


REPRESENTATION of FEMALE SOLDIERS from GENDER PERSPECTIVE: an ASSESSMENT of MEDIA and MILITARY FIELDS

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Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the social position of female soldiers in Turkey and its representations in the media within the framework of gender inequality and feminist media theories. The effects of gender roles, stereotypes and prejudices on both military institutions and media production have been examined in multi -faceted. It was analyzed how women are positioned in the military field, which is considered to be among the male-dominated areas, the socio-cultural effects of this position and how they are represented in the media. First of all, the theoretical foundations of gender through socio-psychological, socio-economic and feminist theories were discussed; The place of women's place of business, the forms of discrimination, wage inequalities and inequalities in the promotion processes have been underlined. Then, within the scope of feminist media studies, it was discussed with which narratives the media presented female soldiers, which stereotypes, and how these forms of representation reproduce gender norms. The increasing visibility of female soldiers in Turkey and the policies of the Turkish Armed Forces for women's employment have been examined in a historical process. The distribution of duties, promotion, difficulties and social perceptions of women officers and non -commissioned officers were analyzed. In the media, the representation of female soldiers is often shaped through their physical appearance or their "unusual achievements .", which gives the impression that women can only be included in the system with their individual efforts. The study reveals that the visibility of female soldiers is directly linked not only by employment policies, but also by social perceptions shaped by media. In this context, the study aims to break the gender norms, to exist in more equal terms of women in the public sphere and to contribute to the questioning of patriarchal structures.

Keywords: *Female soldiers, gender, female representation in the media, feminist media studies, gender inequality, Turkish Armed Forces, patriarchal structure, hegemonic masculinity, gender roles, gender in military institutions.*

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Introduction

Gender is a multidimensional concept that expresses not only the biological differences of individuals, but also the roles, expectations and norms of society for women and men (Butler, 2009). These norms determine the positions of individuals in social, economic, cultural and political life; Working life brings significant inequalities in areas such as education, media and family (Connell, 2005). Especially in institutions defined as male - dominated, the army is one of them - the existence of women is a quality that both questions and reshapes gender roles (Enloe, 2000). In this context, the social position of female soldiers is directly related not only to employment policies, but also to how they are represented in the media. The media is a powerful ideological apparatus in which gender is reproduced and reinforces patriarchal norms by representing women in traditional roles (Tuchman, 1978; Van Zoonen, 1994). The representation of female

soldiers in the media is perceived as a figure that goes beyond these traditional patterns and is occasionally limited to objective, reductionist and exceptional success stories (Sarikakis, 2014). The representation of female soldiers in Turkey is an area that has not yet been sufficiently studied on the axis of feminist media studies, gender theories and sociology of militarism. The main purpose of this study is to analyze the position of female soldiers in the military institution and how they are represented in the media and question the reflections of gender norms in these two areas. Increasing the visibility of female soldiers is possible with the transformation of not only employment policies, but also cultural representations (Sjoberg & Via, 2010).

While women's involvement in the military produces a dynamic questioning the patriarchal structure, how this being is presented; It directly affects society's perceptions of women. The

presence of women in a position defined by masculine codes such as “power, courage, authority” points to social transformation at both structural and symbolic levels (Duncaanson, 2015). However, the quality of this transformation is often limited to the “extraordinary” and “exceptional representation of female soldiers in the media; This provides symbolic visibility rather than an egalitarian representation. This study deals with the historical development and employment policies of female soldiers in the Turkish Armed Forces; It also aims to analyze how women are perceived in the military institution through media representations. Thus, both the internal gender dynamics and how these dynamics are reflected to the public will be revealed.

THEORETICAL FRAME

The theoretical basis of this study was built on gender theories, feminist theory, concept of patriarchy and media theories. First of all, it is accepted that gender is shaped by the cultural, social and economic codes of society rather than the biological gender of the individual (Butler, 2009; Connell, 2005). Gender roles; It is shaped through norms that the individual internalized from childhood and determines the perceptions of femininity and masculinity. These norms place women in disadvantaged positions, especially in working life and in structures that are considered masculine, such as the army. In the theoretical framework, the feminist theory is based on the struggle for equal representation and visibility, criticizing the pushing of women into a secondary position throughout history. Feminist media studies criticize the role of the media in reproducing gender norms; It defines the fact that women do not take part in the media or the representation of traditional, sexist patterns as “symbolic ignorance” (Tuchman, 1978; Van Zoonen, 1994). The theoretical structure was also supported by Connell (2005) by hegemonic masculinity theory. According to this theory, masculinity is a form of power not only against women, but also against alternative types of masculinity. Military institutions are one of the most visible areas of this hegemonic structure. While the visibility of female soldiers in the military field, this patriarchal and hegemonic structure ensures the questioning of; Media representation has the potential to reinforce or transform women's position in this field. Therefore, the theoretical framework makes it possible to evaluate the place of women in the army through both institutional structures and cultural representations.

