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The Figure of the Soldier: Discourses of Indisputability and Heroism in a New Danish Commemorative Practice

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This article explores discourses on the Danish soldier in a new memory practice, a national Flag-Flying Day for Denmark's deployed Personnel (FFDDP), launched in 2009. Analysis of the official speeches on the FFDDP in 2013 shows that the figure of the soldier is placed in discourses linking humanitarianism, heroism, and ethics. What makes the Danish case particularly interesting is that the commemorative practice is so recent and that the discourses presented in this practice seem to already be mimicking international discourses of humanitarianism. This is shown through salient parallels between the discourses in this memory practice and trends in international law and the political discourses and commemorative practices in Britain, Denmark's closest ally in Afghanistan. Alongside this, the soldier is articulated as a veteran, both vulnerable and strong, returning to a unified nation. The article assesses that the hegemonic discourses are used to block oppositional voices against the figure of the soldier, and effectively war, in this particular commemorative context. The hegemonic discourses may reflect a political need to create a commemorative space of indisputability, where the figure of the soldier can attain heroic status regardless of the complexity of the wars of choice.

KEYWORDS soldier hero, Denmark, Afghanistan, military nation, discourse, commemoration, Flag-Flying Day, deployed personnel

Introduction

Although Denmark may not have viewed itself as a military nation since its last great defensive war in the mid-nineteenth century, the Danish Defence forces have been participating actively in various conflicts (e.g. Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan) since

the mid-1990s. The re-emergence of Denmark as a military nation has brought the image of the soldier back into public awareness. This article examines the discourses on the soldier in a new commemorative practice for Denmark.

Along with Denmark's renewed status as a military nation, new discourses about the soldier have surfaced in areas of the media, politics (veteran policies, new associations), the Danish Defence (inauguration of new medals), literature (autobiographies and novels), and art (soldier portraits and depictions of war). The new political development with Denmark as a military nation has sparked changes in existing social practices and new practices have been created to support this development. With these new developments comes a focus on the soldier as a figure that is invested with meaning. The Veterans' Policy stating 'The overall purpose of the effort is to send out competent soldiers, and to bring back competent human beings' (The Danish Government, 2010: 15), a monument in 2011 with the inscription 'One Time One Place One Human Being' and a flame burning in remembrance at that monument are examples that testify to a development where the figure of the soldier is valorized and given space in the public arena.¹ The introduction of a Flag-Flying Day for Denmark's deployed Personnel (FFDDP), a new commemorative practice, has been given little attention in Danish research and has only been dealt with tentatively (Sørensen, 2010; Reeh, 2011; Sørensen & Pedersen, 2012). The aim of this article is to analyse how the soldier is represented in the official speeches given on this particular day. This will be done by using central concepts from discourse theory as sensitizing concepts when creating a methodology, something I will return to. Following Laclau and Mouffe, I use the term discourse in the sense that the 'totality which includes within itself the linguistic and the non-linguistic, is what we call discourse' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1990: 100). However, narrowing the corpus, I investigate how the figure of the soldier is ascribed meaning through public speeches delivered on the FFDDP in 2013 by official representatives from Denmark. The analysis gives access to hegemonic discourses in a commemorative context, which is of interest since contemporary and essentially temporary hegemonic discourses have the potential of functioning as models for future political discourses and actions as well as for understanding and interpreting the past and present. The identification of hegemonic discourses, and thus what is left out, is vital since they may reflect an even wider trend in the contemporary political discourses about the soldier figure in Denmark. By focusing on the speeches given in 2013, the aim of this article is to see what meaning is ascribed to the soldier figure now that the FFDDP has been celebrated for half a decade.² This new FFDDP is interesting for several reasons. First, Denmark has no strong tradition

¹An extensive publication on Danish monuments has been published by Inge Adriansen, see Adriansen (2010).

²I have conducted observation studies of the FFDDP on four occasions: 2012 in Copenhagen and Frederiksberg, 2013 in a smaller town Holstebro and 2014 in Copenhagen. Speech material from these years and the first year in 2009 has been examined. The material from 2012 in Copenhagen is marked by the discourses as we see in the 2013 material (Head of Defence Peter Bartram, Minister of Defence Nick Hækkerup. Foreign Minister Villy Søvndal's speech was not unavailable for retrieval). The material from Holstebro in 2013 put peace, democracy and stability on the agenda and emphasized the local contribution to the international missions. The soldier is portrayed as a professional, a veteran, unselfish

for commemorating soldiers or for paying tribute to those participating in war.³ For instance, as opposed to the general trends in Europe, Denmark has not had the same tradition for instigating medals (Stevnsborg, 2005), which has changed in the last decade with nine new medals being presented. In 2011 on the FFDDP, a new national monument to Denmark's international effort since 1948 was also unveiled. Second, the date for the FFDDP was chosen with reference to September 5 being a 'neutral' date with no affiliation to historical or political events. With this intent of keeping the day 'neutral', the analysis will disentangle what discourses are actually in circulation about the soldier on this particular day five years after its launch.

