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## **PHD THESIS**

**GENDER, EQUAL CHANCES POLICY, AND INTERNATIONAL  
SECURITY. CASE STUDY: THE VISUAL AND AESTHETIC  
CONSTRUCTION OF ROMANIA’S PARTICIPATION IN THE  
OPERATION RESOLUTE SUPPORT MISSION FROM A GENDER  
PERSPECTIVE**

**- SUMMARY -**

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**Key words:** gender identities; gender equality; military institutions; Romanian Army; visual construction; Resolute Support Mission; military social media.

## **The research context**

Currently, in the Romanian feminist literature numerous research papers focus on various topics, such as the history of Romanian feminism, feminist theories, gender, and politics or gender and the media. Thus, the works of Ștefania Mihăilescu are reference poles for the knowledge and understanding of the history of Romanian feminism, especially that belonging to the First Wave, because through them the public life of some feminist associations is reconstructed and important events are marked in women's political movements. In addition to the historical evolution of feminist movements, the studies of Mihaela Miroiu bring to the fore feminist political theories, gender policies during the communist and post-communist period, as well as the processes that women in Romania went through to obtain the "democratic citizenship". In terms of gender and media, the work of Oana Băluță demonstrates that women are often either symbolically removed from media representations or portrayed in accordance with the traditional gender stereotypes. In this variety of topics, the status of women in military institutions has not been ignored either. Thus in her doctoral dissertation, Cristina Rădoi offers a feminist perspective on war, discussing the impact that women have on military institutions.

The industrial revolution that began at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century provided a favorable context for the spread of women's goals of acquiring equal economic and political rights. In the work *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte (1838 – 1929)*<sup>1</sup>, [*From the history of Romanian feminism. Anthology of texts (1838 – 1929)*], Ștefania Mihăilescu makes a foray into the history of the women's emancipation movement, noting that feminist ideas appeared in Romania in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they spread to other developed countries such as England, France, and the USA. But not only the replacement of traditional manual labor with mechanized labor contributed to the spread of feminist ideas, but also the fact that the principles of equality that emerged during the French Revolution of 1789 were adopted by prominent representatives of Romanian society. The second volume that reconstructs the emancipation movement of women in

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<sup>1</sup> Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Antologie de texte (1838-1929)*, Polirom, Iași, 2002.

Romania, *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Studiu și antologie de texte (1929-1948)*<sup>2</sup>, [From the history of Romanian feminism. Anthology of texts (1929 – 1948)], shows that this movement intensified in the interwar period, becoming a significant part of social dynamics. Thus, during this period, Romania went through a process of development both in terms of economics and in terms of education and scientific research, and women's organizations were expanded throughout the country and, moreover, new ones were set up to meet the needs of the country's modernization processes. Even though it was a constitution of the communist regime, the 1948 constitution marks an important point in eliminating gender discrimination, imposing equality between women and men as a constitutional principle, but violation of this principle was not legally punishable, so the process of women's emancipation is achieved only at the legislative level and not actually at the level of social life.

In the work *Drumul către autonomie*<sup>3</sup>[*The road towards autonomy*], in addition to exposing the historical evolution of feminism, Mihaela Miroiu brings to the fore feminist political theories such as liberal feminism, socialist and Marxist feminism, radical feminism, eco-feminism and community feminism. Feminist political theories were born and have evolved at the same time as the feminist movement, with two aims: supporting women's rights and highlighting policies that disadvantage women and understanding gender relations. Also, this study discusses the status of women during the communist period, when the development of feminist theories stagnated, at least in Romania, due to the fact that the access to information from the Western world was limited. With the fall of communism, both cultural isolationism and the regime's pressures regarding the uniformity disappeared, being replaced by mechanisms and policies that regulated gender relations. The book *Birth of Democratic Citizenship. Women and Power in Modern Romania*<sup>4</sup> written by Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu completes the previous study on feminist political theories, examining by means of using the interview method, the process through which women obtained democratic citizenship in Romania. The conclusion of this study was that, although women went through many political developments from 1945 to 2010, their participation in the

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<sup>2</sup> Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc. Studiu și antologie de texte (1929-1948)*, Polirom, Iași, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Mihaela Miroiu, *Drumul către autonomie: teorii politice feministe*, Polirom, Iași, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Maria Bucur, Mihaela Miroiu, *Birth of Democratic Citizenship: Women and Power in Modern Romania*, Hardcover, Indiana University Press, 2018.

democratization process was insignificant, as men were and continue to be the ones who define priorities in the country's development, demonstrating a low concern for obtaining gender equality.

