"Military Families" – Critical Perspectives on a Research Field

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ABSTRACT

Based on ethnographic fieldwork among Danish soldiers and their families going through military deployment between 2015 and 2016, this article investigates the term "military families" from a critical anthropological perspective. It starts by outlining how the military family, as a discrete category, emerged as a research field in the United States between the 1960s and 1980s. The article argues that the specific geographical context in which the study of military families developed has had significant impact both on the academic knowledge produced about these families and what has come to be understood as a "military family." The article proceeds to identify dominant research themes within three academic disciplines which, it is argued, have each shaped the study of military families: psychology, sociology and feminist studies. In the second part of the article, anthropological perspectives on military family life are introduced as examples illustrating the ways in which the cultural and social context become relevant when investigating how military deployment and the military institution affect both service members and their families. The paper argues that an exploration of "things military" (Lutz, 2002) must relate to and take into consideration the societal and cultural norms shaping the experience of any military.

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VIGNETTE: "AFTER ALL, IT IS A LIFESTYLE"

Laila and Christian's family live in a three-story house north of Copenhagen, Denmark. Christian works as a captain in the army at a nearby garrison and Laila is a pedagogue in a local day-care institution. Christian has been deployed five times to Kosovo and Afghanistan and when I meet the family, they are facing Christian's sixth deployment. Like her husband, Laila had been deployed in Kosovo in the 1990s. In fact, Laila and Christian met on a military march shortly after her deployment. When I arrive for an interview with Laila on a cold evening in March 2015, Christian greets me at the front door. While he prepares coffee, Laila and I join their children Caroline and Victor in the living room. Victor is playing on his Game Boy and Caroline is fully occupied drawing, presumably for the expanding bricolage of children's artworks on the wall behind her. Laila kisses the children goodnight before leading the way down to the basement where we can talk undisturbed. At the end of the stairs, through the utility room, Laila guides me into a large room separated from the rest of the basement. The contrast from upstairs is striking. The children's toys and the colourful use of decorations have been replaced by army green symbols and artefacts from Laila's, and especially Christian's, time in the military. The left corner of the room is dedicated to Christian's different uniforms, pictures of him at formal military ceremonies, and the medals he has received during his almost 20-year career in the Danish Defence Forces. At the other end of the room, a number of history books on war fill the shelves of a large bookcase. During the interview, I ask Laila what being a soldier entails and she explains: "If you don't want to be deployed then you shouldn't be a soldier. ... You just have to accept it, because after all it is a lifestyle, and if you take a look around," she continues while glancing at Christian's collection of miniature combat vehicles neatly placed on a shelving unit next to the bookcase, "you can probably see that it has influenced our home quite a bit."

The room, however, does not only bear witness to Christian's interest and career in the military. Laila's past in the Danish Defence Forces has also found its way into the basement. The back wall is decorated with two big gold frames. One is covered with medals, key hangers and pins that resemble her time in the military. The other gold frame contains a somewhat dirty Danish flag, which Laila brought home from Kosovo. In front of the flag, Laila has tucked in a wedding picture of her and Christian. I notice that Christian is wearing his regiment's gala uniform in the picture. Excited to share stories about their wedding, Laila insists on showing me more pictures upstairs. I follow Laila up into the hallway, which is covered in family photos including a large wedding photo of the entire family. In it, to my surprise, Victor is dressed in the same gala uniform as his father. Christian, who in the meantime has joined us on the stairs, tells me that the outfit was a spontaneous idea. He had found it in a costume store the night before their wedding and decided to surprise Laila. Like Victor in the photo, Laila smiles as she recalls her son's outfit on her wedding day.

