

# MORAL DIMENSION OF MILITARY UNIFORM

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The aim of this paper is to define and explain the moral dimension and significance of military uniform. Since this particular dimension has not been explained enough, by the analysis of the existing perspectives of meaning and function of military uniform (technical, historical, psychological, sociological, legal, etc.), the author identifies its core moral significance, and formulates and elaborates its moral dimension. Moral dimension of military uniform is derived both from its practical and its symbolic function – its practical function is to precisely separate combats from non-combatants, while its symbolic function reflects collective identity, norms and values of military profession. The paper elaborates different significant moral implications of putting on and wearing military uniform, both during war and peace time, thus showing its twofold symbolic and value function – it simultaneously imposes duty, but also brings privilege to the person wearing it. It has been concluded that the sacrilization of military uniform is necessary in modern society, especially due to its prominent moral dimension and poses the need for legal regulation of wearing military uniform, its parts, or the uniforms which were purposefully designed so as to resemble military uniforms.

Key words: *military uniform, moral, ethics, collective identity, de-individuation, virtues, military profession, combatants and non-combatants, prestige, symbolism*

## Introduction

Modern societies, regardless of their organization, political organization model, and forms of government, are rather complex organizations consisting of vast number of inextricably linked and co-dependent elements,

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individuals, formal and informal social groups, explicit system and implicit traditional institutions and organizations, etc. The structure of modern societies, consisting of not only its segments *per se* but also layered and dynamic inner-relations among different elements, its constant interaction, constant networking and re-networking, and different social norms which regulate relations and interactions, is to a great extent based on work division and, in relation to that, social roles. Only primitive, rudimentary societies have not been based on division of work and social roles, but on egalitarianism and some kind of collective economy where everyone could perform all the jobs (Ilić, 1978: 25). The actual history of the organized human society begins exactly with work division and society stratification, thus creating distinction between different groups, institutions and *professions* within a society. One of the elements which distinguishes the members of different social groups, organizations and most of all professions, from the rest of the society is specific and unique dress code which, more often than not, implies wearing defined *uniform*. Even though, strictly speaking, uniform is connected to crucial social professions (according to different theorists, only medical, legal, military, police and teaching professions are considered professions, while some theorists include journalists, priests and politicians; for further information on more detailed explanation regarding the difference between profession and occupation consult Станар, 2019a: 145-157) nowadays it can be worn by bus drivers, athletes...private security workers” (Pfanner, 2004: 93), mailmen, railway workers, even students in some schools where wearing uniform is a rule. However, the term uniform in its full meaning is intuitively connected primarily for the military and the police, due to the prominent social significance of these professions, but also because of the strong moral dimension of these uniforms, especially military uniform.

## Military uniform – history of function of military uniform

Despite the fact that nowadays uniform is an inherent attribute of the military and that it is one of the central terms we associate with the nature, culture and identity of armed forces, military uniform – as we understand it nowadays, was not always present in the armed forces. The first regulation regarding military clothing was enacted by Louis XII, while the majority of researchers agree that military uniform, as a standard and “permanent external characteristic” of the military, appeared in the mid-seventeenth century, after the Peace of Westphalia and with the appearance of standing armies in Europe (North, 1971: 4; Krueger, 2012: 64; Николић, Старчевић и Јаношевић, 2017: 281). The fact that military uniform was not regulated and defined in the way it would become in the mid-seventeenth century, it does not mean that the armies did not aim to achieve some kind of uniformity in their clothing throughout history. North (North, 1971: 4) claims that the principle of some kind of uniformity had always existed in the armies as “a

natural result of bulk purchasing of clothing and material (for the military, DS)” by the ruler, while Pfanner (Pfanner, 2004: 95-99) depicts historical efforts of the armies to provide some kind of “uniformity” and uniqueness in clothing – starting from military civilizations of Mesopotamia, more than five thousand years old, across ancient Egyptian army, and the Eastern Roman Empire to the medieval Crusades. Nevertheless, military “clothes”, i.e. some kind of standardized clothing “starting from the ancient period to the mid-seventeenth century existed only in rudimentary form, and did not show great ‘uniformity’” (Krueger, 2012: 64), taking into account that it consisted of different forms of armours and helmets, thus trying to achieve minimal possibility of identification only with certain specific colour of these objects (Pfanner, 2004: 97).

