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The Moral Career of Soldiers' Identity: A Norwegian Case

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Abstract

Military service can require soldiers to act beyond their moral beliefs, something that can impair soldiers' mental health. However, little is known about the shaping of soldiers' moral identity within their institutional context. This article explores how the moral identity of 20 experienced Norwegian soldiers is (re-)shaped in the Army. Findings from unstructured interviews suggest that they accept compromising their moral beliefs and give priority to an institutional obligation to follow orders. They present three mediating arguments justifying such a compromise and one effort to reduce the potential burden of carrying out illegal or immoral orders. I argue that these compromises are made possible through a shared belief they are socialized into through interactions in their military context. The study complements our knowledge of socialization processes in the military and identifies two theoretical concepts useful to gain knowledge about the (re-)shaping of soldiers' moral identity.

Keywords

Norwegian Armed Forces, identity, moral, reinventive institutions, total institution

Introduction

Becoming a soldier means being exposed to a process of socialization, where moral aspects of one's identity are shaped and reshaped within the military institution. Soldiers' identity affects how soldiers choose to act in situations, making this

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socialization process important. Bringing with them their personal moral beliefs when entering the military, soldiers run the risk of being placed in a contradictory position between their moral beliefs and institutional values. But today, several countries have chosen voluntary service in favor of conscription, and choosing a military career remains a choice. This brings the question of how soldiers experience contradictory positions and how and why they accept compromising their moral beliefs. This study draws on the experiences of Norwegian soldiers who have served several years in the enlisted ranks. I find that these soldiers go through an identity reinvention with implications for their moral identity. They find ways to justify compromises to their moral beliefs to fulfill institutional obligations in their military context. To understand the process by which their identity is (re-)shaped to accept such compromises, I draw upon the concepts of "performative regulations" (Scott, 2015) and the "moral career" (Goffman, 1959, 1961, 1963). Understanding culture as the reproduction of identities, moral values, and norms over time (Breede, 2019), this research informs us about military culture and the relationship between soldiers' moral careers and institutional socialization.

The topic of morality in military endeavors and the contradictory positions soldiers can experience has received the most attention from the philosophical perspective. Building on the tradition of the "just war," Walzer (2006) argues that fighting an unjust war is wrong, and places the responsibility on the government. This is a common belief, but one that McMahan (2009) argues risks subjecting soldiers to a "terrible dilemma" (p. 97), whereby they can either follow orders and share in the guilt of their government's wrongdoings or conscientiously refuse and be punished for disobedience. McMahan (2009) therefore suggests introducing selective conscientious objection, allowing active-duty soldiers to opt out of military operations on personal moral grounds and take a "moral holiday" (p. 98). Ryan (2011) argues that McMahan does not pay sufficient attention to the importance of the obligations to which soldiers in democratic cultures are subjected. These obligations place soldiers in a "contradictory position, between personal and institutional obligations" (Ryan, 2011, p. 10). This is where Ryan (2011) describes what he calls the "argument to democratic duty," whereby institutional obligations within a democracy entail an obligation for soldiers to kill in unjust wars to ensure the continuation of its democratic institution, "whose wars are generally just" (p. 20). Ryan argues that McMahan fails to address the impact of this aspect and that it makes taking a "moral holiday" difficult.

Montrose (2013) argues that while introducing selective conscientious objection can strengthen individuals' autonomy and ensure personal integrity, soldiers' opportunities to interpret a democratic government's justification may be limited because the information is often given on a need-to-know basis. Engaging in a selective conscientious objection may be impeded due to a real or assumed lack of knowledge that limits soldiers' ability to assess whether their orders align with their moral values. Furthermore, Montrose (2013) makes a similar argument as Ryan that soldiers may choose to participate based on their professional commitments, where obeying orders

is regarded as an essential value into which soldiers are socialized when entering the military institution. Others have argued that, as a profession, the military subjects itself to “stringent moral constraints” (Wolfendale, 2009, p. 127), under which individuals have a moral duty to refuse orders and refuse to provide their expertise when such orders violate their moral professional commitments. Wolfendale (2009) regards the fact that a refusal on professional moral grounds rarely happens as an indication of inconsistency between professional integrity and “the widely held belief” that soldiers must obey orders, which serves to undermine the military’s claim to be serving a moral good (Wolfendale, 2009). Snider (2017) argues that senior military leaders must always exercise their moral agency to ensure the moral commitment that has been entrusted to them by their people. Among the situations in which he considers it particularly relevant to dissent are orders to plan a war that will not achieve its strategic aim but will lead to the loss of civilian and military lives (Snider, 2017). Others argue strongly against this (Kohn, 2017) and make the case that the hierarchical chain of command must prevail, whereby the civilian authority dictates the activities of military personnel to avoid threatening civilian control of the military.

