

**GÜNÜMÜZ TÜRKİYESİNDE ASKERLİĞİN TEMSİLLERİ:  
SOSYAL PSİKOLOJİK BİR ARAŞTIRMA<sup>1</sup>**

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**ÖZET**

Askerlik görevi Türkiye'nin tüm erkek vatandaşları için bir mükellefiyet olmasının yanı sıra bireylerin ülkelerine hizmet etmelerinin önde gelen yollarından biri olarak görülmekte; bu nedenle, bu kültürel bağlam içerisinde büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma kapsamında, askerlik pratiğinin gündelik hayatta ne şekilde deneyimlendiğini ve yorumlandığını anlayabilmek amacıyla Sosyal Temsiller Kuramının bakış açısından hareketle bir mülakat çalışması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışma 50 yetişkin bireyle gerçekleştirilmiş yarı-yapılandırılmış mülakatlar üzerinde gerçekleştirilen tematik içerik analizi sonuçlarını kapsamaktadır. Araştırmanın bulguları genel itibarı ile toplumda askerlik hizmeti ve askerlere yönelik yaygın temsiller olduğunu ve bu temsillerin militarizm, milliyetçilik ve hegemonik erkeklik ideolojileriyle ilişkili olduğunu, ancak bahsi geçen olgulara farklı açılandan yaklaşan temsillerin de mevcut olduğunu göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sosyal temsiller, askerlik, militarizm, milliyetçilik, erkeklik

**REPRESENTATIONS OF MILITARY SERVICE IN  
CONTEMPORARY TURKEY: A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL  
STUDY<sup>2</sup>****ABSTRACT**

Military service is an essential civil obligation for male citizens in Turkey as well as being seen as a prominent way of serving one's country; therefore, it is of prime importance for this cultural context. In an attempt to understand how this practice is experienced and interpreted in everyday thinking, an interview study has been conducted following the frame of Social Representations Theory. The study includes thematic content analysis of semi-structured interviews that have been conducted with 51 adults. Results show that prevailing representations of military service and conscripts exist and that most of these representations are related to ideologies of militarism, nationalism, and hegemonic masculinity although representations approaching the phenomenon from another angle also exist.

**Keywords:** Social representations, military service, militarism, nationalism, masculinity

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<sup>1</sup> Bu çalışma, yazarın yüksek lisans tezinden üretilmiştir.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Every Turk is born a soldier.” is a famous slogan chanted by conscripts during the regular training included in the military service, which is a compulsory duty for every male citizen in the country. Moreover, the belief that Turks possess militaristic and heroic characteristics as a nation is widely disseminated through the speeches of government officials since the establishment of the country, as well as the school textbooks or contemporary military, themed TV shows or movies. However, to conclude that military service is an important concept in Turkish culture, we still need to learn how the concept of military service is represented in the semantic world of Turkish citizens. Benefitting from the perspective and methodology of Social Representations Theory, this study aims to examine the content and depth of individual-level representations related to military service and conscripts as well as the ideological character of these representations.

### **The Emergence of Military Service**

In today’s world, military service is a duty affecting millions of lives since most countries across the world have armies consisting of professional soldiers or conscripts (Barbey, 2015). However, both military service and the army of citizens are rather new concepts which emerged after the French Revolution and spread through Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Belge, 2011). Until the modern era, wars occurred between armies and affected only the attendants’ lives. Following the French Revolution; on the other hand, all citizens gained the right to carry weapons and – being affected by the patriotic atmosphere in the wake of the French Revolution – to defend their countries. This gave rise to the emergence of the phenomena of total war and people’s army (Aydın, 2009). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the First World War (WWI) broke out, almost all male citizens of Europe had joined the armies of their countries and the commanders in war became national leaders. All these developments paved the way for militarism, i.e. a set of ideas and practices which glorify military norms and make them diffuse into the organization of the social life (Altınay, 2004; Chenoy, 1998), to be the dominant ideology, especially in countries where social forces to prevent this rise did not exist (Belge, 2011).

### **How Do Army and Military Service Seep into Turkish Cultural Context**

Being a multi-ethnic and multi-faith structure, the Ottoman Empire was affected by the rise of patriotic and nationalist movements subsequent to the French Revolution, as well. Therefore, the Empire tried to keep up with developments – especially military ones – occurring in Europe and not to fall from power. *Conscription* was among those important developments and it was easily embraced by the military bureaucracy governing the Ottoman Empire at that time, who believed that the Empire could only be resuscitated

through the militarization of the society (Cora, 2013). Moreover, these beliefs and ideals were shared by the founders of the Turkish Republic, which was established after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire subsequent to the WWI. For them, the army was the “most notable indicator of the unity of the nation and the presence of the state” (İnan, 1930, as cited in Aydın, 2009). Accordingly, military service became a mandatory duty for all male citizens in the early years of the Republic. Hence it can be concluded that the army and military service have begun to gain importance in the period when the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and the Turkish Republic was established.

