Constructing meaning after war

A study of the lived experiences of Norwegian Afghanistan veterans and military spouses

Elin Gustavsen

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Elin Gustavsen
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Summary

This thesis investigates the lived experience of contemporary warfare. The main empirical data consists of 29 thematic interviews conducted with Norwegian veterans of the operation in Afghanistan and 8 narrative interviews with female spouses of veterans. The aim of the project has been to (1) better understand how veterans and spouses interpret their experiences with military deployments, and (2) to explore how the personal meaning assigned to armed service is shaped and channeled by the sociocultural context of Norwegian society. To investigate the sociocultural context in which the interviewees construct meaning from their experiences, the thesis has also made use of document analysis.

The analysis draws on theoretical perspectives from cultural sociology, lived experience and meaning-making as a cultural practice. The cultural theory of Ann Swidler's has been utilized to probe into the connectivity between lived experience and available meaning-making resources. Her concepts of "settled and "unsettled" contexts are used in particular to examine the accessibility of culturally established resources for how to interpret the experience of warfare. The overall argument developed through this research is that unsettled experiences – like the experience of war in the case of Norway – are not accompanied by established cultural scripts for how to interpret their particular meaning. The thesis discusses mechanisms that contributes to construct wartime service into an unsettled experience in Norway, most importantly how changing civil-military relations have reshaped the links between the armed forces and civilian society. The thesis consists of an introduction that sets the scene and elaborates on theoretical and methodological perspectives, followed by the four articles that comprise the main body of the dissertation.

Article I "The construction of meaning among Norwegian Afghanistan veterans" published in *International Sociology* (1/2016) presents an overview of the dominant forms of meaning-making identified among the interviewed veterans. Three interpretive frameworks are presented, conceptualized as a military, societal, and personal framework of meaning. The article draws explicitly on the work of Edna Lomsky-Feder on Israeli veterans to compare and highlight the findings. It further utilizes Swidler's notion of "settled" and "unsettled" to contextualize the interpretive strategies with regards to the lack of a shared war experience that characterizes Norwegian society.

Article II "The privatized meaning of wartime deployments: Examining the narratives of Norwegian military spouses" accepted for publication in *Ethos* (forthcoming 2018) uses a narrative design to analyze eight interviews conducted with female spouses of Afghanistan veterans. The analysis presents two main strategies used by the women to make sense of deployments, conceptualized as "normalization" and "agency". The article demonstrates how the spouses interpreted the deployment in a highly normalized fashion, while also being careful to state their ownership and equality in the situation. Continuing in the footsteps of article I, this second article elaborates on the argument made about contemporary warfare as an unsettled experience in Norwegian society.

Article III "Soldiers without a war. Official and private framings of Norway's engagement in Afghanistan" under review (revised) in *Acta Sociologica* situates the veterans' personal meaning-making in relation to the official framing of the Afghanistan engagement in the Norwegian public sphere. The analysis focuses on how the veterans both framed the deployment in highly job-related terms – as conceptualized in article I as a military framework of interpretation – at the same time as there was widespread resentment among the veterans towards the rhetoric used by the political leadership, in particular their refusal to call the operation a "war". To discuss the mismatch between the public and private framing, the article draws on the theoretical argument developed in articles I and II, arguing that the veterans' insistence on the importance of using the term "war" can be viewed as an attempt to restore a sense of connection between their personal effort and society at large.

Article IV "Civil-military entanglements in Norwegian society: From everyday life to ceremonies and entertainment" submitted as a book chapter for *Civil-military entanglements* (ed. Birgitte R. Sørensen and Eyal Ben-Ari, book proposal under review at Berghahn Books) provides a broader background for understanding the sociocultural context examined in this thesis. It describes how the relationship between the military institution and Norwegian society has evolved since the end of the Cold War until today, and how the new role of the military as an expeditionary force has given rise to new cultural practices, both implemented by formal authorities and emerging in the fields of cultural production. The article discusses how the armed forces have become more removed from most people's regular lives, at the same time as the military institution itself has become more transparent and open.

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Article III: Gustavsen, Elin and Rafoss, Tore W. "Soldiers without a war? Official and personal framings of Norway's engagement in Afghanistan."
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Article IV: Gustavsen, Elin and Haaland, Torunn L. "Civil-military entanglements in Norwegian society: From everyday life to ceremonies and entertainment."
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INTRODUCTION

> *As a repeated, complex event that profoundly affects lives and institutions,*
> *war might appropriately claim a solid place in contemporary sociological*
> *discussion (Modell and Haggerty 1991, 206).*

Warfare is a profound sociological phenomenon, integral to understanding many social developments transpiring over time (Malešević 2010b). Veterans remain at the center of wars (MacLeish 2013, 7) and their experiences are an inherent and continuous part of human history (Shay 2002, Hynes 1998, Shay 1995). This thesis investigates the lived experience of contemporary warfare as conveyed through interviews conducted with Norwegian veterans of the operation in Afghanistan and female spouses of veterans.

Sylvester (2012, 484, emphasis added) reminds us that "war cannot be fully apprehended unless it is studied *up* from the people […]". This thesis has been motivated by a desire to get a more comprehensive understanding of how those most closely involved in contemporary warfare make sense of this experience. The Norwegian Ministry of Defense defines veterans as "personnel who on behalf of the Norwegian state have participated in a military operation (St.meld.nr.34 2008–2009, 10)." The veterans interviewed for this research conform with this definition; however, the thesis operates with a broader understanding of the *veteran experience* that encompasses the perspectives of spouses as well. Although spouses have not served in the theater of operation, they are intimately involved in all phases of a deployment and have been included to explore this experience from different vantage points.

Malešević (2010a, 193) points out how the sociological toolkit provides a wealth of potent concepts to grasp the many social implications of warfare. This thesis draws on theoretical perspectives from cultural sociology, lived experience and meaning-making as a cultural practice. The aim of the research has been to (1) better understand how veterans and spouses interpret their experiences with military deployments, and (2) to explore how the personal meaning assigned to armed service is shaped and channeled by the sociocultural context of Norwegian society.

Norway is a country far removed from the direct reality of warfare and where the societal presence of the armed forces has changed fundamentally since the end of the Cold War. To understand how the personal meaning of war is constructed, it is important to consider the way individual responses are shaped by collective interpretations (Mastroianni and Scott 2011, 18). With this in mind, this research commences from the notion of warfare as a unique point of encounter between individuals and the collective, as inspiringly captured in the following statement by Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari (1999, 1):

> Both warfare and armed service represent intensive meeting points between the individual and the collective. They are locations of engagement between biography and history and the places where social considerations acutely penetrate the lives of individuals.

This statement serves as a valuable starting point for how to think sociologically about the soldier-society nexus. It closely parallels C. Wright Mills' (2000 [1959], 6) notion of "the sociological imagination", described as an analytical gaze that works between "the personal troubles of milieu" and "the public issues of social structure". In line with this notion, the analytical focus has been on the intermediate level above the individual-psychological and below the macro-social (Roper 2000, 184); or in the words of Mills, in the interface between personal troubles and social structures.

Military sociology

This thesis belongs to the sociological sub-discipline known as military sociology. The field emerged in the aftermath of World War II, triggered by Huntington *(1957)* and Janowitz's *(1960)* foundational studies on civil-military relations. Over the years, numerous studies have examined a wide range of issues, like the transformation of the military organization, military culture, and the soldier profession (Haaland 2008, 26–27). Some of the themes investigated in this thesis touch on topics that have received notable attention from military sociologists, such as soldier motivation (eg. Battistelli 1997, Moskos 1977, Segal and Tiggle 1997) and military identities (eg. Franke 2000, Higate 2003). Despite the emerging number of studies, however, military sociology has never had a clear theoretical center; as noted by Siebold (2001, 141) "there has been more of a continual dialog". This thesis contributes to this dialog with a qualitative study of the veteran experience.

The armed forces have received little sociological attention in Norway (Bjørnstad 2011, 7, Neumann and Neumann 2011)[1] . This thesis, therefore, examines a novel theme in the context of Norwegian sociology. Moreover, due to a predominance of quantitative studies within the broader realm of military sociology, there has been a "distinct lack" of qualitative research that engages with subjectivities, experiences and people's life-worlds (Rech et al. 2016, 7). Rech and colleagues (2016) argue that there is a pressing need for studies that help to unpack the complexities involved with regards to everyday-life implications of military activities. This thesis contributes to fill these knowledge gaps, providing both sociological insights into the Norwegian armed forces and a qualitative investigation of the lived experience of military deployments.

To set the scene for the research, this chapter continues with a brief outline of Norway's participation in international operations and the development of veteran affairs. Both sections recapitulate part of the analysis elaborated in article IV. Then follows a review of research conducted on veterans and military families, before I zoom in on the particular theme investigated in this thesis, namely the personal meaning of war.

Norway in international operations

Over the past 70 years approximately 100,000 Norwegian individuals have participated in more than 40 international operations (Forsvaret 2012). These have predominantly been peacekeeping operations, the UNIFIL engagement in Lebanon being the most extensive mission, lasting from 1978 and 20 years forward. The NATO-led operation in Bosnia commencing in 1995 was a crucial turning point for Norway's participation abroad, representing the first time since World War II that Norwegian soldiers served in combat roles. Norwegian soldiers have since been involved in foreign combat operations in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan.

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[1] As pointed out by Bjørnstad (2011), Norwegian sociologists have been rather uninterested in studying the military as a societal institution (see also Slagstad 2016). The journal *Sosiologi i dag* (Sociology Today, ceased publication in 2016) published a special issue on military sociology in 2011 (issue 41/1) that contained four articles in Norwegian, but besides this publication the sparse literature that exists has mainly emerged in the interface between political science and history (for an overview see Bjørnstad, 2011: 7). In addition, some master's theses and research reports can be found that examine the armed forces from a social science perspective (for an overview see Gustavsen 2012).

Afghanistan was the main theater of operations for Norwegian soldiers from 2001 to 2014 and more than 9000 people have been deployed in a range of capacities, including infantry units, Special Forces and fighter aircraft. For a long time Norway was one of the largest contributors relative to population size (Norges Offentlige Utredninger 2016, Oma and Ekhaugen 2014). In 2005 Norway took command of the NATO operation in the northern province of Faryab. This was at first a relatively quiet part of the country, but from 2007 the security situation deteriorated significantly as insurgency groups strengthened their foothold in the area. Norwegian soldiers routinely became involved in combat with enemy forces (Norges Offentlige Utredninger 2016, 58). Several veterans in this study were deployed during the most intense periods, between 2009 and 2011, and experienced highly dramatic situations where their lives were at risk. For instance, one veteran was part of a military convoy whose first vehicle hit an improvised explosive device (IED) that instantly killed the driver. Another veteran was one of the first responders to a scene of a suicide attack. In total 10 Norwegians lost their lives in operations in Afghanistan (Norges Offentlige Utredninger 2016, 8).

Veterans' affairs in Norway
Two incidents occurred in 2011 – the year before this research commenced – which shed a revealing light on the state of veteran affairs in Norwegian society. In early 2011 a small-scale scandal erupted when the national media uncovered that the Norwegian Ministry of Defense did not have a register of physical injuries suffered by service personnel throughout the 10 years Norway had been involved in Afghanistan (VG 2011). The lack of information about facts one would expect to be basic knowledge gave a grim impression of veteran affairs. Then, a few months later, the Norwegian government presented a comprehensive Plan of Action that had been several years in the making, consisting of 126 measures that would improve the care and recognition of Norway's veteran population (Departementene 2011). Six government ministers were present at the official launch of this policy document (Bentzrød 2011), a strong testament to the renewed priority given to veteran affairs.

Veterans have traditionally not constituted a visible and esteemed social group in Norwegian society, with the notable exception of Second World War veterans. Although Norway did participate in various peacekeeping missions during the Cold War, this was viewed as auxiliary compared to the main task of national defense. Those who were deployed were mainly civilians recruited "from the streets" who received limited training and only scant

attention from the military and political establishment (Haaland 2008). Until recent years, veteran affairs were not prioritized and many would argue that political authorities have neglected its responsibility towards the veteran population.

At the same time there has been a significant shift over the past 10 years, during which political authorities and the armed forces have gradually recognized the need to develop a better veteran policy. The lengthy engagement in Afghanistan has been an important catalyst, and among measures taken to signify society's appreciation of its veterans are the appointment of a Veteran Inspector, the institution of a national Veterans Day on 8 May – the same date Norway was liberated from Nazi occupation in 1945 – and the arrangement of public homecoming and medal ceremonies with official representation from the highest level of government (Departementene 2011). In addition to such partly symbolic initiatives, the Norwegian Ministry of Defense has also established a better system for economic compensation of veterans who have been injured during service, either physically or psychologically. A more comprehensive family policy has also been implemented, which includes the arrangement of a "family day" before upcoming tours, and the introduction of family coordinators in some of the military units with the highest rotation to Afghanistan (Forsvaret 2014).

