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WOMEN'S CONDITION IN MILITARY INSTITUTIONS

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This paper aims to explore the condition of women in military institutions. In spite of the numerous reforms this has not improved, women continuing to have only a formal role in the army that is limited to office tasks.

One can identify some theories regarding women's role in the army: the feminist anti-militarist theories which reject the women's entrance into the army, the militarism masculinised theories which also reject this option for women and also, the gender equality theories which supports the entrance of women in military.

This paper focuses on the last type of theory, which argues that in contemporary society gender equality is an objective which should be attained. Under these circumstances, there is no basis on which women should be denied entrance to the military. International organisations like NATO and the EU, have adopted some directives which encourage national states to include and offer equal opportunities for their female personnel.

Key words: military institutions, gender equality, feminist theories, militarism theories

- **The association of women with peace**

Throughout human history women were associated with peace and men with war in most cultures. By deconstructing the war discourse, Elshtain is highlighting that it constructs stereotypes for both men and women. Men are seen as Just Warriors and women as Beautiful Souls. [6] Men are both subjects of war but also its narrators, while women should remain in the private realm and, through their statute, are the reason for men's wars [16]. Feminists have argued that by using a very technical discourse, these theories do not take into account human lives and thus, women's role should be to offer a moral perspective on war. [6]

Elshtain was the first author to point out that women's association with peace and men's association with war is not a good strategy for any of them. These stereotypes disadvantage both pacifist men and warrior women [6], by claiming that women's place is in the private realm as non-combatants and that men's role is to be warriors. "The pervasiveness and trans-cultural persistence of this imagery are well documented and reveal the extent to which male and female identities have been forged around the matter of collective violence". [4] Thus, these stereotypes express "a symbolic rupture with the dominant gender order based on the separation of male and female". [4] However, one can observe that the myth of the Amazons is one of the oldest examples of maintaining the gender order, and another example from contemporary society is that of kamikaze

women. If the Amazons are depicted like "heroines, but very unnatural, masculine and thus, marginal to the accepted condition of women" [4], kamikaze women are a transposition from our society of unnatural, crazy, outsiders from the viewpoint of the accepted gender order.

The violence of kamikaze women's action destroys the idealized image of women, imposed through the gender norm. Women had been labelled as being just Beautiful Souls, incapable of committing such atrocities. Thus, their lack of obedience to the rules of gender entails the disapproval of the entire society, not only for the severe consequences of such actions, but also for daring to challenge the society gender order. The idealized pattern imposed on women by the gender norm determines their socialization to become pacifist because of their female specific experiences. Women are educated to be pacifist, to take care of others, to conscientiously fulfill the roles of wife and mother, and certainly not to unleash their unexpected anger into organizing mortal attacks.

There are two assumptions concerning the kamikaze women's responsibility. If the discourse of Islamic groups holds that kamikaze women completely agree with their actions, demonstrating that they enjoy the same degree of equality as their men peers, the occidental discourse criticizes such actions precisely because it holds that such Islamic groups are using women's lack of decision ability and their naivety to develop such operations. [1] Either in academic studies or in media news, the decision of women to become kamikaze is seen as coming from a wish to be relieved from a traumatising life with sexual abuse, rapes, and all sorts of abuse towards women taking place in an extremely patriarchal society. [1, 18] Even if their declared objective, according to these women's discourse, focuses on political, national and religious issues, mass media keep depicting them under the sign of the private realm. [15] Thus, the emotional overcomes the ideology, their actions are explained by others as being caused by the corruption of the private realm. Because of such approaches,

women are not blamed, but are deemed incapable of imposing their own opinions on the political agenda.

