BA_13.htm)

<sup>18</sup> For more information regarding these demonstrations, see: <http://www.bianet.org/english/kategori/bianet/102518/genelkurmaydan-kitlese-reflekse-sukran> and <http://www.cnnturk.com/2007/turkiye/06/24/teror.cesitli.illerde.protesto.edildi/366817.0/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> For more information regarding this application, see: <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/kategori/kadin/97935/kadina-askerlik-olume-kadinca-isyan-bu-mu>, <http://www.savaskarsitlari.org/arsi.v.asp?ArsivTipID=5&ArsivAnaID=39593>, and <http://www.ayvalikturkannelerdernegi.com/>

such a time of distress. According to their statement, not only men but also women should support the TAF.

A similar event took place on October 2007 when twenty two women from Zonguldak, a city situated on the Black Sea coast of Turkey, also applied to the Military Recruitment Office. Their demand was to be enlisted for military service as a reaction to the “terrorist attack” in Hakkari-Yüksekova where 12 soldiers were “martyred”. In response to their application, these women, just like the aforementioned women from Ayvalık, received a letter of gratitude from the Ministry of National Defense.<sup>20</sup> The letter comprised the following words:

Your act has been evaluated as the symbol of the self-sacrifice that the patriotic Turkish woman will willingly perform for the sovereignty of her country under even the most difficult circumstances like that of the War of Independence. Your desire to participate in the armed struggle that the Turkish Armed Forces is waging against the terrorists has met with great appreciation, excitement, and joy. It is the duty of every Turkish citizen to enable the perpetuity of the Turkish Republic, which we have inherited thanks to our martyrs’ blood and the great sacrifices of our veteran heroes, to elevate it to the state of modern civilization by preserving the indivisible unity of our sacred land and nation, and pass on this entrust to the future generations.<sup>21</sup>

As observed from the letter of the Ministry of National Defense, women’s demand to join the army has been enthusiastically responded to. Present day women have been compared to the self-sacrificing women of the War of Independence who have struggled and fought for the sovereignty of the country. Nevertheless, despite the statement that it

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<sup>20</sup> For more information, see:

[http://www.askerhaber.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=512&Itemid=26](http://www.askerhaber.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=512&Itemid=26) and <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=2348004>

<sup>21</sup> The letter can be found in the above web sites. The original Turkish version is: Bu hareketiniz, vatansever Türk kadınının, Kurtuluş Savaşı’nda olduğu gibi, en zor şartlar altında dahi ülkesinin bağımsızlığı için seve seve yapacağı fedakarlığın bir göstergesi olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Öncelikle bir Türk kadını olarak, Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri’nin teröristlere karşı verdiği silahlı mücadelede yer alma isteğiniz büyük bir taktir, heyecan ve memnuniyetle karşılanmıştır. Şehitlerimizin kanları ve kahraman gazilerimizin büyük fedakarlıkları ile bize miras kalan Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devleti’ni sonsuza kadar yaşatmak, aziz vatanımızın, milletimizin bölünmez bütünlüğünü koruyarak, çağdaş uygarlık seviyesine ulaştırmak ve bu emaneti nesiller boyunca gelecek kuşaklara aktarmak her Türk vatandaşının görevidir.

is every Turkish citizen's duty to preserve the integrity of Turkey, women have been told at the end of the letter that it is only men who are allowed to realize military service according to the laws of the Turkish Republic.

Apparently, these women wanted to participate in preserving the "sovereignty of the country" rather than "sitting at home" to witness the deterioration of the ongoing conflict. While women accepted the duty to "raise soldiers for the country", they also stated that they wanted to fight for the sake of the nation and participate in the struggle to eradicate the terrorists. It is noteworthy that the women are likened to those in the War of Independence and their desire to that of the "patriotic Turkish woman" who as a citizen of the Turkish Republic works for the well-being of her nation and joins the fight when necessary.

An interesting connection between gender, citizenship, and military service arises, however, when the last sentence of the above excerpt is analyzed. Without focusing on a particular gender when talking about citizenship, the letter underscores that "it is the duty of *every* Turkish citizen to enable the perpetuity of the Turkish Republic", but there seems to be degrees and categories of this citizenship. Although the protection and preservation of the country is expected from every citizen, men seem to be the ones who have 'permission' to do so. While women's willingness to fight for the country is regarded as an act of "self-sacrifice", men's act of protecting the country seems to be their "duty". The degrees of this citizenship is manifest where the primary task of "preserving the indivisible unity" of the country is attributed to men as soldiers whereas the secondary task of "passing on this entrust to the future generations" is attributed to women as mothers.

Indeed, the women who have demanded to be enlisted also regard themselves as ‘military mothers’ who raise citizen-soldiers for the country. The discourse of the unilateral “patriotic Turkish woman” mentioned in the letter also seems to be adopted by the women who regard themselves as a homogenous group of mothers who raise soldiers for the country. Women, however, state that they also want to join the ‘mission’ of protecting the unity of the country by not only raising soldiers, but also being soldiers themselves. This demand blurs and undermines the categories and degrees of primary/secondary citizenship where women also become protectors of the nation and not solely be protected by men. A closer look at this desire, however, reveals the problematic nature of this demand embedded with a strong militarized discourse.

These categories of citizenship are significant manifestations of how the citizens of the Turkish nation are imagined. The overt hierarchization of the categories of citizenship, however, does not necessarily imply the predominance of one over the other; on the contrary, both are equally significant for the perpetuation of the gendered and militarized identities in a militarized state order. This categorization, however, encapsulates both men and women into essentialist identities projecting men as soldiers and women as mothers. Since protecting the nation is reflected as a more significant act, women’s position as mothers overthrow them into a second-class citizenship shaped around the discourse of ideal motherhood. While the desire of the aforementioned women to also become these primary citizens seems to subvert these categories of citizenship, it actually reiterates and reproduces them as the definition of citizenship in Turkey is very problematic by nature due to its highly militarized formation.

Such similar acts of reaction to the ongoing conflict in East and Southeast Turkey are usually ephemeral and no news coverage has been made on the aftermath of

these women's demand for being enlisted in the army either, apart from the mentioned letter sent by the Ministry of National Defense. Nevertheless, regarding the aforementioned act as that of a group of marginal women would prevent one from seeing the intricate structure of and the nexus between gender, militarism, and citizenship. A close look at the narratives of women, therefore, can say more about the ambivalent encounter of military service, gender roles, and citizenship in Turkey than that of the official discourse on soldier mothering itself.

I agree with Cynthia Enloe that "militarization is a gendered process" and that it is "a process that won't 'work' unless men will accept certain norms of masculinity and women will abide by certain strictures of femininity" (1990: 202). In this chapter, following Enloe's argument, I trace the formation and perpetuation of these militarized femininities and masculinities in imagining the Turkish nation. Giving an overview of the formation of the "myth of the military-nation", I historicize and contextualize the narratives of women on soldier mothering through an analysis of the roles that have been attributed to women throughout the highly militarized history of the Republic in general and of the concept of soldier mothering in particular. The first part of this chapter will be a theoretical overview of the literature on militarism, nationalism, and motherhood in Turkey. The second part, on the other hand, will be an analysis of the women's narratives where I demonstrate how their stories fit into and complement this literature and the official discourse on soldier mothering.

## **2.1. Imagining the Turkish Nation**

The Turkish Republic was founded on the remnants of the multicultural, multilingual Ottoman Empire in 1923 after the three year War of Independence, which is reflected as the most significant event in the history of the "Turkish nation". Lasting

from 1919 to 1922, the War of Independence constitutes a vital aspect in the historiography and collective memory of Turkey reflected as a time of national struggle where the whole nation, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, and age, fought for the independence of the “Turkish lands”. This narrative later became the basic premise of the official discourse that despite their differences, everyone was united under the common title of “Turk” according to the statutes of the Republic.

The founders of this newly established country also transformed the notion of citizenship. In the words of Ayşe Durakbaşa, “members of the Turkish society were no longer thought of as ‘subjects’ but as ‘citizens’; that is, members of a political community with legally delimited rights and duties” (1998: 141). The “Turkish nation” founded after a war fought by every single person, as told by official historiography, was projected to be a “military-nation” and military service was regarded as the primary duty of the citizens of this nation. This ‘characteristic’ of the Turkish nation is described with the following words in the book *Ordu Saati Konuşmaları II* (Army Hour Talks), a compilation of the talks broadcast on the same titled radio program of the Turkish Army: “It is the Turkish nation which has been the first nation on earth to have recognized the love of the nation and motherland, like the love of God, and for this reason to become the first nation to have founded the military having an immense and immaculate organization” (1957: 23). The “Turkish nation”, according to the above narrative is, thus, projected as the first “military-nation” in the world.

This widely accepted belief later opened the path to the formation and ubiquitous acceptance of what Ayşe Gül Altınay (2004a) names as the “myth of the military-nation”. The discourse that was prepared to create the myth underscored the ‘fact’ that “Turkish culture” was interwoven with the military culture and that the “Turkish nation” and the military were inseparable: “What the soul is for the body is the

love of the nation, homeland, and military for the Turkish nation and its citizens” (*Ordu Saati Konuşmaları III* 1957: 24). The analogy of the soul/body and the Turkish nation/military in the above quote conveys the connection between the army and the nation as an organic relationship where both benefit from the existence of one another.

The aforementioned analogy also gets reiterated when the relationship between the “Turkish nation” and the military is historicized in light of the Turkish History Thesis. The thesis argued that history had started with the “Turks” who had spread civilization to the world with their conquests. The origin of the “Turks” was traced back to the nomadic tribes in Central Asia and it was stated that the military characteristics of the “Turkish nation” were also apparent back then (İlhan 1999: 30-32). The Turkish history “imagined” in the Thesis, therefore, underscored the ‘fact’ that the “Turkish nation” is a military-nation (Ersanlı 2002: 805-806).

The historicization of the ‘innate’ military characteristic of the “Turkish nation” also conveys this ‘trait’ as something which is ‘hereditary’: “For our nation, military is an inheritance from the father to the son and a treasure preserved in modesty” (*Ordu Saati Konuşmaları I* 1957: 82). Therefore, the military ‘traits’ of the “Turkish nation”, which is conveyed to have *existed* rather than *founded* as a “military-nation”, is a “treasure” which is transferred to the future generations; interestingly, not by the mothers but by the fathers. It is, then, only ‘natural’ that the omnipresent saying “Every Turk is born a soldier” is accepted in this “myth of the military-nation”.

In her insightful analyses about the formation of this myth, Altınay demonstrates how compulsory military service was constructed as an indispensable aspect of the “Turkish nation” and “Turkish culture”. According to her analysis, military service is not seen as something related to defense, the army or the state in general but as an

“extension of culture” (2008: 115). Seeing military service as a part of culture, in other words, “an essential characteristic of the Turkish nation, an authoritative ‘tradition’ as opposed to a historical necessity” (Sinclair-Webb 2004: 32) reflects the service as a ‘duty’ immune from war and violence, thus, dissociating it from all its negative aspects like killing or injuring another human being. The military service to which every male Turkish citizen-soldier is entitled, therefore, involves dying for the homeland yet never killing for it despite the fact that the act of staying alive is only accomplished by terminating the lives of others (Scarry 1987: 80-81).

Moreover, the “culturalization” of military service not only constructs the service as an ordinary part of life, but also sets it as a standard of becoming ‘real’ and ‘proper’ men. While the ubiquitously accepted saying “Every Turk is born a soldier” creates the “marriage of militarism with Turkish nationalism” (Altnay 2008: 115), it also brings out the marriage of hegemonic masculinity and military service. Indeed, military service is not only a task to be accomplished on the road to citizenship, but also one to be surmounted to attain proper manhood. The male citizens of the country are thus ‘granted’ with both citizenship and manhood only when their “duty to the homeland” (*vatani görev*) is completed. But how and when was this ideal form of citizenship defined and why do only men but not also women ‘qualify’ for this duty to the homeland?

## **2.2. Women in the Early Nation-Building Process**

During the foundation of ‘modern Turkey’, women were initially regarded as the modern new faces of the Republic and encouraged to step out into the public realm. They were seen as responsible citizens having equal rights with men who would play important roles in the nation-building process. For this purpose, the founders had the

aim of creating “sturdy, hardworking, and austere” women (Durakbaşa 1998: 142) who would equally participate in the national arena. While opening the doors of the public sphere to the women, however, the Kemalist ideology created an immense dilemma by implementing strict control over female identity and sexuality. Ayşe Kadioğlu, utilizing the conceptualization of Afsaneh Najmabadi, states that the “new woman of the Republic” was expected to be “modern but modest”: “she was a hero who had surmounted the double burden of the house and work. She criticized the overt sexuality of the Western woman. She was a modest, asexual comrade in arms. She was, first and foremost, a loyal wife and a mother” (1998: 98).

The founding fathers of Turkey had wanted women’s participation in the public realm and indeed had encouraged women to do so, yet, as succinctly analyzed by Zehra Arat, “the Republican regime wanted to mobilize women, but only under state leadership and only to the point that was permissible by men. Women were called to national duty and action and allowed to enter the public domain, but without the autonomy and power enjoyed by men” (1998: 23). The seeming freedom that was ‘granted’ to women, therefore, was one determined and controlled by men. In this sense, although women were seen as an integral part of this newly founded order, their participation to the public arena was not smoothly enabled despite the opposite utterance of the official discourse. The seemingly ‘new and improved woman’ of the new Republic, in this sense, was actually “emancipated but unliberated” (Kandiyoti 1987).<sup>22</sup>

Women’s “invitation” to join the public realm alongside men also had other restrictions. According to the words of Yeşim Arat, “while the state encouraged a group

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<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the role of women in Turkey’s nation-building process, see Y. Arat (1997), Z. Arat (1998), Berktaş (1998 and 2001), Çakır (1994), Durakbaşa (1998 and 2000), Kandiyoti (1987 and 1996), Sirman (1989), Tekeli (1995), and Zihnioğlu (2003).

of elite women in public life, it sent a different message to an increasingly large number of ‘other’ women” (1997: 100). The message that was conveyed to these women was that they should contribute to the modernization process of the country by becoming housewives who will set the order at home. The modernization process of Turkey was paradoxical in that while it seemed to provide both its male and female citizens with equal ground to join this nation-building process, encouraging particularly women to do so, yet set restrictions for this. The ‘suitable’ women who were supported to step into the public realm were allowed to do so by getting rid of their sexuality while other women deemed ‘unsuitable’ were encapsulated once again to the private realm. Therefore, although Turkish modernism, as put by Serdar Şen, had “transformed the social status of women by altering the traditional family structure, it had also recreated the patriarchal order by rationalizing it” (2000: 54).

In other words, when the “marriage of militarism with Turkish nationalism” was complemented by modernization, women seemed to be deemed suitable for two positions: wifehood and motherhood. The Turkish nation-building process which put great significance on modernization, like similar other nation-states, utilized compulsory education and compulsory conscription to ‘educate’ its citizens. While female citizens of the country *learned* their “duty” to the nation at schools, male citizens *realized* this “duty” through military service. The nation, which was regarded as a family, thus, needed women as mothers and men as soldiers. Women’s “emancipation” and the supposed ‘encouragement’ to step out to the public realm, therefore, once again confined them to the patriarchal roles deemed ‘suitable’ for them. As Selda Şerifsoy has argued in her analysis of the family and the Kemalist modernization project, despite the fact that the Kemalists used women’s equal rights and opportunities with men as a

symbol of modernism, the patriarchal status of women, which underscored women's duty as mothers and housewives, were not undermined (2000: 177).

The 'trait' of motherhood was, therefore, constantly underscored in the narratives of the period related to women. Atatürk's following words are one example to this:

As there is a division of labor in every area of life, there is also division of labor in social life. While women will be realizing the duties related to them among this general division of labor, they will also participate in the mutual work done for the society's prosperity and happiness. Housework is the most minute and trivial duty of the woman. Woman's biggest duty is motherhood.<sup>23</sup>

As seen in the above excerpt, no matter how much women were encouraged to step out to the public sphere, motherhood was still a duty which they had to perform and could not get rid of. The 'new woman' of the Republic, therefore, was loaded with the double burden to become an active citizen in the public realm and a good wife and mother at home. Her citizenship, however, seemed only to have been affirmed with her role in the latter.

Atatürk had made the above statements in 1923. It is quite interesting that very similar words related to women and motherhood were uttered after 18 years in a book entitled *Askerlik Psikolojisi* (The Psychology of Soldiering):

A woman is merely a mother and a mother in all its sense. The father can only seek the mother's labor in his children's lives. The woman to be looked for while getting married is not a cook or a worker, but the one who can best be a mother to her children. The only thing a man can desire or seek [in a woman] after the marriage can solely be motherhood. (Yiğitgüden 1941: 5).

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Şerifsoy (2000:177). Herkesçe bilinir ki, her alanda olduğu gibi sosyal yaşamda da iş bölümü vardır. Bu genel iş bölümü arasında kadınlar, kendilerine ait olan görevleri yapacakları gibi aynı zamanda sosyal topluluğun refahı, mutluluğu için gerekli gündelik çalışmaya da dahil olacaklardır. Kadının ev görevleri, en ufak ve önemsiz görevidir. Kadının en büyük görevi, analıktır. <http://www.atam.gov.tr/index.php?Page=FikirDusunceler&IcerikNo=47>

Different from the double structured speech of Atatürk where women were expected to coexist in the public and private realm, Yiğitgüden's words reduce women into nothing else but mothers. The profile of the 'proper' and ideal woman, therefore, is the one who is "not a cook or a worker", but a good mother.

A later statement on the status of women as mothers and the militarization of motherhood is further striking: "Unfortunately today I do not know the name of this woman. I do not have the means to narrate this [her heroic acts] to her son who would be a young man if he were alive now, but there is no need to tell this woman's name! Every woman at the 1919-1922 battle was her equal. They all had a single name: Turkish Mother!" (*Ordu Saati Konuşmaları II* 1957: 366). Women were reduced to and 'united under' the common title of "Turkish mother" whereas their sons who died in the battle were named as "martyrs".

The dual characteristics that women had to perform in both the public and the private realm was erased by the duty of motherhood, which later came to be what enabled women's existence in the public realm, different from the situation in the early Republican regime. Motherhood, which was related to raising 'decent' children for the future of the nation, also came to symbolize raising soldier children for the military-nation. In the words of Ayşe Parla, "motherhood thus took on a connotation beyond that of the instinctively loving, nurturing female: mothers were now patriotically conscious women who bore the graver responsibility of imparting their love of the nation to their children, but more importantly, it seems, to their sons" (2001: 73). The nation and the military, in other words, needed women as mothers rather than 'modern working women', which could hinder women's complete engagement with her 'real duty' at home.

In her thought provoking book *Maneuvers*, Cynthia Enloe states that “constructing ideals of masculine behavior in any culture cannot be accomplished without constructing ideals of femininity that are supportive and complementary” (2004: 106-107). The creation of the citizen-soldier which came to be the essential discourse of the military-nation thus needs a military mother who will bear and raise these soldiers. The femininities and masculinities in the Turkish case were ‘molded’ according to their standard(ized) ‘recipes’ to be ‘baked’<sup>24</sup> in order to bring out the ‘new and improved’ men and women of the nation,<sup>25</sup> where women would become the proud mothers and men the brave soldiers of the nation.

### **2.3. Militarizing Citizenship**

As Altınay states, “all nationalist projects involve a remaking of femininities and masculinities, with an ambivalent set of opportunities and restrictions for both” (2004: 48). This ambivalence further heightens when national duties are in question. As previously stated, military service becomes a problematic realm due to its intricate relationship with gender and citizenship. Who gets to decide who will be obliged to comply with the compulsory draft? Why are women not required to conduct military service? The following reaction given by a member of the Turkish parliament regarding the conscription law that was enacted in 1927 is quite noteworthy:

Sir we see that here and there women are engaged in suffrage activities, asking for the right to vote and be elected for office. I personally believe that women should get this right. It is only a matter of time ... If voting and becoming a candidate is a national issue, participating in the country’s defense is also a similar right, a similar duty. I realize that the first article of the compulsory military service law has only included men.

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<sup>24</sup> I borrow this ‘molding’ and ‘baking’ metaphor from Pinar Selek (2008) who states that the military service experience is one where the “dough of manhood” is molded and baked to form the desired hegemonic masculinity. For a similar usage of the connection between military service and molding identities, see Cock (1991 cited in Altınay 2004: 67)

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed analysis of how these new men and women were “imagined” and created by means of a nationalized and militarized education, see Tuba Kancı’s PhD thesis, *Imagining the Turkish Men and Women: Nationalism, Modernism and Militarism in Primary School Textbooks, 1928-2000*.

I would like to ask whether you have taken women's services into consideration or to what extent. (*TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi* [1927] 385 quoted in Altınay 2004: 33)<sup>26</sup>

The answer that this male member received was as ambivalent as the identity formation policies of the new Republic: Women had participated in the nation-building process during the Independence War and could strive again for the nation if needed in the future. At this point, military service becomes the primary means which separate men and women. To put it in Altınay's words, "this debate reinforces the need to see military service not only as a practice that is about national defense, but also as one that defines the relationship between male and female citizens, and their state" (2004: 33). As can be seen from this response and from many similar others, women were not seen as the primary actors of the nation-building process, but substitutes for men. Despite this seemingly secondary role, however, women occupied and still do occupy quite a significant place in the questions related to citizenship and military service. Analyzing the reaction to the military service law in 1927 is itself a significant indicator of how women are situated in the ambivalent encounter of military service, manhood, and citizenship.

Then what happens to the women with the adoption of the military-nation? Does women's exemption from military service make "the 'military-nation' a male nation?" (Altınay 2004: 32). How have they been included in this myth and how do these roles differ from that of men? At this point, as previously stated, the seeming emancipation of women was further withdrawn as women were pushed back to the private sphere and granted a 'suitable' place for their own aptitudes. Similarly, wifehood and motherhood were regarded as the primary tasks of women while alternative routes were shoved out of sight. In her review of this "gendered, heterosexist, and militarized discourse",

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<sup>26</sup> The translation of this text belongs Altınay. The excerpt can be found in her book, *The Myth of the Military-Nation* (2004: 33).

Altınay states that women have been ‘granted’ three primary roles: the loyal wife (Kezban), the self-sacrificing mother (Küçük Ayşe), and the Republican woman ready to fight when needed (Sabiha Gökçen).<sup>27</sup> While the first two roles were the primary roles expected from all the women, the latter was “an exception and privilege” making it a rare role only few women could succeed in accomplishing (Altınay 2008: 113).

As demonstrated in the previous example of the debate of conscription in the National Assembly, the major ‘duties’ that were expected of women were to bear and raise citizen-soldiers for the nation. Their participation to the nation-building process in the public sphere was not necessary since men were already ‘there’ to protect the nation; women would be called to ‘duty’ when needed. If women are regarded as the care takers of the future citizen-soldiers, then where and how do they appear in the discourses related to military service? At this point, motherhood again becomes the primary role in placing women within the militarized discourse. In her article on women’s bodies as violent battle fields, Rubina Saigol analyzes the case of militarized motherhood reminding one of the official soldier mothering discourse in Turkey: “The ‘mother’ in nationalistic poems and war songs has given birth to brave sons, she is the self-sacrificing woman who has born many pains, or she is the aggrieved mother who strongly accepts the martyrdom of her son” (2004: 237). The mother, thus, raises her soldier-to-be child with love and care.

Complementing Saigol’s analysis, Afsaneh Najmabadi (2004) demonstrates the ambiguous relationship between the (erotic) love to the motherland and motherhood and the construction of new forms of femininities and masculinities in the nation-building process of Iran. At this point, honor becomes quite a significant concept demonstrating

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<sup>27</sup> For more information regarding the presence of women in the Turkish military and the woman officers in the Turkish Armed Forces, see Altınay (2004: 171).

the relationship between gender, militarism, and nationalism. As Selek points out in her analysis, the concept of honor also frequently comes up in the military service experience in Turkey. The citizen-soldiers are trained to protect both the honor of the country and the honor of their pistol. The protection of the weapon of the soldier, therefore, is likened to the honor of a woman, more specially that of the soldier's wife. Young men, therefore, who "ripen" through this military training, return home to become the commander and protector of the family (Selek 2008: 88-91).

#### **2.4. Nation, Borders, Military Tales**

In the beginning of their military service, the families of young men receive a letter from the Turkish Armed Forces where the military informs the parents of the soldier-to-be<sup>28</sup> about his time during his "sacred duty".<sup>29</sup> In the following sentences, the parents are assured that their son will be taken good care of by the state, "getting to know life in a different environment with his friends". In achieving this "masculine authority", therefore, the military as the father disciplines the young male in "becoming a man". Just as the army is seen as a school, it is also seen as a family where male citizens from various social backgrounds meet and learn to coexist under the 'supervision' of their commander and the military. But, if the commander is the father

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<sup>28</sup> Young men who enter the barracks in order to conduct their military service first receive a 'novice education' for up to three months. Then they are deployed to their actual positions to finish the remaining part of their service. More information regarding the content of this education can be found on the web site of the Turkish Armed Forces:

<http://www.kkk.tsk.mil.tr/PersonelDanisma/AcemiErleriAydinlati/icerik.asp>

<sup>29</sup> Although some of my interviewees mentioned and showed the letter to me in the interviews, some others did not. While I have spoken and received approval from other people who have conducted their military service in various regions of Turkey that their families had received this letter during their service, I should still add that this is not a consistent application since I have seen people who are utterly unaware of the existence of such a letter. For the letter of the Turkish Armed Forces, see Appendix E.

of this ‘family’, then where is the mother? Or to phrase it in a more general framework, “where are the women” (Enloe 1989) in this gendered and militarized construction?<sup>30</sup>

The answer to this question appeared to me in a quite interesting way shortly after an interview I had done with Selma,<sup>31</sup> a soldier’s mother whose son had conducted his military service in Mardin in 2003. While we were having coffee over our conversation, the daily ‘women’s program’ we were watching on TV turned into a military spectacle. One of the guests in the program, Vatan Şaşmaz, a young presenter and actor, had recently returned from his military service which he defined as a “debt to the homeland” and was proudly reciting what he had gone through in the past few months. In his narrative, he stated that he had done his service near the border in the Southeast in Şırnak and that he was very proud to have done so since “[our] borders are our honor” (*hudutumuz namusumuzdur*). Underscoring that “every Turkish youth” should do their military service, Şaşmaz added that he had also peeled potatoes, cleaned the toilets, and was not ashamed of this under the surprised looks of the host, who declared herself as the daughter of a Turkish lieutenant.

Stating that encountering this program on TV right after our interview is a nice coincidence, Selma agreed with Şaşmaz that the military service spared men from being a lacking human (*yarım insan*), which she believed would be the case for the men who do not realize their service. Reminding me of what she had said about military service stories, that they are important between men for sharing a common memory, she emphasized that Şaşmaz had done every task and “crawled enough” to become a ‘real

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<sup>30</sup> For a more detailed analysis regarding the role attributed to men and women in the nation-building processes and its relation to gender, militarism, and nationalism, see Nagel (1998) and Najmabadi (1997).

<sup>31</sup> All of the names used for the interviewees and their sons are pseudonyms assigned by themselves. In such cases where the interviewee told me that I could assign a name to them, the names were assigned by me.

man'. Indeed, such stories constitute a significant aspect in dialogues between men who have completed their military service. No matter what has been experienced in the barracks, these stories are more like adventure stories or jokes rather than the real experiences themselves (Selek 2008: 39). It is exactly at this point that men perform the "rituals of militarized masculinity" by reciting their success stories and thus "exercising masculine authority over the young and over those who are not able to serve due to a particular 'disability'"<sup>32</sup> while also excluding women (Altınay 2004: 82-85). The fact that women are omitted from military service, however, does not omit their presence from the practices of militarism.

In addition to demonstrating why one should take popular culture seriously when the issue at hand is the ubiquitous presence of the Turkish military in everyday life, Şaşmaz's standpoint also gives us important clues on the place of women in the militarized state discourse. Throughout his speech, Şaşmaz constantly underscores that he had done his service near the border and it is significant since borders signify the honor of the state. It is, thus, interesting to see how an abstract and imagined concept such as "border", although quite concrete between the nations, can come up to be signified by honor. Here, the homeland and its borders are turned into a female body whose honor should be protected since the violation of this body, in other words the border, would also mean the violation of the 'honor of the state'. At this point, women

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<sup>32</sup> The 1111 numbered military code in Turkey presents the disabled citizens of the country with the 'opportunity' to conduct a one-day military service so that they can "symbolically realize their right and duty [to the homeland] and live the joy [of conducting military service] by experiencing the barracks even though for a short time". Further explanation can be found on the web site of the Turkish Armed Forces: [http://www.tsk.mil.tr/2\\_GENEL\\_BILGILER/2\\_6\\_Engelli\\_Vatandaslar\\_Icin\\_Istege\\_Bagli\\_Temsili\\_Askerlik\\_Uygulamasi/Engelli\\_Vatandaslar\\_Icin\\_Istege\\_Bagli\\_Temsili\\_Askerlik\\_Uygulamasi.htm](http://www.tsk.mil.tr/2_GENEL_BILGILER/2_6_Engelli_Vatandaslar_Icin_Istege_Bagli_Temsili_Askerlik_Uygulamasi/Engelli_Vatandaslar_Icin_Istege_Bagli_Temsili_Askerlik_Uygulamasi.htm)

become the secondary citizens who are protected whereas men do the primary task of defending both the nation and the women.<sup>33</sup>

A similar issue also came up recently in one of the articles of journalist Fatih Altaylı in a newspaper column where he responded to the journalist Gülay Göktürk who had criticized the Turkish Army on a TV program for hindering the construction of a public ground to discuss the Kurdish issue. Altaylı responded to these words by stating that armies are the most significant values of nations and cannot be weakened with such words and in such manner. He further commented on the words of Göktürk with the following words: “You may or may not realize this, but that army also protects the space between your two legs. Armies do not only protect a country’s borders, lands, or unity. They protect that country’s honor and chastity”.<sup>34</sup> Despite his following statement that the armies protect the honor of the country which may be devastated with rapes taking place at the end of wars, Altaylı seems to be missing the very fact that those rapes are realized after the wars fought by the armies themselves. Altaylı, thus, proposes two positions related to women under the aegis of the military: the traitor woman who does not ‘deserve’ to be protected and the supporter woman for whom the army protects the land.