Beyond the philosophical realm, some attention has been given to understanding how soldiers experience and deal with questions of morality in their everyday lives (Brémault-Phillips et al., 2019; Carre, 2019; Flores, 2016; Katriel, 2018). One study looked into loyalty and moral emotion and warned against utilizing moral emotions to create strong bonds of loyalty in the military as this could lead individuals to override moral imperatives (Connor et al., 2021). Studies have also investigated the negative mental health trajectory soldiers can experience after acting beyond or betraying their personal moral beliefs such as having to compromise moral beliefs to act by institutional values (Brémault-Phillips et al., 2019; Easterbrook et al., 2022; Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020). However, research has found that soldiers experience changes to their morals after entering the military (Brooks et al., 2022; Carre, 2019; Siedlik et al., 2022), where Siedlik et al. (2022) found moral intention and judgment being impaired over time. As such, questions of morality and the impact of conflicting morals continue to be an important topic to allow military personnel to discuss ethical concerns (Rennick, 2013) or conduct ethical training in stressful operational-like settings to strengthen moral reasoning (Messervey et al., 2022). This type of transitioning into soldiers, internalizing military values as part of their identity, can be stressful for Army recruits, who are concerned about learning how to cope “with the demands of the life they had committed to” (Carre, 2019, p. 397). With military service being increasingly voluntary in an era with increasingly individualistic selves, questions about whether this threatens the collective identity of soldiers have been raised (Maheshwari et al., 2021). One study did find that while morals were important ideals for military officers, moral perspectives were considered less ideal among the “more selfish and less empathic” (Olsen et al., 2021, p. 20) younger generation.

This article aims to complement knowledge about the moral identity of active soldiers who are socialized into institutional obligations and answer Soeters’s (2018)

call to understand the perspective of soldiers who, at the bottom of the chain of command, have to live with and "carry the burden of their actions" (p. 203). Taking identity and morality to be an intrinsic expression of culture, I also contribute to Breede's (2019) call for an expanded understanding of the outcomes stemming from the military's use of culture. The study identifies the concept of "performative regulations" and "moral career" as valuable to understand the moral identity of Norwegian soldiers and suggests that these concepts can be useful to understand the moral identity of individuals who are socialized into different institutions.

Moral Imperatives in the Norwegian Armed Forces

The Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF) seeks to institutionalize a set of professional moral values and obligations among military personnel. These are set out through a policy on values and standards, which states that the NAF's values and standards are situated within the "virtues of Norwegian society" to ensure support for and the legitimacy of its actions. However, it also states that "assimilating these values is not primarily a matter of following orders, but of building up a professional identity and culture" (Forsvaret, n.d.). Three core values are highlighted, namely, respect, responsibility, and courage, seeking to empower military personnel to handle their duties and act appropriately by utilizing sound and ethical reasoning in challenging situations.

Respect is "a moral duty . . . expressed through attitudes and actions" through which individuals display "a conscious pattern of behavior based on ethical principles, doing your best to do the right thing" (Forsvaret, n.d.). However, respect also requires that we "comply with that decision and carry out the mission as best we can" while, during peacetime activities, being "free to make our views known within the organization" (Forsvaret, n.d.). *Responsibility* entails self-discipline to "support and help one another and ultimately, if necessary, to give their lives for one another" and for "carrying out political decisions on the use of military force" (Forsvaret, n.d.). It is a form of "collective loyalty and discipline" ensuring that soldiers "will not let each other or the mission down" (Forsvaret, n.d.). *Courage* is the "moral and physical strength to act appropriately . . . and speaking out if we see something that is not right" (Forsvaret, n.d.). This requires "sound judgement," which "depends on a clear sense of right and wrong, self-knowledge and humility" and "requires awareness of the moral implications and the consequences of our actions, so that each one of us can defend our actions in retrospect" (Forsvaret, n.d.). The duty to obey lawful orders is therefore an essential value, anchored within the values of respect and responsibility that soldiers are socialized into when entering the military. Questions of a moral nature, however, can be impaired by these institutional obligations, making it difficult to raise questions that might challenge the imperatives of the institution. Soldiers are entrusted with the sanctioned use of violence on behalf of their democratically elected government; therefore, their acts must be grounded in sound morality to ensure legitimacy from the people and government they serve.

Identity in the Military

Identity addresses "who we are" and who we aspire to be and can be understood as what makes one person different from others (Alvesson et al., 2008), but also similar to their fellows (Breivik, 2005). Understanding identity not as something we *have* but rather as a process that we *do* (Jenkins, 2008), knowingly (Bauman, 1991), makes identity a process of negotiation formed through social interactions in everyday life (Scott, 2015). Thus, identity is a process of becoming, a search for belonging, and a product to be revamped and relaunched at regular intervals (Craib, 1998). However, this process is conducted within a context that provides the conditions under which we can rewrite our identity (Craib, 1998), and the military institution offers one site where individuals may transform their identities to accommodate contextual requirements (Kaspersen, 2021).