Gender theories argue that the differences between men and women are not biological, but socially built. These theories argue that the roles, expectations and behaviors of individuals depending on their gender are determined by cultural, economic and social conditions (Butler, 2009). According to the approach shaped on the basis of the Queer theory put forward by Judith Butler, gender is performed; In other words, it is an identity that individuals constantly reproduce with social practices. Connell (2005) explains how hierarchical relations between women and men are produced and maintained by social institutions. Gender roles are attributed to individuals from birth; Men are more active, strong and leading positions, and women are positioned in passive, emotional and supportive positions. This theoretical framework offers an important basis of analysis in understanding the perception of women as “inappropriate özellikler, especially in masculine professions such as military service. Feminist media studies discuss how the media represents women and how these forms of representation reinforce gender inequality. Tuchman (1978) described the presence of women either in the media or the

presence of clichés in the media as “symbolic disposal”. These studies are not only a reflective, but also a construction. In other words, it argues that it has the power to reproduce and transform social norms. The representation of female soldiers in the media is usually given with contradictory images such as “exceptional”, “extraordinary”, or “strong but emotional”. This sequesters women's existence in the military field and reinforces prejudices about gender roles. Feminist media theorists argue that women's active role in media production processes is critical in the formation of more realistic and egalitarian representations (Van Zoonen, 1994). Patriarchy is a concept that defines social systems based on male domination and forms the basis of gender inequality. This system refers to an order in which men have more privileges in economic, political and cultural fields than women. Walby (1990) describes patriarchy as a multidimensional system that works in both private (family) and public (state, business life, media) fields. Connell (2005) argues that hegemonic masculinity theory is a hierarchical structure among the forms of masculinity and that the ideal form of masculinity, called “hegemonic masculinity”, puts pressure on other masculinity and femininity. Military institutions are the most intense areas of this hegemonic masculinity. Values such as power, discipline, obedience and physical superiority stand out as norms that legitimize masculinity. When female soldiers are seen as “contrary to these norms, they are either excluded or incompatible according to masculine standards. This structure makes not only women but also emotional, compassionate or obedient men; Therefore, it shows that pressure based on gender roles is multi-layered.

SOCIAL POSITION of FEMALE SOLDIERS

The presence of women in the military sphere can be considered as a challenge against gender norms, as well as an effect that reinforces and shapes these norms. Military service is traditionally considered a male-dominated profession. This profession has been associated not only by masculine norms such as physical power and leadership skills, but also with social expectations such as courage, independence and power. Therefore, the fact that women take place in the military field creates a dynamic that questions these gender norms (Sjöberg & Via, 2010). The social position of female soldiers has a wide field of influence not only in the army but also in society. As women's participation in the army increases, the perception of society about women's traditional roles changes. Women's positions in the army offer an opportunity not only to strengthen women, but also for men to get rid of these strong gender norms. The success of women in the army allows men to question and redefine “masculinity” patterns (Sarıkakis, 2014). Women's occupational choices are one of the areas where gender norms are shown most prominently. Military service is generally seen as “male work” in society, and women's entering this field is often perceived as unusual. Gender norms enable women to be directed to certain occupational groups. While women are traditionally concentrated in “caregiver” professions such as health, education and social services, men are more involved in science, engineering and military fields (Connell, 2005). The inclusion of women in professions, which are seen as “men's work, such as military service, questions the gender-based labor department. The position of female soldiers in the army may conflict with the gender roles of men, because the socially expected place of women has been shaped in the roles of “caregiver” and “domestic” rather than “strong and protective” (Duncaanson, 2015). The fact that female soldiers can overcome this traditional division of labor is seen as an individual success,