Research on veterans and military families
Research on veterans as a distinct, social group emerged in the United States after World War II. *The American Soldier* (Stouffer et al. 1949) represents a cornerstone study based on surveys conducted with half a million American soldiers. Schuetz's (1945) article is another early classic that problematizes the discord that may arise between soldiers and the civilian population who may find it difficult to relate to the experiences of returning soldiers.

Overall, the literature on veterans has mainly focused on two areas of study: the psychological impact of service (eg. Horesh et al. 2011, Jakupcak et al. 2009, Schlenger et al. 1992, Tsai et al. 2012, Walker 2010; for a review see Hussain, Heir, and Weisæth 2010) and the socioeconomic trajectory of veterans, often in comparison to the non-veteran population (eg. Angrist and Krueger 1994, Angrist 1990, Teachman and Tedrow 2004, Walker 2010). The Vietnam War led to an increased awareness of so-called "hidden wounds", concerning the mental impact of wartime service (Camacho and Attwood 2007). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) became an official diagnosis in 1980 and has since served as an important

prism for understanding negative stress reactions. The phenomenon, however, is far from new, and had previously been described under different names such as "shell shock", "battle fatigue" and "war neurosis" (Burnell, Boyce, and Hunt 2011, Scott 1992).

Research on Norwegian veterans has also mainly focused on health issues and stress reactions, and the predominant research effort has been oriented towards veterans of the UNIFIL force in Lebanon (e.g. Mehlum and Weisæth 2002, Mehlum 1995, 1999). In 2013, the armed forces conducted a questionnaire-based study of Norwegian veterans of Afghanistan. This was the first study of this veteran group which provided insight into a wide range of issues related to their deployment and post-service reintegration. A main finding of this study was a low prevalence of mental symptoms (Forsvarets sanitet 2013, see also Hougsnæs et al. 2017). In addition, Lien and colleagues (2016) conducted a study of Afghanistan veterans that examined positive aspects of deployments from a psychological point of view.

Studies of military families have also been dominated by a quantitative orientation. Main topics of investigation include stress reactions among family members (Burrell et al. 2006, Sheppard, Malatras, and Israel 2010, Warner et al. 2009), management strategies (Rossetto 2013, Wood, Scarville, and Gravino 1995) and relationship maintenance (Parcell and Maguire 2014, Merolla 2010, Karakurt et al. 2013for an overview of military families research see Booth et al., 2007). Military families have been conceptualized as an intersection of two greedy societal institutions (Segal 1986). International deployments have been cited as the number one challenge for these families (Booth et al. 2007), in which loneliness and fear for their partner's safety has been identified as the most acute stressors for the spouses (Warner et al. 2009). Some ethnographic studies have provided rich descriptions of how military wives cope with, and adapt to, the military life style (MacLeish 2013, Harrell 2000). Yet there are few studies that provide thick descriptions of the meaning-making strategies utilized by family members.

The personal meaning of war
Due to a predominant focus on psychological implications, much of the existing research on veterans and spouses has been conducted within a "war-as-trauma" perspective (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999, 9). While not denying that wartime service is often dramatic – and

for some also traumatic – it is important to remember that this assumption is partly a cultural product of World War I, further reinforced by the collective memory of the Vietnam War (Lomsky-Feder 1995, 464, 2004, 2–3; see also Fussell 1975). The focus of this thesis differs from the above-reviewed literature through its focus on the agency of individuals to create meaning from the veteran experience.

A small body of literature has emerged over the past two decades that investigates meaning-making in the context of modern warfare, with a particular focus on how sociocultural context shapes personal outcomes. The work of Edna Lomsky-Feder (1995, 2004) has been especially valuable for this thesis. Her research examines the narratives of Israeli Yom Kippur War veterans as "cultural texts that interweave personal experience with collective representations" (Lomsky-Feder 2004, 4). Through this analytical approach Lomsky-Feder demonstrates how individual interpretations are constructed in close reference to the collective meaning given to war, arguing that in a society where war is a central part of existence, those who serve are inclined to interpret it accordingly.

Woodward and Jenkins' (2012, 2008) research on British soldier memoirs provides insights into the meaning of war as constructed in a society where the experience is not an integrated part of everyday life. According to Woodward (2008, 264), veterans are participants in uneasy arguments concerning their role in relation to wider civilian society, which I, in article II, argue is also the case for military spouses. Their research finds that in the absence of a collective rationale that connects British Afghanistan veterans to a sense of national purpose, they give meaning to this experience by focusing on things closer to them, such as "mateship" oriented towards their fellow soldiers (Woodward 2008, 274–277). In a study of Norwegian Afghanistan memoirs, Dyvik´s (2016) demonstrates how these "embodied narratives" challenge official narratives about the engagement. These studies of national contexts where the direct experience of warfare is not widely shared focus attention on how the sociocultural environment does not necessarily provide cultural resources that enhance the collective meaning of soldiering. The studies also exhibit how the lived experience of veterans may challenge collective conceptions, like that of the heroic soldier (Woodward and Jenkings 2012, 505), the patriotic soldier (Woodward 2008) and the humanistic, peace-building soldier (Dyvik 2016).

King (2010) explores the theme from a different angle in his study of how British soldiers killed in Afghanistan have been commemorated by their society at home. He finds that the soldiers are remembered for their personal characteristics and individual motivation, not for their sacrifice in a national cause. He argues that a changing relationship between soldier and society has led to a personalized and domesticated perception of those who serve; an observation that is further substantiated by this research.

This body of articles has notably informed the analysis developed in this thesis by providing a theoretical and empirical base for understanding the interrelationship between sociocultural context and personal interpretations. Building on this foundation, the four articles that comprise this dissertation examine the Norwegian veteran experience from various angles, providing insights into how it is made meaningful within the particular context of Norway.

Summary of articles

Article I makes broad use of the interview data and presents an overview of the dominant forms of meaning-making identified among the veterans. Three interpretive frameworks are presented, conceptualized as a military, societal, and personal framework of meaning. The article draws explicitly on the work of Lomsky-Feder (1995, 2004) on Israeli veterans to compare and highlight the findings. It further utilizes Swidler's (2001, 1986) notion of a "settled" and "unsettled" culture to contextualize the interpretive strategies with regards to the lack of a shared war experience that characterizes Norwegian society. The article makes a first attempt to formulate the theoretical argument proposed by this thesis – that the sociocultural context in Norway does not provide a settled manner for interpreting wartime experiences. The article contributes to existing literature with a qualitative study of how veterans from the Afghanistan operation interpret their own service; an underutilized approach within veteran research. The article also contributes to the literature on the personal meaning of war with evidence from the Norwegian context, and offers a theoretical discussion of the cultural embeddedness of the frameworks used by the interviewed veterans.

Article II examines the veteran experience from a spousal point of view. It uses a narrative design to analyze eight interviews conducted with female spouses of Afghanistan veterans. The analysis presents two main strategies used by the women to make sense of deployments, conceptualized as "normalization" and "agency". The article demonstrates how the spouses

interpreted the deployment in a highly normalized fashion, while also being careful to state their ownership and equality in the situation. Continuing in the footsteps of article I, this second article elaborates on the argument made about contemporary warfare as an unsettled experience in Norwegian society. This argument is used to discuss the way these spouses framed the deployment as a privatized event within the realm of their family lifestyle. The article contributes to existing research with a qualitative study of meaning-making among military spouses and provides new insights into how deployments can be constructed as a normalized event; a finding that challenges a dominant assumption within much literature on military families, in which deployments are largely presented as a difficult and interruptive period for the family at home.

Article III places the veterans' meaning-making in relation to the official framing of the Afghanistan engagement. The analysis focuses on how the veterans both framed the deployment in highly job-related terms – as conceptualized in article I as a military framework of interpretation – at the same time as they were deeply frustrated with the public rhetoric surrounding the operation. There was widespread resentment among the veterans towards the rhetoric used by political leadership, in particular their refusal to call the operation a "war". To discuss the mismatch between the public and private framing, the article draws on the theoretical argument developed in articles I and II, arguing that the veterans' insistence on the importance of using the term "war" can be viewed as an attempt to restore a sense of connection between their personal effort and society.

Article IV provides a broader background for understanding the sociocultural context examined in this thesis. It describes how the relationship between the military institution and Norwegian society has evolved since the end of the Cold War until today; a period when many meeting points between the spheres have disappeared due to the downsizing and restructuring of the armed forces. The article further discusses how the new role of the military as an expeditionary force involved in missions abroad, especially in Afghanistan, has given rise to new cultural practices, both implemented by formal authorities and emerging in the fields of cultural production. The article discusses how the armed forces have become more removed from most people's regular lives, at the same time as the military institution itself has become more transparent and open. The analysis elaborates on why wartime service has become an unsettled experience in Norwegian culture. The article also contributes to existing literature with a sociological account of how civil-military relations in Norway have

changed over the past three decades – which is important to assess the cultural circumstances the interviewees face as they make sense of their wartime experiences.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> *The meaning an individual [veteran] can make of his or her individual experience [...] is conditioned by the collective interpretation of the larger events of which those experiences are a part (Mastroianni and Scott 2011, 18).*

This chapter lays out the theoretical framework of the thesis and elaborates on central concepts drawn upon to examine the issues at hand. I start by outlining the broader cultural foundation of this thesis, including the concepts of lived experience, cultural resources and settled and unsettled cultural contexts. I then address meaning-making in the context of warfare, before discussing the theoretical contribution made by the thesis concerning the privatization of the wartime experience.

Cultural sociology

This thesis builds on a cultural approach to the study of the veteran experience. Culture remains a central analytical category across various academic disciplines. Over the past 30 years it has emerged as a growing sub-field of sociological inquiry, referred to as the "cultural turn", connoting an increased interest in analyzing patterns of meaning as a way to understand various social phenomena (Nash 2001). While most scholars agree that culture represents an intrinsic and indispensable part of social life, the term can, at the same time, seem like an intangible construct that is difficult to define (Spillman 2002, 4).

The complexity of culture has given rise to various scholarly debates over its analytical value. An important debate concerns the explanatory power of cultural inquiry. The "sociology of culture" tradition tends to treat culture as an object to be studied, or, as a dependent variable that in itself is constituted by other social structures. The "cultural sociology" perspective proposed by Jeffery Alexander (2003) opposes this view of culture as a "thing" to be studied, and perceives it instead as a thread that runs through every conceivable social form. According to Alexander's position, culture should be considered an independent variable with an autonomous explanatory power. This thesis subscribes to the view of culture as a powerful force with an autonomous significance that plays a crucial role in shaping social life, and is, as such, informed by the "cultural sociology" perspective.

Culture and meaning

Max Weber stated that a fundamental task of sociological research is the interpretive understanding of social action (Weber 1978 [1922], 4). This is achieved by focusing on the subjective meaning individuals attach to their behavior. Without including the dimension of meaning one easily ends up with descriptive accounts of limited sociological value. Myriad perspectives can be drawn to bear on the concept of meaning. While there doesn't seem to exist a precise, agreed upon definition (Park 2010), this thesis builds on a general understanding of what the term implies. From an individual-psychological perspective, meaning is purposefulness that makes life comprehensible and helps organize the understanding of events (Isaksen 2000). Meaning enables people to conceive of an experience as being part of a greater whole; events we are unable to connect to something greater are difficult to comprehend and integrate into one's life (Ravn 2008).

Meaning-making can also be studied in cultural terms as processes located at different levels of social life (Spillman 2002, 5). Culture is the fabric that connects groups of people by shaping their habits, assumptions and how they see the world. It is also a realm of specific expressions in the form of practices and artifacts (Spillman 2002, 2–4). A main strand of cultural sociology concentrates on how meanings are constituted and used in the context of people's everyday lives (cf. Adler, Adler, and Fontana 1987). Another strand focuses on how social and institutional contexts shape cultural outcomes (Spillman 2002, 7–8).

A particular strength of cultural sociology lies in its ability to transcend divisions between subjective experience and social context to examine how these layers connect more precisely. In the words of Sharon Hays (1994, 67, 69):

> Culture is both internal and external, subjective and objective, privately held and publicly available […] it is social and transcendent at the same time as it is experienced as individual and subjective.

Macro-social phenomena are ultimately composed of practices enacted at the micro-level of individual action, which are motivated and made sense of by using available cultural resources. Grasping the connection between these levels necessitates the use of suitable concepts, supported by rigorous research procedures. The theoretical framework of this thesis draws on overlapping perspectives from the lived experience tradition and meaning-making as

a cultural practice. Ann Swidler's (2001, 1986) theory of culture as a repertoire has been utilized more specifically to identify and situate the meaning-making strategies used by veterans and spouses within the particular context of Norwegian society.