Parallel to these developments, The Turkish History Thesis, an official interpretation of Turkish history with a specific emphasis on the militaristic characteristics of the Turkish nation, was being formed. With the help of this thesis, the history of Turkish nationality was reformulated and *the myth of the military-nation*, i.e. the myth that the military is central to Turkish identity, was created. Military-nation myth transformed military service from a military task into a cultural component; in other words, it helped the military task to have a place in the Turkish culture (Altınay, 2004). By means of this transformation, militarism has gained much power and became a prevalent ideology in Turkey. For many years, military ideology has been infused to male citizens of Turkey during their military service (Altınay & Bora, 2002) which is still an obligatory duty for all male citizens of the Turkish Republic and refusing to perform this duty is considered as a criminal offense (Askerlik Kanunu, 1927). Moreover, militarism exists in school textbooks as an active ideology (Altınay, 2009). In fact, the military is so interwoven with cultural practices in Turkey that it brings prejudiced and discriminatory societal implications towards deserters and conscientious objectors (Sayılan, 2013).

As one may infer, military service and militarism can be seen as key concepts to understand contemporary Turkey and the processes it has been through since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, these concepts are not widely discussed in public or studied by social scientists, which may stem from the normalization of the concepts with contributions of nationalism. This ideology and its influences on Turkish cultural context will be reviewed next.

### **Nationalism and Its Rise in Turkish Cultural Context**

Although individuals' attachment to their group and the territory on which their groups reside is a recurring theme since ancient times, nationalism as a political ideology which emphasizes autonomy and self-determination of nations, is formalized in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when nation states are formed and has pervaded to other parts of the world during the following two centuries (Kohn, 1965; Smith, 2008, 2010). Currently, we are living in a

world of nation-states in the name of which wars are waged and people are killed, and individuals tend to perceive the world separating their community, or nation, from members of other communities, namely, foreigners.

However, for Benedict Anderson (1983; see also Gellner, 1983 and Hobbsbawm, 1990), the tendency to divide the world into nations is not natural or ancient; rather, nations are social constructs or *imagined communities* which enable individuals to experience commonality and comradeship with other individuals, regardless of whether they are familiar to themselves, or not, and the stronger their patriotic feeling and the greater the sacrifices individuals make in the name of their nations, the stronger and resilient becomes the nationalist ideology (See Özkırıklı, 2010 for competing views on nationalism and the origins of nations).

For Anderson (1983), the emergence of modern nation states and the ideology of nationalism is rooted in historical transformations such as the decomposition of religious communities and dynastic realms, development of publishing industry, the formation of official state languages and emergence of a new conception of time. The model of nationalism has been initially used and developed in Europe and then it has been transferred to imperialist powers and, lastly, to anti-imperialist powers in the other regions of the world.

When we look at the processes the ideologies of nationalism and patriotism went through in Turkey, we should, again, begin the discussion from the early 20th century when the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapse. This period could be seen as the point when Turkish nationalism emerged as a political movement among the military bureaucracy governing the country (Altınay & Bora, 2002). Following the establishment of the Turkish Republic the nationalist discourse of the military strengthened, and nationalism became the official ideology of the state (Bora, 2003).

A critical factor in the proliferation of the nationalist ideology in the newly established country might once again be the myth of military-nation (Altınay, 2004). Disseminated through the Turkish History Thesis and history textbooks, the military-nation myth glorifies the military ability of Turks as a nation as well as their tendency to consider the army as an integral and indispensable part of their existence, which can be summarized in the widely known Turkish slogan "Every Turk is born a soldier". However, "Every Turk" in this slogan does not refer to every Turkish citizen; it refers only to male citizens of Turkey for whom conducting military service is an obligatory duty. Therefore, it is crucial to include gender and masculine ideology in this analysis, as well.

### **The Ideology of Hegemonic Masculinity**

Being an obligatory duty for male citizens of Turkey (Askerlik Kanunu, 1927), military service means more than a tool of homeland defense for citizens of the country; it could be seen as a tool to determine the relationship male and female citizens have with the state. Moreover, it differentiates women as well as men who cannot or do not perform military service such as disabled men, gay men, or conscientious objectors since they are not soldiers (Altınay, 2004). This differentiation ties masculinity to military and state in a strong manner and makes male citizens who conduct their military service ‘the first-class citizens’ (Altınay, 2000).

Men’s advantage gained through military service is neither an isolated case nor a surprising one since patriarchal system creates a social, political, intellectual and cultural hegemony between men and women by reproducing gender roles and discourse subordinating women to men (Selek, 2004; Sirman, 2005). A key concept in this process of subordination would be *hegemonic masculinity*, which has been defined by Connell as “configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Although the hegemony of men over women is a worldwide phenomenon, the hegemonic ideal depends on power dynamics that are specific to each culture hence it might vary from one culture to another. For example, the hegemonic ideal of Western culture is an independent, risk-taking, aggressive, rational and heterosexual man (Connell, 1995) whereas in Turkish cultural context, the ideal refers to a tough, successful, honest, serious, fit, handsome and paternalistic man capable of protecting his dependents and who may resort to violence when necessary (Selek, 2008).