Although it occupies an important place in academic research, the evolution of Romanian feminism, feminist political theories and the role of women in the social, economic and political processes are not the only topics addressed in Romanian feminist literature. Regarding the relationship between gender and mass-media, in the work *„Gen, politică și mass-media: reprezentări stereotipizate. Cum tragem linia?”*<sup>5</sup>[*„Gender, politics and mass-media: stereotypical representations. How do we draw the line?”*], Oana Băluță explores the intersection between gender, politics and the media, noticing that, in representing women, the emphasis is often on the way they look and not on the actions they take. Precisely for this reason the presence of women in the masculinized political space is viewed with distrust, women being the elements that disrupt the status-quo of the organizations. Moreover, this paper has one thing in common with my study, as it discusses how political actors promote their own gender representations in social networks, thus contributing to the perpetuation of gender norms or challenging them. Another paper on media and gender *Mass-media despre sexe*<sup>6</sup> examines how different types of Romanian mass-media channels illustrate women and femininity. The results of this research are similar to those of the previous paper - namely it states that, in the Romanian media, women are represented in opposition to the masculinized world of politics. Moreover, the symbolic constructions of gender promoted through different media channels contribute to the polarization of the two genders and the presentation of gender roles as different and complementary.

Being an issue studied intensively in the specialized literature of the western world and not only, the status of women in the army also captured the interest of Romanian researchers. Thus, in her doctoral dissertation *„Apărare și război din perspectivă feministă. Studiu de caz: impactul femeilor în instituțiile militare din România”*<sup>7</sup>, [*„Defense and war from a feminist perspective. Case study: women's impact on military institutions in Romania”*], Cristina Rădoi examines the role of women in the army and war, noticing that, once integrated into the army, military institutions have the obligation to include women's interests in formulating their

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<sup>5</sup> Oana Băluță, „Gen, politică și mass-media: reprezentări stereotipizate. Cum tragem linia?”, *Sfera Politicii*, vol. 1, nr. 183, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Grünberg, *Mass-media despre sexe*, Tritonic, București, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Cristina Rădoi, „Apărare și război din perspectivă feministă. Studiu de caz: impactul femeilor în instituțiile militare din România”.

own policies and regulations, adapting to women's needs. The case study of this research is based on the interview method, thus focusing on the perceptions of the Romanian military, men and women, from the Land Forces regarding the impact that women have on the military environment. The conclusion of this case study is that the inclusion of women in military institutions in Romania has not brought major changes in the way they are organized and, moreover, in terms of perception, even if women consider that they are competent enough to hold any position in the army, men said that, because of their physical characteristics, women are much better suited for office work. In addition, this paper insists on the perception of respondents in leadership positions, who have important decision-making power, considering that, at the level of military institutions in Romania, gender equality was achieved when women were allowed the right to be included. This confirms the assumption that not only the small number of women in the army does not allow them to make significant changes to the system, but also cultural and individual perceptions of gender equality obstruct this process.

As noted above, feminist literature in Romania adopts a wide range of issues, from more general topics such as the history of women's emancipation movements, to more limited topics such as the representation of women in politics or the status of women in the army. Thus, the case study developed in this doctoral thesis completes and continues the concern of Romanian researchers, and not only, for the role of women in the army, by providing a visual perspective on how militarized femininity is constructed and reproduced by the Romanian army through social media platforms.