Lived experience

The first three articles of this thesis investigate meaning-making at the subjective level, elicited through interviews with Afghanistan veterans and spouses. The concept of "lived experience" lies at the heart of this approach, and refers to a research tradition interested in examining personal experience in its own right. The analytical focus is on experience as embodied and interpreted by those who have lived through it, and conveyed through their first-hand accounts (Van Manen 1990).

The lived experience tradition privileges personal accounts as a distinct source to obtain a deeper understanding of various social phenomena. However, to understand what significance personal experience assumes in people's lives it must be situated within a broader context of meaning. Therefore, while the first step of analysis is to map out the detailed content of a given instance of lived experience, the second step requires theoretical thinking about how pieces of evidence relate to a broader context of interpretation (Smith, Larkin, and Flowers 2009, 21).

Cultural repertoires and settled and unsettled contexts

Cultural models are usually the first point of reference when people interpret their experiences (Kane 1997, 251). Clifford Geertz (1973) has traditionally had a wide impact on how to understand such cultural models, famously stating that: "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs [...]" (Geertz 1973, 5). The "seamless-web" model associated with Geertz (cf. Vaisey 2010) conceptualizes culture as an all-encompassing construct in which people are inevitably ingrained. Ann Swidler (2001, 1986) proposes a different outlook known as the toolkit, or repertoire, theory of culture. Rather than viewing culture as a seamless web, Swidler perceives it as a repertoire that consists of various resources people can mobilize to organize experience. Culture is not approached as a unified system, but as something "vividly lived" and practiced in people's everyday lives (Swidler 2001, 20). This position gives theoretical space for considering the *use* of culture based on what resources are *available* in a given context. Swidler's approach

has been utilized in this thesis as a gateway to probe into the connectivity between the lived experiences of veterans and spouses and available meaning-making resources in the Norwegian culture at large.

To better comprehend the varying ways people use culture, Swidler makes a distinction between "settled" and "unsettled" lives, or periods in time. This conceptualization has been instrumental in developing the thesis' argument that Norway has an unsettled culture when it comes to the deployment experience. Swidler argues that in a settled life, or period in time, people use well-established, often taken-for-granted, models to organize experience. The use of culture tends to go unnoticed and cultural resources are engaged in a routine manner according to pre-established scripts. In an unsettled life or period in time, culture is not used according to pre-established resources; rather, unsettled circumstances cause people to mobilize their cultural resources in new and different manners (Swidler 2001, 89–107, 1986, 278–282). An illustration can be found in her own research on the meaning of love, where she demonstrates how people who go through an unsettled period of divorce talk about love differently to make sense of a changing situation.

In this thesis the concepts of "settled and "unsettled" are used to examine the accessibility of culturally established resources for how to interpret the experience of warfare. To serve this purpose, they have been used in a somewhat adapted manner. Whereas Swidler is concerned with the ways people use their cultural repertoire differently under various circumstances, this thesis is interested in how a specific society can be seen as having a settled or unsettled culture when it comes to specific experiences. The notion of a "settled culture" is used to connote social contexts that offer a set of established cultural tools for how to organize the experience in question. An "unsettled culture", on the other hand, denotes a context that doesn't offer an established cultural script for how to frame a given experience. An experience in itself can also be viewed as settled or unsettled; a settled experience has an established place in the culture at large, while an unsettled experience is more marginalized and peripheral.

The overall argument developed through this thesis is that unsettled experiences – like the experience of war in the case of Norway – are not accompanied by established cultural scripts for how to interpret their particular meaning. That doesn't mean people are unable to assign meaning to such experiences; rather, other interpretive strategies must be adopted to make

sense of the events. For instance, all the veterans in this study interpreted the deployment within a military framework in a remarkably similar fashion across the group. The veterans utilized resources that appeared to be shared and available within their local, professional military community. The spouses turned to the cultural notion of "agency" to convey their position, an easily available resource in late-modern western culture. At the same time, they also made sense of the deployment in reference to their personal family culture. The research demonstrates how the significance of the deployment experience was formulated through interpretive resources generated both at the micro-individual and mezzo-group level; and in some instances also through the use of generic cultural conceptions. Important to note, however, is that it was not framed according to a settled script generated collectively within the shared culture at large (cf. Lomsky-Feder 1995, 2004).

Swidler's theory has been criticized for failing to account for how specific resources are made available and diffused in a given context (Lamont 2004). It has also been critiqued for being unclear about why people reach for the particular resources they do (Vaisey 2010). All four articles of this thesis deal with the question of how cultural resources are made available – or *not* available – by focusing on the place of warfare in Norwegian society. Articles I, II and III use this notion to assess personal meaning-making strategies, whereas article IV provides a contextual background. By conceptualizing deployments as an unsettled experience in Norwegian culture, the thesis, in part, also addresses the question of why the interviewees mobilized the cultural resources that they did.

Meaning-making in the context of warfare

In line with this theoretical framework, a premise of this thesis is that subjective responses to warfare are inevitably shaped by available cultural forms of expression. The collective meaning of military service is most explicitly constructed and conveyed through shared cultural practices that help enhance the connection between soldiers and the national community (Ben-Amos 2003). However, the potential for wartime experiences to become endowed with collective meaning depends largely on the "capacity to connect with particular popular conceptions" (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper 2000, 13). Some events may, for various reasons, lack the capacity to achieve centrality within the shared culture. To understand the complexities involved it is necessary to probe into the way cultural and institutional

arrangements form a "collective interpretive system" that governs how armed service is made relevant and meaningful in society (Smith 2005, 11–12).

Lomsky-Feder (1995, 2004) points to three interrelated mechanisms that are central in this regard. First are institutionalized relations between the armed forces and society; most importantly, the institution of universal conscription that makes military service a shared experience for members of society. Second are social arrangements that construct this experience into a shared frame of reference into which people are socialized, through, for instance, school curricula and commemorative events. Third is a preoccupation within the cultural field that makes war a central theme of artistic expression. Lomsky-Feder demonstrates in her research on Israeli society how these mechanisms transpire across multiple social spheres, which contributes to making the personal experience part of the collective consciousness.

This thesis argues that the experience of war has a peripheral place in Norwegian society, which, in turn, makes it unsettled in the culture at large. To substantiate this claim one must look at the mechanisms that construct it into an unsettled experience. The most important is how changing civil-military relations have reshaped the links between military service and civilian society. Although the following discussion focuses on the Norwegian context, the trends can be detected in many other Western societies as well (cf. Segal, Moskos, and Williams 2000).

The unsettled place of war in Norwegian society
As accounted for in article IV, institutionalized relations between the military institution and civilian society have changed fundamentally over the past 30 years. During the Cold War the armed forces had a vast presence in society. Military bases were located throughout the country and universal male conscription subjected all male citizens to 12 months mandatory service (Græger and Leira 2005). Thus, military service became a shared frame of reference for the population at large, either through the direct participation of most men, or through the service of male friends and family members. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the military institution was significantly downsized and restructured into a much smaller semi-professional force (Bogen and Håkenstad 2015). Even though Norway continues to practice conscription – and even made it gender neutral from 2016 – today only 10 percent of each cohort is recruited yearly, by targeting those already motivated to serve (Forsvaret 2016). As a

result of this development, "things military" (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999) have become much less visible in everyday life and many arenas for routine contact between the military and civilian sphere have disappeared.

The professionalization of the armed forces is closely connected to the changing use of military force and increased participation in foreign military operations. Different from the Cold War security climate, these operations are not connected to a sense of collectively shared threat. Political authorities have made a notable effort in recent years to reinforce the national relevance of these operations through new forms of commemorative practices. Norway's participation abroad, especially in Afghanistan, has also brought about new cultural products, such as soldier memoirs and various TV-series – fiction and documentary – that provide new insights into military life, as discussed in article IV. While this confirms that there is a market for this topic, the consumption of these products depends entirely on the initiative and interest of the spectator.

McInnes (1999, 2002) summarizes the essence of the argument when he states that warfare in the West is no longer conducted by society as a whole, but by a small group of representatives – such as the veterans interviewed for this thesis. Most of the population have become "spectators, not participants", with the privilege to engage or disengage from the experience, in the same way as watching a game of sport (McInnes 2002, 143). As a consequence, modern-day warfare has become a limited affair with personal meaning only to a small minority. According to King (2010) it has led to a personalized and domesticated perception of those who serve, detaching the meaning of their service from a wider national purpose. The first three thesis articles corroborate this argument and demonstrate how both veterans and spouses interpreted the deployment in a privatized manner; the veterans within a military framework tied to their personally chosen profession and the spouses in close reference to their individually chosen lifestyle. At the same time, articles I and III also demonstrate that there was a notable sense of unease among many of the veterans with regard to their place in Norwegian society. This thesis provides a framework for understanding why the interviewees interpreted their deployment experience in the way that they did and what significance this has from a cultural perspective.

METHODOLOGICAL ACCOUNT

There is no such thing as unmediated reality and we all live on the border-line between reality and our perceptions of it (Berger and Richard 2005, 8).

Bryman (1984, 76) makes a distinction between methodology and methods, arguing that the former term refers to issues of epistemology, while the latter concerns the specific techniques and procedures undertaken to collect and analyze data. This chapter addresses both issues and how they apply to the thesis' research process.

The epistemological position of a sociological project concerns foundational questions about how to study social life; or, put somewhat differently, it connotes a manner of "viewing and talking about reality" and the implications this has for the production of knowledge (Gubrium and Holstein 1997, 5). This research builds primarily on interview data, but has also utilized document analysis. Like most qualitative projects, this research has been motivated by a desire to understand social phenomena on their own terms; an objective closely associated with the philosophical tradition of phenomenology and its particular interest in the multiplex experience of being human (Smith, Larkin, and Flowers 2009, 11). Qualitative researchers, including myself, utilize rich empirical sources that provide "thick descriptions" to obtain a deeper insight into the phenomenon under study (Geertz 1973). Thus, a particular advantage of qualitative inquiry is a sensitivity towards complexity and an alertness to subtle nuances (Ragin 1994, 78–84).

This thesis belongs more specifically to what Gubrium and Holstein (1997, 6–7) describe as the "naturalistic" vein of qualitative research. This is a cornerstone approach of qualitative sociology interested in reality as located in the immediate context of people's lives. The main objective of this thesis has been to study social reality from the point of view of the veterans and spouses, combined with a contextual and cultural interpretation of the meaning systems they employ (cf. Bryman 1984, 77–78). The epistemological privilege given to personal experience rests on a perception of social reality as constructed by those who live it, while also mediated by social forces beyond individuals themselves (Adler, Adler, and Fontana 1987). This is a similar premise to many studies in cultural sociology, which demonstrates how methodology and theoretical notions are often entwined in qualitative research.

Epistemological issues are closely connected with the use of concrete methods (Berezin 2014, 142). Interviewing has been termed the "workhorse" method of cultural research (Patterson 2014, 4). Its main advantage lies in its ability to tap into people's lived experience and the imagined meanings they attach to it (Lamont and Swidler 2014, 158–159). When working with interview data there is, at the same time, a slippery slope to methodological individualism with regard to the conclusions that are made. It is therefore important to demonstrate how the interview data is a source to sociological insights beyond the personal viewpoints of the participants; an ambition that has guided the analysis presented in this thesis.

To investigate the sociocultural context in which the interviewees construct meaning from their experiences, the thesis has also made use of document analysis. Considering the centrality of the interviews, however, more attention will be devoted to this data in the following discussion, which, in line with qualitative research practice, aims to present a transparent account of how the data has been collected and analyzed (Rubin and Rubin 1995, 85).

Two interview designs

Two different interview designs have been utilized in this thesis. The veteran interviews followed a thematic design, whereas the spousal interviews followed a narrative approach. I started this research by interviewing the veterans. I wanted to interview a sizable group of people and a thematic approach was used to take control over themes to discuss, and to make sure everyone covered the same topics during the conversation. In the process of analyzing 29 interview transcripts the thematic structure was very helpful. Even though each conversation was somewhat different, I was able to orient myself in the data, which would be a challenging and time consuming affair if each interview had its own individual structure.

After I had conducted a significant number of interviews that followed the same format, I experienced that the thematic structure created a certain pattern that to a large extent shaped how the veteran interviews were carried out. To break this pattern and challenge myself as an interviewer, I used a narrative design for the spousal interviews based on fewer, but longer accounts.

