3. Intergenerational Conflicts and Military Leadership: A Problem of Generations in Danish Military Education And Beyond

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In social and political contexts, war and other violent events have often been viewed as explanatory factors in the dividing lines between age groups; they divide one generational consciousness from another and influence how a generation should be understood as distinct from those preceding and following it. Landmark events, such as those of 1968, the Vietnam War or the 2008 financial crisis, have been the cue for a heightening of generational awareness "in accentuating time-based social differentiation" (White, 2013, p. 219). A certain kind of generational awareness present in the 1920s and 1930s has, for example, been linked to the effects of the First World War, differentiating those who experienced conflict first-hand and those who knew only the post-conflict peacetime. The events of September 11, 2001 may have linked social trauma and generational awareness in a similar way, and so we speak today of a "post-9/11 generation" (Edmunds & Turner, 2002a; 2005). It is here assumed that the terror attacks in New York, as a significant landmark event, have divided past and present, have affected certain groupings and have heralded a series of political decisions and actions with

long-term consequences. Ender, Rohall and Matthews (2014, p. 18), for instance, understand 9/11 as an event which fundamentally changed the United States and the relationship between American society and the U.S. military.

One explanation for invoking a generational view is the realist one, namely that certain socio-historical material factors demand this perspective to be taken (Eisenstadt, 1956; Edmunds & Turner, 2002b). In this chapter, the Danish Armed Forces' military contributions to the (mostly) American-led coalitions in Iraq and Afghanistan are understood to be material factors that cannot be ignored. These historical events have been constitutive of experiences with the potential to create generational consciousness, and to provoke discussions of professionalism – and, indeed, developments and changes – in the military profession.

Empirically, this chapter explores the experiences of military officers who received an elite education at a Danish military college over 10 months. It applies Mannheim's theory of generations and the idea of generational units to understand these individuals as a particular analytical entity bound together through shared problems and conflicts. The latter includes operational experiences; these have a collective effect, creating memories of operations and contributing to a new understanding of professionalism, including increasingly common professional concepts and practices.

Studies have shown that involvement in recent international conflicts has had an effect on the ways in which professional soldiers understand themselves. Tomforde (2006) uses the newly restructured Bundeswehr as an illustrative case, describing how foreign missions have created a mission-oriented military identity, understood by deployed soldiers to represent a transition from the classic trained soldier to a deployable trooper; King (2011, p. 198) supplements this finding by pointing at the effect that the Bundeswehr's foreign mission involvement has had on its institutional culture, "creating new collective memories about recent or current operations which are useful in uniting troops around new or continuing missions." The study presented in this chapter adds to these analyses of mission involvement and the effects of deployment on professional identities and culture by describing a group of Danish military officers' experiences and shared memories of a significant period, and considering how this may help shape a particular generation in the Danish armed forces.

For the last three decades, the Royal Danish Army has undergone a great transformation of structures, equipment and training methods, abandoning its traditional role of territorial defence and instead focusing on out-of-area military operations, among other actions, and reducing the size of the conscripted and reserve components and increasing the active (standing army) component (Jedig Jensen, 2008). Since being involved in the Yugoslav conflicts under U.N. mandate

in 1994, the Royal Danish Army has been committed to a number of U.N. and NATO peacekeeping and warfare operations. Most notably, it deployed forces to the Iraq operation from 2003 to 2007 and to the Afghanistan operation from 2002 to 2014.

Denmark supported Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq with 225 soldiers in 2003 to bolster the United States-led invasion (Danish Defence, 2020a). The first Danish troops were deployed to Afghanistan in 2002 as part of ISAF (International Security Assistance Force). Between 2006 and 2014, 15 Danish ISAF teams were deployed to Helmand (a total of 750 soldiers), making Denmark the largest force-contributing nation to ISAF per capita (SHAPE, NATO 2020). ISAF Team 1 participated in the longest battles that Danish troops have been involved in since 1864 (Danish Armed Forces, 2020b).

As of 2021, the Danish Defence Command deployed troops to operations in the Gulf and to the Sahel with the U.N., alongside an enhanced presence in Estonia. In addition, the armed forces have conducted multiple capacity-building tasks in several countries.

Sherman (2015) argues that the grand story of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is yet to be written and adds that some images are already taking form. This chapter contributes to this grand story by focusing attention on the generational worldviews and "generational style" (Mannheim, 1928/1952, p. 309) that have developed against the background of Danish soldiers' participation in military operations abroad. Here, it is worth noting that what Schwartz (1996) coins "collective memories" about past and current operations have also intensified the potential intergenerational conflict in the military organisation and affected the power balance in the hierarchical authority structure.