As can be inferred, the hegemonic ideal cannot be achieved by every man, but it still serves as a touchstone which they are encouraged to achieve unceasingly and upon which they can assess their masculinity. Moreover, it can be argued that there are certain phases of the route to hegemonic masculinity that young men should go through in the Turkish cultural context such as circumcision, military service, employment and marriage (Selek, 2008; Sinclair-Webb, 2000) and success at all of these phases help young men to prove themselves as ‘real men’ to both themselves and the society. Moreover, these phases are critical in determining the limits of hegemonic masculinity and monitoring of these limits. Military service, for example, is critical for shaping young men’s process of socialization and positioning themselves in the society. For example, in various regions of contemporary Turkey, young men are asked whether they have fulfilled their military duty when they want to marry or apply for a job since they are not

seen mature enough to earn a living or start a family before they become successful at this phase (Turan & Keskin Demir, 2011).

Sylvia Walby (1990) states that gender, ethnicity, nation, and race should be analyzed together since they are interrelated concepts. To put in another way, we cannot analyze a national project without including gender since national projects are gender projects, as well. In our view, militarism should also be included in this equation since, as can be inferred from the discussion above, militarism is of a key value in this relationship, especially for countries like Turkey. Hence this study examines how military service and conscripts are perceived in contemporary Turkey and how their representations are related to the ideologies of militarism, nationalism, and hegemonic masculinity through using the perspective and methodology of Social Representations Theory.

### **Social Representations Theory**

Social Representations Theory provides a valuable perspective for analyzing such an intricate phenomenon as military service since it argues that social knowledge could only be analyzed comprehensively by taking cultural, historical, and macro social conditions that are specific to that country into consideration (Wagner et al. 1999).

Social representations could be defined as the system(s) of ideas, values, and practices that arise in daily life during communications between individuals or groups (Moscovici, 1981). In other words, they are parts of daily thinking that sets an order to make our attitudes, values, religious beliefs and political ideas coherent (Moscovici, 1976) and help us categorize individuals and objects in our social environment, understand and explain their behaviors (Jodelet, 1991; Moscovici, 1988). In this sense, they have strong influences on how individuals experience and interpret social life around them. They originate in daily chatter and after they begin their lives, they circulate by unifying, attracting, and repelling one another, give birth to novel representations and fall into this use when their time is up (Moscovici, 1984). They can be seen as “alive and dynamic” structures, rather than “static templates that we pull out of our cognitive schemas” (Howarth, 2006, p. 68).

Moscovici suggests that a possible and regular communication requires interacting parties to meet on a common ground and social representations are essential for communication since they serve as the social fabric binding individuals and groups together (Galam & Moscovici, 1994; Moscovici, 1984). Being important tools for not only the construction of social knowledge but also for dissemination and use of it, social representations are essential for a thorough analysis of society. Studies so far have examined social representations of various phenomena in order to

comprehend the nature of the social groups and societies. Science (Bauer, Durant & Gaskell, 2002), citizenship (Andreouli & Howarth, 2012), religion (Wagner, Sen, Wagner, Permanadeli, & Howarth, 2012), history (Liu & Hilton, 2005), gender (Duveen, 1993), disability (Farr & Marková, 1995) and human rights (Staerklé, Clémence, & Doise, 1999) are several fields in which studies of social representations have been conducted. Moreover, critical issues such as identity (Howarth, 2002, 2010) ideology (Oktar, 2001), resistance (Howarth, 2002; Wagner, et al., 2012), social change (Sakki & Salminen, 2015) and participation (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000) have begun to be addressed by scholars studying social representations (See Howarth, 2006, for a discussion on the critical potential of the Social Representations Theory and review of studies). The current study hopes to contribute this literature by examining a critical topic for Turkish cultural context.

### **THE CURRENT STUDY**

Although the literature on social representations is rich and wide-ranging, no known study has addressed such an intricate and critical topic as military service and conscripts in Turkey by benefiting from the perspective of Social Representations Theory so far. This study aims to fulfill this gap by analyzing the content and depth of representations related to military service and conscripts in contemporary Turkey. In this way, it expects to contribute to social scientific research focusing on Turkey by showing the place these representations occupy in the semantic world of Turkish citizens. Moreover, this study expects to contribute to Social Representations literature by analyzing how these representations are related to ideologies of militarism, nationalism, and hegemonic masculinity i.e. the ideological character of representations.