Goffman (1961) described the military as a *total institution*, one into which individuals are entered involuntarily and subjected to processes of social control that affect their self-identities. In the Norwegian setting, however, individuals voluntarily embark upon a military career, dedicating themselves to following orders from above in the search for self-improvement (Ginexi et al., 1994; Österberg et al., 2020; Scott, 2011). Hence, the military has moved toward becoming what Scott (2011) calls a reinventive institution, where "members are ostensibly free to leave but choose not to, because of the strength of their commitment" (p. 3). Scott (2011) emphasizes that individuals who actively enter such institutions are seeking a new social identity as part of a process of reinventing themselves into something better. This is a process of reinvention during which individual identity becomes (re-)organized, occurring through institutional rhetoric such as formal instruction and performative regulations such as *peer surveillance*.

Within the total institution, Goffman (1961) emphasized that members play a passive role in their identity reorganization. Military personnel simply must carry out the identity imposed upon them by the military institution, enclosed and surveilled by superiors who ensure that they carry out orders appropriately. Within reinventive institutions (Scott, 2011), where members can choose to stay or leave, this power dynamic has changed. This means that military personnel can interact with the institutions' rhetoric, interpreting and internalizing aspects as part of their military identity, thus prioritizing certain aspects more than others. These interpretations and performances are then subjected to judgment by their peers. So, instead of surveillance from above, Scott (2011) argues that *peer surveillance*, a type of performative regulation, contributes significantly to the reorganizing of military identities within reinventive institutions. Through normative judgments from above, across, and below, soldiers monitor themselves and each other. Hence, soldiers present themselves in particular ways knowing they may be judged. As such, a soldier's identity performance occurs through an interaction between institutional structures and the practices of the military's members, whereby soldiers balance their performances in the knowledge that they may be judged by their peers.

This shaping of identities can be understood “as a ‘career’ or ‘trajectory’ that is constantly unfolding and never finished,” whereby individuals self-reflexively reconstruct their “transition from one identity to another” in meaningful ways (Scott, 2015, p. 25). The concept of a *moral career* depicts identity transitions that include a moral dimension: “the regular sequence of changes that career entails in the person’s self and in his [*sic*] framework of imagery for judging himself and others” (Goffman, 1961, p. 119). Morality, understood as a set of norms, beliefs, and values, is an integral part of identity and, as such, is also negotiated through social interactions and influenced by contextual requirements (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013). When choosing to enter the military, individuals will seek acceptance and membership by acquiring the competence and skills that are required to be(come) a soldier. One’s authenticity as a soldier is then scrutinized by similar others, “where social reactions to a person’s actions involve normative judgments expressing attitudes of distaste, disapproval, impatience or intolerance” (Scott, 2015, p. 127). When seeking to acquire a military identity in the military context, judgments of one’s identity by similar others become particularly significant. One’s identity performance may be judged as appropriate or inappropriate and being judged inappropriate may result in one’s military identity being discredited. This is what Goffman (1963) called “stigma,” an attribute through which someone is judged to be “of a less desirable kind” (p. 12).

Within the context of Giddens’s (1991) late modernity and its demand for reflexive projects of self-improvement, it has been argued that the performative aspect of identity is increasingly important in shaping identities (Scott, 2011; Stets & Carter, 2012). This includes the processes of peer surveillance and stigma, where adhering to the context-specific cultural codes within the military institution can become more important than remaining true to one’s own identity (Goffman, 1969; Scott, 2011). Thus, contextual requirements can lead us to deviate from our identity in ways that can place a burden upon it (Craib, 1998), such as being judged “of a less desirable kind” (Goffman, 1963, p. 12). This shapes the identity of soldiers by creating a culture that incorporates very specific do’s and don’ts, governed by dramaturgically enacted peer surveillance (Scott, 2015). One’s performance is monitored—horizontally, vertically, and self-reflexively—and judged by its authenticity. By adhering to the context-specific cultural codes, presented through mechanisms of “material, discursive or symbolic structures” (Scott, 2011, p. 3), identities become (re-)shaped within the military contexts through accepting, challenging, or sanctioning performances.

Research Design

This study was conducted from an interpretive perspective (Blaikie & Priest, 2017) and sought to gain rich accounts of the meanings that soldiers attached to their actions during everyday life. I conducted 20 unstructured interviews with soldiers aged between 21 and 35 years who had between 2 and 14 years of experience in the enlisted ranks with an average of 5 years. Four of the cadets had served once or twice

in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. At the time of the interview, the informants were studying at the Norwegian Military Academy (NMA). Most of the male cadets had been working in the Armed Forces for several years before entering the NMA, while the female cadets had served 1 year before doing so. Sixteen informants were male, on average 25 years old, and four informants were female at an average age of 22. The young age of the women is not surprising as mandatory service for women was only introduced in 2015, which resulted in higher rates of women applying to the NMA. Taken together, the informants cover a broad range of junior officers' perspectives, with a variety of experience in the enlisted ranks, as conscripts, professional soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and educational officers.