Etymologically speaking, the term uniform comes from Latin word “one” (lat. *una*) and “form” (lat. *forma*) which clearly denotes the core practical idea and function of military uniform – to ensure uniformity, i.e. to be one identical form of clothing for all the members of one uniformed group which enables visual “homogeneity of otherwise heterogeneous group of people” (Pfanner, 2004: 93) and enables differentiating them from all other groups. Of course, military uniform has always had a very practical purpose - it necessarily serves to “provide protection from cold, certain objects and other negative natural and accidental influences ...and from physical conflicts...” (Николић и др., 2017: 280). Speaking from psychological point of view, it is of the utmost importance that soldiers have trust in practical function of their uniform, i.e. “trust in their equipment and clothing, to believe that the uniform can physically protect them from visible and invisible threats” (Krueger, 2012: 69). Therefore, uniform primarily serves to “mark belonging to a group” which is institutionalized and functionally separated from the rest of the society (Joseph and Alex, 1972: 720). The reasons for this conspicuous visual marking of belonging to the military and clear “separation” from the rest of the society are different – besides differentiating from the rest of civilian society, uniform differentiates between the members of one armed force from those of another armed force, which is equally important. In addition, these reasons had changed throughout the history of military uniform, which had reflected on its appearance and form. The main reason for the military uniformity was the attempt to increase the visibility and identification of the military units in combat, i.e. enabling “being identified by the comrades and commanders in every circumstance” (Embury, 1921: 253), since visual communication was the main way of commanding the units during the time when there were no modern communication devices (Pašagić, 2014: 73). That has become especially important in the period when the armies introduced firearms, such as muskets and black powder cannons, which caused great amount of smoke in the battlefield, thus making it very difficult for commanders to identify their units and combatants. As Creveld states, even Napoleon's commanders who commanded ten thousands of people, had big problems when it comes to efficient commanding, due to inability to make out combatants and units in the battlefield in a cloud of dust and

smoke (Николић и др., 2017: 282). This is why initial uniforms had strikingly strong colours so that “combatants could be identified in the battlefield full of smoke caused by muskets” (Krueger, 2012: 64), which, as Dunn (Dunn, 2009: 12) says, made warfare “a strikingly colourful endeavour” in which tunics of vivid and striking colours mixed.

However, with the development of weapons towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which enabled automatic fire and weapons efficiency at great distances, initial “vividness of uniform becomes its defect” (Pašagić, 2014: 73), and now, instead of highlighting the combatants, armies need to “cover” them with uniforms, i.e. camouflage them. By definition, the purpose of modern camouflage military uniforms is to “hide the silhouette of the body and visually blend the individuals into the environment making them less visible target” (Krueger, 2012: 71), which means that the idea of military uniform evidently experienced complete transformation and became the opposite of what it initially was. However, the change of the visual concept of uniform – from the clothing which emphasizes visibility into clothing which camouflages – did not influence its primary purpose to clearly visually differentiate the members of armed forces from the rest of the society. In modern age, where literally every armed force has camouflage uniform, the key role of uniform is to separate “soldiers” from “civilians”, i.e. combatants from non-combatants in an armed conflict. The first uniforms with camouflage pattern were introduced in the 1970s in the British armed forces, and very quickly they became standard uniforms for all armed forces in the world (Krueger, 2012: 71). Besides practical, military uniform certainly has great symbolic function – it symbolizes “the connection between political rights and duties with the emphasis on citizen virtue”, and it represents “order and discipline...strength and power”, but also all “values of military vocation...and characteristics of military profession” in general, as well as “the system of stratification based on merit and capabilities” (Clifford, 2001: 364; Pfanner, 2004: 94; Николић и др., 2017: 286-287). Nevertheless, it seems that deep moral dimension of military uniform has not been researched and explained enough, despite the fact that it was derived, as well as from its practical, but also its symbolic function, therefore it is twofold.