### **METHOD**

To explore whether there are prevalent representations related to military service and conscripts and to analyze the possible relationships they have with the ideologies of militarism, nationalism, and hegemonic masculinity, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 adults with diverse sociopolitical backgrounds. All participants resided in Ankara, Turkey (18 women and 32 men), the ages of them ranged between 19 and 67. Participants were identified purposively so that maximum variation of perspectives on the issue could be captured (Gaskell, 2000). However, since the participants were reached through snowballing, some groups in the society (e.g., students, men, individuals with undergraduate level of education) might have been represented more than other groups in the sample. Characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Informant Characteristics

<b>Birth of Place (Regions in Turkey)</b>		
Aegean Region	7	14%
Black Sea Region	1	2%
Central Anatolia Region	17	34%
Eastern Anatolia Region	9	38%
Marmara Region	8	16%
Mediterranean Region	3	6%
Southeastern Anatolia Region	5	10%
<b>Education</b>		
Primary School	1	2%
High School	6	12%
Undergraduate	35	70%
Graduate	8	16%
<b>Civil Status</b>		
Married	10	20%
Single, in a relationship	12	24%
Single, no relationship	28	56%
<b>Profession</b>		
Student	24	48%
Academic	4	8%
Civil Servant	14	28%
Worker	5	10%
Craftsman	3	6%
<b>Political Identification</b>		
Left (Liberal Leftism, Socialism, Communism, Marxism)	Wing 15	30%
	5	10%
Kurdish Movement	3	6%
Republican People's Party	1	2%
Liberalism	8	16%
Right (Nationalist Movement Party, Nationalism, Islamic Movement)	Wing	
	18	36%
Apolitical / No political Identifications	18	36%
<b>Military Service (Men)</b>		
Fulfilled	14	44%
Non-fulfilled	18	56%



An Intimate with a recent/forthcoming military duty (women)

Yes	10	55%
No	8	45%

Interviews were conducted by the first author in locations chosen by the participants, which ranged from cafes to participant's home. Before the interviews began, participants were informed about the nature of the study, provided with an outline of the questions and the interviews began only after the consent forms had been signed. In order to get their representations related to military service and conscripts, a topic guide of questions was developed to guide the interviews. The topic guide, which includes questions regarding the meanings attached to military service by themselves and the society, their (or their intimates') experiences related to military service and the role of military service in men's lives, was used flexibly.

The length of the interviews varied from 15 minutes to 1 hour and all of them were audio-taped in line with participants' will. Voice recordings of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed by the first author via inductive thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hayes, 1997, 2000) using MAXQDA - a computer-based tool for the analysis of data, text, and multimedia. Thematic content analysis was employed to elucidate themes relating to social representations of military service and conscripts in contemporary Turkey. Accordingly, interview transcripts were read carefully and repeatedly to identify meaningful units and to categorize them. On later stages of analysis, the thematic units were revised through investigation of patterns of commonality as well as anomaly (Boyatzis, 1998; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

## FINDINGS

The thematic analysis reveals that prevalent representations of military service and conscripts exist in contemporary Turkey.

**Table 2.** Interview Themata\*

Name of the Thematic Block	#	Freq	%
<b>Nationalism</b>			
<i>Promoting Themes</i>			
National service is a debt of honor.	110	45	90%
The one who refuses to do the military service should be seen as a traitor.	54	34	68%
It is essential for national unity and solidarity.	35	16	32%
It is essential for the continuation of the nationalist ideology.	26	8	16%

<i>Countering Themes</i>			
It is a brainwashing process.	31	11	42%
Turkish civil war has alienated people from the military and military service.	27	15	46%
It is not homeland protection.	24	16	62%
There is no such thing as national duty.	18	10	24%
<b>Militarism</b>			
<i>Promoting Themes</i>			
Military service is a national tradition/heritage.	53	26	52%
Our country is under security threat; we should defend it.	35	19	38%
Every Turkish man should learn how to battle.	19	12	24%
<i>Countering Themes</i>			
Military service is about committing violence.	30	10	20%
It means to be an instrument to Turkish civil war.	27	8	16%
War does not solve any problems in the world.	13	3	6%
Everyone does not have to like the army/military service.	12	7	14%
You become the property of the army the moment you join it.	8	4	8%
<b>Religion</b>			
<i>Promoting Themes</i>			
It is a sacred duty.	23	11	32%
Barracks is the home of Mohamed.	10	5	20%
In Anatolia, men's hands are dyed with henna before joining the army.	10	4	16%
<b>Masculine Ideology</b>			
<i>Promoting Themes</i>			
Military service is one of the milestones in a man's life.	57	25	50%
It is the manifestation of masculinity.	47	20	40%
It justifies men's position in society.	36	23	46%
It teaches how to battle, which is a must for men.	24	9	18%
A father wouldn't let his daughter marry a man who has not performed his military duty.	16	9	18%
<i>Countering Themes</i>			
It does not teach anything; it's just a waste of time.	15	6	12%
Men have more important issues than battling with an ambiguous enemy.	5	3	6%
Military service is a paternalistic concept.	7	2	4%

