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The War from Afghanistan (1979–1989) in the Memory of Participants from the Republic of Moldova. Official and Oral Speech

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Abstract:

This article presents the consequences caused by the war in Afghanistan (1979-1989) upon the participants from Republic of Moldova. A number of evidence are offered through biographies, interviews etc.. They highlight the impact that this event had both economic, and social as well, upon the active participants in this war

Keywords:

Afghanistan, memory, life history, autobiographies, “military lexicon”, Afghan syndrome

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The postwar history comprises a series of rigorous, complex and inept political applications that modified both the configuration of international relations and domestic affairs (for some countries these acted as a catalyst for dissolution of state institution) that were unanimously convicted by that force of temerity – *the public opinion*. The wars, as a paroxysm of conflicts promoted by some states on the territory of other states can be mentioned here. Among these, there can be outlined the following: the war from Vietnam generated by the USA, and the one from Afghanistan generated by the USSR. As for the Soviet-Afghan military conflict, the Soviets that had been involved in the longest war in the history of the Soviet Union, which had lasted for nine years and seven weeks (1979–1989), were to put an end to this military interference once with the *Pyrrhus' victory*. The administration of a considerable amount of money (the contribution of the USSR to the war from Afghanistan amounted to 60 billion roubles) (Ševardnadze, 1991:110) was to intensify even more the economic crisis of the Soviets, which resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some authors believe that the War from Afghanistan represented the main cause of the Soviet Union's dissolution, and implicitly of the communism (Vestad, 1994:19; Maiwandi, 2001). In order to keep Afghanistan under its influence, according to some official data, Kremlin was forced to involve troops of around 90,000 people, the total number of the Soviet soldiers who completed the military service in the area reached a figure of 620,000, the number of the dead was estimated at 15,051, and the figure of sanitary losses (physically disabled) was evaluated at 469,685 people (Calvacoressi, 2000:522; Rossiâ i SSSR... 2001:536; Voennyj ènciklopedičeskij, 2007:642). Kremlin, for conceit reasons, recognized in the late moments their loss in Afghanistan, which was “undoubtedly the most serious mistake that Moscow had made in the foreign policy along the whole Soviet era” (McCauley, 1999:34). According to specialists, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan represented the impediment to *Detente* and a “reorientation of the foreign policy of more states to the USSR”(McCauley, 1999:34), which was completed by an ample *East-West confrontation*.

In the same context, the military intervention of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan had a negative influence on the Afghan society, which being divided in the perimeter of a civil war had suffered human losses – 1,200,000 casualties, out of which 90 percent were civilians, 5–6 million inhabitants emigrated (to Pakistan, Iran) living in misery, and other 2 million Afghans took shelter in the country. The war also intensified the economic crisis (according to the Afghan Professor Gany Gausy, throughout the 13 year-period of war – 1979–1992 – Afghanistan had suffered financial losses of \$ 20 Billion) and generated the secession of the country. A substantial part of the cultural and historic values was destroyed or taken away and transported by the Soviets to the USSR, without being returned afterwards (Borovoj, 1992; Novejšââ istoriâ,

2003:40). Afghanistan was changed into a military mechanism where the culture of war and violence still represent the main points of reference, and the economy downturn resulted in placing this country among the unsafest countries in the world nowadays.

The events of the '80s occurred in Afghanistan along with political, military and economic consequences generated some changes in the cultural background; specialists remarked the fact that *The Afghan phenomenon* determined a reevaluation of myths, rites and symbols in the contemporary society (*Mituri, rituri...* 2000: 13, 36-37).

A particular role in the Soviet-Afghan war was played by the former combatants from the Republic of Moldova. According to statistical data, the total number of the former combatants from the MSSR participating in the military conflict from Afghanistan was estimated at 12,500 soldiers, 301 out of them lost their lives and 700 were disabled for life (Arhiva curentă...). Beside the political and military factors, the dynamics of the Moldovans' involvement in this war was also determined by the national structure of the Soviet army in Afghanistan. Thus, the first mobilized soldiers were native of the Asian regions of the USSR, and according to the Soviet leaders the ethnic and linguistic elements were supposed to represent the major components of proximity between the Soviet and the Afghan armies. In fact, things were to be different since the regional historic conflicts, the language knowledge etc. favoured the cases of escape, getaways and trade of weapons. In this context, Kremlin reoriented its position, therefore soldiers from the western part of the Soviet Union: Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Romanians were taken into consideration for the military units from Afghanistan. Considering this, it can be observed that during the Soviet-Afghan war the ethnic composition of the troops fighting in Afghanistan suffered considerable changes, which also influenced the involvement of Romanians in this major historical event. *Grosso modo*, due to the sincere devotion and behaviour, the Romanians from the territory between the Prut and the Dniester created a positive image of themselves both among the officers, and the Soviet soldiers of other ethnic origins.