INTRODUCTION

The vignette opening this article portrays the often surprising ways that the military finds its way into everyday family life. Moreover, it points to the subtle yet defining negotiations taking place within Danish families as cultural ideals about a good family life are balanced with institutional ties, traditions and responsibilities. Christian and Laila's home and family life will be the ethnographic point of reference in this article, in which I critically reflect upon the research field of "military families." The study of the military family has, in recent decades, gained a strong foothold within the interdisciplinary field of military studies (Ross, 2014). From a Western perspective, military engagement in what Mary Kaldor (2012) has called the "New Wars" of the post-Cold War era has not only changed the work conditions of soldiers but has also affected soldiers' families at home. The changing landscape of modern warfare and soldiering pose new demands on soldiers as well as their families (Moelker et al., 2015, p. 4), and since the1980s, scholars from various disciplines have consistently studied the effects of military deployment on soldiers' family members.

In 2015, when I set out to do a 14-month-long ethnographic study among families of deployed Danish soldiers as a PhD student, I knew little, if anything, about the military. My interests as an anthropologist had always circled around issues such as family life, parenthood and gender. Reading into the literature on military families, I soon discovered that these families were most often characterised by a number of things differentiating them from civilian families. When I

embarked upon my fieldwork, this argument initially appeared to hold water. Soldiers serving in the Danish Defence Forces and their partners shared the experience of being in a unique situation compared to what they often referred to as "normal" Danish families. During my fieldwork, I interviewed 21 families. Seven of these families I followed in the timeframe before, during and after deployment. While I primarily talked to the partners at home, my fieldwork also consisted of semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with children and soldiers. I did participant observation on numerous occasions and in different settings – in the families' homes, at children's schools, social gatherings with friends and family, as well as military arrangements. Altogether, this gave me unique insights into the everyday life of Danish soldiers' families. Although the families I followed were going through so-called low-risk missions, the strain on family life was nonetheless remarkable (see Heiselberg, 2018a). During our conversations, the soldiers and partners sometimes described the family life that followed a career in the Danish military as a *livsstil* – a lifestyle, as illustrated by Laila's story above. Other partners were more hesitant towards associating themselves and their family lives with the military. Their critical perspectives on the Danish Defence Forces and its influence on their family life, however, seemed to uphold rather than dismiss the experience of being different from other families.

Yet, as it turned out, soldiers' families lived everyday lives for the most part similar to those of their civilian neighbours. Contrary to military families in Britain and the United States, for example (Clever & Segal, 2013; Gribble, 2016), all Danish soldiers and their partners inhabited civilian neighbourhoods, their children went to local civilian schools and day-care institutions, and soldiers' partners often worked civilian jobs. Only occasionally, military deployment would turn everyday life upside down and leave soldiers' partners at home on their own to manage the responsibilities of household, childcare and career and to conduct their social life alone. This is no different than in those families in which one parent works abroad for spells of similar length (see, for example, Thomas and Bailey, 2009). So – what makes these families special, and how should we study them, if not as distinctively different from other families? How might an anthropological approach to the study of family life and the military contribute with important insights into this field of inquiry?

To answer these questions, the article investigates the term "military families" from a critical anthropological perspective. By engaging with existing literature, the article points to the pitfalls of using the term as a fixed analytical category. For the purpose of comparison and academic clarity, I instead suggest that we take seriously the wider social and cultural landscape defining what it is to be a military family in a given time and place. As I will demonstrate, one way of doing this is by paying attention to the ways families negotiate the presence of the military in their daily family life. I start out with outlining how "military families" emerged as a research field in the United States between the 1960s and 1980s. I argue that the specific geographical context in which the study of military families developed has had significant impact on the academic knowledge produced about these families as well as what has come to be understood as a military family. I proceed to identify dominant research themes within three academic disciplines which, I argue, have each shaped the study of military families: psychology, sociology and feminist studies. In the last part of the article, I introduce anthropological perspectives on military family life in a discussion of the ambivalent and often contradictory relationship between the military and the people associated with it.[1]

MILITARY FAMILIES – THE EMERGENCE OF A RESEARCH FIELD

Originally, the study of "military families" was initiated by the American military (Segal & Harris, 1993). In the post-World War Two years, very little research focused on the family members of military personnel (Segal & Harris, 1993, p. 4; for exceptions, see Hill, 1945; Schuetz, 1945). However, the launch of the first support programmes for military families in the United States in the 1960s became the starting point for a growing academic interest in soldiers' families, particularly among military psychologists, sociologists and feminist researchers. The vast majority of the academic literature on military families has an American context (Gewirtz and Youssef, 2016, p. 5) which has had implications for the focus, discussions and results within