It unmans men.	4	2	4%
It is a process which creates a killer out of a baby.	3	1	2%
<b>Personal Processes</b>			
<i>Promoting Themes</i>			
It provides the individual with the essential discipline one needs throughout the adult life.	44	23	20%
Military service is a school of hard knocks.	14	12	24%
The army is a melting pot.	16	8	16%
<i>Countering Themes</i>			
It eradicates critical thinking to create obedient individuals.	111	35	70%
It is a place full of unnecessary rituals; there is no room for reason and logic.	54	31	62%
It should be based on voluntariness; not everyone is born a soldier.	46	30	60%
It is a burden to get rid of.	45	16	32%
Most of the men serve in the military just because of neighborhood pressure.	33	15	30%
It is nothing more than a waste of time.	30	18	36%
<b>Traumatic Process</b>			
It is a traumatic experience.	44	23	46%
There is a possibility of being exposed to maltreatment.	43	22	44%
There is an iron discipline you undergo.	35	12	24%
There is a high possibility of death/injury.	25	22	44%
Barracks are some kind of jail.	23	11	22%
It is the place of cruelty and oppression.	21	11	22%
The process of military service affects not only the individual but also the people around him.	16	13	26%

\* In this table the column # represents how many times each theme was mentioned during the interviews, the column Freq. (Frequency) represents how many interviewees mentioned each theme, and the column % (Percentage) represents what percentage of interviewees mentioning the theme.

The representations identified are as follows: “every Turk is born a soldier”, “military service is indispensable for Turkey”, “it is a sacred duty”, “it is a milestone in men’s lives”, “it is a process of personal development”, and “it is a traumatic process” (See Table 2 for an overview of interview themata).

**Every Turk is Born a Soldier**

Military service in Turkey represents an intersection of the ideologies of militarism, nationalism, and hegemonic masculinity since it is considered as a moral duty as well as an obligation for all male citizens of the country. As previously discussed, attribution of military characteristics of Turks as a nation dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Turkish Republic was newly established and began to impose its ideologies. Emerged in this period and disseminated through the textbooks in the national education system via Turkish History Thesis, the myth of military-nation empowered the ideologies of nationalism and militarism (Altınay, 2004). These ideologies continue to occupy a place in social knowledge in contemporary Turkey; for example, a recent study examining the relationship between the army and society has found that three out of four individuals in Turkish society believe that Turks are a military-nation (Gürsoy & Sarıgül, 2011).

Merged with the popular slogan ‘Every Turk is born a soldier’, the representation that Turks are a military-nation is the most prevalent representation of military service in Turkey in daily chatter. During interviews, this representation has been marked by informants via promoting units related to nationalism, militarism, and masculinity justification such as “military service is a national heritage/tradition”, “military service is a debt of honor”, “military service is essential for national unity/solidarity”, “it is essential for the continuation of the nationalist ideology”, “the ones refusing to serve for the military should be seen as traitors.”, and “it is a manifestation of masculinity”. The informant quoted below, for example, emphasizes the point that military service is an expression of one’s patriotic feelings and masculine powers, as well as being a national heritage.

Quote 1, (Participant No: 29, Male, Age 24)

To me, military service is something that everyone who loves his country and nation and who calls himself a Turk has to perform willingly or not. It is a national heritage for us and those who object to this and say they cannot hold a gun are unmanly cowards and traitors, and I believe the majority of our people think as I do. I cannot imagine something more honorable than defending one’s country and nation.

The quote above represents how deeply connected the ideologies of militarism, nationalism, and masculinity are. This informant believes that being a soldier equals to being Turk and he is quite sure that performing military service is the only way for expressing one’s love for the homeland. Fed by the ideologies of militarism and nationalism, this belief actively contributes to further militarization of the society by normalizing forced military service with references to nation and history. Moreover, this

representation disparages the ones who refuse to perform their military service as unmanly as masculinity is inherent in the slogan, itself. Since military service is seen as a milestone in young men's lives so as to reach the cultural standards of hegemonic masculinity and young soldiers are glorified as heroes who protect the homeland (Selek, 2008), reluctance to perform this duty is equated with lacking the necessary requirements of being a man as well as being non-Turk or a traitor. This informant exemplifies this point by arguing that the ones who refuse to perform military service are unmanly cowards.

### **Indispensable for Turkey**

As discussed before, militarist thinking puts military needs of the society above all (Chenoy, 1998) and since the establishment of the country, military needs and expenditures have always been on the agenda of Turkey. Politicians often underline the importance of Turkish Armed Forces for the survival of the country and mention that Turkey has one of the most powerful armies in the world (e.g. “‘Sivil ordu’ geliyor...”, 2016) in their statements. In addition to this, as the Turkish Republic has been established after the Turkish War of Independence, a total war in which majority the society took part, military service has gained cultural capital in the early years of the new republic and citizen's role in defending the homeland has been emphasized (Altınay, 2004). Since then, this issue continues to occupy a key place in culture and fed by the politicians who disseminate the representation that the country faces security threats and needs its citizens for protection.

