

The Story of How a Warrior on Horseback Saved Motherland: An Analysis of Militarized Masculinity and National Identity in Azerbaijani History Textbooks

written by BRI History Studies Group BAİ Tarix Araşdırmaları Qrupu

“Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings.”

–Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities

“How beautiful it is for us to die
For the beloved Motherland,
The heart burns with love for the homeland
Constantly, deep within.”

– Əsgər Marşı (author’s translation)

INTRODUCTION

This article examines how Azerbaijani history textbooks function as a site where militarized nationalism and gendered hierarchies are simultaneously produced and normalized. It argues that school textbooks do not merely transmit historical knowledge but actively participate in the formation of national subjects by embedding militarized masculinity and gendered role divisions into both visual and textual narratives. In doing so, they contribute to the production of

a “common-sense” understanding of the nation as something that must be defended, sacrificed for, and embodied through disciplined bodies.

The relevance of this problem lies in the central role of education in shaping collective identities and social norms. School textbooks represent one of the most widely circulated and institutionally authoritative forms of knowledge production, particularly in highly standardized educational systems such as that of Azerbaijan. Therefore, they are relevant not only to scholars of nationalism and gender but also to educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in the relationship between education, ideology, and subject formation. The ideal reader of this article is thus situated within the fields of the sociology of education, gender studies, nationalism studies, and political anthropology.

Existing scholarship has extensively addressed the role of education in nation-building and the reproduction of ideological narratives. Benedict Anderson conceptualized nations as “imagined communities” sustained through shared forms of narration and belonging. Building on this, scholars such as Raewyn Connell have demonstrated that educational institutions play a central role in producing and regulating gender regimes. In the context of post-Soviet nation-building, studies have also shown how history textbooks in the South Caucasus construct selective and oppositional narratives of the “self” and the “other,” often reinforcing ethnonational boundaries and conflict-based memory regimes. However, while these studies highlight the nationalist dimension of educational content, less attention has been paid to the ways in which militarization operates as a gendered logic embedded in everyday pedagogical materials.

This article addresses this gap by arguing that militarized nationalism in Azerbaijani education cannot be understood without considering its gendered foundations. It combines visual and textual analyses of history textbooks with an

examination of extracurricular and institutional practices, demonstrating how masculinity is consistently constructed through images of the warrior, the soldier, and the disciplined body. The article further shows that these representations extend beyond symbolic narration and are reinforced through embodied practices within schooling, thereby linking national belonging to bodily discipline and affective investment. Drawing on approaches from discourse analysis, visual studies, and feminist theories of nationalism and embodiment, the article examines how educational narratives produce militarized and gendered forms of national belonging.

The article concludes that Azerbaijani history textbooks and related educational practices do not simply reflect nationalist ideology but actively produce a gendered and militarized regime of citizenship in which the ideal national subject is imagined as both patriotic and disciplined, capable of sacrifice and control.

WHY SCHOOLBOOKS?

According to Raewyn Connell (2009, 13–16), gender regimes are produced and continuously transformed through the functioning of social institutions, among which education is one of the central forces. While Connell primarily focuses on interactions with teachers and peers that shape gender configurations (2009, 13–16, 95–99), these interactions are themselves largely predetermined by structured curricular materials. In this sense, school textbooks function as institutionalized representations of social norms and values.

In the context of Azerbaijan, educational materials constitute a unified system of standardized textbooks across all disciplines. Within the historical curriculum, the primary subjects studied are the *History of Azerbaijan*, *World History*, and the *History of Karabakh*. The study of history begins in the first grade of secondary school (in the Azerbaijani

system, the 5th grade) and continues through high school, where earlier material is largely reiterated and elaborated upon.

Through the standardization of educational materials, the authors of the history curriculum in Azerbaijan construct a single version of national history in which all events are assigned only one official interpretation. Thus, standardized history textbooks in Azerbaijan are aimed at minimizing students' critical thinking, thereby facilitating the acquisition of "correct knowledge" (Gamaghelyan and Rumyantsev 2013, 168–192). This observation is further supported by Ghazaryan and Huseynli (2022, 58–64), who demonstrate that history textbooks in both Armenia and Azerbaijan rely on selective and one-sided representations of historical events, often mobilized to construct and legitimize a national narrative in opposition to a clearly defined "enemy other." Taken together, these insights support the argument that the historical curriculum functions as a mechanism of ideological formation. In this sense, textbooks function as institutional mechanisms through which the "self" and the "other" are reproduced and normalized, thereby reinforcing nationalist discourse.