For the participants from the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (as well as for the entire Soviet territory) the war from Afghanistan marked a delimitation from the Soviet society (which was extremely difficult to fulfill in the context of a totalitarian society) and an interaction with another civilization, which placed them into a different category in society after the return to the USSR. Thus, the stratification of a social segment that was given the name of "Afghans", on the one hand marked the society's interest for the former Soviet combatants, and on the other hand represented a distinct *identification* of some people who had experienced a series of traumatizing events. The identification of the "Afghan" veterans which was often placed in dichotomy with the society

generated a series of disagreements, tense situations and issues determined by mutual unknown causes and lack of a constructive dialogue. As for the above mentioned, it is most necessary to conduct a research and analysis study of the causes generating these conflicts.

Once with the participation of an important contingent of soldiers, the former MSSR was involved in the war from Afghanistan as well by means of enterprises producing goods for the Ministry of Defence of the USSR, such was the case of the company “Mercuriu” (Patrachi, 1998:378; Todua, 2009:114).

Since it is observed that in the second half of the 20th century the historical research witnessed a deviation from the natural course of the countries that were under the control of the communist ideology, it is now imperative for historians to analyze and approach certain events from the aspect of some paradigmatic change in the domain of *man knowledge* and his actions. In this respect, it is used the memory “planet” (Zub, 2003:1) technique which offers alternative solutions to the historic speech, to conventional documents on the evaluation of historical events. The Soviet-Afghan war represents one of those major impacts resulting in conducting a complex investigation – of reconstitution (by means of oral history instruments) and connection of individual destinies with the great history. If the story of the “small” was overshadowed by the public speech of history during the Soviet period, nowadays it represents one of the aspects tackled with a great interest by historiography. The dialogue with the active witnesses of the “great history”, as subjects of the scientific research, turns them from participants into narrators and implicitly authors in the elaboration of the historiographic discourse (Radosav, 2002:5; Xenofontov, 2009:101-106)

The objective of the present work constitutes the emerging from obscurity of the actors of an important and current historical event of the 20th century and the incorporation of some authentic “living archives”, of the lived and narrated memories into the scientific field. These observations – findings of the former combatants, although sometimes fragmentary and deeply subjective, regarded as a whole enhance the image of the Soviet intervention from Afghanistan, that is the occurrence of the “big history”, outlining as well the original contributions to the *field of polemology*, comprehension of the phenomenon of war and its consequences, promotion of its prevention in the social life, and deliberate acceptance of a peaceful coexistence values. The importance of this subject is also significant due to the fact that this work is conducted exclusively for the Romanian territory, which is an attempt to approach a subject that is blurred from the multidisciplinary perspective, representing a tendency of extension by discussing certain recent and even “non-academic” aspects of the historic discourse related to the researched and analyzed subject.

The political polarity that shaped the postwar world characterized the historiographical approach to the respective subject as well. Each of the parties directly or indirectly involved in the military conflict expressed its specific views on the Afghan issue. In the context of a totalitarian state – the USSR, the historiographical discourse was associated with the propaganda and messages of political leaders. The specialized Western literature was used in the Soviet approach. The whole Western society united in order to disclose the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. As a consequence, there were shown the historiographical tendencies of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan which were analyzed from the perspective of two big trends: pro and anti-Afghan trends. The *pro-Afghan* trend that supported the military intervention was sustained by the Kremlin governing, by mass-media and the literature that was published during the Soviet period, while the opposite trend that was hostile to the military aggression from Afghanistan was supported by a great number of authors (after the collapse of the Soviet Union, specialists and the public opinion from the former Soviet Union supported it) and by the whole international community.

The particular interest for the Soviet-Afghan war resulted in the involvement of other scientific fields, such as medicine, psychology, religion, sociology. A series of studies dedicated to the medical issues of the Soviet combatants in Afghanistan were thoroughly analyzed in the specialized editions of the *Journal of military medicine* (Revista de medicină militară) (1991) (Ivaškin, Luft, etc., 1991:21-25; Perepelkin, Korol'kov, etc., 1991: 27-31; Negaev, Tutohel, 1991:7-12). The reintegration of former participants of the Soviet-Afghan war into family and society was analyzed in the specialized studies of the authors (most of them psychologists).