Understanding Problems of Generations

Karl Mannheim, one of the major theorists of the generation concept, conceptualised how the social phenomenon of generations emerges and how a variety of generational units can exist within the same (physical/age group) generation. He saw generations as sources of opposition, and was interested in the role of generations as "carriers of intellectual and organizational alternatives to the status quo" (Edmunds & Turner, 2002a, p. 4). Referring to the eponymous "problem of generations" of his seminal text of 1928/1952, Mannheim contributed to our understanding of how the structure and distribution of opportunities and pressures or power between the established generation and the next might lead to conflicts and problems, arguing for a culturalist understanding of the concept with reference to individuals' shared experiences and socio-historical reference

points. He rejected naturalistic theories and the notion of biological determinism, arguing that cohort generations (individuals who share the same birth year) were "endowed with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process" (Mannheim, 1928/1952, p. 290).

For Mannheim, and of relevance for this chapter, the distinction between three concepts – *generational location*, *generational actuality* and *generational unit* – is important. He defines the concepts in the following way:

> [The fact of] belonging to the same class, and that of belonging to the same generation or age group, have this in common, that both endow the individuals sharing in them with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action. (Mannheim 1928/1952, p. 291)

A location is defined by both time and space. Doctors born in the same year in the United States and in Denmark do not share the same location; neither do Danish dentists and Danish generals. The concept of being similarly located entails that individuals be "in a position to experience the same events, data, etc., and especially that these experiences impinge upon a similarly 'stratified' consciousness" (Mannheim 1928/1952, p. 297; see also Pilcher, 1994). Thus, location shapes "modes of thought, experience, feeling and action" (Mannheim, 1928/1952, p. 291). However, sharing a location is not enough to delimit a generation. A generation shares, also, a structure of opportunities – and is thus defined by being an actuality, collectively enjoying what Aboim and Vasconcelos (2014) understand as a similar mental order or a worldview based on a combination of historical responses to the group's location. Mannheim argued that generations become an actuality:

> . . . only where a concrete bond is created between members of a generation … in so far as they participate in the characteristic social and intellectual currents of their society and period, and in so far as they have an actual or passive experience of the interactions of forces which made up the new situation. (Mannheim, 1928/1952, p. 303–304)

> . . . *a generation as an actuality* is constituted when similarly "located' contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas

and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding. (Mannheim, 1928/1952, p. 306)

Finally, within these groups of people sharing location and opportunities, such as access to career channels and upward mobility, there are generational units:

> These are characterized by the fact that they do not merely involve a loose participation by a number of individuals in a pattern of events shared by all alike though interpreted by the different individuals differently, but an identity of responses, a certain affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences. (Mannheim, 1928/1952, p. 306)

The concept of generational units is a way to avoid projecting undue uniformity onto groups and certain individuals and to stress that no social unit is a unified and harmonious grouping. This means that particular generations consist of divergent groups of people, who differ in attributes, character and interests. Importantly, this allows generations to be approached as sites of "competing tendencies" (White, 2013, p. 238).

While Mannheim remains the inspirational point of reference for generation scholars, it is acknowledged that his theory is difficult to apply to the empirical study of generations (Bristow, 2016; Connolly, 2019). In that regard, Mannheim's seminal work appears to be preoccupied with theorising social groupings in historical processes rather than applying the theory to empirical studies of generational relations in specific locations. Furthermore, his work does not precisely specify what constitutes an intergenerational conflict or tension in empirical terms. For this, it is relevant to turn to the work of Norbert Elias.

In line with Mannheim, Elias understood generations as webs of interdependent people (figurations) bound to one another by the similarity of their shared social-historical conditions and experiences (see, for instance, Elias, 1996; 2000). Instead of primarily understanding generations through generalised patterns of attributes, character and opinions, however, they are basically bound together by shared problems and conflicts. In his study *The Germans,* Elias (1996) developed a topic from *The Civilising Process,* namely that social processes of change must be understood in light of intergenerational relations between older social dominant groups who gradually lose power to younger groups struggling for dominance. This dynamic was what Mannheim coined "the problem of generations." For Elias, the access to career channels, to positions at the top of an organisational hierarchy and more generally to upward mobility is a relatively contingent, un-

planned process as opposed to a deliberate strategy deployed by older generations to block or prevent younger groups accessing them:

> The narrowing and widening of life chances, and opportunities for meaning in general and career chances in particular, for the younger generations of a society at any one time are processes that undoubtedly most strongly affect the balance of power between the generations. One could say that these processes form the kernel of social conflicts between the generations. (Elias 1996, pp. 243–244)

Empirically, Elias (1996, p. 243) demonstrates how different historical periods are more or less open to "generation circulation." Periods of less circulation typically involve generational units feeling trapped in social systems dominated by older, stronger generations who control economic, social and cultural resources and determine what a meaningful life entails. This potentially leads to generational conflicts of loss of meaning and decoupled meaning fulfilment practices. An extreme case of this is the extra-parliamentary militant group of 1960s and 1970s West Germany, Rote Armee Fraction (RAF), which adopted an outsider position in relation to the established middle class of contemporary Germany. As a generational unit, sharing location and actuality, the members of the group found their search for purpose and a meaningful life blocked by the social order of an older generation whose opportunities and values they did not share.