The representation that military service is indispensable for Turkey is a prevalent one emerging in most of the interviews. Marked by themes such as “military service is indispensable for Turkey because of its geopolitical position”, “the country is under security threat; we should defend it”, “military service is essential for national unity and solidarity” and “every Turkish man should learn how to battle”, this representation could also be seen as a product of militarist and nationalist ideologies. The themes marking this representation are militaristic in the sense that they put the military needs of the society above all others and help to make militaristic thinking diffuse into the organization of social life. Moreover, with the effects of the myth of military nation, militaristic ideology meshes with nationalistic thinking, a process making them both stronger and prevalent for Turkey. The quote below, for example, exemplifies how the theme that Turkey is under security threats by the enemies surrounding it and therefore the homeland needs its sons for protection is normalized with the help of the military-nation myth.

Quote 2 (Participant No: 33, Male, Age 22)

...It is very wrong for a person to say that he doesn't want to perform military service or kill a person out of his belief in a country like Turkey. Turkey, as everyone knows, has a great number of enemies and there are ravenous wolves around. As we can see in history, everything can happen anytime, Mustafa Kemal [Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic] experienced it in the past. That is why everyone has to undergo a basic military training... In Turkish culture, I mean a 13 century-old culture, not just a few years, we have a military-nation perception. Even today, our soldiers are chanting with "Every Turk is born a soldier" slogan during their military training. Seeing that we have this 'military-nation' perception, every Turk has to undergo military training and discipline.

**A sacred duty**

Another representation supporting the forced military service in Turkey is that protecting one's country is a sacred duty. In the process by which military service has gained cultural capital and the society has become militarized, military service has ascribed religious connotations. These connotations are so powerful that serving the country is interpreted as serving for Islam, as well. During interviews, informants have marked this representation with themes such as "military service is a sacred duty", "the conscripts are named as 'Little Mehmet' which is a synonym for Mohammed" and "the barracks are named as 'the home of Mohammed". The quote below could be an example of this representation which signifies the religious connotation of the military service. In the quote, the then prime minister of the country summarizes these religious connotations to underline the importance of military service in Turkish culture.

Military service has been accepted as one of the most divine services paid to one's country on this land. When we call our soldier as "Mehmet the Hero", it has a meaning. It means "Little Mohammed". We regard the barracks as the home of the Prophet. Of course, many speculations have been created on it. However, we, as our nation, regard it as it is... ("Başbakan Erdoğan'dan vicdani ret açıklaması", (PM Erdoğan's remarks on conscientious objection) 2011).

Another sign of the relationship between militarism and religion is the ceremony of dyeing the hands of young conscripts' hands with henna while sending them off to military service, a common practice in rural parts of the country (Askere Uğurlama Geleneği - Kırklareli, 2013).

In Turkish culture, henna symbolizes sacrifice (sacrifice to God) and it is applied on three occasions. The first occasion is the application of henna to rams before slaughtering them and it symbolizes sacrificing the animals in the name of Allah. The second occasion includes applying henna to young brides' hands before their wedding night to sacrifice them to their husband and make sure that they are obedient wives and in the last occasion, henna is applied to the hands of young conscripts before joining the army to sacrifice them for the homeland (Ketre, 1999). A folk tale named 'Hennaed Mehmet' is included in the curriculum of third graders in which one of the main characters (i.e. Mehmet's mother) explains why she has smeared her son's hands before she sent him for military service as follows:

We stain the sheep for sacrifice with henna so that they be a sacrifice to Allah. Also, my son, we put henna on the young men who go to the army. We smear henna on them so that they may be a sacrifice to the fatherland. We sacrificed your grandfather in the Balkan Wars [in 1913] and your uncle at Çanakkale. If it need be, my child, you will be a sacrifice for this fatherland (İlkokul Türkçe Ders Kitabı 3, as cited in Kaplan, 2002, p. 121).

Cynthia Enloe describes the process of militarization as “a step by step process by which a person or a thing gradually comes to be controlled by the military or comes to depend for its wellbeing on militaristic ideas.” (Enloe, 2000, p. 3). For her, militarization cannot be reduced to joining the army; rather, it should be seen as an ongoing process built on mechanisms of consent. This example not only illustrates the militarization of a religious symbol but also shows us the public consent in sacrificing young men in the name of the homeland. Moreover, consent is a mutual one. The family and relatives knowingly send young men to the army where they could be killed or severely injured and the young conscripts get public approval of defending and honoring their homeland and loved ones with their own death.

#### **A milestone in men's lives**

Another prevalent representation related to military service is that it is a milestone in men's lives. This representation has been signified by themes such as “military service helps men to justify their place in the society”, “it is a manifestation of one's masculinity”, “learning how to battle is essential for masculinity”, and “a father wouldn't let his daughter marry a man who has not performed his military duty”. These themes are compatible with what Selek (2008) has suggested in her study named *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak (Leading a Dog's Life: Masculinity)*. Based on the analysis of masculinity in the context of military service experiences, Selek suggests that military service is an important phase of men's socialization since they learn how to

be ‘real men’ during military service which requires full obedience to authorities, taking responsibilities, and use of violence.