## Moral dimension of military uniform

To say that the significance of the moral dimension of military uniform is great would be an understatement, since it is inherently connected with the morally elevated nature of military vocation and as such it necessarily reflects it. That is exactly the main reason military uniform is “the most recognizable distinctive symbol of the army” and this is why it has special “symbolic history” (Pfanner, 2004: 93). Due to its complexity, it is necessary to observe the moral dimension of military uniform as twofold – equally as the product of its practical and symbolic function which were briefly presented.

### *Moral dimension of military uniform practical function*

Despite the fact that by switching from vivid and striking colours of military uniforms to modern camouflage uniforms, their initial practical purpose changed completely – from the one with the aim of highlighting to the function of hiding – its core purpose to separate and identify one specific group from another has not changed. Primary practical purpose of military uniform nowadays is to clearly separate soldiers from civilians, i.e. combatants from non-combatants in an armed conflict, which has *monumental* moral meaning on its own. In layman's discourse the distinction between soldier and civilian is often identified with the distinction between combatant and non-combatant. Nevertheless, despite being evident "significant degree of overlapping in classes of those defined by these separated distinctions" it is more appropriate and accurate to use the categories combatant and non-combatant with the aim of defining target legitimacy in an armed conflict (Coady, 2008: 155). Military uniform clearly marks and emphasizes belonging to the class of *combatants* for all those wearing it; though there are certain exceptions to this rule, since military doctors and priests (spiritual father, chaplains) wear uniform, but are not legitimate targets in an armed conflict (Primoratz, 2007: 29). What is the concrete and practical significance of giving someone a status of combatant? Wearing military uniform certainly does not contribute to practical possibility for someone to participate in an armed conflict, *strictosensu*. Namely, wearing a uniform is not a physical precondition for participating in an armed conflict, since people can very actively fight in "civilian" clothing, and the experiences of asymmetrical conflicts of previous decades clearly proved this on global level. Practically and morally, even more important purpose of wearing military uniform and insignia marking the belonging to the class of combatants is one's *self-legitimizing* as a target in an armed conflict. By wearing military uniform, individuals in this way consciously and purposely mark themselves as legitimate targets in war, i.e. it is legal and even morally allowed (!) to shoot and kill these people during an armed conflict, since "the absence of military uniform implies that a person is a civilian... and that it must not be attacked" (Pfanner, 2004, 94). A very logical question that arises by itself is why the members of armed forces would decide to take such a counterintuitive action if it is perfectly obvious that in doing so they certainly worsen their own position and drastically increase the risk of being wounded or dead?

The answer to this question is the moral dimension itself. Namely, by letting the enemy know that he is trained, dangerous and ready to use force and thus poses a threat, the individual wearing military uniform makes a clear distinction between himself and civilians and in this way "attracts' the fire to himself, drawing attention from those who are not wearing uniform" (Станар, 2019б: 138). By consciously and purposely declaring himself as the danger for the enemy, the individual who wears military uniform actually wears a certain "magnet" for the enemy fire. Namely, he willingly marks himself as a "target" with the aim of drawing the fire away from "the innocent", whom he protects, and attracting it to himself. The notion of innocence in

