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Fighting for the family: overcoming distances in time and space

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ABSTRACT
The article explores how military deployment affects the everyday lives of Danish soldiers' families. By approaching the challenges faced by soldiers and their partners from an anthropological perspective of the family, the article provides new insights into the social consequences of military deployment and the processes of militarization at home. Drawing on ethnographic examples from recent fieldwork among women, children, and soldiers at different stages of deployment, the article demonstrates how soldiers and their families attempt to live up to ideals about parenthood and family by creating 'relational spaces' that allow them to preserve intimate relationships despite geographical distances. Besides dealing with the practical responsibilities of everyday life, soldiers' partners also fight to maintain the sense of closeness associated with normative ideals about family relations and a 'good' family life. The emergence of relational spaces enables soldiers and their families to take part in each other's everyday lives. However, when the lives of soldiers abroad and family members at home become entangled, these relational spaces also result in the normalization and legitimization of the military as a present and interfering figure in the lives of soldiers' families.

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Introduction

Dear Minister of Defense,

I am married to a senior sergeant in the Danish Defense Forces. Together we have two children at the age of 3 and 8. I would very much like to share my experiences with you.

We are now facing the third deployment since July 2011. It doesn't seem as if The Defense Force's emphasis on soldiers not being deployed too often applies anymore? The only thing we have been able to know for sure, was that my husband was leaving on the 10th of July 2015. We told our 7-year-old son this, since that was the day after his 9th birthday. We were relieved and happy that he could spend this special day with us, since for the third time in five years we have to celebrate Christmas without him, you see. But no, last week the message came that the date of departure had been changed. Now the date is the 13th of July 2015. It is so frustrating and it costs so many tears [. . .]. It is so difficult not to be able to get information about the mission! [. . .]

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I work different shifts as a nurse. I make requests for my work schedule depending on the AKOS (Activity Overview) my husband receives. In June this has now been totally changed […]. It is so frustrating to face a month where my husband can't drop off the children and can only pick them up twice. Now, I have to swap shifts and involve different family members yet again. It has huge consequences for our lives and my chances of keeping my job. Luckily, I have negotiated with my job so that I can reduce my hours for six months, though this will have consequences for our economy and my pension. But it will give me time to care for and be with our children.

I am wondering why you haven't negotiated some rights for the closest relatives, so that everyday life can function for families with children. We are doing the hard work – alone! Are you considering that? […] Our children have to do without their father. The oldest one especially remembers the other deployments vividly. I fear that it will have consequences for their upbringing that they have to suffer from his absence this often […] Psychologically, I am under a lot of pressure because I don't have the possibility of planning an everyday life for me or the children without their father.

Do you think these are fair terms?

I hope you will take your time to read and reply to this email.

Kind regards,

Trine

Trine[1] never sent her letter to the Danish Defense Minister. She was afraid that it would have consequences for her husband's career. Facing their third deployment in 4 years, Trine was tired and needed an outlet for her frustrations, which was the reason behind the letter in the first place. Trine and her family had been confronted with the reality of present-day working conditions for Danish soldiers several times. Up until the 1990s, deployment had, to a large extent, been optional for soldiers in the Danish Defense Forces. Now, deployment is mandatory when employed by the Danish Army.[2] The official guidelines now state that deployment is to be expected every third year for the permanent staff, although, as Trine's family exemplifies, there are plenty of exceptions to the rule, especially during times of intensified warfare (Lyk-Jensen, Jacobsen, and Heidemann 2010, 20–25). Since 1991 more than 40,000 soldiers have served the Danish Defense Forces in operations abroad (Forsvarsministeriets Personalestyrelse 2015). Considering a total population of approximately 5.6 million Danes, a fairly large number of primarily men have joined the military and fought wars far away from Danish territory. Changes in Danish foreign policy (see Daugbjerg and Sørensen 2016, this volume), the shift from optional to mandatory deployment, terms of employment in general, and rules and regulations regarding deployment in particular are not only crucial for understanding the conditions under which an individual person works as a professional soldier. As illustrated by Trine's letter, the soldiers' work conditions also affect a vast number of civilian people, who find themselves dependent on the military because of their familial or marital ties to a serving soldier. Thus, the number of Danish people whose daily lives are influenced by war is far higher than the number of actual military personnel. In this article, I examine some of these people, bringing into focus the families at home – specifically the women and children of deployed soldiers[3] whose lives, for long periods of time, are shaped by what for many Danes appear to be distant wars. By shifting the focus from the much debated and investigated

frontline to the less discussed 'home front' (Lutz 2001), the aim of this article is to demonstrate how soldiers' close families[4] become deeply affected by war and the military in their everyday lives as they try to uphold an intimate relationship with the soldier during deployment. By introducing the concept of 'relational spaces' I seek to explain how family members try to stay connected to each other during deployment, and how these specific social processes of staying in touch are motivated by a profound need to preserve the intimacy and closeness characterizing an ideal relationship between partners and between parents and children. Furthermore, I demonstrate how the pursuit of living up to expectations and ideals about a 'good' family life despite the absence of the soldier causes soldiers' families to accept and adjust to the presence and interference of the military in their everyday lives. In other words, I argue that deployment opens a window for a subtle yet profound process of militarization enabled by the attempts of soldiers and their families to take part in each other's lives.