and as an important step in gender equality. However, this process often faces difficulties and obstacles. The sexist barriers faced by women while stepping into the military profession are among the factors that limit equal participation in the labor force. The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) has slowly but steadily changed over time. In the process of modernization, Türkiye began to encourage women to take more place in the social field and took various steps to take place in the army. In the 1950s, women who took part in health fields such as nursing started to work in military professions such as officers and non-commissioned officers in the 1990s. However, the representation of women in the military field was initially limited and often concentrated in logistics and support. In the Turkish Armed Forces, female officers started to work, especially towards the late 1990s. Today, the participation of women as military personnel allows them to serve various tasks as female officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers (Uşan & Ersoy, 2023). The fact that women took part in the Turkish Armed Forces has strengthened the position of women in military service and has been seen as an important step in terms of gender equality. Female officers and non-commissioned officers are increasingly involved in the Turkish Armed Forces and rising to leadership positions. However, the representation of female officers in the army still has a limited rate. The representation of female officers in the military field, which is a male-dominated profession, is often considered "exceptional" or "special". Female officers can assume their leadership roles in their fields, but with the influence of gender norms, these representations are often presented in simplified and stereotypic forms (Goddard, 2016). The situation of female non-commissioned officers is more complex. Female non-commissioned officers are working at the lower levels of the TAF, but it has been observed that these tasks are sometimes limited to supportive, maintenance and organization functions. However, the increase in the number of female non-commissioned officers and the start of taking part in more areas begins to change the perception of the society about women. The representation of women in the military field is not only the increase in the visibility of female soldiers in the army. At the same time, how these representations are shaped through the media and how they are perceived in society is of great importance. Female officers and non-commissioned officers usually stand out with their success, but the media and social perceptions are one of the factors that limit women's role in military service.

MEDIA and FEMALE SOLDIERS' REPRESENTATION

The visibility of female soldiers in the media is an important indicator that both gender norms are reproduced and transformed. Traditionally, media is either very cautious about making female soldiers visible or presents them as "exceptional success" figures. Female soldiers who find their place in the media are mostly limited to remarkable, unusual examples such as "first female pilot", "women commandos" and "soldier who continues to work even in pregnancy". Although this increases the visibility of female soldiers, it prevents them from becoming ordinary and becoming a natural part of the system. In addition, most of the news focuses on the exterior appearance, motherhood identity, or a profession seen in a profession that is seen as "male work rather than the professional competence of women. This approach allows female soldiers to gain visibility, while producing a media language that imprisons them in traditional gender roles. Therefore, visibility does not always mean strengthening, sometimes creating a symbolic boundary line and causing women to remain "other". The media reproduce patriarchal molds mostly

while presenting female soldiers. These patterns place the woman in bilateral oppositions such as "hard and masculine" or "beautiful, gentle but warrior". Especially in the news titles, the female soldier is positioned according to social expectations both physically and emotionally with expressions such as *güzel* he has fascinated with his beauty, disciplined and hard ". This form of representation reduces women's professional assets to their individual qualities. While female soldiers are often presented as "acts like men" women, this reinforces the understanding that the success of the woman can only be possible as long as it adapts to masculine norms. In addition, the "altruistic woman" narrative is emphasized by emphasizing their family life and duty responsibility together. In the media, the female soldier identity becomes a "exemplary citizen" prototype blended with the understanding of femininity idealized by society rather than a subjectivized figure. These presentations reinforce the dual gender system, the cornerstone of the patriarchal social order. Not the existence of the female soldier as an individual, but in the media language, where he acts as "women" or "man" among male soldiers. This creates a representation of media in which women can exist within the framework of the system, not by their own identities. In recent years, more holistic and realistic representations of female soldiers have started to find a place in the media organs that have increased gender sensitivity. In these alternative representations, female soldiers are not only defined by physical power or beauty, but by professional competences such as strategic thought, leadership and crisis management; It is also represented as individuals independent of their family roles. Feminist media studies were effective in this field; The representation of women as a subject is directly associated with the fact that more female journalists and editors have included more female journalists and editors in the production processes. In alternative representations, female soldiers are designed as professionals who stand out with their professional identities, not the people who have news value because they are women ". In this way, not only military institutions, but also media begins to transform in terms of gender equality. In addition, social media platforms have become an alternative area where female soldiers can reach the public with their own voices, explain their personal experiences and offer individual realities other than corporate representations. The contents of female soldiers by themselves create a visibility and representation that can be considered as a form of resistance against gender roles.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON: FEMALE SOLDIER'S REPRESENTATION in OTHER COUNTRIES

The social and media representation of female soldiers is not only a matter of Turkey, but also a gender of gender discussed on a global scale. The institutional positions of female soldiers in different countries, media representations and perceptions of public opinion differ. This comparative view allows the existing structure in Turkey to be evaluated in a wider framework.