Connecting this insight with Connell's thesis on the functioning of education as a key institution, history textbooks in Azerbaijan can be understood as a mechanism through which both national identity and gendered hierarchies are simultaneously produced and reinforced. Therefore, recent editions of Azerbaijani history textbooks can be critically examined as a means of analyzing contemporary state discourses on gender and nationhood.

This study draws on a qualitative analysis of five contemporary Azerbaijani history textbooks used in secondary education between grades 5 and 9. The selected textbooks were published between 2023 and 2025 and constitute part of the standardized national curriculum approved by the Ministry of

Education. The analysis combines textual discourse analysis with qualitative visual analysis, focusing on recurring symbolic figures, representations of gender roles, and militarized imagery. In addition, institutional school practices and extracurricular patriotic activities are examined as complementary mechanisms through which nationalist meanings become embodied.

Although the reception of educational narratives may vary among students, the analysis demonstrates how institutional educational discourse constructs normative frameworks of national belonging and gendered citizenship.

A MAN ON HORSEBACK: CONSTRUCTING THE WARRIOR IDEAL

A notable feature in the textbooks is the recurring image of the horseman. The “man on horseback” is one of the most frequent images among the five textbooks analyzed, with a total of 63 visual representations according to manual counts (Hüseynov et al. 2025; Mahmudlu et al. 2023; Şükürov et al. 2024a, 2024b; Xubyarov et al. 2024). The recurrence of this image recalls George L. Mosse’s argument that modernized masculinity, in order to become a standardized mental image, requires consistency and an internalized visual form (Mosse 1996, 5). The repetition of the same images not only establishes normative standards but also participates in their institutional production. As Michel Foucault (1975) argues, institutions generate “docile bodies” through mechanisms of regulation and control. Schoolchildren’s bodies, as the primary recipients of educational materials, are therefore inscribed within regimes of discipline in which standardized representations are embodied and internalized. Building on this, the persistent recurrence of the horseman figure in textbooks can be interpreted as a disciplinary pattern aimed at shaping forms of masculinity among students, producing a controlled subject capable of mastering both himself and others.

Images of horsemen across all textbooks operate as temporally fluid figures, spanning from the early Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. Rather than functioning as historically specific representations, they produce a continuous visual model of martial masculinity that transcends chronological boundaries. This temporal compression is itself significant, as it suggests the persistence of a singular masculine ideal across time.

In these images, the horseman rarely appears as an individual historical actor; instead, he is constructed through a set of repeated visual codes. Military attire drawn from different periods is less an indicator of historical accuracy than a visual signifier of martial authority. Even when rulers are depicted, their ceremonial clothing and the decorative treatment of horses reinforce elevation and domination, positioning the figure within a hierarchy of power rather than within a specific historical context.

Similarly, the depiction of combat does not primarily communicate narrative events but rather stages masculinity as a performative condition. Recurrent facial expressions such as frowning, focus, and resolve not only index emotional states tied to battle but also stabilize a visual grammar of control and determination. When horsemen are depicted in isolation, the composition further intensifies this logic. The raised weapon and rearing horse function less as descriptive elements than as iconic gestures of command, producing a sense of suspended but contained force.

Taken together, these visual patterns represent a specific kind of masculinity: the militarized form. Militaristic attire and embodied poses generate a visual continuity between masculinity and controlled violence, in which masculinity is defined through the capacity to direct force, both outward, toward the enemy, and inward, toward the body itself. In this sense, the images participate in the normalization of militarism as a masculine ideal.

This visual regime resonates with broader historical processes in which masculinity became increasingly aligned with militarization. As George L. Mosse has shown, particularly in the period preceding the First World War, masculinity was consolidated around ideals of willpower, hardness, and self-discipline (Mosse 1996, 115). Within this framework, the male body was constructed as strong, controlled, and mature, in opposition to figures coded as weak, undeveloped, or feminine (Mosse 1996, 109). Comparable logics can also be observed in nationalist projects such as *Zionism*, where the “New Jew” was envisioned as a disciplined body overcoming earlier stigmatized representations (Mayer 2000). From this perspective, the horseman images can also be read through a psychoanalytic register. Freud’s formulation of the ego as a rider attempting to control the horse (Freud 1923, 28) offers a symbolic structure in which mastery over the body and its drives is central. The textbook horseman thus condenses multiple registers of control: over history, over nature, and over the self. He is not merely a warrior figure but a visual technology through which disciplined masculinity is made intelligible and desirable.