A family perspective

Most, if not all, Danish soldiers have family members who must deal with their absence while they are serving their military duty in war-torn countries. Deployment is, thus, not only a concern for soldiers' partners and children at home. The soldiers' parents, siblings, and close friends all have emotional issues at stake in a deployment situation. However, the soldiers' partners and children are influenced by the soldiers' absence in a very specific and concrete way, as it interferes with the routines and relations of everyday life (The Danish Veteran Centre 2011). In the Danish military, 95% of the deployed soldiers are men (Statistics from The Danish Veteran Centre's deployment database). The gender balance has varied slightly during the past years, and though there seems to be a tendency for more women to join the military, the Danish Defense Forces are still, in 2016 when I conducted my fieldwork, a profoundly male-dominated workplace. Therefore, the vast majority of soldiers' partners are women, who for the most part become associated with the military only through their relational ties to a serving soldier. However, especially in the Danish case, only scarce research has been done on how these women's lives are affected or which consequences military deployment might have for soldiers' children. Apart from a few exceptions (Hastrup 2000; Adriansen 2003; Forsvarsakademiet 2011; Sørensen 2013), newer research conducted by and about the Danish military has mainly focused on the soldiers, i.e. mental and psychological health in relation to deployment (Andersen et al. 2014) as well as experiences of being a veteran of war (Kofod, Benwell, and Kjær 2010; Sørensen and Pedersen 2012; Sørensen 2015). Hence, gaps remain in Danish research in terms of understanding the various ways war reverberates in the lives of people outside the military institution, and especially the consequences it has for soldiers' closest family members who experience deployment and war not on the battlefield (Lutz 2001, 2), but in their struggles to establish and uphold a family life in the absence of a husband and father.

Looking beyond the borders of Denmark, a growing number of scholars have examined the consequences of war and the military on the lives of women and children at home. Within the field of psychology, research has especially focused on levels of resilience and stress indicators among partners and children of deployed soldiers (e.g. Srour and Srour 2006; Cozza et al. 2010; Chandra et al. 2013; Wadsworth 2013; Creech,

Hardley, and Borsari 2014) as well as on the notion of 'secondary traumatization' as a psychological phenomenon where previously non-traumatized people react and feel as if they themselves have experienced the traumatic events of a traumatized veteran (e.g. Mikulincer, Florian, and Solomon 1995; Andres, Moelker, and Soeters 2005; Dekel et al. 2005; Herzog, Everson, and Whitworth 2011; Baum, Rahav, and Sharon 2014). Without underestimating the relevance of these studies, this article seeks to demonstrate how an anthropological approach can contribute to our understanding of the consequences of deployment on soldiers' partners and children. As opposed to the quantitative approach that characterizes most studies within the body of psychological research on soldiers' families, qualitative methods enable an in-depth perspective on the specific social circumstances that shape and constitute each family's particular situation. Furthermore, as Mogensen and Olwig have argued, ethnographic fieldwork is particularly fruitful for explicating the implicit ideals of family life, which, albeit often hidden in the details and micro interactions of everyday life, have great influence on the way we live our lives (Mogensen and Olwig 2013, 33, 147). Thus, based on the anthropological assumption that family relations are central for people's perceptions of themselves as well as the society that surrounds them (Mogensen and Olwig 2013, 10), the empirical and analytical focus of this article is the family.

The study of kinship and family has always been at the heart of anthropology (Mogensen and Olwig 2013, 14–17). Spearheaded by David Schneider who pointed to the cultural construction of the family (Schneider 1968), many anthropologists have emphasized the normative ideals and expectations associated with family relations. Ideals regarding family life, it is argued, not only define how people understand themselves as individuals, parents, sons and daughters etc., but also create tensions, cause conflicts, and give rise to feelings of ambivalence (Strathern 1992; Furedi 2002; Gillis 2006; Peletz 2001). In recent years, the notions of parenting and parenthood have, furthermore, become a specific field within anthropology (e.g. Johnson 2009; Barlow and Chapin 2010; Doucet 2011; Cucchiara 2013; Mattingly 2014). Studies of parenting culture as a moral context for identity work among mothers and fathers in various local settings have shown that to be a parent in today's world is not only about what you do. In fact, 'how people parent has implications for our conceptions of self, kinship and politics' (Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne 2013, 2, 8–10). Thus, the tasks of childrearing, it is argued, reach far beyond the boundaries of the domestic sphere. As a moral practice where specific actions are discursively portrayed as better than others, parenting comes to shape identities, perceptions, and opinions in various social and political arenas (e.g. Sørensen 2013; Pedersen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen 2013). In Denmark, Vivian Pedersen and Tine Tjørnhøj-Thomsen have pointed to the ideal relationship between family members as characterized by closeness, solidarity, and intimacy. Being a (good) parent is perceived as depending on one's ability to participate in the everyday activities and special occasions that constitute family life, and although almost every other Danish marriage ends in divorce,[5] the nuclear family persists as a normative ideal (Pedersen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen 2013, 42–44).