The veteran interviews: Sample and recruitment

I conducted 29 interviews with a group of veterans comprised of both active-duty service members and veterans who had left the armed forces. The two groups were initially included to see if they yielded any significant differences in how they talked about their experience. However, the groups turned out to be surprisingly similar in their views and interpretations and were therefore not maintained as distinct categories in the final analysis. All participants were recruited on the basis of purposive sampling based on their fulfilment of two predefined criteria (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006, 61): I wanted the veterans preferably to be in their late 20s or early 30s, and have deployed to Afghanistan one or more times. I wanted to interview veterans who had served in the armed forces for some time, yet had not advanced into higher-ranking leadership positions. The age group was also chosen based on an assumption that they had reflected more thoroughly over their position compared to a younger cohort, also given that they had made the choice to continue in the armed forces. Most interviewees matched the age profile, with a few outliers that were some years younger or older. Several interviewees had also deployed to other missions than Afghanistan, predominantly in the Balkans, but the interviews only addressed their experience from Afghanistan.

The sample included two women, whereas the rest were men. I attempted to recruit more females, but the male dominance of the military organization made it difficult to access women. Since gender issues were not a main concern of this research, I did not view it as problematic that there were only a few female participants and their interviews were analyzed on the same terms as the rest. I do recognize, however, that the study might have yielded different results if more women were included. Family situation was not a sampling criterion, but most participants were married or in a long-term relationship, while there were also some that were single or divorced. About half of the interviewees had children.

Interviews with the active-duty veterans took place at an army base in Northern Norway in the spring of 2013. I contacted the commander of a unit with a high rotation to Afghanistan, who showed an immediate interest in the project and put together a list of veterans who fit the profile described above. He also gave permission to conduct interviews at the base during work hours. It was important that interviewees were not pre-selected by the unit leadership. Potential participants were contacted by me personally via an email which described the project and what participation entailed. Some interviewees responded positively to the email,

while others agreed during a follow-up phone call. No one declined to participate, although some were unable due to practical reasons.

Interviews with veterans who had left the armed forces were conducted in the summer and early fall of 2013. Interviewees were recruited through snowball sampling, targeting veterans who fit the same profile as the active-duty sample and lived in the vicinity of Oslo. At first it proved difficult to get in contact with enough participants and I only managed to recruit a handful through people I knew. After struggling for some time I contacted an acquaintance I had met a few times through work, who I knew had a high standing with many professional soldiers. He posted an update on his Facebook-profile where he informed about my project and encouraged veterans willing to participate to contact me directly. This gatekeeper led to a rush of people who volunteered to be interviewed, and in the end I even had to turn people down. This particular gatekeeper and his use of social media proved invaluable for recruiting enough participants. In Norway, younger veterans tend not to be involved in veteran's organizations and their veteran-identity is not detectable unless revealed by the person him- or herself. Even though snowball sampling is biased towards the recruitment of people from the same network, it is also an effective tool for making contact with people from a population that is hidden or difficult to access (Atkinson and Flint 2001). Even though many of the interviewed veterans shared an acquaintance with the gatekeeper, they represented a variety of backgrounds in terms of current occupation and deployments to Afghanistan. The gatekeeper has a wide network and many of the people interviewed had deployed at various times and in different capacities. My personal, though undocumented, impression is that interviewees did not comprise a close group of people who all knew each other; although I do recognize that is a risk when relying on one main gatekeeper in the recruitment process.

Data collection

The interviews were conducted as thematic, semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide consisting of about 30 open-ended questions (see appendix I). For the active-duty interviews, I was assigned a seminar room inside the camp and participants were allowed to schedule interviews during work hours. Interviews with civilian veterans were conducted at a seminar room at my research institute, or at the workplace of the participant – depending on their preference. The interviews lasted on average for about one hour, with some running a bit shorter or longer. The conversation started on a broad note asking the interviewees to share

freely from their deployment experience. Based on where they left off I would continue with questions from the interview guide. I attempted to maintain a natural flow in the conversation, but the interviews were largely structured by the guide. One specific issue, however, was introduced by the participants spontaneously in conversation, namely the political rhetoric surrounding the Afghanistan engagement. Already during the very first interview this surfaced as a topic the participant felt strongly about. It is important to employ a flexible design when doing qualitative research to pick up on unexpected themes such as this, and the topic was incorporated into the interview guide early in the process (Rubin and Rubin 1995, 44).

An interview is a complex social event (Larkin, Watts, and Clifton 2006). There is an inherent asymmetry in the situation, in which the interviewer tells very little about him- or herself, while the interviewee shares personal information about their own life. At the same time, people are often glad for the opportunity to talk to an interested listener (Rubin and Rubin 1995, 103). My interview experience was very good overall, even though there were variations to how successful I felt each conversation had been. Some interviews were slow-paced and the participant would offer only short answers, or had difficulty elaborating on the topics that were discussed. In some interviews, I sensed a certain level of skepticism towards me as a civilian outsider. The interviewees appeared guarded in their answers and I got the impression that they withheld information, in particular about their experiences in Afghanistan. Other interviews went incredibly well. For instance, one participant came in the door and immediately showed me a picture of his children that he had just received, and the interview continued with the same open tone. Several people said this was the first time in very long they had talked at length about the deployment and they were thankful for the opportunity to do so. To sum up, some interviews were challenging because the participants were hesitant to elaborate or open up; however, most interviews went well and confirmed the fact that people are often happy for an opportunity to talk to a devoted listener.

All interviews were fully recorded and transcribed by an external consultant based on anonymized recordings.

The spousal interviews: Sample and recruitment

This second part of the project was based on fewer interviews conducted with eight military spouses. Narrative inquiry refers to a sub-type of qualitative research that examines texts that have a storied form (Chase 2005, 429). By employing a narrative design, I wanted to devote more attention to the composition of each specific story and utilize the "power of the particular" to get a detailed insight into how these women experienced the deployment (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007, 21). As with the veteran interviews, I also wanted to understand how the sociocultural context shaped their accounts and examine which cultural resources they used to frame their experiences.

I operated with three main sampling criteria: I wanted to interview spouses with young children, whose partner had deployed at least once to Afghanistan, and who did not have any extensive experience with the armed forces themselves. Due to logistics, I wanted to conduct interviews in the vicinity of Oslo. The spouses were recruited through snowball sampling, starting with a shortlist of spouses from the veterans already interviewed. Two women from this group were interviewed and the rest were recruited through contacts in the armed forces, civilian acquaintances, and referrals from the participating spouses.

The spouses were either married or a long-time cohabitant with a veteran of Afghanistan. Their ages ranged from early 30s to late 40s. All participants had either two or three children and most women maintained full-time work outside the home while their partners were deployed. The exceptions were one stay-at-home mother and a woman who was on maternity leave to care for her newborn baby. I initially tried to include men in the sample also, but since I didn´t want the interviewees to have substantial experience from the armed forces it proved difficult to find suitable participants within the data collection time frame.

Interviews were collected during the spring of 2015 and lasted between one and two hours. They took place either at my office, at a quiet cafe, in the interviewee's home or at their job – depending on their preference.

Data collection

To conduct a successful narrative interview the researcher needs to adopt a different attitude compared to a thematic interview, in which the conversation is largely structured according to a list of pre-defined questions. In order to elicit the stories of the participants the interviewer needs to follow the narrator down their own trail and into what Gubrium and Holstein (2009,

72) refer to as "the varied nooks and crannies of their social world". This requires the researcher to give up some control over how the interview will play out (Riessman 2008, 24). These interviews were not accompanied by a list of questions to steer the conversation. Instead, the women's stories unfolded largely on their own terms, although questions were asked intermittently to probe certain themes. Because of the loose structure, I felt less constrained by a list of questions that had to be covered and the interviews felt more like a regular conversation. The fact that all of the women shared a fundamental experience with myself, namely that of motherhood, seemed to contribute to a good conversational relationship as I could easily relate to aspects of their stories that concerned childrearing and family logistics. Unlike some of the veterans, none of these interviewees appeared guarded or reserved in their responses. Some of them had to warm up a bit at before the conversation flowed well, but as far as I am concerned everyone talked openly about their experience of being a military family.

All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed by an external consultant based on anonymized recordings.

Analyzing the interviews

The analysis was a meticulous process of first disentangling comprehensive data, and then translating significant features into potent analytical concepts (Ewick and Silbey 2003, 1341). The analysis followed a grounded approach in the sense that it did not start with any pre-defined concepts or hypotheses, but evolved in a manner that allowed the findings to emerge from the data itself (Glaser and Strauss 1967). While the grounded theory tradition originally prescribed a set of concrete procedures for generating new theory, its principles are more often employed as general guidelines for how to work inductively with empirical data – as has been the case in this thesis (Midré 2009). A main tenet of a grounded method is to approach the data without a preconceived theoretical stance. It is, at the same time, humanly impossible to discard of all pre-existing assumptions. Richardson and Kramer (2006, 501) note that "an open mind doesn't mean an empty head", arguing that it is necessary to engage some pre-existing knowledge in order to ask the right questions during the analysis – while still being sensitive to the uniqueness of the data. Going into the interviews, my pre-existing knowledge was mainly based on the research literature I had read beforehand. I was, at the same time,

careful to keep an open mind about new and unexpected insights that might come from these interviews.

The interview analysis has been an exercise in double hermeneutics in which I, as the researcher, make sense of the participants, who through the interviews make sense of their personal experience (Smith, Larkin, and Flowers 2009, 3). That means my gaze and interpretive focus is an inherent part of the analysis that is produced. According to Bruner (1991, 7) "the best hope of hermeneutic analysis is to provide an intuitively convincing account of the meaning of the text as a whole in the light of the constituent parts that make it up." In my experience there is definitely something intuitive about the way the analysis unfolded, in that I got a sense of what themes might be interesting to explore further (cf. Stefansen 2011, 52–53). This being said, I have been careful to conduct a rigorous coding process to ensure that the analysis is closely embedded in the empirical data.

Coding and concept development

The veteran interviews were coded in a thematic manner using the qualitative software program ATLAS.ti. The interviews were first assigned codes that emerged directly from the phrases and words used by the participants. The aim of this first phase was to maintain the richness and subtle nuances of the data by letting it speak through the codes that were assigned (Tjora 2012, 184). This first phase generated a total of 97 codes. In the next phase, similar codes were collapsed into broader categories, from which the dominant concepts emerged. This was a meticulous process of going back-and-forth between codes and interview transcripts. Potential concepts were constantly revised and re-worked before settling on the ones that structured the final analysis, referred to in the articles as frameworks of interpretation.

The analysis of the narrative interviews proceeded somewhat differently. To maintain the composition and totality of each story, I opted not to utilize a software program as I believed it could easily lead to a pattern of thematic coding. The transcripts were instead printed out, and I started by highlighting the numerous sub-stories in each interview. These sub-stories were typed into a separate document containing between 28 and 60 storylines per interview. After reviewing each narrative individually, the interviews were approached collectively to look for common themes. To avoid the pitfall of "narrative smoothing" (Spence 1986) in

which certain aspects are either omitted or enlarged to enhance the smoothness of the findings, I focused specifically on the two narratives most different from one another as an analytical device. The trajectory of each narrative was written on large card boards; then I plotted in other interviews that corroborated the themes identified. By using small post-it notes I could add or switch around analytical points, or test potential concepts that captured the narrative strategies. To think conceptually about the narratives was a slow process, and the small sample was a prerequisite for the analysis to proceed in this manner. Eventually, two main strategies were identified used by the spouses to make sense of the deployment experience, as presented in article II.

Sample size and data saturation

Data saturation refers to the point when no new themes are observed in the data (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006, 59). Saturation is reached when participants begin to repeat the same variety of interpretations, which provides an indication that the analysis has captured the central issues at stake (Rubin and Rubin 1995, 73). There are no set guidelines for how many interviews are needed to produce a saturated analysis. Some scholars argue that as few as five interviews are sufficient in a phenomenological study, whereas 20 to 50 interviews have been suggested for grounded theory studies (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006, 61). Guest and colleagues (2006) document that 97 percent of all codes used in their study were identified within the first 12 interviews out of a sample of 60. I have deliberately chosen to work with two different sample sizes in this thesis. While I have not conducted a systematic analysis of if, and when, saturation was reached, in my experience the most dominant interpretations emerged quite early in the analysis of both groups.

Presentation of findings

The presentation of findings is the last step of the analytical process, in which excerpts from the data are used to illustrate and reinforce the analytical points that are made. There is no established standard for how much empirical detail to include when it comes to the number and length of quotes. LaRossa (2012, 648) makes a distinction between two strategies. One is the "indenting strategy", in which sizable excerpts are inserted as blocked quotes, exposing the readership to a greater amount of material. The other is the "integrative strategy" in which smaller excerpts up to a few sentences are sprinkled throughout the manuscript. The former approach gives the reader a better chance of assessing the authenticity of the interpretations offered, but also runs the risk of overloading the audience with too much detail and detracting

from the overall analysis. The latter approach allows for a chance to draw upon a greater range of data, while the lack of context can also distort the value of the findings. This thesis has adopted a middle position, presenting both longer, indented quotes that capture the essence of key arguments, while also integrating shorter quotes and phrases throughout the articles. I have been very meticulous about substantiating all interpretations in the data, not expecting the readership to believe my claims without the empirical support.