In conclusion, if their actions are not considered as being their own decisions, one cannot consider them as having any effect concerning the evolution of events at the international level system. [18]Denying their responsibility for terrorist acts represents in fact the denial of their agency and autonomy in making deliberate political decisions in a certain socio-cultural context. Thus, if one cannot accept the agency and the responsibility of these martyr women, the stereotype of women being innocent, powerless and in need of protection remains, and as we will see below, this affects the agency of other women, those in the military. [15]

- **Theoretical assumptions concerning the role of women in military**

- **The biological theoretical model**

The idealized image that women are peaceful was that who kept women outside military institutions for a long time. There are several approaches concerning women's role in such institutions. One of the approaches holds that biology plays still a very important role in defining the degree in which women should have a contribution. The biological theoretical model, agrees with a gender order which demands women to be peaceful and man warriors. Thus, because women are birth and care givers, they should be empathetic, care takers and in need of protection. Men, instead, are demanded to be very strong physically, to have a certain level of aggressiveness and to be very protective. Men's aggressiveness is justified by the lack of reproductive capacities and for that reason violence is considered to bridge the biological gap between women and men. [14]

This theory is embraced by certain theoreticians, either feminist or not. Thus, the argument is that the "warrior power to destroy

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and kill" is proportional to women's power to procreate. [14]

If non-feminist theoreticians, the masculinised militarized theoretician, consider that biology is a very important factor, holding that women's lack of adequate capabilities should not allow them to enter into military institutions or to have a formal role, feminist theoreticians argue that women's capacity to reproduce determines them to have a less favorable attitude toward fighting in a war. Even though Elshtain has criticised the traditional roles, she does not support women's admission in the army, arguing that they will only represent a trophy and not achieve real power as they believe they will [6] Ruddick, even if she argues that women can be more peaceful than men because of their specifics experiences, considers that the association of women with peace is rather dangerous, explaining that men too can develop a "maternal thinking". [12] Constructing a maternal thinking is the road to reconstructing the military approaches and thus, to reconstructing the concept of peace. [11]

As we can see, the theoretical biological model assumptions, by being based on different biological characteristics, ignores the socio-cultural factors which determine the construction of female and male personalities and body structures. This model is not reliable because it assumes that women are inherently peaceful, an assumption which was demonstrated untrue through time. Women have always had a role in wars, examples including kamikaze women or women fighting along men in wars as in Vietnam or El Salvador. Another eloquent example which enforces the idea that women are not inherently peaceful is the well known situation when women's anger and aggressiveness manifests into violence of women against their children. [11, 16]

There are feminists which, agreeing that there are biological differences between men and women are different, argue that there are however several socio-cultural factors which contribute to the development of different types of roles for women and men. If the non-feminist theoreticians take into account only the biological characteristics, the feminist ones consider also the socio-cultural factor along with biological ones. Some feminists, even if they argue that women's different biological characteristics and different socialisation could determine important changes concerning the design of military approaches, do not approve of women's entrance to the army, holding that their role would be just minimal and that men will always feel the need to protect them by condemning them to office tasks.

- **Segal model regarding the role of women in armed forces**

Mady Segal had developed a systematic theory about the role of women in military institutions (1983), a model which was extended in 1995. Her model highlights a theory concerning the variables which determine a low or high level of participation in military affairs throughout history and across nations. She is interested in a set of three variables: Military, Social, and Culture. [14] "The Military dimension consists of those characteristics of the nation's security situation and aspects of military organization and activity that affect women's roles. The Social Structure category includes aspects of women's civilian roles and more general civilian social structural variables that affect women's roles. The Culture dimensions concern the social construction of gender and family roles." [14]

Segal points out that national emergency periods favour the entrance of women in

military institutions. However, after that period is finished, women's role is not adequately appreciated and the contribution of women is forgotten. There is therefore a process of cultural amnesia affecting the contribution women made during emergency situations. In the aftermath of war, women's military activities are reconstructed as minor (or even nonexistent), allowing the culture to maintain the myth "of men in arms and women **at** home". [14] Contrary to this situation is that of developed societies, that have a high standard of living and a low rate of threats to national security, but in which prevailing cultural values support gender equality and in whichwomen's participation increases. The author offers the examples of Canada and Sweden. However, if there are periods with high rates of unemployment, then women's access decreases because men usually tend to apply for such jobs. [14]
The author holds that if the level of gender equality is high then the distribution of family tasks enters military institutions. [14] The development of technology also allowed women to have better opportunities in the army, changing the face of war.