This role attributed to women as the ‘passive protected’ subject buttresses a single aspect of women’s roles in the intricate relationship between gender, militarism, and citizenship, which is motherhood. Loving, caring, and compassionate mothers are expected to raise and sacrifice their children for the sake of the state. As the ‘secondary’ subjects of the nation who cannot defend the country but are rather defended by the male, in other words the primary citizens, women are expected to become mothers who

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<sup>33</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the ambiguous relationship between honor, gender, and nationalism, see Najmabadi (1997) and Cockburn (1998).

<sup>34</sup> For the complete article, see [http://www.fatihaltayli.com.tr/content.cfm?content\\_id=4533](http://www.fatihaltayli.com.tr/content.cfm?content_id=4533).

will bear and raise the future citizen-soldiers. In this sense, whereas the woman as the 'chaste' and 'loyal' wife is expected to become the 'sacred mother', the man is expected to become the citizen-soldier protecting not only the country, but also the women and the 'honor' of the country. Thus, while military service determines the gendered roles for men and women, it also sets the untransgressable boundaries of gender norms.

## **2.5. From the Ideal Citizen to the Ideal Mother**

Analyzing militarization in its relation to motherhood, Cynthia Enloe states that "militarizing motherhood often starts with conceptualizing the womb as a recruiting station" (2000: 248). A similar comment can be made on the discourse of soldier mothering employed by the army where women are expected to be self sacrificing mothers willing to send their sons to death for the sake of the nation. 'Performing' in a different way, thus, strips these women off their identities as the "mothers of the nation" and transforms them into the undesirable mother. In a similar manner, in her analysis on the movement of the Mothers of Peace in Turkey, a group of Kurdish women who lost their children in the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces in East/Southeast Turkey,<sup>35</sup> Özlem Aslan comments on the acceptable forms of motherhood by saying that "the state only recognizes the mothers of the nation while stamping the other mothers living in the country as abject. They are labeled as improper mothers of the subversives and are excluded from the type of motherhood that should be respected and valued" (2007: 108). The conditions of ideal motherhood, thus, seem to be strictly defined and drawn by the state.

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<sup>35</sup> For more information on the lives of the Kurdish guerrillas in PKK, see *Ben Öldüm Beni Sen Anlat: Savaşın Tanıkları Anlatıyor* (2006), an oral history project conducted with 125 relatives of the Kurdish guerrillas. For a similar project comprising the narratives of the Turkish soldiers who have conducted their military service in the "emergency zone" in South East Turkey between 1984-1998, see *Mehmedin Kitabı: Güneydoğu'da Savaşmış Askerler Anlatıyor* (Mater 1998).

The roles attributed to women as mothers, in this sense, are standardized ones ‘tailored’ to fit into a uniform mold, which are categorized as the acceptable and the non-acceptable. At this point, the ultimate representation of the desirable mother image becomes the Mothers of the Martyrs, women whose sons have been “martyred” in the conflict with the PKK in the Southeast. These women are portrayed as the grieving but proud mother who usually utters the saying “I bestow my son to this land” (*Vatan sađ olsun*) and “I would also bestow him if I had another son” (*Bir ođlum olsa onu da veririm*).<sup>36</sup> Although few in number, women who reject this saying and resist to the military authority, in other words, women who deviate from the desired discourse, are labeled as the non-acceptable mothers.<sup>37</sup> Just as the standards of hegemonic masculinity determine proper manhood, ‘hegemonic femininity’ also sets the limits of ‘proper motherhood’.

The (limited) visibility of women in the (militarized) public realm is thus possible under two circumstances. As formerly stated, women get interpolated as exemplary mothers setting the protector/protected relationship in the nationalist discourse. Their visibility as mothers, however, only becomes possible with the death of their children, also bringing a set of restrictions with it. Just like the standardized identity of the ideal citizen, the existence of these women is also possible as long as they become the ideal mother. The temporary visibility they gain with the “martyrdom” of their children is thus a restricted, molded, and also ‘disciplined’ visibility. In a similar manner, this visibility is also one that is thrown outside of the language since these mothers are only allowed to exist in requiems rather than their own speeches. It is

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<sup>36</sup> For more information on the Mothers of the Martyrs and their place within the official discourse on soldier mothering, see Esra Gedik’s MA Thesis *Ideological Ambivalence of Motherhood in the Case of Mothers of the Martyrs in Turkey*.

<sup>37</sup> For more information on these alternative narratives, see Gedik (2008: 11).

exactly at this point, where the mothers try to construct their own language, that they are further marginalized by both the state and the media.

## **2.6. Motherhood in Women's Narratives**

According to Marsha Marotta, “the built spaces and discursive practices that contemporary mothers inhabit constitute a powerful force that helps shape their subjectivities and their possibilities, define who mothers can be and what they can do at any given time” (2005: 15). Marotta names these spaces as “MotherSpace” and discusses whether resistance within this space, which creates the classification of the good/bad mother, is possible. Following Marotta’s line of thinking, I use the concept of MotherSpace to refer to the “built spaces and discursive practices” the state and the military construct for mothers’ existence and analyze how mothers adjust to and/or challenge this space.

One question with which I tried to analyze the limits of the MotherSpace for the women was how they regarded the women who after their sons’ death do not state that they bestow their son to the homeland and who are thus regarded as the unwanted mothers of the state. Despite this strict state discourse on soldier mothering and the division of good/bad motherhood, it was interesting to observe that all women apart from one in the research did not think of the mothers as a “bad mother” or a woman disrupting the “good mother” image:

No, I do not think about that as good/bad motherhood. Depending on which perspective they view [the event] they find a way of consolation for themselves. Of course, the reaction of some people may be bigger than others. We do not all show the same reaction to or look at each event from the same perspective. I think these differences are in human nature. I do not think it is right to immediately stamp people. There is no such thing as good/bad mother.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Yo yo öyle iyi/kötü annelik gibi bir şey diye düşünmüyorum ben bunu, iyi/kötü annelik diye düşünmüyorum. Sadece hangi perspektiften baktıklarına bağlı olarak kendilerine bir yol buluyorlar bence

OK, I bestow my son to the homeland, of course everything is for this land, but as I said for what do I bestow him? What is there to be bestowed for? Because of that it [the saying] seems illogical to me. OK, they go out there [and say] I bestow my son to the homeland. OK, but for what? If the homeland does not protect my child then that saying seems illogical to me. I do not think that any of them [the mothers of the martyrs] say it willingly.<sup>39</sup>

Emphasizing the fact that there is no such thing as a good/bad mother since motherhood is something above all assets, the women also seem to be quite critical about the conflicts going on in the East and Southeast Turkey. Thus, rather than criticizing the mothers for uttering the saying “I bestow my son to the homeland” and not standing up for their children’s rights, they rather criticize the military for utilizing young soldiers without any knowledge on war and weapons in the conflict.

Nevertheless, this seeming ‘openness’ related to motherhood seems to fade out when the issue at hand becomes the soldiers themselves. While the interviewees, in this sense, do not seem to believe in a standardized ideal mothering, they do seem to believe in ideal soldiering. Listening to the responses related to the question on the conscientious objection movement, it was interesting to observe that nearly none of the mothers had heard about the movement itself and had difficulty in understanding how one could reject military service “based on their conscience”. Ayşe, for example, says:

The ending of wars is a huge utopia for the world and people not participating [to the wars] is the biggest value, biggest utopia, but under the present circumstances of the world, I think this [conscientious objection] is running away by taking refuge in a certain philosophy. You are obliged to do what everyone else is doing. I also have thoughts as a philosophy about the world but for example I cannot meddle in [the

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teselli yolu buluyorlar, kiminin tepkisi çok daha yüksek olabilir haklı olarak. Biz hepimiz öyle, her olaya aynı tepkiyi göstermiyoruz ki aynı açıdan bakmıyoruz ki, insan olmanın gereği bu bence farklılıklar. Onu hemen insanları damgalamayı doğru bulmuyorum, o anne iyi, o kötü hayır öyle bir şey yok. Ayşe

<sup>39</sup> Tamam, vatan sağ olsun tabii ki sağolsun ama her şey vatan için ama gene demin de dediğim gibi niye sağ olsun, hani ne var da sağ olsun neyin savaşını yapıyoruz ki yani o yüzden şey geliyor bana biraz mantıksız geliyor. Tamam, çıkıyorlar oraya vatan sağ olsun. Tamam da niye sağ olsun vatan? Vatan benim çocuğumu korumuyorsa şey yapamıyorsa, ne bileyim, o kelime bana biraz mantıksız geliyor. Yani hiçbirinin de isteyerek söylediğini sanmıyorum ben onu. Sevinç

business of] a person who is killing an animal. I cannot do anything; activism has not started in the world in that sense. Maybe this will grow and be a step in helping that point...<sup>40</sup>

As can be observed in the previous quote, obedience to the state<sup>41</sup> which demonstrates itself with the statement that one is obliged to do what everyone else is doing is also a recurring theme in other responses. Thus, the conscientious objection movement is regarded unacceptable for the mothers since every Turkish citizen has to perform his “duty to the homeland” if it is an obligation for every healthy male citizen. While most of the responses demonstrated that the act of objecting to military service itself was out of question, it was interesting to see that one of the mothers stated that “it is difficult for people with an unstable psychology to perform military service” and thus the army has a very difficult job in inspecting these people:

I have no idea that such a thing [conscientious objection] exists. Bu there is the thing that people whose psychology is not fit for this [military service] are I guess separated, eliminated. I think it is important to separate people with psychological problems. Maybe there are such people among these [conscientious objectors] because their condition may worsen there under bad circumstances ... Apart from that, I don't accept such a thing as “I don't want to go to military service”. If you are a Turkish citizen, if the homeland needs this [military service] you have to give support. But people with unsuitable psychology should be evaluated well because it is very difficult, not being able to take order; there are indeed people who cannot obey the order-command cycle.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Çok büyük bir ütopya dünya için savaşın bitmesi ve insanın katılmaması en büyük değer en büyük ütopya ama şu günkü durumda dünyanın bu bir bu felsefeye sığınarak bir kaçış olabilir diye düşünüyorum yani. Herkesin yaptığını sen de yapmak mecburiyetindesin. Ben de felsefe olarak neler düşünüyorum dünya için ama kalkıp da atıyorum hayvan kesen bir insana müdahale edemem, hiçbir şey yapamam yani bu anlamda dünyada eylemcilik başlamış değil. Böyle bu çoğalır çoğalır çoğalır hakikaten o noktaya yardımcı olur belki basamak olur ama...” Ayşe

<sup>41</sup> For an analysis of this discourse on obedience to state in the Turkish school textbooks, see Altınay (2009: 160-162).

<sup>42</sup> Valla hiçbir fikrim yok böyle bir şey olduğuna dair. Yalnız şu var yani zaten psikolojisi bu işte uymayan insanlar yani herhalde ayırılıyor, ayıklanıyor, psikolojik sorunları olan insanlar, psikolojik sorunları olan insanları iyi ayırmak lazım diye düşünüyorum. Bunların arasında belki öyle olanlar da vardır, yani çünkü orada durumu daha da kötü şartlarda, durumları daha da kötüleşebilir en azından ... Onun dışında ben kabul yani çok da kabul etmiyorum yani benim keyfim istemiyor gitmek istemiyorum tarzındaki olayı da çok kabul etmiyorum yani bir Türk vatandaşıysan, vatanın da bu işe ihtiyacı varsa destek vereceksin diye düşünüyorum ama psikolojisi müsait olmayan insanların da iyi değerlendirilmesi lazım, zor yani çok zor, çünkü emir alamamak yani emir komutaya uyamayan insanlar da var hakikaten. Sevim

The current marginalization that the objectors face is doubled according to this response as the objectors in this statement are regarded as people with “imbalanced psychology”, which is actually one of the points on which grounds you can be exempted from military service upon close (military) medical examination. Despite their criticisms about the conscientious objection movement, however, it does not seem that these women are rejecting and marginalizing the act of the objectors because they have solely internalized the myth of the military-nation, but more specially because they believe that every healthy male citizen should go through the same experience if their children are also dealing with this ordeal.

This standpoint, however, does not weaken the discourse of military service as a “duty” since in the responses as to whether they regard military service as a “debt to the motherland”, most of the women agreed and emphasized their standpoint saying that military service should of course be conducted. Scrutinizing further about what exactly this “debt” means, however, yields different answers since the question is usually met with surprise and silence. Arzu, for example, says:

Well it is uttered as such [as a debt to the nation], you think that it is a debt to the nation and that he [his son] will realize this duty. Everyone says it is a debt to the nation so it is also in our minds as a debt and he will conduct it [military service].<sup>43</sup>

Most of the interviewees cannot elaborate on the specifics of this “debt”, but rather state that this idea has prevailed for such a long time that they also regard military service in the same manner. Here, it is again the “myth of the military-nation” which “culturalizes” military service demonstrating it as an indispensable aspect of Turkish culture and thus the Turkish nation that fictionalizes the compulsory draft as a “debt”.

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<sup>43</sup> E öyle deniyor ya vatan borcu bu vazifesi yapacak diye düşünüyoruz yani öyle hani öyle dedim ben vatan borcu, herkes yapacak, herkes vatan borcu diyor ya biz de aklımızda artık vatan borcu bunu yapacak. Arzu

In his analysis of the conscription practices in the late Ottoman Empire, Erik Jan Zürcher (1996) portrays a quite different picture than the present heroic narratives of military service. Analyzing the consequences of the period of wars between 1913 and 1923, doing a close reading of the (somber) songs that were written during the war, and drawing attention to the enormous number of draft evaders, Zürcher demonstrates that military service initially aroused such feelings as despair and hopelessness rather than joy and celebration. Zürcher's analysis reveals that women's internalization of the compulsory draft as a "debt" and "duty" has been the result of a perpetual effort to embed Turkish culture with the military.

Moreover, although none of the interviewees apart from one expressed any negative feeling about military service, one interviewee stated that she does not regard military service as a "debt to the motherland" since she thinks that the motherland has not provided her with anything to necessitate such a 'reimbursement'.<sup>44</sup> Despite this seeming sharp critical stance, however, these narratives also perpetuate the militarized discourse in a similar way. According to this, military service is necessary and should be done by every "Turkish youth" not because it is a debt but because of the 'delicate' geostrategic position of Turkey which requires such precaution:

I think of it [military service] as the reality of Turkey, it should be as such. I think that a strong army is necessary regarding its [Turkey's] position, its geostrategic position.<sup>45</sup>

We are actually always obliged to do military service saying that we have to do military service for protection, in order to be able to stand strong.

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<sup>44</sup> Vatan borcu dediğiniz nedir, vatana karşı borcumuz, vatan bize işte eğitim verdiği için ya da sağlık verdiği, vatan bize ne veriyor ki o anlamda borçlu olalım? Vatan sevgisi farklı bir şey, vatan borcu değil. O zaman öyle bir borcumuz benim oğlumun varsa benim de var, sizin de var, hepimizin var. Yani vatana karşı, devlete karşı dediğimiz bir şeyse, ki bizim ülkemizde böyle bir şey yok. Zeynep

<sup>45</sup> Türkiye'nin gerçeği diye düşünüyorum, Türkiye'nin gerçeği olsa gerek. Yani güçlü bir ordunun olması Türkiye'nin içinde bulunduğu konum, stratejik konumun bir gereği gibi düşünüyorum. Övünç

Even if terror is not an issue, military service will still be done in this country. There should be an army.<sup>46</sup>

The discourse of the military service as a duty to the homeland, thus, gets transformed as military service as protecting the homeland from the omnipresent enemies. According to such thinking, military service will also be necessary for Turkey due to its ‘delicate’ geostrategic location. What is interesting in such narratives is the embodiment of the ‘knowledge’ that is conveyed to the high school students in the National Security course in Turkey that the country is surrounded all over by ‘malicious eyes’, which leads to creating and sustaining the saying that “a Turk has no other friend than a Turk”

<sup>47</sup>

In her analysis of this course, Altınay elucidates three points that are inculcated to the students through the text book: the myth of the military-nation and essentialist military identity; the normalization, affirmation, and exaltation of war/violence; and militarized citizenship (2009: 145-162). Apart from one interviewee, all of the women with whom I spoke conveyed similar responses in their narratives, under which lies an omnipresent fear surrounding the sentences of the women that “we would not be able to sleep in our [comfortable] beds” and “walk securely in the streets if the army were not there [to protect us]”. The army and the soldiers, therefore, are regarded as the proud guarantors to whom the nation is trusted, protecting us from the all-encompassing enemies of Turkey, turning women into the protected subject, men into the protectors, and Turkey, just like it is described in the National Security course books, as a country under constant ‘threat’.

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<sup>46</sup> Biz hep askerliğe mecbur kalıyoruz aslında, askerliğin yapılması gerekli diyerekten, korunmak için dik durabilmek için en azından. Yani terör olmasa da askerlik herhalde bu ülkede olacak. Bir askerın olması gerekli öyle hissediyorum. Sevim

<sup>47</sup> For more information regarding the National Security course, see Altınay (2004: 119-157). For a further critique of the course and the similar militaristic aspects in other school text books, see Altınay (2004 and 2009).

## 2.7. The Oath Taking Ceremony as a Nationalist Spectacle

One of the instances where militarized MotherSpace manifests itself is the oath taking ceremonies of the soldiers-to-be, who will be protecting the country which is under constant threat. The sense of pride that is felt by seeing one's son become a soldier is thus better observed in the narratives of the soldiers' mothers regarding the oath taking ceremonies. The concern that the mothers experience related to their son's well being in the army leaves its place to similar feelings of joy, pride, and happiness when the issue at hand is the oath taking ceremony:

During the ceremony I became sentimental for raising such a healthy child. Tahsin [his son] had also prepared something like a speech; I also became sentimental and cried of course when I heard the speech. I even wanted to become a soldier.<sup>48</sup>

Of course I became very very sentimental, we all became very sentimental. Once I entered the place, the military zone where the ceremony was held in Samsun, the first thing I felt, of course since I am a military officer's daughter, was the order and cleanliness of the place. Everything was so modest, but in order. I remember bemoaning about why the rest of the country is not like this.<sup>49</sup>

The proud mother image supporting his son in the army, which is a strong buttress for the military, reaches its climax during the oath taking ceremonies where mothers forget all their concern about life in the barracks or their son's adaptation process to the army and enjoy the pride of raising a fit healthy child to serve for the country.

In addition to the joy and pride felt by women, one striking aspect recurring in the narratives is the sense of unfamiliarity that the women encounter in the ceremony, which for them also becomes a source of excitement. The mothers state that in the

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<sup>48</sup> Tören süresince valla duygulandım, sağlıklı olarak böyle bir evlat yetiştirdiğim için, bir de konuşma yaptı Tahsin orada şiir gibi mi konuşma gibi bir şey hazırlamıştı komutanlar, o konuşmayı da duyunca duygulandım ağladım tabii. Benim bile asker olasım geldi. Gökçen

<sup>49</sup> Çok çok duygulandım tabii ki, hepimiz çok duygulandık. Orada ilk törenin yapıldığı Samsun'da, törenin yapıldığı yere askeri bölgeye girer girmez ilk hissettiğim şey tabii ben asker çocuğu olduğum için böyle ilk hissettiğim şey her yerdeki düzen ve temizlikti. Son derece alçakgönüllü her şey fakat düzenli, niye bütün ülke böyle olamıyor diye hayıflandığımı hatırlıyorum. Övünç

beginning they were not able to recognize their sons since all the soldiers look so similar and in such perfect order. In the words of Sibil, whose son had conducted his military service in Elazığ in 2007, “all of them [the soldiers] are in immaculate order”<sup>50</sup> which makes it quite difficult to pick out one’s own child from that line-up. Hayrunisa describes her feelings as such:

The ceremony was quite sentimental for me. Of course all the children look alike in the parade, one can’t even recognize one’s own child since we don’t know where he is walking; you don’t see them before, don’t know his line.<sup>51</sup>

Interestingly, this feeling of alienation and unfamiliarity also arises in the narratives of the soldiers themselves after they have had their hair shaved in the barracks (Selek 2008: 60-64). It is exactly this standardization, same type of hair cut and uniforms, which make them indistinguishable from one another in the ceremony. While men define this moment of homogenization as a quasi-traumatic experience<sup>52</sup>, however, the mothers think of it as an alluring representation of order and discipline.

The emphasis on discipline which appears in the mothers’ narratives also recurs while talking about whether the military service experience is something really transformative for their children. While some of the mothers agreed that it did indeed transform their child, others stated that while there is such an accepted saying that men return from military service as more tidy, organized, and responsible individuals, they did not observe such a transformation in their children. What is interesting, however, is the fact that women who fervently agreed that the military service does indeed transform men, stated that they had not particularly observed a change in their sons since their children were already very respectful, disciplined, and mature. It is, then, I

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<sup>50</sup> Tabii jilet gibi duracaksın orada komutanların başında.

<sup>51</sup> O yemin töreni çok bana duygusal geldi, bütün çocuklar birbirine benziyor tabii resmi geçitte geçerken, insan kendi çocuğunu dahi tanıyamıyor, nerede yürüdüğünü bilmediğimiz için, önceden de görmüyorsunuz sırasını falan bilmiyorsunuz. Hayrunisa

<sup>52</sup> For the narratives of the soldiers regarding the hair shave and the sense of alienation they experience, see Selek (2008: 60-64).

believe worthwhile to talk about whom the army transforms and how it manages to do so.

One thing that the mothers commonly agree, however, is the fact that the army is a place of education and it is this education that transforms their children. Interestingly, one interviewee giving the example from the statement of one of her relatives who had done paid military service that he had not “crawled enough” during military service, meaning he had not gone through all the hardship and suffering that the ordinary soldiers had, and thus his education was lacking was a remarkable parallel with Pınar Selek’s book (2008) and statements that men become men by crawling in the army. But what is the difference between the education received at schools and the education received in the army? Again, discipline, which also enables this act of crawling, arises as a common answer:

They grasp the value of the family; the family, the homeland. And there is a little bit of education there, discipline, strictness, order. Osman, for example, used to stay up at night till two or three a.m. in front of the computer and the television; there everything is on time, disciplined, there is also that. Waking up early in the morning, going to the training... Of course, they have gone through some discipline, strict [discipline]...<sup>53</sup>

Of course it [the military service] has an influence [on men’s lives]. I guess it makes the children more mature because everyone lives with their family under comfortable circumstances, but of course they encounter the realities of life once they go there. They see that there may be lives different than theirs, they meet different people, they take that discipline, waking up very early in the morning joining the guard watch. They learn how to wake up in the middle of the night; of course they learn that discipline.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Biraz da ailenin de kıymetini anlıyorlar, ailesini memleketini, yani biraz da eğitim işte orada disiplin var sıklık, her şey yerinde. Osman mesela normalde gece iki üçlere kadar televizyonda bilgisayar başında otururdu, orada her şey disiplinli saatinde her şey, biraz o da var. Oğlumun hani sabah erken kalkmaları, eğitimlere katılma şeyleri, e biraz disiplin gördüler tabii haliyle, sıkı... Arzu

<sup>54</sup> Muhakkak oluyordur, olgunlaştırıyordur herhalde çocukları daha çok; çünkü herkes kendi ailesinin yanında yaşıyor, el bebek gül bebek yaşıyor ya da ne bileyim şartlarına göre yaşıyor, oraya gidince biraz hayatın gerçeklerini görüyorlar tabii ki. Sırf onların yaşantısı gibi bir yaşantı olmadığını görüyorlar, değişik insanlar tanıyorlar, ne bileyim o disiplini alıyorlar, sabahın köründe kalkıp o nöbetlerde ne bileyim gecenin bir vakti uyanabilmeyi öğreniyor çocuk, o disiplini alıyor muhakkak tabii ki. Hayrunisa

It is noteworthy that the letter the military sends home to the parents comprises the same words regarding military education. According to the letter, the “biggest downside of military service” referred to as a “different environment and duty”, will be the longing for family home. The service, however, will ‘reimburse’ this by providing the soldiers with education and “an environment with friends” where he will “get to know life”.

Despite their neutral and sometimes affirming accounts related to discipline in the military and the assuring official letter, the mothers feel a strong fear and concern for the well being of their children. It is exactly at this point that the affirmation of the “illogical nature of military service” and normalization of the commands and humiliations arises. Sevim, for example, says:

He [his son] says it is difficult, there are rules, if you start searching for much logic, nothing is logical. There is the order-command cycle; there is no questioning there, and maybe you become tired out. I had also told him not to question anything in military service otherwise you will have difficulty; they will make you have difficulties. Because there is such a system there, you should not say ‘Why is this so?’ or ‘Why is this so meaningless?’ since you become the one to experience difficulties once you say that. A single person by trying to challenge the order there can’t do anything; you can’t change anything by yourself. He [his son] also says that the ones who don’t do this experience difficulties.<sup>55</sup>

The attitude of putting up with the illogical side of military service is also derivative of the fact that most people, despite stating that they see military service as a “debt to the nation”, regard military service as an obstacle which stands in the way of their children and which thus needs to be surmounted, preferably without experiencing any problems in the barracks. Although they do not think of military service as a path to marriage, which is the traditional viewpoint that a man can get married only after he is over with

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<sup>55</sup> Zor diyor askerlik zor yani ama kurallara göre, yani çok mantık ararsan hiçbir şeyin hiçbir mantığı yok diyor askerlikte yani emir komuta zinciri var diyor, orada sorgulama yok diyor, sorgularsan diyor o zaman emir komuta zinciri zedeleniyor zaten sorgulamayla o zaman da tabii hırpalanıyorsun belki de veyahut da işte yani ben de zaten buradan giderken söylemişim ona sakın hiçbir şeyi sorgulamayasın askerde çok yıpanırsın, yıpratırlar seni. Orada öyle bir sistem var çünkü bu niye böyle bu ne saçma şey demeyeceksin yani, dediğin vakit yıpranan sen oluyorsun çünkü orada yani orada öyle tek başına birinin ses çıkarıp düzeni değiştirecek halin yok orada çünkü. O da onu diyor, orada öyle yapmayan zaten diyor şey yapıyor diyor çok hırpalanıyor diyor. Sevim

his service, they do think that the service should be completed so that their children will not face any difficulty in finding a job. This temporary nature of the service seen as something to be done with rather than questioned also normalizes every experience to be lived while in the barracks. Sevinç, for instance, talks about her advices to her son as such:

I told him, son, do not object if they make you clean toilets in the army. Clean them because this will be over in fifteen months and no one will ask you whether you cleaned toilets or not. Even if they do, let it be so, just finish [your military service and] return safely.<sup>56</sup>

Sevinç's narrative is noteworthy to analyze how women adjust to the MotherSpace by performing the image of the supportive mother. The 'illogical practices' of the military service is not something that the official letter or the military officials particularly mention and ask support from the mothers to put up with. The military, however, does need the support of the mothers for the soldiers to stay in order. The mothers, while benefiting from the proud mother image of the MotherSpace, also assist the soldiers in surmounting the 'unseen' and 'unspoken' aspects of the service.

As suggested in the above excerpt, military service stories are significant, but you do not have to tell the fact that you have cleaned the toilets in the army or have done any other job which actually 'feminizes' you and when you tell them, just like in the case of Vatan Şaşmaz, they become sources of pride for having overcome the obstacles of the service. The soldier performs the 'feminized' activities, like cooking and cleaning during the day. In fact, it is this feminization rather than the hardship of the act itself that further affirms the manhood of the male. The soldier who does this during the day, protects the motherland, in other words, the 'honor of the nation' at night on guard watch, and gets humiliated by the commander with feminized words if

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<sup>56</sup> Oğlum askere git de tuvalet temizletseler hiç sesini çıkarma diyorum. Temizle çünkü bu bitecek, 15 ay sen burada tuvalet temizleyeceksin, senin peşine diyordum hiç kimse demeyecek Levent sen askerde tuvalet mi temizledin. Ulan diyordum desin oğlum ne olacak, yeter ki diyordum bitir hayırlısıyla gel. Sevinç

he cannot fully perform his “duty”. It is then that they become “proper men” ready to get back to their own lives where they recite their “stories of success”. It is, however, not necessary whether these tales involve any success or not, the thing which differentiates military service stories from any other means of bonding between men is exactly the fact that they are all aware that it is the hardship encountered during the service which forms these usually exaggerated and fictionalized stories rather than accomplishments and success.

Demet, for example, told me what she thought about men’s relentless desire to talk about their military service experience. She had gone to an office of a big chain store for her job around the times when her son was in his initial stages of service. After talking about how worried she was about her son’s present state, an employee tried to console her by saying that he had done his service in Şırnak, which he implied was more dangerous than being in Tunceli. After commenting on how long they talked about their military service stories, she was responded by the quite common saying about military service: “Military service stories never end”. The story of Demet demonstrates the significance of military service stories among men, but it also conveys how even where the service is done, in Şırnak and not Tunceli for example, becomes a source of proof for masculinity.