The militarization of masculinity becomes especially evident when attention is paid to the captions and texts accompanying the visual images. For example, in a fifth-grade textbook, an image of ancient warriors is accompanied by the following text: “People protected the territories where they lived shoulder to shoulder. The lands, protected at the cost of the lives and blood of forefathers in the wars fought for these territories, were sanctified by the people. Thus, the concept of the Motherland emerged” (Şükürov 2024a, 11; author’s translation). This passage not only describes historical events but also constructs a framework in which masculinity is defined through war. The figure of *ata-babalar* (“forefathers”) represents male ancestors and situates this narrative within masculinity. References to blood and life emphasize the central role of the body. War and struggle are presented as

necessary conditions for the emergence of the Motherland, linking masculinity to violence and sacrifice. The readiness “to shed blood” shapes an understanding of both the body and territory as something that must be protected through control and force.

Overall, the combination of visual imagery and accompanying textual commentary demonstrates that militarized masculinity operates as a coherent controlling logic. This framework does not remain confined to historical narratives but extends into broader educational practices, including bodily training and organized school activities discussed in the next section.

BODIES OF THE NATION: TRAINING LOYALTY

In addition to establishing norms of militarized masculinity in textbooks, these ideas also manifest in other aspects of schooling. The National Law on Education explicitly states that the cultivation of “ideas of patriotism and loyalty to Azerbaijanism” among students is one of the main goals of education (Law on Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2009, Art. 4; author’s translation). In practice, this is expressed through the teaching of the subject *Pre-Conscription Military Training* in high school. According to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the discipline of initial military training is aimed at “ensur[ing] the moral, physical, and psychological training of youth, as well as increas[ing] their sense of love for the Homeland” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2015).

So-called moral education is not limited to high school students. Nearly all pupils, from pre-school preparation through the final grades of secondary education, are regularly involved in extracurricular activities with a militarized national character, such as military-themed competitions, commemorative events, and school-based patriotic ceremonies. According to the Ministry of Education, such initiatives are explicitly designed to “instill military-patriotic values and

increase the popularity of military sports games in secondary schools” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2015).

In the case of extracurricular activities, the celebration of *Victory Day* on November 10 is particularly emphasized, having been introduced after Azerbaijan’s victory in the Second Karabakh War. Such events typically take the form of military-themed parades or theatrical performances for parents and school administrators. Children are often dressed in military uniforms, and the events feature numerous national symbols, such as flags and coats of arms. Symbols deployed in these practices help construct social routines that reinforce nationalism (Batuman 2010).

Nevertheless, militarization in education in Azerbaijan is not a novelty associated solely with the outcome of the war. According to Jafar Akhundov, similar practices existed as part of the educational process before it; however, prior to April 2016, when hostilities resulted in Azerbaijan regaining control over parts of the Karabakh territories, such events primarily focused on mourning martyrs and the fallen. After 2016, these practices began to take on more celebratory and triumphant forms (Akhundov 2017).

Thus, the cultivation of patriotism in this context can clearly be understood as a form of nationalism. Through militarized practices in schools, national belonging becomes embodied through singing patriotic songs, marching, reciting poems, and engaging in physical training. Returning to studies of *Zionism* in early twentieth-century Europe, we observe a similar pattern: young people attended camps in forests, where they performed physical exercises and sang songs praising their heritage and bodies “to be free and to reclaim the masculine past of the nation” (Mayer 2000, 285). The education of manliness is directed, then, toward hardening boys, sculpting their bodies, and giving them a proper moral posture, “within the constant preoccupation of how to make

boys into men, worries about immaturity counted for less than fears of effeminacy: the attainment of a certain standard physical and moral fitness" (Mosse 1996, 109).