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1   The discussions and reflections presented in this article are based on unpublished work from my PHD thesis, which explores military deployment from a family perspective (Heiselberg 2018b).

the field. For instance, a systematic review of the literature on psychosocial functioning and health in veteran families conducted by the Danish Centre for Social Science Research states that 88 of the 103 articles reviewed were from the United States; no studies were found from the Scandinavian countries (Jensen et al., 2015). These findings do not necessarily imply that other countries do not study the effects of war and military deployment on soldiers' families. Studies from Argentina, Slovenia and Japan are just a few examples of the existing literature on military families from other national contexts (Frederic & Masson, 2015; Juvan & Vuga, 2015; Kawano & Fukuura, 2015). It suggests, however, that American studies dominate the research field. Consequently, it becomes relevant to describe the cultural context and the circumstances under which "military families" emerged as a research field.

In their report *What We Know About Army Families*, the sociologist Mady Segal and the social work professor Jesse Harris argue that the development of various support programmes for American army families was a response to the challenges experienced by a growing number of military personnel in the American military (Segal & Harris, 1993, pp. 2–4). Soldiers struggled to balance a military career and a family life, and their spouses at home were frustrated with the high demands from the military (Harris, 2011, p. 6). From the 1960s onwards, the American army gradually started recognising its responsibility towards family members by developing support programmes and services. By the time of the early 1980s, the American army "began systematic attempts at policy formulation to address the problems" of military families (Segal & Harris, 1993, pp. 1, 4). During that period, academic interest in military families increased significantly. Policy makers and military institutions needed research data on which to base their family policies and initiatives, and thus a range of social scientists, especially psychologists and sociologists, were invited to study the needs and problems encountered by soldiers' family members. By the time Segal and Harris's report was published in 1993, the research on military families in the United States could already "fill a library" (Segal & Harris, 1993, p. 4).

The women's studies professor Janet Kohen has described the same developments within the American military from the 1960s onwards, albeit from a critical feminist perspective. In 1984, Kohen defined the process of developing support programmes and policies directed at "military families" as reactive rather than proactive (Kohen, 1984, p. 402) That is, facilities directed at soldiers' families were not developed because the military recognised the hardships experienced by soldiers' family members but, rather, because of an organisational demand to recruit and retain more skilled personnel – i.e., older men more likely to be married and have children (Kohen, 1984). Following Kohen, the American military's incentive to develop programmes, policies and initiatives was never to accommodate the challenges faced by soldiers and their family members, but, rather, to make soldiers' families adaptable to the military lifestyle (Kohen, 1984), a point also emphasised by the sociologist René Moelker and the psychologist Irene van der Kloet (2006). "Producing" military families that would support the soldier in his endeavours, Kohen argues, would allow the military institution to continue demanding full loyalty from its members, without taking into account social changes in the larger society, such as changing gender roles and the balance between work and family life (Kohen, 1984, p. 402).

As illustrated, Segal, Harris and Kohen's diverse academic backgrounds have had implications for the approach and focus of their research on military matters, which is often the case within interdisciplinary research fields where scholars seek to contribute to different debates. Below, I describe dominant themes of the current debates on military families within psychology, sociology and feminist studies. The division presented below is constructed for the purpose of providing an overview of the dominant issues addressed by various scholars and disciplines. The literature presented is primarily from 1995 onwards. Some authors have conducted research within more than one field and in collaboration with scholars from other disciplines, just as some frameworks are used across disciplines.