The historiographical record of the *Afghan phenomenon* included the approach to a political subject, which had as a result the study of this topic from the historical aspect (Hauer, 1991; Soulet, 1998:212; Monks, 1981:19). The polarization of the Soviet/ex-Soviet and Western historiographical discourse drew the perception of the public opinion – „consumer” of scandalous and secret information – to a contentious and taboo topic. In this respect, the research and analysis of praxis of the Moldovan combatants in the Soviet-Afghan war requires an approach to the “militant” human experience and the collective imaginary.

Our approach marks chronologically the years 1979–1989, which is the period of deployment of the Soviet army’s troops in Afghanistan. As a result of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (December 1979), the soldiers from the MSSR were mobilized together with the soldiers from the entire Soviet territory, and the withdrawal of the Soviet troops (February 1989) represented the end of the Moldovans’ participation in this war (Xenofontov, 2010).

Theoretical and methodological aspects. Approach perspectives.

The complex issues emerging from the participation of the Moldovans in the war from Afghanistan outline various analytical aspects in approaching this respective subject. The theoretical and methodological support of the research lies on the basis of the current achievements in the scientific field of history, marking at the same time a coordination with the perspectives of postmodern historiography “which is directed towards a new paradigm of knowledge and which has already shown significant results under the favourable sign of pluridisciplinarity.” From the theoretical view point, the subject under discussion belongs to the field of *immediate history*, while from the methodological point of view it belongs to the *oral history*. (Xenofontov, 2008:108-113).

The oral history – a field recognized in the contemporary western historiographic discourse – as a method of studying the immediate past is viewed as a non-classical, non-conventional or unwritten source in the context where the oral discourse is centered in the memory area, offering alternative and reliable solutions as compared to the “ordered” public discourse of history and the tendencies of adjacency of communist ideology with the collective memory. (Radosav, 2004a:5; Radosav, 2004b:77; Portelli, 2010)

As for the above mentioned, we observe the relation between the researched subject– The war from Afghanistan (1979–1989) in the memory of participants from the Republic of Moldova. Historic reality and social imaginary – and the theoretical approach to the topic. We signal contiguity between the temporal coordinates related to the immediate time and the witnesses who experienced and narrated the event, and its consequences. An important position in this context is occupied by the mediation of historians who assume the responsibility of narrating “true events, where the actor is the man” (Veyne, 1999:6). From another perspective, the necessity of temporal estrangement from the event is imperative for conducting an objective and complex scientific research, since both the written and oral documentary sources (and their agents – the people) perceive the essence being influenced by the external factors.

Being centered on the “human dimension of history”, the subject of research – the memory of combatants related to the “big history” – as well as the oral history approached a particular historical hermeneutics being interdependent with the methodological perspectives of an inter/trans socio-human discipline, that elaborated parallel scientific discourses on a common subject: the history of collective mentalities, cultural anthropology, historical demography, psychology, conflictology, sociology, etc. On the basis of the epistemological principle of unity or *methodological complementarity*, we mention the conclusions of M. Dogan and R. Pahre on the perspectives of creation from the field of social sciences. The American authors believe that a scientist has more

chances to introduce innovations by studying another field, but having its own discipline of study as a starting point (Dogan, Pahre, 1997:27, 108-109).

The history of collective mentalities that has significantly evolved since the mid-fifties of the 20th century develops the human emotionality, feelings, attitudes, and human, individual and collective behaviors, which complement the image of the past. The specific problem of imagology from the perspective of comparative literature, the history of mentalities and anthropology allows the return and reconstitution of the imaginary of identity and alterity, the existing relations at the individual and society level, to the general dimensions like culture, space, foreign, etc. From this perspective, there are observed the field of the dream and utopia, temptations of foreign areas, and anguish towards the unknown etc.

The cultural anthropology (ethnology) and historical demography are associated with subjects and historical methods of sensitivity like family, attitudes towards life and death, description of various communities lifestyle, belief, the study and observation of different “exotic” populations and cultures, which are the subjects of some interesting, and at the same time relevant and objective surveys from the perspective of beholders (participative observation) or researchers. The ethno-psychological studies reveal certain particularities specific to each society, marked by interrelations, interferences, acculturation etc. *Ethnomethodology*, in particular the one centered on a “holistic” view, identifies ethnographic-qualitative methods – that is observation, interview, *life history*, autobiographies, analysis of material and symbolic documents – by means of which the researcher expresses his opinion on the studied individuals and groups, and *offers solutions* to the epistemological subject matter.

