

Ripples of Recognition: Danish War Veterans since 1990

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Abstract

In the post-Cold War period the military has increasingly been considered a useful tool in Danish foreign policy and simultaneously Danish international military engagement has switched its focus from peacekeeping to peacebuilding. The new operations have demanded considerable changes and adaptations within the military institution, but no less important, they have implied a reinvention of the social imaginary of the soldier and an active engagement with the new social category of war veterans. This implication of Denmark's new strategy became evident in 2007, when Danish combat soldiers deployed to Afghanistan, were caught in fierce battles and suffered unprecedented fatalities. These experiences did not weaken the broad political and popular support of Danish presence in Afghanistan, but they did, I argue, contribute to making veterans, including from previous wars, an issue on the political and public agenda.

As I shall show, the notion of *anerkendelse* (social recognition) became a sort of catch-all phrase used by veterans and their families as well as politicians, policy-makers and the general public to give voice to expectations, demands, responsibilities, promises and concrete interventions. In the name of *anerkendelse*, we have within a brief period of 3-5 years seen the emergence of several new monuments, homecoming parades, medals, a national flag flying day, a national veteran policy, law amendments, veteran institutions, (virtual and real life) interest groups, funds earmarked for veterans, special courses for public employees, special rehabilitation programs, recreation homes, special job offers for veterans, 'support our troops'-merchandise and social and sport events, museum exhibitions, art exhibitions, and finally, literature, films and features.

Since 2010, I have been documenting initiatives that address the veterans' various calls for *anerkendelse*, and in this paper I explore what an archaeology of these initiatives tell us about the shifting constructions and ongoing negotiations of the category of the veteran.