With a discourse theory framework, I identify how the soldier is constructed in official speeches in light of Denmark's present status as a military nation and in the context of this new memory practice.

The figure of the soldier

As a cultural construct, the figure of the soldier has been addressed in a wide range of studies, many of them also touching upon the figure of the soldier in a commemorative context (Mosse, 1990; Koselleck, 2002; Wittman, 2011). The figure of the soldier is often connected to the nation and portrayed as male; he becomes the bearer of particular national values, masculinity, and heroism (Dawson, 1994). In the context of the nation-state the soldier can function as a powerful figure to justify political hegemony; but, never entirely stable, the figure of the soldier can also unsettle and weaken the national myth built around him (Cooper & Hurcombe, 2009: 103).

The literature on commemoration of soldiers is extensive when it comes to World War I (Bartov, 1989; Mosse, 1990; Siebrecht, 2012), whereas work on commemoration of soldiers in the contemporary context of the Afghan War and the war in Iraq is naturally still a rising field (Simpson, 2006; King, 2010; Switzer, 2010; Abousnoug & Machin, 2011; Knudsen & Stage, 2012; Lagerkvist, 2014; Machin & Abousnoug, 2014). King (2010) examined the commemoration of the dead from Helmand Province, Afghanistan, and identified a shift in how the soldier is imagined in the British public. This is particularly evident through new commemorative practices, e.g. the weekly rituals of notification and remembrance of the war dead. Through these rituals the soldier is domesticated and personalized, being

and courageous in protecting democratic values but also as a modern human being with love of adventure and aiming for personal development (Mayor H.C. Østerby, Colonel Kurt Mosgaard, and Commissioner of Police Jens Kaasgaard). The material from 2014 is influenced by a discourse of 'ending the mission' in Afghanistan. The soldiers are portrayed as professionals who have actively and bravely protected Danish values. A clear domestication of the soldier figure is also visible (Mogens Lykketoft, Minister of Defence Nicolai Wammen, Head of Defence Peter Bartram, National Commissioner of Police Jens Henrik Højbjerg).

³Reception analysis of the FFDDP is not the aim of this article, but it is worth noticing that the FFDDP has had a mixed reception. A 2009 TNS Gallup poll showed that 56% welcomed an FFDDP, while 28% were against (TNSGallupPublic, 2009). Some have criticized the FFDDP for being without content and being worthless in regards to debating the mission in Afghanistan (Berg Sørensen). Others have criticized the FFDDP for having too much focus on the soldier and not on other groups, e.g. doctors or Red Cross workers (Heidebo, 2012).

remembered primarily as a living personality more than as a representative of the state. The dead soldier is remembered for his professionalism and is first and foremost defined by his personality and his domestic relations (King, 2010).

Graham Dawson has analysed the soldier hero as a form of imagined masculinity making use of textual analyses from the field of literary and media studies and combining it with Kleinian psychoanalysis to be able to understand the formation of subjectivity in his autobiographical study (Dawson, 1994: 7).

Tradition of study — discourse, commemoration, and war

In a broader sense the present study is also a part of a larger corpus of discursive studies of commemoration and war.

In 2004, *Discourse & Society* published a special issue concerning war discourses arising out of the events of 11 September 2001 (Martin & Edwards, 2004). This issue holds articles whose analyses are primarily based on ‘verbal texts’, viewing these as one form of communicative modality. Standing out in this issue is Chouliaraki’s analysis of television footage which demonstrates a multimodal approach, focusing on ‘how the reported event [11 September] “comes to mean” how it becomes intelligible through television’s meaning-making operations’ (Chouliaraki, 2004: 185).⁴

Another example of post 11 September research is Gardiner’s investigation of gender discourses in the US army through analysis of the institutional level. Here a new institutional gender identity, ‘the warrior’ has been created for the soldier as a covering masculinity applicable to soldiers regardless of sex or the nature of the soldier’s tasks (Gardiner, 2012).