As discussed previously, the cultural standards for hegemonic masculinity are stated as being a “though, successful, honest, serious, fit, handsome and paternalistic man capable of protecting his dependents and using violence when necessary” (Selek, 2008) and men who do not perform their military service are viewed as incapable of taking responsibilities and protecting the ones depending on him. A young female informant in Quote 3 exemplifies the importance of military service in the justification of masculinity by arguing that young women should consider whether men they plan to marry have completed their military service, or not, since military service is a period which helps young men reach to maturity. Moreover, she argues that the difficulties young men face during military service are essential for them to be superior to women in patriarchal societies like Turkey.

Quote 3 (Participant no: 44, Female, Age: 20)

I think that military service is a must in a man’s life. We are living in a patriarchal society and men are regarded as superior to women in a sense. For this reason, I think men should face all the difficulties during the military service such as sleeping together with some other 60 guys or crawling on the floor etc. I personally think as a woman that a man should complete his military service before he may take a step for marriage. I think that girls should also ask their future husbands to have completed his military service before marriage as this experience renders men more mature.

**A process of personal development**

In conjunction with the representation that military service is a milestone in men’s lives, there exists another representation that military service is a process of personal development for men. This representation is signified by the themes such as “military service disciplines young individuals and prepared them for adult life”, “military service is a school of hard knocks – especially for the ones who have little experiences in life” –, and “military service is a melting pot where young men socialize with members of social groups they do not encounter in their daily lives”. One informant explains how military service contributes to the personal development of young men with references to his own military service experiences as well as his observations in Quote 4 below.



Quote 4 (Participant No: 42, Male, Age 34)

... First of all, I can say that military service disciplines a man. This is a good thing, but it is not by beating someone, don't get me wrong. You have to get up early every morning, dye your shoes, shave, and put your dresses in order. But at home, your mom and dad do everything; they want to feed you if they can. And you become mama's boy. ... And it widens one's horizon, yes this is not the case for everyone, this is not the case for such people like you and me, but this is the case for the men who live in the villages. They see the cities in the west for the first time in their lives – all thanks to military service. Perhaps they won't see Istanbul again...

**A traumatic process**

Contrary to representations affirming the role of military service in the personal development of men and their socialization into masculine roles, as well as the ones justifying its importance from militaristic and nationalistic stances, the representation that military service is a traumatic process for young men underlines the negative impacts of this process to young men. Shared by informants with antimilitaristic stances, this representation is signified by themes such as “military service eradicates critical thinking to create obedient individuals”, “it is a brainwashing process”, “there is a high possibility of being killed/injured during military service”, “there is a possibility of being exposed to maltreatment”, “barracks are some kind of jail debarring individuals of their freedom”, “there is an iron discipline one has to undergo”, “it is about committing violence”, and “it means to be an instrument to Turkish civil war.” An informant summarizes this representation by saying that military service represents anything inhumane.

Quote 6 (Participant No: 29, Female, Age 25)

I think that military service means hierarchy, the chain of command and everything one may consider as inhumane. There is no room for free thinking. There is just obedience. All you can do during your military service is to obey. If you do not obey, you may be the victim of a ‘stray bullet’ as we hear from the news all the time. Soldiers are dying in torture rooms, commonly known as disko [disiplin koğuşu, discipline ward] in Turkey. All that means that your life is valueless in the military service and this is a direct attack on your most vital right, which is the right to life... All you have in that structure is obedience, death, and blood; nothing more.

Although military service has an important place in Turkish culture and generally perceived by the public in a positive way, this does not represent the whole picture. The general concept of military service, the duration of the service, its method and the political nature of the army have started to be discussed in public in recent years. For example, Ergenekon and Sledgehammer trials in which military officials are put on trial forced the public to discuss the political character of the Turkish Armed Forces. Moreover, in addition to ongoing conflicts and clashes in the southeastern region of Turkey between Turkish army and PKK, 35 citizens of Turkey died in Roboski, Şırnak as a result of the bombings of Turkish Air Forces (“Savaş uçakları sivilleri vurdu”, 2011). All of these events have shifted the way society perceives the Turkish Armed Forces. Along with these, the Turkish Armed Forces has been criticized in the name of human rights violations and maltreatment of soldiers (Asker Hakları, 2011). According to a recent statement by the Ministry of National Defense, 2221 persons committed suicide during military service and 1602 persons died in consequence of various accidents between 1990 and 2002 (BİA, 2012). When these developments are taken into consideration with the representation that military service is a traumatic process which has started to occupy a place in both media products and daily chatter, it can be argued that the prevalent representations of military service are about the transform.

## DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis revealed that there exist prevalent representations of the military service and conscripts in contemporary Turkey, most of which are fed by the ideologies of nationalism, militarism, and hegemonic masculinity and show how dominant these ideologies in this cultural context. Moreover, it has been seen that there exist some similarities and contradictions among them signaling the polyphasic nature of representations of military service (Moscovici, 1984). The representations named “every Turk is born a soldier”, “military service is indispensable for Turkey”, “it is a sacred duty”, and “it is a milestone in men’s lives”; to begin with, are parallel to one other since they are all fed by the ideologies of militarism, nationalism, and hegemonic masculinity.