Segal's model highlights very well the variables which played an important role in modifying the condition of the military along the time and her model become a very reliable model for the analysis of many countries, even of those outside the EU and NATO. [9]

2.3 The gender equality model

Theorists like Tickner and Charlesworth reject the association between women and peace and oppose the anti-militarist perspectives holdingeither that women are more peaceful than men because of their womanly experiences [12, 6], or because of their different socialization in the spirit of cooperation and interdependence [2]. The two authors believe that such arguments serve to perpetuate the myth of „protector-protégé", implicitly excluding women from the decision-making sphere regarding the defence policy. Thus, focusing on the concept of 'citizen defender', Tickner argues that if both women and men are defenders, feminist

values such as cooperation and interdependence should be found in the defence conception.

Tickner has added some important criticism to traditional theories, holding that it is neccesary to also value women's role in mantaing peace and in promoting security, not only that of soldiers and officials. [17] Thus, this author has argued in favor of some institutional changes, including women's access in the army and increasing their role in achieving sustainable global peace, arguing that women can offer a different image on war from their position as mothers, wives, and defender citizens. [17] She has also criticised the concept of citizenship, considering that it is imbued with a hegemonic view on masculinity and correlated with a devalued feminity. The social construct of devalued feminity determines the perpetuation of the"protector/protected myth", a myth that has allowed men to protect women because of their presumptive vulnerabilities. [17]

Tickner argues that a feminist perspective which values the relational universe could contribute to the reconstruction of the concept of security. Thus, she argues that a security approach which relies on the insecurity of other states cannot determine sustainability. A feminist approach to security will not consider an abstract state as main referential, focusing instead on the human beings. [17]

In pursue of gender equality, Charlesworth criticizes the gender perspective adopted by international documents regarding women's condition in conflict. The author deconstructs the UN approach, considering that the premises for a sustainable security cannot be based on the association of women with peace in light of their womanly experiences. [5] Thus, it is necessary to develop a defence approach based on values favouring gender equality and not just to provide for a specific number of women in the institutions empowered to ensure peace. Consequently, feminists consider that women's status must be improved in order for them to have an important role in shaping the defence concept according to their own values. Also, the author underlies the need for correctly transposing the "gender" term and not only

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trying to associate it with feminity. She observes that United Nations documents contain an institutional orthodoxy concerning the association of women with peace.

According to the studies conducted by Caprioli (2001) and Carreiras (2007) there is an obvious correlation between the gender equality level of a society and the measure of gender equality in military institutions. [2, 4] One can find: the assumption that women have a higher role in developing and sustaining peace, the use of a language of "special needs" referring only to girls and women, the open suggestion to include women in the formal process of peace because of their skills towards pacifistic policies and not in the name of gender equality, the addition of references to the feminine when a gender perspective is presented. [5]

Concerning this type of assumption, that gender represents the feminine, it is also to be found inthe 1612 (2002) and 1820 Resolution (2008). „The last one focuses on sexual violence against women and girls", without considering the possibility that men and boys can also be harassed. [3] All these resolutions, UN1325, UN 1612 and UN 1820 highlight the connection between women and peace, and are trying to propose a gender perspective in all operations concerning the maintenance of peace. [7] The type of essentialism advanced in patriarchal societies is also present in international documents which aim to eliminate gender inequity, which in turn leads to the reduction of women's capacity and opportunities to gain power in decisional spheres.

The gender equality model focuses on equal rights for both women and men. Thus, without favouring one or another gender, this approach helps in attaining the principles of a just society.

- **NATO and UE role in promoting women's role in military institutions**

Women's entrance in military institutions was a result of either human logistical needs in a certain period, or due to the structure or the characteristics of armies caused by different cultural systems or by the economic or political characteristics of the society which accepted women in the armies. [4] Maria Gomez argues that, although now the military system is a plural one, we can identify some common characteristics which favoured the process of recruitment of women, like the professionalization of armies and changes in the traditional type of war. [8] These characteristics have removed some of the existing prejudices on low physical capacities, on psychological and biological issues, or the belief that women are morally superior and thus cannot fight. (Gomez, 2008: 32)

Carreiras identifies also as important factors the role of global pressure towards attaining gender equality in general, and the role of NATO, through the Committee on Women in the NATO Forces (CWINF), in advancing the military institutional system need for recruiting women. [4]