war does not imply the absence of some kind of moral or legal *guilt*, but the absence of threat for the enemy. Therefore, soldiers are not innocent because they threaten, not because they did something morally or legally wrong unlike civilians (McMahan, 2009: 11-12). Moral elevation of conscious and deliberate increasing the risk for the soldier who wears uniform for the purpose of reducing the risk and potential self-sacrifice for non-combatants, who are mostly people whom he personally does not know or has any kind of personal connection with them, simply cannot be stressed enough! This is the moral duty of a soldier which is of course codified in the international law. Thus, pursuant to Paragraph 3, Article 48 of the Additional Protocol (I) to the Geneva Convention combatants are obliged to be clearly “distinguished from civilians ...in order to increase the protection of civilians from the enemy action”, which clearly seems “widely accepted practice” of wearing military uniform. Within this context, any kind of clear visual expressing of belonging to the class of combatants is considered as wearing a uniform, even if one side does not have the possibility of acquiring military uniforms *per se*. Hostile parties acknowledged wearing “green clothes with distinctive colourful cap” or even “clearly visible armbands” as “being uniformed”. The only thing that matters is that the clothing enables making clear and unambiguous “distinction from civilian population from afar” (Pfanner, 2004: 107-108).

Obviously, not wearing uniform or taking off one’s uniform in situations when it is convenient for the combatant with the aim of “blending in” with civilian population (illegitimate targets), thus making it more difficult for the enemy to differentiate between combatant and non-combatant, and making it easier to perform covert actions from close range and similarly – it would be “practical” and “convenient” for a soldier, but such an act would be deeply dishonourable, immoral, and it would have certain practical repercussions. Namely, as participation in war itself is both legal and moral, soldiers cannot be considered responsible for participation in an armed conflict (Babić, 2017: 194), and thus cannot be punished for the combat, either as war prisoners or after the end of an armed conflict. Their uniform, which is an indicator of their status of a legal and legitimate combatant, guarantees them this very right. However, not wearing uniform or taking it off deliberately for the purpose of gaining advantage in combat, regardless of whether we speak about regular armed forces, rebels, guerrilla, paramilitary formations, private military companies or any other formation engaged in combat, is often interpreted as an act by which one *de facto* loses the status of legal combatant, and also the right guaranteed to the prisoners of war. The experiences of Israeli and American armed forces clearly depict this practice, since according to their interpretation enemy soldiers who do not wear uniforms (or any other kind of visible insignia which identifies them and distinguishes them from civilian population) lose the status and right of prisoners of war (Pfanner, 2004: 115, 119). What is interesting is that pursuant to Article 46 of the Additional Protocol (I) to the Geneva Convention not even “spies” caught while gathering intelligence data cannot be treated as “engaged in espionage” if they are wearing

uniform, while those who are wearing civilian clothing, caught for the same reason, lose the status of prisoner of war and with it all the accompanying rights! Moreover, according to some interpretations relying on this Protocol, as well as the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, such deliberate abuse of uniform in armed conflicts is not only illegal, but due to its “perfidy” it can be interpreted as a form of war crime, and as such it can be sanctioned (Pfanner, 2004: 121). Because of this specified core moral dimension of military uniform, the ones who do not wear it during armed conflicts, and they should be, cannot be treated equally as soldiers when it comes to their rights, as well as their status.

It should be mentioned that on a very subtle and latent level of meaning, wearing a military uniform in war raises the awareness of the one wearing it, and that his potential death would not be perceived as “tragic” in the way the death of young people is usually perceived. Understanding and accepting the fact that it is very difficult to express this clearly and precisely with words, which usually brings the risk of solipsism, ambiguity and vagueness in expression, still there is a need to stress this deep layer of meaning of military uniform. Namely, in every society, there has always been an almost tangible but untold kind of pleonastic implicit common knowledge of the death of a soldier in war. The understanding of war is understanding the fact that during war there must be mass killing and dying. And, since the army is an instrument the state uses to wage armed combat, the society believes that the army is not only killing, but that the army should “die” because that is what it “serves for”. Combat victims of people in military uniforms are perceived as heroic, but at the same time they are implied, therefore they do not have the element of social and historical tragedy which accompanies the death of non-combatants, i.e. civilians in war. One of the factors which influences such interpretation is certainly understating that killing people in military uniforms in war is not a crime (it is neither immoral nor illegal) unlike the death of a civilian in war, which usually remains in the collective memory of one people, along with incomparable greater mourning, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Of course, killing of people in uniforms is not treated as a crime only assuming that proportionality criterion is being met and that *malum in se* assets were not used, i.e. that the killing is performed in accordance with the laws of armed conflict. Civilian war victims firmly remain in the collective memory of one people for centuries and with many generations, while incomparably more numerous victims in uniforms are often perceived as “expected”, “implied” and “normal” during war. The moral dimension of uniform is indisputably part of conscious decision and acceptance of those wearing it that their potential deaths in war are not crimes *per se*, despite the fact that they are not guilty for the war, and that their engagement in the war was not immoral, but that they are “implied” and “not-as-tragic” for the society they defend, despite the fact that those wearing uniforms during the war are the absolute elite of one people. Solzhenitsyn’s “self-sacrificing elite” in military uniform is a “symbol of accepting the responsibility as destiny, and of elitism as readiness for selfless sacrifice” (Николић и др., 2017: 288).

