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GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN THE MILITARY ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper is the result of the Military Gender Studies project. The aim of the project is to analyze the dynamics of gender perspectives in some military institutions in Europe, namely the Military Academy, Lisbon, Portugal, the University of Turin, Italy, "Vasil Levski" National Military University, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria and "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy of Sibiu. The project started with the application of a questionnaire to military students and this paper will present part of the results obtained only in "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy of Sibiu, after analyzing the discrimination dimension.

KEYWORDS:

Gender pespectives, gender discrimination, gender equality

1. Introduction

The dynamics of gender values is determined by the context of economic, social and cultural changes, imposed by the transition from traditionalism to modernism and postmodernism. As Inglehart (1997) points out, the relationship between cultural and socio-economic changes is reciprocal, because major socio-economic changes reshape culture, including values, and, implicitly, gender values. In what regards the impact of modernization and postmodernization on gender values, Inglehart and Norris (2003) distinguish two stages in the process of value changes. The first stage corresponds to the

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industrialization process that facilitated the access of women to the paid labor market and determined the decrease of the birth rate. This stage is also related to the decline of the traditional family and, consequently, to the decline of the values that underlie the traditional family type. The second phase is that of post-industrialization, which has gradually brought greater gender equality, women being increasingly involved in management and political processes. According to the perspective of the authors, the first stage freed women from gender relations in the traditional family, while the second established gender equality in society. The recommendation is certainly to support the equal participation of women and men in the labor market and a new division of gender roles within the household, but all these aspects must be contextualized, depending on the particularities of each society.

The topic of gender issues in the military context must be taken into consideration as a reflection of gender values specific to each particular society, against the backdrop of specific transformations, which were different from one society to another, depending on their placement on the traditionalism-modernism-postmodernism axis and based on some typical aspects.

In order to analyze the dynamics of gender values within some military institutions in Europe, the Military Gender Studies (MGS) project was launched. The project aims to investigate to what extent young military cadets adapt (or not) to a military culture and to its hegemonic masculine environment.

2. Sample and research method

The first part of the project was focused on data collection based on a questionnaire and an interview guide regarding the perspectives and experiences of the cadets from "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy on gender equality. In this paper, we will refer only to the results of the questionnaire, and we will focus only on the items that focused on the analysis of the perception of gender discrimination among military students.

Regarding the socio-demographic data of the sample, which consisted of 319 military students, the questionnaire was completed as follows: a number of 128 students from the first year of study, of which 45 female and 83 male; 91 students from the second year of study, of which 30 female and 61 male; and a number of 31 female and 69 male students from the third year of study. It can be seen that the proportion is maintained in terms of gender difference in the academy, in general, given that the questionnaire was answered by a smaller number of female students than male students, as we have a total sample of 105 female respondents and 214 male.

3. Gender discrimination

The questionnaire started with an item that emphasized the fact that gender discrimination occurs prior to admission to the Academy, more precisely to the motivation of choosing a military career. Thus, to the question *"What determined you to join this institution?"* most of the respondents, namely 163 cadets, responded that their motivation was related to the career opportunities offered by the profession of officer; 138 students answered that the option was rather determined by individual goals. The rest replied that family or friends guided them in the choice or that there were other situations. Out of the total number of those who responded and opted for career opportunities as a reason for choosing a military career, 117 are male and 46 are female students; of those who responded that their own goals determined them to make this choice, the number of female students is higher than in the first situation, namely 54 female students chose this answer, while the number of male students is lower compared to the first option, being of only 84 students. Given the higher number of male students who chose career opportunity as motivation, we can conclude

that male students are more career-oriented, while probably female students are more focused on meeting their own needs: for example, job security, a decent income, etc. These choices are consistent with the need-based motivational theory, which postulates that men are generally more career-oriented than women, who seek a work-life balance. In fact, as observed by Meyer and Allen (1997), men develop more affective organizational commitments than women, who have a predominantly continuance organizational commitment, probably determined by fewer opportunities on the labor market, which makes them more aware of the implications of a possible departure from an organization and a likely lack of alternatives.