## **The research topic**

Over time, various policies aimed at regulating equal opportunities and gender have been adopted in Romania, but most of them have formulated goals without applying them effectively in accordance with the particularities of each gender. This was the case of the communist regime in Romania, which promoted and implemented policies aimed at achieving the well-being of women, including the concept of equality in their formulation, but the equality promoted during communism was more an equality in treatment rather than a gender equality. However, after 1989, gender equality and respect for women's rights became mandatory principles for sustainable development, so a significant progress in terms of norms and policies regarding gender equality was made in Romania, mainly due to the accession negotiations to the European Union and NATO. With the adoption, on 30 October 2000, by the UN Security Council of Resolution 1325, „Women,



Peace and Security”, the importance of women in the processes of security institutions is recognized, so NATO decides to include women in all its operations. In Romania, the concern for gender equality in military and security institutions becomes clearer since 2001, when the processes of recruitment and selection of female personnel in the structures of the armed forces resumed due to the conditions of accession to international organizations.

In order to understand the condition of women in today's Romanian society, it is important to observe the signs left by the old policies regarding the perception and application of the principle of gender equality. Thus, the political mechanisms promoted by the communist regime were based on the principle of equality, including gender, but it was rather an equality in treatment, as it ignored the specific needs of both genders, arguing that women and men should use them identically. The problem that arises in this case is that the equal treatment of women has been achieved in accordance with the norms and standards already existing in society, which are obviously those of hegemonic masculinity. For this reason, the policies promoted during the communist regime did not produce major changes in terms of gender equality, so the empowerment of women was a "duplicitous, distorted emancipation"<sup>8</sup>, which, in fact, not only did not improve social life of women, but also contributed to the deepening of gender inequalities. If in the period 1948-1965, an important component in the construction of female identity was the profession, between 1966-1989 it was replaced by motherhood, the image of women as mothers being intensely spread by the communist propaganda apparatus. Thus, during this period, communist policies reinforced the division of labor in the private sector, both by prioritizing economic branches and by supporting the traditional family model, alongside measures to ban abortions and contraceptives. Although gender equality was formally adopted during communism as a fundamental principle in the functioning of society, its application quickly became a baseless form, being based, in fact, on existing masculine standards and the idealized image of nation-building leaders, thus reinforcing gender roles and social inequalities.

After the fall of communism, at the official and legislative level, numerous advances in the application of the principle of gender equality have been made in Romania, especially due to the negotiation processes for accession to the European Union. In the European Union, gender

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<sup>8</sup> Alina Hurubean, *Statutul femeii în România comunistă. Politici publice și viață privată*, Institutul European Iași, Iași, 2015, p. 19.

mainstreaming issues were formalized in 1997 by the Amsterdam Treaty<sup>9</sup>, which, in the articles 2 and 3, requires all member states to adopt gender equality in all organizational processes, as this principle is an important part of the European acquis. Currently, the "EU Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025" aims to apply this principle in the EU and all member states, having a few main objectives: "eliminating gender-based violence, eliminating gender inequalities in the labor market, achieving equal participation in different economic sectors, achieving gender balance in decision-making and political processes"<sup>10</sup>. However, even by imposing a European legislative framework on gender equality, the echoes of the old policies continue to be present in Romanian society, so that the new programs and mechanisms adopted with EU accession fail to achieve lasting results as long as there is still a perception that the role of women needs to be focused on caring for the home and family. As there are currently international and national legislative mechanisms regulating the equality between women and men, in order to achieve it, real changes must be made to the core of the problem, both by removing the mental boundaries drawn by traditional gender norms and by involving both sexes in actions that produce social change.