There are several reasons why the NMA was chosen as the site for research. First, the NMA provides informants with a broad range of experiences from different units in the Army. Second, the NMA offers a bachelor's degree in military skills and leadership making it central to officers' development of a professional identity. And third, as the NMA seeks to develop a feedback culture to encourage personal development and reflection to increase cadets' understanding of self and others, the cadets are thus in a mode of personal reflection seeking personal development and are therefore accustomed to reflecting openly on their understandings. These reasons make the NMA a particularly valuable place for research, and because of this mode of reflection, it is a particularly valuable place to gain rich data.

I conducted unstructured interviews that revolved around their process of becoming soldiers, including their perspectives on being a soldier and the challenges they faced. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 min and were conducted between September and October 2019 at private NMA facilities. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, recorded, and transcribed verbatim. To ensure anonymity, context-sensitive strategies were used where, in addition to altering the names of participants, I disguised other identifying characteristics such as places of work, prior experiences, and matters of family or upbringing to preserve anonymity (Saunders et al., 2015).

The transcribed data were subjected to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), driven by an iterative process that entailed moving between induction and deduction. The analysis was primarily data-driven but I moved between data, concepts, and theory circularly to allow concepts to inform and enrich the analysis (Tjora, 2019). In the results section, I have interpreted the data to the most prominent issues concerning the participants' moral careers. I present five individuals because they exemplify the range of differences across the data material, but in instances where other informants shed further light on the process or expressed a different process, excerpts have been added to include these.

The research was subjected to a notification to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data and received ethics approval from the Norwegian Defense College. However, the research remains independent, and the Norwegian Defense College did not have any role in the research or publication process.

Results

"Not an Easy Transition"

An issue commonly raised by informants was the transition into becoming soldiers. This transition took more than their first year of mandatory service, not uncommonly up to 4 years, but sometimes shorter if preparing for or deploying to international operations. An example that was brought up by several informants was their surprise after realizing that they had to be told that the shape of the targets they were shooting at served a purpose:

> Our platoon commander was making this point, why the shooting targets were shaped in the silhouette of humans. I was like "Whaaaaaat? Shit! I never thought about that," which was weird. I'm there, practicing shooting, but I never reflected on the fact that I might have to use a weapon to kill. I was like "I don't want to deploy and kill someone." But it's a consequence of my career choice, it's part of the responsibility I've taken upon myself, so apparently, I'm willing to do it. (Anna)

For most informants, transitioning into a soldier involved a realization that violence is an ingrained part of the military. Adrian considered himself a typical Norwegian youth who was neutral about the military and had no plans for a career. Finding his mandatory service rewarding, he opted for tryouts and became a ranger (Norwegian: *jeger*) for 3 years before entering the NMA. When reflecting upon his transition into becoming a soldier, Adrian said,

> I didn't grasp the severity of the profession. It wasn't obvious to me that I might have to participate in war. I care about this, how do you get civilians, who have been told that solving problems with violence is wrong and that it's wrong to kill, how do we get them to understand in one year that they're instruments of violence, who must commit violence if our government says so? I recognize myself in this, it's not an easy transition—from identifying as a peaceful civilian to identifying as a warrior. (Adrian)

Adrian described coming to realize what being a soldier is about, which to him implied being a warrior or an instrument of violence conducting missions on behalf of the government. Hence, Adrian emphasized his duty to carry out orders and having little or no agency "when it all comes down to it":

> Our politicians decide. I carry out the missions they tell me to carry out. It's not up to me to consider where we should contribute. That's a question at a much higher level. I hope to grasp the big picture one day so that I can have an opinion. There are some ethical, moral, and legal restrictions, however; you can't go along with anything just to maintain an alliance, for example. If it's against the law and against what I believe is ethically correct, I will have serious problems doing it. But when it comes down to it, I don't have a say in it. (Adrian)

Adrian considered decisions about military conduct to belong higher up in the hierarchy, at the political level. Acknowledging legal and moral restrictions on his conduct and stating that he would have serious problems with acting beyond these, he perceived himself as not having a say in it, leaving him with no sense of agency in his conduct as a soldier. Later, Adrian highlighted how adaptable soldiers are:

> We carry out the missions we're given and seek to solve them the best way possible, regardless of the mission. We adapt, and I think selected soldiers are particularly adaptable. (Adrian)

Referring to the selection process that soldiers undergo if they opt to continue after their mandatory service, Adrian highlighted that soldiers might be selected based on being adaptable. For a few informants, the transition evolved less around realizing the potential use of violence. This was the case for Chris who said,

> I had accepted being used to kill when I joined, but I was naïve and trusted orders to be correct. I trusted the system. Told my parents to expect me to deploy abroad, and I regarded it as an important test of my soldiering ability. If I couldn't handle it, I would quit immediately! Now I know that I ought to follow intentions, not orders, and to disobey if they're not in line with the overall purpose, and I will reject orders if I can't carry them out successfully. I'm fine with being somewhere just to show our presence and wave our flag at our allies without any aim or meaning, but not if it's at the expense of others, then I wouldn't do it. (Chris)

Chris described being susceptible to following orders uncritically before realizing that he might have to disobey if orders did not align with or serve the overall purpose.