Such examples confirm the importance of corporeality in processes of nation-building. Bodily nationalism has been explored by numerous feminist scholars, who argue that embodied gender performances in everyday life form the foundation for the construction of national belonging. In these cases, embodiment implies a consistent connection with emotions or, in other words, affect. As Sara Ahmed (2004, 171) argues, it is precisely the politicization of emotions that binds bodies together or sets them apart. The transformation of emotions into a tool of nation-building can be traced through an ethnographic study of *Novruz Bayramı* and the January 20 commemoration in Azerbaijan. The authors emphasize the affective dimension of Azerbaijani nationalism, which, in the case of the day of remembrance, is expressed through collective marching accompanied by music. Responding to the researcher's question about whether she feels sadness regarding *Bloody January*, participant Samira stated:

"Me? Because I am Azerbaijani by blood, you know, I feel it in my blood. The music is in my blood. As soon as I hear the music, it is in my heart, and my heart is broken. Yes. I lost many people here. Children, youth, adults... It is like the music is crying" (Militz and Schurr 2016, 58).

Her description of embodied feelings demonstrates how a sense of national belonging is experienced through the body.

Adding further examples from militarized school practices and textbook imagery, it can be argued that education as an institution in Azerbaijan is oriented toward cultivating a particular form of militarized nationalism. It becomes clear that military values come to be seen as normal and desirable in everyday life (Enloe 2000) and, through this process, become inseparably connected with patriotism and,

consequently, with nationalism. Through both curricular content and the extracurricular embodiment of patriotic values, students are guided not only to know the nation but also to experience it, making the nation a lived, affective reality embedded in bodily experience.

THE MOTHER, THE SISTER, AND THE SOLDIER

However, a pressing question arises: if militarized practices affect all children, regardless of gender, does gender truly play a significant role? At first glance, it might seem that such practices foster a unified sense of patriotism, yet a closer analysis reveals that roles, expectations, and forms of participation in school events are far from neutral. Boys and girls occupy different positions, which reproduce and reinforce broader societal norms. As Connell notes, gender coding is enacted through the allocation of roles within collective practices, shaping how students perceive and internalize social hierarchies (Connell 2009, 14–17).

Moreover, no nationalism in the world has historically provided men and women with equal access to the resources of the nation-state. On the contrary, as McClintock emphasizes, all nationalisms continue to rely on powerful constructions of gender difference (McClintock 1993). This becomes particularly evident in the context of militarized school activities: girls typically take on roles as nurses, mothers, children, or sisters of soldiers, but not as soldiers themselves. Thus, the focus shifts from children as agents of the nation to girls as part of the symbolic environment surrounding the soldier, embedded within the family structure. The way roles are divided is directly linked to broader ideas of nationalism, in which the family functions as a key symbol.

Representing the nation through images of the family allows it to be constructed as something natural, “biological,” and self-evident (McClintock 1993). In this framework, similarly to the nuclear family, women in nationalist discourse embody

what must be protected: they function as symbolic bearers of the nation while being deprived of a direct connection to political action and agency (McClintock 1993, 63). At the same time, men “stand in the same symbolic relation to the nation as men do to women,” whereby political power relies on the prior construction of gender hierarchy (McClintock 1993, 62).

If this division manifests in school performative practices through role allocation, in history textbooks it attains a more stable and institutionalized expression. Historical representations of individuals often reinforce gender distinctions. When women are depicted as rulers or military leaders, the focus frequently shifts to their connections with male relatives or clan members, thereby diminishing their political agency.

The case of Momine Hatun serves as an example. The text acknowledges her significant role in the ascent of Atabey Shamsaddin Eldaniz, stating that she “played an important role in the rise of Atabey Shamsaddin Eldaniz” and was actively involved in state matters (Şükürov 2024a, 65; author’s translation). Nevertheless, this recognition of her political influence is fleeting. The narrative subsequently centers on her posthumous commemoration, specifically her husband’s actions in erecting a mausoleum in her memory. Here, an active political figure is transformed into a passive object of memory.

A similar logic is evident in the representation of Tutu Bike. Despite her initially militarized image, depicted on the battlefield and mounted on a horse, she is introduced into the narrative through familial connections: as the sister of Amir Hamza and the wife of Fatali Khan. Even her refusal to allow her brother’s troops into the city after his deception regarding her husband’s death is interpreted not as an autonomous political decision but as an expression of loyalty to her spouse and family (Mahmudlu 2023, 99). In this way, even actions potentially indicative of agency are framed

within the bounds of familial loyalty.

