

WORLD TRIBUNAL ON IRAQ

Making the Case Against War

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Militarism and the Culture of Violence

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Exactly 100 years ago, in 1905, Leo Tolstoy published his essay "Patriotism and Government," where he said the following: "Continental powers without a murmur submitted to the introduction of a universal military service, that is, to the slavery, which for the degree of degradation and loss of will cannot be compared with any of the ancient conditions of slavery."¹

Introduced by the French Revolution and perfected by Prussia, universal military service had turned the formation of "citizen armies" into a foundational process in the emerging nation-states of Europe. A state's soldiers would no longer be limited to its paid mercenaries. With the introduction of military service as a foundation of citizenship, the states would have access to the minds and bodies of at least half of their citizen body. This enabled a cheap and effective form of military mobilization, which soon created the catastrophes of WWI and WWII.

I don't know if this was your reaction a minute ago when I read Tolstoy's quote, but when I first read the statement by Tolstoy, calling military service the worst form of slavery, I was quite surprised. These views are quite radical even *today*; they must have been like science fiction in 1905. How could he have been so clear, so unambiguous, so sharp in his critique? Soon I realized that the problem was not with Tolstoy. It was with my assumptions about history and historical change. Deep down, I was assuming that we, as the critical thinkers of late twentieth and early twenty-first century, were more radical in our views about military service and militarism than our predecessors from the previous century. The more I read about militarism, the more problematic this assumption has become.

The twentieth century has been a century of war and destruction. It has also been a century of militarized nationalisms defining the order of our lives. Nationalism and militarism have strongly reinforced each other and have together made it very difficult to remember and appreciate Tolstoy's remarks on military service. After all, serving in the military, whether as part of a compulsory system or as a "volunteer," is the most valued citizenship practice. Who can talk against those "men and women who bravely put their lives at risk for all of us"? We can only be grateful.

Yet, as critic Elaine Scarry reminds us, the most fundamental activity in war is killing.² In the words of Tim Goodrich, who spoke yesterday, "a soldier's foremost job is to kill." Therefore, those men and women to whom we are asked to be grateful are not dying for us, they are *killing* for us. In our name; with our direct or indirect support...

According to historian Alfred Vagts, "if the members of a whole nation are to be made soldiers, they must be filled with a military spirit in time of peace."³ It seems as though nation-states initially had two main tools to create citizens with a military spirit: universal compulsory military service and universal compulsory education. These were the two institutions through which the state had direct contact with its citizens and, in early years of nation-state formation (and particularly during times of war), there was a close link in the way these two institutions were perceived. The military was seen as a school, in Eugen Weber's terms "the school of the fatherland,"⁴ and the schools were given a nationalizing and militarizing role. During and after World War I, there were fierce debates about militarism and education in the United States and Britain (there have been numerous reports, articles, and books published on this issue). Educator and philosopher John Dewey, for instance, was vocal in his critique of military training in schools:

Military Training in schools cannot be defended on the ground of physical training.... Its real purpose is to create a state of mind which is favorable to militarism and to war.... Now that war has been outlawed by agreement among the nations, it ought to be recognized that it is criminal to produce in the young, emotional habits that are favorable to war.⁵

In Britain, John Langdon-Davies wrote a book titled *Militarism in Education: A Contribution to Educational Reconstruction*, and argued that schools were being configured as the thresholds of conscription. He urged the public to "beware of the insidious advance of industrial and military conscription" and suggested that they "must cease to educate for war, and to inculcate the doctrine of force."⁶

So let us ask ourselves: A century into these debates, has this marriage of nationalism and militarism through such practices as military service and national education ceased to exist in the national and global order of things? If not, have we as scholars and activists paid enough attention to

them? Or have the sciences and the social sciences, as well as our oppositional political struggles, been complicit in the *normalization* and *invisibilization* of the everyday forms of militarism?

If you do a search on books that have "militarism" in their titles, you would be surprised (or perhaps not) to find that quite a few of your major resources will be books from the first part of this century. Despite the critical thinking, at least in academia, on nationalism since the 1980s, there are still very few works that discuss militarism, apart from the militarism of Japan and Germany during World War II.⁷ For some reason, militarism as a concept has been absent from our critical vocabulary. Does this mean that it has been absent from our lives? Or have we, as Issa Shivji's paper suggested on the first day, been *embedded* in military structures and militarized language as intellectuals as well?