## *Moral dimension of military uniform symbolic function*

In accordance with its institutional and organizational culture, but its nature itself, the military aims towards “uniformity” of its members and generally all of its elements. This goal towards “uniformity” is within the core of military culture – “perfect army consists of identical soldiers without deviations, who all work together in order to achieve maximum efficiency” (Stanar, 2021: 242). One of very important and necessary products of this effort is de-individuation which has always been present in military organizations, while the uniform itself is the key element of this significant process. De-individuation is a process of reducing individuality and individual differences within a group, reducing the significance of individual identity and creating certain anonymity within a group which is ensured by taking mass, collective identity (Zimbardo, 2007: 295). Therefore, it does not assume complete deprivation of any kind of identity, but substitution of personal identity with collective identity. This is exactly what military uniform does – it “suppresses individual idiosyncrasies in behaviour and appearance” by representing the symbol of conformity of those wearing it and it becomes identity symbol of its own, i.e. it “overtakes the qualities of totemic emblem and it embodies the attributes of the group” (Joseph and Alex, 1972: 720, 723). Therefore, military uniform is a symbolic physical representation of attributes of military profession, so the act of wearing it and metaphorical “wearing” is a virtue of military profession. Therefore, the individual wearing a uniform simultaneously “wears” moral values typical of the army and the ideal of a warrior; on personal level, he takes “super-personal collective values” which are morally elevated and socially prestigious (Николић и др., 2017: 289).

By wearing military uniform the individual “transfers accumulated glory (and prestige DS) ...of the group” onto himself (Joseph and Alex, 1972: 720) and almost immediately, he becomes “blessed” to the public’s eyes with prestige, virtues and honour accumulated by century-long tradition regardless of his personal dispositions and moral character which perhaps would never allow him to achieve any kind of social reputation and respect. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that soldiers are usually “especially proud of wearing their uniforms, and wear them with their heads held high” (Krueger, 2012: 68), because simply by wearing one form of clothing, they become morally superior and highly esteemed society members to the rest of the society. The act of putting on the military uniform has ceremonial and symbolic character, and it is equally important as ceremonial and symbolic “taking-off” one’s uniform for those individuals who embarrass it, and the act of depriving them of their right to wear uniform is ultimate symbol of dishonour (Kasturi, 2012: 427, 431; Joseph and Alex, 1972: 721). Due to this great bordering-on-magic power of uniform to immediately transform social status and society’s overall value perception of an individual, the military must be extremely careful and cautious when deciding whom and how to allow to wear uniform. Taking into account that it “represents the characteristics of the whole group” (Clifford, 2001: 368), and it embodies the attributes of the *collective* identity and that in every moment it



represents its value status, uniform can also be “dishonoured” and morally degraded by the the individual's actions which are not evaluated on individual but on the collective level of the group he belongs to. Besides, uniform represents a “face”, i.e. visual symbol of what we nowadays call military “brand” which represents the institution as a whole and which is of the utmost importance for modern armed forces (Перић, 2008: 127-135).