Military deployment challenges these ideals, as one parent is absent for longer periods of time and therefore not physically capable of taking part in the everyday life of his/her family. Conflicts derived from trying to combine a military career and a

family life have been pointed out by military sociologists, who refer to the family and the military as two equally 'greedy' institutions, both defining, controlling, and constituting people's lives (Coser 1974; Segal 1986; Albano 1994; De Angelis and Segal 2015). Unlike these scholars' line of work, the purpose here is not to demonstrate clashes in demands. Rather, by analytically exploring how soldiers' families aim to live up to the expectations and ideals of family life, and especially parenthood, in their everyday lives during military deployment, this article aspires to demonstrate how these ideals become crucial for our understanding of military legitimacy and the militarization of soldiers' families.

Militarization of 'the home front'

Feminist scholars have a long tradition of exposing the processes behind military legitimization by focusing on women's position and agency in and outside the military. A prominent voice within this academic field is Cynthia Enloe, who, for many years (1997, 2000, 2007, 2015), has advocated for a greater focus on the myriad of ways that women's lives are militarized, i.e. the processes by which 'a person comes to be controlled by the military *or* comes to depend for its well-being on militaristic ideas' (Enloe 2000, 3; emphasis in original). Enloe argues that the very processes of militarization prevent women in and outside the military (soldiers' wives and mothers, female soldiers, and prostitutes) from realizing their mutual position as gendered targets for military control (Enloe 2000, xiii). With her insight and analysis, Enloe contributes considerably to our understanding of the structural and gendered mechanisms of militarization, especially in the US. Although she recognizes the high degree of contradiction, confusion, and messiness entailed by studying women's different attitudes and experiences with the military (Enloe 2015), Enloe focuses on the commonalities rather than the particularities of these various categories of women. By bringing into focus the situation of Danish women and children who share their everyday lives with a soldier, this article likewise seeks to contribute to the debate about militarization. However, by approaching the issue of military legitimacy from a specific perspective of family and parenthood, I wish instead to point to the dialectical process of militarization, partially enabled by expectations of certain social relations within the soldier's close family. As I will demonstrate, in the pursuit of maintaining close and intimate relationships across distances during deployment, soldiers' families are compelled to accept the presence of the military in their everyday lives, e.g. as an information channel, as a logistical decision-maker during deployment, and when confronted with the moral character of one's husband's career choice by other civilians.

For most Danish women in my study being subjected to a military agenda was not easy to accept. This became obvious when I participated in an information meeting for relatives of deployed soldiers with Trine shortly after her husband was deployed. The audience of family members was encouraged to support the soldier by sparing him the burdens and responsibilities of everyday life. Rather discouraged by the advice, Trine flatly asked me, 'Are we then just supposed to stop being humans while they are away?', indicating that she considered sharing the experiences and responsibilities regarding family life with her partner as a natural part of life. Birgitte Refslund Sørensen describes similar situations from her study of soldiers' families (Sørensen 2013, 105), suggesting that the military's idea

of support does not fit easily with the responsibilities and expectations of everyday family life. As I became familiar with the everyday life of Trine and 20 other Danish families of deployed soldiers during a one-year ethnographic fieldwork, it likewise became evident just how much the absence of a parent and partner can influence the lives of the remaining family members, or, in the words of Bille, Hastrup, and Sørensen (2010, 4), can create a 'presence of absence'. By participating in activities such as picking up children from school, making and eating dinner, watching television, and playing games in six families that I followed before, during, and after deployment, I have gained valuable insights into the ruptures and routines of everyday life, and observed how closely these were tied to ideas about a shared emotional and practical responsibility among the parents. Tjørnhøj-Thomsen notes that home in a Danish context is constituted by the special kind of sociality that characterizes family life (Tjørnhøj-Thomsen 1999), but one might ask what happens to this special kind of family sociality when a parent leaves the home for a longer period of time?