In the past years, as I was studying militarism in Turkey, one of the things I looked at in the context of the militarization of education was a high-school course on national security.⁸ Every single Turkish person you have met who is a high-school graduate has taken a one-year course focusing on military issues, as part of a curriculum and textbook developed by the military. The teachers of this course are military officers. As I was doing ethnographic research on this course, my interest was met with surprise by many of the people I interviewed. Almost everyone suggested that this course was "not important at all." It was an "easy" course which did not "mean anything to the students." Many remembered that the students often made *fun* of this course and its teacher. The suggestion that the course might have had an impact on us in any way was "absurd." "No one takes the course seriously, why are you?" was the response I often received. I ultimately concluded that these responses themselves were the utmost expression of the widespread nature of militarization in Turkey. The fact that all high-school students were educated in military affairs by a military officer was something to simply make fun of. The presence of the military in civilian schools was so normalized that there was nothing to take seriously.

We are here today discussing war. A horrific human tragedy has taken place—is taking place—in Iraq. Even as someone who has been following this war pretty closely, I was shocked and utterly disgusted at the testimonies provided at this tribunal. The crimes committed against the Iraqi people are crimes against all of us. We are all asking ourselves a simple yet very difficult question: "How has this been possible?"

I would like to suggest that in seeking this answer, we remember Tolstoy and many others who have taken similar positions, and pay more attention to *peacetime* war preparations and *peacetime* militarization.

I understand militarism to be an ideology that glorifies practices and norms associated with militaries.⁹ Fundamental here is the *normalization* of the use of violence. Military thinking and practice rests on the use of violence and makes everything else unimaginable. It is *unrealistic*, we are often told, to imagine nonviolent solutions to serious international conflicts. Nonviolence *may* be the ideal, but we all have to be realists and "bite the bullet," so to speak. Very successful acts of nonviolent opposition to colonialism and racism, such as the Gandhian resistance, which resulted in the independence of India, or the African-American struggle for civil rights, which resulted in the desegregation of the United States, are presented as exceptions to the rule that violence is necessary to initiate social and political change.

It is this argument about the "inevitability of violence" that militarizes our notion of resistance, our notion of opposition, our politics in general, often times even in the antiwar movement.

It is very significant in this sense that one member of the Jury of Conscience in this tribunal is a conscientious objector. Mehmet Tarhan is not against the Turkish military; he is against all militaries. Most importantly, he is against the very institution of military service, which even in the absence of war—perhaps more effectively then—militarizes our minds, our bodies, our relationships with one another, and our own self-understanding.

As we hold this World Tribunal at the turn of the twenty-first century, what do we have to say about our embeddedness in the prevailing discourses of militarism, in the subtle processes of militarization, and in the normalization of violence in both hegemonic and oppositional politics? What would Mehmet Tarhan say if he were here with us today instead of being detained in a military prison for "persistent insubordination"? What does his insubordination tell us about *our* subordination? I am personally saddened by our lack of attention to the militarization of Iraqi resistance and the crimes committed by armed resistors against civilian Iraqis. Are we once again suggesting that "there is no other way"? And whose language does this mimic?

This session is about the global security environment and future

alternatives. Having talked about the urgent need I perceive in taking militarism and processes of militarization seriously as a way of understanding global *insecurities*, I would now like to concentrate on the issue of alternatives and point to a very creative form of political action carried out by antimilitarists in Turkey in the past two years. I want us to join their tour of militarist sites for a few minutes and reflect on similar sites in our own neighborhoods, in our own lives.

On 15 May 2004, militourists gathered in Istanbul and started their day-long tour of selected militarist sites. In the Haydarpasa train station, where one often witnesses the farewell ceremonies of young men going to their military units, antimilitarists greeted the conscientious objectors arriving on the train, throwing one of them up in the air, shouting "our objector is the greatest objector." The next stop was the Gulhane Military Hospital. A case of apples was to be presented to the soldiers "defending" the hospital. They would be asked to separate the good apples from the "rotten" ones, as they were experts in this procedure. This did not happen, because the group was not allowed to get close to the hospital, but instead they left the apples in a park nearby, asking the soldiers to come and get them. Why was this site important? The brochure of the militourism festival announced the Gulhane Military Hospital as the only "state-sponsored institutional gay porn archive" in Turkey. This was due to a widespread procedure whereby those men who declare themselves to be gay are asked to present photographs or videos that show them in a homosexual relationship. These photographs are meant to qualify them for the "rotten" (or "unfit") report that they would be given. This was part of Mehmet Tarhan's objection. He refused to get this report, saying that this procedure was a proof of the rottenness of the militarist system itself, not of him as a gay man.