Therefore, the person wearing the uniform of the Republic of Serbia is not only under pressure of symbolic representation of the overall *current* institution of the armed forces in the Republic of Serbia, but historical and identity ideas in general, and the ideals of a *Serbian soldier*. Such person does not represent only himself, but the identity of the whole group all the time. This implies not only current, but also historical identity of the group, thus making the responsibility of the person wearing the uniform great. Their actions reflect upon the historical dimension of identity; they do not only violate the reputation, “brand”, image, and the core value significance of *this* army, in *this* moment, but the army as cultural and identity entity in its historical span. By making the servicemen wear military uniform, the military provides some kind of validity “certificate” to its representative (Joseph and Alex, 1972: 723-724), and by doing so takes the responsibility for his every action while in uniform. This is how uniform becomes symbolic claim and *guarantee* of the armed forces to the society and other armed forces that the person wearing it would represent group's norms, rules and values. If it comes to uniform “dishonouring” it can mean and signal not only an omission on personal level of a uniformed person, but that the military does not have full control over its own process of “certification”!

The abovementioned described symbolic and moral dimension of uniform, as expected, influences the person wearing it. Even though the critical attitudes towards the concept of *role morality* are mostly quite grounded due to the fact that this concept is often (mis)used as an excuse for immoral actions, in the context of the influence of military uniform on an individual the phenomenon of “role morality” can have very positive connotations. The *role morality* concept basically implies that “individuals can adopt different moral norms depending on the *roles* they have” (Gibson, 2003: 17), i.e. that the actions they take in certain professional roles stem from the moral norms of the profession itself, not the individual. This is the exact kind of effect that the strong symbolic dimension of uniform has on the individual wearing it – it strongly motivates and encourages the actions which are in accordance with specific moral norms and imperatives of military profession, by giving the individual the *role* which erases individual and implies collective. As Fussel (*Fussell*) states, “every uniform, even the most modest one, has a tendency to ennoble the one wearing it” (Kasturi, 2012: 428), while military uniform brings this process to a maximum. It “speaks, motivates, encourages, admonishes, inspires and instills confidence” and develops high morale (Николић и др., 2017: 286) by ennobling the individual with virtues and values of highly moral nature of military profession. Military uniform encourages “role morality” by assuming that moral imperatives of the role are higher and more demanding than personal, therefore “encourages actions

primarily from the role of uniformed status” (Joseph and Alex, 1972: 726). Military uniform is indisputably an instrument of de-individuation, but it can be certainly assumed that the collective substituent is “superior” to the individual one regarding values and moral; – uniform’s moral *role* is supererogative and overcomes everything that can be required from an individual outside the role, since it requires acting in accordance with motifs which are “beyond the reach of morality” (Čekić, 2013: 130).

## Conclusion – protection and sacralization of military uniform

Military uniform epitomizes military values, powerful visual symbol of separating “sacrificial elite” from the rest of the society. Despite the fact that the values, norms and principles of military vocation exist independently from uniform as their key symbol, it is very common “to attach matter to ideas and universal values so they would get sold form” (Николић и др., 2017: 286) in order for them to get concrete and practical articulation. From its intrinsic and inherent moral dimension it is evident that it “simultaneously implies duty but also bestows privilege” (Kasturi, 2012: 427) upon those who wear it, and it necessarily and at first sight oxymoronically synthesizes self-sacrifice and privilege. The moral dimension of military uniform in modern society is a key and vital reason because of which it is necessary to protect it not only from being misused, but it should also be sacralized!

