

Post-Deployment Disorientation

The Emotional Remains of Uneventful Peace Support Operations

By Louise Weibull

Military units are often engaged in areas where the security situation is tense. Indeed, unstable and uncertain local conditions are often the very reason for deployment in the first place. It is a well-known fact that exposure to threats (and in a worst-case scenario, to the risks of serious injury or loss of life) is extremely stressful for the individual (Janis, 1949; Horn, 2004; Van den Berg & Soeters, 2009). Moreover, the fact that symptoms like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can be found in the wake of service in high-intensity operations is also widely acknowledged by military authorities and the research community alike (Cozza, 2005; Michel, 2005). However, little qualitative research has been conducted to understand how soldiers who have served in low-intensity missions orient themselves on return to civilian life.

The underlying causes for such apparent lack of interest are likely to be multiple. Firstly, it might be assumed that the emotional remains¹ from low intensity missions have few if any consequences for the individual. Secondly, even if the phenomenon of change is commonly known to soldiers with mission experience, it is invisible in terms of statistics. The emotion work (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) that may follow resilience from these types of deployments is most often an internal individual process, hidden to outsiders, with the possible exception of close friends and relatives. Thirdly, many of the espoused values held within the Swedish Armed Forces are connected to connotations of real military tasks, i.e. combat (Dunivin, 1994, p.533; Winslow, 2000). As a consequence, the more missions abroad involve warlike encounters, as is currently the case in Afghanistan, the more concern for the emotional load on soldiers and their wellbeing. Even if this progression seems quite natural, this focus may also imply that soldiers may be less inclined to seek help after service in low-intensity missions and that they also take for granted their own ability to manage possible problems. As will be discussed, the question is further complicated by the fact that the experiences gained abroad may be seen by the soldiers as both involuntary changes and voluntary re-orientations.

With reference to a qualitative study of 24 soldiers deployed to Kosovo and Liberia, this article seeks to extend previous empirical research on Peace Support Operations² in

¹ The term 'remains' refers in this context to the total emotional impact of service abroad.

² Peace Support Operations (PSO) is an umbrella term for different sorts of operations encompassing peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peace-building, conflict prevention and state building.

two ways. Firstly, it shows that deep-running emotional affectedness is a ubiquitous experience regardless of mission area. More specifically, it is argued that the phenomenon of feeling changed and somewhat lost on return may also present itself after a tour of service that has been, from a military perspective, uneventful. Secondly, the article makes a theoretical contribution by introducing the concept of Post-Deployment Disorientation (PDD). Disorientation in general terms usually refers to a state of confusion, where one loses a sense of time and place. A definition that is close to the topic of this article is one for which disorientation is seen as a 'loss of the sense of familiarity with one's surroundings (time, place, and person)', or 'loss of one's bearings'.³

More specifically, Post-Deployment Disorientation (PDD) in this context refers to a situation that soldiers are often confronted with on return, expressed in terms of a personal change, a change of outlook and of perspectives. As will be further outlined, the tours of service referred to here did not include major traumas or threat to individual security, a matter that serves to underline the argument that the military perspective on uneventful missions is, in terms of emotional remains, misleading when taking into account the emotional costs also involved in participation in these types of missions. In order to emphasize that PDD symptoms refer to feelings which are most often less severe than clinical stress syndromes (i.e. PTSD), the milder term *disorientation* has been chosen. Nevertheless, the baseline is that the emotional impacts of international missions should not be underestimated, irrespective of mission. Although the PDD concept has its origin in experiences formed during military deployments, it seems likely that it may also be applicable to civilian personnel deployed in conflict areas.⁴

While it is well-known that many Swedish soldiers have been exposed to various emotionally challenging events when taking part in Peace Support Operations,⁵ it was first and foremost after the sudden riot in the Kosovar village of Caglavica in 2004⁶ that the debate concerning the experiences of Swedish troops serving abroad took off. The development in Afghanistan towards a gradually more warlike situation has also resulted in more focus on veterans' wellbeing on their return, not least due to the fact that for the first time in fifty years Swedish soldiers had been killed in action. The Swedish Armed Forces' increased attention to the wellbeing of returning soldiers is indeed a positive development. However, it is fair to say that, up until now, there has been only modest interest from military representatives and the academic society into the emotional experiences of soldiers serving under less traumatic conditions, although these individuals make up a much greater number.

³ See: <http://www.definition-of.net/disorientation>.

⁴ For instance among NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and IOs (International Organizations) personnel, war correspondents, police officers etc.

⁵ See for example Lars Karlsson's (2004) description of his service in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early nineties.

⁶ This refers to the protection of the Serbian population of Caglavica on March 17th 2004, from the attack of an Albanian crowd, a crowd that vastly outnumbered the KFOR (Kosovo Force) troops.