Moreover, while these stories create a means to form social bonding between men, as shown in the example of Demet, they are also used to suppress or trivialize and mock the hardship and humiliation that men encounter during their service. One striking story I had encountered during the interviews was that of Sevinç who narrated the

breaking of his son's nose with a benumbed joy.<sup>57</sup> According to her, his son had done an "easy" service yet, she added, he had "of course" been beaten up or gone through other similar experiences. It is, thus, significant to discuss how violence, inherent to military service, can be so widely accepted by the mothers.

## 2.8. Women and the Duty to the Homeland

Women as mothers prepare their children for this thorny road and most of them state that they have also felt like doing military service while their children were in the army. While the official discourse on soldier mothering regards women as the mothers of the nation, which comprises the state and the army in general, women as mothers also utter statements implicating that they have also been mothering the army during their children's military service. However, what would women themselves think about women's literal participation to the barracks as soldiers? In other words, if military service is the duty of every Turkish citizen and a "debt to the homeland", why are the women not there and what can women do to 'compensate' for the lack of this military service experience?

Apart from Demet, who stated that military service itself is not needed, all of the women stated that women could also conduct military service if necessary. One woman regarded the segregated structure of military service as a men only act a "feodal" division<sup>58</sup>, one stated that women also need to have education related to the weapons<sup>59</sup>,

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<sup>57</sup> "Gitmeden önce de pek öyle şey yapmıyordu, ilgilenmiyordu yani, pek şey yapmıyordu öyle. Dediğim gibi rahat askerlik yaptı, olanlar bize oldu burada da, yani hiç dert yanmadı işte dediğim gibi. Tabii çekmiştir, dayak da yemiştir her şey de olmuştur ama yani bize şey yapmadı. Burnunu falan kırmışlar hep ama şikayetçi değil. (Annesi konuşuyor) Kavga bir olaylar olmuş ama hiç bize anlatmadı. Hele oradan bu tarafa telefon ederken kesinlikle, hep diyordu iyiyim rahatım."

<sup>58</sup> Yani aslında kadınlar da yapabilir diye düşünüyorum, yapınlar diye düşünüyorum çünkü ataerkil ve feodal bir ayırım yani erkekler savaşır kadınlar da yemek yapar ayırımı feodal bir ayırım. Eğer vatandaşlık borcu olarak algılanıp o şekilde kabul ediliyorsa niye kadınlar da yapmasın yapabilirler; ama bütün bunlar dediğim gibi yani bir eğitim ocağı, işte birtakım şeyleri öğrenmek adına hem olmalı hem de evet işte

whereas one said women could participate in an alternative civil service rather than do military service.<sup>60</sup> No matter how supportive thoughts on women's participation to the military occurred, one common aspect that all these narratives had, however, was that women could do military service but they could do so "when needed", just like the heroic women in the Turkish War of Independence where they had helped the men by carrying weapons, cooking food, and treating the wounded:

Women previously had carried bullets [in the War of Independence], they also had a lot of difficulties. Of course if we face such a situation, we will also do it [military service], we will do everything for our homeland. If women are also granted such a right, we would also do it, why would we not? I love my homeland, my Turkey, I will do it [military service]. Even my daughter says mother I will go if military service becomes [compulsory]. We love our homeland.<sup>61</sup>

Women's duty is this, my dear, previously they had carried bullets, there were such things. If something similar [like a war] were to happen, I would also go immediately. I don't know what you think, what she [her

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jeopolitik birtakım şeyleri olan bir alanı olan bir yerdeyiz, önemli bir jeopolitik bir yerdeyiz, onun için de elbette yurt savunmasında hem kadınlar hem erkekler katkıda bulunmalı, dış tehlikelere karşı ama. Eda

<sup>59</sup> Ben o konuda şöyle düşünüyorum, vatan savunması için silah eğitiminin bir şekilde sadece erkeklere değil tüm ülkenin insanlarına verilmesi gerektiğini savunuyorum, kadınlar da dahil olmak üzere; ama burada işte altı aylık sürecin nasıl geçtiğine baktığımız zaman hiç de o kadar bir sürenin gerekli olmadığı kanaatindeyim, bu belki bir ilk yardım dersi gibi iki aylık sürecin ya da bir buçuk aylık ne kadar yeterli oluyorsa yoğunlaştırılmış bir teknik eğitimin kadın erkek ülke vatandaşlarının hepsine verilmesinden yanayım belli yaştan sonra. Yani çünkü yarın öbür gün hakikaten bir ülke savunmasına girdiğimiz zaman bizim elimiz de bir şekilde silah tutacak sadece kaçacak göçecek değiliz, ondan sonra o silahı kullanmayı ben öğrenmek isterdim doğrusu. O anlamda öyle bir zorunluluk yani herkese. Zeynep

<sup>60</sup> Bu geçmişte de yaşanmış bizim memleketimizde işte Fatma Nineler, Kara Fatmalar bilmem ne, erkeklerle beraber seferberliğe katılmış ve kendi branşlarında yardımcı işte yemek yapmak atıyorum çorap yapmak örmek falan gibi şeylere girmişler ama şu dönemde erkeklerin bile fiziksel olarak yapıları daha müsait olduğu için bazı şeylere zorluk olarak gördüğü şeyleri askerlikte bir kadının kadınlar da tabii çeşit çeşit, zayıf naif bir kadının bunları göğüslemesi çok zor; ancak şöyle bir şey olabilse keşke, deminceki konu gibi bir sosyal olarak o askerlik içerisinde sosyal olarak kültürel olarak bir paylaşabileceği bir şeyler olsa ki kadının illa yani tüfek tutma adına değil ve kadının da kadının girdiği her yer zaten daha güzel olur, güzelleştireceği bir konu varsa kadın ama mecbur tutulmasını ben şu anda düşünemiyorum yani kadınların da mecbur edilişlerini şu ortamda. Düşün PKK'nın olduğu bölgelere yollanan kadının... Ayşe

<sup>61</sup> Eski kadınlarımız taşımışlar, biliyorsunuz mermiler eskiden, az zorluklar çekmemişler, tabii ki bizim de öyle bir şey olsa biz de yaparız niye yapmayalım vatanımız için her şeyi yaparız biz de niye yapmayalım olsa yaparız tabii ki kadınlara da öyle bir hak tanınsa yaparız niye yapmayalım ki, ben vatanımı Türkiye' mi çok seviyorum, yaparım, kızım bile diyor ya anne askerlik şey olsa anne giderim diyor. Yani biz öyle severiz vatanımızı. Arzu

daughter] thinks, but I will willingly go because you are protecting the homeland, you are this homeland's [citizen], you are obliged to go.<sup>62</sup>

As previously stated, women underscore that they as the citizens of this country can do whatever is necessary yet at the same time do not question the gendered division of citizenship practices.

While the state of the women in the War of Independence was a recurring theme in the narratives of the women, military service for women unless “necessary” was not necessarily seen desirable. One interviewee, for example, stated that there is no need for compulsory military service for women at the moment since there are enough men to conduct it<sup>63</sup> whereas one said that women are way too delicate in nature to perform military service.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, two women saw fit other “duties” for women rather than joining the army:

Actually women bear children for the country, I was also thinking about that. I mean they raise these children, they realize such an immense duty as this. But of course women can also conduct [military service] but the circumstances are very difficult, women experience harder circumstances than men. She sets up a family, bears a child, then raises a child, all responsibility is on her shoulder. I mean women have taken all the hard work in society in general. She is actually conducting military service by raising a child for the homeland. She does not literally need to join the barracks, which may be equality I think.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Kadınların görevi şu yavrum, eskiden bak bu şeylerde mermiler taşınmış öyle şeyler olmuş, şu anda öyle bir şey olsa, bu aşamada olsa seve seve giderim ben ama senin fikrini bilemem bunun fikrini bilemem, gider mi gitmez mi, ben seve seve giderim çünkü bir vatan bunu koruyorsun, bu vatanın şeyisin, mecbur gidersin. Fatma

<sup>63</sup> Zorunlu bence olmaması lazım şu anda bence zaten çok çok fazla asker var, öyle değil mi? Yani şu an ne bileyim ben yani pek de zorunlu gibi gelmiyor bana; ama hani öyle bir savaş zamanı bilmem ne zamanı tabii ki o zaman herkes gider. Sevinç

Zorunlu olsa gidecek de şimdi erkek dolu Türkiye’de, askerlik yapacak gençler sırada bekliyor, kadınlar da evde işine baksın; ama mecbur kalırsa yapmaları gerekir sağlıklı her genç. Gökçen

<sup>64</sup> O vaziyet, o dağlarda bayırlarda yapamaz yani kesinlikle, herhalde o yüzden de erkeklere vermişler bu görevi. Nimet

<sup>65</sup> Esasında kadınlar ülkeye evlat veriyorlar esasında, bir de onu düşünüyordum yani, çocukları onlar yetiştiriyor, büyütüyor, esasında onlar çok büyük görev yapıyor esasında bir taraftan da öyle düşünürsek. Yani ama tabii ki bire bir bir şey söylenirse yapılabilir de ama şartları zor kadın çünkü zor şartlar yani bir erkekten çok daha zor şartları yaşıyor kadın, aile kuruyor, arkasından çocuk doğuruyor, çocuğunu büyütüyor, her türlü ağırlık onun üzerinde. Yani kadın zaten zor görevleri almış zaten toplumda, toplumun bütününde. Esasında askerlik görevini yapıyor bir taraftan da, zaten vatana çocuk yetiştiriyor,

What should women do? It is something that Allah has bestowed upon us, raising children, sending him to military service, marrying the girls, is it not? They [the girls] should be raised as such. That is women's duty, to look after her children, to clean the house, to cook, to wash the dishes, to do the ironing; that is women's duty. It is not such an easy job I tell you, the job of the mothers. The working mothers also experience that difficulty, they work to bring money for their children, to look after them.<sup>66</sup>

I find the former analysis of Sevim significant in terms of reflecting the gendered discourse of citizenship and the relationship between motherhood and militarism. While talking about the "rationalities of militarism and of care", Sara Ruddick (1990: 240) says:

"Mothering begins in birth and promises life; military thinking justifies organized, deliberate deaths. A mother preserves the bodies, nurtures the psychic growth, and disciplines the conscience of children she cares for; the military deliberately endangers the same body, mind, and conscience in the name of victory and abstract causes. Mothers protect children who are at risk; the military risks the children mothers protect."

It is hard to agree with Ruddick after considering Sevim's words and that of many other women who think like her. Mothers with whom I have talked do not justify death in certain cases like that of the soldiers "martyred" in the East/Southeast while in conflict with the PKK. They do, however, justify the deaths and "martyrdoms" which happen for a "just cause" like the deaths in the Turkish War of Independence. They do not risk their children's lives either, but they advise children to obey the orders and accept the illogical nature of military service, which most of the time involves punishment and violence.

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evlat yetiştiriyor bir taraftan da. Esasında tabii ki askerlik görevini yapıyorsa o zaman tabii ki bire bir onun gibi şeyde kışlada askerlik yapmasına gerek yok erkeklerin yapabilir o zaman belki eşitlik olabilir, bir taraftan da öyle düşünüyorum. Sevim

<sup>66</sup> Kadınlar da ne yapmalı, kadınlar da işte cenab-ı Allah'ın verdiği bir şey çocuk büyütme yetiştirmek, onu askere gitmek, kızları evlendirmek değil mi? Onları da öyle yetiştirmek lazım. Kadının vazifesi de o; çocuğuna bakmak, evin temizliğine bakmak, yemeğini yapmak, bulaşığını yıkamak, ütüsünü yapmak, kadının görevi de bu, kadınlar öyle kolay bir şey şey değil annelerin diyeyim ben sana. Çalışanlar da tabii o zorluğu çalışıyor, çalışıyor çoluk çocuğuna para getirmek için, aç koymamak için. Selma

Susan Zeiger's analysis of the ideal soldier and ideal mother are noteworthy to further discuss Ruddick's arguments. According to Zeiger, "the ideal soldier and the ideal mother share many qualities. Both are asked to give unquestioning obedience to authority, both are under the orders and the discipline of superior males, and both are asked to sacrifice their lives and needs for those who are important" (1996: 27). Indeed, the military itself utilizes the image of the self-sacrificing, compassionate, and loving mother to perpetuate the militarization of motherhood. It is, thus, important to note that the language of the mothers and their "rationality" do not necessarily display a sharp difference than the language of the military. Mothers find ways to justify their actions within the "rationality of militarism" and mostly within the limits of MotherSpace by supporting their children during their service and not overtly objecting to the practices of the military.

An interesting point that I would like to tie with the arguments above and connect with the TAF's attitude towards the mothers is the fact that despite their comments on mothering apart from two or three women, none of the interviewees could come up with an exact definition of what being a soldier's mother means. When asked about women's representation in the media in relation to the military and military service, I had the greatest difficulty in explaining what I was trying to ask. After I tried to help them by rephrasing the question as what comes up to their mind when thinking about soldiers' mothers, nearly all of them responded by asking whether I was trying to refer to the mothers of the martyrs and not the mothers of the soldiers. One interviewee also stated that despite the fact that I am writing my thesis on soldiers' mothers, neither the media nor the state have any particular interest in the soldiers' mothers and that it is

only the mothers of the martyrs who receive some sort of financial support from *Mehmetçik Vakfı*, but nothing more happens related to soldier mothering.<sup>67</sup>

It is indeed true that most of the time no specific distinction is made between a soldier's mother and a martyr's mother in the media. It would be fallacious, however, to think that neither the media nor the military cares about soldier mothering. In fact, the media is a potent tool to convey messages about soldier mothering, which the military has also been utilizing.<sup>68</sup> The TAF, for example, has been publishing posters for the Mother's Day since 2007.<sup>69</sup> One poster published in 2007 writes, "You are worth everything" with a picture of a soldier waving to his mother whereas the other poster writes, "You are always with us" with a picture of a soldier looking at his mother's photograph in his wallet. The same picture has been used with a different background in 2008 with the words "Your love is our power". It would not be wrong to say, then, the army needs the support of the mothers of the soldiers in the barracks just as it needs the support of the mothers of the "martyrs".

The TAF has also been publishing posters related to the March 8 Women's Day since 2007.<sup>70</sup> Although the posters of the previous two years focused on women more as the "symbols of modern Turkey", the posters of 2008 and 2009 are quite significant in discussing how womanhood and mothering is equated in the discourse of the military.

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<sup>67</sup> Bundan üç ay önceki şehit annesiyle işte dünkü şeyin annesi arasında görsel olarak çok fazla fark yok, zaten hep aynı şekilde veriliyor haber, sonuçta yani bir ocağa ateş düşmüş şeklinde ama asker annesi diye de bir ayırım yapmıyor, işte anasının ciğeri yandı, hep böyle aynı söylemler, aynı deyimler. Özellikle asker anneleri, hani siz tez hazırlıyorsunuz belki ama asker annelerine yönelik bir şey olduğunu hiç sanmıyorum, ne medyanın böyle bir yaklaşımı var ne de devletin, sadece Mehmetçik Vakfı'nın o ailelere yardım yaptığını biliyorum ben, o kadar yani. Zeynep

<sup>68</sup> The Turkish Armed Forces has two official programs, one broadcast on TV on TRT 1, the Turkish Radio and Television Network, and the other on TRT's Radio 1 radio station. Both programs are used to promote the activities of the Turkish Armed Forces. *Savaşta Barışta Türk Ordusu* (The Turkish Army in War and Peace) is broadcast on TRT 1.

<sup>69</sup> See Appendices for the Mother's Day Posters of TAF.

<sup>70</sup> See Appendices for the Women's Day Posters of TAF.

One of the 2008 posters, for example, writes: “Our women have to be more intelligent, more productive, more knowledgeable than men” with a silhouette of Atatürk and five ‘modern’ women from different professions. What the poster omits, however, is the latter part of this sentence of Atatürk, which continues: “They should be as such if they want to be the mothers of the nation”. It is understandable that the latter part of the sentence is omitted since this is a Women’s Day poster yet it is similarly interesting why this particular saying has been selected.<sup>71</sup> Another poster from 2008 writes, “We celebrate the Women’s Day of our self-sacrificing women who have educated, raised, made us who we are and with whose existence we are honored”. Here, womanhood again implies motherhood and women are thanked as the compassionate mothers who raise the future citizens of the country.

The 2009 Women’s Day posters of the Turkish Armed Forces, on the other hand, comprised three different pictures. In the first poster, a picture of Atatürk’s mother Zübeyde Hanım is situated on the left hand side and a picture of Atatürk walking with the ‘modern women of the nation’ is on the right hand side of the poster with the heading “How happy it is to be a Turkish woman raising Atatürk”. The second poster is composed of a woman carrying bullets in the Turkish War of Independence with the pictures of ‘Anatolian’ mothers in the background with Atatürk’s following words: “Woman for the Turkish Republic today is an exalted and honorable being in the most respected state, just like she has been throughout Turkish history”.<sup>72</sup> The posters, thus, assume that there is one single “Turkish woman” and she is equated to the

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.atam.gov.tr/index.php?Page=FikirDusunceler&IcerikNo=47>

<sup>72</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyet anlamınca kadın, bütün Türk tarihinde olduğu gibi bugün de en muhterem mevkiide, her şeyin üstünde yüksek ve şerefli bir varlıktır.”

“Turkish mother”. Turkishness, womanhood, and motherhood are, thus, amalgamated to bring out the homogeneous category of the “Turkish mother”.

As can be observed, these posters convey their messages on two basic premises: women as sacred mothers raising children (or rather sons) and women as self-sacrificing women who have helped the independence of the nation by fighting alongside the male, in other words the primary citizens of the country. Despite the fact that these posters are related to the Women’s Day and not the Mother’s Day, motherhood and mothering is the primary emphasis that can be observed in three of the posters. Women who bear male citizen-soldiers for the country thus also become both the mothers of the state and the mothers of army. The 2007 Mother’s Day message of the Chief of Staff Yaşar Büyükanıt demonstrates how mothers are created in the MotherSpace of the military: “I have no doubt that the Turkish mothers who have previously raised the Metes, Alparslans, Fatihis, and Mustafa Kemal Atatürks, will also raise new generations who will preserve Turkey’s existence, protect its basic values, and with never ending love cling to it and struggle for its development”.<sup>73</sup>

If motherhood is such a significant aspect for the military, then where does fatherhood stand in the militarized state discourse? Pınar Selek talks about four steps in reaching what she defines the “threshold of manhood”: circumcision, military service, a job, and marriage (2008: 19). According to this scheme, marriage becomes the final step in completing the rituals to become a “real man” where the (heterosexual) male becomes the father, in other words, “the military power of the house” (Selek 2008: 23).

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<sup>73</sup> “Dün, Meteleri, Alparslanları, Fatihleri, Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK’leri yetiştiren Türk analarının bugün Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin varlığını koruyacak, onun temel değerlerine sahip çıkacak ve bitmek tükenmek bilmeyen bir sevgiyle ona bağlanıp gelişmesi için mücadele edecek yeni nesiller yetiştireceğinden hiç şüphem yoktur.”  
[http://www.tsk.tr/10\\_ARSIV/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Yayin\\_Faaliyetleri/10\\_1\\_8\\_Mesajlar/2007/anneler\\_gunu\\_0805\\_07.html](http://www.tsk.tr/10_ARSIV/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_1_8_Mesajlar/2007/anneler_gunu_0805_07.html)

At this point, the fatherhood metaphor holds a significant place on the road to manhood. Before becoming a proper man, the military as the father takes his child and disciplines, tames, and educates him to befit the acceptable and ideal definition of manhood: brave, austere yet also loving and compassionate (Selek 2008: 121-125). Only then can the ‘raw’ young man become the mature father of the house and take on the role ‘bestowed upon’ him by the military.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, it is quite noteworthy that in addition to the declaration of the military in the letter that is sent home indicating that the army is now the second home of the soldiers, the TAF has also been publishing posters for the Father’s Day since 2008.<sup>75</sup> One of the posters of 2008, for example, writes “We have realized that you have never let go of our hand which you had held on our birth” accompanied by a baby’s hand held by an adult man’s hand in military uniform. The discursive construction of the military as the father can be observed in the mentioned poster where it is indeed the army becoming the father of the soldier to be. One of the posters of 2008, on the other hand, writes, “It is our turn of duty”. It is thus noteworthy that compared to the Women’s and Mother’s day posters, the future soldier in the Father’s Day posters is reflected to take his education in being a ‘proper’ citizen from his mother while takes the turn to watch for the homeland from the father.

The notion of manhood imposed upon men through the practice of compulsory military service also becomes closely related to citizenship and identity formation. While the passage to manhood of this male citizen is realized with the completion of his service, his citizenship also gets affirmed and legitimized at the end of this ordeal. The military as the father, in other words, becomes the one to be obeyed in order to achieve

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<sup>74</sup> For a detailed analysis of hegemonic masculinity and its repercussions related to military service in Turkey, see Altınay (2004a: 77-80).

<sup>75</sup> See Appendices for the Father’s Day posters of TAF.

both a legitimate manhood and citizenship. The existence of the male being as a citizen, therefore, only gets ‘approved’ after the completion of his duty as a soldier, which makes him a “proper citizen” of the country (Altınay 2004: 68) also enabling him be to the commander at home.

There is, then, I argue a “FatherSpace” just like a “MotherSpace”, restricting the identities of men with strictly drawn limits. Patriarchy, in other words, not only shapes the lives of women, but also men. The fact that FatherSpace is not so apparent as the latter is, I believe, the fact that fatherhood is not a category with which men are solely interpolated. Men are primarily expected to be soldiers rather than fathers. Motherhood, in this sense, seems to be an essential characteristic of women whereas fatherhood is something given and does not exist from the beginning. Women as mothers are thus regarded as more significant for raising the future citizen soldiers.

## **2.9. Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I tried to trace the views of the mothers in relation to the official soldier mothering discourse and the critical literature on nationalism, militarism, and gender. As also discussed above, while motherhood holds a significant place in the state discourse on women, it is the mothers of the martyrs who become visible in the public sphere, although in a limited scope. The experiences of the women whose children have gone to and returned from military service seem to be doubly silenced since they do not gain the visibility to express what they have been through. More importantly, however, it is not necessarily the state or the army itself which perpetuates these silences but women themselves. Despite the fact that the women could not define what it meant to be a soldier’s mother, almost everything they uttered in their narratives seemed to be the repercussions of the militarized discourse of nationhood: the

myth of the military nation; the constant fear of being attacked by the “enemies of Turkey”; normalization of discipline, war, and violence; and women’s second-class citizenship.

The silences that prevail the narratives of these women, therefore, cannot easily be classified as one related to or a sympathizing with the oppressor since these women are not exposed to such oppression as they do not deviate from and actually support the state discourse on soldier mothering itself. The women themselves are not silent because they are silenced, but because they do not see the soldier mothering experience something special to be publicly spoken. Moreover, they act within the discursive and material spaces provided and seen fit for them in the MotherSpace. Their language does not deviate from the state discourse so as to create silences. It is important to remember, therefore, that the silences prevailing related to soldier mothering is not one which victimizes women, on the contrary, it is one which cherishes them with the proud mother image they attain in return for bearing, raising, and supporting their sons through military service.

I have previously stated that social and economic class was a determinant while trying to reach interviewees in order to see the different perceptions of military service. There was a balanced composition in terms of my desire and I managed to interview women from different social backgrounds. The differences between the social and economic status of women, however, did not necessarily change what they said about military service. The language of the militarized MotherSpace prevails in women’s narratives no matter what their social background is. The content remains the same yet the phrases can at times get sophisticated. While a woman from a relatively lower social and economic background and with little education may refer to military service as a “debt to the homeland” to protect the borders of the country, a woman from a higher

social and economic background and level of education refers to military service as a “necessity” due to “Turkey’s geostrategic position”. Although uttered in different phrasings, the “culturalization” and acceptance of the service, however, still continues.

As I have previously argued in this chapter, the “culturalization” of military service makes the service immune from all negative connotations like war, death, and violence. Since military service is regarded as a part of “Turkish culture” and an ordinary aspect of everyday life, it is only natural, according to the mothers I have interviewed, that male citizens of the country perform this duty. This normalized discourse, however, encounters a slight rupture when the place of service is announced to be the East, which creates great shock and surprise. The everyday ubiquity of the military service replaces itself with the unthinkability of the East due exactly to the fact that the East resurfaces the erased connotations of military service. The following chapter will be an analysis of the relationship between military service and the East and a discussion of how the East is perceived, represented, and experienced by the mothers.

### CHAPTER III

#### **“WEST” MEETS “EAST”: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE “EAST” IN MOTHERS’ NARRATIVES**

Three common aspects usually arise in the general narratives regarding the East in Turkey: terror, poverty, and backwardness. The “East” is a contested space with multiple connotations producing a single stereotypical image. The “East” is regarded as a region of people who have not received enough attention and support from the “West” in economical terms: There were no factories in the “East” to decrease unemployment and provide people with work; no schools to enable ease of access to education; and even no roads to enable proper transportation. The people, according to the common viewpoint, who have remained “poor” and thus without any education have been “going to the mountain”, to use the literal Turkish translation, to join the PKK in order to protest for their endless misery.

Indeed, the East and Southeast regions of Turkey have been torn apart with the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces for a quarter of a century where the army has continued to counteract the PKK by deploying the conscripted soldiers to the conflict zones. These two regions experienced an abrupt militarization when they were declared an emergency zone in 1987<sup>76</sup> in an attempt to establish control over the region in response to the activities of the PKK and to establish security while normalizing “a permanent state of insecurity” (Öncü 2003: 6) in the region. The state of emergency implemented in ten different cities in the region militarized life until 2002 when the last two cities, Diyarbakır and Şırnak, were also let go of the military rule after 15 years.

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<sup>76</sup> Before the declaration of the emergency zone, thirteen cities, including some of the above states, were ruled under the martial law from 1978 to 1980. This number was raised to twenty cities in 1980.

Since the beginning of the conflict, thousands have been sent to the war zone where many have been killed and many returned home with tormenting memories of violence and war. Throughout these 15 years of emergency rule, the number of the wounded and killed soldiers in the conflict gradually increased, the news of the “martyred” soldiers gaining vast media coverage. While the soldiers-to-be were sent to their service with exuberant celebrations under the slogans “The greatest soldier is our soldier” (*En büyük asker bizim asker*), the funerals of the “martyred” soldiers were accompanied with loud cries of “Martyrs won’t die, the homeland cannot be divided” (*Şehitler ölmez, vatan bölünmez*). Meanwhile, women appeared in the TV news and newspaper articles as mothers grieving and crying in front of their children’s caskets at the funerals uttering the saying “I bestow my son to the homeland” (*Vatan sağolsun*). Women, in this sense, were conveyed as painful yet proud mothers who were expected to be phlegmatic by “burying their pain in their heart”, to use the literal Turkish translation. The loud cries which prevailed in the exuberant celebrations, thus, replaced themselves with “loud silences” (Altınay 2004) after the funerals since the mothers seemed to become invisible left alone with their pain after their visibility at the funerals.

What the “East” connoted for the mothers with whom I had spoken was also mostly terror and fear. The military service practice for which their sons had to leave home was so thinkable and ordinary yet the fact that their sons would be going to the “East” utterly shocked them. In the previous chapter, I argued that the acceptance or rather the unquestioning from the beginning is so ordinary for the mothers. Military service which initially and usually connotes pride and joy for the mothers leaves its place to shock and disappointment with the news of their sons’ deployment to the “East”, which as stated previously usually connotes terror, poverty, and/or backwardness.

The “East” on which I had so much focused when I thought about my research, however, only occurred to me in a rather general framework, in other words, solely as a region significant to the ongoing war where conducting military service would be different compared to other “peaceful” regions. In this sense, I only thought of the “East” as a geography, a taken for granted land where a long lasting war and silence was taking place. Similarly, I had not thought about the constructions of the “East”, the fact that it is a “semi-real, semi-imaginary geography” (Öncü 2003: 1) and a rather plastic one. Indeed, I had not even thought about the fact that the East may have different meanings for different people. As I proceeded in the research, however, I began to think more on the representations of the “East” and who most of the interviewees defined as “Easterners” were. Therefore, while this chapter will try to seek what soldiering in the “East” and mothering under these circumstances has meant for the interviewees, it will also try to delve into what the “East” and its inhabitants mean and how they are perceived and represented in the narratives of the women.

### **3.1. First Encounter with the “East”**

Apart from two of the ex-soldiers, all of them had conducted their military service in the 2000s. Three of the ex-soldiers, two of whom had done their service in the 1990s, had conducted their military service under the state of emergency. I had not particularly chosen to interview the mothers of the people who had done their service in the 2000s; such a pattern emerged as a coincidence. In addition to this similarity, there were also two other aspects which united these narratives. Firstly, all of the ex-soldiers apart from three had left their home for the first time. There were some people who had formerly been away from their homes for holidays or business trips, but military service was the initial step where they were separated from their parents. Secondly, none of the ex-soldiers had been to the “East” before their military service, most had not even

stepped out of the boundaries of Istanbul. In this sense, while the parting of the ex-soldiers from their homes was due to their encounter with military life, it also led to their encounter with life in the “East”.