Hodges and Nilep facilitate an important contribution to the field in their *Discourse, War, and Terrorism*. The common denominator for the chapters in this publication is the explicit focus on discourse generated out of the events of 11 September and seen from within the critical study of language (Hodges & Nilep, 2007: 3). As pointed out in the introduction, many of the chapters fall within the school of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which means that the studies, despite their different theoretical frameworks, have one thing in common; an orientation towards language embedded in the social (Hodges & Nilep, 2007: 4). Another example of a CDA-inspired analysis is Almeida and Hafner’s analysis of the portrayal of American and Afghan soldiers in US newspapers as respectively heroes and traitors (Almeida & Hafner, 2014).

The present article however is rooted in discourse theory. This means that it is based on another conception of discourse. According to Laclau and Mouffe, a discourse is a temporary fixation of meaning. The discourse is a totality, where the relation between the signs is what stops the meaning from changing. However the fixation can never be

⁴For other examples of multimodal analysis of war and commemoration, see Abousnnouga and Machin (2011) and Machin and Abousnnouga (2014).

totally stable, it can be destabilized or reproduced through on-going articulations (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 112). When a discourse becomes hegemonic, it indicates that a hegemonic intervention (Laclau, 1993) through articulations has successfully dissolved potential antagonisms and conflicting discourses and has thus created a new dominance. Laclau and Mouffe reject the distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive and, in Jacob Torfing's words, 'insist on the interweaving of the semantic aspects of language with the pragmatic aspects of actions, movements and objects' (Torfing, 1999: 94). This interweaving transcends Fairclough's idea of the dialectic relation between the discourse and the social (Fairclough, 2005). The methodological frame of the analysis is designed with key concepts from discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985): discourse, hegemony, articulation, and subject position. I use the discourse-theory concepts as sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969; Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007), that is, to inspire and open up my reading and analysis of the commemorative speeches. As sensitizing concepts, the discourse-theory concepts function as the lens through which I do my reading and analysis.

I follow Laclau and Mouffe in viewing identities as socially constructed and posit that the different renderings of the soldier figure can in fact be regarded as models of masculine identities (Dawson, 1994; Connell, 1995) or subject positions (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 115) that are offered to the real-life soldier. Following this, I identify what discourses on the soldier are prevalent or even hegemonic in the material and what might pose threats or counter-discourses to these temporarily hegemonic fixations of meaning.

The commemorative speech

I point to the commemorative speech as an important medium of conveying certain beliefs or ideas of community and consensus. In this way, the commemorative speech is considered to be an essentially political action. Lazar and Lazar's analysis of Bush, Blair, and Bin Laden's speeches demonstrate how speeches are used in legitimizing conflict (Lazar & Lazar, 2004). And Graham, Keenan, and Dowd show how speeches are used to call people to war and to create political legitimacy in times of crisis (Graham et al., 2004). Quoting Wodak et al., the commemorative speech

seeks to convey certain political values and beliefs, to construct common characteristics and identities and to create consensus and a spirit of community, which in turn is intended to serve as a model for the future political actions of the addressees. (Wodak et al., 1999: 71)

This is the basis for choosing the official speeches given on the FFDDP in 2013 as empirical data. The analysis is thematically structured and focuses on the discourses that dominate the speeches.

The speakers on the FFDDP in Copenhagen were authority holders at the time: the Danish Prime Minister then in office Helle Thorning-Schmidt, then the Danish

Minister of Foreign Affairs Villy Søvndal, the Danish Head of Defence Peter Bartram, and the Danish Army Dean Thomas H. Beck. As leaders they have the potential to influence and temporarily fixate particular discourses on the soldier figure. The speeches are given in a commemorative context and this partly determines what is being said. The official commemorative context offered is a day that is principally a neutral date that should be honoured regardless of political stances. Nevertheless, I expect the speakers' political positions and offices to influence their speeches. As Wodak et al. set forth in their analysis of commemorative speeches, a chancellor or a federal president is prone to advocate for unity and to act as an integrative authority rather than the opposite (Wodak et al., 1999: 72–73).⁵

Founding a Flag-Flying Day for Denmark's deployed personnel

In 2002, Denmark once again became a belligerent state when the Danish parliament decided that Denmark should take part in the Afghan War and become an active member of the international coalition. Before that, Denmark had had a long tradition of engaging in peacekeeping missions, such as in Egypt, Gaza, and Cyprus.