Another argument for a changed focus is the specific character of peace support operations. Some scholars referred to in a Dutch report (Schok, 2009) point to the difference between war and peacekeeping, suggesting that the previously relatively one-sided focus on PTSD should be complemented with focus on support measures for other forms of ill-health among participants, even though these are of a less pronounced type. Their main argument is that peacekeeping operations have additional elements that create considerable stress. These elements are summarized as lack of control and involve, for example, witnessing violence against civilians whilst being prevented by mission mandate to intervene, being subjected to humiliation and occasional sudden attacks, and having to master the impulses that in other contexts would seem natural (see also Bartone *et al.*, 1998; Thomas *et al.*, 2006).

In line with the reasoning above, a growing body of literature has lately shown that soldiers serving abroad may experience, not PTSD, but consequences of cumulative stress (Michel, 2005), often described as originating from 'cultural stress' (Azari *et al.*, 2010), challenged ethics (Tripodi & Wolfendale, 2011), stress from strained multinational military cooperation (Elron *et al.*, 2003; Moelker *et al.*, 2007; Hedlund *et al.*, 2008) and from constantly maneuvering in the unexpected (Weibull & Dandeker, 1999; Kramer, 2004). That missions abroad bring new experiences for Swedish soldiers, for better or for worse, is also illustrated in other Swedish reports (see for example Johansson, 1997, 2001; Andersson, 2001; Wallenius, 2001; Tillberg *et al.*, 2008) although, and especially when it comes to the transformative properties of service in low-intensity conflict areas, in more general terms.

The importance of the above areas of research should not be underestimated and in fact confirm some of the stressors experienced by the soldiers herein referred to. Nevertheless, the kind of disorientation in this study does not seem to primarily relate to cumulative stress, and can rather be said to be a departure from a question raised in a recent article on British reserves, where Dandeker *et al.* (2011) conclude that the readjustment and reintegration processes for reservists (a group that share many characteristics with the Swedish soldiers) are not well understood, and that more research is needed into those individual psychological changes which occur around the significant life experiences attendant to overseas operations (p.12 *sq*).⁷

Carrying Out Uneventful Peacekeeping Missions

The main objective of this essay is to show how experiences when coming home from missions abroad may imply confrontations between two contrasting realities, causing a phase of disorientation and a need for re-adjustment. Even if the focal interest here is to explain the reasons for and the consequences of the form of disorientation inherent in the PDD concept, a cursory introduction to the conflict areas and the soldiers' tasks herein is appropriate.

⁷ One major difference between the British reservists and the Swedish soldiers is that the former group has served in mission areas that can be characterized as high-intensity (i.e. Iraq and Afghanistan).

Mission Areas and Tasks

The term low-intensity conflict areas usually indicates that quite some time has passed since the conflicting parties were involved in actual hostilities, or at least that the development is moving steadily away from such hostilities.⁸ The first Swedish contingent arrived in Kosovo in October 1999 and the contingent under study arrived seven years later (2006). Their tasks included regular patrols near minority enclaves, putting up check points, escorting minority groups, protecting memorial monuments such as monasteries, information gathering and the distribution of donations including food, clothes and school supplies.⁹ In other words, the Kosovo force was basically engaged in constabulary tasks (i.e. police work).

The soldiers in the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in Liberia arrived in 2006, two years after the first Swedish contingent. Their task was to support the ceasefire agreement, the peace process, and to protect the civilian population and UN personnel. The QRF did not have a special area of operations but were to operate all over the country if necessary. Compared with the contingent deployed to Kosovo, this force had a more traditional military mandate that did not include humanitarian work. Apart from being temporarily stationed in Freetown, Sierra Leone as reinforcement at the time for Liberia's ex-president Charles Taylor's trial of war crimes, the force was never used in accordance with its primary task, i.e. to provide support to other UN forces anywhere in the country at short notice in the event of violent upheaval or attacks by some of the former warring factions (FWF). Consequently, the soldiers mostly did reconnaissance patrols, maintenance or waited inside the camp. All in all, the soldiers under study here thus served in two conflict areas where the security situation was low-key, and where there were no reports of personal injuries or threats towards the contingents. Moreover, both contingents were fairly positively acknowledged by the civilian population¹⁰ and none of the informants report having experienced any incidents that made them see a personal need for support on return.

A seeming contradiction then is that even if the soldiers also regard these missions as uneventful, their narratives on return are rich in accounts of how service without 'ado' may still bring about feelings of disorientation on return. For some, these feelings are connected to a re-evaluation of what actually matters in their future life, for others it is the struggle with re-adjustment to the familiar. How soldiers' impressions and feelings of being changed on return is expressed and experienced has so far not been the focus for more systematic analysis. Although the first contingent deployed to an area is always interesting to scrutinize, it is less so for missions like the ones herein referred to, where most routines are settled and inherited, and the environment is known and assumed to be safe. Hence, a closer look into the emotional remains from this type of mission can hopefully add something of general interest.

⁸ However, both the KFOR and UNMIL missions operated under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, meaning that one is entitled to use force not only in self-defence but also when an opponent shows hostile intent.

⁹ See http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48818.htm.

¹⁰ For a discussion on the impact of a less positive relationship, see, for example, Dutch experiences in the Balkans (Sion, 2008).