Even though data analysis inevitably involves a reduction of complexity, it is important not to smooth over the "contradiction and unpredictability that real lives normally encompass" (Lamont and Swidler 2014, 164). Through the interview analysis I have endeavored to account for the multidimensional way both veterans and spouses interpret their deployment experiences, using quotes from across the interview samples, not just from some selected favorite interviews (cf. Jarvinen 2000). I have also been careful to incorporate voices that diverge from the majority to include competing perspectives on certain issues (Lomsky-Feder 1995, 476, Hughes 1999, 370).

Document analysis and other sources of data

This thesis has also utilized documents as a source to examine the place of warfare in Norwegian society. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents (Bowen 2009, 28). Unlike interview analysis, it involves texts that have been recorded without the intervention of a researcher (Silverman 2001, 119). Documents are a source of valuable information about the context within which participants operate. It is also a pertinent means for tracing change or development over time (Bowen 2009).

This research has analyzed various forms of documents, used in articles III and IV of the thesis: (1) newspaper articles (2) political speeches (3) archival documents from the Ministry of Defense and the private archive of former MP Hans Røsjordet (4) military memoirs written by Norwegian soldiers and TV series and documentaries.

In article III, written with co-author Tore W. Rafoss, newspaper articles, political speeches and statements were analyzed to examine how the operation in Afghanistan has been framed by political authorities. Documents were collected through Retriever, a digital archive of the most important Norwegian newspapers, and from the official government webpage that contains a database of public government documents. We focused on documents that clearly

conveyed justifications for participating in Afghanistan, which were found most clearly in Parliamentary speeches given by the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense. We also looked at public statements where the abovementioned ministers discussed certain aspects of the engagement, most notably the decision not to refer to the engagement as a "war". Both I and my co-author read each document and then compared the themes identified by each of us.

Article IV, written with co-author Torunn L. Haaland, draws on various sources to examine the trajectory of changing civil-military relations in Norway. As stated in the article, the analytical ambition has not been to provide an in-depth study of each source of data, but to present an overview that allows us to discuss the broader development as a backdrop to articles I, II and III. The description of the Cold War period builds on secondary sources. We also use the personal experience of my co-author as a concrete example of a typical everyday life experience from this period. To examine new practices that have emerged in the past decade we rely on archival documents, public statements and newspaper articles, as well as books and TV-series.

Archival documents were retrieved from the private collection of former MP Hans Røsjordet, the first person to take a formal initiative to establish a Veteran's Day in Norway, and from the archive at the Ministry of Defense. Røsjordet accepted an invitation to meet me and my co-author for an informal interview and allowed us to make copies of the correspondence he had with veterans' organizations concerning their views on establishing a Veteran's Day. The Ministry of Defense archive granted us access to their documents concerning the establishment of a Veteran's Day and a Memorial Day. 103 documents were filed in the archive under "veterans day" and 23 documents under "memorial day". All documents were copied and filed chronologically in ring binders. Then my co-author and I made summaries of the documents with relevant information, which generated an overview of the process leading to the establishment of these two events. In addition to these documents, we have also reviewed military memoirs, other eyewitness accounts of Norwegian military operations in Afghanistan published over the past 10 years, and TV-series about the armed forces, both documentary and fiction.

Researcher positionality

The military is a unique societal organization authorized by the state to use violent means to maintain national security (Ben-Ari and Levy 2014, 12). Because of its mandate the organization is marked by a cautious attitude towards outsiders, and researchers have often experienced difficulties getting access (Soeters, Shields, and Rietjens 2014). My positionality as a researcher at an institute that is part of the armed forces situated me within the military organization. This eased the research process in certain ways, given that I had security clearance, access to the military email system and a network of contacts in the organization.

On the other hand, my positionality also necessitated careful consideration of how it might affect the research process (Ben-Ari and Levy 2014). Before the interviews could commence the Defense Staff had to approve the study, a procedure where I only informed them about the project. I also talked to a security officer about how to handle classified information that might surface during the interviews. Although the project has been financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Defense, it has been a premise from the start that it should be carried out independently without interference from any parties in the military organization. This has also been the case.

Ethical considerations

This research has relied on human subjects, which requires careful consideration of ethical implications. The project has been approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data to ensure it follows the necessary procedures with regard to informed consent, confidentiality, and maintaining the integrity of participants. In line with the guidelines provided by the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2016, 13–16) all interviewees were informed about the aim of the research, who financed it, who will access the data and how it will be used. Participants were informed both when I initiated contact, and in a written statement presented before the interviews commenced (see appendix II). I also emphasized their right to withdraw at any time without explanation; a right no one used.

To secure the anonymity of all participants, no names were recorded. Interviews were given a number that corresponded with a list that was kept separate and that only I could access. The recordings contained no personal information and I sometimes edited out sensitive information before the interview was sent to the transcriber; mainly details concerning service in Afghanistan. I have also been careful to obscure details in the analysis that may identify

participants. It should be noted that when I conducted interviews at the military base, several veterans had talked to other participants about being interviewed and thereby knew of each other. Similarly, those spouses who referred me to other participants also knew each other's identity. With the exception of people the interviewees informed themselves, I am the only person who knows their identity.

When interviewing soldiers there is a risk that someone might share information about illegal conduct that took place while deployed. This can potentially create a dilemma between the confidentiality agreement governing the interview situation and the duty to notify (Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees 2016, 13–16). I did not experience any episodes that raised this dilemma, however, some interviewees did share information about episodes that were classified and could not be repeated outside the room. In some cases they asked me to turn off the recorder before going into such episodes, and a few times I deleted details I assumed could be classified after the interview was over.

The ethical issue I found most challenging is what Kari Stefansen (2011, 51) describes as "managing the trust" of the participants. This is not merely about treating the data in a confidential manner, but about presenting it in a way that does justice to those who have shared their personal experience. In line with qualitative analysis techniques, the interview data has been structured and presented through the use of concepts that are abstracted from the interviews. That means they are interpreted according to frames that might be foreign to the participants. To enhance the empirical basis of the concepts that are presented, however, I have been careful to link all interpretations closely to the data and use quotes from across the entire sample.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This thesis offers a detailed analysis of how Norwegian veterans of Afghanistan and spouses of veterans construct meaning from their experiences with deployments. It also provides a contextualization of how their meaning-making strategies are shaped by the sociocultural context. Little research has been conducted on veterans from a qualitative and cultural perspective. This thesis, therefore, provides novel insights into the meaning of contemporary wartime service through the eyes of some of those most intimately involved. The thesis contributes to military sociology more broadly with a study of lived experience and everyday-life implications of military activities, a topic that has received relatively little attention within this sub-discipline. Within Norwegian sociology few studies have focused on the armed forces, and the thesis examines a novel theme in this academic context as well.

The main empirical findings of this research relate to how the interviewees interpreted their experiences and can be summarized as follows:

- The veterans interpreted their deployment within three main frameworks, conceptualized as a military-, a societal-, and a personal framework of meaning. The military framework was most prevalent and generated meaning from the professional aspects of their deployment. A societal framework was used to emphasize the societal value of their service, and a personal framework conveyed what impact this experience had in their personal lives. While the veterans largely interpreted the deployment as a professional assignment, they also expressed a sense of discontent with their place in Norwegian society – most clearly expressed through their frustration with the political framing of the Afghanistan engagement and the refusal among the political establishment to call the operation a "war".

- The spouses utilized two main narrative resources to organize their experience with deployment, conceptualized as "normalization" and "agency". In contrast to much existing research on military families, they did not frame the deployment as a negative and interruptive event, but conveyed a normalized interpretation in which the meaning of their husbands' deployment was constructed in close reference to the private realm of family life.

- The veterans and spouses did not interpret the deployment according to a settled script generated collectively within the shared culture at large. Instead they framed their experiences through resources generated at the personal and interpersonal level, in some instances also through the use of generic cultural conceptions like that of personal agency. The deployment was to a large extent discussed as a privatized event situated as part of their individually-chosen profession, or family lifestyle. A privatized interpretation was most notable among the interviewed spouses. Most veterans would concurrently highlight the national value of having served in a military operation abroad.

To probe into the connectivity between the personal meaning-making strategies and the sociocultural environment, the thesis utilizes Swidler's theory of culture and her notion of settled and unsettled cultural contexts. These concepts are used to formulate the overall argument developed through this research, namely that military deployments represent an unsettled experience in Norwegian society and culture. As a result, the shared culture does not provide an established script for how to interpret its particular meaning generated collectively in union with civilian society. The argument is buttressed by engaging with the work of Edna Lomsky-Feder on Israeli society. This is used as a valuable point of comparison to enhance the characteristics of the Norwegian context.

This thesis demonstrates the theoretical value of utilizing Swidler's concepts of settled and unsettled cultures to expand our thinking about how a given cultural context makes *specific* cultural resources available for the interpretation of *particular* experiences. By accounting for why deployments can be viewed as an unsettled experience in Norwegian culture, this research addresses this question of how cultural resources are made available – or, in this case, not available; a theme Swidler has been criticized for neglecting in her own work. This use of Swidler represents fruitful territory for studying veterans and spouses in other national contexts – as well as other social groups beyond the military realm.

While a thesis provides new knowledge that illuminates certain issues, it also generates a host of questions that lay the ground for future research. This study has focused on veterans and spouses in a specific national context, which begs the question of how the findings hold up outside the case of Norway. Many Western countries have gone through a similar transformation with regard to the restructuring of the armed forces; at the same time each

culture has its own history and characteristics that make the sociocultural environment unique in its own way. It would therefore be interesting to study the veteran experience in other national contexts to see how they compare to the present study. Moreover, this thesis builds on interview data from a limited number of participants, associated with the army. It would be valuable to see if results would be different if interviewing people from the other military branches. Lastly, the contextual analysis of changing military relations in Norway looks at a development that is still in progress. Initiatives taken by the political establishment to enhance the position of veterans are relatively new. It would therefore be interesting to revisit the subject and explore how veterans who deploy in the years to come respond to this ongoing development, and what implications this has for the meaning they assign to their military participation.

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II

The privatized meaning of wartime deployments:
Examining the narratives of Norwegian military spouses

Abstract

This study examines the narratives of eight female spouses of Norwegian veterans of the war in Afghanistan. The narratives are approached as rich cultural texts that arise in the interface between their individual experiences and the socio-cultural milieu. The analysis focuses on the use of "normalization" and "agency" as narrative resources used by the women to organize experience and transform it into meaning. In their accounts, the deployment was not framed as a negative and interruptive event. Nor was it connected to a national narrative of collective meaning. Instead, the spouses conveyed a normalized interpretation in which the meaning of their husbands' deployment was constructed in close reference to the personal realm of family life. This article argues that the experience of contemporary warfare has become a marginalized and unsettled experience in Norwegian society. In the absence of a settled repertoire of cultural scripts to portray the experience of having a spouse deployed abroad, the Norwegian military spouses used a privatized framework to interpret their wartime experience.

Key terms: meaning making, narratives, military families, war and society

The privatized meaning of wartime deployments: Examining the narratives of Norwegian military spouses

2

Introduction

Having a family member participate in armed conflict is an experience as old as warfare itself, canonically personified by *The Odyssey* in Penelope, who long awaits her husband's return. Even though spouses are not directly exposed to the theatre of war, they are intimately involved in most phases of a military deployment and it is important to recognize their rightful part of the wider wartime experience (Tomforde 2015). In the literature on military families that has emerged since the Second World War, deployments are predominantly conceptualized as a difficult and interruptive period the family must "get through" (see eg. Hill 1949, Burrell et al. 2006, Sheppard, Malatras, and Israel 2010, Faber et al. 2008). Little attention has been paid to the ways in which spouses construct meaning from their wartime experiences.

In an effort to address this knowledge gap, this study departs from the notion of meaning-making as both a very personal and a deeply cultural process that transpires at the intermediate level above the individual-psychological and below the macro-social. Roper (2000) emphasizes how the individual memory of wartime experiences is co-produced through the working of past experience into available cultural scripts, at the same time as the choice of how it is formulated relates to the subjectivity of the narrator, both with regards to the nature of their experiences and unconscious processes that might come into play. Personal meaning-making, therefore, has both a cultural "overlay" and a subjective "underlay" (Roper 2000, 184). This analytical approach offers a framework that transcends divisions between subjective experience and social context, enabling us to examine how these layers connect more precisely in people's lives.