For all the mothers I interviewed, the news of their son’s deployment to the “East” comprised three responses: surprise, panic, and fear. Neither the women nor the ex-soldiers themselves were expecting the “East” to be the place of service. Since most of the ex-soldiers were university graduates and were thus eligible for the short term service, the families expected them to be deployed to cities near Istanbul. If their children were not that “lucky” to be sent to a place near their homes, then Central Anatolia was expected to be the farthest place where their sons would be sent. Thus, the reaction of surprise prevails in all the narratives in regard to the news of their son’s deployment to the “East”, the news of which in certain cases like Eda’s can initially be regarded as a joke:

I actually thought it was a joke when I first heard it. I didn’t learn it from Ahmet [his son], but from his cousin and I said this must be a joke. You can’t believe it at first, I said it can’t be possible, but then I had to believe that it was real.<sup>77</sup>

The inability to distinguish the real from the imagined or the unwillingness to believe in the reality is an aspect which also arises in other narratives. The news of the place of deployment thus becomes a shock to be overcome:

[It was] Kars-Sarıkamış, short term. Kars was a city we hadn’t even thought about. Of course with all the conflict going on over there, the East is a place where no mother would want to send her child. We never thought about it, it was a huge surprise.<sup>78</sup>

Of course it [the place of deployment] was unexpected. I mean we were shocked that he was sent there, how could it happen? He was deployed to

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<sup>77</sup> Zaten ben ilk duyduğumda önce şaka zannettim. Ahmet’ten gelmedi haber bana, Ahmet’in yeğeninden geldi, kuzeninden geldi ve ben dedim ki kesin şaka bu herhalde, yani önce inanamıyorsunuz zaten yani olmaz ya falan filan dedim ondan sonra hakikaten olduğuna artık inanmak zorunda kaldım. Eda

<sup>78</sup> Kars-Sarıkamış kısa dönem, yani hiç düşünmediğimiz bir şehir. Kars, Sarıkamış ve kısa dönem. E tabii oradaki çatışmaların hepsi yani Doğu olarak hiçbir annenin çocuğunu göndermeyeceği bir yer, hiç düşünmemiştik, çok büyük sürpriz oldu bize. Deniz

Mardin, which you know was at its worst time back then. We were very sad, I couldn't sleep at night.<sup>79</sup>

Of course they were very surprised when they heard Ağrı-Patnos, Özgür was utterly shocked. It took us a lot of time to accept it; it took 3-5 days. We overcame it by saying he's really going, he's going to Ağrı-Patnos.<sup>80</sup>

As can be observed in the narratives, the announcement of the place of service introduces the mothers to unfathomable reality. The encounter, in this sense, leads to their confrontation with the realization that they are indeed at the very heart of the military service experience which they had rendered invisible and ignored before their son's service.

Regarding the initial reactions of the mothers and their sons, the news of the deployment can be seen as a hyper-real moment where the boundaries of reality and illusion blur. Demet's account of his son's reaction to the news of his deployment demonstrates a similar moment:

My son's cousin called us at 1.30 am, woke us up and told us that it [the place of service] is Tunceli and that it's short term, but we were shocked, we had woken up from our sleep and were in shock. Well it's my son who would be doing his service, but he was also shocked, he answered the phone and said what kind of a thing is this and went back to sleep. I and his younger brother woke up. My younger son walked around, he also rebelled and said the same thing. I felt uneasy; I went to my bed and started praying.<sup>81</sup>

Demet's son seems to have reacted to the news in a phlegmatic manner, responding to his place of deployment with only one single sentence and then going back to sleep.

When asked why his son had acted that way and whether he did not care about his

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<sup>79</sup> Tabii tabii, beklemediğimiz. Yani öyle bir şey, şok olduk yani oraya düşmesi şok olduk yani nasıl olur. Bu askerlik yani hükümetin işin, şok olduk, nasıl olur dedik bu şey nere şeyde askerlik yaptı geldi ta gitti şeye düştü ne diyecektim Mardin'e düştü. Mardin de biliyorsun çok o zaman oranın çok kötü zamanıydı. Çok üzüldük, çok şey ettik. Ne bileyim gece uykum yoktu. Selma

<sup>80</sup> Ağrı Patnos adı çıkınca tabii çok şaşırdılar, Özgür yani adamakıllı böyle şoke oldu falan, hazmetmemiz zaman aldı, 3-5 günü buldu hazmetmemiz. Gidiyor, evet gerçekten Ağrı Patnos'a gidiyor diyerekten. Sevim

<sup>81</sup> Gece yarısı bir buçukta oğlumun kuzeni telefon açarak uykumuzdan kaldırarak bizi Tunceli kısa dönem olduğunu söyledi fakat biz böyle bir şok oldu, uykumuzdan uyanarak tabii ki şok olduk. Gerçi askere gidecek oğlum, tabii o da belki şok oldu telefona o cevap verdi, o ne ya dedi kafasını vurdu yatı tekrar. Fakat ben ve küçük kardeşi kalktık böyle bir. Küçük oğlan böyle bir dolandı, o da böyle bir isyan etti, bu ne ya dedi, ben de şöyle bir tedirgin oldum, gittim yatağıma başladım dua etmeye. Demet

deployment, Demet responded by saying that it was actually a rebellion rather than indifference:

Well that [his reaction] was a shock, it can't possibly be indifference because he directly went back to sleep, he said what kind of a thing is this, a mountain in the middle of nowhere, but he went back to sleep. I walked around a little; his brother did and said the same thing. It was rebellion, what we all felt was rebellion.<sup>82</sup>

The news about the place of deployment thus becomes a source of rebellion; an unthinkable yet also inevitable future which is initially refused then has to be accepted. What Demet emphasizes with the word "rebellion", however, is a reaction against not the army itself, but the idea of going to the "East" and realizing how 'real' this is, and that it is not just a formality. It is, thus, particularly interesting why this rebellion does not occur to the military service itself or unless they encounter the bare reality of going to "the middle of nowhere". Why, then, is this rebellion solely the outcome of being sent to the "East" and not a perpetual reaction to the compulsory military service itself?

The initial reactions of the mothers indicate another common aspect which also arises in other narratives. Military service for the mothers is not something they particularly think about before their own son's 'turn' leads them to think on the issue. The service itself, in this sense, is always present and 'there' to a certain extent, but also invisible until one experiences it:

I wasn't thinking about it [military service]. I used to say well he will do it and come back once the time comes. I didn't think about anything bad, I mean it didn't occur to me, nothing as such occurred to me.<sup>83</sup>

Well, yes, I was thinking that way [that military service will be done when the time comes], that men will be doing military service, boys will

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<sup>82</sup> Yani o bir şoktu, mümkün değil ki umursamamazlık olsun; çünkü kafayı vurdu yattı Allah'ın dağı dedi, ne bu ya dedi, Allah'ın dağı dedi ama kafayı vurdu yattı. Ben biraz daha dolandım, kardeşi dolandı, gitti camın önüne falan böyle bu ne ya falan dedi. İsyân yani aslında hepimizdeki de isyandı. Demet

<sup>83</sup> Ben bir şey düşünmüyordum, yani hani diyordum zamanı geldiği zaman yapacak gelecek yani şey düşünmüyordum öyle aklıma pek fazla kötü bir şey de getiriyordum, gelmiyordu ki zaten yani aklıma öyle bir şey gelmiyordu. Sevinç

be doing military service. Military service will be done if it should be, but I wish it could be done at a place devoid of terror.<sup>84</sup>

Before [my son's military service] I used to say "How happy for you that you're sending your son to his service, God will it to all people" to the people who have sent their children, but I saw that it's not that happy when it happens to you. It took a lot of time for me to accept it, I became perplexed, uneasy.<sup>85</sup>

Military service, as apparent in the narratives, is something which is a source of celebration and congratulation, but until one experiences it herself.

The unthinkable of the service also continues for a certain while when the parents do not want to think about the unthinkable, in other words, the "East". In this sense, the 'strategies' that are used to avoid thinking about the place of deployment, which is the reality itself, also arises when the place of service is anticipated yet not talked about between the family members. Sevinç, whose son was a commando, interprets this with the following words:

He [his husband] didn't say anything to me. After a while he said well didn't we already know it, weren't we a hundred percent sure that he would be deployed to the East? We did. At that moment I felt very bad, I still get goose bumps when it comes to my mind. They say that there's a moment when your brain stops working; well it was exactly like that, my ears no longer heard, it was as if my whole logic stopped working.<sup>86</sup>

The unthinkable of the "East", in this sense, is a common aspect in a big percent of the narratives. The "East" as a region is always 'there' as a part of Turkey yet also not seen or cared about due to its non-presence in the lives of the women. In other words, the "East", just like military service, is not something which the women particularly think about before their son's deployment yet it is not something as ordinary and

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<sup>84</sup> Evet, yani onu öyle düşünüyordum, erkekler askerlik yapacak, erkek çocuklar askerlik yapacak diye düşünüyordum. Ama gönül ister ki terörün olmadığı bir ortamda askerlik yapılınsın tabii askerlik yapılacaksa, yapılması gerekiyorsa yapılacak tabii ki ama terörün olmadığı bir ortamda yapılınsın. Sevim

<sup>85</sup> Eskiden askere gidenler mesela çocuğu yakını gider, ne kadar güzel ne mutlu size hani oğlunuzu askere gönderiyorsunuz Allah herkese nasip etsin; ama insanın kendi başına gelince öyle olmuyormuş yani çok çok kabullenmem çok vakit aldı, huzursuz oldum, tedirgin oldum. Hayrunisa

<sup>86</sup> Şimdi hiçbir şey demedi bana işte aradan zaman geçti, dedi zaten dedi bilmiyor muyduk, biliyorduk dedi hani Doğu'ya gider yüzde yüz diye, Hakkari'ye düşmüş, o anda zaten çok kötü oldum, hala aklıma geldiği zaman tüylerim diken diken oluyor. Hani derler ya beyninin durduğu bir an vardır, aynen öyle oldu; kulaklarım duymadı, hani resmen mantığın bitiyor öyle bir şey yaşadım. Sevinç

familiar as the service itself. Sevinç's further comments on the place of Hakkari are thus quite striking:

No, I didn't [know the East/Southeast], I knew it only from the television. To be honest, I didn't even bother about Hakkari until Levent went there. Of course we saw it on TV, but I didn't quite pay attention I guess, I don't know. But once Levent went to do his service, Hakkari was always on my mind. I always saw and heard the word Hakkari, for example, on TV, radio, and newspapers. Then I said well it was always there but I never noticed it.<sup>87</sup>

As observed from Sevinç's narrative, the "East" goes unnoticed until one has to literally encounter it. The fact that it creates such disturbance, on the other hand, is due to the limited knowledge on the region and its limited representation. The "East" is encountered solely on TV or in newspapers, needless to say, with cliché narratives perpetuating the dichotomies of "us" as the 'educated and wealthy Westerners' and "them" as the 'backward Easterners'. The media, in this sense, becomes the 'mediator' introducing and translating these 'unknown' and 'unintelligible' territories and their people to the "Westerners".

Another significant aspect which makes the "East" such a source of fear and panic, I believe, is that the connotations of the "East", contrary to the connotations of military service are quite negative. In other words, military service, which is regarded as a part of "Turkish culture" is usually regarded as a "duty to the homeland" yet this "duty" does not seem to involve any negative aspect of the service, like going to the conflict zone, death, violence, and killing. The "East" as both an unknown and 'far away' territory evokes these negative connotations which the "culturalization" of military service has made invisible. It is then, I argue, seeing the military and military

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<sup>87</sup> Hiç, hayır hayır, anca televizyonlarda falan. Yani açıkçası o kadar da mesela ben Hakkari, Hakkari, Levent askere gidene kadar hiç üstünde durmuyordum, yani televizyonlarda falan görüyorduk ama yani o kadar da hani dikkat etmiyordum belki de bilmiyorum ama şimdi nasıl Levent askere gitti sanki her dakikada bir gözümün önüne Hakkari geliyor. Mesela televizyonlarda, radyoda, gazetelerde hep Hakkari lafı görüyorum ve duyuyorum. Yani bu da çok şey yapıyor insanı. Yani diyorum demek ki yani hep varmış ama demek ki diyorum ben fark etmemişim. Sevinç

service as a part of “Turkish culture” which makes the “East” as a place of terror, violence, and death in the eyes of the mothers so unthinkable. The neutral connotation of the word “culture” and the heroic narratives dedicated to military service being the indispensable aspect of “Turkish culture” renders the “East” unfathomable.

On the other hand, although it is true that there is a general tendency to react to the place of deployment with shock and awe, it should also be stated that it would not be correct to generalize that the “East” creates a shock for every single prospective soldier since there are also people who would like to be sent to the “East” as seen in the following examples:

He reacted well. He himself wanted to go to the Southeast, he was a boy who liked military service. He wanted to go to the Southeast since he liked adventure. Luck was with him and he was sent to the Southeast. His height was also an aspect which enabled him to go there, but he had also chosen to go to the region. He did his service well and he says he would like to do it again if another chance arises.<sup>88</sup>

Emre was happy when going to his service. He likes military service, he still wears his military jacket and stuff. He likes everything [related to the military] since he likes his homeland. He’s a different kid, at least that’s the case for my child, I cannot say anything for the others.<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, Emre, the son mentioned in the latter excerpt had described his military service as “paying his debt to Anatolia and returning home”.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, during another interview I had conducted, Oğuz, who had been sent to Siirt, stated that he saw military service as a school and that the service had increased his love to the homeland and thus he would do it once again if he had another chance. In a similar manner, Sibil told me how his son, who had conducted his service in Elazığ, tried to sooth his mother about

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<sup>88</sup> Yo yo gayet güzel karşıladı o Güneydoğu’yu, zaten kendisi Güneydoğu’ya gitmek istiyordu yani askerliği seven bir çocuktur. Macerayı daha çok sevdiği için zaten Güneydoğu istedi, şansına da Güneydoğu. Boy zaten boyundan, boyunun da biraz etkisi oldu Güneydoğu’ya gitmekte, biraz da kendi işaretlemiş. Çok da güzel yaptı geldi, gene de gitmek isterim diyor. Ayşegül

<sup>89</sup> Sevinerek gitti Emre seviyordu. Yani askerliği seviyor, daha hala hani montunu giysin şey yapısın, o vatanımı çok sevdiği için her şeyi seviyor yani, farklı bir çocuk, benim oğlum için diyeyim yani başkası için diyemem. Nimet

<sup>90</sup> Personal communication; February 22, 2009.

going to the “East”: “He said look how good this is my dear mother, I’ve studied at Sorbonne and done my service in the “East”, it doesn’t matter whether it’s short or long term, I’m very happy. That’s what he had told me”.<sup>91</sup> In this sense, although living the experience of his son’s service in the “East” as a woman at home is difficult for the mothers, the soldiers may utter different words.

In the two particular aforementioned cases of Ayşegül and Nimet, the mothers with whom I had spoken told me that the initial phase of acceptance was difficult for them. The prospective soldiers were deployed to Diyarbakır and Gaziantep respectively. Although Nimet, the latter interviewee, stated that she had gotten used to the news of his son’s deployment, Ayşegül told me that she had needed to receive psychological support, something which she still lives with, during his son’s service. In the words of Ayşegül, sadness, anxiety, longing, and risk are the main concepts which define the experiences of a mother sending her son to the “East”.

To return to the words of Sibil’s son and Ayşegül’s comments on military service in the “East”, it can be stated that if risk is one of the primary feelings of a mother who sends her son to the “East”, so it is for the soldier to be who goes to the “East”. Just like mothering a soldier who is sent to the East, soldiering in the “East” also represents a challenge to be overcome for the soldier-to-be. While mothering a son who surmounts the challenges of not only doing military service, but also doing it in an area of deprivation is a source of pride and approval of the women’s motherhood, soldiering in the “East” is also the approval of one’s manliness.

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<sup>91</sup> Anacığım dedi bak ne güzel bir şey dedi, Sorbonne’lardan gelip Doğu’larda askerlik yaptım ben dedi, ama kısa dönem ama uzun dönem, çok mutluyum, bana söylediği buydu. Sibil

### **3.2. The Deployment to the “East”**

The East/Southeast regions of Turkey, as previously explained in the beginning of this chapter, experienced an abrupt militarization with the declaration of the state of emergency in ten different cities in 1987. The conflict between the PKK and the TAF heightened in the 1990s where news of the “martyrdom” of soldiers were a perpetual part of the news and the grieving mothers of the “martyred” soldiers a significant component of this picture. What was conveyed to the public in the news related to the death of these soldiers was that the army was allegedly sending people from a disadvantaged social and economic background particularly to the East/Southeast regions. It was said that it is always the “children of the poor” who are sent to the conflict zone and who die there. Although this is a contested topic still mentioned in the public arena, whether or not they agreed with this and how they regarded their son’s deployment to the East/Southeast has also been a question that I had posed to the interviewees.

As had been previously demonstrated, the first encounter of the mothers and their children with the “East” is generally lived with a reaction of shock. In this sense, regardless of their class and social background although the women do believe that their children will not be sent to the “East”, they do not agree with the saying that men coming from a socially and economically disadvantaged background are deployed to the “East”. What they all agree upon is that this is mere chance since their children could be sent anywhere. When asked whether they think that people from a disadvantaged social and economic background are particularly deployed to the “East”, all but one responded by saying that the place of deployment is determined by chance. Ayşe, on the other hand, said:

Yes, I had recently heard that on TV on a program someone was asking why isn't the prime minister's son or somebody else's son of a high status not going to the Southeast, why is it always the son of farmer this and son of the craftsman that. It had evoked my attention then where I thought whether it really is working this way, but I didn't search this issue, I don't know.<sup>92</sup>

Despite this standpoint, however, it is still thought provoking to think about why the "East" causes such a shock and surprise if any place and region is expected as the place of deployment. In the words of Sevim related to his son's deployment, the East is seen as a "lottery" which hits people.<sup>93</sup>

Although not overtly manifested in the narratives, I would like to argue that the reactions given by the family members to the place of deployment are closely connected to the social and economic background of the ex-soldiers. The people coming from relatively lower economic backgrounds when asked whether they believe in the saying that people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are sent to the "East", they responded by saying that people with higher education levels are also sent to the "East". When the same question was asked to the people with higher economic and social statuses, they responded by saying that they do not agree with this since their children's friends with a high level of education are also sent to the "East". While it seems that both sides agree with the nonexistence of such a theorization, it seems that the shock that is caused by their children's place of deployment, which gets defined as a "lottery", is derived exactly from the fact that they had assumed he would be sent elsewhere since he has a high level of education. Thus, while the response of the economically disadvantaged people tend to imply that 'the rich' and 'educated' *also* go

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<sup>92</sup> Evet, geçenlerde televizyonda mı hatta birisi bir programda söylüyordu dikkatimi çekmişti, yani niye yüksek rütbeli insanların işte başbakanın atıyorum cumhurbaşkanının oğlu evladı hiç duyulmuyor gitti Güneydoğu'ya bilmem neye diye de hep işte çiftçi bilmem nenin oğlu, bilmem ne ustanın evladı falan diye öyle bahsediyorlardı o zaman dikkatimi çekti benim de acaba hakikaten böyle mi işliyor yani mekanizma diye ama çok da fazla etüt etmedim bu konuyu bilmiyorum yani. Aşşe

<sup>93</sup> Piyango gibi bize çarptı.

to the “East” and that it is not only their sons being deployed there, the response of the economically advantaged people, on the other hand, tends to imply that while not expected, their children will *also* ‘share the burden’ in protecting the country.

Another explanation which the mothers give for the unexpected deployment of their son to the “East” is the general saying that people who are born in the “West” are sent to the “East” whereas the ones born in the “East” are sent to the “West”. Eda, who fervently opposed the question as to whether only people from an economically disadvantaged social background are sent to East commented on the issue as such:

This is wrong and I’ll tell you why it’s wrong. My sister also has a son who had done his military service a year before my son, he did in Batman and he was a university graduate, a well educated man. So the belief that poorly educated people are sent to the Southeast is wrong. I think that’s determined according to the need over there, but I’m not quite sure as to what the criteria are. The general opinion is that people who are from the West are sent to the East and the ones who are from the East are sent to the West, this opinion has existed for years and it might be true cause it’s more logical. Since the East and Southeast are our problematic regions, they might be such an exchange program for the Turkish citizens to mingle and enable them to see the regions they haven’t seen or gain the experiences which they haven’t gained.<sup>94</sup>

This opinion also uttered by a couple of other people is also significant in the sense that it is one of the rare instances where the “West”, although still vague as to its boundaries, is mentioned. In this sense, the service in the “East” is also seen as a ‘chance’ for the “Western, educated” children to get to know the “East”, which again turns the “East” into this far away foreign place waiting to be discovered by the “Westerners”.

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<sup>94</sup> Bu yanlış, niye yanlış şöyle söyleyeyim çünkü benim kız kardeşimin de bir oğlu var, o da Ahmet’ten bir sene önce askerliğini yapmıştı, o da Batman’da yaptı, o da yani sonuçta üniversite mezunu, gayet iyi eğitim almış olan bir çocuktuktu, yani ya da bir gençti. Dolayısıyla Güneydoğu’da daha az eğitilmişler gider diye bir varsayım bence yanlış. O, oradaki ihtiyaçlara göre zannediyorum tespit ediliyor ama bunun kriteri nedir onu da tam bilmiyorum. Şöyle bir genel bir kanı var o da Batı doğumlu olanlar yani Batı kökenli olanlar Doğu’ya, Doğu kökenli olanlar Batı’ya daha çok gönderiliyor diye genel bir izlenim yıllardan beri vardır, bu da doğru olabilir, bu akla yakın çünkü. Bu daha çok akla yakın çünkü hani Doğu ve Güneydoğu sorunlu bölgemiz olduğu için yani Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’ndeki vatandaşları kaynaştırmak ya da işte görmediği yerleri göstermek, edinmedikleri tecrübeleri edindirmek ve kazandırmak için böyle bir değişim programı dahilinde şey yapılabilir yani askerlikte yönlendirme yapabilirler. Eda

### 3.3. Putting the “East” on the Map

In his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson talks about the creation of the map as a means of controlling and setting the boundaries of the nation in addition to the census. In talking about the emergence of the logo-map, Anderson says: “Instantly recognizable, everywhere visible, the logo-map penetrated deep into the popular imagination, forming a powerful emblem for the anticolonial nationalisms being born” (2006: 175). The map with its all-encompassing nature ties and connects the diverse and heterogeneous aspects of the nation into one single whole projecting the nation as unfragmented, indivisible, and compact.

Similarly, the “East”, although so foreign to most of the ‘Western urbanites’, is regarded as an “indivisible” part of Turkey and thus a significant component of the Turkish map, “a tightly bounded territorial unit” (Anderson 2006: 175) colored and adorned with the Turkish flag during special days like national holidays, constitutes a significant part of the popular imagination fostering a sense of an intact community among the citizens of the country.<sup>95</sup> These citizens might not have seen any other place apart from their own space of inhabitation, but the map sustains a living image of the country as one single community always there and present. Despite this strong fact, however, apart from three women, none of the mothers, just like their sons, had been to the “East” before and could not quite locate the place of the cities to which their sons are deployed. The same reaction of where the places the soldiers are sent to also occurs in the narratives of the soldiers. Emine’s son talks about his reaction with the following

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<sup>95</sup> Although the maps of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia can be found in the appendices, my aim in placing the maps in the appendix is not to reproduce the stereotypical and Orientalized representations of the “East”, which I believe just like the “West” is a construct. It is rather to demonstrate the arbitrariness of the boundaries, which I at the beginning of this research had also taken for granted by regarding the East solely as a territorial unit and disregarding its connotations, perceptions, and representations. The maps, I believe, is an interesting contrast with the vague representations of the “East” in mothers’s narratives and the strictly yet arbitrarily drawn boundaries of a territorial unit.

words: “I was saying Siirt, there really is such a place called Siirt”.<sup>96</sup> The reaction of Emine is also a similar one where she asks her son where Siirt is. A similar reaction is also observed in Sevim’s narrative where she describes how she had felt when she heard his son’s place of deployment:

He did it [his military service] in Ağrı-Patnos. Well, firstly we were greatly shocked when we heard Ağrı-Patnos. Of course military service can be done anywhere, but I thought it would be more close to the city center. Ağrı-Patnos utterly shocked us and my son. To be honest, I hadn’t heard such a name or a place [before]. When I heard Ağrı I thought it would be the top of Mount Ağrı.<sup>97</sup>

As apparent in Sevim’s above narrative, the “East” is only known by the mothers through certain symbols. Ağrı for Sevim, for instance, only signifies Mount Ağrı; it is unthinkable as a place of settlement. The “East”, in this sense, also seems to be an empty territory.

In addition to this, although the “East” seems to be a homogeneous geography on the map, it also seems to be in a hierarchical order where there are degrees of good/bad East:

Well, we were expecting the East, but we know that Tunceli is a dangerous region where events are taking place. I thought why it couldn’t be Erzincan, Elazığ, Malatya because those cities are surrounding Tunceli. We said how on earth did Tunceli come up? But of course there are also places like Hakkari, Bingöl, or Şırnak; there are worse places.<sup>98</sup>

We weren’t expecting [the East], we were shocked. I was very sad. I was praying for him to be safe even though he would be far away. We

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<sup>96</sup> Siirt diyordum hani Siirt diye bir yer var mıymış, gerçekten varmış. Emine

<sup>97</sup> Ağrı Patnos’ta yaptı. Özgür’ün yaptığı dönemler tabii ki bir kere Ağrı Patnos çıktığı zaman çok büyük şoke olduktum. O bölge, yani her tarafta yapılabilir tabii askerlik de, sanıyordum ki yani böyle merkezlerde falan olacak, Ağrı Patnos bizi böyle çok şoke etti, kendisini de çok şoke etti, hiç duymamıştım daha doğrusu, böyle bir isim yer de duymamıştım. Ağrı deyince Ağrı Dağı’nın tepesi falan diye düşündüm, öyle bir şeyler. Sevim

<sup>98</sup> Vallahi Doğu bu kadar şöyle diyeyim Doğu bekliyorduk ama böyle Tunceli’yi duyunca birden ya dedim Tunceli, tehlikeli bir bölge biliyoruz, olayların olduğu yer, niye dedim Erzincan değil, Elazığ değil, Malatya değil; çünkü etrafında hep o şehirler var. Tunceli nereden çıktı dedik, bunu dedik yani, nereden çıktı Tunceli? Ama tabii bunun yanında Hakkari’si var, Bingöl’ü var, Şırnak’ı var, daha kötülere var. Demet

thanked God that he didn't go to worse places even though Kars is far away; there are places like Şırnak or Hakkari.<sup>99</sup>

I don't know why, but I had expected him to stay in Istanbul [for his service], I knew that it wouldn't happen, but I wanted to think that it would. I was very sad when Gaziantep came up, but I realized that [the panic] was unnecessary. Some children go to such far away places, he went to a good place, he could find food when he went out [during his weekend leaves]<sup>100</sup>

As observed in these narratives, there are certain 'desirable' places, in other words, the good choices among the worst to which the mothers would like their children to be sent if going to the "East" is an inevitable process. While cities such as Antep or Erzincan can be regarded as relatively safe and desirable, Hakkari or Şırnak appear to be the least desirable and most dangerous places.

Interestingly, the "East" which is experienced by the soldiers and evaluated by the mothers seems to be restricted with its comparisons with big city life and opportunities. The "East", in other words, seems to be equated with the "facilities" that it accommodates. It is regarded as a "good" and "comfortable" place so long as the soldiers in service do not have the difficulty in finding the goods that they were used to consuming at home. Interestingly, security does not seem to arise as the primary issue to be talked about. The following narratives of Sevim and Gökçen give a hint about this:

It [the fear related to the East] did fade away after I saw Batman; it's a very nice city, especially that main street. Well, he would be able to find everything; all the food, pizza, and stuff. There was a place called Mado, it's even better than the one in Istanbul. It was constructed by someone from Ankara, it's a three-story building. The kids used to go there during the weekend, all the soldiers would go there during the holidays to eat what they wanted.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Beklemiyorduk, şok olduk. Ben çok üzüldüm. Dua ediyordum tabii uzak da olsa rahat olsun iyi olsun istedik hani uzak da olsa daha kötü yerlere düşmediğine şükrettik, hani Şırnak var Hakkari var. Arzu

<sup>100</sup> Çok şartlanmışım hep kendimi nedense sanki İstanbul olacakmış gibi bekliyordum, olmayacak bir şey de öyle yakıştırmıştım. Birden Gaziantep olunca çok üzüldüm; ama yersiz olduğunu sonradan anladım. Bazı çocuklar ne kadar uzaklara gidiyor, iyi bir yere gitti, çıktığı zaman yemek buldu yiyeceği hani çevre güzel... Hayrunisa

<sup>101</sup> Geçti geçti, gidip gördükten sonra Batman'ın içini de gördüm baya bir şehir güzel o ana caddesi falan. E sonra aradığımı bulabilecek, her türlü yemekler pizzalar şeyler, hele bir Mado diye bir yer vardı, belki İstanbul'daki Mado öyle güzel değildir, Ankaralı biri yapmış onu galiba üç katlı falan, oraya gidiyorlardı

Well, his [son's] thoughts weren't different from mine while going to Patnos; he went there thinking that he would be going to the middle of nowhere. To be honest, Patnos is a very uncivilized place, it's a very underdeveloped town, but the military brigade is very civilized. It's a very big brigade, my son tells me that they could find everything in there and that they didn't feel the need to go down town since the town was very underdeveloped. I think he felt better after he saw the brigade.<sup>102</sup>

Sevim equates Batman with Mado, a patisserie which she says is much better and bigger than the one in Istanbul. Her relief comes from the fact that his son will not face difficulty in finding the same comfort which he had at home. Interestingly, in all the similar narratives, the "East" for the mothers does not seem to be an inhabited space. The mothers, in other words, do not utter any concern as to whether their children will get used to the *people* of the East, but rather seem to be more concerned about whether they will be able to find the *products* that they were consuming back home. Similarly, when asked how their children had experienced the East, the responses are related to consumption rather than acquaintance with people. The "East", in this sense, seems to arise in the narratives as a place of deprivation where the goods accessed at home may not be found.