United States: "visibility and crisis representations"

The US Armed Forces is one of the most comprehensive steps in the world in terms of the participation and representation of female soldiers. Women are included in both combat duties and senior command levels. However, this visibility is often associated with dramatic events in the media, for example, sexual harassment cases are represented through PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) or tragic stories in military operations (Harrell & Miller, 1997). This may cause female soldiers to be shown as "problems

with problems" in the system, not "individuals integrated into the system".

Israel: "Between necessity and representation"

Israel is one of the few countries that applied compulsory military service to women. Women's military service is perceived as a part of national identity and its social legitimacy is quite high. However, in terms of media representations, the visibility of female soldiers is often presented in aesthetically and serving militarist discourses. Women are often highlighted with labels such as "beautiful soldiers" and the patriotic woman who loves their country", which causes professional identity to replace ideological representations (Lomsky-Federation & Ben-Ari, 2012).

Norway: "Integrated model with gender sensitivity"

Norway is one of the most advanced countries that implement egalitarian policies on female soldiers' representation. In military institutions, gender equality is tried to be provided not only by the existence of women, but by the transformation of corporate culture. In the media, female military representations are presented in a more realistic and ordinary way; Women are represented without professional individuals, but without being identified with gender roles. This produces a media language that can create a model for gender equality (Skjelsbæk, 2010).

Comparative evaluation

In Turkey, female soldiers' representation is still constructed in a limited, selective and patriarchal patterns. Compared to the dramatic media language in the USA, the ideological representation in Israel and the egalitarian approach in Norway, it is seen that there is still no beyond news such as "first female officer" and "women who receive commando training" in Turkey. The visibility of women in the military field directly affects how the public perceives them and to what extent gender equality is institutionalized.

Therefore, it is necessary to diversify media policies for women's soldiers representation in Turkey and encourage egalitarian and gender sensitive content as in the Norwegian example. This process will be possible with the joint effort not only of the media but also education, military institutions and civil society.

CORPORATE EXPERIENCES of FEMALE SOLDIERS: INVISIBLE LABOR and QUIET STRUGGLE

The experiences of female soldiers in military institutions are not limited to employment; It also includes a multi-layered struggle. This struggle often emerges in an invisible labor: emotional burden, micro-level discrimination, professional insulation, inequalities in the promotion system, and daily functioning of patriarchal norms. Behind the "success stories" represented in the media are these structural inequalities and silent forms of resistance.

Emotional labor and dual role burden:

Female soldiers may have to adapt to military discipline and to meet social expectations of femininity. Criticized in the military unit "if it is too hard"; If there is a "too soft", women who are thought to be not professional enough try to establish a constant emotional balance. The emotional labor of Hochschild (1983) explains the efforts of female soldiers to protect their professional identity and maintain the relationship. Especially the women's soldiers who work in mixed units, both to prove themselves and

not to experience conflict, brings a continuous emotional arrangement.

Micro level discrimination and silent resistance:

The discrimination experienced by female soldiers is often not open, but in implicit ways: the exclusion in the distribution of tasks, ignoring technical skills, and not being taken into consideration in meetings. These micro-level discrimination are defined as microaggressions in the literature and are normalized in institutional culture (SUE, 2010). Female soldiers often go to prove themselves by working harder, rather than directly confronting this discrimination. This can cause burnout in the long run.

Inequality and glass ceiling in promotion processes:

In the promotion processes of female soldiers, the effect of "glass ceiling" is still strongly felt. Although a legally egalitarian structure is envisaged, it is observed that women are assigned to less strategic task, less in leadership positions and their emotional qualities are highlighted in the evaluation processes (Connell, 2005). This leads female soldiers to feel the pressure to prove themselves more and to think that they are under constant performance control. The "having to do more" by women working in the same position as male colleagues reveals the structural nature of inequality.

Lack of corporate insulation and colleagues solidarity:

Female soldiers can experience a feeling of professional loneliness, especially in male majority troops. In military environments where women are very small or only symbolically, the chances of establishing solidarity with their colleagues of the same gender are also limited. This causes female soldiers not only institutional, but also socially isolated. This insulation may reduce the sense of belonging over time and adversely affect job satisfaction (Sjoberg & Via, 2010).

Silent forms of resistance and durability strategies:

Female soldiers develop quiet and strategic resistance rather than open conflicts: they try to establish their own field within the system by developing, education, high performance in task, and role models. This strategic form of resistance is a way that women show invisible resistance in the institutional structure (Acker, 2006). However, this effort can also lead to individual burnout in environments where systematic support is missing.