"You Can't Be So Principled That You Don't Carry Out What You're Obliged to Do"

Geir did not want to serve his mandatory service but felt forced to do so by the recruitment officer. Today, he is grateful for this. During his mandatory service, he was recommended to apply for noncommissioned officer training. Following this, he served for 3 years in an infantry unit and said, "I had the best three years of my life there, it's an amazing culture and environment to be working in." At the time of the interview, Geir had been serving in the Army for 6 years and served 6 months in Iraq before entering the NMA.

Geir stressed that his personal moral beliefs had to yield to his institutional duty as a soldier to carry out orders. This view, having to compromise personal moral values to fulfill institutional obligations, was commonly accepted:

> You have the ethical framework; what is okay for me to do? I think in some cases you must compromise with your perception of what [is right]. If it's legal and tactically

> wise, then I think you must. You can't be so principled that you don't carry out what you're obliged to do. But it is a difficult balance. (Geir)

Acknowledging that there is a balance to be maintained between one's values and institutional obligations, Geir went a long way in describing how personal values must yield to institutional obligations to carry out legal and wise orders.

Most informants knew and mentioned their duty to refuse to carry out orders that were beyond the legal framework. Yet, several aspects caused the informants to express doubts as to whether they would refuse to carry out unlawful orders:

> I have to say: "I'm not allowed to, I can't do it," then he must have a damn good reason and be able to convince me if I'm to do it. (Geir)

Geir thought that he could be convinced to carry out an unlawful order. However, he also stressed that the concept of loyalty influenced his ability to speak up when disagreeing with orders. Drawing on his experience in Iraq where he carried out orders he considered unwise, Geir described having to strike a balance based on different considerations:

> It felt pointless, and extremely difficult because you have your role, your boss, and you must be loyal to your soldiers. They noticed that this wasn't working, it was a waste of resources. And when you feel the same way, having to balance this and not say "things are great" because they'll see through you. Be honest but do not say everything to avoid becoming part of the bellyaching. Because you have a responsibility toward the mission, and you have someone above you to whom you must relate. It was a weird situation. (Geir)

Geir described taking measures to strike a balance between the expectations of his peers and his superiors to avoid negative reactions. In general, the informants described several aspects that caused them to doubt their ability and agency to speak up. The most important aspects were information being given on a strictly need-to-know basis, a lack of opportunity to speak out, and the aspect of conformity. Many informants also mentioned the threat of being punished if they did not carry out orders.

"You Have to Do Things"

Kristian joined the Army to challenge himself, do something exciting, and have the same experiences as other family members who had been in the Army. After working in a special operations force for more than a decade, he entered the NMA. He highlighted two aspects of particular importance for his understanding of being a soldier: a sense of duty to serve and protect his country from external threats on the one hand and being a political tool on the other. The latter implies,

> The cynical part of it is being used as a tool for politics in our country, meaning that you must do things you don't think are morally acceptable. You can be used to create a connection between Norway and another country, for example, the USA. (Kristian)

A common way to depict what Kristian referred to as "the cynical part" was through the metaphor of the soldier as a tool or multitool. By drawing on this metaphor, the informants situated the soldier as being under a duty to carry out orders, subject to political control, and with a limited agency. This view was generally accepted and argued for in ways like Kristian later put it:

> Someone must be willing to do what's necessary. Do things you don't want to do, that go against your fears and against those feelings we have in today's civil society. You're a tool. You can uphold your own opinion but can't act beyond the intention that politicians enforce upon us. I believe I can conduct my job with my integrity, but we're a tool when it comes down to it. (Kristian)

Some informants also argued that carrying out orders was the right thing to do since the population had not objected to the military's actions:

> There haven't been any uprisings, at least not yet like with Vietnam in the USA. It hasn't been that bad in Norway, which is good. Some people are positive, and some are negative, but most think it's fine, at least when ISIS was raging at its worst, then the acceptance was great. (Olav)

The informants described having little agency "when it comes down to it." Yet, all the informants described having a duty to refuse unlawful orders and a duty to speak up if they believed actions to be unethical:

> Concerning integrity and such, I hope that officers do speak up. But I believe there isn't much room to speak up. It relates to consensus, or conformity and compliance. It's stated clearly at the NMA that when a decision is taken, it's final. You need to be there before the decision is made. (Kristian)

When describing their duty to refuse orders and to speak up, the informants revealed various institutional obstacles making the act of refusing orders or speaking up difficult. Kristian hoped that he would speak up and give priority to his moral values above institutional requirements but described an institutional structure that delimits when and where it is possible to speak up. Other informants highlighted that the Army only disseminates information on a "need-to-know" basis and said that time constraints could make it difficult to obtain information. This makes them susceptible to accepting and following orders because they are uncertain as to whether they have sufficient information to assess the legalities or moralities of actions. Many informants argued that the responsibility to judge actions concerning the legal or moral framework rests higher in the hierarchy, although they simultaneously

expressed the hope that they would be able to speak up in situations where they found actions to be legally or morally problematic. One example of this is Adrian, quoted above. A few informants also argued that, regardless of the actions they carried out, one would always be able to find justifications based on the legal or moral framework of the Army.