On the other hand, relating the "East" to commodities and at times seeing the "East" as a commodity itself, like in the "culture tours" for example, also arises in the narratives of the women who seem to become interested in and curious about the "East" after their son's service. Again, the images of the "East" that they imagine, however, do not particularly involve the *people* of the "East", but rather the *places* of the "East". For the women who have only been to the oath taking ceremonies in the "Eastern" cities, a

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haftasonu çocuklar, bütün askerler gidiyormuş zaten tatil olduğu zaman gidip istediği yemeği yiyor pizza tatlı tuzlu her şey var. Gökçen

<sup>102</sup> Valla şimdi giderken tabii ki benim düşüncemden çok farklı değildi onunki de, o da böyle dağ başı bir yere gidiyorum herhalde diye gitti. Hakikaten Patnos hiç ilerlememiş bir yer, yani çok geri kalmış bir kasaba ama askeri tugay son derece ilerde. Yani askeri tugay da çok büyük bir tugaymış zaten orada. Askeri tugayda her şey var esasında, biz diyor kasabaya inmek ihtiyacı hissetmiyorduk esasında diyor, indiğim vakit tugaydan daha şeyde geride bir pozisyondaydı diyor çünkü orası diyor. Yani gittikten sonra tugayın içini gördükten sonra daha iyi hissetti kendini herhalde diye düşünüyorum. Sevim

direct correlation comes to mind between the “modernity of the brigade” and the circumstances of the “East”, where the image of the “East” becomes the image of the brigade itself. The women who had been to the “East”, which are quite few in number, on the other hand, have mostly been able to do so with the “culture tours” that are organized to the East/Southeast. The “East” that the women see in these tours, is thus shaped by the viewpoint of the tour organizers where solely certain “touristic” places which are “landmarks of the East” are included in the trip.<sup>103</sup>

The mental maps of the people regarding the “East” reflect the “East” as an uninhabited place. The “East”, if never visited, arises in the narratives of the mothers with certain stereotypical narratives, the poor “East” for example, and certain cliché symbols and landmarks like that of Mount Ağrı. People, in other words, get acquainted with the “East” through commodified symbols. The familiarity regarding the “East” does, even in a limited way, increase very much. The image of the “East” for the mothers, however, does not necessarily change after their sons’ departure since their children also experience an “East” laden with symbols and landmarks or usually the barracks since they do not have permission to leave their units due to security reasons. The map of the “East” as an uninhabited territory does not, therefore, stay intact.

### **3.4. The Connotation of the “East” and “Easterners”**

There have been two particular instances in the narratives where people in addition to the places and products were also mentioned in relation to the “East”. When asked whether his son was able establish any contact with the civilian people living in the region, Sevim said that a couple had very much helped his son and started telling her

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<sup>103</sup> For an interesting study of these “culture tours”, see Sandra Finger’s *The Meaning of a Discovery: Tourist Gaze and Tourist Narratives in Southeastern Anatolia*. 2008. Sabancı University: MA Thesis.

experiences with the “people of the region” by stating that they were indeed very hospitable people:

The Kurds who are outside of terror are actually very warm and welcoming people, the ones who engage in terror should be something different, I don't know, since they have taken away so many lives, but I've known people from Antep and Diyarbakır, the people of the region, are all very nice people. They were all Kurds, but they were very different people. They are also unhappy about this terror, they're also not content or happy, they also don't have peace, either.<sup>104</sup>

Sevim, being one of the few people who had been to the East/Southeast among the women with whom I had talked, recalls the people she has met on her way with sympathy. According to her the ‘ordinary’ Kurds are warm and welcoming people whereas she states that she has difficulty in understanding the ‘other’ ones who join the PKK. Before moving on to further discuss this issue, it should be stated that Sevim's narrative is an exception for using the word “Kurd” since it is one of the very few narratives which mentions Kurds and Kurdishness in relation to the East. In all of the narratives, the women talk about “Easterners” without specifying what exactly “Easterner” means. Despite this vagueness, however, they specify the “good/bad Easterners”. The fear that the “East” connotes, thus, leaves its place to a relief when they encounter with the local people, in other words the “good Easterners”.

The second narrative which focused on people rather than places or commodities was Gökçen's story. I believe that Gökçen's depiction of her direct encounter with the people of the region says more about the perceptions of the “East” and “Easterners” than the theoretical analyses. It is further interesting and worthwhile to talk about the fact that Gökçen narrated this story when asked about whether there is a particular manner in which the mothers of the soldiers should behave:

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<sup>104</sup> Yani bu o terörün dışındaki Kürtler çok sıcak insanlar esasında ama teröre bulaşmış insanlar yani başka türlü bir şey herhalde, bu işleri yaptıklarına göre bu kadar insanlara kıydıklarına göre; ama oradaki yöre halkı, ben Antepli de tanıdım Diyarbakırlı da tanıdım çok iyi insanlar, çok hakikaten onların hepsi Kürttüler ama çok farklı insanlardı, onlar da memnun değiller, o terör belasından onlar da mutlu değillerdi, onların da huzuru yok. Sevim

I don't think that [there is a particular manner in which the soldiers' mothers should behave]. I'll speak as I want to. Should I speak in fright in my own homeland? I'll tell what I think. Look I even talked on the bus in the East. They first had a Kurdish tape on [in the bus] then I said we're all human, why should a human being be scared of another? I wouldn't be in this bus now if I were scared. They understood that I didn't go there with fear so the driver took out the Kurdish tape right away and put a Turkish one. I said why should a human being be scared of another one, this is also our homeland; [so they thought] she's not an enemy, she came here with good intentions, he took out the [Kurdish] tape and put a Turkish one.<sup>105</sup>

What arises in Gökçen's narrative is a common aspect mentioned in all narratives regarding the "East". The "East", being an unknown and far away territory, directly connotes fear, which I assume is also a concern for the safety and security the mothers feel for their children and for themselves when they are in the region. While mentioning this story, Gökçen also said "I had a fear inside, but I didn't show it so that I could look brave".<sup>106</sup> As previously emphasized, the fear that is manifest, however, tends to leave its place to relief for the mothers who have been to the region when they see that the "people of the East" are also good people. The "good Easterner", in this sense, gets defined to be the one who does not treat the 'outsiders' in a hostile manner, who is welcoming and hospitable.

The feeling of fear that the "East" connotes, thus, gets amalgamated with the "good/bad Easterner" discourse. Emine, whose first son had also been to the "East" for his service states that she had initially felt bad and scared since she did not know the region, but got used to it after his second son was also sent to the "East":

To be honest, it [the East] doesn't connote anything my dear. They say East is like this, East is like that, but I was never nervous. There are also very good people in the East, there are both good and bad people

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<sup>105</sup> Öyle bir şey düşünmüyorum. İçimden ne gelirse onu konuşurum. Kendi vatanımda korkarak mı konuşacağım? Düşüncem neyse onu söylerim. Bak Doğu'da bile minibüste konuştum, ilk önce şey koymuşlardı Kürtçe kaset, hepimiz insanız, insan insandan korkar mı, korksam zaten şu anda burada minibüsün içinde olmazdım dedim, sonra baktılar ki bu korkarak gelmemiş, hemen Kürtçe kasedi çıkardı Türkçe kaset koydu minibüsteki şoför. İnsan insandan korkar mı, burası da bizim vatanımız dedim ya, bu bize düşman olarak gelmemiş demek ki iyi niyetle geldi kasedi çıkardı Türkçe kaset koydu. Gökçen

<sup>106</sup> İçimde bir korku vardı ama belli etmedim, kendimi cesur göstereyim diye. Gökçen

everywhere, isn't it also like that in Istanbul? It must be, people from all over Turkey have settled here. Isn't it like that elsewhere? It is. I mean there are both good and bad people in the East, I wasn't that nervous.<sup>107</sup>

Semiha, on the other hand, whose son had been to Mardin as a commando describes what the "East" connotes to her with the following words:

When they say the East, the terror connotes bad things. Not everyone in the East is bad, but we get a little scared because of the terror. The Easterners are also humans, I don't think bad about them, but we get a little scared because of the terror.<sup>108</sup>

Semiha's utterance is an example to the fear of the "East", but also a desire to be fair to the 'real' people of the region. As manifest in Emine's and Semiha's narratives and which can also be observed in other women's narratives, they do not think bad about 'all the Easterners'; it is the PKK and terror which makes them biased against the region. This is, to quote again from Öncü, what creates and sustains the image of the East as a "semi-real, semi-imaginary geography" (2003: 1) for the mothers. This double layered image of the "East", thus, also reiterates the image of the warm and welcoming "good Easterners" who should be separated from the ones who engage in terror.

One sharp exception to these narratives and an overt dislike of the "East" and "Easterners" arose in Sevinç's narrative when asked about the conflict in the East/Southeast:

We're living on the same land so what are you fighting for? And you know I can't stand one thing; there are also many Kurds living in Istanbul, those belonging to the PKK and all that sort, I say you take the same bus with me, you eat the same food, maybe you live much better than me, but you come here and burn the bus, why are you burning it, am I not right? You take that bus with me, then you shouldn't come here, that's what I think. Since you think bad then I also feel bad about you, am I not right? You live here, in Istanbul so why are you doing this? There

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<sup>107</sup> Valla hiçbir şey uyanmadı ablacım, yani şeyli görmedim ben, diyorlar ya işte Doğu böyle öyle ama ben hiç tedirgin olmadım, Doğu'da da çok iyi insanlar var, her yerin iyisi var kötüsü var; bu İstanbul'un yok mu? Vardır, her yerden insan gelmiş. Diyelim başka yerin yok mu, var. Yani Doğu'nun da iyisi de var kötüsü de var yani öyle pek tedirgin olmadım yani. Emine

<sup>108</sup> Doğu deyince işte bu terör dedikleri zaman bazı kötü bir şeyler çağrıştırıyor, yani Doğu dedik de Doğu insanların hepsi kötü diye değil ama işte terör olduğu için biraz korkuyoruz Doğulu da insan onlar da ona bir şey demiyorum onlara ama işte bu terör olduğu için biraz korkuyoruz. Semiha

are many things happening in Okmeydanı, in Gazi Street, for instance, they burn and demolish everything. Then how am I supposed to like you? I say I don't.<sup>109</sup>

Sevinç's narrative is the only one where a criticism of Kurds is manifested in such a strong manner. Although uttered as the answer to a different question, Gökçen's narrative also reveals a possible feeling of animosity regarding the 'people of the East':

That pain [related to their son's death] will never soothe in the heart of the mothers of the martyrs. They will always see the people in the East as enemies since their children have died there. There will be cold look when someone says "Easterner", but everyone would unite if it weren't for this [terror]. She [the mother of a martyr] won't even want to look at him/her when she sees an Easterner.<sup>110</sup>

While Gökçen does not use the word "Kurd", the "East" which connotes fear due to terror also directly connotes Kurdishness. Although no direct expression of fear and prejudice of the Kurdish people has been uttered, the fact that the "East" is correlated with terror covertly implies a fear against the "Easterners", who are equated with Kurds.

In addition to these, the lacking and deprived "East" also connotes poverty. According to the narratives, while the East brings deprivation to mind, it is also the reason why the people of the region join the PKK:

Poverty, deprivation, then unity, actually separation [not unity] because there is a Turk-Kurd separation in the Southeast. Even my son was saying mom be grateful for the food you're eating and the place where you're sleeping, there's great poverty there. When you say Southeast, it's only poverty that comes to my mind; unemployment and poverty.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Aynı topraklarda oturuyoruz yani neyin savaşını yapıyorsun, ne var? Bir de şeyi hazmedemiyorum mesela bu İstanbul'da da çok Kürt vardır o PKK'lı mıdır her ne zıkkımsa hepsinden vardır, benle beraber diyorum aynı otobüse biniyorsun, benim yediğimi sen de yiyorsun, belki de benden çok daha rahat yaşıyorsun; ama sen geliyorsun otobüsü yakıyorsun, niye yakıyorsun onu ya, öyle değil mi? Benimle beraber sen de biniyorsun, o zaman gelmeyeceksin buraya, yani ben öyle düşünüyorum. Demek ki sen art niyet düşünüyorsun ki ben de sana karşı öyle düşünüyorum, öyle değil mi? Şimdi burada yaşıyorsun, İstanbul'da yaşıyorsun, niye bunu yapıyorsun ki? Mesela bir olaylar oluyor Okmeydanı bu aşağı tarafları bir Gazi Mahallesi bilmem ne, yakmadık yıkmadık hiçbir şey bırakmıyorlar, ben seni nasıl seveyim o zaman, sevmiyorum diyorum. Sevinç

<sup>110</sup> Şehit anneleri konusunda valla ömür boyu o acı onların yüreğinden çıkmayacak, devamlı Doğu'daki bütün insanları düşman görecekler çünkü oğulları o tarafta olduğu için. Doğulu dediği zaman bir soğuk bakış olacak Doğululara ama bu olaylar olmasaydı herkes bir olurdu. İstanbul'un içinde bile bir Doğulu gördüğü zaman o tarafa bakası gelmez. Gökçen

<sup>111</sup> Yokluk, eziklik, ondan sonra ne bileyim ben birlik daha doğrusu ikilik, Güneydoğu'da biliyorsunuz Türk-Kürt ayrımı var, ben Güneydoğu benim oğlum bile diyordu askerlik yaparken anne yani dedi çok

He [his son] says mom when you consider it, the people of the region are also right, they don't have any job or anything, but it's still not normal for me. Well alright, I don't say anything to its people, but Levent stayed there for a year, they took their weekend leaves twice, it was forbidden they couldn't go out. Levent used to tell that the people you see during the day, like the man in the supermarket, the butcher, you see them in the mountain at night. He says not everyone is like that, but most of them can be so.<sup>112</sup>

To be honest, the East doesn't deserve this. When I say East, I think of our homeland as a whole. I think the East as a place of deprivation and think that we could have thought in a much different manner about the East if it weren't for the deprivation. There wouldn't be this much pain and bad thoughts. There wouldn't be sadness, I would have wanted to think about there as a normal city. On the other hand, the things that we hear from the soldiers on TV, the things that we watch and read influence us greatly. I find the cities of the East more warm, I see them exactly like Anatolia. The Western parts are more European, the other part [the East] is like real Anatolia for me due to the warmness of the people, but I think it as such since opportunities have not reached there.<sup>113</sup>

In addition to emphasizing the deprivation discourse which recurs in the narratives, Deniz's narrative also introduces another recurring connotation of the "East" in the narratives: the "East" as the warm, welcoming, and exotic Anatolia. According to this narrative, the people of the "East" are different from those living in the other regions of Turkey. While the people in other regions are more "European", which implies being self centered and cold, the "people of the East" are more warm and welcoming. Övünç,

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burada gelin yatmanıza yediğiniz ekmeğe dikkat edin, orada çok yokluk var. Güneydoğu dedin mi aklıma yokluk geliyor, başka hiçbir şey gelmiyor, işsizlik ve yokluk geliyor. Ayşegül

<sup>112</sup> Şimdi anne diyor mantıklı düşünürsen oranın insanı da haklı. Yani oranın diyor insanı da haklı iş yok bilmem ne yok; ama yani gene de ne olursa olsun şey geliyor bana. Yani tamam insanların falan bir şey demiyorum ama mesela diyor normalde diyor Levent, ki onlarda mesela çarşı izni falan yoktu, tam bir sene kaldı, iki sene mi ne çarşı iznine çıktılar, yasaktı zaten çıkamıyorlardı. Hani şey anlatıyorlar diyordu Levent, normalde gündüz görürsün normal bakkaldır veya işte markettir veya kasaptır ama gece görürsün onu dağlarda. Yani halkın hepsi diyor bir olmayabilir ama gene de çoğunluğu o şekilde olabiliyor diyordu. Sevinç

<sup>113</sup> Yani aslında hak etmiyor Doğu, Doğu derken bizim bir vatan olarak bir bütün olarak düşünüyorum, imkansızlığın nasıl söyleyeyim, imkansızlığın oraya ulaşmadığını düşünüyorum, belki de ulaşabilseydi daha farklı düşünebilecektik. İmkanlar oraya gitseydi daha farklı olacaktı, bu kadar çok acılar olmayacaktı, kötü düşünceler olmayacaktı, hüznün olmayacaktı yani normal bir şehir olarak düşünmek isterdim ben orayı. Ama mesela öbür taraftan şimdi en çok askerlerin televizyonda duyduklarımız basında izlediklerimiz okuduklarımız falan tabii insanı çok etkiliyor bunlar, ister istemez çok etkiliyor. Bir kere ben Doğu şehirlerini daha sıcakkanlı, tam bir Anadolu gibi olarak düşünürüm ben, Batı tarafları daha böyle şey Avrupalı, öbür taraf gerçek Anadolu gibi görürüm ben insanların sıcaklığını toprak olarak ama tabii oraya imkanların ulaşmadığını düşündüğüm için imkansızlık nedeniyle öyle olduğunu düşünüyorum. Deniz

who has lived in Erzurum for four years and Sibil, who has never been to the “East” apart from her one time visit to his son’s oath taking ceremony interpret the people of the “East” as such:

I have always thought that the East is very beautiful, attractive, and original. My husband is also from the Southeast, we also know the Southeast to a certain extent so the East isn’t a very foreign region for us.<sup>114</sup>

I always view things as not events, but as values, those places [the East] are the places where civilization, evolution has started. I find it really mystical, I don’t see it as present life, I view it differently. Of course our Istanbul has also become like that, it’s very different, it’s not like before. They are beautiful places, but we haven’t been able to take care of our values, we don’t know how to...<sup>115</sup>

While the Orientalist approach to the “East”, apart from three narratives, does not manifest itself with the expression of the ‘far away’ “East” as the exoticized other, the Orientalist discourse is still reproduced in the narratives of the women by creating the lacking, poor, deprived, remote, imaginary East. The myth of the ‘warm and welcoming Easterner’, thus, goes hand in hand with the image of the ‘destitute East’.

Before moving on to the other arguments related to the “East”, I would like to return to Deniz’s utterance related to the “East” to discuss another issue, which I had briefly mentioned before and which I believe to be significant regarding all the comments on the “East”. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said says, “the Orient is not an inert fact of nature. It is not merely *there*, just as the Occident itself is not just *there* either” (1995: 4). Despite the fact that the words “East” and “Easterner” are extensively used in all of the narratives, the word “West” or “Westerner” is rarely uttered in relation to the “East”. Although not mentioned or discussed in the interviews,

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<sup>114</sup> Doğu’nun ben çok güzel ve çok çekici çok özgün olduğunu düşünmüşümdür. Eşim de Güneydoğulu, Güneydoğu’yu da biliyoruz bir ölçüde, yani Doğu bize çok uzak bir şey değil bölge değil. Övünç

<sup>115</sup> Ben hep olaya şey bakarım yaşananlar değil de değer oralar yani medeniyetin “evolution” yani oradan çıkmış şey, çok mistik geliyor bana, şimdiki yaşantı olarak görmüyorum ben orayı, farklı bakıyorum. Muhakkak şimdi İstanbulumuz da öyle oldu, çok farklı eskisi gibi değil. Çok güzel yerler ama sahip çıkamadık işte hiçbir değerimize, bilmiyoruz... Sibil

the “West” seems to be ‘there’ as both an absent yet at the same time omnipresent category. The women rarely mention the “West”, but seem to assume that there is an always already present “East” which can be spoken about. Moreover, while the “Westerner” does not have certain characteristics that define him/her, the “Easterner” gets to be defined as warm, welcoming, exotic, poor, uneducated, good/bad etc. by all of the mothers. It is also interesting that although the word “Kurd” rarely appears in relation to the narratives on the “East”, the “Easterner” seems to connote Kurdish people or Kurdishness whereas the “Westerner” does not have such an equivalent.

It is interesting that despite the definitions of the “Easterner” and the seemingly homogeneous state of the “East”, the boundaries of neither the “West” nor the “East” are quite clear. Although the “East” seems to be more strictly defined in the narratives of the mothers, it is still unclear as to where the “East” starts and ends. Despite the fact that I had contacted people whose children had conducted their service in the East and Southeast according to the geographically defined boundaries,<sup>116</sup> two of my interviewees were surprised to see that I also wanted to incorporate them into the research since according to them the place of their children’s service, which is Gaziantep, could not be regarded as “that East”. Similar comments have been made by other people whose children have been sent to Erzincan or Erzurum where people have stated that these cities “cannot really be considered as East”. In this sense, as also demonstrated above, although the “East” seems to be talked about as a homogeneous land with a homogeneous set of people as “Easterners” living on it, the boundaries between the East and the West are actually quite ambiguous.

### **3.5. The “East” in Conflict**

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<sup>116</sup> The Eastern Anatolia region comprises the cities of Ağrı, Ardahan, Bingöl, Bitlis, Elazığ, Erzincan, Erzurum, Hakkari, Iğdır, Kars Malatya, Muş, Siirt, Tunceli, and Van whereas the Southeast Anatolia region comprises Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Mardin, Şanlıurfa, and Şırnak.

The reason for and solution of the ongoing conflict in the East was another question that the interviewees answered. The women had difficulty in understanding the reason of the conflict, which as Emine has stated “cannot be understood whether it is an inner or an outer war”.<sup>117</sup> Some said this question had nothing to do with their son’s military service and was too long and convoluted to talk about, some constantly underscored that they regarded this as a war between brothers since there is no reason to fight since we are all living under the same flag and on the same land, while a number of mothers said this had nothing to do with Kurdish identity. The general stance towards the reason of the conflict, however, was one of uncertainty.

While most of the women were hopeless about the solution of the conflict, the responses related to its reasons were twofold. First, as previously emphasized, poverty, deprivation and thus lack of attention is thought to be one of the primary reasons as to the reason of the conflict. Gökçen states this with the following words:

The people over there might be thinking that the East doesn’t receive enough attention, which may be the reason [for the conflict]. Maybe they’re doing it to receive attention, I think as such. Many people are unemployed, they have plantations, they’re engaged in smuggling. I can’t think of anything else.<sup>118</sup>

Despite the fact that Gökçen thinks the reason of the conflict to be the poverty and the lack of attention the people in the “East” receive, she continues her sentence with the following words regarding the solution to the conflict: “Well the solution, they want to establish a separate Kurdish state, I think that’s also why this conflict is going on. They already live comfortably in this land, they rule every job, I can’t understand why they

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<sup>117</sup> Valla çözümü olmadı, ne zamandır var sen dediğin gibi yani bilmiyorum aslında bu iç savaş mı dış savaş mı onu da anlayamadık kaç senede biz. Yani terör diye bir şey var anlamadım ama bu terör içinden mi dışardan mı, bir durmadı gitti yani nasıl yansıtım, nasıl söylesem. Emine

<sup>118</sup> Sebebi Doğu’ya fazla ilgi gösterilmiyor düşüncesi var herhalde o taraftaki halkta. Belki de ondan dikkat çekmek için mi yapılıyor bu hareketler, benim düşüncem o; işsiz ya çoğu kişi, tarlası var, dağda bayırda işte kaçakçılık yapıyor bunlar. Başka da bir şey gelmiyor aklıma valla. Gökçen

want to establish a separate state”.<sup>119</sup> A similar response regarding the solution of the conflict also arises in Sevinç’s narrative: “Well, I don’t really think there will be a solution. The solution will be giving that region to them [to the Kurdish people], but how could that be possible? It’s not. I don’t think there’s a solution. This has been like that and will continue to be so”.<sup>120</sup>

Another common reply related to reason of the conflict was the external powers, meaning foreign countries, which have interests in Turkey and the solution is their disengagement from the events:

There are exterior powers. We [Turkey] are in such a good location, I think they have expectations about Turkey; trying to make people fight, uneasy for so many year. I think they have certain expectations; these are all the games of the external powers, everything is their game. The game is still played, I do believe so.<sup>121</sup>

I don’t think it has a particular reason. The reason is it’s America’s game, a game that is played by the state within a state. I think the heads of the state are doing this so that more guns can be sold. I think as such, I don’t know if I’m wrong.<sup>122</sup>

As also manifested in the above narratives, the discourse that a game is being played on Turkey regarding the conflict in East/Southeast is a strong opinion. In the words of Övünç, the reason of the conflict is seen as “the acting of the scenario written by some people rather than the real distress of the Kurds”.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Çözüm bir de ayrıyeten Kürt devleti kurmak istiyorlarmış ya, biraz da ondan bu çatışmalar herhalde. E zaten bu vatanda rahat yaşıyorlar, her işin başındalar. Bence yersiz bu ayrı bir devlet kurmaları, kurmak istemeleri. Gökçen

<sup>120</sup> Valla bence böyle giderse yok gibi, ya orasını onlara vereceksiniz çözümü bu, öyle de bir şey olabilir mi? Olamaz. Bence yok. Yani bu böyle geldi böyle gidecek mi artık bilmiyorum yani. Sevinç

<sup>121</sup> Dış güçler. Vardır ama dış güçler. Konum olarak o kadar güzel yerdeyiz ki. Yani bunu yıllardan beri bir şekilde hep işte insanları birbirine düşürmek, huzursuz etmek; beklentileri var sanıyorum bizden, beklentileri var dış güçlerin oyunları hep, her şey her şey. Hala oynanıyor yani inanıyorum. Sibil

<sup>122</sup> Sebepsiz bir şey bence sebebi ne Amerika’nın yaptığı bir oyun bu, devlet içinde devletin yaptığı bir oyun sebepsiz yani bence şeyler yapıyor bunu baştakiler yaratan, silah satılsın diye benim fikrim o, yoksa başka bir sebebi yok yani, yanlış mı düşünüyorum bilmiyorum. Nimet

<sup>123</sup> Oradaki Kürtlerin sadece Kürtlerin sıkıntısından kaynaklanmasından çok sanıyorum ki gerçekten ve gerçekten birilerinin çıkarı olduğu için yazılmış olan senaryonun oynanmasıdır bu, başka bir şey değil. Övünç

Despite the fact that she thinks the reason of the conflict has got nothing to do with problems or distress related to Kurdishness, Emine was the only interviewee to talk about the daily experiences of the “East”, which deeply affected a certain period of both her and her children’s life. It was also thanks to the question of Emine’s son as to what I thought about “Easterners” that I started to think about what the “East” and people defined as “Easterners” meant both for me and the women I interviewed. It was after my initial reaction of silence when Emine said: “Those people are humiliated you know. They humiliate them because they’re Kurds, then everything gets intermingled”.<sup>124</sup>

Although not directly related to the reasons of the conflict in the “East”, I believe what Emine uttered says more than the vague generalizations about the “East”. She tells the story of how her children were discriminated by being called “Kürtka” (Kurd) by the mothers of the other children just because they had settled to Istanbul from the “East” despite the fact that they are not actually Kurdish. In a similar manner, Emine’s son says: “They should abandon the discrimination and I think this conflict has nothing to do with Kurdishness; I’m not actually a Kurd, but they always regard Easterners as Kurds”.<sup>125</sup>

Interestingly Emine and her son have been the only people among the twenty women I have interviewed to mention the discrimination experienced by the Kurdish people. Emine, as previously stated, did not necessarily regard the discrimination as the primary source of conflict and reiterated the narrative that it is the “outer powers” that control what is going on in the “East”. It is interesting; however, that she acknowledges the lived experiences and comments on them. Also, she seems to be the only one who

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<sup>124</sup> Aşağılanıyor o insanlar biliyor musun? Kürt deyip de hani şey yapıyorlar ondan sonra ne oluyor karışıyor ortalık. Emine

<sup>125</sup> Ayrımcılığı kaldırsalar ve yani dediğim gibi hiçbir alakası yok, ben Kürt değilim aslında Doğulu olan insanlara hep Kürt gözüyle bakıyorlar. Emine’s son

has encountered such discrimination herself since she is an “Easterner” yet she says “not a Kurd”.

In his comments on the “Kurdish issue”, Mesut Yeğen states that the initial stages of the issue was based on denying the existence of a separate Kurdish identity by giving the Kurdish people “a chance” to become a Turk yet this later turned into an assimilationist oppression (2006: 53-55). Emine’s narrative seems to imply the repercussions of this ideology and the only one to do so among the other mothers. This does not mean, however, that other interviewees are aware of this discrimination and purposefully do not talk about it. Rather, the silence which prevails here, I believe, is one of confusion deriving from the partial success of the discourse that the discontent of the Kurdish people and the activation of the Kurdish movement is because of backwardness and traditionalism rather than a particular problem with this assimilationist ideology (Yeğen 2006: 54).

Still, it is interesting that there were three particular instances where I observed such an attitude of thrusting aside the conflict. Eda, for example, said that we should not delve much into those issues since they are “way too political” and are “the topic of another discussion”. She said she could just say that this is a multifaceted issue; there may indeed be “sincere beliefs” of the Kurdish people yet this is a complex issue involving the interest of the US and the Big Middle East Project. Similarly Zeynep said that the reason for and the solution to the conflict is not directly related to his son’s military service and a very deep issue. Övünç was also another interviewee who did not want to speak about the conflict since, she said, these are “very deep issues”. What generally arises in the narratives related to the conflict, however, is that although neither the Turkish nor the Kurdish people have any problems with the existence of each other,

there is still terror because “terror is something different” since there are “external powers” involved in this.