With the 1990s engagement in Bosnia, Denmark's involvement in international missions was widened so that it also included peacemaking missions.⁶ Today, Denmark pursues an active foreign policy to increase international security and stability. In 2002, Denmark sent soldiers to Afghanistan as part of the UN-mandated international NATO force, ISAF, the International Security Assistance Force. On 10 May 2014, the Danish fighting forces officially ended their mission in the Helmand province (Forsvaret, 2014). Approximately, 10,000 Danish soldiers were sent to Afghanistan in the period between 2002 and 2014, resulting in 43 fallen soldiers.⁷

The FFDDP is the first of its kind in a Danish context. Never before has tribute been paid to soldiers through official national commemorations in Denmark. The soldier as a national figure dates back to developments in the mid-1800s when the army in Denmark was nationalized.

Today, Denmark has eighteen official days when the Danish flag is hoisted; seven royal birthdays, five connected to Christian traditions, two connected to World War II, and one each for Constitution Day, New Year's Day, Reunion Day⁸, and the new FFDDP. According to the Department of Justice, the official flag days are days of particular national importance. State authorities have a duty to fly a special

⁵For analysis of Prime Ministerial speeches, see Gavriely-Nuri (2014) and Fairclough (2005).

⁶The distinction between peacekeeping and peacemaking is not a simple one. For this purpose it suffices since the distinction is used and perceived by Danish policy makers. For a critical approach to the concept of peacekeeping, see Cunliffe (2013).

⁷The focus of this article is on the FFDDP speeches given in 2013. From February to August 2013, ISAF 15 was deployed with 548 persons in Helmand. From August 2013 to February 2014, ISAF 16 was deployed with 271 persons in Helmand (Defence Command Denmark 2014). This reduction in the number of deployed was the beginning of the Danish withdrawal.

⁸On this day, Denmark celebrates the fact that in 1920 Sønderjylland was reunited with the rest of Denmark by referendum after having been a part of Germany.

swallowtail flag, whereas organizations, private persons and companies are free to choose if they want to fly the Danish flag (Department of Justice, 2013).⁹

In 2007, the Danish veteran Kim Eg Thygesen introduced his idea of an FFDDP on a private webpage (*SoldaternesFlagdag*, 2007). Prior to this, there had been political debates concerning a date for an FFDDP, but all with more limited commemorative scope. Thygesen put pressure on the decision-makers by expressing a need for Denmark to pay tribute to deployed personnel sent on international missions. His argument for an FFDDP was that Denmark ought to acknowledge the soldiers who fight for Denmark. Today Kim Eg Thygesen is considered to be the founder of the FFDDP in its present form.

The first FFDDP took place on 5 September 2009. According to the press release, the purpose of the day is to pay tribute to Danes who have partaken in international missions issued by the Danish Government since 1948. The press release announcing the new FFDDP also stated

The Government has emphasized finding a neutral date so that there will be the best possible support for the day. The choice of 5 September as an FFDDP builds on a recommendation from three people with particular historical insights. (Department of Justice, 2009)¹⁰

From this release, it appears that the government abandoned the earlier idea of choosing a day that would bear reference to a single historical event. In order to pick a neutral date, they consulted people they believed to have particular 'historical insight'. The working group was asked to take into account that the new commemoration day should have a neutral and unifying symbolism, that it should not interfere with other official flag days and that the days should not be tied to specific political positions. The working group recommended a neutral date since the group believed that: 'If a day with a symbolic meaning were to be picked, the working group believes that the date is likely to split rather than unify' (Document UFB40723, 2009). In their recommendation to the government, it was further stated that the date should not be too close to days of symbolic importance or 9/11 because that might disturb the day's purpose.

Since the first FFDDP in 2009, the programme for the day in Copenhagen¹¹ has consisted of four parts. There is a wreath-laying ceremony at the historic site of the fortress Kastellet and since 2011 at the monument to Denmark's international effort since 1948 inside the fortress, at The Princess's Bastion. The wreath-laying ceremony is followed by a memorial service in the Church of Holmen. Hereafter a parade with the deployed personnel from this year's missions on Christiansborg Castle Square in front of the Danish Parliament. This is finally followed by a reception inside the

⁹For a more extensive analysis of the Danes' use of their flag, see Jenkins (2007).

¹⁰The working group consisted of Professor Dr Phil. Knud J.V. Jespersen, Museum Director, Cand. Phil. Ole Louis Frantzen and military historian, Cand. Mag. Hans Christian Bjerg.

¹¹Apart from the official commemoration programme held in Copenhagen, a number of local celebrations are held in larger cities and in towns with military barracks.

Danish Parliament. In the programme, official representatives from Denmark take part. Members of the royal family, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Defence usually participate in these official events.

My analysis is structured around three salient discourses identified in the material: the soldier as heroic figure, the soldier figure waging ethical warfare and the soldier figure as a veteran.