From a psychological perspective, meaning-making is essential for our well-being and for maintaining a sense of coherence in life. It is important that the meaning we assign to events enables psychological composure, allowing us to live on with past experiences in "relative psychic comfort" (Dawson 1994, 23). The construction of meaning is also a cultural process that reflects particular institutional, historical and cultural settings beyond the mental realm of the individual (Wertsch 2000, 513). In this theoretical perspective, culture is conceptualized as a "mediational means" (Wertsch 2000) that provides a "tool kit" (Swidler 2001, 1986) or a canon of scripts (Wierzbicka 2002) that people mobilize to make sense of, and respond to, situations in their lives (see also Bruner 1987, Bruner 1990, Chase 2005, Gubrium and Holstein 2009).

Narratives are fertile ground for probing into the connectivity between individual-level meaning making and sociocultural environment. According to Bruner (1987, 11-12) there is no such thing as "life itself," but "in the end it's all a narrative achievement." Narratives have been deemed the most natural way of organizing experience. A narrative is both a mental construction crucial to how we remember significant events (Gregg 1998, 124-125; Roberman 2007) and a rich "cultural text" that tells us about how subjective responses are formulated within a wider context of meaning (Lomsky-Feder 2004, 4). Serving as a methodical and analytical device, narratives have the advantage of bridging the individual and the cultural, providing a view onto the ways in which these realms are entwined and co-constructed (Cole 2003, 96).

While this general approach serves as a robust framework for sociocultural analysis, existing perspectives do little to explain how *various* experiences may resonate differently within a given cultural environment. It is important to be mindful that culture does not provide an infinite reservoir of means to interpret all forms of experience. The theoretical motivation of this article is to expand our thinking about how a given cultural context makes specific cultural resources available for the interpretation of *particular* experiences. The aim is to provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways people utilize cultural resources by focusing on an experience that is not widely shared in Norwegian society, namely that of military deployments. In order to explore this issue more precisely, the study applies a concept introduced by Ann Swidler in her work on cultural repertoires. She makes a valuable distinction between "settled" and "unsettled" cultural contexts as a means to examine the varying ways people use culture under different circumstances (Swidler 2001, 89-107, 1986, 278-282).

A "settled" culture connotes an established, and often taken-for-granted, way of organizing experience. Experiences that are widely shared are often accompanied by settled cultural schemas for how it should be interpreted, supported and structured by social arrangements. An "unsettled" context, by contrast, provides few cultural scripts with which to frame a given experience. This is often the case for experiences that are marginalized by, and peripheral to, the culture at large. This study contends that wartime deployment is an unsettled experience in Norway, a designation that has notable implications for what resources are collectively available to frame its significance (cf. Gustavsen 2016). By analyzing the interpretive strategies used by the

military spouses, the aim is to demonstrate the advantage of thinking conceptually about the cultural "settledness" of a particular experience and what it means for the personal meaning assigned to it.

Families, war and society

Wartime service represents an intensive meeting point between the personal and the public (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999, 1), which makes it a particularly interesting subject to analyze from an individual-cultural vantage point. Warfare is, on the one hand, essentially a collective activity; no one wages warfare alone and soldiers always serve as representatives of a shared community (Rutherford 2005). On the other hand, soldiers do risk their personal lives. This requires a unique individual commitment of both the soldiers and their immediate family members, who are also closely affected by the service.

Military families have been described as an intersection of two greedy societal institutions (Segal 1986). This presents these families with some particular challenges, especially related to duty-based separations, in which loneliness and fear for their partner's safety has been identified as the most acute stressors for the spouses (Burrell et al. 2006, Booth et al. 2007, Warner et al. 2009). Family support is crucial for deployed soldiers to perform well and maintain a sense of well-being (Wiens and Boss 2006), and spouses have a key role as mediators between the soldiers and their home society (Tomforde 2015). Woodward (2008, 264) reminds us how soldiers are participants in uneasy arguments over their role in relation to wider civilian society. However, given the intimate involvement of their spouses, it is important to include their experiential perspective when discussing the wider meaning of wartime service.

The personal meaning of war

Two notions have tended to govern how we think about the personal significance of service in war. On the one hand, it has predominantly been conceptualized as a traumatic event, foreign and interruptive to the course of normal life (Lomsky-Feder 2004, 2, Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999, 9-10). This perception has also dominated studies of military families (Moelker, Andres, and Poot 2006). On the other hand,

wartime service is also the focus of powerful collective constructs, like nationhood and service to the country (Gibson and Abell 2004). These two perceptions convey somewhat opposing views of the meaning of service, constructing it as harmful and heroic at the same time; as detrimental for the people involved, yet constitutive of the shared community.

Several studies in the past two decades have questioned the dominance of these cultural perceptions, offering alternative views on how to understand the personal meaning of war. In her research on Israeli veterans, Lomsky-Feder (1995, 2004) challenges the assumption that warfare is inevitably traumatic and negative. Rather, she encourages us to be sensitive to the ways in which soldiers "adopt certain meanings, reject others, and sometimes propose new and even alternative interpretations" (Lomsky-Feder 2004, 4). Gibson and Abell (2004), Woodward (2008), Woodward and Jenkins (2012) and Gustavsen (2016) all find a convoluted relationship between collective constructs of "king and country" and how contemporary soldiers make sense of their own participation. The two latter studies, which focus on Afghanistan veterans, demonstrate how in the absence of a prevalent collective motivation soldiers construct private rationales to give meaning to their effort. King (2010) demonstrates in his study of commemoration of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan that the meaning of their service has largely been detached from a wider national purpose, leading to a domesticated and personalized perception of those who serve.

Military service in Norway

The meaning of wartime service, as examined in the above studies, must be understood in light of the position that the culture at large accords to warfare and military service. This study argues that Norway, along with other western societies, has become largely disassociated from the experience of warfare (Gustavsen 2016, Rutherford 2005, Malešević 2014). During the Cold War, the military had a vast presence throughout Norwegian society. As a small country bordering Russia, Norway's security policy was based on the concept of "total defense," in which all sectors of society would be mobilized in the case of an invasion. Universal male conscription was the backbone of the armed forces, subjecting all male citizens to 12 months of mandatory service (Græger and Leira 2005). The female half of the population was also routinely exposed

to the military sphere through the experiences of sons, brothers, husbands and friends who served. Even though Norway participated in various peacekeeping missions during the Cold War era[i], these missions were viewed as auxiliary to the main task of national defense, and those who served received only scant attention from the military and political establishment (Haaland 2008).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the societal presence of the armed forces changed in fundamental ways. The military was significantly downsized and restructured into a smaller semi-professional force (Bogen and Håkenstad 2015). Although Norway still practices conscription – and even made it gender neutral from 2016 onward – only 10 percent of each annual cohort is recruited, and the practice functions primarily as a recruitment tool targeting those already motivated to serve (Forsvaret 2016). As a consequence of the armed forces' changed role in Norwegian society, "things military" (Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari 1999) have become largely removed from the civilian population. The professionalization of the armed forces has also led to a significant shift in the way military service is culturally perceived: From being a national duty shared by all male citizens, it has largely become a matter of personal choice (Burk 2002, Moskos 1977).

This has notable implications for how wartime service is made relevant in society. Contemporary warfare in the West is no longer conducted by society as a whole, but performed by a small group of representatives – including the partners of the spouses in this study (Mastroianni and Scott 2011). The majority of people have become "spectators, not participants," with the privilege of engaging or disengaging from the experience in the same way as watching a game of sports (McInnes 2002, 143; see also McInnes 1999). King (2010, 19) argues further that military operations in the West are no longer a matter of national survival but have become "wars of choice," a development which reinforces a sense of disengagement in the population at large. In Norway, members of the general public have experienced few – if any – consequences from their country's participation in Afghanistan, as illustrated by the societal response to Norway's long-time participation in Afghanistan. Instead of debate or widespread interest, the common reaction has been described as "quiet acceptance" (Oma and Ekhaugen 2014, 241, Harpviken 2011, 14).

Though the experience of actual warfare has become a marginalized experience in Norwegian society, the situation is different for service members and their families. Over the past 20 years, missions abroad have become a core aspect of military service and a duty to be expected if you serve as a professional soldier (Haaland 2010). The Afghanistan engagement is the most comprehensive operation for Norway since World War Two, with 9,000 people deployed between 2001 and 2014 in support and combat roles – a significant number relative to Norway's population of only five million (Oma and Ekhaugen 2014, NOU 2016, 10).

Methodological framework

While maneuvering in this socio-cultural environment, the women interviewed for this study had to make sense of a life event that does not occupy a settled place in the culture at large. To investigate their meaning-making strategies, this study utilized narrative interviews designed to elicit first-hand accounts of lived experience (Berger and Richard 2005). The focus of this article is not on the construction of these accounts, but on the narratives themselves as culturally charged texts that arose in a particular environment of narrative options to frame experience (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, 57-62). Personal narrative has always been an inherent aspect of war (Hynes 1998), telling us not only about the experiences of the narrator, but about "our collective cultural responses to the practice of organized violence" (Woodward 2008, 267). Wartime narratives are often conveyed through written texts, such as military memoirs, which bear the imprint of a particular production process (see Jenkings and Woodward 2016). This study utilizes oral narratives that unfolded spontaneously in conversation. Even though these narratives were shaped by the dynamics of the interview situation (Gubrium and Holstein 2009, 93-94), a notable difference from written narratives is that the women were not able to edit their accounts after the interview.

Narrative research usually employs smaller samples to provide detailed insights into how particular people, in a particular context, interpret a particular experience. In line with this approach, participants were not selected to reflect the broader population of military families. The analysis draws upon eight interviews with women, each of whom was either married to or a long-time cohabitant with an Afghanistan veteran who served in the Army[ii]. Their ages ranged from early 30s to late 40s, and all participants had

either two or three children. Most women engaged in full-time work outside the home while their partners were deployed; the exceptions were one stay-at-home mother and a woman who was on maternity leave to care for a newborn. In Norway, there are no significant differences in employment rate between military spouses and the overall female population (Heen 2012). One should also bear in mind that the interviewed women live in a universal welfare state and are therefore less affected by the class-related issues that military spouses in some other countries face (see e.g. Harrell 2000, 2003, Simons 1997, chapter 11).

Overview of participants

Anita	Three children	Early 40s	Three deployments
Inga	Two children	Late 30s	Two deployments
Mina	Two children	Early 30s	One deployment
Miranda	Two children	Mid 30s	One deployment
Mary	Two children	Mid 30s	Two deployments
Chrissy	Two children	Late 40s	Three deployments
Rachel	Two children	Early 40s	Two deployments
Carry	Three children	Early 40s	One deployment

The narratives were collected over a five-month period in the spring of 2015. The spouses were recruited through contacts in the armed forces and snowball sampling. In Norway, military families are not subject to regulations hindering them from taking part in a research project, and it was entirely up to the spouses if they want to participate or not. The women were contacted directly based on referrals from people I knew, and from one another. My position as a researcher in the armed forces might have eased the recruitment, through relevant contacts in my network, but gave me no privileged access other than that. Interviews lasted from one to two hours. In line with narrative interviewing, the women's stories unfolded largely on their own terms, though follow-up questions were asked at times if needed to further illuminate certain aspects (Chase 2011). All conversations were fully transcribed, and after careful assessment of each story's particular composition, the narratives were examined in a thematic manner to identify shared resources that the tellers used to organize their experiences and position themselves in the stories (cf. Reynolds, Wetherell, and Taylor 2007). The perspectives

conveyed by the women are approached as truly reflective of their personal experience with military deployment, yet, also assessed from a cultural perspective, beyond the sphere of their individual life, so as to determine their embeddedness and broader significance.

Two main narrative strategies are identified and discussed in the following analysis, referred to as *normalization* and *agency*. The interviewees relied most broadly on a strategy of normalization to frame various notions of their experience. In the analysis I also address how certain aspects challenged their normalized orientation. Their use of agency was more varied; however, it captures an important facet of their interpretation concerning how they actively managed their own role with regards to the deployment and being a military family.

Normalization

"It was a natural part of how things were"

The most common manner of opening up conversation about the deployment was to talk about it as an anticipated event. Rachel, whose husband had served two tours in Afghanistan, said, "we were prepared it would happen. It was really part of the deal," implying that to deploy was an expected part of her husband's service that she knew would occur at one time or another. Inga, who had experienced two deployments, said:

> I don't think we discussed it much. I think it is, kind of, a given in the situation
> they are in. He [her husband] had already been deployed once when I met
> him, so it was kind of part of the package, that this is the job he has chosen
> and he thinks that is fine.