Every uniform, including military uniform, not only separates one group from the rest of the society, but, by definition, it does so “as a matter of exclusivity” and prestige (Clifford, 2001: 368). Joseph and Alex (Joseph and Alex, 1972: 722-723) warn that modern “uniform proliferation” causes confusion in the public, since uniform explicitness, as a status indicator, depends on its monopolization, as well as that uniform should primarily denote a “special status” in the society of the person who wears the uniform. If wearing a specific type of uniform would be enabled practically for everyone, the significance of uniform of the social groups that really have “special status” would be consequently reduced. Understanding the deep moral dimension of military uniform, its wearing, even without insignia (in the Republic of Serbia, “uniform without the insignia of the Serbian Armed Forces, ranks and other military insignia of the Serbian Armed Forces” is not considered a uniform (Serbian Armed Forces website 2023)), wearing some of its parts or clothing which is deliberately designed in order to resemble military uniform, by the people who are not servicemen, must be regulated by the law and sanctioned. Such abuse of practical and symbolic connotations of vital value symbol of supererogative and morally elevated character of the army is humiliation, even ridiculing of military uniform, and one must *earn* and be *worth of* wearing it. Therefore, it is necessary to regulate its status in the Republic of Serbia by some kind of law on “stolen honour” based on the *Stolen Valor Act*, legal document adopted in the USA in 2006 and later

revised in 2013, which stipulates harsh sanctioning of abuse of the military uniform, military decorations, but also the act of verbal lying about being a member of the armed forces or about received military decorations, but without the necessary presence of “verbal element” (Kasturi, 2012: 420). Wearing of military uniform (and everything which implies belonging to the armed forces), would be publicly and explicitly regulated with such act, especially taking into account indisputable core significance of military uniform for Serbian identity and culture.

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## Summary

In this paper the author aims to define and explain the deep moral dimension and profound significance of military uniform. Analysis of the available relevant literature has revealed that the moral dimension of military uniform has not been sufficiently elaborated and explained. The author analyzes the existing perspectives of meaning and function of military uniform (technical, historical, psychological, sociological, legal, etc.) and identifies its additional, moral meaning, which is, to a large extent, derived from its other meanings and functions, and goes on to formulate and elaborate its moral dimension. Throughout the history of armed forces, military uniform has had various different forms, principal uses, primary functions, and levels of significance. It wasn't before the modern age of human societies that the moral dimension of military uniform emerged as its most important and significant element. The crux of the moral dimension of military uniform is derived both from its practical and its symbolic function. The practical function of military uniform is to clearly separate combatants from non-combatants, and by doing so, to further legitimize violence against those who wear it. Wearing of uniform is a highly morally interesting act of one's self-legitimization as a target in war, almost enabling one's enemy's efforts against one's life. On the other hand, its main and potent symbolic function is to reflect collective identity, norms and key values of the military profession. Deindividuated collective identity, built on unique and specific set of values and principles is central to every military in the world, and even more important source of military power and effectiveness than weapons and material assets. History has demonstrated this fact countless of times in various ages, cultures, and circumstances. The author then proceeds to offer in-depth explanations of various significant and crucial moral implications of wearing military uniform, in a state of peace as well as in a state of war. Furthermore, this study points out and identifies the peculiar dual symbolic-value function of military uniform, which simultaneously imposes significant duty and bestows remarkable privilege upon the individual wearing it. Wearing of uniform is therefore extremely difficult and demanding while at the same time it is desirable and appealing to the members of

the public. In the concluding remarks, the author highlights the vital necessity of protecting and even sacralizing military uniform in modern societies. The author underlines that this is particularly needed due to its distinct moral dimension which is unparalleled compared to other uniforms often worn in modern societies. Finally, the author calls for a much more explicit and much more strict legal regulation of wearing of military uniform, its segments, or even other uniforms which are intentionally designed to resemble military uniforms in the Republic of Serbia, and offers the American *Stolen Valor Act* as the leading example of legal regulation which properly reflects the pivotal moral significance of military uniforms, reminding of the fact that the military identity, heavily symbolized by the uniform, is of central significance for Serbian national identity and inseparable from its culture.

Key words: *military uniform, moral, ethics, collective identity, deindividuation, virtues, military profession, combatants and non-combatants, prestige, symbolism*

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