The militourism festival continued with a stop at a corporation, the Nurol Holding, that produces weapons, in addition to many other products for civilian consumption. The group read a declaration in front of this corporation and placed an order for "broken rifles." The next site was a military recruitment office in Beşiktaş. After a very loud concert of anti-militarized songs (that is, songs whose lyrics were turned into antimilitarist messages) in front of the recruitment office, the militourists proceeded to Taksim, where the new objectors, among them three women, read their objection declarations.

In May 2005, militourists were this time in Izmir, making visible the militarist symbols and sites of this beautiful Aegean city. Attended by a Greek conscientious objector, this tour covered a castle, a NATO base, a militarist statue, the central office of a company (TUKA) owned by the big military corporation OYAK, and a military port facility. The final stop was the cultural heart of the city: Kibris ehitleri Caddesi, the Cyprus Martyrs' Street. The street was in a neighborhood called Alsancak (literally, "red military flag"), which we approached by driving on the Talat Pa a Boulevard (Talat Pa a being the main architect of the Armenian deportation law of 1915), passing the Veteran Primary School. As the brochure of the second militourism festival suggested: Militarism was in every aspect of our lives.

The tour ended with a non-militarist, nonviolent, yet very loud walk (because it was non-militarist, I will not call it a "march") along the Cyprus Martyrs' Street, where the group shouted over and over again: "We will not kill, we will not die, we will not be anyone's soldiers."

Before this walk, eleven people, four of them women, read their conscientious objection declarations. Why were women refusing? many people who witnessed this event asked. After all, military service is only obligatory for men. To answer this question, I will refer to a very revealing story that was published in the 1930s in a major Turkish monthly.

In the story, Hüsmen, a young peasant from Bergama, is spending his last day in the barracks. He is very excited that it is his last day, *not* because he is leaving the military, but because he will be able to put to use the things that he learned in the military in his civilian life. He starts daydreaming:

After he is back in the village and has his wedding, he will tell Kezban all about the things he learned in military service... When Hüsmen says it all to Kezban, she will be dumbfounded; the fascination of his wife... will make Hüsmen proud. He will first teach Kezban how to identify herself [in the military way]. When he calls 'Kezban,' Kezban will run to him like a soldier, stand in front of Hüsmen and after giving the official greeting, she will say 'Ali's daughter Kezban... yes, sir!' and will wait for his orders.

Such was the daydream of a young peasant man as it was narrated by Celal Sıtkı, the writer of this short story, in 1933.¹⁰ In this story, participation

in the military is linked directly to masculinity, where *military knowledge is power over women*. Hüsmen may have been a private accepting orders in the military (or a slave in Tolstoy's terms), but he is guaranteed the *unconditional* position of the commander at home, with the position of the slave designated for his wife.

Like the Israeli women who have run a campaign called "Women Refuse" (and we are very fortunate to have one of the initiators of this campaign, Rela Mazali, here with us today), the women objectors in Turkey point to the crucial role that women play in normalizing and reproducing militarism in our contemporary societies. They point to the intricate links between militarism, sexism, and heterosexism, and challenge everyone to recognize those links. Mehmet Tarhan does the same.

To repeat my earlier questions: What would Mehmet Tarhan say if he were here with us instead of being detained in a military prison for "persistent insubordination"? What does his insubordination tell us about *our* subordination, *our* embeddedness in reproducing militarized politics, militarized lives, a militarized world order?

Amy Bartholomew was suggesting earlier that we need to re-theorize empire. I would like to insist that we re-theorize militarism as well, and that we do this with "feminist curiosity,"¹¹ to borrow Cynthia Enloe's beautiful formulation. This re-theorizing is necessary if we want to understand how Tolstoy can be more clear and more radical than most of us a century later.

I want to finish with an anonymous antimilitarist statement:

"Imagine that there is a war, and no one is going."

Can we?