After they become members of the military organization, the way in which students perceive gender dynamic in the academy varies. As illustrated in Table no. 1, regarding the answer to the question *"Do you feel that you are treated differently because of your gender in this institution?"*, 191 students consider that they have not been treated differently. A number of 80 students stated that they "sometimes" felt this, most of them being female respondents (a number of 43 female students). Probably the differentiated treatment is felt by the students both in a positive and in a negative sense, an aspect that will be clarified to a greater extent in the analysis of the interviews. A total of 48 students answered "yes" to the question, stating that they were treated differently in the Academy due to their gender. Surprisingly, only 12 of these are female, while the remaining 36 students belong to the male gender. One of the explanations may be related to the fact that girls are positively discriminated against, while men react negatively to this preferential treatment applied to women.

Table no. 1
Regarding the different treatment based on gender

Do you feel that you are treated differently because of your gender in this institution?	Gender	Total
No	Female	50
	Male	141
Sometimes	Female	43
	Male	37
Yes	Female	12
	Male	36

(Source: Authors)

The answers to the following question clearly show the difference between positive and negative discrimination among military students, and the fact that probably the preferential differential treatment of female students has a negative impact on the perpetuation of gender issues in the Academy: *"You think you are treated: better than cadets of the opposite gender / worse than cadets of the opposite gender?"*. The majority of female students believe that they are treated better than the opposite gender, while the male cadets admitted that they are treated worse than the opposite gender. A total of 38 female students, compared to 11 male students, said they were treated better, while 62 male students stated they were treated worse than female cadets, compared to 17 female students who mentioned they were treated worse than their male colleagues. Consequently, on the whole, female respondents are treated better by the organization/officers, which generates a feeling of discrimination among male students, a feeling that worsens as they advance in the academic career as students.

The same pattern (see Table no. 2) is repeated in the answers to the next question *"Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your gender?"*. Thus, most of the respondents, namely a number of 221 students answered "no", they do not feel discriminated against because of gender, 60 answered that they "sometimes" feel discriminated and a smaller number of students (38) answered

"yes", considering that they have felt discriminated against because of gender. This time, the number of female cadets who answered positively is higher than the number of male students, but the number of those who answered "sometimes" is higher among the male sample.

Table no. 2

Regarding gender-based discrimination

Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your gender?	Gender	Total
No	Female	58
	Male	163
Sometimes	Female	25
	Male	35
Yes	Female	22
	Male	16

(Source: Authors)

An extremely important aspect is the source of discrimination in the organizational environment, because the implications are different if it occurs within horizontal or vertical social relations. As illustrated in the chart below (Chart no. 1), most female students consider that discriminatory actions come mainly from male cadets, colleagues, and not hierarchically, from the academy staff. On the other hand, male respondents believe that discrimination comes largely from officers. It is certainly about the same positive discrimination that favors female students and has negative implications for gender perceptions among male students.

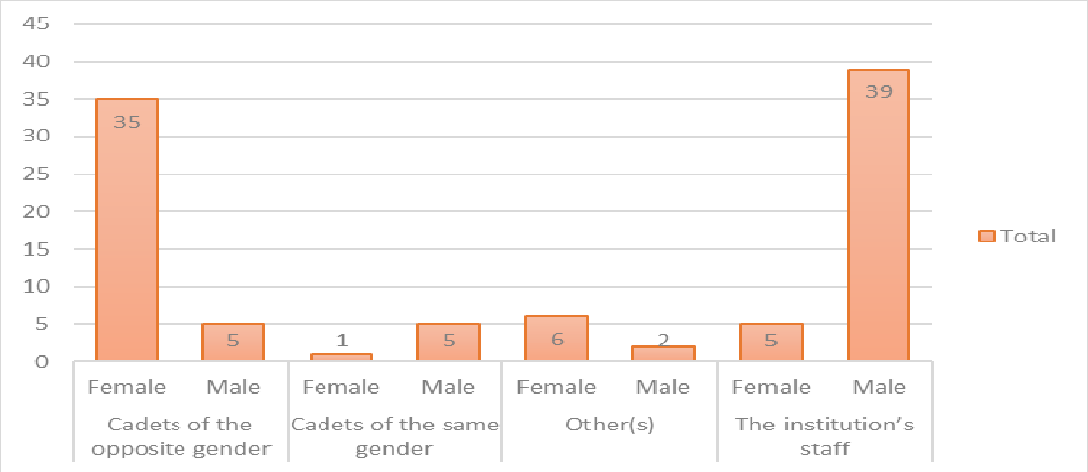


Chart no. 1 regarding the source of gender-based discrimination

(Source: Authors)