Thus, there exists for Elias a strong relationship between, on one hand, generational conflicts and open or closed channels of opportunity for career opportunities and, on the other, occupational positions, the achievement of meaning and particular value and interest systems – and when and how these were shaped (Connolly 2019, p. 8).

Below, I focus on identifying how generations manifest in an organisational setting, taking into consideration professional military officers' commonality of reference points, leading to the shaping of a generational unit with implications for subsequent behaviour and attitudes in the Danish armed forces.

Research Context and Data Collection

The empirical data analysed in this paper were collected as part of a field study conducted between 2016 and 2017 that investigated training and education for higher command and general staff work in the Danish armed forces.

My entrance to the field study was the army's higher command and general staff officers programme, which has been institutionalised since the 19th century

(Clemmensen, 2015a). The purpose of the programme is to provide officers an education, with particular emphasis on the ability to hold army operative staff positions; it aims to endow officers with the capacity to contribute to the implementation of the analysis and evaluation of complex tactical and operational issues in a military strategic context (The Royal Danish Defence College, 2020). The programme is for mid-career officers selected for advancement in the armed forces.

The educational activities lasted 10 months and were mainly located at a military college. Other destinations were also visited as part of the programme (including an airbase, an international headquarters and some of the areas east of Berlin where the historic battle between the Red Army and the German forces was fought). The field study involved participant observation of operational exercises, classroom teaching, debriefings, official rituals and ceremonies, weeklong training tours, visits to monuments and participation in informal social gatherings over the course of the programme. At the conclusion of the fieldwork, I conducted 13 individual semi-structured interviews with participants (officers), each lasting an average of 60 minutes. I also conducted nine semi-structured interviews with directing staff (officers). The interviews covered a range of topics centred on the role of the staff officer and what it means to be a professional soldier, both in how the participants understood that role in their present work life and in light of their previous operational and non-operational experiences. For example, I was curious about how the participants brought experiences from Iraq and Afghanistan into the learning environment at the military college and the degree to which these experiences were integrated during the course. During the fieldwork, I became aware of some conflicting tendencies, which in the interviews I explored as problems related to specific social groupings, more specifically to generations. It is important, however, to recognise that the engagements and concrete work tasks connected to individuals' former deployments and contracts vary hugely in kind and nature.[1]

Digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed and anonymised. Although this chapter's analysis presents only interviews, the observations helped me understand processes and procedures of staff work and, further, the character of operative military planning methods and doctrines. In the interview excerpts,

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1 I thank Harald Høiback for reminding me of this important point – and the experienced reality of being from different armies despite wearing the same uniform. "The contrast between the sparse desert camp where we watched our comrades being flown out in boxes and the international REMF-fest up in Kabul couldn't have been more pronounced" (REMF = Rear Echelon Mother Fucker; JAFSO = Just another fucking supply officer; Hennessey, 2009, 27).

the officers participating in the programme and the directing staff are all referred to as "participants." One argument for treating both directing staff and students as participants is that they form a particular group – what Mannheim would understand as a generational unit, as both participants and directing staff share some specific experiences grounded in a common location and time frame. This point of view is further unfolded in the chapter's empirical analysis. Another argument is an ethical concern with protecting and further anonymising a small group of people who are in a career-sensitive phase of their professional trajectory.

The programme's participants are in their late 30s. To be accepted into it, one must have an outstanding efficiency report and a recommendation from one's superior. The Danish candidates are typically older than their British and American counterparts. The directing staff do not form a distinct group, but as part of their own progression through the ranks they are training and educating their colleagues of lower ranks. A staff member is also an officer who has graduated from the course relatively recently. Typically, the directing staff are only a couple of years ahead of the participants in the military career system. The staff hold their position at the war college two to three years before moving on to a new position. Sometimes they hold their position for an even shorter time.

In analysing the data, I coded the interviews to establish themes across the data set. Following the ideographic process of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to analyse and systematise the data, I was interested in coding for the details and nuances of the stories that individual participants told and the specific words they choose (see Gill, 2020; Roelsgaard Obling, 2020). When organising the superordinate themes, I used the technique of "abstraction," "subsumption," "polarisation" and "contextualisation" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; see also Smith & Osborn, 2008 for an introduction to IPA research methods). This analytical process made it possible to pay attention to each case individually before moving on to producing more general statements of the experiences of professional military officers that emerged during the research.