There is observed a particular discourse from a different approach to psychology, a tirade that enriches the methodological basis of the thesis. There are taken into consideration the achievements in the fields of psychology of age (of combatants), military psychology, ethno-psychology, psychology of conflicts, psychoanalysis etc.

At the elaboration of the thesis, in order to register the general and particular characteristics of historical facts and events, there were also taken into account the diachronic and dialectical methods, as well as the comparative, qualitative and quantitative analysis of the subject under discussion.

The reconstitution of the topic implies the conceptual and methodological distinction from the perspective of socio-human sciences, namely: *ethic approach* – by analyzing the phenomenon from the external aspect, and *emic approach* – by studying it from the internal aspect (Radu, Iluț, Matei, 1994:310; Iluț, 2001:39). From this perspective, depending on the researched aspect, it was observed the polarization of approaches between the author and the interviewed subjects on the one hand, and their complementarity on the other hand.

Historical sources.

The study of a complex subject requires a heterogeneous approach from historical sources – essential authorities in the reconstitution of the historical scenery experienced by the witnesses of time. The diversity of information sources also allows their confrontation, resulting in the enlargement of the interpretative range.

Oral sources.

From the perspective of historical approach to the lived history, it was elaborated a method of scientific investigation using a pre-established goal on the basis of communication mechanism. As a consequence, we firstly referred to oral investigation in the form of interview (questionnaire), which allowed an interaction between the researcher (operator, interviewer) and the interviewee (respondent), that is witnesses or direct participants in the Soviet-Afghan war, the operator's interventions followed the principle of *“not controlling the essence, but the form”* (Iluț, 2001:12). In the course of conducting the research, *the technique of semistructured individual interview* was applied as a working method using a pre-established subject, there were also approached a series of specific questions previously expressed, which were often modified in the process of oral communication due to the specific particularities of the respective interview. Another instrument used in oral investigation was represented by *the technique of semistructured group interview* (Iluț, Rotariu, 1997:63), which unlike the semistructured individual interview, represents the development of the qualitative method since it includes the interaction of participants on the basis of an open debate on the same subject. An important aspect in the elaboration of the researched subject was the introduction of the *Delphy* technique, aimed at identifying the *solution* to an issue by means of specialists, as for our case that is related to the means and possibilities for the reintegration of the former combatants into family and society, we conducted interviews with specialists in medicine who also participated in the war from Afghanistan.

By means of a series of research methods and techniques using *signalectic questions* (data about witnesses), *opinion questions* (reveal the informer's opinion on the respective topic or extract indirect information) and *performance questions* (the researcher's intervention by means of open questions on the subject form aimed at drawing out the essence from the historic event), we elaborated the following structure of the questionnaire:

The official interviews with 125 respondents recorded on audio tape or in notes were conducted between April 10, 2001 – January 11, 2010, and the selection of respondents was made according to witnesses' attitudes towards the event, military rank of the direct participants in the war from Afghanistan and

the intermediaries – those who pass information related to the memoirs of direct participants, like relatives (parents, spouses, brothers and sisters, sons, cousins), acquaintances and friends of the combatants. The analysis includes 109 direct witnesses and 16 indirect witnesses of the respective historical event. Among the direct respondents, 104 were men, 5 were women, which means that it is explored both the male and female perspective towards the historical event. The duration of military service, military duties and ranks practically cover all the dynamics of the war, the majority of activities and the higher military ranks of the Soviet army in Afghanistan, which allows a general approach to the researched subject. The military attitude of male combatants had evolved along the military service, depending on the context of the war, military operations, regular transgressions etc. Some of the participants had performed various military duties during certain unforeseen events.

The oral investigation was complemented by the testimonies of the 11 former Moldovan combatants of the war from Afghanistan, native of Antonesti village, Stefan-Voda district. Due to the direct access to the recent work of Alexandru Vakulovski *Romanian soldiers in Afghanistan (Soldații români în Afghanistan)* (Vakulovski), we could notice a common topic using a different series of questions and interventions between the interviewer and respondents. In this context, we also made use of the personal archive of Eduard Boboc who elaborated a thesis on the military conflict from Transnistria (1991–1992). Due to the fact that the “Afghan” veterans also participated in the war of secession from the Republic of Moldova, there can be drawn various parallels of the *lived and narrated history* between these two military conflagrations.

The oral documents regarding the participation of Moldovans in the Soviet-Afghan war were referred to especially after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and due to a series of interventions of the former combatants in mass-media.

Oral sources, as a main historical source in this study, allow an intrinsic approach to the historical event and its actors, where a particular role is played by the researcher’s ability to observe the major elements of the complex research mechanism.