In literature on the military, the family and home of the soldier have often been termed 'the home front'. The term was originally deployed as an indication of the military's dependence on civilian support services from the home country, for instance in terms of providing materials during warfare (Honeyman 1996; Downs 1995). However, with the growing interest in the implications of war outside the battlefields, the term is now widely used both within and outside academia to refer to the home and families of the soldier. In Catherine Lutz' seminal book *Homefront* (2001), she shows how the notion of 'front line' and 'home' are deeply intertwined by exposing the on-going processes of militarization in American society since World War II. She demonstrates a convincing link between the military front lines and the American homeland by providing a historical account of the societal implications of political decision-making that has led to the military's present-day impact on issues such as gender, class, and race. By illustrating how strategic military manoeuvres cause a militarization of the home front, Lutz reveals how the military penetrates the domestic sphere from the outside. In what follows, I instead start from the inside by ethnographically examining how family life during deployment comes to reach far beyond the four walls of the home and, furthermore, how family members' attempts to transform physical family space and time to make everyday life at home and abroad accessible and tangible to one another simultaneously result in processes of militarization. In this sense, I demonstrate that militarization of the home front is not only enabled by neoliberal tendencies, camouflaged, for example, as aid to poor children or career opportunities for high school students (Lutz 2001, 221), but is also the product of families trying to stay connected and take part in each other's lives, even when this entails becoming familiar with the everyday life of war in a camp in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Creating relational spaces and staying connected

As I spent time with the families it became obvious to me just how embedded the experiences and realities of deployed Danish soldiers are in the lives of their partners and children back home in Denmark – just as the women and children at home came to live their everyday lives in the presence of war, even in families where the soldiers were deployed to so-called 'low-risk' missions. Compared to the Danish International

Security Assistance Force (ISAF) missions to Afghanistan, for example, where deaths and injuries of Danish soldiers became a regular feature in Danish news broadcasts,[6] I have followed families going through military deployments that were not considered dangerous by the Danish Defense or the family members at home. As Trine put it, 'he might as well be sitting in an office in Oksbøl [a military barracks in the western part of Denmark]. I'm not afraid anything is going to happen to him'. Nonetheless, the presence of war can manifest itself in a number of ways and is not always contingent on the level of danger associated with the mission. In his article 'Cities as Battlespace: The New Military Urbanism', Stephen Graham (2009) adds a useful perspective to the extensive literature on militarization by arguing for the need for a new concept to encapsulate the processes of 'irregular wars'. Introducing the concept of 'battlespace', Graham suggests that it is no longer useful to distinguish between battle and peace zones due to the change in character of today's wars. Accordingly, Graham argues that war is everywhere, and, as a consequence, the urban landscape of civilians has become highly militarized, and the lines between 'civilian' and 'military' blurred through a range of doctrines, ideas, practices, norms, techniques, and popular cultural arenas (Graham 2009, 388–89). Graham's concept of battlespace thus supports the argument of the frontline as empirically as well as analytically inseparable from the home front due to the ways war infiltrates people, cities, and countries far away from military bases and checkpoints. War has moved or, maybe more accurately, expanded in space. However, there are interesting perspectives to add to Graham's ideas of the spatial expansion of war. As I have already indicated, soldiers and their partners try to preserve the intimacy and closeness associated with relationships between family members, and especially between parents and children (Pedersen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen 2013), by staying connected with one another during deployment. These various attempts of communicating and taking part in each other's lives, which I will return to below, create what I call 'relational spaces'. Relational spaces emerge when ordinary family space and time is expanded to include the non-present soldier in everyday family situations, and when the soldier's daily life is made comprehensible to the family members at home. That is, as a concept, relational space seeks to encapsulate both the processes by which the 'special kind of family sociality' (Tjørnhøj-Thomsen 1999) is made tangible to persons not physically present in the home and everyday lives of their families, and the processes by which a seemingly strange and unfamiliar everyday life of war becomes known and accessible to the family members at home. Inspired by Zigon's thoughts on attunement as an ontological condition defining the subject as first and foremost a relational being (Zigon 2014, 24), I hold that relational spaces enable family members to somewhat maintain intimate relations and uphold a sense of being attuned or relationally bound to one another. In addition, by introducing the concept, my ambition is to underline the more ambiguous consequences of sharing time and space for soldier's families. Just as civilians are militarized when cities become battlespaces (Graham 2009), so will the emergence of relational spaces inevitably lead to the militarization of soldiers' families as they, in their pursuit to live up to certain family ideals, come to accept the presence of the military in the most private spheres of their lives. Before elaborating on this latter statement, let me start by introducing the two teddy bears, Cosinus and Sinus, to illustrate how relational spaces come to exist.