Findings

The analysis produced a number of subordinate themes organised within three master themes: (a) being part of a club, (b) common experiences and (c) conflicts and tensions. These themes represent distinct strands of the officers' operational and non-operational experiences of a significant period in their work life but form, in part, an identity of responses.

Being Part of a Club

The participants described how their sense of being part of a unique group emerged over time through their involvement in foreign military missions, especially the more recent missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Central to this understanding was the idea that they shared some common experiences that made them special.

> Our group is … the last of the old guard who have had a period [serving] where it became deadly serious. We have gained some experiences and some experiences that the next generations may or may not be able to get. We have some very specific and concrete experiences about what it means to have been responsible for military operations, in which people have died. Often very close to you, both physically and mentally. And that is of course not a success criterion in itself, that you have led units that have suffered losses; however, it makes you a part of a club. (Participant, Jonathan)

The expressed feelings of belonging to a social group – a club – are held together by the experience of some particular historical events, shared from more or less the same vantage point. Further, the club is defined by its uniqueness, especially with regard to concrete, common experiences of "dead seriousness," which distinguishes it from both past and (perhaps) future groups.

As explained by another respondent: "The fact that you can talk about some things and have an understanding of the importance of what we do; an understanding, which people didn't have before us." These experiences, shared in context and time, are also described in the next quote:

> All of a sudden, we came down to Afghanistan and Iraq, where figures for military losses are suddenly also a politically relevant factor and where people actually died, so they were shot at and they were blown to pieces and they lost limbs and everything possible, so it got more serious. Because before that time it was mega serious in case anything happened. However, nothing happened. We only practised for fun. We are a generation from people about my age and younger ones where it has… where it has been, well, where there has been blood and all those kinds of things. (Participant, Lloyd)

It is notable here how the respondents again draw upon aspects of the missions that clearly separate them from previous generations. "Seriousness," a theme consistent with the idea of feeling special, works as a way to specify or delineate the generation.

> We, well, we have the same mind-set; I think we are the generation, the people that are here at the moment; we have really experienced that things needed be done in real life, and I think that has done something good for our professionalism, but, yes, yes, I did get a little warm here, but this is something that means something to me. (Participant, Thomas)

For some respondents, the feeling of belonging to a club is related not only to social conditions and experiences but to a degree also to biological factors such as belonging to the same age cohort:We are a very, very small group of people; the recruitment sample has been small and we are very few, as people at the same time are leaving the system. (Participant, Nicolas)

Here, the participant refers to the shortage of officers and other key personnel in the Danish Armed Forces, and to the fact that a high deployment frequency shared among a relatively small group of people might have caused some to leave the military (Jedig Jensen, 2008). Despite smooth mission recruitment, the pressure on a small group of officers has been high.

Common Experiences in the Generational Unit

According to Mannheim (1928/1952), generational units are bound together by an "identity of responses" formed by similar experiences. While different participants in this study spoke of different types of experiences which had shaped their working lives and sense of being professional military officers, the deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan formed a particular cluster or accumulation of experiences.

> The whole issue of getting through Iraq and Afghanistan, and being part of the development that the army has undergone, and that the Danish armed forces have been through, and the fact that we had no idea what we went into, either in Iraq or in Afghanistan is, that is, it's a little unique. (Participant, Jonathan)

The officers in what is here defined as a generational unit has, as the first generation in the Danish Armed Forces, experienced what the now-retired British

Lieutenant General Lamb described as the chaos of theatres of war ("I referred to Iraq as a three-dimensional contest, played in a dark room, while someone was shooting at you. I think I underestimated the game"; Lamb 2013, p. 151). The next participants confirm that this experience has, among other factors, helped create a generational consciousness, or what can also be explained as a particular way of thinking, seeing and acting:

> There have been episodes during this education where I have been down, thinking "Okay, as long as nobody shoots at me, nobody is dead, and there are no wounded, then that's fine and everything will be all right again tomorrow." That's what we learned in Afghanistan. Perhaps something exploded, but when I watched, nobody was dead, nobody was wounded, fine, then we continue. (Participant, Greg)

> Just before it happened [a deployment], the Company command-er, who was killed in Afghanistan, was getting replaced, so I was ready, so inside my head, the small wheels started to spin and then say, "well okay that might as well be you on the next team." Then you start to put the tasks in perspective, so I also thought from back home that the probability for getting all my soldiers home again, it is practically non-existent. So mentally, if you mentally, I think, understand what the tasks are and what the consequences of the tasks may be, then you are also better prepared. … A lot of things in our métier are about defining the task and thinking about the costs of that task. (Participant, David)

While some of the officers had previously served in Kosovo or in the Balkans, the character and costs of engagement in the conflict in Afghanistan, especially, have no parallels in Danish war history. Of 19,199 soldiers deployed, 214 were wounded and 43 killed in Afghanistan during the period 2002–14 (The Danish Defence 2020c).