Psychology: Stress and trauma among partners and children

The majority of research on military families is conducted by psychologists. In fact, the relationship between the military and psychology, at least in the United States, has often been described as "symbiotic" with reference to the growth and development of the discipline enabled by the military institution (Summers, 2008; Laurence & Matthews, 2012). Since the end of World War Two, military psychologists have contributed to "recruiting, training, socialising,

assigning, employing, deploying, motivating, rewarding, maintaining, managing, integrating, retaining, transitioning, supporting, counseling, and healing military members" (Laurence & Matthews, 2012, p. 1). As the burgeoning literature on family members' mental health indicates, the cooperation between psychology and the military does not only involve the study of the soldier but, since the 1980s, as mentioned above, soldiers' relatives, too. Today, psychological research on military families is typically interested in studying individual family members' mental health at various stages of deployment or in relation to soldiers' psychological injuries, such as PTSD.

The psychological literature on military families can be divided into two subgroups. The first consists of studies focusing on distress among soldiers' partners and children. Distress is most often studied either in relation to family separation during deployment (see, for example, Merolla, 2011; Creech et al., 2014; Dursun & Sudom, 2015), or as a result of the soldiers' psychological reactions upon return from deployment (Laffaye et al., 2008; Cozza et al., 2010). The literature identifies several stressors among soldiers' spouses, such as concerns for children's wellbeing, marital problems and abuse. The second subgroup concerns studies that focus on trauma among partners and children of service members. Traumatisation is often studied from the perspective of what is known within military psychology as "secondary traumatisation" – a psychological diagnosis where family members of traumatised soldiers react and feel as if they themselves have experienced the events that caused the soldiers' trauma (see, for example, Mikulincer et al., 1995; Dekel et al., 2005; Baum et al., 2014). Naturally, there are overlaps among the two subgroups mentioned above, as well as areas of research that I have not accounted for here. One example is the growing interest among military psychologists in potentially positive outcomes of a military lifestyle, especially in relation to service members' children (Cozza & Lerner, 2013). The studies and themes mentioned above, however, suggest some general tendencies within the psychological approach to the study of military families. First, the empirical objects of study are typically individual family members' psychological responses to challenging or traumatic experiences; second, the research design is more often deductive than inductive; third, quantitative methods are generally favoured over qualitative.

Sociology: Work-life balance and risk assessment in military families

According to Eric Ouellet, the history of military sociology dates back to after the end of World War Two and can be divided into two separate branches, dealing roughly with civil-military relations and the military as an institution (Ouellet, 2006, p. 2). Within military sociology, the study of military families is sometimes categorised under the civil-military tradition (Caforio, 2006). However, over the years, the sociological literature on military families has grown to become a subfield of its own. Often, military sociologists and psychologists collaborate in research projects on military families and, as the literature reveals, a number of themes and methods overlap between the two academic disciplines (Moelker et al., 2015; Wadsworth & Riggs, 2014, 2016). Generally speaking, however, military sociology "adopts an external focus" (Dursun & Sudom, 2015) and studies how the military organization and lifestyle impact on the wellbeing of military families.

Within the sociological literature on military families, I have identified two directions. The first concerns the studies focused on the balance between work and family life in military families. This tradition owes much to the sociologist Mady Segal (1986), who has described the military and the family as two equally greedy institutions, each competing for the time and devotion of the service member. Sociologists interested in work-life balance in military families often find that the conflict between the military and the family has increased in recent years, as missions have become more frequent and as gender and family roles change (Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011; De Angelis & Segal, 2015; Smith, 2015). The second direction is concerned with identifying "risk factors" such as frequent separation of family members, relocation and isolation, as well as "protective factors" creating resilience (Demers, 2009; Chandra et al., 2010). With the purpose of introducing, evaluating or recommending support (programmes) to accommodate identified risk factors associated with the military lifestyle (see, for example, Andres & Moelker, 2011; Cozza et al., 2013), this branch of the literature is often made in collaboration with social work scholars. Generally, sociologists studying military families wish to improve the wellbeing of soldiers' family members by pointing to those social and institutional factors hindering a balanced and satisfying family life for this particular social category. In that sense, much of the

sociological literature on military families can be categorised as "instrumental" or "pragmatic" rather than critical (Ouellet, 2006, pp. 3,6). The opposite holds true for the feminist approach to military families.