The Correspondence.

The records designated for providing information, that is the correspondence – in a broader sense, and letters – in a narrower sense, reveal an individual perception transferred to another space. The personal archive of the author contains the correspondence of 10 families of the former combatants from Afghanistan. The most recent letters are included in Al. Vakulovski’s book, *Romanian soldiers in Afghanistan (Soldații români în Afghanistan)*. The museum of the “Afghan” combatants that is located in the sector of Botanica, Chisinau

city also possesses a valuable correspondence from Afghanistan of four former Soviet participants.

We mention Ana Manole's publications that enter the category of the edited letters of the former Moldovan participants in the war from Afghanistan, being known to the general public and included in the scientific field (Manole, 1991).

Army journals, notes.

Based on the practice of perpetuating a tradition or annotating their own impressions, the Soviet soldiers had elaborated a series of descriptive narrations during the military service. Therefore, it was interesting to find a series of army journals and notes revealing the daily universe and the relations established with it that were kept by some participants in the war from Afghanistan. The army notes (1987–1989) of the journalist Eduard Boboc present a particular interest. In conformity with certain deontological rules of journalism, E. Boboc had collected a series of meaningful expressions along the military service (Notițe din armată). O. Capatina wrote a journal in Afghanistan which was to be published with the title of *Afghan hymn (Colind Afghan)*. (Căpățină, 2002).

“Afghan Lexicon”, “military lexicon”, “military folklore”.

We did not forget about the military slang, military jokes and “stylistic achievements” of the former Soviet soldiers, which could be noticed both in the oral investigation, and in the “raw” presentation of materials of the army journals, notes, works, memories etc.

Published memoirs, interviews.

Beside the oral sources, the correspondence and journals, a rich material of the historical facts and events is represented in the published memoirs and interviews as well. The temptation to share a special experience with the younger generations, and the interest of the public opinion for an exciting topic gave rise to these types of publications. Thus, we have the possibility of confronting the oral investigation of the respective subject with the material known to the public. In the same context, the information was provided long time ago and certain views of the authors suffered alterations. The image of the war from Afghanistan is also completed by the memoirs of other direct or indirect witnesses from the former Soviet Union, of political leaders, scientists, journalists etc.

Speeches of political leaders.

The official discourse about the war is placed in dichotomy with the story of “the small” reflecting the official version of the military conflict. At a comparative level, the discourses of the Soviet political leaders were studied and analyzed in order to observe the perception of “the big” about the war from Afghanistan. Along with the attitude of the Soviet leaders towards the events from Afghanistan, there were also studied the opinions of the Afghan leaders, Babrak Karmal (Karmal, 1981; On byl..., 1991:4) and Muhammad Najibullah (Cuvântarea lui..., 1989:2). As well, there were set forth references to the Soviet interference in Afghanistan by other political leaders.

Archive documents.

For the elaboration of the present work, we also made use of a series of recent documents that supplemented the lack of information, which could not be found in the oral testimonies: official secret directives, statistical data etc. The archive of the Socio-Political Organization from the Republic of Moldova creates a general image of the activity of CC of the MCP and the Soviet youth organization from the MSSR of the '80s aimed at training the youth for the “international aid”. Statistical data from the current Archive of the Administrative - Military Department within the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Moldova provides information regarding the number of participants, number of the dead and *missing persons* in the war from Afghanistan. New data on the former Moldovan combatants from the Soviet-Afghan war was found at the Union of “Afghan” veterans of the Republic of Moldova, the Union of “Afghan” veterans of Chisinau city, the League of “Afghan” veterans of the sector of Botanica, Chisinau city. Statistical data on the current health state of the former Moldovan combatants was provided by the Republican Experimental Centre of Prothesis, Orthopaedics and Rehabilitation, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Moldova, the International Union of Disabled People, and the Clinical Hospital of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Moldova.

Published documents.

The published documents are classified as follows: a) documents related to the international situation and the Soviet-Afghan relations until the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979); b) crucial documents of the intervention; c) legal documents of the USSR; d) propaganda materials of the Soviet army in Afghanistan; e) documents of the “Afghan” veterans.

The media.

The materials from mass-media – “chronicles of the time” – offer valuable information about the Soviet-Afghan war. If the Soviet media represented more of an instrument of the political élite, then the post-Soviet and the western media reveal various approaches to the respective topic. A special role is played by the publications dedicated to the former participants in the Soviet-Afghan war.

Internet information sources.