Another element of gender coding is the figure of the mother, which is particularly evident in the depiction of Sara Hatun. Her status as the first female diplomat of the East is legitimized through Mehmed II addressing her as “mother.” Consequently, her diplomatic authority is recognized and deemed acceptable only insofar as it fits within the traditional family hierarchy. Such representations of women through family ties in textbooks directly resonate with the concept of women as symbolic bearers of the nation (Yuval-Davis 1997, 21). This is particularly evident in the example of Sara Hatun: by becoming “the mother” of Mehmed II, she symbolically extends the boundaries of “we,” encompassing not only the Aq Qoyunlu but also the Ottomans. Similarly, Tutu Bike’s motivation is framed as protecting the family-nation upon learning of her husband’s death. In this instance, the “brother” figure takes on a negative meaning, highlighting the importance of the nuclear family (a male-female relationship) in nationalist thought, while other family structures are pushed aside. This aligns with the idea of women as protectors of boundaries, contributing to the continuation of the national community but not participating in its military defense (Yuval-Davis 1997, 94). Their inclusion in masculinized forms of struggle, as in the case of Tutu Bike, is permitted only as an exception, in situations where no alternatives exist.

The figure of Momine Hatun, in turn, reflects a more classic model of nationalist gender order, wherein the woman appears as a figure in need of protection. This aligns with theories that view the nation as an extension of familial and kinship structures, based on a “natural” gender division of labor in which men protect “women and children” (Enloe 1990). In this context, the motivation for male sacrifice becomes intelligible: the willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice of killing and being killed (Yuval-Davis 1997, 15–16) relies not only on an abstract notion of the nation but also on the

concretized image of *Ana Vətən (Motherland)*, embodied in women and children in need of protection.

This logic becomes especially evident in visual and textual representations of trauma. One striking example is the visual sequence in the chapter dedicated to the Khojaly genocide: two wounded women are depicted under the care of male soldiers. One is carried in their arms, while the other follows alongside in a state of emotional shock. The accompanying text reinforces this impression: “During the Khojaly genocide, 613 of our compatriots, including 106 women, 63 children, and 70 elderly people, were killed with particular cruelty” (Şükürov 2024b, 156; author’s translation). Listing women alongside children and the elderly marks them as a category of citizens inherently unable to defend themselves and in need of male protection; thus, the figure of the woman-victim becomes a functionally necessary element in constructing the image of the male warrior.

In summary, although all children, regardless of gender, are socialized within educational institutions in the spirit of “patriotism,” this patriotism takes varied forms. As Mayer notes, gender identities are constructed in mutual opposition, and it is impossible to understand the formation of the “masculine” without analyzing the “feminine” (Mayer 2000, 284). In this context, it manifests through the construction of the woman as the keeper of the nation, but not its defender.

Gender socialization, therefore, can be understood as a form of mimicry—a process in which students reproduce embodied norms by emulating established national and military ideals: “When women in particular are mimetic of the nation, their bodies are disciplined to correspond to an ideal of femininity embodied in the nation” (Martin 2000, 83).

If militarized masculinity defines the ideal defender of the nation, it becomes equally important to examine how the nation

itself is symbolically constructed. The production of the collective 'we' in Azerbaijani educational discourse relies not only on gendered distinctions but also on ethnonational narratives that define historical continuity, belonging, and external threat.

TURKIC NATIONALISM AND THE MAKING OF "US"

The logic of nationalism presupposes *Othering* and a binary division into "us" and "them." This division most often manifests through the national borders of the state: everything beyond these borders is considered "other," and therefore dangerous and threatening to our "women and children." In many contexts, alongside gendered boundaries, nationalist projects also employ the construction of ethnicity as an instrument. According to Smith, nations often draw on pre-existing kinship, religious, and belief systems that form ethnic communities. He argues that a shared national identity mobilizes ethnic communities to assert their rights as a nation—cultural and historical territorial communities with a sense of shared past and destiny (Smith 1991). Anderson proposes a different approach, claiming that nations are entirely social constructs without historical substance. Nations, as phenomena, are relatively recent, and a person's nationality is a contingent factor that modern nationalism transforms into a vocation. Although the members of a nation will never know most of their fellow members, in the mind of each lives the image of communion; the sense of "we" is one of the central elements of identification in modern nation-states (Anderson 1983).

Regardless of the "origins" of ethnicity, it is difficult to deny its symbolic or real role in the construction of nation-states. In the case of Azerbaijan, nation-building in the post-Soviet transitional period adopted an ideology of Turkic nationalism. By definition, Turkism refers to national self-consciousness and was considered the basis for rapprochement and cooperation among Turkic peoples and states (Ergun 2021).