Teddy bears on a mission

Cosinus and Sinus are brown and white teddy bears. Sinus is brown with white patterns whereas Cosinus is white with brown patterns, and that is how Freja (8) and Benjamin (10) tell them apart (Figure 1). Just before Freja's and Benjamin's father, Hans, was deployed to Iraq for 9 months, their stepmother, Lise, sewed the two teddy bears – one for Freja and Benjamin to keep at home and one for Hans to bring to Iraq. Together they stuffed the back of the teddy bears with little red cardboard hearts, so that they would be 'filled with love', as Lise explained me. While Hans was away, Cosinus took turns sleeping in the bed with Benjamin and Freja, and they both told me that whenever they were sad or missed their father they told Cosinus, and the message would be delivered to their father through Sinus. Every now and then Hans would email pictures home to Freja and Benjamin of Sinus accompanying him on patrol or posing in the pockets of his uniform in the desert outside the camp (Figure 2). Hans also received pictures from home of Cosinus having dinner, doing grocery shopping, or enjoying Friday candy with Freja, Benjamin, and Lise (Figure 3).

One conclusion to draw from this example is that the teddy bears became a way for the children to handle the absence of their father, by functioning as something concrete and material to remember him by. However, inspired by Bille, Hastrup, and Sørensen's claim that 'What might appear as a binary opposition between presence and absence is in fact often conceptualized within a continuous and ambiguous spectrum…' (Bille, Hastrup, and Sørensen 2010, 10), I argue that the teddy bears provide more than a link between two distinct realities. Essentially, they create an opportunity for the experience of simultaneity and connectedness between father and children, as their very distant worlds in brief moments become relatable. For instance, Hans took pictures of himself in everyday-like situations in and outside the camp, knowing that shortly thereafter an email would tick into his mailbox featuring Cosinus in the starring role in a line of snapshots from daily life at home. As a shared point of reference through which Hans,

Figure 1. Cosinus and Sinus.

I have been granted permission to use the photos in the article by Lise and Hans.

Figure 2. Sinus in the pocket of Hans' uniform.
I have been granted permission to use the photos in the article by Lise and Hans.

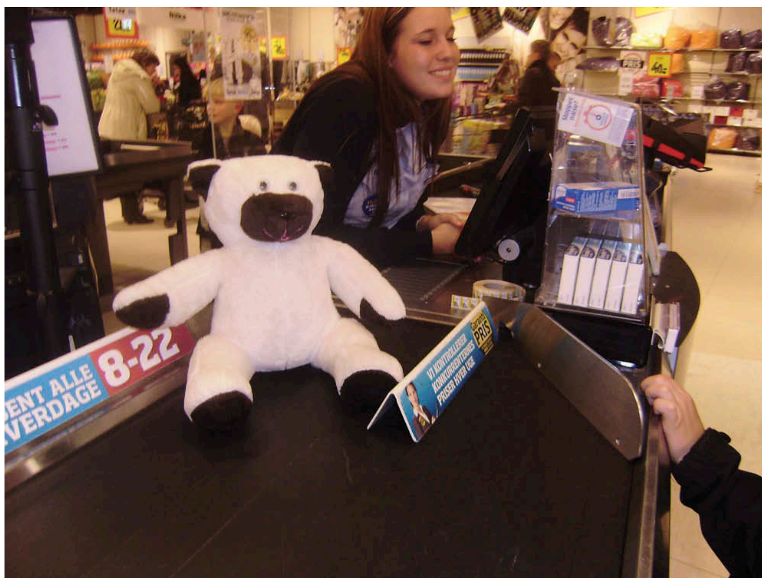

Figure 3. Cosinus on a conveyer belt.
I have been granted permission to use the photos in the article by Lise and Hans.

Benjamin, and Freja could communicate, the presence of the teddy bears in the pictures merged a seemingly distant and strange world of war with the mundane family life at home. By sharing ordinary, yet very different, situations and moments of daily life at home and of the camp in Iraq, the unfamiliar becomes familiar to the family at home, and the well-known everyday life at home becomes accessible to the soldier abroad. Inspired by historian and psychologist Eelco Runia who defines presence as '"being in touch" – either literally or figuratively – with people, things, events, and feelings that make you into the person you are' (Runia 2006, 5), the teddy bears enabled presence in the absence by creating the foundation for a relational space that allowed the family members to be in touch and maintain a sense of attunement with each other.

Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne argue that to be considered a 'good' parent one is expected to put the needs of the child before one's own. Being a parent demands that a great deal of time and energy be invested in the child's development as well as in the parent/child relationship (Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne 2013, 2, 5). In that sense, 'parenthood is not something that *is*' (Mogensen and Olwig 2013, 33; emphasis in original, Author's translation), but something one most learn and work for. Throughout my fieldwork I encountered several teddy bears and other stuffed animals that, like Cosinus and Sinus, became important figures in the relational work between children and partners of deployed soldiers. Peter, for instance, who was deployed for 6 months as a senior sergeant to Afghanistan, spent hours working on an illustrated book with pictures of the adventures of Hector, his teddy bear mascot. Peter explained the book as a way for him to make his everyday life and 'what I am doing down there' known to his five-year-old girl, Sally. Similarly, Thomas eventually found out that the only way he could communicate with his 3-year-old son, when he called over Skype, was through a stuffed animal, Zebra. Through the zebra, Thomas made fun, played with his son and talked about his life in the camp in a way his son could relate to:

> Well, for instance the thing about it [Zebra] always eating my candy and then I would scold it and things like that [...] he thought that was really funny. And that was very, very basic, right? But then it's still kind of cool and funny that I have candy, and he could relate to the fact that I also have candy, and he probably hadn't thought about that. Maybe he had just thought that I was out fighting or something like that. So, it's like, the Zebra broke down a barrier in a way.

According to Pedersen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen the interactions, routines, and micro exchanges of everyday life are what create and maintain the special character of parent/child relationships (Pedersen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen 2013, 42–44). When deployed, the soldiers were not physically present in their families. However, Hans, Peter, Thomas, and most of the other soldiers stressed the importance of being in tune with everyday life at home, or, as Thomas described it, being updated on 'the little, unimportant things that in some way become everyday life or the nerve'. As the examples of Cosinus and Sinus, Hector, and Zebra illustrate, the soldiers and their partners went to great lengths to create relational spaces, where sharing of and participation in everyday life's banalities became possible despite geographical distances. Many families emphasized how new technologies had made it easier to communicate and get the sense of 'just being together', as one woman described it. This included using Skype, Viber, or FaceTime for watching television, doing homework or eating dinner 'together', with the soldier physically thousands of miles away but present in time and (cyber)space. Playing hide-and-seek through an iPhone screen or recording bedtime stories on DVDs for the children to listen to before they fall asleep were likewise attempts at creating relational spaces that to a certain extent allowed the family members to stay attuned to one another.

Family ideals and military legitimacy

Although most families were positive about technological developments and opportunities for keeping in touch, I suggest that there are considerable consequences related to

these families' attempts to take part in each other's worlds. Following my earlier statement, I argue that soldiers and their families allow the military to enter their private sphere when trying to make the soldier's everyday life relatable to the family members at home. The presence of the military especially became obvious when, for instance, children's teddy bears were dressed like soldiers to remind them of their fathers, or when portraits of absent fathers and husbands dressed in uniforms were hung in the living room and in children's bedrooms during deployment. These military features creeping into the private homes of soldiers' families were often explained as ways of creating a special bond between father and child by making the child feel part of the father's life while he was away. However, the regular appearance of one's husband or father in a uniform on an iPhone screen, or the decision of a father to visit his child's school during his leave period[7] to explain his job as a soldier, likewise contribute to normalize and legitimize the military as a present figure in the lives of Danish soldiers' families. A relevant question to ask at this point is: How do soldiers' partners react to this militarization of their everyday lives, to what extent do they accept it, and why? To answer these questions, it becomes necessary to examine what is at stake for these women as mothers, partners, and part of a family.

Being in a relationship with a Danish soldier entails dealing with the frequent absence of one's partner due to time-consuming training exercises throughout the country or deployment for longer periods of time. As demonstrated in the previous section, soldiers and their partners became very creative in their pursuits of taking part in each other's everyday lives. Despite great efforts this was, however, not always an easy or even possible task. During the deployment of her husband for 6 months to Iraq, Trine wrote me after coming home from a meeting at her younger son's daycare institution: 'I just find it difficult to let go of the thought that things would be better, if we were two parents at home', implying that their family life was suffering from her husband's absence. Likewise, Natasha, a mother of two, also experienced the frustrations of being alone when her younger daughter fell ill during her husband's deployment:

> The week just got worse and worse and it ended with Emma [their one-year-old daughter] and me spending Sunday night in the pediatrics ward. So, it was a huge challenge to get up at 2.30 after having waited more than six hours for the doctors to take blood samples, and then having to figure out what to do with Laura [their six-year-old daughter] and the dog [...] Phew... and on top of that I also had to update Jacob [her husband] and calm him down because he was so worried when we got hospitalized. I felt so sorry for him...

As the statement clearly reveals, Natasja was exhausted from being up all night, taking care of a sick child as well as making arrangements for someone to take care of their older daughter. Furthermore, she had tried to keep Jacob updated and calm, but as she later told me, he had cried all night and would have come home, had she not – despite her own feelings – convinced him to stay. In spite of Natasja's efforts to include Jacob in the hospitalization of their daughter, Jacob found it difficult to accept that he could not physically be there. As also pointed out by Pedersen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, Trine's statement and Jacob and Natasja's story indicate how certain activities and situations associated with family life call for the presence of parents (Pedersen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen 2013, 48), and, thus, how the absence of a parent can have

emotional costs. Similarly, I have received many emails from frustrated partners, and observed awkward Skype conversations when everyday life could not be transmitted through an iPhone screen or when the military, yet again, did not take into account the schedule or situation of the soldiers' families. So, to return to my second question: Why keep trying? What makes these women accept the absence of their husbands and the interference of the military in their everyday lives, when feelings of frustration and self-sacrifice continuously reveal themselves during deployment? Based on a situation experienced by two of my informants, I will discuss what is at stake for soldiers' partners during deployment, and how ideals about family life and parenthood become crucial for understanding the processes resulting in the militarization of soldiers' families.