Feminist studies: Militarisation and the social role of the military wife

Within feminist studies, a few scholars have dedicated their research to military matters. Among the most prominent researchers in this branch are Cynthia Enloe and Catherine Lutz, both using critical feminist perspectives in their studies of the U.S. military. Enloe's main focus is the militarisation of women's lives. Over the years, she has contributed considerably to our understanding of militarisation as a mechanism operating at both structural and gendered levels (Enloe, 1983, 2000). Lutz, while also concerned with militarisation, has a different perspective. By demonstrating how the role of the military institution has penetrated everything from the American education system to emergency aid, Lutz shows how American society, the "home front," in general, has been continuously militarised since the end of World War Two (Lutz, 2002, 2009). In relation to the literature on military families, feminist perspectives have mostly contributed with critical perspectives on the roles, identities and situation of the "military wife." Studies on British army wives (Hyde, 2016, 2017), ranks and hierarchies in the British and American military (Harrell, 2003; Jessup, 1996), voluntary work and expected social roles among military wives in Britain, the U.S. and Canada (Weinstein & White, 1997; Gribble, 2016), as well as the impacts of a "traditional" military institution on soldiers' wives' careers and social lives (Higate & Cameron, 2004) are some of the themes brought up by feminist researchers since the 1980s. Feminist studies and perspectives have, until recently, rarely been included in anthologies dealing with military families (see, for example, Moelker et al., 2015; Wadsworth & Riggs, 2014). Perhaps because of their unequivocal focus on gender as empirical and analytical categories, feminist studies of military spouses tend to be represented in the literature on gender and the military (see Woodward & Duncanson, 2017). However, recent works, such as *The Politics of Military Families: State, Work Organizations, and the Rise of Negotiation Household*, edited by René Moelker, Manon Andres and Nina Rones (2019) might indicate a shift toward a more critical focus on gender and care-work in the literature on military families.

WHAT IS A MILITARY FAMILY?

The term "military family" (especially in some national contexts) is used both by soldiers and their family members as a category of identification, and among researchers as an analytical category. In that sense, the "military family" and the derivatives "military spouse" and "military children" are simultaneously emic and etic terms. However, studies on military families rarely distinguish between the categories invented for academic purposes and the ones used by and among people themselves. Going through the literature on military families, one is unlikely to come across a definition of the military family. Scholars such as Karin De Angelis and Mady Segal point to the changing landscape of families in general as well as in the military by referring to the growing number of single parents and same-sex couples in service (De Angelis & Segal, 2015, p. 35). Other researchers draw attention to changes in the gender composition among serving soldiers as well as the emergence of dual-military couples (Smith, 2015; Segal & Segal, 2006). Meanwhile, few studies define, let alone reflect upon, the relevance or the analytical consequences of using the descriptive category "military families."

The absence of a precise definition of a "military family" in the literature can be explained by national differences in organisational structure and categorisation within military institutions. Not all countries have a clear definition of what constitutes a military family. A working group lead by the psychologist Rachel Gribble, for instance, examined existing definitions of "military/ veteran families" in four countries (the United States, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom). The working group concluded that only the United States had an official definition of military families; however, depending on the service of the soldier, even this definition was sometimes broadened to include other family members (Gribble et al., 2018). Official definitions influence, among other things, who is entitled to services provided by the military as well as who is considered part of the military community, if one such community exists (Oswald & Sternberg, 2014). If researchers provide a definition of military families in their studies, these tend not to correspond with current family forms (see, for example, Moelker & van der Kloet, 2006, p. 207) or turn out to be exclusionary, even within their own study (Cozza & Lerner,

2013, p. 4). From an anthropological perspective, the lack of reflection when using descriptive categories such as "military families" is problematic as it becomes unclear who is included in the category and by which criteria. Is the mother of a soldier's children, for instance, included in the study or only his current wife? Does "family" include stepchildren or only biological children? I do not suggest that scholars should decide on a universal definition of military families. This is neither possible nor desirable. However, when researchers do not provide a definition or reflect on the categories used in their studies, it becomes impossible to talk about military families from a comparative perspective.