EVALUATION and CONCLUSION

The representation of female soldiers in the media is still mostly limited and often discriminatory. While the media frames the existence of female soldiers in accordance with gender norms, it does not adequately reflect the potential and achievements of women in the military field. Female soldiers are often referred to in special situations such as "first" or "first", which presents as exceptional achievements rather than ordinary to ordinary their existence (Sarikakis, 2014). The media reinforces the idea that female soldiers cannot exist in equal conditions with male soldiers, and that they can only succeed in complying with male-dominated norms. The representation of female soldiers in the media is largely shaped in patriarchal patterns. While women are defined as "hard" or "masculine", the traditional qualities and emotional aspects of their femininity are ignored. On the other hand, the emphasis on women's roles such as motherhood, sacrifice and emotional support shadows the professional identities and military achievements of

female soldiers (Tuchman, 1978). Such representations see women's involvement in the military profession as an exceptional situation, and women are prevented from maintaining this profession in a normal way. Female soldiers are introduced with titles such as "first" or "the only employed woman, and that women can only find a place in the system with their individual efforts. This creates a narrative rather than the fact that the woman has an egalitarian representation in the military field, but the difficulties of accepting it to the army through how the system accepts it (Goddard, 2016). Although the achievements of female soldiers are known more, it is based on an understanding of the fact that these achievements belong to a "masculine" style that can only go beyond the norms of femininity. This constitutes an important obstacle for gender equality in the military field. As a result, it is a structure that reinforces female soldiers, reinforces gender inequality and prevents women from being equally involved in the military profession. In order for female soldiers to gain a wider visibility, the media should represent women not only as individuals who match masculinity patterns, but as individuals they can freely express their own identity and professionalism.

The fact that female soldiers take part in the media with stronger, equal and diversified representations will be a big step in gender equality. This can not only increase women's visibility in the military field, but also contribute to the reshaping of gender norms. In this respect, the following policy suggestions and strategies have been developed:

Equal and direct representation of female soldiers in the media:

Instead of being limited to gender norms of female soldiers, female soldiers need to focus on their professional identity, leadership characteristics and institutional contributions. Media organizations should encourage women to stand out not only with their physical characteristics, but also with their professional competence and success. In addition, the representative media content of female soldiers can be made more realistic and inclusive by providing more female participation in production processes. The increasing representation of female journalists and media professionals can promote gender equality and allow the development of alternative representations (Goddard, 2016).

Expanding the role of women in the military field and corporate support:

Turkish Armed Forces and other armies should expand the areas where female soldiers can take more tasks. Female soldiers should be more involved not only in supportive, logistics or auxiliary roles, but also in leadership positions and operational fields. Gender equality policies should be strengthened in military training and promotion processes; More opportunities should be offered in the military hierarchy of female soldiers. In addition, psychological support and gender -sensitive training programs should be developed in order to cope with gender -based discrimination and difficulties of female soldiers (Sarikakis, 2014).

Media Trainings and Awareness of Gender Equality:

Gender equality and gender -sensitive publishing trainings for media professionals should be given. These trainings will contribute to the creation of accurate and fair representations of women's positions in the army. The media sector should produce content that shows female soldiers not only as "first woman" or "special success", but as an indispensable part of the army. These representations enable women's professional identities to be reflected in a more equal and honorable way.

Female soldiers are more active in the public opinion:

Platforms should be created where female soldiers can offer their stories directly to the public. Social media can be an important tool in this context. Female soldiers can share their experiences through social media, gain more visibility in society and create their own representation. This is important both for breaking gender norms and for women to create their own identity in the military profession. Furthermore, hearing the voices of female soldiers can raise awareness about gender equality and women's rights.

Supporting the policies focused on gender equality:

Gender equality is not limited to media or military institutions; At the same time, an egalitarian perspective must be adopted in all areas of society. Legal regulations and policies that encourage gender equality in society should be developed. Reforms should be made on issues such as positive discrimination, gender -based violence and domestic labor department in order for women to have equal opportunities in the labor force (Connell, 2005).

As a result, the social position of female soldiers and the representation of the media are at a critical point in terms of the struggle for gender equality. Existing media representations limit the potential of female soldiers and reinforce gender norms. However, the inclusion of alternative representations and women in the media production processes may change this situation. In order to strengthen women's representation in military fields and to take part in an equal way, media organizations, military institutions and governments should work together and implement gender equality -oriented policies. This transformation will be an important step for not only female soldiers, but also the whole society to have an egalitarian and fair structure.

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