What is at stake?

The first few times I visited Pernille and her two children, Sebastian (6) and Sofia (4), in their family apartment in Copenhagen, she spoke openly about her anger towards her husband Erik, and how she could not forgive him for leaving:

> I have to deal with the fact that I have been let down. He has let me down, and that is the feeling I have [...]. Understanding how you can leave your children. I can't. I can't even... I don't have any experiences, or I don't have anything that I feel that passionate about to be able to just relate a little bit. I simply can't understand it. If we didn't have children, then it would be completely different. Then 'off you go' because then I would have gone myself. But I can't understand how you can leave your children. It's because I think it is an ego trip. You know, it's not about fulfilling the children's interests, it's about fulfilling one's own interests. And that's fine, of course you also have to fulfill your own interests to a certain point, but it doesn't benefit your children that you move away from them. Quite the contrary, I think.

However, the last time I visited the family before Erik's return, something had occurred that had changed the atmosphere in the family. As usual, I arrived at dinnertime to find Pernille in the kitchen preparing the food while Sebastian and Sofie ran around the apartment playing tag. Just as I sat down on the stool in the back end of the kitchen, she told me that something crazy had happened since my last visit. Erik, who was deployed on an international mission, working with Public Relations, had been quoted in a British newspaper with his full name. His executives had advised him to change his name on Facebook for safety reasons, which he had done. He had called to tell Pernille about the incident, and asked her to 'un-marry' him on Facebook. 'I was totally cool with it at that point', she told me. 'It wasn't until I heard myself tell the story to some of the other parents at a parent's meeting in Sebastian's school that I realized how crazy it was'. Pernille told me that she went home after the meeting and looked Erik's name up on Google. Her name and their private address appeared on the screen. It freaked her out, she said and explained how, in the following weeks, she had found herself changing behaviour to a point where she couldn't recognize herself. 'I felt like isolating myself in the apartment with Sebastian and Sofia, and I was scared every time I stepped out into the street. I remember seeing a Middle Eastern taxi driver parked outside of our building. I was sure he had a bomb and was going to kill us. As it turned out, he was, of course, just waiting for an older

lady. I love people from the Middle East. I don't want to be like this', Pernille had exclaimed with a perplexed look in her eyes. Finally, she told me, she broke down. One day, on her way home from work, she pulled to the side on the highway and started crying. When Pernille paused in her story, I asked her what Erik had done when confronted with her reaction. 'Well, in some ways that episode was actually good for us', she responded. 'Erik offered to come home, and he was very affected by the entire situation… and that made me feel like, we actually are the most important thing for him… I don't feel angry at him anymore'.

Pernille and Erik's story is relevant for two reasons. First, it clearly illustrates the previous point of home and front as deeply entangled. When Pernille's fear of a potential threat causes her to alter the family's daily routines to prevent them from running any risks, it directly ties the actions of everyday life at home in Denmark with Erik's actions as an involved soldier in the war against Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in Iraq. One could argue that what Pernille is experiencing is, in fact, Graham's battlespace – an example of how war has moved in space with the internet as an information source providing the link between Denmark and Iraq. However, as Craig Calhoun points to in his article 'A World of Emergencies' (2004), it is crucial to investigate not only 'the prominence of risk, but the specific ways in which risk and threat are conceptualized' (Calhoun 2004, 381). With that in mind, I suggest that the experience of being at risk for Pernille is very much shaped by and interpreted within specific ideas and expectations about what constitutes a 'good' family life and what defines a 'good' parent. As Pernille repeatedly stated, she could not understand how Erik was capable of leaving them. In the eyes of Pernille, Erik was willing to risk his family, even knowing how she felt about his decision. In that sense, their family had been threatened ever since he left, and the feeling of being at risk was, thus, caused not only by the specific incident that made Pernille change behaviour but also by the choices made by Erik as a parent and husband.