In history textbooks, Turkism and Pan-Turkism are presented as movements that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century among the Azerbaijani and Turkish intelligentsia (Şükürov 2024b, 50–112). Such representations create historical and cultural continuity, which is expressed in contemporary Turkism and formed the foundation of nation-building in Azerbaijan after the collapse of the Soviet Union, beginning with Abulfaz Elchibey and continuing under the Aliyev administration.

Today, Turkification manifests in various ways. In the textbooks, the pages of the latest editions are framed with Turkic ornaments, visually linking historical events to the Turkic cultural context. The rider-warrior defending the Motherland is thus presented as a Turk, “defending Azerbaijan as part of the unified Turkic world” (Gamaghelyan and Romyantsev 2013).

Historical hero figures also help construct the sense of Turkic “us.” A prominent example is Babak, leader of the Khurramite movement, who led resistance against the Arab Caliphate. In the fifth-grade textbook, Babak’s battle against the Arab commander Afshin is presented as follows: “The caliph, who was obtaining great benefit, did not want to withdraw from Azerbaijan. He sent against Babak the well-known commander Afshin, who was of Turkic origin and subordinate to him, and entrusted him with a large army. (...) Unlike the previous Arab commanders, Afshin did not enter into direct battle with Babak. He understood that the Khurramites drew their strength from the people. Therefore, by various methods, he tried to weaken the forces defending Babak” (Şükürov 2024a, 35; author’s translation). From this excerpt, it is evident that even among “them” there were individuals of Turkic origin whose “Turkicness” contributed to the attainment of peace, emphasizing the continuity of “us” and the importance of Turkic identity.

Another example is a question in the textbook: “In the early

Middle Ages, the Huns, Basils, Bulgars, Sabirs, Khazars, and other Turkic tribes, crossing the Derbent Pass and moving southward, settled in the lands of Azerbaijan. In the following centuries, they mixed with the local Turkic tribes that had been living in our country since ancient times. In your opinion, what made the Turkic tribes move to Azerbaijan and merge?" (Xubyarov 2024, 10; author's translation). The question implies an answer concerning the merging of local and incoming Turkic tribes into a unified whole. Such historical interpretations create master narratives that place the collective in time within a coherent and logical narrative about the past and demonstrate that the existence of collective identities depends on the dissemination of consistent representations of the group's fundamental identity (Humlebæk 2018).

Connecting the past with the present, we can analyze the role of contemporary nation-states in the governmental discourse of Azerbaijan. Among allied states and nations traditionally characterized as "brotherly," the central place is occupied by the regional neighbor Turkey (Gamaghelyan and Romyantsev 2013). The ideological connection with Turkey manifests at all levels of national discourse, most prominently through the motto "*bir millət, iki dövlət*" ("two nations, one state"), which actively circulates both in society and in speeches by state officials of Azerbaijan and Turkey (Darıcı 2020; Ertekin 2012).

Turkey is constructed as the successor to the Ottoman Empire, which is also represented as a brotherly state. In describing wars with the Russian Empire or Persian Empire, textbooks use terms such as *düşmənlər* ("enemies") (Şükürov 2024b, 189) and *işğalçılar* ("occupants") (Hüseynov 2025, 92), whereas events involving the Ottoman Empire are referred to as a "senseless brotherly war" (Hüseynov 2025, 91). This contrast demonstrates that Turkey is represented not as an "enemy" but as a brotherly ally, while "they" are represented as problematic and aggressive states. Despite references to the Russian and

Persian Empires, Armenia is consistently presented as the primary “enemy” in textbooks.

Armenia, engaged in prolonged conflict with Azerbaijan since the late 1980s, is portrayed in textbooks as the main “villain,” specifically in contrast to the Turks. According to Ghazaryan and Huseynli, the image of the “enemy” plays a key role in constructing a “continuous and organic national history” in both Armenian and Azerbaijani textbooks (Ghazaryan and Huseynli 2022, 58). For example, Karabakh is presented as land inhabited by Turkic tribes since prehistoric times, establishing the historical continuity of Azerbaijani identity. In Armenian textbooks, similar but reversed narratives are employed (Ghazaryan and Huseynli 2022, 67). Students encounter references to Armenians in Karabakh as “Armenian bandit groups settled in Karabakh” (Ghazaryan and Huseynli 2022, 69). In textbooks addressing the establishment of the first Azerbaijani Republic, Ottoman troops are portrayed as assisting in liberating Baku from the “Armenian-Bolshevik forces” (Ghazaryan and Huseynli 2022, 72). The Turkish soldier memorial in Baku, erected after independence, became a pilgrimage site for Azerbaijani and Turkish politicians, reinforcing this discourse.