The scientific achievements allow the direct access to Internet documentary sources. The web pages of various non-governmental associations and organizations of the “Afghan” veterans, and museums provide valuable information about the direct witnesses of the war from Afghanistan.

The objectives of this work were set forth based on the specialized literature, various theoretical and methodological perspectives of research along with documentary sources.

Afghanistan at the end of the 8th decade of the 20th century.

The traditional mechanism had determined the daily life of Afghanistan, maintaining the rigidity of this complex system before the great changes of the 20th century’s civilization, which resulted in placing Afghanistan among the world’s poorest countries. The visible poverty was joined by a diminution of the intellectual life, which is a current subject nowadays.

By the end of the ’70s, mankind had been going through a complex range of contrasts: peace-war, capitalism-communism, bourgeoisie-proletariat, religion-atheism etc. The politics was benefiting of these confusions by applying rigorous methods, including the military factor as well – as an important aspect in the foreign policy of the contemporary world. The polarization of the international life and antagonist ideologies created a *doubtful, stressful atmosphere*, while the collective mentalities were facing various changes, mental conjunctures. The most profound aspect of the collective mental state was represented by the imaginary of identity and alterity.

A general view on the dynamics of the Soviet-Afghan relations was essential for a better understanding of the military intervention of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The geographical proximity between Afghanistan and the USSR represented the main catalyst for the relations between the two countries, yet beside the historical and geographical factors, the economic factors played a major role as well. At the end of the ’70s, the constant interests of the USSR in Afghanistan were expressed by means of various “protective” economic and

financial projects, infrastructure development, social base formation, infiltration of counsellors (including soldiers) etc., and together with the bilateral and international treaties there were also approved two directions of the international policy doctrine based on the perspective of “equilibrium or force”: creation of *a kind of Asian Finland*, a neutral country; according to the Soviets the revolution occurrence did not exclude radical methods determined by the concept of *a second Mongolia*, which is a radical transfer from feudalism to socialism (radical method) (Xenofontov, 2002:334-369.).

On the basis of a detailed analysis of historical facts we concluded that the Soviet intervention was generated due to the socio-political crisis in Afghanistan, the obsession for security and the phobia for *directing* the Islam to the southern border of the USSR, according to the individual decisions of the Political Board of December 12, 1979 that supported the military intervention in Afghanistan, this way transgressing a series of bilateral and international treaties. The Soviet interference that occurred at the end of December 1979 generated a major international crisis and a significant lowering of the Soviet Union’s prestige, which was considered as an aggressor country. Afghanistan, being engaged in a civil war, was turned into a military shooting ground of the great powers – the USSR and the USA, involving other countries from the West and Asia in this conflict as well.

As an expression of the totalitarian state, the Soviet Union created itself a violent message with respect to alterity. Operating with notions such as *international aid*, *imperialist forces* etc., Kremlin placed the world in an antagonist, bipolar space. An expression of this aspect shall also be observed in the political approach to the military campaign in Afghanistan.

The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan was followed by propaganda with obscure pacifist shades and multilateral aid, an aspect which was present during the war as well. In order to justify its actions before the public opinion, Moscow put forward other arguments as well: threat to the April revolution by the foreign aggression, danger of an attack from the southern part of the country. It was also called for the legal basis of the actions – the Treaty of friendship, vicinity and cooperation, which was signed by the USSR and Afghanistan on December 5, 1978 in conformity with the Art. 51 of the UN Charter.

In the Soviet propaganda, the war from Afghanistan was outlined on the basis of the *Saving state* and *Victim state* concepts. Being associated with various manipulation techniques and actions, in the Soviets’ opinion these notions constituted the legality of the military action in the neighbouring country.

The Soviet ideologists insistently applied the defeatist state, the anxiety to mobilize the society. As a consequence, there were generated informational psychosis, enemy culpability, *psychological war*. The political message was conveyed especially among the young Soviet people by means of various

persuasive methods: official discourse, school, mass-media, etc. These methods were applied in order to provide horizontal and vertical links in the process of society mobilization in specific situations.

As regards the totalitarian state which efficiently manipulated the propagandistic mechanism, the combatants from MSSR extracted *the causes* of the military intervention from the official discourse about the war: *international aid and defense of the Soviet Union's southern borders*. At the conceptual level, Kremlin insisted on the phrase of international aid, while the Soviet soldiers decided upon the expression of defense of the Soviet Union's southern borders, considered as a vector of patriotism of the Soviet origin. One of the intervention's *causes* appears to be the bipolarity between the Soviet Union and the USA, as a result of the Soviet controversy regarding the adverse world, the danger of the American imperialism, which therefore generated the *American phobia*. Other *causes* of the Soviet-Afghan war, as well as other explanations regarding this topic can be revealed from the statements of the former participants made during the postwar period.