The historian John Gillies makes a distinction between the family we live by and the family we live with. On the one hand, the family we live by represents the ideal family that never lets us down and that is shaped by certain societal norms of how family life ought to be. The family we live with, on the other hand, is our actual, everyday family, which is characterized as less reliable and more fragile than the family we live by and therefore also more likely to disappoint us (Gillis 1996, xv). Following Gillis' distinction, the discrepancy between the family Pernille lived by and the family she lived with became obvious when Erik decided to leave and thereby failed to live up to specific cultural ideals about the present and self-sacrificing parent (Faircloth, Hoffman, and Layne 2013; Pedersen and Tjørnhøj-Thomsen 2013), or in Pernille's words, a parent who 'fulfills the needs of the child'. However, despite being disappointed about Erik's decision to leave, and even though she 'couldn't promise anything' when he came home, as she said, Pernille didn't leave, and neither did any of the women in my study who expressed disappointment or frustration towards their husbands and their military careers. In fact, Pernille, like most other partners, made an effort for her children to stay connected with their father as she paved the way for relational spaces to emerge during his deployment. For instance, Erik would usually call on Skype around dinnertime and 'participate' in the family meal by being placed at the end of the table, which allowed him to see and talk with the children from the other side of the iPad screen.

Moreover, in the last part of her story, Pernille described the episode as 'good for us' and one that made her forgive Erik. This may seem contradictory considering her strong opinions regarding Erik's deployment and what she had just been through because of it, but, instead, I suggest that Pernille's interpretation of the episode reveals exactly how important it is for her to live up to the family ideals of intimacy and closeness. In other words, she needed to forgive him in order for the family she lived with to resemble the family she lived by. Like Pernille, most women in my study wanted to believe in Gillis' idea of the family they lived with and spent a considerable amount of time and energy to uphold what they considered to be 'good' family relations. For many this meant accepting the presence of the military as either an institution causing experiences of being at risk, as in the case of Pernille, or, as seen in Trine's letter reproduced at the beginning of this article, as an employer that disregards family logistics and attempts at planning ahead. Thus, ideals and expectations about family life not only are crucial to understanding the motivations behind families' attempts at staying in touch with each other in times of physical separation, but must also be taken into consideration when studying the militarization of soldiers' families. Even in families where the soldier's partner is critical of the military, as both an institution and an employer, strong family ideals come to determine what can and should be accepted.

Conclusion

Deployment is a challenging task. It is difficult not only for the soldiers who travel to unknown territory with the purpose of fighting a (sometimes) unknown enemy, but also for the family members at home who are trying to make everyday life durable in the absence of a missing parent or husband. In this article, I have argued that the risks and struggles experienced during deployment cannot be disentangled from norms and ideals of parenthood and family life. Understanding the consequences of warfare and processes of militarization calls for analytical attention to the emotional demands and obligations within family relations. Whereas parenthood and family life, within anthropology as well as in society generally, were previously considered the domain of women, this study of Danish soldiers and their families reveals that the morality of the family reaches far beyond the domestic sphere and even into the pockets of soldiers' uniforms. Ideals and expectations of family life and parenthood become crucial for our understanding of militarization as a subtle, yet profound, process resulting in a legitimization of military presence in the lives of 'ordinary' people. By introducing the notion of 'relational spaces', I have sought to conceptualize the driving force behind the actions of soldiers and their families as they try to live up to certain norms of 'good' parenting and a 'good' family life. Despite geographical distances and emotional distress during deployment, soldiers and their partners persistently seek to maintain a relationship characterized by closeness, intimacy, and a sense of attunement. These efforts lead to a higher acceptance of the military as a part of the everyday lives of soldiers' families as well as a normalization of the military profession, even among women who are sceptical of the military and would prefer it if their husbands worked elsewhere. This argument points to the importance of the family as an empirical and analytical starting point for identifying processes of militarization in a Danish context among soldiers' close

families. This article has been an attempt to delve into a field which, at least in a Danish and Scandinavian context, is still largely unexplored, with the hope of providing new insights as well as inspiring further research.

Notes

1. All informants have been anonymized.
2. The Danish Army is responsible for the vast majority of deployments of Danish soldiers, and most of the soldiers interviewed during my fieldwork had been deployed by the Army. Therefore, I am only accounting for the rules and regulations of deployment for soldiers in the army. It is worth mentioning, however, that deployment of soldiers in the Airforce or Navy is not a rarity, albeit the duration of the deployments as well as the working conditions during deployment typically vary from the standard 6 months in the Army.
3. The women referred to in this article are all partners of serving soldiers in the Danish Defense Forces. All couples had at least one child during deployment.
4. By ‘close family’, I refer to the soldier’s partner and child/children.
5. In 2015, 46.7% of all Danish marriages end in divorce (Danmarks Statistik 2016).
6. Especially during the period of 2007–2010 where most Danish soldiers lost their lives (Forsvaret 2014).
7. All Danish Soldiers serving in the Army on international operations are entitled to 3 weeks’ leave during deployment. The leave period is usually divided into one long leave period or two separate leaves, depending on logistics and the soldiers’ individual requests.

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