Included in some of the described operational experiences were participants' experiences with planning, collaboration and leadership: from concrete lessons learned to cultivation of a particular attitude, a "generational style" (Mannheim, 1928/1952, p. 309). It is notable again that the participants reflect upon some of the aspects of operations that separate them from other groups:

> I think we have a different perception of what planning is and what war is, even though most of us have only tried it at a sub-tactical level… we've got a slightly different view of how it is utilised and I think it's really, really healthy. (Participant, Thomas)

This participant continues:

> I think even if it has been tough, especially Iraq and Afghanistan, it has meant a lot to the profession. For example, such a thing as when we speak about what we teach, i.e., our doctrines, the procedures that are, they come under pressure when it is a stabilisation scenario; i.e., these are just some procedures, that do not always fit perfectly … and how much collaboration between staff means. (Participant, Thomas)

Another participant follows up, adding a preliminary picture of intergenerational differences:

> Mission commanding is a very good example. Because one thing is to say it, something else is to do it, it's tremendously difficult, and [officers] can do this, and they have tremendous confidence, and they have… they are trained to have specialists in their units, who are better than they are, where they have given them the responsibility . . . My old boss he was the boss; he came in and spit out some words of wisdom, and then I put it into practice … So this is another type of experience one has with the younger generation. Because it has been so much more … if you go to war and risk dying from it, then it is better that we all have talked about it, and we agree that now this is it, what we do and we do it for each other. Previously, there was just commanding. And then we did it because we knew that the day we were put into war, we would probably all die. (Participant, Lloyd)

Besides the self-conceptions evinced in the interviews about this distinct generational unit, positively distinguishing it from other groups in the Danish Armed Forces, others also reflected upon situations in which the military work organisation did not work optimally: "Most of us have been part of dysfunctional staff organisations, because they haven't been cooperative, people have just come up with different positions." (Participant, Thomas). The participant develops his point of view here, discussing a specific deployment experience:

> We experienced coming really, really under pressure, because we had the first casualties really, really fast – I was very close to the first two people we lost – and then things became very personal and, and at the same time, we were in a very complex environment. I was responsible for [anonymised task] and [anonymised task] in relation to [anonymised Afghan city], which is a city of fifty thousand people, where we did not really understand what was happening, so then we suddenly start to be put under pressure there, and at that same time we had no staff personnel that were collaborating, where you did not know each other, that is, and where you did not know the professional qualifications and competencies, that lay with the individuals. Then it really, really started to be up the hill also at the same time that you experience a chief of staff who did not lay out a line or who put down a completely crooked line; there were just so many things that built on each other. (Participant, Thomas)

Several participants described how the experience of seeing leadership in action, so to speak, provided them a different approach to leadership and leadership practices than those of previous generations:

> Those people who sit today, and are chiefs in the Danish Armed Forces, have not had the experience; so I think, among other things, that leadership is … to be able to explain … and to be able to make sense and that you also have to listen, so in that circumstance we are different. I think doctrinally, we teach the same things, but the way to be a leader and the way to use staff and things like that … that is different. (Participant, Lloyd)

The respondent above explains "the way to use staff," for example, as "having specialists in their units, who are better than them, so they gave the specialists the responsibility." Besides concrete experiences with what the management literature describes as "shared leadership" or "distributed leadership" (Ospina, 2018, p. 280), participants also experienced a chain of command, which did not always function in the expected way.

> Staff had to make plans that subordinate units had to implement; then it was sometimes a disaster, because the units that would go out on the ground would not implement [the plan], sometimes it was basically mutiny, because you thought it was a shitty plan you

had been given, and you didn't want to follow it at all. (Participant, Lloyd)

Seeing operational leadership in action, or in Clausewitz's coinage "war proper" as opposed to "preparations for war" (1993, p. 151), thus included experiencing both well-functioning and dysfunctional superordinate–subordinate relationships, which, because of the context, had real, enduring effects (see Clemmensen, 2015b; see also Ledwidge, 2012, on British military failures in Iraq and Afghanistan). One measured effect, documented in a newspaper commentary signed by 52 younger officers, concerned Danish higher military commanders, whom the officers found to be disloyal and generally lacking professional judgement and understanding of actions on the ground (Friis Christensen, et al. 2012).