The soldier as a hero — a force for change and *good*

In the following sections, I show how the figure of the Danish soldier is ascribed heroic traits in discourses on Denmark as an active state fighting for freedom and democracy in the international community. Dawson and Connell inspire the concept of the hero; Dawson because he stresses the changing historical forms of what he calls hero narratives, and Connell for pointing to the imagery of masculine heroism as an essential part of keeping soldiers in line, setting standards, and claiming popular assent (Connell, 1995: 214). In Dawson and Connell's work, the hero embodies an idealized masculinity. Infused with a particular heroic masculinity, the soldier figure has, according to Dawson, historically been infused with virtues of manhood and 'military virtues such as aggression, strength, courage and endurance'. This with war is the ultimate test for a 'real man' prepared to fight and ultimately to sacrifice his life (Dawson, 1994: 1).

The soldier is the central figure in missions that the Prime Minister describes as 'dangerous missions', 'the mission is tough', 'the missions make a difference', and 'the missions do matter'. When she describes why the missions matter in her opinion, she lists examples of how the Danish soldiers and veterans have made a difference:

Dear soldiers and veterans. We are gathered here today, because we are proud of you. And you never have to doubt that the Danes back your efforts. It makes a difference when Danish specialists from the Emergency Management Agency help build a refugee camp for Syrian refugees. It makes a difference to fathers, mothers, children and grandparents. Ask the Syrian families what your efforts are worth. Yes, it can be hard. Yes, it can be heavy. There can be setbacks. But you keep on going. You keep on going because it is important. Ask the Afghan girl that has started school. Ask her sick brother who gets treatment in the health clinic. Your efforts matter. (Thorning-Schmidt, 2013: 2)¹²

The examples she mentions in her speech are all humanitarian in their substance and can be hard to question. By using these examples, she creates a discourse of unquestionable virtues and underpins a claim that all Danes support the involvement in international missions. This discourse of humanitarianism ties to broader developments in international law, where humanitarian values are seen as the prerequisite for peace (DUPI, 1999). By highlighting these examples, emphasis is placed on parts of the

¹²The speeches quoted in this article has been translated by the author. The speeches were given in Danish.

international missions that are not related to combat but health issues and education. The unquestionable virtues are strengthened throughout the speech by aligning the soldiers with a positive change through phrases, such as ‘you plant hope’, ‘you replace discouragement with will and vigour’, and finally ‘You show us that it makes a difference to fight for freedom, democracy and respect for the individual human being’ (Thorning-Schmidt, 2013: 3). This last quote shows that the Prime Minister wants to convey the idea that the Danish soldier can help transform foreign countries by conveying what she calls ‘values that are fundamental to us Danes’ (Thorning-Schmidt, 2013: 3). The soldier becomes a proponent for a whole society’s set of values and becomes a figure that exercises global governance driven by an idea of humanitarian values. This ties to a broader development in the field of international security where security and development interlace (Duffield, 2001) and the divide between humanitarian and military missions is becoming harder to see (Nørgaard, 2006: 32). It is thus possible to ascertain that there is a clear connection to an international discourse on security, development, and humanitarianism¹³ and that the discourses in a Danish military context are mimicking international trends.¹⁴ Taking a look at Denmark’s closest ally in Afghanistan, the UK, the similarity is evident. Tony Blair was one of the strongest advocates of the idea that, in Malcolm Chalmers’ words, ‘Western military force could be the midwife of radical transformation of foreign societies, bringing freedom and democracy to territories suffering under tyrannical rule’ (Chalmers, 2014: 110). Blair advocated this in 1999 in relation to the Kosovo intervention in his doctrine for the international community (the ‘Chicago Doctrine’), but it has also been an approach used to understand and label the British operation in Afghanistan since 2006 (Chalmers, 2014: 109).

The discourse of Denmark and the Danish soldiers as forces for change is fixated by articulations that stress the purpose of international missions as making a difference. It is statements such as ‘contributing to a better world for all of us’, ‘making a difference for millions of Afghans’, ‘making a difference in the world’, and ‘bringing hope where there was only despair’ (Søvndal, 2013: 2–3), that convey this same discourse in the Foreign Minister’s speech. The arguments in these passages of the speech can be seen as what one could call moralized policy or ‘forces for change’ or ‘forces for good’ discourse, as is known from the British context (Farrell et al., 2013: 291; Chalmers, 2014: 109). By foregrounding the humanitarian and value-based ideas behind the missions, a particular rendering of the soldier is promoted. The soldier is constructed as a proponent of values that are made indisputable in a discourse of freedom and democracy. That the soldier figure fights for freedom and democracy already forms the basis of a hero subject position. He is

¹³Ashplant et al. (2000) also point to human-rights narratives being articulated through multi-state alliances and institutions of international law.