Of particular note is the dual characterization of Armenia in national discourse: it is represented simultaneously as feminized (“sister”) and as an aggressive, uncontrollable state. In documents of the Azerbaijani Ministry of Defense, Armenia is referred to as *təcavüzkar ölkə* (Ghazaryan and Huseynli 2022, 66), which Ghazaryan and Huseynli translate as “aggressor country,” although another meaning of *təcavüzkar* is “rapist.” Thus, the translation of *təcavüzkar ölkə* can also imply the meaning of a “rape-state.” The semantic ambiguity of the term *təcavüzkar*, which can denote both “aggressor” and “rapist,” opens a broader symbolic association between national threat, violence, and masculinized domination. Such metaphorical representations reflect the common practice of constructing the “other” as barbaric, uncontrollable, and

dangerous (Žarkov 2001). Ilham Aliyev's 2022 speech also illustrates this when he ironically commented on the relationship between France and Armenia:

"France is now patronizing Armenia. They call each other sisters, and I could see that myself; some friends noted this particularly. I didn't mention that they could also call each other brothers, but for some reason they say they are sisters" (APA 2022).

Contrasting with the representation of Azerbaijan and Turkey as "brothers," we can conclude that the Turkish-Azerbaijani image of "brothers" defending the Motherland is presented as positive, masculine, and civilized, whereas Armenia is simultaneously feminized and represented as an aggressive rape-state. Thus, the construction of linearity and continuity in national history is closely intertwined with gender ideals. Master narratives of Turkism, which create "us" through historical events, also construct the image of the "defender of the nation"—a warrior on horseback capable of protecting the territory, honor, and values of the community. Masculinity here functions as a central mechanism of the narrative through which the collective "we" gains strength. The linear construction of history, uniting "incoming" and "local" Turks, reproduces cultural and ethnic continuity, reinforcing a Turkic-national identity.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined Azerbaijani history textbooks as a site where militarized nationalism and gendered subjectivities are jointly produced and reinforced. It has argued that educational materials do not simply transmit historical knowledge but actively shape how the nation is imagined, embodied, and emotionally experienced through both visual and textual narratives, as well as through broader institutional school practices.

The analysis of textbook imagery has demonstrated the

recurring figure of the warrior, which functions as a standardized model of militarized masculinity. Through repetition and visual consistency, this figure contributes to the normalization of discipline, control, and readiness for violence as central components of national identity. In addition, the study has demonstrated that militarized values extend beyond textbooks into extracurricular and institutional practices within schools. Ceremonies, physical training, and patriotic events all contribute to the embodiment of national belonging, transforming abstract narratives into lived and affective experiences. In this process, students are not only taught about the nation but are also encouraged to feel and perform it through their bodies.

The article has also shown that these processes are fundamentally gendered. Although militarized nationalism is presented as universal, it is structured through differentiated roles that position masculinity in relation to protection, violence, and discipline, while femininity is associated with care, symbolism, and vulnerability. Gender is therefore an integral part of how nationalist meanings are constructed and sustained. Finally, the analysis has situated these dynamics within broader processes of national identity formation, including ethnonational narratives and historical continuity. Together, these elements illustrate how nationalism in educational discourse operates simultaneously as ideology, embodied practice, and gendered social order.

Future research could further explore each of these dimensions in greater detail. In particular, the embodied aspects of nationalism, the specific configurations of gender roles in Azerbaijani education, and their relation to constructions of ethnonational belonging remain open areas for deeper empirical and theoretical investigation.

In this sense, Azerbaijani history education operates not merely as a medium of historical instruction but as a disciplinary and affective apparatus through which militarized

citizenship, gender hierarchy, and national belonging are simultaneously reproduced.

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Akhundov, Jafar. 2017. "Conflicts and Militarization of Education. Part I. Azerbaijan." *P.S. Urban Landscapes* (CISR e.V.).

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.