Another issue which may also bind group members together is something one respondent, describes as a profound duty to care:

> The age group I'm a part of is a dying race; however, we believe in the narrative that abilities oblige you. One cannot not care now. Really, that's just not possible. (Participant, Greg)

This sense of a duty to care is also described by another participant as continuous reflection on some core competences of the profession:

> The generations of younger people … they have been at war; in other words, they have lost soldiers, they have experienced leaders who have pushed and made decisions based on agendas they didn't understand and stuff like that, so that's why I think they reflect a lot on these issues. (Participant, Lloyd)

The combination of seeing things from a particular position also implies, if we pay attention to the quote above, that the participants have experienced situations, such as blurred decision-making processes and moments of bad leadership, that have impacted the ways in which they see themselves and other groups today. According to Mannheim (1928/1952, p. 306), this ability to see things and experience so-called "psychological and intellectual impulses" and formative principles characteristic of the group and to "endow concepts with particular shades of meaning," such as concepts of leadership and decision-making, further strengthens the distinctiveness of this generational unit.

Conflicts between Generational Units

During the process of analysis, it not only became clear that the officers understood themselves as belonging to a special group – "a dying race" – but also that the group was at times in opposition to other, often older, groups in the military organisation. Many respondents disclosed mixed feelings about their relationships with individuals in the organisation, who were placed in higher positions in the hierarchical authority structure. The conflicting elements were often described as a conflict of experience, "All in all, we form an entire middle group. A common age group which has been at war and we are led by an entire age group who has never seen even the shadow of a deployment" (Greg) – and, memorably: "We just wait around to seize the power." (Lloyd) The next participant meanwhile, states quite explicitly:

> We are in the process of a generational battle to a greater extent than we have been before, because today we are a generation, not only of officers but also sergeants and constables, who have many deployments and a lot of experience gained at a fairly early stage in their careers, and we have a management group consisting of chiefs who have never been out and I think it is something that challenges us all, when we are to listen to them and let us inspire by what they say, why is it we need do that? (Participant, Nicolas)

The sense of belonging to a distinct social group which I previously described through the officers' common mission experiences – and the impact in the form of, for example, ways of thinking about leadership, collaboration and decision-making processes – also appears as a line drawn between "us" and "them." One participant described a situation he had encountered in a previous job, in which "they" tried to overcome the division:

> What people are willing to do to compensate for this generation split … they come and tell you about their own experiences, trying to bond. … So, I remember I was in a job interview and a general all of a sudden told me that he had also been on some patrols himself, and he was very busy telling me about it, and it was an interview and he spent half an hour on telling me what he had experienced himself and some of the patrols he had been on. And I came in as a company chief and I had been sent to Afghanistan and been in war every third day and throwing air bombs and having helicopters flying all over the place, had dead soldiers and all sorts of other things.

> And then he sat there telling me what it would be like to be in a war.
> It felt like, it was just … biggest compensation, it is such a thing. …
> It is like motorcycles and small cocks. (Participant, John)

The generational unit to which the officers in this study belong is bound together through similarities in their experiences and feelings and has, against that background, developed what Elias (1991/2001) would refer to as *we-feelings* and the contours of a *we-identity*. That identity is not available to everyone, as the quote above clearly indicates. Further, when individuals –here especially superiors and chiefs – try to become a part of the unit's particular "mentality collective" and part of the "we," it counteracts their efforts in two ways. First, the described situation displays an ignorance of the generational unit's experiences, which here, as in other instances, are paid undue attention. Second, it creates feelings of uneasiness and disturbs the power balance in the relationship, in which feelings of disrespect occur on behalf of the unit. This disrespect is also associated with scepticism towards top-level individuals' leadership capabilities, and especially the capability to create meaning and direction for the officer group:

> You have not tried it yourself; you do not necessarily know what we
> have been through. And not because it has to be something they
> have to measure up against, but I think a little unconsciously, then
> it's something they get measured on, unfortunately, and it can then
> sometimes be harder to get through with their messages if they do
> not simultaneously inspire, because if they just stand up and say
> "Now it's just like this," then they immediately meet some resistance.
> It has become clearer to people that there must be a clear purpose
> to the things they do. Especially in light of the things they have been
> out experiencing and doing. (Participant, Nicolas)

Throughout the staff officer and higher command education, different prominent guests were invited to follow the participants as they, for example, role-played war-planning exercises, such as how to plan for conducting a stabilisation operation with 30,000 men in a fictive Middle Eastern country. One general met the participants with the following words:

> There wasn't any plan for what we did in Helmand. You have all
> built up and ascribed to some operational habits and routines, which
> are stupid and do not fit with what we are confronted with today on
> the battlefield. So, don't think you know about things.