"To Refuse an Order"

Lars was determined to work in either the Army or the police after his mandatory service. He sought action and to be part of something few were allowed to participate in. Lars said that speaking up against decisions was taboo. This view was shared by other informants, who commonly described having a duty to speak up but stressed that this was rarely done in practice. The main reasons why taking responsibility to speak up was considered difficult were fear of punishment and potentially limited access to information making it difficult to assess orders:

> I think it would cost a bit to express this view, and at least to resist or refuse an order, that would cost a lot. It's a bit taboo . . . I want to believe that doing what's right for me means doing what *is* right, but by positioning myself in the military I've given up many rights. You should do what you're ordered, for the good of the nation, but doing something you don't think is right is very taboo, or difficult, and where's the limit? Maybe get your career ruined or be punished for a refusal. It's quite difficult because by refusing you've made a clear choice that "I don't think this is right." (Lars)

In addition to the threat of consequences, such as being punished, Lars highlighted that expressing his personal beliefs would reduce his ability to continue to carry out an order, as the act of carrying out orders one personally disagrees with is considered taboo.

The act of visibly diverging from the institutional view was not considered easy. Many informants said that refusing to carry out orders that breached both their moral values and the legal framework would be subject to careful assessment:

> I would say no if I was convinced that it was better to accept the consequences of a refusal than to execute the orders. But it depends, and I think it's difficult to know what you'd do until you're in the situation. (Linnea)

Lars described having difficulty determining where his responsibility lay in situations where the legalities or moralities of actions were not clear-cut:

> Is it right, that refusal? Also, you have other considerations, from ethical to legal, but where is the limit? The gray area is very difficult, a lot of what we do is within that gray area, and I can't pinpoint where my area of responsibility is. (Lars)

The informants commonly described having doubts about their ability to assess orders due to their limited access to information. This was highlighted by one informant who stated,

> When taking responsibility and speaking up, you must accept that sometimes you're still going to follow orders. Sometimes there's information that you don't have access to, it's classified or due to time constraints, you must accept it and just follow the orders. (Olav)

The possibility of lacking sufficient information made it difficult for the informants to depict their area of responsibility because it was difficult to assess the grounds on which they were objecting. This blurred the boundary between their duty to speak up and their duty to carry out orders.

"That's the Military Profession"

Mathias, who had served both in Afghanistan and Iraq during his 11 years in the Army, considered it a coincidence that he had joined the Army. After being recommended to apply to the Army as an apprentice by his high-school teacher, Mathias applied for tryouts for noncommissioned officer training by mistake. When granted a position, he decided to continue, having found friends with mutual interests. Early in the interview, Mathias stressed the importance of soldiers "daring to be critical, not follow blindly, and managing to think independently," as highlighted by all the informants. However, when Mathias described his experiences of deployments, he argued that being a soldier entails following orders:

> We didn't understand *why*, but we carried out our mission to the best of our ability regardless. If we had understood, we could have resolved it differently, it might have had a different result. But perhaps nobody cares because the aim was just to be present and make a good impression, so the Americans were happy. Now that I know *why* it might have been just as well that we didn't understand the political reason. But that's the military profession, do the mission regardless. Do what the politicians and country decide. (Mathias)

Not understanding the political reasons for his mission and regarding this as "just as well" in hindsight, Mathias argued that carrying out orders is what the military profession is all about. However, he said that he disagreed with the political reasoning for the mission he took part in and argued that his team could have conducted it differently if they had known *why*. Nevertheless, Mathias communicated feeling a lack of meaning, as though knowing might not have made any difference because the aim was "just to be present" and "make a good impression." Mathias then went on to depict something that was described by most informants, namely that if you took issue with orders, you had to quit:

> It's your responsibility. If you don't understand why you're doing a mission and that's a problem for you, it's not right for you, you have big problems with carrying out such a mission, either find someone to talk to and ask to stay at home, or you must quit. Find something else to do, apply for a new job. If this is the job, most missions being abroad, I think that if you can't deal with it, you must find something else to do. (Mathias)

As part of the previously mentioned fear of punishment for speaking up, here Mathias was highlighting some possible consequences of disagreeing, resisting, or refusing, namely that you must quit.

"Can I Live With What I Do?"