### **3.6. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I tried to analyze and reflect on how the “East”, a novel and unexpected space, was experienced by the mothers. I analyzed how the widespread acceptance of the military service encountered a rupture when the news of deployment to the “East” was received by the mothers. The “East” as an unknown and distant territory usually meant fear and concern. The negative aspects of military, which with the “culturalization” of the service was erased to be replaced with feelings of joy, pride, and honor whereas the “East”, which was mentioned with fear, to a certain extent, reverses this “culturalization”.

I have also dwelt upon the connotations of the “East”, which are fear, poverty, and backwardness. I demonstrated how the “East” was both a homogenous piece of land with strictly drawn boundaries yet at the same time a vaguely defined space. The mothers, as I have previously demonstrated, had difficulty in locating and understanding to where their sons had been sent on the “East”. This map was uninhabited, timeless, laden with cliché images, and immune to a long lasting war, which seemed to be taking place on a far away land. The “East” on which the mothers commented is interestingly both something very contemporary and timeless.

It was interesting to observe the fact that imagining the “East” as an uninhabited territory also has ambiguous repercussions related to the perceptions of the people of the “East”. While a constant utterance of the word “Easterner” prevails in the narratives, it is unclear who this “Easterner” is. Although the word “Easterner” does not explicitly connote Kurdishness, there was at times a distinction made between the “good/bad

Easterner” which implied and at times stated that the ‘real’ Kurds apart from the ones in the PKK are very nice, warm, and welcoming people. While the “East” stands as a source of fear, it also connotes an exoticized land of warm and welcoming people. Therefore, the “East”, although constructed upon strictly drawn boundaries, and the definition of the “Easterner”, are quite vague and flexible.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONTESTED SPACES, PERPETUAL FISSURES: MOTHERHOOD AND MILITARY SERVICE

“The happy, healthy, smiling soldiers in the TV ads are an illusion;  
the reality is the opposite. It is terrible.”  
*Voices from the Front* (Mater 2005: 114)

“When I return home I’m going to open a flower shop. Life will smell good then.”  
Cevher the Ghost in *Yazı Tural/Tossup* (Uğur Yücel 2004)

The month of April 2009 was the time when one of the professors, an anthropologist, from the college I had graduated joined the barracks to realize his military service. He had defended his PhD thesis at a university in the US and could no longer postpone his service in Turkey due to age restrictions. The blog he had kept to save his fieldwork experiences for his PhD research also became the ground from which he conveyed his thoughts and feelings about his experience in the barracks. In one of his initial posts writing about his unit, he says:

I am not supposed to write about military life itself, and so please forgive me for not giving details here. Just for general observations related to me: This is probably the best place for the mandatory service to take place. Still the service life is hard to swallow. Just to give you an idea: the films that would best describe the service life is not the action packed war movies but Holocaust movies that focus on concentration camps. For instance scenes from *Bent* (1997) came to my mind (not something special- it was one of the latest movies I watched, it was easier to remember). Maybe *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) could also be relevant here.

Erkan’s experience as a 33 year old man obliged to leave his current life as an academic aside for five months and join the barracks for the compulsory service does not reflect any joy or excitement related to performing what the army defines as his “sacred duty to the homeland”. Rather, it conveys a similar feeling of discontent which many other young men also experience today when their lives are interrupted by the military. The image of the military as the continuation of “the action packed war movies” does not correspond to what young men encounter in the barracks. The service itself, in other

words, does not generally involve the “happy, healthy, smiling soldiers”, but harsh discipline, punishment, and violence.

Interestingly, however, it is mostly joy and pride recited by the mothers of these soldiers related to their sons’ military service. Despite all its hardship, what usually gets told in the military service stories of men also usually involve the good, enjoyable, and pleasurable memories or rather stories which are remembered or turned into such memories. Similarly, the mothers I have interviewed do not generally talk about the negative aspects of the service and when they do the issue is usually cut short or somehow legitimized. No matter what they have experienced in the army, the experience of men in the service is reflected to be a fruitful one, a novel ground where they have seen another side of life. Such experience and seeing one’s healthy son depart for his “duty to the homeland” is what makes the mothers proud.

The role of women as mothers for the military also becomes doubly important since women not only bear and raise the future soldiers and protectors of the nation but are also strong buttresses for supporting the men during their service as can be observed from the Women’s and Mother’s Day posters of the TAF that I have discussed in the first chapter. Apparently, it is the mothers more than the lovers, fathers, or brothers of these soldiers who prepare them for the hardship of the life in the barracks, or at least a special emphasis is put on motherhood by the army and the state. The army, before and after the service of the soldier, regards women as mothers as the moral supporters of their children who will prepare them for military service.

The mothers are transformed into the proud but grieving mothers in the case of the “martyrdom” of their children supporting and mothering not only the soldiers themselves but also the army and the state in surmounting the grief of the martyred

soldiers. The individual loss of the mothers, in this sense, is transformed into collective spectacles of mourning where the mothers grieve for the loss of the country. The following words of the military, taken from the letter they have published for the Mother's Day but addressing the mothers of the martyrs in 2004 is noteworthy for exemplifying this: "You are the moral mothers of all the soldiers in the Turkish Armed Forces. You are always in our hearts as the 'Mothers of the Year'".<sup>126</sup> These mothers, as demonstrated in the words of the former Chief of Staff Hilmi Özkök, also become the mothers of the state: "You are a treasure which is embraced not only by the Turkish Armed Forces, but also by the whole nation".<sup>127</sup>

The army, thus, creates its own definition of an acceptable or ideal mothering rejecting, denying, or suppressing all other alternative voices arising from the fissures of this ideal soldier mothering discourse. The ideal mother is one who is caring, loving, and compassionate; a mother who is expected to encourage his son for his military service, support him throughout this ordeal, and mourn silently in case of his death. Although the visible mothers of the army are the mothers of the martyrs, it would be wrong to assume that the official discourse on mothering comprises the mothers of the martyrs only. On the contrary, a surreptitious praxis takes place regarding soldier mothering. It is interesting, however, that although motherhood is a crucial element the military utilizes in buttressing its order, the mothers themselves seem to be invisible since their voices are hardly ever heard. This fact makes it further significant to get in touch with soldiers' mothers to see how they experience the military service of their children. It is, thus, significant to hear the voices of these women and not just simply analyze how they are utilized in the official discourse on soldier mothering.

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<sup>126</sup> [http://www.tsk.tr/10\\_ARSIY/10\\_1\\_Basin\\_Yayin\\_Faaliyetleri/10\\_3\\_Bilgi\\_Notlari/2004/BN\\_11.html](http://www.tsk.tr/10_ARSIY/10_1_Basin_Yayin_Faaliyetleri/10_3_Bilgi_Notlari/2004/BN_11.html)

<sup>127</sup> <http://www.tumgazeteler.com/?a=408429>

The interviews I had conducted with soldiers' mothers with such an aim, although initially unintended, at certain times also involved the ex-soldiers themselves. Out of 20 interviews I had conducted 6 of them were also accompanied by the mothers' sons. It was both interesting and confusing to meet the people in person through whose experiences I was going to interview their mothers. It was confusing because I had not shaped my questions thinking that the ex-soldiers would also be present during the interview. Although I was not planning to follow a strict structured interview, I had prepared a list of questions in order to ease the process and asking questions to the ex-soldiers themselves was not a part of this. Despite the initial perplexity, however, these interviews proved to be fruitful and interesting.

Apart from two interviews where I kindly asked whether the son would also like to stay with us in the former and where the son himself left to do other things in the latter, other four interviews were conducted under the presence of the ex-soldiers. It was interesting to observe the different perceptions of military service and the uniqueness of each experience, that of the mother and the soldier. It was also during these interviews that I started to think further on the tensions in the mothers' narratives regarding military service and the army; where they criticized or supported the army, how they made sense of their son's military service, and when and how their narratives diverged from that of their children.

It would be hard and wrong to generalize these interviews by saying that the ex-soldiers expressed exactly opposite views from that of their mothers, but it is possible to say that there were at times sharp differences. The clash of these two narratives and the clash of the 'real' military service experienced by the soldiers and the 'imagined' one experienced by the mothers led to my further cogitation on the issue. In this chapter, I give a brief analysis of how the military service experience arises in the narratives of the

women, when and how the fissures through which the criticisms are uttered are formed, and, to the possible extent, the comparison of and the clashes between the narratives of the mothers and that of the ex-soldiers.

I had previously demonstrated how women as mothers accepted and indeed performed the proud mother image that the military itself promoted in its discourse. I explained this issue by using the concept of MotherSpace, which, I argued, leaves mothers powerless when they try to step outside of it. I, however, believe that regarding the issue solely as such will be oversimplifying the relationship mothers establish with the official discourse on soldier mothering. The analysis in this chapter, therefore, aims to briefly demonstrate how the official discourse produces and reproduces the proud mother image and further analyze how mothers position themselves vis-à-vis this discourse.

#### **4.1. Becoming a Military Mother**

Soldier mothering for the women I have interviewed, as discussed in the first chapter, is a nonexistent category. Women do not seem to regard soldier mothering as a distinct category or define themselves as a soldier's mother, but convey their experiences from a supposedly detached position. They, in other words, speak with their identity as mothers but do not narrate their stories under the title of soldier mothering, something which they do not seem to have thought about before the interview. Soldier mothering thus stands out as a "ubiquitous but invisible" (Larranaga 1996: 59) category in which the women do not seem to be engaged yet by which (at least a certain period of) their lives are shaped.

Despite this situation, however, it is interesting to see the match between the narratives of the women and the official discourse on soldier mothering, which is what I

engaged in analyzing in the first chapter. Although the women do not seem to regard soldier mothering as a distinct category, they constantly reiterate the militarist and nationalist discourse related to mothering and military service. For them, military service is necessary and inevitable for every healthy Turkish citizen. This reiteration, in this sense, starts before their son's military service where women unquestioningly show constant support in order to prepare their children for military service.

Women, in this sense, do not utterly deviate from the discourse that they are expected to stay at the home front to raise and look after their children, who are then to be sent to the army in order protect the homeland. Women, unless under "severe" circumstances like a war or a mobilization, do not need to join the army since men are "already there" to realize this duty. In the words of one of the interviewees, Sevim, "women bear children for the country, they raise these children, they realize such an immense duty as this. She [woman] is actually conducting military service by raising children for the homeland. She does not literally need to join the barracks".<sup>128</sup>

Sevim's words are significant for three aspects. First of all, they demonstrate how ossified the strictly gendered and militarized roles are in the minds of women. In other words, women's role as mothers and care takers of the home(land) and the army are such normalized practices that mothering is elevated and equalized to conducting military service itself. Secondly, they stand out as an example to the invisibility of the militarization of our everyday lives. Here, women not only become the mothers of their own children, but also the mothers of the nation bearing and raising (soldier) children

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<sup>128</sup> "Esasında kadınlar ülkeye evlat veriyorlar esasında, bir de onu düşünüyordum yani, çocukları onlar yetiştiriyor, büyütüyor, esasında onlar çok büyük görev yapıyor esasında bir taraftan da öyle düşünürsek. Yani ama tabii ki bire bir bir şey söylenirse yapılabilir de ama şartları zor kadın çünkü zor şartlar yani bir erkekten çok daha zor şartları yaşıyor kadın, aile kuruyor, arkasından çocuk doğuruyor, çocuğunu büyütüyor, her türlü ağırlık onun üzerinde. Yani kadın zaten zor görevleri almış zaten toplumda, toplumun bütününde. Esasında askerlik görevini yapıyor bir taraftan da, zaten vatana çocuk yetiştiriyor, evlat yetiştiriyor bir taraftan da. Esasında tabii ki askerlik görevini yapıyorsa o zaman tabii ki bire bir onun gibi şeyde kışlada askerlik yapmasına gerek yok." Sevim

for the homeland. This statement, in other words, exemplifies how the “womb is turned into a recruiting station” (Enloe 2000: 248) and how women themselves unquestionably accept this “duty”. Thirdly, they demonstrate the army’s constant need for women as mothers to perpetuate this militarization and ease the adaptation process of men to military service.

One common aspect of these support narratives is the constant advice to obey the commanders. This is a recurring motif in the narratives where the mothers utter their acceptance that one should not question or seek logic in military service. Here, it is the practices related to the service and not the service itself that should not be questioned. In a similar manner, talking about what his son has told him related to the military service experience, Sevim says: “He [his son] says it [the military service] is difficult, it is related to the rules; if you seek for logic, there is no logic in military service”.<sup>129</sup>

These women, therefore, are aware that the military service experience is a harsh one yet are not critical of the service itself. They provide their children with moral support and backup in order for them not to stumble during this ordeal. At this point, however, it should also be noted that these narratives of encouragement do not solely indicate a support for the service or the army itself, but rather a concern for the well being of their children. Hayrunisa expresses the concern that she felt during the initial stages of her son’s military service with the following words: “They always say that there is no logic in military service; that made me nervous, even my sleeps were like panic attacks, I felt worried as to whether something happened to him”.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> “Zor diyor askerlik zor yani ama kurallara göre, yani çok mantık ararsan hiçbir şeyin hiçbir mantığı yok diyor askerlikte...” Sevim

<sup>130</sup> “...diyorlar ya askerlikte mantık yok falan ya o tedirgin etti beni yani uykularım bile bir panik atak gibi tedirgin oluyordum ay acaba başına gelmiş olabilir mi...” Hayrunisa

Hayrunisa's state of panic and fear raises two important points about the role of women as mothers sending their sons to the army. First of all, it demonstrates the double existence that the mothers experience during their son's service. While they live in constant panic, they do not reflect this to their children and go through these feelings alone without having the chance to share them with anyone. Although not solely aimed at mothers, but the family in general, the letter that the military sends to the homes of the soldiers also suggest that the parents live under such conditions by saying, "Unless you have serious family problems, we would like you tell your son that you are always happy and content in cases of little problems you can solve. Tell him the significance of duty, bonds of friendship, and love of the homeland in order for him to be more connected to his duty". Indeed, this is exactly what mothers do. Thus, willingly or not, they actually fulfill the duty of ideal mothering supported by the official soldier mothering discourse by providing their sons with moral support and not conveying anything of discouraging nature to their children.

The mothers' state, just like that of Hayrunisa, once again strongly demonstrates the essential role of and the need for women to buttress the army in its endeavor to recruit the future citizen-soldiers. The army needs women in the role of mothers who will not only raise these potential soldiers, but also support them throughout their service. The military, on the other hand, provides the mothers with such a promise in the letter: "It is our common desire for your son to get used to his new environment and the military life, and return home physically and spiritually more strong and mature than you had sent him". The military, in this sense, sets a contract with women assuring them and appeasing their concerns that their children will be alright if they cooperate with the army. The 'reward' they will get in return for this will not only be qualifying for the proud mother image, but also having "stronger and mature" sons, which is also

something most women believe that the military does yet could not observe any change in their sons since they say that they “were already mature children before the service”.

Despite this double existence and some minor criticisms of the practices during military service, however, women also support the service itself on the basis of “homeland protection”. Except for one interviewee, all women regard military service as a “duty to the homeland” or a “necessity” that needs to be realized in order to protect the nation:

This [military service] is a duty to the homeland. Every male child should do his military service.<sup>131</sup>

Military service is necessary for our country. As you know, we [the country] are surrounded by problems. I think that the country needs to have military power so that we can claim it as ours and protect it. Otherwise, we cannot stake our claim on this country.<sup>132</sup>

I do not have in depth knowledge about military service, but this [fighting] is not something that could be done without any education in case of a mobilization, protection, and joining the army.<sup>133</sup>

As can be observed from the above quotes, military service is seen necessary for the protection of the country which cannot be claimed “as ours” unless someone is there to look after it. While this approach naturalizes the existence of compulsory military service due to reasons of ‘security’, it also demonstrates a constant fear and paranoia that Turkey, as a country “surrounded by problems” might be attacked any time by its ‘enemies’.<sup>134</sup> It is interesting that what these women utter is very similar to the discourses of the compulsory National Security course taught at high schools in Turkey.

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<sup>131</sup> Bir vatan borcu, her dünyaya gelen erkek çocuğu askerliğini yapması gerekir. Gökçen

<sup>132</sup> Askerlik gerekli, bizim ülkemiz için gerekli. Yani malum bütün etrafımız problemle çevrili, yani gücü olması lazım, ülkenin bir askeri gücünün olması gerekiyor bence, ki ülke bizim diyebilelim, ülkeyi savunalım, başka türlü bu ülkeyi sahiplenemeyiz. Sevim

<sup>133</sup> Askerlik hakkında çok da derin bilgim yok ama hakikaten bir seferberlik ve herhangi bir savunma müdafa orduya gitme durumu söz konusu olduğu vakit hakikaten insanlar o zaman hiçbir bilgisi olmadan olacak bir olay değil. Ayşe

<sup>134</sup> Esra Gedik also observes a similar attitude in the mothers of the martyrs, according to whom “everyone is the enemy of Turkey” (Gedik 2007: 123).

Until recently, the book even had a chapter entitled “The Games Played on Turkey” where the policies of the countries that had an “interest” in the lands of Turkey due to its “geostrategic location” were analyzed.

In this sense, such narratives of women also normalize wars and, in a sense, regard military service as a preliminary step where both the homeland is protected and the necessary education needed in case of a war is received. Thus, despite all its illogical practices and futures, the service due to the reasons stated above, is also supported by the women without any alternative to it:

Military service is necessary in this country. Our country is the country of harsh circumstances. Even if it is for its [the country’s] position, I think it [military service] has to be conducted. On the other hand, it is very difficult to say all this when there is terror, when you are living with it, and the children are being wasted. It is very sad, but there is nothing to be done, I cannot see any other solution. Military service has to be done, who else would do it, who else would wait for and protect this country? So I cannot say that our children should not do it [military service], it should be done.<sup>135</sup>

They provide us with [protection] in the army, but if he [a man] does not go, if neither of us go to military service then how will this land be protected; I don’t know.<sup>136</sup>

I think it [military service] is [a duty to the homeland]. This has been like this for ages. It is something like this. There must be something different, but it is something like this I guess, I don’t know.<sup>137</sup>

While it is true that women do not regard military service as something to which an alternative can be found since “the world was founded as such and continues to be

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<sup>135</sup> Evet, yani bu ülkede askerliğin yapılması şart. Yani bizim ülkemiz tabii ki zor şartların ülkesi, konum itibariyle de olsa mecburen yapılması gerektiğini düşünüyorum; ama işte şu var ki tabii çok zor tüm bunları söylerken de, o kadar terör ortamının olması, onlarla yaşamak, çocukların böyle ziyan olması, çok üzücü bir taraftan da ama başka da şey yok, başka da bir şey göremiyorum, ama bu askerlik yapılacak bir şekilde, yani kim yapacak yoksa, kim bekleyecek bu ülkeyi, kim sahiplenecek yoksa. Yani bir taraftan da yok yapmasın çocuklarımız diyemiyorum, yapılması da gerekiyor. Sevim

<sup>136</sup> Nasıl bir şey, diyelim o askeriye de onlar şey yaptıkça biz burada, onlar bizim şeyimizi sağlıyor bence yani askeriye yani ama gitmese, sen gitme, ben gitmeyeyim, ötekisi gitmesin, o vatan nasıl korunur, nasıl şey yapar onu da bilmiyorum yani. Emine

<sup>137</sup> Valla düşünüyorum, bu böyle gelmiş böyle gidiyor. Bu artık böyle bir olay. Muhakkak farklı bir şey vardır ama böyle bir şey herhalde bilmiyorum. Sibil

so”<sup>138</sup> and thus which can somehow be abolished, it should also be added that this acceptance does not imply a non questioning. On the contrary, despite their normalization of the “special and unquestionable logic of the military within”<sup>139</sup>, as put by Eda, they are critical of the deaths taking place due to the conflict with the PKK in the East and Southeast. It is exactly at this point where (although feeble) criticism of the military service takes place.

Okay, it [military service] is very natural; it is a duty to the homeland. Of course he will do it [the military service] and come back. Okay, the soldiers get martyred, everyone gets hurt, but what are they being martyred for? If there was a war like the Çanakkale War, then martyrdom would be acceptable, but this is not something similar, what kind of a war is being waged? Why are people killing each other for no reason all of a sudden; I have been thinking like this from the beginning.<sup>140</sup>

I would also say so [that I would not bestow my son to the homeland in case of a death]. My son is very important, God forbid, of course, but homeland is something different. Here, you are fighting with your own race, this should be prevented.<sup>141</sup>

As can be observed in the previous quotes, the conflict going on in the East and Southeast is not regarded as a war. Women have difficulty in understanding the reasons for this long lasting ambiguous event, which they cannot name as war. This ambiguity has two reasons in the words of the mothers. First of all, the conflict is constantly compared to the “War of Independence” where the whole population had been mobilized to protect the country. In the conflict with the PKK, however, it is only the soldiers that are deployed to the East and Southeast regions who are involved in this

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<sup>138</sup> “...demek ki dünya öyle kurulmuş öyle gidiyor.” Emine

<sup>139</sup> “askerliğin kendi içerisinde çok özel bir mantığı, hiç tartışması mümkün olmayan bir mantığı olan bir kuruluş” Eda

<sup>140</sup> Tamam, çok doğal, vatan borcu, tabii ki yapacak gelecek, ben öyle düşünüyorum hani tamam şehit oluyor askerler, herkesin canı da yanıyor ama diyorum ki ne var da neye şehit oluyorlar. Tamam, bir savaş olur, hani bir Çanakkale Savaşı’dır bilmem nedir, tamam gitsin, şehit mi oldu, olsun geldin; ama bu öyle değil ki hani öyle bir şey değil, neyin savaşı var? Yani durup dururken insanlar birbirini niye öldürüyor, yani ben öyle düşünüyorum, yani baştan beri hep aynı şeyi düşünüyorum ben. Sevinç

<sup>141</sup> Ben de öyle derim yani, benim oğlum çok önemli, Allah göstermesin vatan sağ olsun da ama vatan başka kendi ırkına kavga ediyorsun yani bunun önüne geçilmesi gerekiyor. Nimet

conflict. Secondly, the “insurgents” are regarded as kin to the “Turkish people” sharing the same land and flag, two common national symbols which make this uprising and conflict further incomprehensible.

This understanding of the ‘just’ or ‘acceptable’ war, on the other hand, highlights an aspect so apparent yet at the same time unrecognized embedded in the narratives of the mothers. First of all, it naturalizes and legitimizes the existence of war under ‘fatal’ circumstances like that of the “War of Independence” where the whole “nation” fought against the “enemies” to save the country. More importantly, however, it breeds an undercover yet legitimized xenophobia against the ones who ‘deserve’ to be fought against; in other words, the ones who are not and despite their long existence in the country cannot be a part of “us”:

These are the children of Diyarbakır and Mardin, Turkish children attacking us. I cannot stand this. Our grandfathers have fought with the Greek, the Armenian to save Turkey but here it is the Turk fighting against the Turk. I don’t know. We sent our child [to military service], we had to since we are Turkish, what else can I say my girl?<sup>142</sup>

The conflict between the soldiers and the PKK, thus, cannot be regarded as a war since “they” are also a part of “us” who are incomprehensibly trying to separate themselves from the “Turkish nation” with whom they share the common land and the flag.

Women, thus, protest to the vain martyrdom of the young soldiers who are sent to the East and Southeast to fight with the PKK in a non-war:

I would say I bestow my son to the homeland if there was a war. Many people have been martyred in the previous times in order to protect and save the homeland, but now they [the PKK] are killing our soldiers on purpose. There is no war or saving; our children are being killed there on

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<sup>142</sup> Bildiğimiz şey Diyarbakır’ın Mardin’in çocukları, bizim Türk insanımız bize saldırıyor. E bu biraz ağırına gidiyor, dedelerimiz savaşmış onlar Yunanlıyan Ermeniyle Türkiye’yi kurtarmak için ama bizimkileri Türk’len Türk kavga ediyor savaş ediyor, bilmiyorum artık onu gönderdik, göndermek zorundaydık, Türk olduğumuz için be kızım başka ne diyebilirim ki? Semiha

purpose. Then I will not send my son there [to the East and Southeast] against this.<sup>143</sup>

Despite the sharp criticism uttered by Gökçen that she will not send her son to the conflict zone if the children over there are dying in vain, the practice is quite different. In this sense, it would be fallacious to assume that the criticism that takes place regarding the conflict with the PKK creates a rupture from the official discourse on military service. Interestingly, it seems to be the vain deaths that are taking place in the conflict zone that are criticized rather than the army itself who actually sends these soldiers to fight with the PKK. Furthermore, it is at this point where the official discourse is constantly reiterated by the women and the ‘requirements’ of soldier mothering is realized and fulfilled.

As I had discussed in the previous chapter, the reaction of the mothers to their son’s deployment to the “East” derives from the fact the “East” with its connotation of terror and fear brings back all the negative aspects like war, death, and violence, things which had been detached from the military service with its “culturalization”. The service, which was made a part of “Turkish culture” and not something which buttressed the nation-state, left the service unquestionable since this questioning also meant questioning the ‘values’ of the “Turkish nation” so intact and apparent since the time of the nomadic tribes in Central Asia, like the Turkish History Thesis argued. The widely accepted saying “Every Turk is born a soldier” did not necessitate the complementary saying “Every Turk kills/dies as a soldier” for the soldiers deployed to the conflict zone since military service symbolized the protection of the borders and the homeland yet not killing. The criticism related to the “martyrdom” of the soldiers in the

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<sup>143</sup> Tamam, savaş olur şey olur vatan sağ olsun. Vatanımı korumak için çok kişi eskiden de vatani kurtarmak için şehit düşmüş de şimdi bu tür olaylar bilerek askerlerimizin üstüne gidip askerlimizi öldürüyorlar bir savaş bir kurtarma bir olayı yok ki, kasten öldürülüyor çocuklarımız orada. O olaya karşı ben de o tarafa göndermem o zaman. Gökçen

East/Southeast, therefore, cannot turn into criticisms of the military but the PKK for the existence of terror.

#### **4.2. Military Service, Motherhood, and Bonding**

When asked what they would choose if their son had a chance to not conduct his military service, despite their criticisms, all of the women except two stated that they would not want such a thing. There were two reasons for this decision. First of all, as constantly demonstrated in the previous narratives, the women regard military service as a duty without which the protection of the country would not be possible. Thus, children are encouraged to join the army and are provided with psychological support in order to surmount the obstacles encountered during their service. Secondly, it is a common response that men who do not conduct their military service experience strong peer pressure and lack stories to tell about the service. In commenting on the former, Semiha says, “I would not want people to say that he [his son] has not done his military service. They [her children] hear it from around, they call the kid ‘hey sister’ since he has not done his military service”.<sup>144</sup>

Before moving on to further discuss the second reason and the words of Semiha, I would like to return to the first reason as to the women’s rejection of their son’s omission from military service since, I believe, these two reasons are interrelated. In talking about the need for homeland protection, the women constantly underscore the fact that their children “do not have the luxury” to not conduct military service when everyone else is sending their child to the barracks. On the surface, this conduct seems like a ‘socially responsible’ attitude where each and every parent shares the ‘burden’ to

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<sup>144</sup> Olsun, sonra gitmemiş askerlik yapmamış demesinler. Sonra duyuyorlar işte askere gitmemiş ya bacım diye hitap ediyorlar çocuğa yani öyle diye duyuyoruz... Semiha

protect the country. A closer look at this approach, however, reveals how this homeland protection discourse is intertwined with the place of military service within the society, in other words, the peer pressure.

The seemingly sharp criticism uttered related to the death of the soldiers in the conflict with the PKK and the discourse related to the ‘need’ for military service for homeland protection, thus, becomes interchanged with and turns into an internalization of the still prevailing social pressure that a man cannot “become a man” unless he conducts his military service. In this sense, while the service is seen necessary to enable the protection of the homeland and the security of the citizens, it is also regarded as a means to provide the male citizens with a ‘proof’ of their “manliness”.<sup>145</sup> The service, therefore, has to be conducted in order to enable the proper socialization of the males and the mothers become the backbone and perpetuators of this socialization by supporting their son’s military service.

Furthermore, no matter what the ex-soldier has gone through during his service, his completion of the “duty” is regarded as a source of pride for the mother who has raised and brought her child to protect the homeland. What is striking at this point is the fact that these women, despite their rejection of the image of the grieving but proud mother who declares that she will bestow her son to the homeland, actually conform to this image by opposing to even an imaginary chance that may be presented to their children to be omitted from military service. The service, in this sense, becomes more of a void to fill for the sake of other people rather than a sole devotion for homeland protection.

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<sup>145</sup> A similar point is made by Esra Gedik in her analysis of the narratives of the mothers of the martyrs: “...military service is not only seen as a service to the state, but as something that produces masculinity. A sense of proper masculinity is reinforced by the achievement of each man in fighting or in handling other tasks” (Gedik 2007: 102-103).

While it is true that women support military service because of the social pressure with which they and their children are surrounded, it would be wrong to regard this as the only reason of this support. At this point, it is significant to analyze how the image of military service is constructed for women. In other words, how do women learn about military service? How do they perceive the army and the barracks? What does military service mean to them? And how can the mothers, despite their hard experiences and seemingly sharp criticisms, still claim that military service is a necessary experience?

The information that the women receive regarding military service has two basic sources: official and unofficial. The contents of the chats and rumors that are related to military service and heard from their environment is one aspect of this unofficial source. The things that women hear about military service from their friends, relatives, and social network in general can thus be regarded as their primary source of information about the service itself. Since the media is also an indirect source filtered by and differing related to their sources, they can also be classified under the unofficial category. In this sense, it is these rumors, talks, chats, and the media through which women get a chance to have a peek inside the barracks.

