

Ripples of Recognition: Shifting Images of Danish War Veterans

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Abstract

Danish war veterans have recently made repeated public claims for more social recognition. Yet, at the same time we have witnessed a veritable burgeoning of public and private initiatives over the past five years that are meant to do exactly that, to recognize and support Danish veterans. New additions to the symbolic and organisational landscape include monuments, homecoming events, art and museum exhibitions, documentaries, a national veteran policy, special funds for veterans and their families, veterans' recreational homes, veterans and interest associations, sale of supporting merchandise and jewellery, rehabilitation facilities, revision of social policies and training of social workers, virtual communities, various documents that verify veterans' competencies, etc., etc.. In this paper I employ Axel Honneth's theory on social recognition in an attempt to understand Danish veterans' struggles for recognition with special attention to how these inevitably contribute to a reconceptualization and reshaping of Danish society and its cultural values. I argue that the veterans' claims for and partial achievement of recognition follow two major narratives, one that perceive of the veteran as a "national hero" and another that considers the veteran as a "social citizen". I also show some of the ambiguities and tensions that are experienced – by veterans as well as civilians – in connection with these master narratives.