The concern for the integration of women in the structures and formulation of security policies was observed internationally with the adoption on 30 October 2000 by the UN Security Council of Resolution 1325, "Women, Peace and Security", which recognizes the importance of the role that women play in the decision-making process, at the civil level, but also at the level of security institutions. As a result of this resolution, NATO encouraged the inclusion of women in all its operations, and all member states were obliged to adopt reforms and policies dedicated to improving the status of women in the military. But NATO states have failed to achieve the same results in terms of the status of women in the military. For example, some of them removed all legal barriers to women's access to military institutions, but others continued to either impose access criteria for women in military functions and roles in combat operations, or refused to make improvements regarding the social and family policies. According to Lana Obradovic "although women in Italy were integrated into the army in 2000, today they occupy about 3.9% of the positions in the armed forces. Even though women in Turkey have been part of the army since

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<sup>9</sup> „EUR-Lex - 11997D/TXT - EN”, *Official Journal C 340*, 10/11/1997 P. 0001 - 0144,; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:11997D/TXT&from=RO>, data accesării 14 august 2020.

<sup>10</sup> „Gender equality strategy”, *European Commission - European Commission*, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en), data accesării 14 august 2020.

Ataturk's time, today, the state allows them only to become non-commissioned officers or officers, generally being part of the administrative and medical services. Greece did not establish the Minister of Gender Equality until 2004, and countries such as Denmark, France and Belgium lack gender consultants. Romania has no programs for recruiting and retaining women in the military service and, together with Poland, it demonstrates the lowest commitment to achieving gender equality in the military"<sup>11</sup>. As it can be seen, Romania is not the only NATO and EU member state that has encountered problems in implementing the principle of gender equality but, in order to understand the differences regarding the participation of women in NATO armies, more detailed research is needed on all gender policies promoted by the member states.

Regarding the status of women in the Romanian Army, with Romania's integration into NATO, a process of restructuration and modernization of the armed forces took place, based mainly on the revision of the force structure and the realization of gender balance, and on the modernization of military equipment and ensuring financial support with the help of the state budget. If, in the 1990s, women's military training was stopped in Romania, "starting with 2001, the Ministry of National Defense resumed the program of recruitment and selection of women, which aims to develop, use and promote women according to their abilities and potential"<sup>12</sup>. Since 1990, through multiple revisions of the "Statute of Military Personnel", women in the Romanian Army have been guaranteed equal rights and opportunities with men, in terms of access to public, civilian or military positions, including high-level appointments. However, as the chapter of the case study in this paper demonstrates, the adoption of a normative framework regarding the integration of women in the Romanian army is not a sufficient step to achieve effective and sustainable changes in reach gender equality in armed institutions. Moreover, my case study shows that, despite the existence of legislative mechanisms, women in the army continue to be portrayed in accordance with traditional gender stereotypes, thus contributing to their de-legitimization as soldiers.

The practice of equality between women and men has been adopted in state policies since the communist period, but this was not a real gender equality, but an alignment of women with the standards of masculinity existing at that time. Although communism disappeared in 1989, the

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<sup>11</sup> Lana Obradovic, *Gender Integration in NATO Military Forces: Cross-national Analysis*, Routledge, 2016, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> „Romania - National Report for 2003”, <https://www.nato.int/ims/2004/win/romania.pdf>, data accesării 14 august 2020.

echoes of its gender equality policies continue to persist today, with the formal adoption of measures to eliminate gender inequalities and ignoring feminine and masculine particularities. Even if Romania was forced by international organizations to integrate the principle of gender equality in all its organizations and institutional processes, this was achieved without a solid knowledge of the needs and challenges of contemporary society. Thus, formally, women were offered the opportunity to be included in the military, gaining unrestricted access to higher military education institutions in 2017, but not only that they are not perceived as suitable for a military career, as we have observed above, but also at the level of visual construction they are represented as disconnected from military activities, as shown in the presented case study.

## **Objectives**

In this doctoral thesis, I aim to analyze how the principle of gender equality is applied in the security institutions in Romania, thus initiating a research topic barely addressed in the Romanian academic literature and which is situated at the intersection of security studies with gender studies. However, unlike other studies that address the issue of gender equality through the analysis of linguistic discourse, the primary sources of this paper are visual representations, which imply the use of research methods focused on visual content, thus highlighting a new approach, both for the study of gender equality, as well for the way it is perceived by military institutions and civil society. For this reason, the main objective of this doctoral thesis is to provide a visual and aesthetic analysis on the application of gender equality in the Romanian military. Therefore, although it identifies an old issue of the Romanian society and not only, by adopting the visual as a practice of researching gender equality in the army, this thesis is integrated in the visual turn that appeared more recently in the field of international relations.