The European Union also had an important role in attaining gender equality. Being concerned with social cohesion, equal opportunities, gender equality, the European Union can be an important partner for those who are fighting against gender based violence. Its „feminine political culture", which is characterized by democracy, confidence and participation, could provide a good support for integrating gender in the mainstream of security approach and, consequently, for constructing a perspective more inclusive of women's interests in this field. [10] Thus, in the author's opinion, these two factors represented "a minimum (but operative) common denominator that

produced<comparable> effects in terms of cognitive models, policy orientation, and formalization of behaviours". [4]

Gomez proposes a taxonomy concerning the degree of inclusion of women in military institutions. [8] Thus, there are countries which did not impose any kind of restrictions, where women have total access to any position (Norway, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland), countries which do not allow women to perform on submarines (Germany, France, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Belgium), states which have imposed restrictions concerning access to certain positions, mainly the ones which refer to first line combat positions (Holland, UK, Turkey), and a last type, represented by Russia, where women hold functions correlated with the necessities of a period or another, for the moment having access only to certain positions. Gomez mentions Romania too in the category of states which do not need to improve the status of women in the military very much, and thus, do not need to adopt special policies for solving the problemof reconciliation between family and professional life.

Carreiras holds that thereare mechanisms which have an important effect of restricting or conditioning women's representation. Thus, rank restriction is a mechanism that in certain countries, which do not have a volunteer system but a compulsory one, lead to women not being recruited in certain positions. Thus, in these positions women were also not promoted. One can mention: Poland, Hungary, Check, Greece and Turkey.

A second type of mechanism which has a role in restricting the representation of women consists in the establishment of a maximum ceiling. The influence of "ceiling glass", in states which have internal conflicts, without a volunteer system of recruitment and without being under pressure for attaining a gender equality agenda, allowed women to enter the military only in a certain percentage and thus, limited their opportunity to promote in this kind of positions. The author provides the example of Greece and Turkey, where there is a 10 % quota, or 4 % quota of accession to military academies. Italy also imposed such a quota, although in its case it could be explained by the recent introduction of the volunteer recruitment system [4]. Analysing these types of mechanisms in relation to Romania's situation, one can observe that even if in Romania there is a volunteer recruitment system since 2007, the Romanian system is not similar with the Greek or Turkish ones. Also, although the introduction of the volunteer recruitment system was almost simultaneous in Romania and Italy (2001 for Romania and 1999 for Italy), the ceiling glass mechanism was applied. Its use contradicted all the expectations of above presented models, concerning the fact that the adoption of a volunteer system should have extended the inclusion of women. Imposing such a maximum glass ceiling limited the process of inclusion of women in these institutions, so one can speak about a limited representation. This limited representation also includes a lack of decision-making power of women on the defence design and the on the way their status should be improved.

• **Conclusions**

It is important that women are seen as real actors in achieving security, women's access to the military not being sufficient for achieving gender equality and sustainable peace. In order for women to be real "defender citizens" and to promote their values and interests in the defence policy, it is necessary to also promote policies which will change the perception on gender roles, will help promote women to decision-making positions and will create strong institutions to prevent and sanction prejudiced attitudes and discrimination.

I argue that women's access to the military should not be restricted, but that ensuring only that there is a specific number of women in these institutions is not enough. In order to improve their status and to propose their own perspective on security, women have to gain real power. Romanian women continue to have only a formal role in the army, limited to office tasks, which prevents the transposition of their own values and interests in the defence policy.

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I have based my conclusion regarding the merely formal role of women in the army on the fact that the army is still a patriarchal institution governed by masculine values such as violence and aggressiveness, in which women's role is limited to administrative jobs. Given the fact that women are birth and care givers and that they have been socialized differently from the men, they are seen as vulnerable, peaceful and in need of protection. Thus, the patriarchal military institutions have chosen to protect them by condemning them to desk jobs. The patriarchal society and institutions, which have imposed gender differentiated roles, are responsible for preventing women's accession to top level jobs in the army, thus denying theirs right to contribute to the construction of a gender balanced defence policy.

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