The official source related to military service where the women have direct contact with the army, on the other hand, comprises two aspects: the oath taking ceremony and the letter that is sent to the house of the soldier-to-be by the army after the soldier's ceremony. Women's initial official encounter with the army happens during the oath taking ceremony. For those who were able to attend it, this event is depicted as one full of pride where the mother sees her healthy child, whom she has diligently raised, become a man. Women become sentimental, feel proud, excited, and some get overwhelmed by the order and discipline the army entails regarding both the

barracks and the ceremony itself. The mothers who are able to attend the ceremony talk of it with joy and pride whereas the ones who have not been able to be present feel sad and sorry for missing such a significant happening. While the military service stories of the ex-soldiers become the one common aspect which unites men, it is the oath taking ceremony stories that unite the mothers. In this sense, the ceremony, and not the initial parting for the service itself, seems to be the 'real' ground where the children are detached from their parents and are prepared for the barracks.

The official letter that is sent to the parents of the children regarding their military service after the ceremony also signals the switch of families, the army now becoming the father of the child taking care of him while he is away from his 'real' home: "Your son, away from his home but in a different environment with his friends, will start to get to know life in the military hearth, will be given the necessary education, and will be prepared to be in duty in our combatant units". The family is, thus, assured of their children's well being and also expected to cooperate with the military to enable this.

No matter what the women have heard from the unofficial sources regarding military service, the impact of this direct and official encounter with the army has two significant consequences. First of all, the harsh discipline which educates the soldiers in the barracks becomes transformed in the eyes of the women elevating the army as the epitome of harmony and order. The immaculate cleanliness and order of the place where the ceremony takes place is seen as a product of the discipline that the army entails. The brute discipline that is utilized to "educate" the soldiers during their service, therefore, appears to the mothers with its 'mild' and 'loving' face turning the cold and unwelcoming barracks into a warm and homely place for the ceremony. One interviewee, Övünç, for example describes her feelings related to the ceremony with the

following words: “Everything [where the ceremony took place] was so modest but orderly. I remember bemoaning why the whole country cannot be like this”.<sup>146</sup>

Similar feelings further heighten and turn into a source of trust to the army after having observed the attitudes of the commanders present during the ceremony. Gökçen says: “The inside of the barracks are in perfect order, the commanders are very nice, they always morally support the soldiers, they [the soldiers] were well taken care of. He [his son] was very comfortable during the service. We felt better after having seen the place [the barracks] at the ceremony”.<sup>147</sup> This firsthand experience of the barracks and the encounter with the military officials stabilize the trust that the mothers feel for the army. The letter that is sent home to ensure the parents about the safety of their children under the ‘military family’ further stabilizes the confidence in the army. A part of the letter exemplifies how the soldiers in the barracks actually have two families from the time they enter the army: “Your son will gain moral support from your close aid and attention which we believe you will show. In this way, he will perform his sacred duty to the homeland with a bigger love to the homeland, love of duty, and feelings of solidarity and unity.” Övünç, for instance, had shown me the letter she had received from the army before starting the interview and urged me to read the letter by stating that the letter had made her so proud and relieved.

### **4.3. How the Proud Mother Silences the Omnipresent**

Listening to what the children themselves have to say and looking at the invisible side of this tale, however, reveals a different side of this joyous story. Eda, for

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<sup>146</sup> “Son derece alçakgönüllü her şey fakat düzenli, niye bütün ülke böyle olamıyor diye hayıflandığımı hatırlıyorum.” Övünç

<sup>147</sup> “...askeriyenin içi çok düzenli, oradaki komutanlar çok iyi, devamlı askerlere moral verici şeyler, bakımları iyiydi. Çok rahat askerliğini yaptı orada. O yemin törenine gidip de orasını gördükten sonra rahatladık.” Gökçen

example, talks about how his son did not want anyone to attend the ceremony without presenting any reason for this demand. Similarly, Sevim states that they could not go to the ceremony since his son had told them that the ceremonies were forbidden now, but she later found out that his son had lied as he did not want anyone to be present in the ceremony. Some children, such as Selma's son, on the other hand, did not want their parents to come to the ceremony showing distance as a pretext for their demand. The untold narratives of the ex-soldiers, therefore, require further attention to rethink the place of military service in the lives of both the men as ex-soldiers and women as mothers.

Although the ex-soldiers that were present in the interviews did not comment on how they felt during the ceremony, it was interesting to observe one striking similarity in the narratives of the mothers with whom I have spoken and that of the ex-soldiers in Pınar Selek's book on military service, *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak*. The women usually state to have been mesmerized with the discipline and order that dominated the physical atmosphere of the ceremony. What was striking, however, was the statements that the parents were not able to recognize their child since all soldiers looked alike. While women see this unfamiliarity as the symbol of the immaculate order, the men who Selek and her colleagues have interviewed regard it as a quasi-traumatic experience of alienation.

The narratives of the ex-soldiers like those in Selek's book, however, most of the time cannot find voice during the talks with the parents. In this sense, it is interesting that the ex-soldiers' narratives as a source of information related to the army can neither be placed under the official nor the unofficial category since most of the time they rarely talk about their experiences related to the days in the barracks. The joyous and thriller-like military service stories that are told in public turn into silences when the

time arrives to share them in the private domains. Thus the “loud silences” (Altınay 2004: 151) that prevail these experiences need further scrutiny in order to grasp how the differences between that of the children and the women related to military service are sustained.

How are then the narratives and experiences of the children forgotten or maybe never taken into consideration leaving the military service solely as an experience to be proud of? First of all, as also underscored above, what women know about military service can be said to be the tip of the iceberg, revealing only a small portion of what is actually present down under. Thus, their positive contact with the army creates an imagined military service experience shaped by these content encounters. Secondly, since the stories of the ex-soldiers are most of the time left undercover, there is no alternative image which can challenge this imagined picture, which becomes so strong and ossified that it cannot be broken.

In this sense, it cannot be said that women forget what has been told to them by their children, but are rather benumbed to the limited narratives that reach them. The ‘little’ details which can distort the big (perfect) picture related to military service are thus ignored or talked very little of. The women, in other words, have their own byways to prevent the distortion of this idealized and to a certain extent romanticized image of military service, thus creating double silences in addition to that of their children. This does not mean to say, however, that these details are not uttered. On the contrary, they are mentioned, but talked about as minute and trivial aspects of the big picture.

Throughout the narratives, military service is seen as a “natural” aspect of life since it is a “duty to the homeland”. This discourse of the natural, however, is broken when the mothers also talk about the service as an “obstacle in the way of the children’s

lives”. Their pride of seeing their healthy grown up child become a soldier, at this point, becomes conflated with the relief that they have finally surmounted this obstacle, which hinders men to construct a proper life especially depriving them of a job until the completion of their service. On commenting what she felt about her son’s military service, for example, Övünç says: “Every youth finds difficulty in finding a permanent job and establishing a permanent order until military service is done. I got happy thinking that he will surmount these”.<sup>148</sup> How can then something which is supposed to be so natural, ordinary, and a source of pride also become an obstacle? What is further interesting is how can these two views coexist without the latter undermining the former? As previously mentioned, these are regarded as the ‘little’ details of the big picture, minutiae of the military service experience.

In a similar manner, although the army is embraced as a family, certain narratives which demonstrate that these new ‘parents’ may not be as compassionate as the ‘real’ ones challenge this image of the army as the loving and caring father. The following words of Semiha on his son’s experience in the military succinctly describe this experience: “I [his son] say, for example, that I have a headache, the commanders tell [us] that they are not our mom and dad and that we should bear with the pain”.<sup>149</sup> The mothers, in this sense, as had also been previously described seem to be quite aware of the fact that the visible side of military service may be somewhat different on the inside. It is interesting to see, however, that despite this knowledge, what is constantly repeated more than everything else and the hardship is the pride that a mother feels after having sent her son to military service.

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<sup>148</sup> “Her gencin hayatında askerlik bitmeden kalıcı bir işe başlayamama sorunu var, kalıcı düzeni kuramama sorunu var, bunları aşacağını düşünerek sevindim.” Övünç

<sup>149</sup> “Mesela başım ağrıyordu ben diyorum diyor babanız değiliz biz ananız çekeceksin ağrını, komutanlar öyle söylüyor...” Semiha

A similar ‘strategy’ to cover these details also arises when the women talk about the place where their sons have been deployed during their service. Although doing one’s military service in the East and Southeast regions, especially in places where the conflict is intense, usually involves the risk of being injured or getting killed if the soldiers are sent into an operation, none of the mothers have uttered the word “death” while talking about the places to which their sons have been sent. The only word that appears in the narratives is “concern” rather than dying or killing and the possible death of their son is compared with that of an ordinary death equating it to fate or coincidence. On talking about his son’s duty to conduct “street operations” in Batman, Zeynep says: “This is a street clash, it [death] might have happened there [in Batman], but this might also happen in Istanbul. I mean there is a chance that it might happen to you when you leave this place”.<sup>150</sup> The not so coincidental death of the soldiers in the operations is thus transformed into a fortuitous event which might happen to anyone at anytime.

What is further striking is the fact that the concept of death that arises in the soldiers’ narratives also seems to be ignored by the mothers. After each interview, I asked my interviewees whether there was something interesting or striking that they would like to tell me related to their son’s military service. Ayşegül immediately responded with a very disturbing story. During one of the regular phone calls with his son in Diyarbakır, she was baffled by the response that his son had given to her on the phone: “We will not talk to you because you are civilians; civilians kill us”. After a difficult talk on trying to convince his son that she is his mother and that she will do no harm to him, Ayşegül told me that the commanders had told the soldiers that they should not trust the civilians they see outside of the barracks since “a butcher you see

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<sup>150</sup> “Bir sokak çatışması sonuçta bu, orada da olabilirdi ama bu İstanbul’da da olabilir. Yani hemen şuradan çıktığınız zaman sizin de başınıza gelebilecek kadar ihtimali bir şey.” Zeynep

during the day may be in the mountains [fighting alongside the PKK] at night, which you never know”. It was quite confusing to see Ayşegül still mention his son’s service with great pride and joy despite this traumatic narrative, which was mentioned at the end of the interview after a certain question rather than being brought up by Ayşegül during the interview itself.

At this point, it once again becomes significant to analyze how military service is constructed for the mothers. Why are the psychological state of the ex-soldiers and their life after military service which is supposed to “smell good” after the barracks yet most of the time does not, not included in this picture? It is difficult to answer this question and would be fallacious and vain to try to provide the reader with one ‘correct’ answer since there is none in this situation. What can be talked about here in addition to the women’s “patriarchal bargain” (Kandiyoti 1988) is the temporariness of the military service experience; that it is regarded as something which comes and goes, something to be completed and be over with. In talking about his son’s and his friends’ military service experience, for example, Arzu says:

They [the soldiers] are scared; my son was scared too before he left. Now he says thank God it is over, I am free. He was always scared before he left, thinking how it is going to be, what kind of a place he will be going to. They are all scared; all his friends are scared, reluctant. It is fear that is present in them when the issue is military service.<sup>151</sup>

As can be observed, Arzu is quite aware of the fact that military service has different connotations for the soldiers and the mothers. The strong feeling of pride present in the mothers sending their son to military service finds its expression as a strong sense of fear related to the unpredictability of the service in the case of the soldiers. No matter what happens then this feeling of pride dominates all other feelings by shoving them

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<sup>151</sup> Korkuyor, benim oğlum da gitmeden hep korku kafasında hep şeydi, şimdi nasıl geldi ay özgürüm çok şükür yaptım. Gitmeden hep kafasında nasıl acaba, nasıl bir yere gideceğim nasıl olacak, hep kafasında bir korku vardı. Hep korkuyorlar, bunu hep düşün bütün arkadaşları hepsi korkuyor çekiniyorlar askerlik deyince korku var içlerinde... Arzu

aside and leaving it as the only thing to be mentioned after military service since a couple of minutes after the above quote, Arzu utters the following words: “I think it [military service] is [a duty to the homeland] and I was proud [of my son], I mean I am still proud [of him]”.<sup>152</sup>

The ‘burden’ shared by the mothers during their son’s service, what is described as “also doing military service with their sons” is ‘awarded’ by this feeling of pride and honor after their son’s return. The army for the ex-soldiers is something to be gotten rid of and to become “free”, just as it was for Arzu’s son, whereas for the mothers it is a proof of their just pride for raising a boy and sending him to his service. In this sense, while military service becomes the proof of proper manhood, it is also the proof of proper motherhood, which is equated to raising obedient (soldier) children to the state.

At this point, I would like to argue that the peer pressure experienced by men, and constantly uttered by women, is also relevant for the women in a different form; through their sons. The sense of pride that is constantly underscored in the narratives between men who have done their service also finds its reflection in the narratives between women. Analyzing the MotherSpace from a Foucauldian perspective, Marsha Marotta says, “Through the variables of territory, communication, and speed, mothers are encouraged to feel powerless to escape MotherSpace. Like the panopticon, which is based on the normalizing gaze that establishes the visibility of power, MotherSpace is linked with seeing and being seen” (2005: 19). Indeed, the militarized MotherSpace in the case of the soldiers’ mothers involves not only seeing other mothers perform the proud mother image but also being watched by both the military and other women who can criticize them for not being the ‘exemplary mother’ for their sons. It is the

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<sup>152</sup> “Düşünüyorum ve gurur duydum, gurur duyuyorum yani.” Arzu

MotherSpace, in other words, which partly enables the perpetuation for the proud mother image.

It is indeed true that MotherSpace set by the military defines the limits of proper mothering and sets a strict line to exclude the women who do not act so; it is a prescription of the formula for ideal mothering. It would be wrong to assume, however, that it totally encapsulates women into its borders since women as mothers have alternative ways of stretching this discourse. Borrowing Deniz Kandiyoti's (1988) formulation of the "patriarchal bargain" concept, I argue that while the military service experience of their children is indeed a source of 'peer pressure' for the mothers, it is also their way of strategizing within the limits of the MotherSpace.

In her formulation of the patriarchal bargain, Kandiyoti says, "It [patriarchal bargain] is intended to indicate the existence of set of rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated" (1988: 286). According to this, women's second class citizenship and duty to raise citizen-soldiers for the country is exchanged with attaining the proud mother image. The mother who cooperates with the military, obeys its demands, and does not question its existence is thus granted with the proud mother title. It is through this bargain, I believe, that the mothers reproduce the proud mother image the army so much utilizes.

Despite the limits of the MotherSpace in defining the image of the ideal good mother, there is no such thing as good/bad mothering, at least on the surface, according to the women I have interviewed. However, ideal mothering seems to be correlated with 'proper' child rearing. When asked what they think about the Mothers of Peace and whether mothering can be a solution to the ongoing conflict between the PKK and the

army, they respond positively stating that mothers can of course be a solution to this conflict; the solution being that the Kurdish mothers should give proper education to their children preventing them from joining the PKK. Commenting on this issue, Sevim, for example, says:

Mothers have great responsibility, it is important to raise the level of consciousness of the mothers. They [the children] should be well protected; it is the mothers' duty to take care of the children. If the mother is educated, if she can convey that level of consciousness [to the child], if she can take care of and protect the child maybe this can be one of the solutions [to the conflict]. It is significant that mothers become conscious.<sup>153</sup>

Sevim does not further elaborate on what she exactly means by “consciousness”, how a mother can become “conscious”, and who can raise the “level of consciousness” of the mothers, but two implications arise from this utterance. First of all, it blurs the roots of the ongoing conflict since 1984 by reducing its reasons to the improper raising of children. While most women do not have an idea about the origins of the conflict and as to why there has been a conflict for so long, similar statements arise regarding the solution of the conflict; that mothers can be the solution on condition that they “convey the level of consciousness” to and “educate” their children. In this sense, although no strict good/bad mothering divide is made, this statement implies that good or ‘responsible’ mothering means raising ‘proper’ children; children who are ‘well behaving’ and obedient to the state.

In a similar manner, although no atrocity is demonstrated regarding the Kurdish mothers and no statement is made related to ‘bad mothering’ another significant aspect arises from these narratives. While the mothers do not explicitly define an ideal motherhood, an implicit image of acceptable motherhood arises. In other words, the

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<sup>153</sup> ...annelere çok iş düşüyor, annelerin bilinçlendirilmesi çok önemli, yani iyi korumak lazım hakikaten o çocukları sahiplenmek annelerin işi ama annelerin eğitilmesi lazım. Anne eğitilirse, anne o bilinci verebilirse, çocuğu koruyabilirse kollayabilirse çok şey olur yani bu işin belki çözümlerinden biri olabilir belki, annelerin bilinçlenmesi çok önemli. Sevim

definition of the ‘good mother’ is the one who raises her son for the sake of the unity of the homeland. Mothers who ‘work’ for the opposite are thus not favored. Ayşe, for example, had raised her concerns that the Mothers of Peace movement could be used for “other purposes” and not be “purely” related to motherhood.

It is interesting to see, however, that despite this implicit ideal mother image, the women who do not utter the saying “I bestow my son to the homeland” are not seen as deviant or undesirable. On the contrary, as had been previously discussed, the women themselves are also critical of the “martyrdom” of the soldiers sent to East and Southeast Turkey that they support the mothers of the martyrs by stating that they would also have said the same things if their sons had died. While the utterance which deviates from the ideal motherhood image at the aftermath of the son’s death is not found odd, it would be interesting to observe what the women would think about a mother supporting a conscientious objector son since objection is utterly rejected in these narratives.

At this point, it should be added that the perpetuation of this proud mother image is also something very personal related to their own status as the mothers who have surmounted the stress and pain of their son’s military service rather than completely being a support for the glorification of the service itself. The women reject objecting to the service stating that it is a must for “every healthy Turkish citizen”. Underlying this emphasis, however, also lies the endeavor to compensate for the harsh experiences of both their children and themselves, in other words, the belief that the ‘burden’ should be equally shared.

#### **4.4. The Remnants of Military Service**

Although beyond the scope of this research, the question as to why this ‘burden’ cannot be turned into an antimilitarist stance is also a question worth thinking about. Again, the temporariness, despite the traces it leaves afterwards, is one of the primary reasons why military service does not become something to be talked about. The memories of military service are turned to exaggerated adventure stories related to the days in the barracks yet the concrete aspects of the barracks do not appear in the aftermath of the service. The houses of the ex-soldiers, for example, are not turned into a museum-house replete with objects that relate to the ex-soldier and his life in the barracks, as in the case of the mothers of the martyrs (Gedik 2007: 96). Military service, thus, passes through the lives of the ex-soldiers and the mothers leaving them with (silenced) memories.

It is true that the concept of MotherSpace restricts the lives of women as mothers whereas patriarchal bargain provides them with a way out from these strict limits. It would, however, be reducing this to a very basic and smooth process, which is not usually the case. At this point, benefiting from Pinar Selek’s discussion of the aftermath of military service for the ex-soldiers (2008: 214-215) I would like to argue that the fissures which are revealed in men for not having been able to fulfill the parameters of ideal manhood also reveal themselves in the lives of mothers in a different form. The performance of the ideal soldier and the ideal mother come with consequences. Men cannot deviate from the discourse of the ‘manly man’ and women as mothers cannot deviate from the image of the compassionate, loving yet at the same time strong mother who will bear the absence and loss of their children. What make these fissures common are the silences which are kept so in order not to diverge from the image of the

unattainable ideal gender identities. The negative memories which can undermine this picture should not be spoken about and thus are suppressed not to be mentioned.

Memories, however, remain vivid and haunt people on the unexpected, and are not forgotten. Zeynep and Emine comment on the effects of their sons' military service experience with the following words:

The things that are forgotten are the details otherwise I keep remembering the pain that I felt while sending my son to Batman unexpectedly, not just only now because we are talking about it, but it occurs to you on such unexpected moments and you feel like crying. For example, just like the pain I feel for the loss of my mother forty years ago, it [his son's military service] will also occur to me and the pain will be the same [with that felt in a mother's death], nothing is different.<sup>154</sup>

I used to see my child waking me up while I was sleeping in the living room. My eyes are open, I'm not sleeping, and I see that my son is there saying 'Mother, I'm home'. I also felt the same things during my younger son's service. I'm all alone in the house, I'm half awake, I mean I can see, but then I open my eyes and see that there's no one. I started crying. When everyone came home at night they asked me what had happened since my eyes were all swollen. I said my son had come, I saw him, you feel him as if he's with you. I don't know, it's a very different feeling.<sup>155</sup>

Despite the sharp pain that is left remnant of those times, silences prevail in the narratives of women rather than told stories. Just like the untold stories of men as ex-soldiers, women as mothers also live with stories which they keep to themselves as "loud silences" despite the fact that what appears to the outside is the image of the proud mother, which is encapsulated within the limits of the MotherSpace which actually encourages these silences. It is exactly this double and "loud silence", that of

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<sup>154</sup> ...unuttuğum şeyler detaylar yoksa yani hiç ummadığınız bir anda yani şimdi sadece konuştuğumuz için değil, Tanyol'u Batman'a gönderdiğim o an Batman olduğunu öğrendiğim anki duyduğum acı hiç ummadığınız anda öyle bir aklınıza geliyor ki ve tekrar gözleriniz doluyor. Bu sadece sizinle konuşma değil, bir konu olur, işte bu kırk sene önce ben annemi kaybetmişimdir, anneye ilgili konuşulan herhangi bir şeyde nasıl yine aklıma gelir içim acırsa yine aynı şekilde içiniz acır, içiniz aynı şekilde acıyor hiç fark etmiyor yani. Zeynep

<sup>155</sup> Uyurken ben çocuğumu gelmiş beni kaldırıyor görüyordum, gözüm açık yani uyumuyorum salonda, bir bakıyorum ki hani çocuğum tepemde duruyor anne ben geldim gibilerinden. E Oğuz'da gene aynı duyguyu hissettim, evde kimse yok yalnızım ama böyle dalmışım gözüm görüyor yani, bir baktım gözümü açtım hiç kimse yok, başla ağlamaya. Akşam herkes geldi Allah Allah gözlerim olmuş bu kadar, ne oldu, işte ben oğlum gelmişti gördüm, oğlum gelmişti, sanki hissediyorsun o çocuğun yanında gibi, bilmiyorum çok bir değişik bir duygu. Emine

the ex-soldiers and the mothers,<sup>156</sup> which prevent these experiences from being transformed into a questioning of military service since it is over and life continues despite the fact that unlike what Cevher the Ghost utters in *Tossup*, life (at least for a certain while) may not necessarily “smell good” after military service.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have analyzed how the MotherSpace, the limits of which are drawn by the militarized soldier mothering discourse, shape the narratives of the mothers. Women as mothers, however, have their own means of coping with the limits of the MotherSpace. The second-class citizenship that are attributed to women with their roles solely as mothers expected to raise (soldier) children for the country is accepted in return for the proud mother image that is ‘bestowed’ upon them for their endeavors. While “the duty to the homeland” for men is soldiering, this duty is mothering for the women. Women, thus, benefit from this “patriarchal bargain” by raising citizen-soldiers and in turn attaining the status of the proud mother. I have tried to show, however, that this strategizing also comes with restrictions, just like the restrictions of the MotherSpace, which create certain fissures in the language of the mothers, urging them to shove away anything that may distort the perfect proud mother image leaving them with unspeakeable silences.

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<sup>156</sup> Although beyond the scope of this research, it would also be interesting to observe what fathers, as people who have also gone through the same experience, think about military service. Thus, analyzing how silences are perpetuated or broken in the case of the fathers would also be worthwhile to talk about. For a brief discussion of this issue, see Esra Gedik (2007: 119).

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

During the initial stages of the research when I was perusing the Internet on news related to soldiering, mothering, and the army, I stumbled upon a website named “The Voices of My Martyrs”, a regularly updated blog about the news of the “martyred” soldiers in the conflict zones in Turkey and the recent developments in the Turkish military. Back then, I had found it both striking and vexing that a whole website intended to function as a news blog could be kept about the young soldiers dying in the conflict zone. My initial reaction left its place to indifference after reading the numerous news of the unnamed “martyred” soldiers lined up one after the other. I visited the website several times after my initial encounter to see the frequency of its update. My interest declined when after several visits I concluded that the blogger had ceased to publish.

I visited the website once more recently after I had finalized my research. The initial indifference, however, left its place to uneasiness. I came across the news on the situation of the soldiers who had been wounded in Tunceli by a remote control bomb blast. One of my interviewee’s son was conducting his service in Tunceli and was expected to return back home in mid-May, 2009. Demet had told me how concerned she was about his son’s deportation to Tunceli, which would be taking place through Elazığ, since such a military convoy had been attacked by the PKK in the previous years. She was relieved that his son had safely made it to his military unit yet was uneasy about his return since he would be going to Elazığ again with the military convoy for his return trip.

The names of the soldiers who were wounded in Tunceli and sent to the Elazığ Military Hospital were not mentioned in the news on the blog. It was as if they were anonymous without any names or previous lives. I knew that Demet's son was not in a position to be wounded since he would not be joining the operations or sent to the conflict zone. I still felt disturbed, however, after reading the news thinking what Demet would have felt when she saw it. What perplexed me in the news was the fact that individual life stories were obscured by this narration which rendered living people into sheer numbers: two wounded soldiers. These people had different names before they became anonymous soldiers. Their lives afterwards, however, changed drastically transforming their unique stories into mere military tales.

Although encountering such a blog particularly devoted to a topic like this on the internet may be somewhat peculiar, similar news in the Turkish press are in fact quite common. The newspapers are replete with news of the “martyred” soldiers in the conflict zone and their mothers crying back at home in front of their son's caskets. The stories of the returned soldiers, however, barely receive any attention since military service in Turkey, as demonstrated throughout the thesis, is regarded as an ordinary part of an adult male's life. Military service, on the other hand, not only affects those who perform it, but also the people around them. In other words, it is not only men but also women who are a part of this militarization. Thus, I argue that women's contribution to this militarized order and the “maneuvers” which militarize their lives should be taken seriously.

## **5.1. Main Conclusions and Arguments**

The initial objective of this thesis, in this sense, was to analyze how women, among their various roles, as mothers are incorporated into this militarization. I aimed

to see how women from different social backgrounds whose sons had conducted their military service in the East and Southeast regions of Turkey perceived the army and the practice of compulsory military service and how they situated themselves within the official discourse on soldier mothering. My initial motivation was to hear the voices of the women and incorporate them into the literature on the hitherto limitedly explored nexus of militarism and motherhood, assuming that these women, whose lives became abruptly militarized with their son's service, were not provided with a realm to speak about their experiences. My initial assumptions, however, proved to be wrong.

The outcome of the research has demonstrated that the silence which seemed to prevail over the soldier mothering construction is actually reproduced, reiterated and perpetuated by the women themselves. As demonstrated in the second chapter, such a category as soldier mothering does not exist for the mothers. Though not named, the practice of soldier mothering, on the other hand, just like mothering itself, is something which the women regard ordinary and 'natural'. Talking about the experience of soldier mothering is, thus, something out of the ordinary since, according to this viewpoint, a mother is expected to encourage his son's realization of military service. It is exactly this taken for granted act of mothering, which requires that a mother be nurturing, compassionate, and supportive at all times that renders soldier mothering a non-existing category.

Unlike the silence of the mothers of the martyrs, for example, who cannot find a language to convey their experiences and who thus cling to the martyrdom discourse of nationalism and religion brought to them (Gedik 2008: 144) and the silence of the Mothers of Peace whose voices are suppressed by the state deemed to be the 'improper mothers' (Aslan 2007: 121), the women I have interviewed are not necessarily silent/silenced because they cannot find a medium to express themselves or are

repressed, but rather because they do not see this experience as something worth speaking about, at least not publicly. I argue that it is exactly this taken for granted stance towards the soldier mothering experience which makes the discourse on soldier mothering invisible yet at the same time stronger.

The invisibility of the soldier mothering practice and soldier mothering as a non-existing category due to its ‘naturalness’ makes it stronger since it covertly perpetuates the assumption that bearing and raising citizen-soldiers for the state is the duty of the women as mothers, just like soldiering and protecting the nation is the duty of every man. The women’s unquestioning acceptance of the military service as solely men’s duty and not also women’s also imply and buttress this assumption.

In addition to the invisibility and non-existence of the category of soldier mothering, one striking aspect arising from the narratives is the proud mother image, which actually complements the (non-)existence of the former aspect. Despite all the seemingly negative answers to the questions which imply the proud mother image, like their positive stance towards the women who say “I will not bestow my son to this land” upon their children’s “martyrdom”, the women with their answers to other indirect questions and narratives reiterate the proud mother image, who is expected to raise, send, support, and in turn, be proud of her son who is protecting the homeland.

Although the image of the proud mother seems to be a strict and unquestioned encapsulation of women into traditional gender identities, the issue at hand is quite different. This eager embrace of the proud mother image, I argue, is a mixture of Marsha Marotta’s articulation of the concept of “MotherSpace” (2005) and Deniz Kandiyoti’s concept of “patriarchal bargain” (1988). As previously demonstrated in the thesis, it is true that women as mothers experience a similar peer pressure as their sons.

“MotherSpace”, being one of the reasons of this pressure, which restricts the mothers in criticizing and undermining the official soldier mothering discourse, turns to their benefit with the image of the proud mother which they embrace as a part of the “patriarchal bargain”. Since women cannot totally reject the proud mother image, they strategize to find their way through this militarized order. I argue, in the final analysis, however, that this strategizing is not such a simple and smooth process since it leaves the mothers with fissures and unspeakable memories which should not be uttered for the fear that it may distort the perfect proud mother image.