Participants explained the situation by referring to how representatives from the older generation grew up with and were taught different ways of thinking and conducting conflicts and warfare, and thus inhabit particular value and interest systems, which contrast the generational unit's systems of relevance. In other words, this was a symptom of Mannheim's "problem of generations," which makes one generation criticise or not understand what happens in the next generation. One participant, for example, explained: "We grew up with a battlefield; in my career I haven't tried anything besides counterinsurgency, which is complex and really difficult to navigate in." The next participants add:

> There is a rhetoric and a set of values and assumptions about warfare that characterise our senior officers today, let's say our generals and our colonels, and then there is a more experiential attitude to what war and armed conflict are, which has stored with my generation. It is very, very much about stabilisation operations, about COIN [counterinsurgency], which we have felt on body and soul, which forms a gap to the other set, which is largely based on the assumptions and ideas of the Cold War. (Participant, Paul)

> We are a generation who have not been trained and experienced things, in the way they [the older generation] experienced it when they were young, the complexity of large-scale exercises, for instance. However, in return we live in a world today where the size of units and exercises and operations no longer has its justification in today's conflicts, so you could say it's somewhere irrelevant to talk about it; uh, we are in a completely different place today. (Participant, Nicolas)

Intergenerational conflicts present themselves in the development of military doctrine, too.

As the generational unit's experiences and specific know-how have not yet been fully institutionalised in the Danish military organisation, these elements of professional knowledge are not written into doctrine. As one participant concludes in a panel discussion:

> The different worlds of generations must meet in our doctrine, which originally was based on "the Russian," but everyone in our generation has been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, and this experience needs to be incorporated into the doctrine for staff work in the field. (Participant, Frank)

The point here is that incorporating the newest war theatre experiences does not mean that previous, conventional field rules must be rejected; instead, the two sets of rules must co-exist. Other participants express concerns that "by bypassing a doctrinal element, we are not whole" ("Martin") and that "there is a 'brain drain' when you drop your focus on [counterinsurgency]; then the storage of experiences dries out" ("Anthony"). The challenges of recent stabilisation and security operations have called for new requirements and expertise, and in effect changes in professional work arrangements and training procedures (see, for example, Meese & Morgan, 2005 for a descriptions of the U.S. Army's structural adjustments to these challenges). For years, the army has circled around and discussed how one might embrace and develop expert knowledge and expertise based on these new requirements in Danish doctrine. At the time of writing, however, those experiential lesson-learned principles collected and included here have not effectively been incorporated, institutionally speaking, at the level of Danish doctrine development or management processes to form integrated activities (see, for example, Søby Kristensen & Larsen 2010). Another dimension, which adds to this collective loss of memory, is that a larger part of the soldiers with experience from the ground are leaving the Danish armed forces.

In sum, the generational unit described in this article is a distinct generation in the "middle," so to speak, of two other generations. It is led by a generation "who have not seen the shadow of a deployment," as participants described, and followed by a younger generation who instead of focusing on counterinsurgency and "small wars" are back to focusing on and training for more conventional Western ways of warfare – that is, grand-scale force against force. Since 2018, change in the Danish army, as in other Western armies, has been greatly driven by the transition from counterinsurgency operations in the Middle East to countering a resurgent threat from Russia (Cohen & Radin, 2019; Danish Government, 2018). As the British Chief of Defence Staff General Nick Carter (2019) framed it in his annual Royal United Services Institute speech: "We have returned to an era of great power competition, even constant conflict." There is, however, considerable uncertainty about the direction that Western forces will follow in the face of rising geopolitical competition and conflict. Indeed, this uncertainty is a mixed source of curiosity and concern:

> To really grasp what is coming, that is not possible; maybe the generation or the virtues, that I value and which my generation carry with them as a consequence of their experiences, in fact is not going to reflect what will come. (Participant, Paul)

Michael Howard's often quoted comment, written in peacetime in the 1970s, is relevant to the generational awareness expressed above:

> If there were to be another conflict the first battle may be the last … the social changes of our time may so transform the whole nature of warfare that the mode of thought of the military professional today will be, at best, inadequate or, at worst, irrelevant. This is the kind of change which we must today be prepared and able, if necessary, to adjust … the alternative is disappearance and defeat. (Howard, 1974, p. 7–8)

To adapt to future challenges may be a question of being able to build on past experiences, making adjustments for new, technology-infused contexts, among other things. As Klein (2017, p. 126) points out, "experience is about how to use our knowledge to tune our attention." Experience here includes being able to "see" the way things work, seizing opportunities and anomalies, and being aware of one's own limitations. Thus, our background can "sensitize us to cues or patterns that others might miss." This is a way to link future ways of warfare back to historical realities and principles (see, for example, Freedman, 2017) and to fight the temptation to think that it is possible to stare into the future and come up with what to do next *ex nihilo*.