STARTING FROM "THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FENCE"

As an analytical category, military families are often, within the literature, assumed to share a number of characteristics that set them apart from civilian families and which often define the study of these families. The characteristics are typically described as: (a) risk of injury and death; (b) frequent geographic relocation; (c) family separations; (d) long duty hours, shift work, and unpredictability of work hours; (e) residence in foreign countries; and sometimes (f) isolation from civilian society (Segal & Harris, 1993, p. 3; Dursun & Sudom, 2015, p. 128). Researchers refer to these characteristics when asserting that military families are "unique" and face incomparable stressors (see, for example, Harris, 2011, p. 1). The assumption that military families per se are different from other families, and thus that the category "military family" by default serves as a favourable analytical lens through which to study the challenges and experiences of military families is problematic. More important than understanding soldiers' families as "military families," I would argue, is an analytical focus on how these families navigate and position themselves according to existing categories, such as "soldier's wife," "husband," "mother" etc., both within and outside the military world. While recognising that soldiers' and veterans' families often live under different circumstances to those of their civilian neighbours, and that these differences should be accounted for, I am, as one of the founding fathers of military sociology has phrased it, concerned with how research on military matters often "places excessive emphasis on the boundaries – the formal boundaries – of the military" (Janowitz, 1960, p. 15). Morris Janowitz argues that one of the pitfalls of taking the military institution as a starting point for any analysis is the risk of removing "the military as an object of research from the societal environment" (Janowitz, 1960, p. 15). In his introduction to the anthology *New Directions in Military Sociology*, Eric Ouellet draws from Janowitz's point to argue for a new direction within military sociology. He states:

> One of the possible directions for military sociology is to look at the military institution from the other end of the spectrum. In other words, military sociology, traditionally, takes the institution for granted when it studies the various facets of military life. What this chapter proposes is to regard the military institution as the final outcome of military life rather than its starting point. (Ouellet, 2006, p. 4)

The critique put forward by Janowitz, and later Ouellet, I would argue, also applies to much research on the military family. The most obvious indication of this are the numerous studies on the effectiveness of various support programmes offered to military families by the military institution (see, for example, Paris et al., 2010; Kawano & Fukuura, 2015). Such studies are examples of what Eric Ouellet has termed an "instrumental" approach, in the sense that they are "useful" to military decision-makers, but not necessarily contributing to the conceptual frameworks of sociology, psychology or any other discipline (Ouellet, 2006, p. 12). Inspired by Ouellet and my own empirical findings, I propose an analytical approach in which it is the everyday lives, experiences and social relations between family members guiding the analytical focus, rather than a specific association with the military. Or, as my interlocutors would put it when talking about the civilian world, I suggest to start from "the other side of the fence."

As mentioned in the introduction, the presence of the military institution in the everyday lives of the Danish families in this study was limited. During deployment, communication with and information from the military increased; however, for the most part, their social lives and everyday needs were met by people and institutions outside the military. This does not mean that the military was absent in the lives of my interlocutors. As illustrated quite clearly in the vignette opening this article, the military did in fact creep into the intimate sphere of soldiers' families – sometimes also in unnoticed and unexpected ways (see Heiselberg, 2017). Nonetheless, my findings speak in favour of an approach to the study of soldiers'

families which does not presume that certain categories or characteristics apply to or define the experiences of all soldiers' families. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this is by pointing to the lack of identification with any military category such as "military wife" or "military family" among the families I encountered during my fieldwork. As also argued by scholars of Swedish military family life (Olsson & Olsson, 2019), the term "military family" simply did not resonate as a category of identification among these families. Nor were the characteristics of "military families" mentioned above relevant for all families at all times. Some did experience frequent separation caused by deployment, and at certain times the risk of injury or death had been present for some of my interlocutors. Others rarely deployed, and never to high-risk missions. Some soldiers worked long and unpredictable hours while others did not. Barely any experienced frequent relocation or residency in foreign countries, and none of the families were isolated from civilian society. Instead of terms such as "military wife" or "military child," some of the families adopted the term *pårørende*, relatives, introduced by the Danish military to refer to the soldier's immediate family. Originally, the Danish term was used to describe the family members of someone seriously ill. In that sense, in a Danish setting, the word connotes suffering and victimhood (Sørensen & Heiselberg, 2019). For some family members, these associations were experienced as degrading (Sørensen 2013, p. 107), whereas for the majority of my interlocutors, it seemed to fit well with their perception of deployment as a continuous struggle.