Although they were not considered soldiers and their role was focused on caring for the home and family, women were involved in war activities long before the concept of "gender equality" was defined as it is defined today, so the study of gender equality in the army is not complete without the analysis of the status of women in war and in military operations. For this reason, the secondary objective of this doctoral dissertation refers to the manner in which the Romanian Army constructs the military operations in which it participated in the period 2015-2019 considering a gender perspective. Thus, this research not only provides a general visual perspective on equality between women and men, but a specific one, oriented towards the presence of Romanian women in military operations carried out under the umbrella of *Resolute Support*

*Mission* in Afghanistan, because it can be said that women's integration into combat activities and other military operations is an indicator of the degree of equality in a military institution. In other words, through the formal acceptance of women in military institutions and combat operations, gender equality is reduced to women's physical abilities, a dimension that has so far predominated in official discourses regarding the status of women in the army and war.

## **Research question**

Although much progress has been made in recent decades in terms of equal opportunities for women and men, inequalities continue to exist today, especially when it comes to security structures and institutions. Considering the efforts that have been made recently to disperse these inequalities, but also the fact that Romania joined NATO and later the EU, the issue of gender equality in the Romanian Army remains an important topic on the agenda of researchers concerned with gender issues, but also on the agenda of decision-makers concerned with formulating security policies. However, this paper does not address the issue of gender in the military from a normative and political perspective, but from one of social construction, using images that illustrate military operations as communicative acts regarding the representation of militarized femininity and masculinity. Also, taking into account the fact that the firsthand sources of this paper were collected from social media, their number was limited to the activities carried out during the *Resolute Support Mission* between 2015 and 2019. Thus, the most important research question of this paper is **"How does the Romanian Army visually construct the national and gender identity in the photos published on its Facebook pages, which illustrate the military operations carried out in Afghanistan during 2015-2019?"**. The purpose of this question is not only to highlight the issue of gender (in) equality at the level of military institutions in Romania, but, particularly, to provide a visual perspective on it.

## **Motivation**

The status of women in the army and war is a topic that has long raised the interest of researchers in the field of gender studies and, precisely for this reason, there are many studies investigating how women are integrated into the armies of the most important state actors and not only. While most gender and military studies have demonstrated, through methods such as content and discourse analysis or interviews, that women are often only partially integrated into military institutions, this research completes the existing literature by highlighting three aspects:

the importance of the visual approach in the study of gender equality in the army, the symbolic and partial integration of women in military institutions, which is achieved not only through the improper implementation of gender policies, but also through the symbolic representation of gender, and the emergence of the military as an important media player which promotes its own gender constructions related to the army and military operations.

As I will show in the following chapters, the role of women in war and their status in various armies of the world has been intensively studied by feminist researchers. However, very often, the focus of these studies is oriented towards the normative framework regarding the implementation of gender equality in military institutions or on the perceptions of soldiers, men and women, regarding the condition of women in the army. However, fewer researchers have turned their attention to how the visual representations can reflect the degree of gender equality in military institutions in a given society. Even though, in the past, the range of images depicting the military and their activities was limited, with the emergence of social networks and digitalization, the study of the military from a visual perspective becomes much more accessible, especially given that the 21st century began with two highly publicized military interventions, one in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. Thus, through the first hand sources it uses - namely the photographs portraying Romanian soldiers, this research paper emphasizes the relevance of the visual in the study of gender equality because it not only brings to the fore aspects that do not emerge from the methods applied to textual language by identifying the symbolic gendered elements, but also transmits information about the receivers' perception regarding the militarized femininity and masculinity. For this reason, the existing gender stereotypes in the military organizations become much more visible, being, in addition, transmitted to the civil society, which, through their (un)intentional internalization, will perpetuate a distorted perception of what gender equality means.