One other issue that this research dwells upon is the construction, perception, and expressions of the “East” in the mothers’ narratives. Although military service is a very ordinary practice for the mothers, their sons’ deployment to the “East” seems to be an unfathomable event. I have tried to show how the “culturalization” of military service, the construction of which I have demonstrated in the first chapter, enables the service to be devoid of any negative connotation like death or violence. These connotations, however, reappear when the issue at hand is deployment to the “East” since the “East” as an unknown and ‘far away’ territory brings terror and fear to the minds of the mothers.

What I have also tried to delve into related to the “East” was how it is perceived by the mothers. According to the mothers, the “East” seems to be a homogeneous land with strictly drawn boundaries. It is, however, at the same time a quite vague space difficult to determine where it starts and ends. The “East” seems to be composed of an uninhabited and timeless map laden with cliché images, devoid of people, and immune to a long lasting war. There also seems to be a common narrative related to the “Easterner”. Although it is unclear as to who this “Easterner” is, s/he is reflected to be poor/lacking/welcoming/exciting and/or good/bad at the same time. The taken for

grantedness of the “West” and “Westerner” vis-à-vis the quite stable “Easterner” image is also what I have discussed in the thesis.

To sum up, this research contributes to the existing literature on militarism and motherhood in Turkey in several ways. First, it delves into the category of soldier mothering by analyzing the individual experiences of the people who have gone through this ordeal. In this sense, it bases its arguments on an ethnographic analysis rather than a solely theoretical one. Secondly, it not only scrutinizes the category of soldier mothering, a hitherto unanalyzed issue, as a part of the nexus of gender and militarism, but also reflects on the implications of soldier mothering as a non-existing category. Moreover, it demonstrates that despite its reflections in the official discourse, soldier mothering from the narratives of the mothers themselves is not a strictly unilateral category. This seemingly multilateral experiences and expressions of soldier mothering, however, add up to one single category of womanhood: the proud soldier’s mother. Thus, by analyzing the diverse narratives of women on military service, the thesis also reflects on how and why this proud mother image is produced and sustained by the women. Finally, this research also scrutinizes the meanings and reflections of the East in the mothers’ narratives, how “East” is constructed and perceived, something which previous research (Gedik 2008) had considered by intervieweing the mothers of the soldiers who had been “martyred” in the “East” yet had not problematized the meaning and perception of the “East” for the mothers.

## **5.2. Suggestions for Further Research**

This research was based on in-depth interviews with twenty women from different social backgrounds. While the research material was very rich in content, it was also limited in several ways. First, my initial aim in the beginning of the research

was to reach contacts from different social backgrounds. In this sense, ethnicity, religion or similar other aspects were not my primary concern. There were one Bosnian and two Armenian women among my interviewees. Apart from them, when asked to answer the short questionnaire that I gave them at the end of the interview, all of my interviewees responded by writing down or saying “none” to the question on whether they had a particular ethnic identity. Although I have not talked much on this issue, I think it would be interesting to analyze how the military service experience intersects with ethnicity.

It is noteworthy to further analyze the fact that being Turkish is not regarded as an ethnic identity just as responding to the ethnic identity question with the answer “Turk” was not an option for the women I had interviewed. While it would be interesting to analyze military service, citizenship, politics, and gender through such an analysis, I believe it would also be worthwhile to conduct interviews with a group of people with particular ethnic identities, such as Kurdish, Armenian, Bosnian, Circassian mothers, or with a large number of mothers with different ethnic identities, to see how perceptions of the state, military service, and citizenship are shaped according to these particular positionalities.

Also, I had not specified a particular time period at which the ex-soldiers had conducted their military service. All of the ex-soldiers, apart from two, had conducted their military service in the 2000s. For a further intriguing study, I would suggest a comparative analysis of the narratives of the mothers whose children have conducted their service in the 1990s and 2000s to observe how military service in the East/Southeast and soldier mothering is experienced in different time periods. Regarding the fact that the Eastern and Southeastern cities had lived under a fifteen year state of emergency which ended only recently in 2002, I find it very significant that academic work should be conducted on this issue.

As previously mentioned in the thesis, six of my interviews were accompanied by the ex-soldiers. I had not specifically invited them or asked for their presence; neither had I thought to shape the research as a comparative analysis of the perceptions of the mothers and their children regarding military service. The interviews realized under the presence of the ex-soldiers, however, proved to be quite thought provoking to analyze the discrepancies between two viewpoints, closely observe, and gain firsthand insight on how gender(ed) identities are shaped through the citizenship practices as military service. I could not change the direction of my research due to time limitations and restricted access to people, but I believe that such a research would be very thought provoking and fruitful.

This research with both its arguments and restrictions tried, to the possible extent, to fill the existing lacuna of the studies on the intricate relationship between militarism and motherhood in Turkey. Although scholarship and research on militarism in Turkey has gained attention and velocity in the past fifteen years, I believe that there is still a lot to cover in this realm. In this sense, militarism still remains as quite a pristine area with a lot of topic waiting ahead to be written on. Analyzing militarism and its repercussions with a feminist perspective is further significant regarding the pivotal role women play in the militarization process of Turkey. The nexus between motherhood and militarism remains as one of these areas which is touched upon but has not been spoken on in depth. Although the recent interest in this topic is a promising development where young researchers have been interested in the notion of motherhood and militarism both in the Turkish and Kurdish cases (Aslan 2007 and Gedik 2008), I believe that this subject still needs further scrutiny in order to demonstrate and further think on the implications of the militarization of women's lives. I hope that the outcome of this research will be able to provide a modest ground which other young researchers

can utilize for carving out space for feminist perspectives of militarism studies in Turkey.

## APPENDIX A: Interview Questions

Bu araştırma, Sabancı Üniversitesi Kültürel Çalışmalar programında gerçekleştirilen yüksek lisans tezi için yapılacak saha araştırmasının bir parçasıdır. Tez çalışmasının konusu Türkiye’de asker anneliğidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, devlet söyleminde ve medyada “asker annesi” olarak karşımıza çıkan kadınların, oğullarının askerliğini nasıl deneyimlediklerini kendi hikâyeleri üzerinden analiz etmektir. Bu çalışmada, zorunlu askerlik ve asker anneliği odaklı devlet söyleminin kadınlık, annelik, vatandaşlık ve siyaset bağlamında kadınların hikâyelerinde ne şekilde ortaya çıktığı üzerinde durulacaktır. Bu amaçla, 1984-2009 yılları arasında askerliğini Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu bölgesinde yapmış insanların anneleriyle mülakatlar gerçekleştirilmesi amaçlanmaktadır. Yapılan araştırma sadece tez çalışmasında kullanılacak ve mülakatlar sırasında edinilen tüm veriler ve bilgiler gizli tutulacaktır.

1. Ne kadar zamandır İstanbul’da oturuyorsunuz?
2. Daha önce nerelerde oturdunuz?
3. Bu semtte oturmanızın belli bir sebebi (akraba ilişkileri vs.) var mı?
4. Kaç çocuğunuz var?
5. Çocuklarınızın eğitim durumu nedir?
6. Çocuklarınızdan hangisi askere gitti?
7. Oğlunuzun askerlik yaptığı yıl, yeri ve süresi neydi?
8. Oğlunuz askere gittiğinde kaç yaşındaydı?
9. Oğlunuzun görev yapacağı yeri nasıl, kimden öğrendiniz?
10. Oğlunuzun görev yeri belli olunca neler hissettiniz? Oğlunuzun tepkisi ne oldu?
11. Oğlunuz askere gitmeden önce sizinle beraber mi yaşıyordu? Daha önce sizden ayrı yaşadı mı?
12. Oğlunuz askerden döndükten sonra sizinle beraber mi yoksa sizden ayrı mı yaşadı?
13. Oğlunuzun görev yerine gitmeden önceki süreyi nasıl geçirdiniz?
14. Kendisi için bir uğurlama töreni yaptınız mı?
15. Oğlunuzun yemin törenine katılabildiniz mi? Evet ise, tören sırasında neler hissettiniz?
16. Askerliği süresince oğlunuzla iletişim kurma imkanınız oldu mu? Görüşebildiğiniz vakit size neler anlatırdı?
17. Daha önce Doğu/Güneydoğu Anadolu bölgelerine gitmiş miydiniz? Oğlunuz orada bulunmuş muydu?

18. Doğu deyince aklınıza neler geliyor? Bu düşünceler oğlunuz orada askerlik yaptıktan sonra, eğer gittiyseniz siz orayı gördükten sonra değişti mi?
19. Askerlik süresince görev yapılacak yerlerin nasıl belirlendiğini düşünüyorsunuz? Bu belirlemede kişinin eğitim, ekonomik ya da sosyal durumunun etkileyici olduğu görüşüne katılıyor musunuz?
20. Sizce askerlik bir görev ya da vatan borcu mu?
21. Oğlunuz askere gitmeden önce askerlik hakkındaki düşünceleriniz nelerdi?
22. Askerliğin zorunlu olması hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?
23. Erkekler için askerlik bir görev ya da vatan borcuysa, sizce kadınların buradaki vatandaşlık görevi ne olmalı?
24. Paralı askerlik konusundaki düşünceleriniz neler?
25. Askerliğin eğitici bir yanı, erkeklerin üzerinde dönüştürücü bir etkisi olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz?
26. Askerliğini yapmamış erkeklerin eksik kalacağını düşünüyor musunuz?
27. Askerlikte alınan eğitimin okul eğitiminden nasıl bir farkı olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz?
28. Batı'dan Doğu'ya gidenlerin Doğu'yu; Doğu'dan Batı'ya gidenlerin de Batı'yı tanınması açısından askerliğin faydalı ve olumlu bir tecrübe olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz?
29. Kadınların da askerlik yapması konusunda ne düşünürsünüz?
30. Bir kadın/anne olarak sizin oğlunuza/devlete karşı belli görevleriniz olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz?
31. Oğlunuzun askere gitmeme şansı olsaydı bunu kullanmasını ister miydiniz?
32. Başka bir oğlunuz varsa/olsa onun da Doğu'da/Güneydoğu'da askerlik yapması konusunda neler hissederdiniz?
33. Oğlunuzun askerliği süresince/sonrasında hayatınızda değişen bir şey oldu mu?
34. Oğlunuzun askerliği süresince/sonrasında çevrenizdeki insanlarla yaşadıklarınızı paylaşabildiniz mi?
35. Oğlunuzun askerlik sırasındaki yokluğu size annelik açısından hayatınızda bir eksiklik hissettirdi mi?
36. Sizce asker annesi olmakla asker babası olmak farklı şeyler mi? Evet ise annelik, babalıktan nasıl farklı?
37. Oğlunuzun askerliği sebebiyle kendisinden ayrı kaldığınız zaman süresince aranızdaki ilişkide bir değişiklik oldu mu?

38. Ođlunuz askerlik sırasında yařadıklarınızı sizinle paylaşır mıydı/paylařtı mı?
39. Ođlunuzun askerliđi sonrasında aranızdaki iliřkide/paylařımda bir deđiřiklik oldu mu?
40. Ođlunuzun askerlik yaptıđı kiřileri/askerlik arkadařlarını tanıyor musunuz? Bu kiřiler ođlunuza benziyor mu? Benzemiyorsa, ondan nasıl farklılar?
41. Ođlunuzun askerlik arkadařları vesilesiyle tanıştıđınız anneler var mı?
42. Ođlunuz askere gittikten sonra siyasete ve bölgedeki siyasi olaylara olan ilginizde bir deđiřiklik oldu mu?
43. Ođlunuzun askerliđiyle ilgili herhangi bir derneđe üye oldunuz mu?
44. Herhangi bir siyasi görüřü destekliyor musunuz?
45. Hangi partinin sizi temsil ettiđini/edebileceđini düşünüyörsünüz?
46. Dođu'da/Güneydođu'da yařanan olayları ve PKK'yı nasıl deđerlendiriyörsünüz? Sizce bu olayların sebebi ne?
47. Sizce askerlik ve Kürt sorunu medyada nasıl ele alınıyor?
48. Sizce yařanan çatıřmaların bir çözüümü var mı?
49. Devletin vatandařlara karřı ne gibi sorumlulukları olmalı? Bu sorumlulukların yerine getirildiđini düşünüyor musunuz?
50. Bunun karřılıđında, devletin vatandařlardan ne gibi beklentileri olmalı?
51. Sizce devlet yetkililerinin/siyasetçilerin konuřmalarında asker anneliđi nasıl bir yer teřkil ediyor?
52. Ođlunuzun askerliđi süresince ya da sonrasında herhangi bir devlet görevlisiyle bir asker annesi olarak temasınız oldu mu?
53. Kadınların askerlik bađlamında medyada nasıl yer aldıđını/temsil edildiđini düşünüyörsünüz (asker annesi, asker eři vs.)?
54. Kendinizi medyada resmedilen 'asker annesi'ne benzer buluyor musunuz?
55. Sizce asker annelerinden, madalya törenleri, televizyon programları gibi yerlerde nasıl bir 'performans' bekleniyor?
56. Siz annelerin bu gibi yerlerde nasıl davranması gerektiđini düşünüyörsünüz?
57. Siz bir asker annesi olarak bu gibi etkinliklere katılacak olsanız oradaki insanlara neler söylemek isterdiniz?
58. řehitlik/gazilik kavramları hakkında neler düşünüyörsünüz?
59. řehit anneleri konusundaki görüřleriniz neler, tanıdıđınız bir řehit annesi var mı?

60. Televizyonlarda, oğullarının şehit olması sonucunda “Vatan sağolsun demiyorum” diyen kadınlar/anneler görüyoruz. Bu kadınların tepkilerini düşünürsek, bu konu hakkındaki düşünceleriniz neler?
61. Bu bağlamda, sizce annelik üzerinden iyi/kötü annelik ayrımı yapılabilir mi?
62. Medyaya da yansdığı üzere, kendilerini “Barış Anneleri” olarak adlandıran, bu oluşum çerçevesinde Kürt ve Türk anneleri Doğu’daki/Güneydoğu’daki olaylara bir çözüm bulmak amacıyla bir araya getirmek için çalışan kadınlar var. Bu oluşumu daha önce duydunuz mu, etkinliklerinden haberdar mısınız? Evet ise, bu konu hakkında neler düşünüyorsunuz? Anneliğin dönüştürücü bir etkisi olabileceğini düşünüyor musunuz?
63. Bu açıdan kadınların erkeklerden daha barışçıl olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz?
64. Son zamanlarda askerliği dini ya da vicdani sebeplerden ötürü reddeden ve askere gitmeyen insanlar hakkındaki haberler medyaya yansıyor. Siz bu konu ve bu insanların tutumları hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?

## APPENDIX B: Interview Questionnaire

1. Kaç yaşındasınız?
2. Nerede doğdunuz?
3. Anadiliniz nedir? Bildiğiniz yabancı diller var mı, varsa hangileri?
4. Eğitim durumunuz nedir?
5. Çalışıyor musunuz? Evet ise, mesleğiniz nedir?
6. Herhangi bir sosyal güvenceniz var mı? Varsa nedir? (Emekli Sandığı, SSK vs.)
7. Hanenizin toplam geliri nedir? (500'den az; 500-1000; 1000-2000; 2000 ve üstü)
8. Kendinizi hangi sınıfa mensup olarak görüyorsunuz? (alt-orta, orta, üst-orta)
9. Kendinizi hangi dine mensup olarak görüyorsunuz? (Müslüman, Hıristiyan, Musevi vs.)
10. Kendinizi herhangi bir etnik sınıfa mensup olarak görüyor musunuz? (Ermeni, Kürt, Boşnak vs.)

**APPENDIX C: Profile of the Interviewees**

Name	Son's Place of Duty	Service Year
Eda	Hakkari-Yüksekova	2006-7
Zeynep	Batman	2007
Fatma	Ağrı-Tutak	1999-2000
Ayşe	Bingöl	2001
Sevim	Ağrı-Patnos	2003-4
Sevinç	Hakkari-Otluca	2006-7
Sibil	Elazığ	2007
Gökçen	Batman	2007
Selma	Mardin	2003
Nimet	Antep	2005-6
Arzu	Kars-Subatan	2008-9
Hayrunisa	Antep	2003
Övünç	Erzincan	2008-9
Demet	Tunceli	2008-9
Hatice	Diyarbakır-Ergani	1996-7
Emine	Siirt	2008-9
Semiha	Mardin	2007-8
Ayşegül	Diyarbakır	2004-5
Deniz	Kars-Sarıkamış	2005-6
Dilek	Şırnak	2007-8

**APPENDIX D: Socio-Economic Profile of the Interviewees<sup>157</sup>**

Name	Education	Job	Social Security	Income	Class	Religion	Ethn.
Eda	Univ.	TV Admin.	SSK	2000+	Upper-middle	Muslim	None
Zeynep	Univ. drop out	Housewife	SSK	2000+	Middle	All	None
Fatma	Primary S.	Housewife	None	500-1000	Lower-middle	Muslim	None
Ayşe	High S.	Housewife	Bağkur	2000+	Middle	None	None
Sevim	Univ. drop out	Retired	SSK	1000-2000	Upper-middle	Muslim	None
Sevinç	Primary S.	Stylist	SSK	1000-2000	Lower-middle	Muslim	None
Sibil	High S.	Retired	SSK	1000-2000	Middle	Christian	Armenian
Gökçen	Primary S.	Housewife	SSK	500-1000	Middle	Muslim	None
Selma	None	Housewife	Emekli S.	500-1000	Middle	Muslim	None
Nimet	H. S. drop out	Housewife	SSK	500-1000	Lower-middle	Muslim	Alevi
Arzu	Middle S.	Housewife	SSK	1000-2000	Upper-middle	Muslim	None
Hayrunisa	High S.	Retired	SSK	2000+	Middle	Muslim	None
Övünç	University	Chem. Eng.	SSK	2000+	Upper-middle	Muslim	None
Demet	High S.	Engineering	SSK	1000-2000	Upper-middle	Christian	Armenian
Hatice	Primary S.	Cook	Bağkur	-500	Middle	Muslim	Bosnian
Emine	None	Housewife	SSK	500-1000	Middle	Muslim	None
Semiha	Primary S.	Housewife	SSK	1000-2000	Middle	Muslim	None
Ayşegül	High S.	Housewife	SSK	1000-2000	Middle	Muslim	None
Deniz	High S.	Teacher	Bağkur	2000+	Middle	Muslim	None
Dilek	Primary S.	Housewife	SSK	500-1000	Middle	Muslim	None

<sup>157</sup> The answers given to these questions are that of the interviewees.

## APPENDIX E: The Letter from the Turkish Armed Forces

SAYIN:

..... KUTSAL GÖREVİNE BAŞLAMAK ÜZERE / / TARİHİNDE BİRLİĞİMİZE KATILMIŞTIR.  
KOMUTANLIĞIMIZ ..... SAĞLIĞI VE İHTİYAÇLARIYLA YAKINDAN İLGİLENECEK VE İHTİYAÇLARI  
DEVLET TARAFINDAN KARŞILANACAKTIR.

..... BUNDAN SONRA ASKER OCAĞINDA, YUVASINDAN AYRI FAKAT ARKADAŞLARI İLE BİRLİKTE DEĞİŞİK  
BİR ORTAMA HAYATI TANIMAYA BAŞLAYACAK, GEREKLİ EĞİTİMLERİ GÖRECEK VE MUHARİP BİRLİKLERİMİZDE GÖREV  
YAPACAK SEVİYEYE GETİRİLECEKTİR.

BÜYÜK DEĞİŞİK ORTAM VE HİZMETİN EN BÜYÜK NOKSANI, SİZLERDEN AYRI KALMIŞ OLMAK VE AİLE YUVASININ  
ÖZLEMİNİ DUYMAKTIR.

SİZLERİN GÖSTERECEĞİNİZE İNANDIĞIMIZ YAKIN İLGİ VE DESTEĞİNİZLE MORAL KAZANACAK, BÖYLECE DAHA  
BÜYÜK BİR VATAN SEVGİSİ, VAZİFE AŞKI, BİRLİK VE BERABERLİK DUYGUSU İÇİNDE KUTSAL VATAN GÖREVİNİ İFA  
EDECEKLERDİR. MAZİDE VATANIN BİRLİĞİ VE BÜTÜNLÜĞÜ, MİLLETİN REFAH VE HUZURU İÇİN SEVE SEVE HAYATLARINI  
FEDA EDEN ATALARININ İZİNDE VE ONLAR GİBİ GEREKTİĞİNDE KANINI VE CANINI FEDA EDECEĞİNE İNANARAK ONLARIN  
RAHAT VE HUZURU, YÜKSEK BİR MORALE SAHİP OLABİLMELERİ İÇİN SIK SIK İLETİŞİM KURMANIZI TEMENNİ EDERİZ.

ANCAK;

ÖNEMLİ AİLEVİ PROBLEMLERİNİZ OLMADIKÇA KENDİ HALLEDEBİLECEĞİNİZ KÜÇÜK SORUNLARINIZI İLETMEMENİZ  
VE HEPİYİ VE MEMNUN OLDUĞUNUZU BELİRTMENİZİ,

VAZİFE ARKADAŞLIK BAĞLARI, VATAN SEVGİSİNİN ÖNEMİNİ BELİRTEN TELKİNLERDE BULUNMANIZI, BÖYLECE  
..... VAZİFESİNDE DAHA ŞEVKLE BAĞLANMASINA YARDIMCI OLMANIZI ÖNEMLE BELİRTİNİZ.

..... RUHEN VE BEDENEN GÖNDERDİĞİNİZDEN DAHA GÜÇLÜ VE YETİŞMİŞ OLARAK AİLE YUVASINA  
DÖNMESİ, ASKERLİK HAYATINA VE GİRDİĞİ YENİ ÇEVRESİNE DAHA KOLAY UYUM SAĞLAMASI HEPİMİZİN ARZUSUDUR.

ASKERLİK YAŞAMI BOYUNCA, ..... HER TÜRLÜ SORUNU İLE YAKINDAN İLGİLENİLECEKTİR  
BUNUN İÇİN SİVİL HAYATTA İKEN TARAFINIZDAN BİLİLEN ALKOL BAĞIMLILIĞI, UYUŞTURUCU MADDE KULLANMA  
ALİŞKANLIĞI, KİŞİSEL DAVRANIŞ BOZUKLUKLARI VEYA ÖNEMLİ SAĞLIK PROBLEMLERİ İLE VARSA SÜREKLİ KULLANDIĞI  
İLAÇLARIN BİZLERCE DE BİLİNMESİ KENDİSİNE YARARLI OLACAKTIR. .... BİLİLEN SORUNLARINI  
BİLDİRMENİZ HALİNDE TARAFIMIZDAN SORUNLARININ ÇÖZÜMÜ KOLAYLAŞACAKTIR.

KISA DÖNEM ERLERİN YEMİN TÖRENİ / / TARİHİNDE YAPILACAK OLUP BU TÖRENDE SİZLERİ DE ARAMIZDA  
GÖRMEKTEN KIVANÇ DUYACAĞIZ.

..... YENİ ADRESİ VE BİZİMLE İRTİBAT KURABİLECEĞİNİZ TELEFON NUMARASI AŞAĞIYA  
ÇIKARTILMIŞTIR. MEKTUPLARINIZDA BU ADRESİ KULLANINIZ VE İHTİYAÇ DUYDUĞUNUZDA BELİRTİLEN TELEFON  
NUMARALARINI ÇEKİNMEDEN ARAYINIZ.

SAYGILARIMLA.

**BİRLİK ADRESİ** \_\_\_\_\_ :

J.KOMD. TB. KLIĞI

**TELEFON VE SAATLERİ** \_\_\_\_\_ :

MESAİ GÜNLER	SAAT 17:30'DAN SAAT 21:00'A KADAR
CUMARTESİ	SAAT 13:00'DAN SAAT 21:00'A KADAR
PAZAR	SAAT 07:00'DAN SAAT 21:00'A KADAR

TLF.NO (SANTRAL)  
TLF NO (ANKESÖRLÜ)

## APPENDIX F: The Map of Eastern Anatolia



## APPENDIX G: The Map of Southeastern Anatolia



**APPENDIX H: Women's Day Posters of TAF, 2007**



“You are the symbols of modern Turkey. We celebrate your March 8, Women's Day.”

APPENDIX I: Women's Day Posters of TAF, 2008



“We celebrate the Women's Day of our self-sacrificing women who have educated, raised, made us who we are and with whose existence we are honored.”

APPENDIX I: Women's Day Posters of TAF, 2008



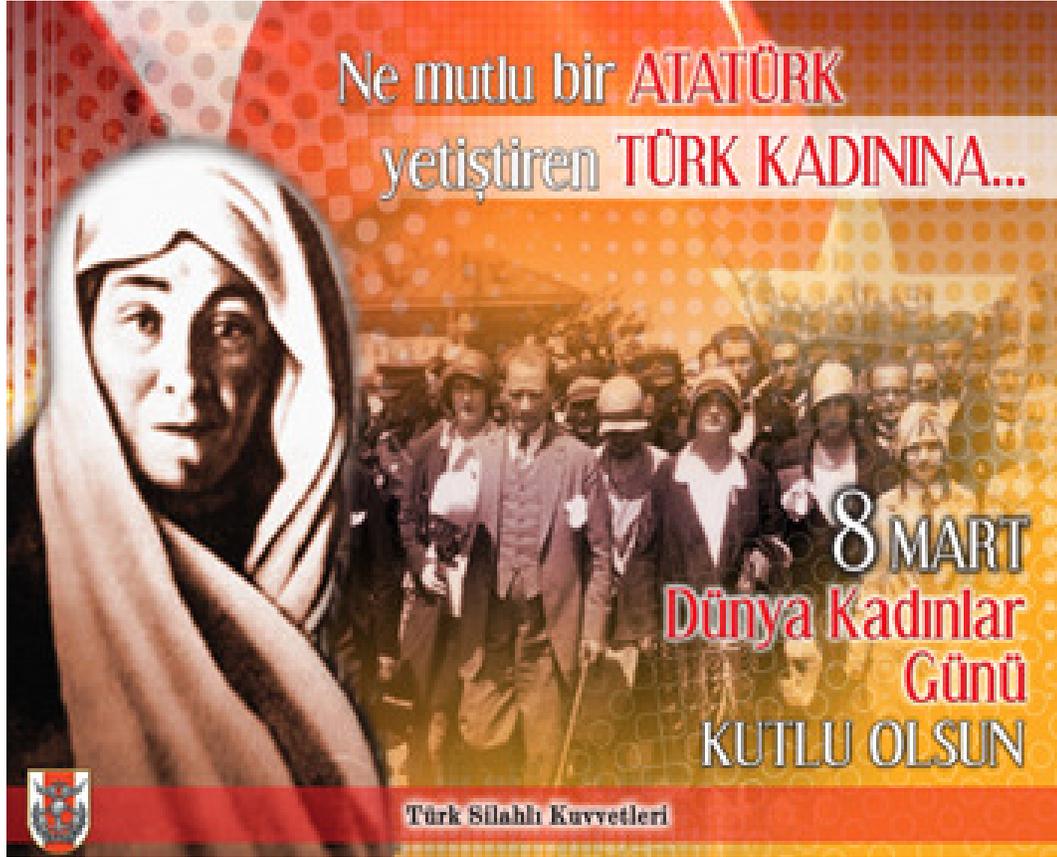
“Our women have to be more intelligent, more productive, more knowledgeable than men. We celebrate your Women's Day.”

APPENDIX I: Women's Day Posters of TAF, 2008



“Our republic has reached its present state by developing on the shoulders of our women.”

APPENDIX J: Women's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



"How happy it is to be a Turkish woman raising Atatürk. We celebrate March 8, Women's Day"

APPENDIX J: Women's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



“We celebrate March 8, Women’s Day. Woman for the Turkish Republic today is an exalted and honorable being in the most respected state, just like she has been throughout Turkish history.”

APPENDIX J: Women's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



“March 8, Women's Day... Everything we see on earth is the creation of women.”

APPENDIX K: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2007



“You are worth everything. We celebrate your Mother’s Day.”



“You are always with us. We celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX L: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2008



“Your love is our power. We celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX L: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2008



“Everything you see on earth is the creation of women. We celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX M: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



“The most significant men of every period have been raised by the mothers of the Turkish nation. We celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX M: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



“Our loving and self-sacrificing mothers, we celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX M: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



“Mothers with a scent of flowers, we celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX M: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



“All our mothers are in our hearts. We celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX M: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



“Our compassionate mothers, we are there for you. We celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX M: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



“The children you have raised are the protectors of this homeland. We celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX M: Mother's Day Posters of TAF, 2009



“Kind hearted mothers; we celebrate your Mother’s Day.”

APPENDIX N: Father's Day Posters of TAF, 2007



"We are proud of the sons you have raised. We celebrate your Father's Day.

APPENDIX N: Father's Day Posters of TAF, 2007



“How happy I am in your compassionate heart. We celebrate your Father's Day.”

APPENDIX N: Father's Day Posters of TAF, 2007



“The love of the homeland in my heart is your creation. We celebrate Father’s Day.”



“We have realized that you have never let go of our hand which you had held on our birth. We celebrate your Father's Day.”

APPENDIX O: Father's Day Posters of TAF, 2008



“We celebrate the Father's Day of our fathers whose sacrifices we will never forget.”

APPENDIX O: Father's Day Posters of TAF, 2008



“It is our turn of duty. We celebrate your Father’s Day.”

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