As a component part of the civil society, intruders of a hostile context, the young combatants were given a certain period of adaptation in order to face the war. This *hiatus* was to be complemented by the military training: the school of the future fighters for participation in the military conflict from Afghanistan. While the conscription and military training were on the second plan in the initial phase of the war, there have gradually been made significant improvements in the process of recruitment and training conditions due to dynamics of the war. The two phases of the military training (the first one occurred in the USSR, and the second one in Afghanistan) associated with the political mentor (*political instructor*), placards, propaganda materials, military discipline, physical training, adjustment to (analogical) climate conditions etc., represented characteristics meant to provide theoretical and practical training for combatants, which is difficult to overpass in the specific context of the military conflict.

The Soviet-Afghan war. Lived history and narrated history.

The connection between the two enemy camps – Afghan resistance and the Soviets – was outlined not only by the military actions, but also by a mutual study, conceptual and somatic identification, analysis of the fight strategy and tactics etc. Despite the resentments against enemies, there were as well singled out certain abilities of their appreciation.

The Soviet-Afghan military confrontations were marked by the *asymmetric* typology of the conflict and were focused on the important areas from geostrategical perspective. Depending on the dynamics of the war, there were also instituted *military administrative poles*, which configured the military conflicts

between the two camps, and at the same time there were singled out a series of fight directions in the geographical areas, with a clear strategical content. The most known forms of military actions promoted by the Soviets were the so-called “cleaning up” of enemies, the raids upon the enemies camp, ambushes, etc. By means of “cleaning up”, the Soviets aimed at eliminating firstly the enemies, including the armed children (*bacha*), that is the persons who were acting by means of armed methods, avoiding as much as possible the decimation of the population that did not comply with the rules. Yet, we do not exclude the abnormal cases and soldiers with disequilibrium that were present in the case of Afghanistan, like in any other war. The unfavourable geographical conditions and the mountain relief represented an advantage for enemies and a great obstacle for the Soviet combatants in the dynamics of military fights. Another form of military conflicts was represented by the ambushes generating panic and defeatist situations. *The Underground War* from Afghanistan was conducted by the special Soviet units. In the context of military actions, the Soviet combatants sometimes did not take into account the strategy and tactics, therefore various military errors were committed.

Afghan army was obstructed by the *collaboration with the limited contingent of the 40th army* as a result of sovietization and *policy of forces*. The splitting between the allied and the Soviets that occurred during the military actions resulting in desertions from the Afghan army, was outlined in the context of the civil war from Afghanistan and the specific features of the Afghan civilization.

Being placed in dichotomy with military actions, the Afghan civilization had developed an archaic image expressed by exoticism and particularities of ethnocentric mentality in the Moldovan combatants’ opinion. The mechanism of communication and cognoscibility established between the Moldovan and indigenous combatants had evolved to image representations of the two distinct socio-cultural spaces. The somatic profile was perceived from the physical appearance, marked by the conditions of existence (climate, lifestyle, nutrition, etc.). Due to the ancestral traditions, the Afghans’ family and environment represented a confidential structure, being forbidden for intruders, that is the Soviets. It was observed the economic bipolarity, marked by misery and luxury at the same time, being singled out by various specific forms and economic relations, including the mechanism of competition, eccentric activities (drug industry) etc. The war from Afghanistan marked a general turnover in the Afghan economic life, which resulted in the intensification of the pauperization of the indigenous population. Poor knowledge of the Afghan civilization, non-observance of their traditions, irreligion etc. had generated tensions between the Soviet and indigenous combatants, a situation that was also intensified by the context of the war.

Thus, the hierarchic relations between the Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan associated with behavioural proximity and denial were marked by a series of

unwritten traditions of the Soviet army, as well as by the tense atmosphere of the war. The officers' image was perceived as a patriarchal one, of moral or administrative support meant to face the tense circumstances. Despite this, there were also observed situations of displaying the hierarchical position, which had a negative impact on ensuring vertical hierarchical relations. The most rigorous mechanism of communication and behaviour among the Soviet combatants was controlled by *dedovshchina*, a type of habitual cohabitation, an alternative to the military regulations involving a conventional language that resulted in horrible consequences for participants' life, it was the category of marginals that was established in the process of communication of soldiers as an element of interhuman relations (Xenofontov, 2006:335-366).