APA. 2022. "France and Armenia Call Each Other Sisters, They Could Also Call Brothers – President Ilham Aliyev." *APA News Agency*, November 21, 2022. <https://en.apa.az/official-news/france-and-armenia-call-each-other-sisters-they-could-also-call-brothers-president-ilham-aliyev-390029>

Batuman, Bülent. 2010. "The Shape of the Nation: Visual Production of Nationalism through Maps in Turkey." *Political Geography* 29 (4): 220–234.

Connell, Raewyn. 2005. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Connell, Raewyn. 2009. *Gender: In World Perspective*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Darıcı, Mehmet. 2020. "Türkiye Azerbaycan İlişkilerinin 'Bir Millet İki Devlet' Söylemi Üzerinden İncelenmesi / Investigation of Turkey-Azerbaijan Relations Through the 'One Nation Two States' Discourse." *Social Sciences Studies Journal* 6 (71): 4310–4318.

Enloe, Cynthia. 1990. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Enloe, Cynthia. 2000. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ergun, Ayça. 2021. "Citizenship, National Identity, and Nation-Building in Azerbaijan: Between the Legacy of the Past and the Spirit of Independence." *Nationalities Papers* 50 (4): 813–830.

Ertekin, Bülent. 2012. "Turkey and Azerbaijan: The Dream versus the Reality or the Reality versus the Dream for 'Two States and One Nation.'" *Mustafa Kemal University Journal of Social Sciences Institute* 9 (19): 159–176.

Foucault, Michel. 1975. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Freud, Sigmund. 1923. *The Ego and the Id*. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XIX. London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

Gamaghelyan, Philip, and Sergey Rumyantsev. 2013. "Armenia and Azerbaijan: Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and New Interpretations of History Textbook Narratives." In *Myths and Conflicts in South Caucasus: Instrumentalization of Historical Narratives*, vol. 1, 168–192. International Alert.

Ghazaryan, Flora, and Mirkamran Huseynli. 2022. "Armenian and Azerbaijani History Textbooks: Time for a Change." *Caucasus Edition*, May 20, 2022.

Humblebæk, Carsten. 2018. "National Identities: Temporality and Narration." *Genealogy* 2 (4): 36.

Kami, Əli. "Azərbaycanın Əsgər Marşı." Lyrics. Music by Cavanşir Quliyev. Accessed via *e-Dərslik*. <https://portal.azertag.az/az/node/10850>

Law on Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Təhsil

haqqında Azərbaycan Respublikasının Qanunu). 2009. Adopted June 19, 2009. Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Martin, Angela K. 2000. "Death of a Nation: Transnationalism, Bodies and Abortion in Late Twentieth-Century Ireland." In *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, edited by Tamar Mayer, 65–86. New York: Routledge.

Mayer, Tamar. 2000. "From Zero to Hero: Masculinity in Jewish Nationalism." In *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, edited by Tamar Mayer, 283–307. New York: Routledge.

McClintock, Anne. 1993. "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family." *Feminist Review* 44: 61–80.

Militz, Elisabeth, and Carolin Schurr. 2016. "Affective Nationalism: Banalities of Belonging in Azerbaijan." *Political Geography* 54: 54–63.

Mosse, George L. 1996. *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan. 2015. "Patriotism Education of the Young Generation Is One of the Main Directions of State Youth Policy." News and updates, Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan. <https://edu.gov.az/en/news-and-updates/8978>

Smith, Anthony D. 1991. *National Identity*. London: Penguin.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997. *Gender and Nation*. London: Sage Publications.

Žarkov, Dubravka. 2001. "The Body of the Other Man: Sexual Violence and the Construction of Masculinity, Sexuality and Ethnicity in Croatian Media." In *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, edited by Caroline O. N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark, 69–82. London: Zed Books.

Textbooks:

Hüseynov, E., et al. *Azərbaycan Tarixi 6*. Bakı: Azərbaycan Respublikası Elm və Təhsil Nazirliyi, 2025.

Mahmudlu, Yaqub, et al. *Azərbaycan Tarixi 8*. Bakı: "Təhsil Nəşriyyat-Poliqrafiya" MMC, 2023.

Şükürov, Kərim, et al. *Azərbaycan Tarixi 5*. Bakı: "Şərq-Qərb" ASC, 2024a.

Şükürov, Kərim, et al. *Azərbaycan Tarixi 9*. Bakı: "Şərq-Qərb" ASC, 2024b.

Xubyarov, B., et al. *Azərbaycan Tarixi 7*. Bakı: "Şərq-Qərb" ASC, 2024.