Over time, an important progress has been made in the Romanian armed forces in terms of access and integration of female personnel. However, the number of women in the military is low both in terms of physical presence in military organizations and in terms of visual representation and correlation with indicators of masculinity. In addition to observations formulated according to the quantitative method, the qualitative visual method used in this paper shows that women are symbolically and partially integrated into the Romanian armed forces, because, although they have the same status as men, by correlation with symbols considered feminine and symbolic subordination to men, they continue to be represented in accordance with gender norms regarding

femininity. Moreover, not only the way women are illustrated conveys this symbolic integration, but also the framework and activities in which they are involved or, rather, not involved. Thus, women are absent from military activities, often being passively represented, which gives the impression that, although present in a theater of military operations, the role of women in them is unimportant, limited to the military base. As there are currently both quantitative studies and policy analyses on the status of women in military institutions, in order to understand whether women are truly or symbolically integrated into the military, future research needs to adopt principles and paradigms from more recent trends in international relations and political science, such as the visual and aesthetic turn or the emotional turn.

Despite the fact that the literature on gender, war and the army is rich, evolving with the processes of modernization of states, the same cannot be said about studies on the emergence of the army as a media player, these studies are almost non-existent in Romanian literature. With the development of social media, more and more organizations and institutions decided to be present in the online world in order to make their activities known, thus gaining respect and popular support, and the Ministry of National Defense of Romania was one of these institutions. Therefore, starting with 2012, the Ministry of National Defense has established several Facebook pages belonging to different force structures, through which it publishes information regarding the activities it carries out in the country and abroad. However, although the social media pages are accessible information resources, they have not been processed at all to obtain knowledge that goes beyond the formal borders of politics. So, in addition to the visual perspective it adopts in the study of gender in the military, this doctoral dissertation brings the military to the forefront as a media producer, highlighting both the relationship between media coverage and militarization and how the visual representations of femininity and masculinity captured by the military personnel contribute to the formation of public perception regarding gender equality in the military. However, even if it exposes the role of the military as a media actor, the present study does not fully cover how the visual representations promoted by military forces influence the processes of social construction of gender, both in terms of the role of women in the army and war and in the civilian world. Moreover, there is a wide range of images, videos and comments, but also research topics such as the role of social media in recruitment processes or in the construction of the public image of the Romanian Army institution, which remain unexploited.

The concern for the status of women in the army is not a recent one, so the literature in this field is varied, demonstrating by various methods that, in general, gender equality in the military institutions is achieved only at a formal level. However, the purpose of this doctoral dissertation is to enrich the existing literature by highlighting three important aspects. Firstly, through the primary sources used in this paperwork demonstrate the importance of the visual in the study of gender equality, in general, and at the level of armed institutions, in particular. Secondly, through the processes of representation, the photographs communicate the fact that Romanian women are partially and symbolically integrated in the armed structures and not in a real way, which take into account the needs and particularities of femininity. Finally, this research brings to the attention of the research community in the field of international relations and security studies a topic that has received very little attention in the pages of scientific papers – namely the army as a media producer.

## **The research structure**

The core of this research work consists of two central concepts, the gender and the visual, which stand out and intertwine in the case study on the Romanian Army. Thus, I structured this doctoral thesis in four main chapters, the first two bringing to the fore the existing research papers on gender and visual, while the following two adopt a practical dimension by applying the concepts presented in previous chapters. The literature review chapter, brings to the fore the concept of “gender” and its definitions, but also the way in which gender norms influence the social and professional life of individuals. Next, the theoretical chapter focuses on the "visual turn", highlighting the importance and impact of images in the study of international relations. The third chapter focuses on the presentation of the process of data collection, selection and reduction, but also of the research method. Finally, the last chapter integrates the elements presented in the previous chapters by analyzing the way in which gender is represented in the photos published by the Romanian military forces on social media platforms.