¹⁴Denmark has been a close ally with both the US and Britain for many years, Denmark obviously being the ‘follower’, mimicking some of the discourses from this alliance. Another parallel development can be seen in the launch of the FFDDP in Denmark and the launch of an Armed Forces Day in Britain also in 2009. For interesting points on the concept of ‘mimicking’ in a military context, see Ben-Ari and Frühstück (2003, p. 552).

fighting for a better world. Added to this are statements that render the soldier figure as brave, energetic, enduring, resilient and willing to suffer privations, and even paying with his life. This corresponds well with what Graham Dawson has identified as heroic characteristics. In his speech, the Head of Defence, Peter Bartram, recognizes the courage the soldiers have shown and the privations the soldiers have accepted: 'it is your commitment, your courage, your actions and your acceptance of privations, that is the essence of international missions' (Bartram, 2013: 1). The Prime Minister talks about the 'unique effort by Danish fighting troops in the front row' and 'our long-haired and long-bearded Special Forces training Afghan Special Forces' (Thorning-Schmidt, 2013: 2), both examples of the characteristics added to the soldier figure. The fighting troops are portrayed as brave, and the Special Forces by their mere looks show signs of being tough and persevering. A specifically Danish accent to the discourses of humanitarianism is the positioning of Denmark as a small country striving not to be cowed by more powerful countries. The Prime Minister addresses this, when she states that Denmark needs to take responsibility on the international scene, so that 'the bigger players cannot keep the small ones down'. The Head of Defence stresses that Denmark's contribution compels the respect of collaborators such as the US, UK, and France. This respect and praise is due to the Danish soldier's 'long haul' and a 'high professional level'.

Overall, the soldier figure is portrayed as a hero; not with force and fighting as the central components but instead armed with hope and democratic values. Thus, the traditional image of the enduring masculine hero is supplemented with value-based discourses of *good* adding an extra dimension to the heroic portrait.

The soldier as a figure waging ethical warfare

The Foreign Minister Villy Søvndal states that it can never be an easy decision to partake in international missions, thus indicating ethical dimensions of warfare without using the word 'war' at any time during his speech. The Foreign Minister is also a member and former party chairman of the left-wing party the Socialist People's Party, and fiercely opposed Denmark's former Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's decision for Denmark to engage in the war in Iraq. This party background and earlier political stance may be a factor in him downplaying the war aspect. The Foreign Minister stresses that the decision-makers act on behalf of democracy when they decide upon Denmark's participation in international missions. This has the effect of stabilizing the efforts as legitimate and grounded in a democratic decision process. The people that are sent on missions are referred to as 'deployed personnel' (in Danish *udsendte*), which covers all kinds of personnel and not just servicemen/soldiers. He rarely uses specific job titles, e.g. soldiers, for the ones participating in the missions. This is in accordance with the intent of the official purpose of the FFDDP to pay tribute to all deployed personnel (Danish Defence, Danish National Police, Danish Emergency Management Agency).

As with the intent of the monument and with the ‘neutrality’ of the FFDDP date, the Foreign Minister’s speech maintains a more distanced view of the soldier by using the broad term *deployed personnel*. The only time the Foreign Minister mentions soldiers and civilian personnel, he gives them a number of subject positions that create the feeling of the soldier being one of us. The soldier that the ‘national we’ send off is a ‘mother, father, sister, brother, spouse, partner, daughter or son’ (Søvndal, 2013: 3), and thus an emotional claim is connected to the soldier figure. The soldier figure is domesticated, and in line with Judith Butler’s work, made grievable (Butler, 2010: xxi) by presenting the different subject positions to the listeners. Similar to this, the Army Dean states that it is a public matter for a country to be at war and that ‘we’ have to rely on the decisions being made conscientiously because it puts ‘good women and men, sons and daughters, spouses, parents, lovers and friends in serious situations (...)’ (Beck, 2013: 2). Again, the soldier figure is domesticated and made grievable. The similarity to Anthony King’s examination of how the dead British soldiers of Helmand are remembered is clear. King concludes that ‘In the act of remembrance, soldiers are increasingly defined by their actual relations to their relatives and spouses; dead soldiers are commemorated as husbands or wives, daughters or sons’ (King, 2010: 19).

