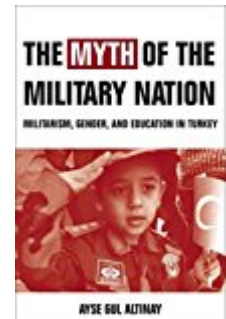


**Ayşe Gül Altınay.** *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 206 S. \$59.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4039-6281-2.



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**Published on** H-War (December, 2005)

## The Mask of the Military

This book is an effort to reveal the central myth of modern Turkey: the nation as indivisible from its military. The author's thesis is that this myth has become, by the deliberate activity of the state, intertwined with the ideology of nationalism, the educational process, understandings of gender, and other elements of Turkish society. Promoted by the Turkish government, as well as by the army and other security forces, the concept of Turkey as a "military-nation" has become inseparable from the modern model of Turkey, even as the nation becomes more distant from the original conditions that created this state. This doctrine exemplifies the efforts by the Turkish military and other supporters of the national security state to provide a mask covering the internal conflicts within Turkey over religious and ethnic differences. Altınay's argument, based on years of research, has broader implications for Turkey and its political partners, as the Turks attempt to become more integrated into Europe and the West.

The saying, "Every Turk is born a soldier" is one of the founding myths examined in part 1,

"The Military-Nation." Tracing the development of Turkish nationalism during the late Ottoman period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Altınay argues that the concept of Turks as soldiers became inextricably linked to this new ideology, through the deliberate efforts of leaders such as Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) to inculcate militarism into the nascent nation. The most intensive efforts to create a militarized definition of Turkish nationalism, however, did not come during the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and subsequent War for Independence (1919-1923). Instead, this movement came after the founding of the Turkish Republic (1923), when previous calls for unity among Muslim peoples of the Ottoman Empire became subsumed under the umbrella of distinctively Turkish nationalism, thereby excluding Kurds, Laz, Çerkes, and other Islamic groups in the region. By the time of Atatürk's death in 1938, Turkish militarized nationalism had become the exclusive ideology of the Turkish Republic, promoted through education, culture, language reform, and the institutions of the state, especially

the military. One example of this process was the supervision by Mustafa Kemal of the writing of an official history of Turkey, which embraced several key claims: the Turks as a state-making people; a white ethnic and racial heritage; a historical presence in Central Asia and Anatolia predating that of other ethnic groups; and the contributions of Turks to past civilizations, including the Hittites, Seljuks, the Moguls, and the Ottomans. A key aspect of these previous Turkish states was, according to the "Turkish History Thesis" articulated during the 1930s, the tradition of military service for all able-bodied Turks: the Turkish military nation of past and present. Although historically dubious, this new ideology, according to Altınay, was essential in the creation of Turkish nationalism and the modern state of Turkey. This Turkish nationalism, even in its military manifestations, was almost entirely masculine, as illustrated by the case of Sabiha Gökçen, Turkey's (and the world's) first female combat pilot. Her exceptional example, however, proves the rule of masculinity, as she was only able to achieve her special status because of her adoption by Mustafa Kemal, who encouraged her dream of being an air force pilot, but did not endorse the same opportunities for other Turkish women. Military service, aside from brief periods, remained restricted to male Turks until the 1990s.

In part 2, "Military Service," Altınay discusses universal military service and its role in creating Turkish militarism and nationalism. Illustrating the widespread acceptance of service as a prerequisite to marriage, serious employment, and other obligations, she presents the importance of the military as an institution for the education of Turkish men. In addition to preparing them for war, the army introduces Turks to Turkey, through training, travel, and combat operations throughout the nation, and even in foreign nations. Men also become literate and, if minorities, Turkish-speakers. This education through the military enhances male dominance by providing access to the state and its institutions. Another fun-

damental element of military service is the development of a military culture, which veterans express through the fraternity of war stories, complaints about the conditions, and a common sense of sacrifice.

Not every able-bodied Turk serves in the military, as Altınay articulates in her section on military resisters. A very small minority in a nation that embraces military service as a precursor to manhood, these conscientious objectors exist perilously along the margins of society. Tolerated so long as they do not make their objections public, many exist in a limbo between freedom and imprisonment. The Turkish government denies their existence, because to acknowledge it would be to accept dissent to the concept of the military nation, but does not allow them full rights, for to do so would also admit that men can be citizens without military service. The war against the Kurdish insurgency, which continued in Eastern Turkey throughout the 1990s, was a focal point for resistance to conscription.

In part 3, "Militarizing Education," Altınay argues that the Turkish educational system functions as a key institution in the militarization of society. Atatürk's emphasis in the 1920s and 1930s was on two "fronts": defending Turkey from external and internal opponents, and promoting Turkish nationalism. Both of these fronts are linked by military officers assisting in public schools. Another key element of this linkage is mandatory military education, a course named National Security Knowledge. Taught by senior officers in every high school, this class has served to inculcate military values, even when not taken seriously by its students. Although Kurdish, Greek and Armenian minorities faced discomfort and difficulties in this class, the continued existence of the class perpetuates the official ideology of Turkey as a military nation.

There are two very minor problems with this book, both issues of style. First, the author's use of sources is distracting. In some sections, there are

so many parenthetical references they interrupt the flow of the text. While it is important to show evidence of research and theoretical knowledge, Altinay could have used footnotes to improve the manuscript. The other minor issue is one of voice; the author extensively uses the first person. Common in Altinay's field of anthropology, the practice is rare in other social sciences. The author is most effective when she speaks more exclusively in the third person. Again, these are more questions of style than content, and do not detract in a significant way from the merits of the volume.

This book unveils much about the culture of the military in modern Turkey. College and university libraries will find it a useful addition to their collections, as will researchers interested in military anthropology, gender issues, the ideology of nationalism in the developing world, and concepts of the state in the modern Middle East.

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**Citation:** Wayne Bowen. Review of Altinay, Ayse Gül. *The Myth of the Military-Nation: Militarism, Gender, and Education in Turkey*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. December, 2005.

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