Chapter I of this doctoral dissertation is structured in three important sections. In the first one, my goal is to define gender and to discuss the distinction between sex and gender and the formation of gender identities in the evolving society. In this section I also observe how gender roles are transferred from the private space of the home to the public space, thus contributing to strengthening male dominance and deepening gender inequalities in various organizations and institutions like the army. The second section of this chapter focuses on the



social processes of building hegemonic masculinity, identifying the militarized man as one of the most important symbols of hegemonic masculinity because it is the symbol of heroism, physical and moral power, and he is willing to sacrifice himself. However, militarized masculinity and the order established in armed institutions has more recently been challenged by women's access to the military, which has sparked criticisms regarding women's participation in combat operations. The third section presents the impact of political, economic and social dynamics regarding women's participation in war and peace operations. Thus, it was possible to observe the evolution of the status of women in war and the army, from passive femininity to quasi-active femininity, present in peace movements to active femininity in peace-building and peacekeeping processes and, later, in combat operations.

Chapter II brings to the attention of the research community the visual turn as a new way of analyzing and understanding the problems in the field of international relations. Like the previous chapter, this one was also structured in three main sections. In the first section, I present a general perspective on the use of images as valid empirical sources of knowledge of reality, detailing the impact they can have on receivers by provoking various emotional responses, which can be afterwards mobilized in the processes of political and social change. The second section presents the conceptualization process, by identifying the key concepts related to both national identity and the construction of bodies in war images. Thus, it was noticed that, like gender, the nation is a socially constructed concept, and the image of militarized masculinity and militarized femininity are formed in accordance with the policy promoted by each state. Moreover, the visual representations of war did not stop at shaping gender identities, but also focused on the process of framing the enemy in order to legitimize the war. In the last section of this chapter, I present the process of operationalization of the key concepts established previously, by identifying several types of indicators of (de) militarization, grouped into four categories, according to the represented participants identified in the collected photographs: Romanian female soldiers, Romanian male soldiers, the Afghan civilians and the Romanian military priests.

In Chapter III, I present the methodological process used for elaborating this doctoral thesis, and it is also structured in three sections. In the first part, I present information about Romania's involvement in the war in Afghanistan, but also the role of photographs in the representation of the war, thus observing the emergence of the army as a media producer. Also, in this section I discuss the sources of the images used to elaborate the case study. The second part

of the chapter describes the process of data reduction and categorization according to three dependent criteria: the location where the photos were taken, the presence of the Romanian militarized bodies and the date of their publication. In the last section, I present the methods of analysis applied in conducting the case study, the analysis of visual content and the semiotic social method. As the examination of visual methods is not sufficient to understand how they are applied, the section continues with a description of how to interpret the collected photographs using the two methods mentioned above.

In Chapter IV, the one presenting the case study, I integrate the elements from the previous chapters by incorporating them in a particular case regarding the gendered construction of militarized identity in visual representations of military operations carried out during Resolute Support Mission and promoted by the Romanian Army through social networks. Like the previous chapters, this is also divided into three sections. In the first section, the images collected and grouped in the four categories mentioned above will be interpreted using the three dimensions of the social semiotics method: the representational meaning, the interactive meaning and the compositional meaning. The next section is dedicated to the presentation of the results obtained after the application of the social semiotics method, emphasizing the importance of the visual in approaching the research topic. The last section initiates a discussion on the visual and political components in gender construction processes. Thus, if the visual provides information which comes from the interpretation of the symbolic elements and modes of representation, the policy factor highlights how symbolic representations contribute to the construction and legitimation of gender identities in a society. By the intersection of the two components, I show that the integration of women in the army is rather a symbolic process than a real one, being carried out under the pressure imposed by international organizations and not as a result of identifying the need to apply the principle of gender equality.

Finally, in the final considerations chapter, I present the general results of this thesis, regarding the importance of the visual in the study of international issues, also mentioning the role that social media plays in the way information is distributed and in initiating social changes. Further, I presented the limits of the research regarding the degree of generalization of the obtained results, but also the challenges brought by using the visual method when approaching the research topic. This chapter concludes with the formulation of the future research agenda by outlining some

topics related to the researched subject or which were identified in the process of elaborating this study and were poorly addressed in the academic literature in Romania.

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