Anita's husband had served three tours and normalization was a strategy used consistently throughout her narrative to talk about the deployment as a smoothly integrated event in their life together. She said: "Well, then he would be away for those weeks and months. It was not really – it was like a long [military] exercise, really." The deployment was not singled out, but viewed alongside other military activities that also required her husband to be away from home. This orientation also dominated her talk about the homecoming experience:

> It was like he came home from an ordinary day at work. We had perhaps made some good food, baked a cake, things like that, but I cannot remember that we did anything special, because it was a natural part of how things were.

Although Anita talked about the deployment in a highly normalized fashion, she did not discount the effort required on her part to take care of the household and three children by herself for an extended period: "I probably thought so [that it was demanding] there and then. I had to always get up, I had to fix everything, like that." But she quickly added: "Things become routine and we were used to managing on our own, so it wasn't a problem." The increased responsibility was not central to how she remembered the times her husband was deployed and did not challenge the overall framing of it as a "natural part of how things were."

Across the narratives, none of the spouses spoke directly about not wanting their partner to deploy, but some admitted they had to warm up to the idea. Miranda, whose husband had served one tour, said she was hesitant to discuss the issue when her husband first brought it up, but it didn't take long to change her mind. She said:

> But then you actually get really used to it, to the thought that, okay, this is something he has to [do] and it isn't so – they do take a lot of precautions – and, okay, he can die, but you can also die during a [military] exercise in Norway, too.

Utilizing normalization as a resource, Miranda neutralized her view of the particular risk involved, helping her come to terms with the event. She also emphasized that their lifestyle had already included frequent work-related absences. That made it easier to adjust to an extended separation:

> I was so used to lying in bed alone and managing things alone, so I believe
> that has strengthened me a lot, in the sense that – well, okay, he will be gone
> six months, fine, we can do that too. ... You are more or less used to those
> things [him being away], so definitely that had a lot to say.

As these excerpts demonstrate, absences were portrayed as part of the family story, not a disruption from outside. Their everyday lifestyle was a dominant frame of reference for these spouses, promoting a normalized view of deployment.

There was sufficient leeway in the narratives, however, to address difficult emotions, which often surfaced in talk about leave-taking and adjusting to being alone right after one's partner had left. Among the interviewees Inga, who had experienced two deployments, was the most vocal about such feelings; in fact, her narrative's emphasis on the difficult aspects of the experience set it apart from the others. She recounted two episodes, for instance, when she heard on the news that Norwegian troops in Afghanistan had been involved in an incident. When it took some time before she learned that her husband was safe – although such delay was normal – she was overcome with emotion and seriously "expected the field priest would be at the door with bad news." Inga also said it was "horrible" when her husband first left, and that she cried herself to sleep many nights. Carry, whose husband had served one tour, said she experienced an "overwhelming sense of grief" after saying goodbye at the airport and during the first night alone. However, she quickly developed a positive attitude: "Then you get up the next day and you just get going, and you know this is something you accepted and this is something you can do." The spouses generally exhibited a persistent attitude, refusing to be overwhelmed by what could seem a dire situation – that of having their partners in a war zone while they singlehandedly managed the household for an extended period. The women confronted such negative stigma by not defining the period in negative terms, framing it instead as a legitimate event in their flow of life (cf. Rapoport, Lomsky-Feder, and Heider 2002).

"We have a very pragmatic approach to life and death"
Normalization was also used as a resource to address issues of risk and safety. A defining feature of a deployment, as opposed to other work-related absences, is the

elevated risk involved of participating in a military operation. Most women, however, discussed the safety aspects rather matter-of-factly, without highlighting it as a particular concern. Mina's partner had served one tour, and she said, "I can truthfully say I have never been afraid for even one day when he was down there. [...] I felt the same as if he was on a winter exercise in northern Norway." Chrissy, whose husband had deployed three times to Afghanistan, said she was more concerned that her husband would hit a moose driving to work in Norway – an actual risk where they live – than him being killed in action. The risk of serving in Afghanistan was juxtaposed to situations closer to home and not singled out as a situation meriting enhanced concern. Rachel said she and her partner discussed issues of life and death in the same terms as other practical matters:

> I guess we have a pragmatic approach to life and death, that it's okay to talk about. [...] We talk about it on equal terms as his life insurance and, it was really sorted under the same topic as car insurance. It was, kind of, if I die then you'll get this and, in a way – it went under the "milk and bread" list.

Emotional manifestations were rare in the stories, even when the teller was addressing the possibility of not getting her partner back, an orientation that runs contrary to other studies which have identified fear for a partner's safety as one of the biggest concerns during a deployment (eg. Warner et al. 2009). The pragmatic attitude of the women interviewed may reflect Norway's general emotional culture. Noregaard (2011, 106-108) observes in her fieldwork that the cultural value of "being in control" often regulates how emotions are managed in everyday Norwegian life. She links this value to a cultural emphasis on "being tough" and not showing powerlessness in the face of difficult situations. It is hard to say whether the military spouses' normalized attitude reflected an intentional strategy, or was an unmediated response, but the cultural pattern observed by Noregaard may help us better understand the stoic attitude that was observed.

The normalized attitude was largely formulated in reference to what can be perceived as a "military normal", according to parameters specific to a military environment. In telling their stories, the women often highlighted aspects of their partners' regular

service to frame the deployment, as notably illustrated by Anita and Mina who compared it to a long military exercise. As such, the armed forces served as an intermediate context that shaped their sense of normalcy. Several women noted that it could be difficult for civilian people to understand the demands of being a military family, suggesting that their perception of normal is not necessarily shared by people outside this context. At the same time, a few spouses, like Mary, emphasized that she didn't feel very different from families in other occupations that also experience periods of work-related absences. The military realm, therefore, did not always serve as an intermediate level that informed their sense of normalcy and some framed the deployment as normal according to other points of reference, as well.

"It was a relief, really, when he left, because then I was done with that experience of stress"
Even though normalization was a prevalent strategy used to organize experience, the narratives also contained elements that challenged this frame of interpretation. Several women spoke of incidents that challenged their anticipated sequence of events, phases of "limbo" during which their partners were neither deployed nor part of their daily lives. Pre-deployment training could be experienced as such a phase, when their partner was away most of the time preparing for the upcoming tour of duty, yet had not officially left. Chrissy said this was actually the most stressful part of the experience for her:

> I almost didn't see him in three months; I just knew he was there. That was sort of tiring. [...] So it was a relief, really, when he left, because then I was done with that experience of stress, of are we going to eat together today or shall I eat alone. It is better to know and deal with the fact that you are gone now, end of story, no stress.

Another limbo phase was connected to the leave period mid-deployment, when the partner serving in Afghanistan returned home for two weeks, after which he would depart again to finish his tour. Several women believed these two weeks were hard to deal with; even though their partner was physically home, he was often mentally still in Afghanistan. Inga, for instance, said, "the state of mind was very strange when he was home on leave. I remember I wished he hadn't come." Not all women experienced these phases as stressful, but for those who did it was usually considered the most difficult

times of the deployment due to the "ambiguous presence" (Faber et al. 2008) of their partners, causing a situation of unclear boundaries.

For some of the women, the homecoming was also experienced as a time of limbo. Mina said she felt very disappointment when her partner arrived home. She had a "romantic dream" about her husband helping out a lot so she could focus more on their baby, but in reality he was away more than she anticipated on various job assignments. Rachel talked about how she and her husband had a big "clash" a few weeks after he returned. She emphasized, however, that she was prepared it would happen and the argument was therefore "put on a separate account". Then some of the other women, like Anita, framed the homecoming as a highly normalized event, saying it was like he came home from another day at work.

Agency

"We have decided"

Agency represented another strategy, one used to frame the experience from a different vantage point, allowing the spouses to emphasize their personal autonomy and sense of ownership of a lifestyle that in many aspects is regulated by their husbands' service. Norwegian society is characterized by a strong gender ideology, encouraging men and women to participate equally in the work force and home sphere alike (Nadim 2014). Even though many families organize themselves differently, they may still feel confronted by this cultural ideal from time to time (Knudsen and Wærness 2009). In many narratives the spouses told of people outside the armed forces questioning their autonomy as a result of adjustments they made to facilitate their partners' service, in particular their acceptance that he would be absent for such a long period when deployed. In talking about how they responded to such situations, agency was mobilized as a strategy to convey their independent role and underscore their equal partnership in the deployment decision. While the armed forces can order personnel to deploy, the arrangements are usually made in consultation with service members, who can also express a particular interest in deploying. There is, therefore, a degree of decision-making involved on the part of those who deploy. Mina gave birth to her second child

while her partner was in mid-deployment, causing acquaintances to question why she had allowed her partner to leave. She said:

> There has been that [reaction], "Oh my gosh, do you just let him leave?" Then I say it is not something I let him, but it is something we have decided. [...] That has kind of been my answer, we have decided.

Mina refused to be assigned a passive role and articulated her stance by framing the deployment as a shared project that she and her partner had decided together. She asserted her position by awarding herself an autonomous role in the decision-making process; such a strategy was in fact shared by all spouses who spoke of similar episodes of confrontation. Rachel said some of her girlfriends believed she was "going in the opposite direction of the women's movement" by being too compliant in accommodating her husband's service. She, too, used agency as a resource to formulate her position. Drawing on the agentic notion of "choice," Rachel presented herself with options, which is a privileged position that conveys a strong sense of agency (Reynolds, Wetherell, and Taylor 2007). She said: "I think of it this way: this is a choice we have made. It is not something I was told, 'This is how it should be.' There are so many different ways to live – but not all civilians get that."

Mary, whose husband had been deployed two times, offered a somewhat different perspective. She, too, used agency as a resource, but instead of framing her husband's deployment as a shared project she insisted on framing the deployment as part of her husband's sphere of responsibility. It is not that she opposed his deployment, but that her sense of agency was not formulated as a matter of her equal partnership to this event. She said:

> That [to deploy] is kind of his responsibility. I wouldn't appreciate if someone forced me into a job I didn't like, the same way I don't want to force him into a job he doesn't like. But it is his responsibility. ... He needs to back up the choices he makes, then I will back up those I make – and the consequences that come with it, right.

Utilizing agency to compartmentalize her realm of responsibility enabled her to keep the distance she needed to her husband's work, and while she admitted her outlook may have sounded cynical, she was careful to emphasize her husband's agency in the matter, underscoring that he had entered the armed forces freely. Mary believed he shouldn't "burden" other people with the consequences of this choice and said her orientation resulted from an "active decision not to engage," adding that she was more interested in the nature of the conflict than what the soldiers did on the ground.

While the other women interviewed did not utilize agency as directly as Mary to compartmentalize their spheres, the women generally exhibited a limited interest in what happened in Afghanistan during their partners' deployment, and when the partners returned this was not a major topic of conversation. Anita said: "I don't need to know everything, because I think he shares what he wants to share, and then he can share the rest with his buddies." For most women it was important to keep a sense of distance to the theatre of operation, either because they simply were not that interested or as a deliberate strategy to manage the situation (cf. Merolla 2010).

"I couldn't stand to be a stay-at-home military wife"

Agency was also mobilized by the women in talking about the importance of making room for their own projects and interests within the military family lifestyle. There were, however, different manners of approaching this issue, which in the narratives were well illustrated by the different ways in which Inga and Rachel talked about the experience of relocating to a small military community in northern Norway. In order to move, Rachel had had to quit a job she "really enjoyed," but she did not portray this as a major sacrifice. Instead, she said, she had approached the situation with an "adventurous attitude": "I have always focused [more] on the opportunities than the limitations." She acknowledged that her flexibility was convenient and that the move would have been difficult if she had had very defined goals in terms of what she wanted to do. Rachel constructed the military lifestyle as an arena of opportunity but was, at the same time, careful to maintain her sense of independence, noting, "I didn't feel I have had to compromise or sacrifice."

Inga's sense of autonomy was unequivocally tied to maintaining a relevant job, an issue brought up very early in her story and presented as a paramount concern for her, especially when the couple had to move:

> I was very clear about not wanting to go if there wasn't something for me too. I wouldn't have done that. I have always been very clear about that, if we were to move here or there because of the armed forces, it has to be a place where I could do something, as well. I couldn't stand to be a stay-at-home military wife.

Inga contrasted her own position against the traditional role of a "stay-at-home military wife," disassociating herself from the latter in order to assert that her role was independent and equal.