Referring to the public debate on the conflict in Syria and Afghanistan, the Army Dean identifies a position in the public debate that he calls utilitarianism. He defines the utilitarian position as being what leads to most happiness for the largest number of people. According to him, this argument is cynical and weak, driven by a ‘relativistic teasing and disbelieving spirit that wants us to believe that there is nothing fundamentally right, true and good at all’ (Beck, 2013: 3). He promotes that this position should be abandoned in favour of a position that puts duty to the foreground. The duty to do ‘the good, true, right’ (Beck, 2013: 4). The soldier is aligned with this position through words like ‘brave’, ‘independent’, ‘well performing’, ‘loyal to political decisions’, and ‘ready to adapt’, and thus the soldier is constructed as a figure representing dutifulness, capability, and action. The relativistic position is blocked because it does not allow for the soldier to attain the hegemonic subject position as a dutiful and independent figure. An antagonistic relation is established between the soldiers who act and people who do not act but put moral judgements on the soldiers for their actions. These people are ascribed with cowardice, sloth and are viewed as imprisoned ‘in a dead life in standstill’ (Beck, 2013: 2). The soldier, on the other hand, is ascribed with the ability to ‘fight lies, injustice, evil and hostility’ (Beck, 2013: 3), and thus the image of the heroic, right-doing soldier figure emerges again.

The soldier figure as a veteran

The soldier as a veteran is a discourse that is present in the speeches of the Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister and the Head of Defence, but not in the sermon given

by the Army Dean. In the following, the image of the soldier as a veteran is examined in the three speeches. The theme is predominant in the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister's speech, and the veteran discourse is especially pronounced in the Prime Minister's speech. The analysis shows that no longer a combatant, the soldier-as-veteran figure is at once strengthened and burdened by his experiences abroad. As a group the veterans are conveyed to us as strong, yet also a distinct and vulnerable group with special needs to which society is obliged to attend. This plunges into a rising focus and debate on veteran policy in Denmark.¹⁵ Only just recently have veterans' psychological injuries been acknowledged as grounds for getting workers' compensation, and it is still a topic that is not yet fully settled.¹⁶ In 2014, a special law for the first time opened up for acknowledgement of post-traumatic stress disorder specifically for deployed personnel with symptoms arriving later than six months after deployment (L336, 2014).

The Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt gave her speech outside the parliament at the parade with the soldiers from ISAF 15, who had returned from the Helmand province, Afghanistan, in August the same year. She opened her speech as follows:

One Saturday in January I visited the barracks at Svanemøllen. Here I met a group of happy young people. They were exactly as enthusiastic as young people normally are. They were playing ball and they weren't playing by halves in the hard tackles. They were going at it and were evidently having fun. What was somewhat special was that the game was played on rolling boards. During substitutions I talked to some of the soldiers. Also about the serious fate they carry as wounded veterans. (Thorning-Schmidt, 2013: 1)

She describes the soldiers as happy and young but also as carrying a serious fate because they have been wounded. She indicates that she is close to them and pays attention to their situation as veterans. She uses this anecdotal story to illustrate and acknowledge the physical costs of war. She uses phrases that indicate that the experiences the soldiers have from the missions are something they have to carry; phrases such as 'a heavy burden' and 'but some of you also have difficult thoughts to carry. And others again have to carry the backpack on only one leg' (Thorning-Schmidt, 2013: 1). With these statements the Prime Minister acknowledges both the physical and psychological costs of war. At the same time as the soldiers' vulnerability as veterans is stated and acknowledged, she does not let the vulnerability of the veteran stand alone. The veteran is ascribed with words like 'happy' and 'energy and will to live' (Thorning-Schmidt, 2013: 1), and she conveys the message that most soldiers return from a mission strengthened. Thus the strength and will to live triumph over the vulnerability and the soldiers are 'coming home with the backpack filled with experience and knowledge'

¹⁵See, e.g. Løvgren (2014) on the acknowledgement of psychological injury.

¹⁶See the press release from the Ministry of Employment (2013).

(Thorning-Schmidt, 2013: 1). By ascribing strength and happiness to the veterans she tries to push the vulnerability to the background, letting the positive depictions be hegemonic. Thus, the veteran discourse reveals cracks in the image of the soldier as strong and as a non-combatant.

The Prime Minister thereby establishes a veteran community, a community that she wants the veterans to maintain after returning home. She stresses that the soldiers have shared experiences that are 'rough' and 'tough', and 'rougher and tougher than we can perhaps ever imagine' (Thorning-Schmidt, 2013: 1). These experiences create 'a strong bond' between them that she encourages them to hold onto once they are home again. She says that they need to 'take care' of each other, and this creates the image of the soldiers as figures that need to be taken care of, by each other as well as by the surrounding community. This makes the soldier a member of a distinct group and creates a position for the surrounding society that is in a debtor relationship to the veteran.