As previously discussed, the ideologies of militarism and nationalism could be seen as the official ideologies of Turkish Republic as they constitute important elements of Kemalism, which is perceived to be the founding ideology of the Republic (Altınay, 2004; Bora, 2003). Fed by the myth of military nation, these ideologies have become so powerful in the culture that we can see their effects in social knowledge 95 years after the establishment of the Republic. The representations “every Turk is born a soldier” and “military service is indispensable for Turkey” are indicators of their strength. Moreover, by means of the militarization of the society in the

meantime, these ideologies have transformed themselves from being doctrines of state to being elements of culture. The representation that military service is a sacred duty could be seen as the indicator of this transformation process. Turkey is a predominantly Muslim country and Islam has been the major force shaping the culture for centuries. Therefore, it is not surprising that forced military service – a duty which affects not only the lives of millions of conscripts but also the lives of their families and loved ones – has religious connotations, as well, and the facts that Turkish Armed Forces has no religious character and Turkey has not waged war against countries of other religion for decades do not change the situation.

The representation that military service is a milestone in men's lives; on the other hand, signifies another major force in Turkish culture, namely, patriarchy. Apart from being an obligatory duty for male citizens of the country, military service is perceived by the society as a lofty aim transforming young boys into mature men who can take responsibilities and protect his dependents. Although it is not the sole criteria for hegemony, it is still seen as one of the major phases that all the men should complete successfully.

Another important function of military service in men's lives is represented as turning them into heroes who protect the homeland and their loved ones living on it. Closely connected to the ideologies of militarism and nationalism, the ideology of hegemonic masculinity forces men to be brave and strong guys who could 'hold a gun' and resort to violence when necessary. The ones who cannot perform their military service, or refuse to do it, are seen as lacking the necessary requirements for being 'real men' and degraded as unmanly cowards. Moreover, since military service is seen as a prominent way to show one's love for the homeland, men are forced by the public to risk their lives in the name of homeland and perform their military duty even if there is a high possibility of death or injury during the service.

In this sense, the representations that every Turk is born a soldier, that military service is indispensable for Turkey, that military service is a sacred duty, and that military service is a milestone in men's lives are seemingly hegemonic representations as they have important connotations with ideological and religious beliefs forming Turkish culture and as they are stable representations affecting symbolic processes of society. Moreover, these representations form a coherent unity and strengthen one another since they are parallel and interconnected with one another.

Another common point of these representations is their perspective on the relationship between society and individuals. These representations take social institutions such as military, religion, or state, rather than individual citizens and their well-being, into the fore and represent a

standpoint viewing individuals as nothing but cogs in the machines. Similar to cogs in a machine, individuals are seen as required yet unimportant elements when compared to a religious culture existing for centuries or to a nation-state in which military service is seen as “something that everyone who loves his country and nation and who calls himself a Turk has to perform, willingly or not” in the words of an informant.

However, not all the representations of military service are in harmony. The last two representations, namely, “it is a process of personal development”, and “it is a traumatic process”, approach the issue of military service from another angle. Contrary to the representations putting an emphasis on the well-being and continuity of society and its institutions, rather than the individual citizens constituting the society, the representations that military service is a way of personal development and that military service is a traumatic process with enduring effects view conscripts as individuals and focus on their well-being.

The representation that military service is a process of personal development; to begin with, emphasizes the advantages of military service for young men as individuals, despite its compatibility with the aforementioned representations in affirming military service. The last representation, i.e. that military service is a traumatic process with enduring effects in men’s lives; on the other hand, is different than all other representations that has been found in the study in the sense that it questions and negates the ideologies of militarism, nationalism, and hegemonic masculinity as well as approaching the issue from the perspective of conscripts rather than institutions. Mentioned by informants with antimilitaristic stances, this representation signifies an important shift in the perception of military service and conscripts. Hence when these two representations are examined together, it can be argued that they mark a transformation of representations of the military service and a perspective taking the cogs, rather than the machine, into the fore.

This study could be seen as an example of the close relationship between representations and ideologies. According to Moscovici (1998), Social Representations Theory could be seen as a critical theory dealing with the *battle of ideas* (Moscovici, 1998) and in this battle, representations are constructed, disseminated or rejected purposefully, rather than in an arbitrary manner (Moscovici, 1988). Moreover, even ideologies could be defined as systems of representations (Althusser, 1969) that surround us and define “who we are, what we stand for, what our values and what our relationships with others are” (Oktar, 2001, p. 314). In this sense, it would not be wrong to see these representations of military service and conscripts as reflections of prevailing ideologies in contemporary Turkey.

Overall, this study outlines the content and depth of representations related to military service in contemporary Turkey. In this way, it contributes to social scientific research focusing on Turkey by showing the place these representations occupy in the semantic world of Turkish citizens. Moreover, it contributes to Social Representations literature by analyzing how representations are closely related to and manipulated by ideologies; i.e. the ideological character of representations.

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