Concluding Discussion

Against the backdrop of the role of the Danish armed forces' active participation in international conflicts, in this chapter I have explored the creation of a generational consciousness through the officers' experiences of deployment, the lag in operational experiences between generations, and the associated struggles between the generations connected to social phenomena such as the lived fulfilment of meaning. I have argued that the social and formative effects of mission participation (though not exclusively the actual or concrete missions) are central to the emergence of a generational consciousness which demarcates, even cuts off, that generation from past and future generations.

As explored elsewhere (see Roelsgaard Obling, 2020), "being a soldier" means different things for different people across generations in the Danish armed forces. This is also true within the investigated generational unit, a body which, rather than sharing an overarching common identity, is bound together by many different things. The internalisation of new tasks, responsibilities and recognition has been one acknowledged effect of recent mission involvement. Mannheim's

perspective offers insight into the ways in which violent historical events can trigger new forms of professionalism, galvanising generations through organisational activity. According to Evetts (2003, p. 772), this is a type of "professionalization from within" and points to certain historical and political contexts in which the profession is permitted to flourish.

This chapter adds to the existing debate on the professionalisation of armed forces by addressing changes in the outlook and behaviour of an institution composed of individuals and social groups. Departing from the theory of generations, one of its contributions is the focus on how a group of Danish officers form a generational unit distinct from past and future generations of officers on account of their experiences of recent international missions and war theatre participation. Among other things, this has introduced a gap, which continues to grow, between the specialised experiential knowledge, values and interests of the generational unit and those of the older generation in the military organisation. It is, of course, necessary here to acknowledge that there exist many exceptions to this "problem of generations," and that there are Danish generals and colonels with substantial deployment and mission experience.

In addition, there exist individual differences concerning how, on one hand, the generational unit's members see themselves and their relationship to others in the established military hierarchical authority structure, and, on the other hand, how others attempt to contain the aspirations of the members. Addressing a generational gap and intra- and intergenerational tensions is, however, an issue of concern in relation to a well-functioning and effective military organisation. This includes awareness of the potential growth of a polarised outlook – an awareness affording the military the opportunity to avoid a potential impediment to the presentation of a unified front and, thus, new problems of internal and external coordination. Future research could examine how groups within the armed forces are shaped by different national and international factors and consequently may have developed very different professional ethos and values. This remains a matter of debate.

When attending to "a problem of generations," one may present the common-sense statement that younger generations are always ahead of, or more progressive, than elder generations. According to Mannheim, however, this is not necessarily the case; much depends on the tempo of social change, which shapes each generation's worldviews. In that regard, Mannheim's perspective is resolutely anti-deterministic and retains a strong structural dimension (Milkman, 2017). Mannheim's preoccupation with social structure and culture recalls Simmel and Weber, both of whom are clear influences on his work. As such, the generational perspective offers a way to think about, and empirically explore, social change

and progress and to present a way to analyse the processes of generation-related struggles and conflicts in organisations – which in turn shape and transform these organisations.

However, it is important to mention some reservations concerning generational analysis. As noted by White (2013), there appears to be an overlap between generational consciousness and the social formations the term is used to describe; it may, indeed, generate these formations itself. The concept of generation is both a category of analysis and a practice in the way that it, as a social category, can describe and explain social groupings and differentiation, and be imposed by individuals – scientists and practitioners – to legitimise a specific vision of reality or to evoke the inclusivity of a grouping (Bourdieu, 1991; see also Jaeger, 1985). According to Purhonen (2016), generational interpretations can seek to either promote the value of the group in question or reduce the value of a specific group. As a form of labelling and categorisation, these interpretations are hardly ever disinterested but are, rather, normative and bound up with cultural, professional and political ambitions and motives. For the researcher, this prompts the critical question of who, precisely, is doing the interpretation.

Proposing the generation argument, there is a risk, furthermore, of overlooking the contradictions and diversity of attributes and experiences given within a social grouping. This also includes a potential downplaying of diversity and divergence among the individuals in what is understood here to be a particular generational unit. This study has raised the generation issue while avoiding projecting claims on larger groups of people at the level of the greater society for instance. Generation intellectuals who have attempted to emphasise a particular "zeitgeist" by defining a whole generation of young people as "millennials" or "Generation Z" have done this with more or less success. Instead, I have highlighted some significant temporal and spatial factors in a limited group of military officers defined by a commonality of reference points in order to make my claims empirically plausible and not risk "lapsing into caricature" or seeking truths of a higher order (Jaeger, 1985, p. 288; White, 2013, p. 241).

Previous studies have identified different ways in which Western armed forces have been professionalised, particularly through focusing on new expert knowledge and expertise. This chapter has argued that through applying a generational perspective it is possible to address how professionalisation as social change takes form as intra- and intergenerational relations. This perspective warrants further attention from organisation scholars and military sociologists who aspire to expose and discuss developments of, and changes in, the military profession.

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