Normalizing and privatizing the wartime experience

These narratives largely tell a story about wartime deployments as a normalized experience. It does not mean that the interviewed women provided only neat and polished accounts; however, their stories were not dominated by difficult moments. This finding contradicts much of military family research that has primarily targeted deployment as a disruptive and stressful event (e.g. Booth et al. 2007, Warner et al. 2009). The narrative approach of this study offers new ground on which to understand the spousal experience by giving analytical priority to their meaning-making strategies. In existing research this perspective has been underutilized. The narratives display how the women incorporated their partners' deployment into a coherent account of military family life. They were "used to" the particular requirements of the partner's profession, and deployments abroad were perceived as "part of the package" when entering a relationship with a service member. This attitude bears some resemblance to the way contemporary soldiers have been shown to frame their deployment service as an expected consequence of their chosen profession (Gustavsen 2016, King 2010, 2013, Woodward 2008, Woodward and Jenkings 2012). Although ethnographic studies have provided rich descriptions of how military wives cope with, and adapt to, the military life style (MacLeish 2013, Harrell 2000, Simons 1997, Frese 2003), this article offers an additional perspective, highlighting the use of normalization as a dominant organizing

principle in the accounts of the women interviewed – even in their talk about the life-and-death aspects of deployment[iii].

A feminist scholarship has argued that the military institution subordinates wives by legitimizing and reproducing a gendered division of labor (e.g. Harrison and Lalibertè 1997, Eran-Jona 2015, Weinstein and Mederer 1997). The spouses interviewed in this study also discussed adjustments made to accommodate their partners' service; however, rather than conceptualize the military lifestyle as oppressive, this article has focused on the women's agency in defining their stance. From their perspective, it seemed that the overall lifestyle had cultivated a family culture that advanced a normalized orientation that also included the particular stressors of wartime deployment. The military realm appeared as an intermediate context that shaped their sense of normalcy, which was used as an interpretive resource to frame the deployment. The spouses also employed agency as a resource to present themselves as choosing individuals who did not passively comply with their husbands' deployment. To act as autonomous individuals who are not victims of chance or circumstance has become a dominant code for how to frame experience in our late-modern society (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Agency thus represented a potent cultural resource the women could employ to confront negative stigma about their role. There was variation among the spouses, however, in how forcefully this strategy was employed. Inga and Mary, for instance, were very vocal about the importance of maintaining their independence, regardless of circumstances. Others were more measured in their use of agency, as illustrated by Rachel's narrative of constructing the military lifestyle as an arena of opportunity for herself. Regardless of these variations, the deployment was in all instances scripted into their personal biography of choice (Giddens 1991).

These narratives represent rich texts that tell us not only about the personal experiences of the spouses, but about the position of warfare and military service in the Norwegian culture at large (Woodward 2008, 268). It is especially interesting to observe how the women discussed the deployment as a private event in the context of their family life. The domestic realm was a unifying element in their stories, and the meaning of the deployment was constructed in close reference to their individually chosen lifestyle. The ascendance of a privatized interpretation of deployment is also documented in studies of

contemporary western soldiers (Battistelli 1997, Gustavsen 2016, King 2010, 2013, Woodward 2008, Woodward and Jenkings 2012). King (2010), for instance, observes the distinctly privatized manner in which British soldiers killed in Afghanistan have been commemorated, highlighting their individuality and domestic relations as opposed to their sacrifice in a national cause.

The privatized interpretation identified in this study must be understood in light of the Norwegian cultural context and the resources available to the spouses to make sense of this particular experience. The women all live in a country commonly regarded as one of the world's most peaceful societies, where the previous wartime experience occurred more than 70 years ago (Von Hofer 2004). While the armed forces of Norway had a vast societal presence during the Cold War, they have been gradually downsized in the past two decades, which means fewer and fewer people have any personal experience with the military institution. It should be noted that several political initiatives have been launched in recent years to strengthen the link between the armed forces and society – for instance, the institution of a national Veterans Day. There are, at the same time, few other practices that contribute to reinforce the centrality of the military experience in the culture at large (Gustavsen 2016). In a society where the general public has become largely removed from the experience of armed service, there are few settled resources that connect the experience of these military spouses to a shared repertoire of meaning.

Lomsky-Feder's (1995, 2004) studies of Israel, where military conflict remains a central part of existence, provide a valuable comparison with the Norwegian case. Lomsky-Feder demonstrates how the centrality of the wartime experience is reinforced through a variety of macro-social arrangements, among them the powerful institution of conscription that subjects all men and women to several years of military service. Shared meanings are further produced and disseminated through a multitude of social and cultural practices, such as the school curriculum and expressions in literature, music and the media. What is described as a "continual and intensive preoccupation with the war experience" helps to remove this experience from the private realm by integrating personal and collective responses into the same sociocultural space (Lomsky-Feder 2004, 17). This is a prime example of a settled cultural context that, in contrast to Norway, provides a collective repertoire of meanings that can be used in a flexible

manner to frame individual experiences. This comparison allows us to better understand the cultural circumstances the Norwegian spouses were up against as they sought to interpret their deployment experiences. It also underscores the value of utilizing the concept of settled and unsettled contexts to examine the connectivity between individual-level meaning-making and the cultural resources available to interpret specific experiences. Whereas conceptualizations of culture as a mediating arena have mainly focused on culture as a shared set of schemas of interpretation (Bruner 1990, Geertz 1973), the analysis presented in this article demonstrates that not all experiences may be framed according to scripts "already there" (Bruner 1990, 11). It is important to recognize how the absence of cultural resources that makes particular meanings available also shapes subjective responses to specific experiences. That is often the case for experiences that are not widely shared, but peripheral in the culture at large – as with military deployments in Norway. That is not to say that unsettled experiences are not mediated by the cultural environment. This article instead provides a conceptual view of the different ways people may use culture under settled and unsettled circumstances by promoting an analytical awareness of how some experiences are more easily formulated through shared frameworks of understanding, while others may be interpreted in a more privatized manner.

Conclusion

These narratives represent valuable cultural texts that enhance our understanding of how the meaning of wartime service is negotiated within a specific socio-cultural context, paying particular attention to how the unsettledness of war and conflict in Norwegian contemporary culture shapes the narrative accounts of these military spouses. The analysis identifies *normalization* and *agency* as two distinct resources used by the women to frame this experience, conveying a privatized interpretation of this event. In a culture where the links between warfare and society have become fewer and weaker, the narratives demonstrate how deployments are made meaningful outside the collective realm and within the private context of family life. Judging from their stories, however, the women emerged as impressive teammates for their deployed partners and exhibited a strong sense of mastery. While the purpose of a small qualitative study is not to provide broad generalizable findings, the cultural vantage point could prove valuable in examining the personal meaning of war in other social contexts as well. As warfare

takes on new forms, so does its reference in the overall culture. Links between the armed forces and society are being reshaped, prompting soldiers and their families to adopt new strategies to assign meaning to their experiences. On a theoretical note, the analysis suggests the benefit of considering the cultural settledness, or unsettledness, of a given experience and how it shapes the ways in which agents maneuver the socio-cultural environment in their interpretive feats.

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[i] Norway has participated in more than 40 international operations since World War II, most of them taking place from the 1990s onward (Forsvaret 2012)

[ii] The Norwegian armed forces consist of three branches: The Army, the Navy and the Air Force. Personnel in the army have been most frequently deployed to Afghanistan.

[iii] International deployments are correlated with an increased divorce rate among Norwegian military families (Heen 2012); however, none of the women in this study were divorced. Neither had they experienced any visible or invisible injuries related to their partner's deployment, at least to my knowledge. Whether their strategy of normalization testifies to a unique ability to adjust and maintain stable relationships, or if the absence of the aforementioned difficulties facilitated a normalized attitude is difficult to say based on these narrative interviews. It is an interesting puzzle that remains to be explored.

III

IV

Appendix I: Interview guide veteran interviews

<u>Bakgrunn</u>
1. Hvilken stilling jobber du i nå
2. Hvorfor valgte du å søke deg hit
3. Familiesituasjon, alder, hvor har du vokst opp
4. Har du flest venner i eller utenfor Forsvaret
5. Hvilken bakgrunn har du (fra Forsvaret)

<u>Erfaringer Afghanistan</u>
1. Fortell fra tjenesten i Afghanistan
2. Opplevdes tjeneste som farlig/trygg
3. Når du nå ser tilbake, er det et spesielt minne som dukker opp / hva husker du best?
4. Hvordan opplevde du møtet med den afghanske kulturen
5. Hvilken kontakt hadde du med familien hjemme
6. Føltes det meningsfullt å delta
7. Hvilke tanker gjør du deg om Norges engasjement i Afghanistan
   - Vil du hevde at Norge er i krig?

<u>Overgangen tilbake til det norske samfunn</u>
1. Hvordan opplevde du overgangen tilbake etter tjenesten ute
2. Var selve hjemkomsten slik du hadde sett det for deg
3. Hva så du mest frem til med å komme hjem
4. Hva var den største overgangen fra å ha vært ute
5. Er det noe du savner fra tjenesten ute
6. Har du tatt med deg noen vaner fra tjenesten ute tilbake til Norge
7. Ser du annerledes på ting etter tjenesten
8. I ettertid, hva er det mest verdifulle med erfaringen
   - Er denne erfaringen noe Forsvaret setter pris på

<u>Anerkjennelse / Forsvaret</u>
1. Hva slags oppfølging har du fått fra Forsvaret etter at du kom hjem
2. Hvilket forhold har du til de menneskene du var ute med
3. Har ditt forhold til Forsvaret endret seg (hvordan du selv ser på organisasjonen, Forsvarets rolle etc)
4. Hvilken betydning har medaljen(e) for deg
   - Er det andre ting som betyr mye for deg fra tiden i Afghanistan?

<u>Anerkjennelse/ I hverdagen</u>
1. Ser du på deg selv som en veteran
2. Hvordan opplever du å være veteran i det daglige
3. Er det noe i ditt daglige liv som har endret seg etter du ble veteran

4. Er det et «før/etter» i forhold til tjenesten ute
5. Vet folk i lokalmiljøet at du er veteran?
   - Er det et bevist valg å være åpen/lukket om dette
6. Er det positivt eller negativt at de vet/ikke vet dette
7. Har familien opplevd noen spesielle hendelser knyttet til det at du er veteran

Anerkjennelse/ Samfunnet
1. Hvilken status mener du veteraner har i det norske samfunnet
   - Hvorfor mener du veteraner har denne statusen
2. Hva tror du folk flest forbinder med en veteran
3. Hvordan mener du det norske folk ser på operasjonen i Afghanistan
   - Hvordan opplever du debatten om den norske deltagelsen i Afghanistan
   - Opplever du å bli kritisert for å delta
4. Hvordan mener du veteraner er fremstilt i debatten i Norge
   - Har debatten noen betydning for deg og din familie
5. Burde veteraner hatt en mer synlig plass i samfunnet
   - Savner du mer anerkjennelse
   - Hva slags anerkjennelse burde det være

Annet
1. Hvordan vil du beskrive deg selv
2. Er du medlem av en veteranorganisasjon, hvorfor/hvorfor ikke

Appendix II: Information statement

Informasjon til intervjudeltagere i prosjektet:

Mestring og meningsdannelse blant Afghanistanveteraner

<u>Kort om prosjektet</u>
Tusen takk for at du tar deg tid til å delta som informant i dette doktorgradsprosjektet om norske veteraner fra Afghanistan.

Dette er et kvalitativt forskningsprosjekt som ønsker å belyse hvordan norske veteraner forholder seg til sin deployeringserfaring hjemme i Norge. Prosjektets overordnede mål er å undersøke hvordan forhold knyttet til anerkjennelse og verdsetting påvirker veteraners meningsdannelse og hvordan de (sammen sin familie) mestrer egen livssituasjon. Det tas utgangspunkt i hvordan veteranene og deres nærmeste opplever at Forsvaret forholder seg til deres krigserfaring, hvordan de syntes det politiske Norge verdsetter deres innsats og hvordan de opplever å bli fremstilt i det offentlige ordskiftet. Det vil og fokuseres på hvorvidt deltagerne selv føler seg som veteraner og hvilken verdi de mener uteerfaringen har hatt for dem.

Prosjektet bygger på intervjuer med både veteraner som arbeider i Forsvaret og som har sluttet, og med veteraner som bor på et Forsvarsdominert sted og i en større by.

Prosjektet er finansiert av Forsvarsdepartementet og vil ferdigstilles sommeren 2016. Ansvarlig instiusjon er Forsvarets høyskole. Prosjektet er meldt til Personvernforbudet for forskning, norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste.

<u>Deltagelse</u>
Det er helt frivillig å delta og du kan når som helst bestemme deg for å trekke deg uten å forklare nærmere. Dersom du ønsker å trekke deg vil all informasjon om deg bli slettet.

Intervjuene vil bli tatt opp på bånd, men du vil på ingen måte kunne identifiseres. Ingen identifiserende bakgrunnsopplysninger blir tatt opp og intervjuene vil kodes, og kun jeg vet hvilken kode som tilsvarer hvilken informant. Kodene vil oppbevares et sikkert sted. Når prosjektet er ferdigstilt vil lydfiler og navnelister bli slettet.

Skulle det dukke opp spørsmål på et senere tidspunkt, ikke nøl med å ta kontakt.

Vennlige hilsener
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