We have seen that a common depiction of what being a soldier entails is having to carry out orders that diverge from one's personal moral beliefs. Consequently, being unable to carry out such orders means that you are unsuited for military life and should not have joined the Army. While this was commonly conveyed, the informants simultaneously displayed a fear of the possible long-term consequences that being a soldier might have on their lives. Lars, who talked about refusals as taboo, said,

> It's scary not knowing what you will face . . . never knowing what you're being sent to do until you're there, not knowing what tools to use, is this right or wrong? Is it wise? And not least, as the ultimate consequence, can I live with what I've done? The insecurity around whether it's right or not is perhaps the most frightening thing and knowing that if I'm wrong it could cost someone's life. (Lars)

Most informants reflected on the possibility of finding themselves between personal morals and institutional duties. This was commonly accepted by the informants, that as soldiers they had chosen to expose themselves to this occupational risk. Geir, who said that he had experienced the best 3 years of his life in the Army, described this well when he said,

> Some people do struggle with the long-term consequences of doing things they haven't been personally comfortable with, things that have been accepted by those around them, tactically correct and legal, but where you perceive them as so awful that you suffer long-term consequences. That can happen. It's a risk that we expose ourselves to by being a part of this system. (Geir)

Others, however, had not reflected much upon the possibility of becoming situated between their morals and institutional duties, such as one informant who said,

> This sounds a bit "flower power-ish"; that I hope to achieve things without the use of violence. But whether my hopes coincide with my role in the Army . . . I feel I must reflect more upon this because I never really considered it, but now, after you've asked these questions, I notice that some things are important to me. (Linnea)

While this risk was commonly articulated as accepted, the informants also described taking measures to enable themselves to carry out orders they knew might become challenging for them to live with personally. Having voluntarily opted for a career in the Army, the informants considered it their responsibility to find ways to live with and mitigate the risk of long-term consequences. Geir described this succinctly:

> Manage to incorporate a culture among soldiers, that they're doing this together, it's not the individual who's killing the enemy, it's not you, you're not doing this, it's the team. While knowing that doing something that is not within the confines [of one's morality] places great strain, you need a plan for how to process it afterward. It would be an extreme burden for anyone, I believe. But if you have soldiers who are totally against it, they've ended up in the wrong profession and should have been removed long before standing there with a rifle and deciding whether to shoot or not. (Geir)

Geir described having a responsibility as an officer to promote a culture in which soldiers locate the responsibility for their actions within the team. He later explained why this culture is important:

> If people start to doubt me, if someone comments "damn, now you've done it," then I think it's extremely tough for anyone. At least, I would have felt it and thought "damn, this isn't good." So, preparations and setting clear frameworks and guidelines for what is acceptable or not are important. (Geir)

Locating the responsibility for actions within the team, particularly in situations where those actions could be questioned, seems to be important as a measure to reduce the chances of individuals being placed under strain for their actions.

Discussion

When entering the military institution, many of my informants experienced challenges in adapting to military life and culture. They experienced difficulties in grasping the tasks and the severity of the profession while acquiring military skills when being absorbed into the military culture that was preparing them for military conduct. However, having acquired the skills and mindset required by the military profession as part of their identity, these informants then chose to apply to the NMA. Through their reflections on their military identity, the informants revealed some of the processes of performative regulations and institutional rhetoric. Through interaction with other military personnel, the performative regulations and the rhetoric were transformed into justifications that made the compromising of their moral values possible.

The Argument to Democratic Duty

My findings show that the soldiers justified the compromising of their moral values and that this was based on a shared belief. This belief is similar to the argument to

democratic duty proposed by Ryan (2011) but extends beyond it in my context. Ryan's argument to democratic duty addresses soldiers' experienced obligation to kill in unjust wars, which has the function of ensuring the preservation of the democratic institution. In my context, the argument to democratic duty extends to following orders in general, and to killing. It also includes circumstances both inside and outside the operational theater. This is indicated in the policy for values and standards of the NAF, where the argument to democratic duty is lying dormant within the core values: of respect, courage, and responsibility. When reflecting upon their identity as soldiers, this belief was reproduced by all the informants; however, it was not univocally expressed initially. Rather, the belief becomes part of their identity through socialization with meaningful others through interactions in their military context.

Being obliged to follow orders to uphold the democratic institution, the interviewed soldiers regarded it as a governmental responsibility to ensure that the actions they take under orders are appropriate. As stressed by McMahan (2009), this can result in soldiers being placed in a terrible dilemma because they may have to carry the burden of fighting an unjust war or conscientiously refusing, thus risking punishment. I found that, with few exceptions, the informants accepted this burden as an "occupational hazard," a risk to which they had voluntarily chosen to submit themselves. Most of the informants had reflected upon the possible consequences, such as physical or mental challenges, or being prosecuted. A small number of informants expressed concerns about acting beyond their moral values. These statements were made by individuals who, at the time, had the shortest military careers. I suggest that this indicates the presence of an ongoing process, during which the military identity is still being negotiated. The fact that none of the more experienced cadets articulated similar views may indicate that individuals who do not accept the compromising of their moral values choose to leave the military institution.