The Foreign Minister Villy Søvndal's speech was given at the wreath-laying ceremony at the monument to Denmark's international effort since 1948. He refers to the flame that burns in the monument and lets it function as an offset for the last part of his speech. In a way similar to the Prime Minister, he addresses that those who have come home may have changed because of what they have experienced while on mission. He stated: 'Some of you have come home strengthened, others have come home with scars on body and soul. The flame also burns to remind us all that those who return home often have changed' (Søvndal, 2013: 4). This is clearly a reference to the soldiers returning as veterans. Similar to the Prime Minister's speech, it reveals a focus on the veteran as a distinct group that society needs to pay attention to and towards which society needs to show its gratitude. This is also evident in the Head of Defence Peter Bartram's speech; the Danish Defence is indebted to the veterans as well as to the volunteer organizations and society. The flame mentioned in the passage above is, according to the Danish foreign minister, a reminder to 'all of us at home' that international missions change people and that these people may need society's help. Both the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister's focus on the veteran concept are in accordance with a growing political focus over the last years in Denmark on the veterans as a distinct social group. The links that the Foreign Minister establishes between the veteran and the community at home are strong, and it is evident that the soldier figure in this manner belongs to a unifying collective 'we' characterized by being the soldiers' 'home'. It conveys an image of the soldier as a figure returning home to a unified nation. It portrays a community of consensus, which Wodak et al. (1999) also stress as a characteristic trait in a commemorative speech.

As we saw in the analysis above, the soldiers are not mentioned by their specific job title by the Foreign Minister but as 'deployed personnel'. The fact that the veterans are not explicitly described as soldiers also has the effect of downplaying the image of combat in the portrayal of the group. No real images of war, war

experiences or danger are conveyed to the listeners. What is maintained and hegemonized in the discourse is the neutralizing and broader term ‘deployed personnel’, and what is left out is the more precise term *soldier* that does not correlate with the stability and peace and calm of the speech. Nevertheless, it is clear that there must be danger involved when some of the personnel never returned home and others returned with both physical and psychological scars. The veteran theme challenges the discourses on the soldier as a peace-loving figure waging ethical warfare. In the veteran discourse, it is hard for the speakers to fixate the image of the missions as ‘just’ missions; the wounded veterans distort this image by also being wounded, vulnerable subjects in a mission that admittedly is a violent war.

Conclusions

Denmark has not had a strong tradition for commemorating and honouring Danish soldiers, but with Denmark’s recent partaking in international missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, new ways of commemorating and honouring soldiers are emerging. In 2009, a Flag-Flying Day (FFDDP) in honour of deployed personnel on international missions since 1948 was initiated. Through a discourse-theory-based methodology the analysis shows that the hegemonic discourses on the figure of the soldier are discourses of heroism interweaving masculine virtues of endurance and resilience with fight for change, for the good. The soldier becomes a proponent for indisputable values, and in this way a space is created where oppositional voices are ruled out. The soldier figure is not a ‘simple’ warrior hero but rather a reflective hero figure possessing democratic and ethical values. The classical warrior hero cannot stand on his own in the Danish material – the image of a rough and resilient soldier has to be followed by images that soften this and thus give it a specifically Danish accent. The soldier represents the small nation’s right and responsibility in a game with bigger and more powerful allies. Ruled out are the depictions of international missions as warfare with violent effects. The possible costs of international missions are acknowledged through a veteran discourse that points not just to the veteran’s strength but also to his vulnerability. Thus, cracks arise in the image of the soldier – and effectively war – as peaceful.

With an eye on the British development, being Denmark’s closest allies in Helmand, it is evident that the discourses in a Danish context are mimicking international trends. An example of this is the way in which the soldiers are domesticated. The soldier is somebody’s son or daughter or husband or wife. The domestication of the soldier widens the space for commemoration and mourning so that potentially everybody is able to pay respect and mourn disregarding, for a moment, the potential critical stances one might take against the active Danish foreign policy.

Despite the clear domestication of the soldier, the soldier figure is still ascribed meaning within a national frame. The figure of the soldier is actively placed in a

position of tribute and honour by the alignment of the FFDDP with other Flag-Flying Days considered to be of national importance. Thus, the political claim for the figure of the soldier is central in the framing of the commemorative space.

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