AMBIGUITY AT THE HEART OF CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Although my interlocutors did not identify as military families, they still – at certain periods in their lives – considered themselves different from other families. So, the crucial question remains: how should we go about studying these families without assuming that they share universal features of uniqueness? What, if anything, makes these families special? On one hand, the families considered their way of living as unique; on the other hand, most of the partners struggled not to let the Danish Defence Forces and the obligation of deployment become too dominant an aspect of their family life. Conclusively, the relationship between the Danish Defence Forces and the families I followed is probably best described as ambiguous – sometimes foregrounded in conversations about family life and at other times pushed to the margins. This became especially obvious when soldiers or their partners embraced certain aspects of the military lifestyle and rejected others. Or, as is so often the case in anthropological studies, when they told me one thing and did another. For instance: Trine, a mother of two boys and married to a sergeant in the Danish Army, refused on principal to participate in the official homecoming ceremony organized by the Danish Defence Forces when her husband returned home from his deployment. Participating would require her to take a day off from work – something that she had been forced to do several times during her husband's deployment to care for their children. However, when the Danish military organized a children's medals ceremony in collaboration with a volunteer organization to support Danish children's efforts during the deployment of a parent, Trine gladly welcomed the initiative. The more I became familiar with these families and the character of their struggles over the course of deployment, the more important it became to understand the complexity of a family life where military demands and obligations were entangled with ideals of what constitutes a good family life in a particular local and social context.

Other anthropologists have likewise studied how war, military culture and deployment are interpreted into the intimate sphere of home and family (see, for example, Sørensen, 2013; Wool & Messinger, 2012). Kenneth MacLeish's *Making War at Fort Hood: Life and Uncertainty in a Military Community* is a sophisticated portrayal of the everyday lives and struggles of army veterans, their family members and others living on a U.S. army base. In his book, MacLeish touches upon the issue of a certain military lifestyle. According to MacLeish's informants, clear boundaries exist between the "inside" and the "outside"; between the two sides of the fence, as my informants would phrase it. However, as he demonstrates, the presence of the army may manifest itself differently at different moments for different people, consequently leaving the boundaries between "the broader civilian world" and "army life" blurred and unsettled:

> The whole business of being in, and there being a specific interior in mind – "being
> in *it*," "believing in *it*" – is illuminating for what it suggests about the visibility and
> discreteness of the army as an institution. It is so totalising, so obviously present, but

in this curiously illusory fashion whereby one moment it is as in your face and obvious as a Humvee on the highway or the heraldic code of a shoulder patch, and the next minute it recedes into the deep background as merely the way things happen to be. This *it* seems to be defined just as much by how it flashes nervously in and out of view, from plainly obvious to invisible and back again, as it is by any putative content. (MacLeish, 2013, p. 27)

MacLeish (2013, p. 27) further argues that because these boundaries are constantly negotiated, disputed and reformulated by the practices and daily lives of the people defining them, "it is the constantly shifting and melting, looming and receding edges of one or another *it* that calls out for attention, that actually defines the object in question." That is, according to MacLeish, it is precisely the intangible and changing ways in which people on the "inside" negotiate, accept and reject the presence of a dominant military institution in their everyday lives that is of interest to the anthropologist. Inspired by MacLeish, I suggest that "things military" (Lutz, 2002) are interpreted into and transformed by intimate social relations, and thus that the relationship between the soldier, the members of their family, and the military is best understood taking the specific cultural and social context of soldiers' families seriously. MacLeish's insights furthermore suggest an approach to the study of military families that foregrounds situations and aspects of social life in which soldiers and their family members negotiate, balance or find themselves in moral dilemmas because of their "military position." Although a "totalizing" institution (MacLeish, 2013, p. 27), my study suggests that the military does not define the lives of Danish soldiers and their families. Their everyday lives as families and individuals take shape in a wider social context where multiple ideals, responsibilities, desires and aspirations coexist. The interior décor on the two floors in Christian and Laila's home is an illustrative example of this.

