

## The power of PTSD

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### **Abstract**

Almost two decades after Danish soldiers had returned from missions in the Balkans, they caught the attention of the press and the public with their personal testimonies of post-mission social life. A life saturated with social phobia, break-up of families, depression, heavy medication, alcohol and drug abuse, numerous consultations with psychologists, struggles with the authorities, and in some cases (attempted) suicide. The public exposure of the Balkan veterans' experiences and predicaments coincided with a growing concern that soldiers deployed to Afghanistan would develop PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). However, the sudden interest in the Balkan veterans' situation was primarily spurred by the controversial fact that despite apparent evidence of a psychological disorder, Arbejdsskadestyrelsen (Injury Board) in most cases rejected their claims for compensation. The veterans' sense of being misrecognized and "stuck in the system" generated feelings of frustration, anger, despair, or certain numbness, apart from leaving many of them in a situation with no means to provide for themselves and their families, and little hope for a better the future. My aim in this paper, however, is not to describe the disturbing and paralyzing effects of PTSD. Instead, I focus on how being stuck and rejected contributed, in quite significant ways, to the formation of particular veteran subjectivities as well as communities, from which followed a number of veteran-centred social activities and events, the emergence of new social relations and alliances outside the veteran milieu, and to some extent even a new public image and self-understanding.