The next item brings students to an area that generates quite a debate, especially recently, given that there are no separate places for females and males at the admission exam, but different scales are still kept for sports tests, both at admission and later on, at the respective discipline. The majority of students, meaning 154 cadets, consider themselves as capable as the opposite gender in terms of *physical abilities*, while 119 students consider they are more capable, and 46 students think they are less capable than the opposite gender. Of these, 7 female students consider themselves more capable than male cadets and the remaining 112 male students consider they are more capable than female students. A number of 62 female representatives consider themselves as capable as male representatives when it comes to performing activities that require physical effort, while 36 female students think they are less capable than male cadets in terms of physical effort. We can notice that there are 10 male cadets who consider themselves less capable than the opposite

gender. Certainly, there are female students who have the same abilities as male students to perform activities that involve physical strength, as there are also male students who are less prepared than female students from this point of view. Nevertheless, this is definitely a sensitive topic among students, because gender equality implies that there should be no different scales.

In terms of *mental strength*, male students consider themselves as capable as female students. A number of 166 male cadets answered that they feel "equally capable", while 60 female respondents gave the same answer. Compared to the previous situation, related to physical abilities, we can notice that the number of female cadets has decreased. A small number of female students (3) feel that they are less capable than male students from an intellectual point of view. On the contrary, they feel even more capable than male students, given that the "more capable" option was selected by 43 girls. It seems that in terms of activities that require intellectual effort, female cadets consider that they are not inferior to male cadets, but quite the contrary. There are also male cadets who claim that females are better at academic activities.

To the questions "*Would you feel comfortable being commanded by a man*?*"* and *"Would you feel comfortable being commanded by a woman?",* almost all respondents (a number of 310 students) answered "yes" to the first question. There are only 6 female cadets who answered "no". Certainly, the experience regarding the almost exclusively male command in the Academy has promoted a sense of comfort among students from this point of view. Regarding the acceptance of a female commander, the results are similar, as 276 students consider that there would be no problem with this from their point of view. Only 43 respondents chose the answer "no", meaning they would not feel comfortable under the command of a woman. The majority of these are male students. Military regulations require obedience of higher ranks, regardless of gender, so students accept this. The gender should not be the variable that influences the acceptance of authority. It is the competence of the commander that should prevail. In the context of Weber's (2020) idea, that of doubling the rational-legal authority offered by the position occupied with the charismatic authority (given competencies), we could not only talk about compliance/acceptance, but also about the internalization of military values and norms.

4. Conclusions

Gender differences are observable from the motivation of choosing a military career. Comparing the choices of male students with those of female students, we see how gender stereotypes function even before admission to the Academy. When men choose a military career for career opportunities and women rather out of private interests, it is clear how the *glass ceiling* (Boyd, 2008) works – women's career is paved with glass, or more precisely with shards of glass.

Students (regardless of gender), have an open attitude towards the possibility of balancing the relationship between females and males in the Academy. With few exceptions, they argue that it would be beneficial to increase the number of females in the Academy, as they would find their place in the student community and later find suitable employment/positions in the military, given the diversity of professional requirements for military branches and specializations.

Differentiating the scales for physical tests between females and males (both at the admission exams to the institution and later during schooling) is a topic that arouses animosity in the military students' community, being mentioned by many cadets as an example of gender discrimination in the institution. Many of the examples provided by cadets refer to

gender discrimination and mention the division of administrative tasks according to the gender of students, this practice being also perceived as discriminatory. Male students sometimes perceive discrimination to a greater extent than female cadets, due to the preferential treatment they enjoy from higher ranks.

Considering that we are discussing gender relations in an organization with a predominantly masculine and collective culture, we consider that formal education in this sense can be the key to reducing gender discrimination.

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