Alexandra Hyde's study conducted among British army wives is another example of anthropological research that may well serve as inspiration for the study of the military family. In her study of everyday life on a British army base in Germany, Hyde investigates "women's agency and wives' ambiguous status as both subjects and agents of militarization" (Hyde, 2017, p. 195). According to Hyde, an ethnographic focus on female partners' narratives and social practices during their stays overseas offers "military wives a central and productive, rather than peripheral or reactive role in mitigating the everyday effects of military power" (Hyde, 2017, p. 205). Essentially, Hyde suggests an approach to the study of military life where women are not portrayed merely as victims of militarisation but as active agents who sometimes benefit from the "barbed wire fences of military presence" (Hyde, 2017, p. 196) and at other times reject the demands and limitations caused by their social position. By paying attention to the everyday practices and strategies used by these women as they navigate foreign territory, Hyde illustrates how her interlocutors regain control and take advantage of the benefits provided for them. Studies such as those of Hyde and MacLeisch illustrate how social and cultural relations outside the military institution become crucial for the ways that members of military families negotiate their own position and demonstrate agency in the face of a dominating institution. My own study is no exception from this. As I have illustrated elsewhere, cultural ideals and norms surrounding family life and parenthood in a Danish context highly impacted the ways Danish soldiers' partners experienced and responded to military deployment (Heiselberg, 2017, 2018a). From this perspective, the analytical category "military families" cannot be disentangled from its local, social and cultural anchoring.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

By critically engaging with the research conducted on military families and based on my own and other anthropological studies, I have argued that studying "things military" (Lutz, 2002) should include a reflection on the contextual framings of one's study. In relation to "military families" this is particularly pertinent as the family and the military are indeed "greedy institutions', as Mady Segal (1986) reminds us. Both the family and the military are tied to cultural and normative structures as well as local practices. As defining institutions in Danish society, they both compete over the time and engagement of their members. However, it is their particular entanglement that frames the experience of being a (Danish) soldier family. As indicated by the vast psychological literature on war and the military's effects on service men

and their family members, the "spectacular world of war" (Featherstone, 1992) often steals the picture from the mundane world of the everyday. Notwithstanding this, everyday life is the place and time in which soldiers' and their family members comprehend the impact of war on their lives and social relations. Or as a soldier in my study bluntly put it: "It is at home the real war is going on." Explaining soldiers' families' relationships with the military as the result of a specific military culture, as a large part of the military sociology literature suggests, does not, for example, explain how families continually negotiate and relate to the military in their everyday lives. Nor do such explanations take into account the influence of social norms and ideals outside the military institution affecting family members' interpretation of themselves, their intimate family relations, and their relationship with the military. For instance, gendered norms and ideals in relation to domestic work, childcare and career ambitions, just to mention a few examples, strongly influence soldiers' partners' experiences of deployment and the military institution. To be clear, I do not argue that a "military culture" does not exist, or that some families in some social and local contexts do not identify as "military families." However, I do advocate that the relationship between any military and the people associated with the institution is studied with attention to the national and local context in which this relationship is formed.

As the historian Clare A. Dale eloquently notes: "The historical importance of the family to society has long been acknowledged by scholars in many fields; the importance of the relationship that exists between the military family and society, however, has been somewhat underestimated." (Dale, 2002, p. 347). An anthropological focus on everyday life and the intimate relations of Danish soldiers' family lives in the context of military deployment is one way of addressing this concern academically.

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