Logistics provision – accommodation, nutrition, equipment – is an aspect applied to the ontological need in the mechanism of mobilization and administration of soldiers that was controlled by the military conflict's dynamics and adjusted to the cruel context of the war. For the Moldovan combatants, the cantonment and its regulations marked a new lifestyle, a balanced daily life, it also singled out the restricted individualism, as well as certain actions that disregarded even the natural course of the military life.

Beside the extreme situations (panic, military fights, stress), military discipline (training, protocol formalities) etc. that the participants in the war from Afghanistan were going through, they were also enjoying moments of *escape* from the reality of the armed conflict – the free time. In the Soviet soldiers' perception, the tense circumstances eclipsed the presence of the free time. Generally, the free time which was distributed by needs, interests, intelligence etc. was divided into three levels: individual or private, common and complementary (Xenofontov, 2003:156-186).

There was observed a series of immoral habits among the Soviet combatants in Afghanistan, such as: drugs, alcohol, traffic, prostitution and homosexuality. Some vices were generated by the endemic circumstances or by various habits of the Soviet army, while others by cupidity and indecency (Xenofontov, 2005:283-310).

It was used a conventional language in the Soviet combatants' communication, known as the *Afghan lexicon*. This military language created syncretisms: terms specific either to habits of the Soviet army or to the combatants' place of origin, literature, prisons, Afghan population etc. At the metaphysical level of the alternative language, the participants in the war from Afghanistan had created their own reality, which is a symbolic reality. In the same context, they applied other language forms, even the ordinary one, which subconsciously revealed the experience of certain shocking circumstances. The Russian language, the main means of communication in the Soviet army, was also doubled by national languages of the soldiers. By this native element, fighters created an alternative universe of spiritual survival in the context of the

military conflict. Studying the enemies' language was determined by specific situations of the Soviet participants (Xenofontov, 2008:108-119).

The military intervention of the USSR in Afghanistan had left a profound trace in the life of the combatants from the Moldova.

The death of the Soviet participants, a subject with possible psychological consequences in society was wrapped in mystery by Moscow. The soldiers' death, the way of carrying the corpse, the funeral rituals, the death show were similar in every respect to the society, although with a tendency of being placed in an offensive environment. In dichotomy with the Soviet community, death was omnipresent in the life of soldiers by two ways: direct death implying its proximity to the terrifying space, and indirect death implying the mirror effect, that is the death of a comrade being visualized as a self-image of the *end*. The concept of life opposed to the terrifying end constituted an antidote to repudiate death. At a conceptual level it was created a parabiosis and a *virtual dialogue with divinity*. The own victory before death represented the survivor's act of heroism, yet generating the *guilt feelings towards the dead comrades*.

Physical disabilities (injuries, disorders, diseases) were also omnipresent in the daily life of soldiers. Anything related to the war, foreign and unsafe environment constituted a danger to health. Diseases, *the terrible enemy*, as endemic factors, were subject to improper treatments, therefore the recurrence of diseases still remains a major problem especially among the "Afghan" veterans.

The war tensions, military life and subjective issues of each individual soldier were among the factors generating suicides and self-mutilations. If suicide represents a world belonging exclusively to its author, self-mutilations represent an alert to society with respect to the cruel environment of the individual. *Accidental* self-mutilations constituted a specific factor of the war.

The Soviet prisoners who were subject to tortures, their guidance by the "masters" to fulfilling propaganda purposes and ensuring complicity in destroying the Soviet army constituted forms of militant actions of *mujabedeens*. Even under the circumstances when prisoners reached various *compromises with the torturer*, the aspirations for individual freedom represented a strong desire.

Another aspect related to the military conflict and the *aggressive war* was represented by the *disappearance* and desertions. Beside the indeliberate factors of *disappearance*, there existed a series of volitional clauses, some of them being sustained by the Afghan Resistance. The desertions were also determined by historical, religious, geographical factors etc. The repatriation of the former Soviet prisoners in Afghanistan was delayed due to political, legislative, moral causes.

Grosso modo, the living environment marked rigorous limits in the life of the Soviet soldiers, directing yet to unacceptable aspirations for survival reflected by an encoded message of sustenance.

The reintegration of the former Moldovan combatants in Afghanistan into family and society was marked by the *Afghan syndrome*, a psychosomatic trauma caused by the *alarming agent* – the war – which has had a major long-term affective impact on the participants' identity. The socialization was impeded by various disputes with the society occurring at conceptual level, and today the “Afghan” veterans are actually going through a phase of *integration* into society, after the estrangement determined by the respective event.

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