The arguments justifying the compromising of their moral values were twofold. The first rested upon the belief that insubordination implies not being suited for military service. The second rested upon three mediating arguments that served to justify following orders, and one effort to reduce the potential burden of carrying out illegal or immoral orders.

Not Suited for Military Conduct

The policy for values and standards of the NAF (Forsvaret, n.d.) seeks to enforce ethical reasoning among its personnel and empower them to stand up against unlawful and unethical orders. However, I found that the informants did not unequivocally consider this assessment to be among their responsibilities, and when they did accept it as a responsibility, they often considered it impossible to pursue or did not want to do so, based on their fear of the consequences. The informants commonly voiced the widely held belief that soldiers must obey orders (Montrose, 2013), and prioritized their institutional obligation to carry out orders above personal moral values. The policy for values and standards and the professional moral duty to refuse to provide

their expertise if they consider a situation to violate moral professional commitments, highlighted by Wolfendale (2009), seem to have undergone a process of interpretation. The result was that higher priority was given to obeying orders (Kohn, 2017), and less to one's moral values or professional moral duty. The informants described clear, stringent alternatives to being soldiers if they took issue with orders or could not accept the breaching of their moral values. This would involve quitting, leaving, or finding something else to do. You were clearly "of a less desirable kind" (Goffman, 1963, p. 12), or not the desirable type of soldier if you could not accept being a tool and could not deal with the compromising of personal moral values. Taking issue with orders or the actions of the military was thus not considered an option if one wished to be, or be accepted as, a soldier.

Mediating Arguments

In their stories, the informants provided three main arguments to justify following orders. A fear that refusal would harm their careers, a real or assumed lack of information impeding their ability to assess orders, and the silent acceptance of society, implying an external legitimacy for the military's and soldiers' actions. The fear of a negative impact on their careers served to make insubordination or conscientious refusal very difficult. As the policy for values and standards seeks to ensure that these are real options for military personnel, this should be regarded as an expression of identity-shaping based on peer surveillance and not institutional rhetoric. Justifications based on a real or assumed lack of information and society's acceptance should, however, be seen as occurring through an interaction between institutional rhetoric and peer surveillance. The policy for values and standards clearly states that military personnel must comply with decisions and carry out political decisions and that these political decisions are situated within the virtues of Norwegian society. Thus, the argument to democratic duty can be seen to be lying dormant within the policy, and it was utilized and reproduced by the informants to shape their military identity.

In addition, one effort was made to reduce the potential burden of carrying out immoral orders. This was the argument that all actions should be established as a collective responsibility. This argument should be seen as taking shape through an interaction between institutional rhetoric and peer surveillance. The policy for values and standards places a responsibility on military personnel to support, help, and ultimately sacrifice one's life for another. Through positioning the responsibility for actions as a collective one, the risk of stigma or peers judging one's actions as inappropriate is reduced. This further enables the persistence of the argument to democratic duty because soldiers know that they are enabled to carry out orders without the risk of being held accountable or having to assess the morality of their actions. The risk is reduced and they may be judged as authentic soldiers who have acquired a military identity. Adopting an internalizing gaze (Scott, 2011), soldiers balance their performance in the knowledge that they may be judged by their superiors, their peers, and their subordinates (Bauman, 1991).

Conclusion

I suggest that the compromising of personal moral values is only made possible through recourse to the argument to democratic duty. This argument enables the view of an authentic soldier as someone who follows orders despite the existence of a policy to ensure ethical action. One of Goffman's (1961) findings was the organizing power that institutional structures held over the identities of individuals, despite the mediating power of resistance carried out at the interactional level within total institutions. In this study, the institutional structures are limited, because the informants can freely choose to leave. This means that the mediating power of resistance at the interactional level is no longer requested; they are there voluntarily, so what is there to resist? As individuals enlist to reinvent themselves, resistance is replaced with peer surveillance, where similar others mutually surveil their own and others' progress toward becoming authentic soldiers. Within this interactional context, identity is shaped to enable soldiers to accept the compromising of their moral values to fulfill the institutional requirements even where these are morally questionable. This study reveals a culture that enables the (in)voluntary compromising of soldiers' moral values as individuals enlist and try to adjust their selves in line with established views on the authentic soldier.

This research identifies how the concepts of "performative regulations" (Scott, 2015) and "moral career" (Goffman, 1959, 1961, 1963) can be useful to gain knowledge about the (re-)shaping of individuals' moral identity as they are socialized into an institution's culture. It expands our knowledge about the moral careers and experiences of some Norwegian soldiers. However, similar findings may be present among other soldiers or countries, and other institutions where a process of socialization (re-)shapes individuals' moral identity.

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