Research Design and Proceedings

The data refers to an interview study conducted by the author and a research colleague in 2006/2007.¹¹ The informants selected for interview were a group of 24 individuals¹² who were interviewed three times: during pre-deployment training, after about five months into the deployment (in total six months), and six months after their return to Sweden. They were all men – male infantry soldiers¹³ aged 21-36. Roughly a quarter of those interviewed had served in one or more previous missions. The selection for interview was conducted by Army Tactical Command Headquarters, meaning that we were able to indicate the categories of people we wanted to interview but had no influence on individual interviewee selection. Five additional interviews were conducted in order to compensate for the lack of interviews with female service members and civilians in the units, along with a number of informal conversations. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was recorded and transcribed in detail.

Part of the research design can be described as ‘blitz fieldwork’ (Gellner & Hirsch, 2001), meaning that the two researchers spent two, one-week periods in Kosovo and Liberia respectively. The focus here is on the second and the last rounds of interviews which contained specific questions regarding the homecoming. For the purpose of this essay, only segments reflecting how impressions in theatre have brought about a disorientation on return have been abstracted, coded and presented.

Post-Deployment Disorientation in the Looking-Glass

Participation in military missions abroad is an experience for life, regardless of specific events. During their deployment, the soldiers in our study were asked questions about their expectations of coming home and their experiences of the same six months after returning. How they expressed themselves regarding their homecoming and their mission life compared to life in Sweden is here summarized in the term Post-Deployment Disorientation, and the emotion work (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) connected to their readjustments will be presented and further discussed.

In order to bridge the gap between the present and the past and give a better understanding of which experiences cause disorientation an introduction to examples of situations in the conflict areas requiring emotion work will be presented. As the name indicates, however, the PDD concept specifically focuses on soldiers’ experiences on return to Sweden when being gradually acclimatized to a civilian ‘reality’. Whilst the official understanding is that service in low-intensity mission areas produces little if any emotional remains, the PDD concept underlines that soldiers are deeply emotionally and cognitively affected by these experiences.

¹¹ Parts of the results have been published earlier in *Military Cooperation in Multinational Peace Operations* (Hedlund *et al.*, 2008) and in *L’Année sociologique* (Weibull, 2011).

¹² Twelve of the informants were deployed to Liberia and twelve to Kosovo.

¹³ One was a regular officer and the others were former conscripts who had passed a two-month preparatory course.

Feeling Rules in Theory and Practice

Military sociologists recurrently refer to Van Gennep's (1909) concept 'rite of passage', when portraying the transition between the military and civilian world, indicating a successive emotional adjustment and adaption to various emotion rules and logics over time. The present analysis adopts an emotion management theory developed by Arlie Russell Hochschild (1979, 1983). Central here is the concept of feeling rules, i.e. socially shared norms that influence how we want and try to feel in given social relations. This line of reasoning was introduced by Émile Durkheim (1915), and further developed by Erving Goffman (1967), a pioneer within emotion sociology. Since feeling rules are deeply rooted in societal and cultural norms, the appropriateness of a feeling is thus not something that could be inferred by examining the feeling in itself, but in the comparison between the implicit rules that frame all situations of human interaction. In order to meet the requirements from these rules, we engage in emotion management work, adjusting either our facial and bodily display or our actual emotions within. People then evaluate 'what's going on' based on the extent to which our inner cues (what I feel) and outer cues (what others think of a situation) say the same thing (Hochschild, 1983, p. 256). Importantly, the emotion management perspective concerns feelings of the whole span, from giving vent to a particular emotion to holding back emotions and also changing the emotions of other (*ibid*, 1979, p.561).

The adjustment to organizational, professional and social feeling rules (Bolton, 2005) during service abroad has been previously outlined in more detail (Weibull, 2011). However, the main interest here is to show that the PDD concept highlights the existence of feeling rules when also applied to soldiers' adjustments to civilian life on return.

Possible Moderators of Emotional Demands

Many scholars have been interested in possible moderators of emotion management at work (see for instance Kunda, 2006, chap.5; Bolton, 2005; and for peacekeeping missions specifically, Moldjord *et al.*, 2003). Hochschild (1983) suggests that one strategy could be to limit the identification with work or consciously, conceptually, try to make a difference between the 'self' and the 'self at work'. Another strategy is that you simply accept that you play a part at work and the rules and regulations that come with the territory. However, Hochschild is quite pessimistic about a successful outcome of this endeavor, and does not believe that employees can really dodge the demands of the organization. Others, like Bolton & Boyd (2003), describe that this is in fact a strategy that most professional groups employ in order to avoid too much engagement and emotional impact from work. The relevance of these assumptions will now briefly be discussed with regard to the mission contexts under study.

For one thing, Swedish soldiers are highly motivated volunteers and former conscripts, i.e. not professionals in a traditional sense. Their tour of service is six months, during which soldiers expect to take part in something adventurous but also to work hard. This commitment, often combined with an expressed altruistic motivation, frequently creates a situation where not having enough tasks is more often a reason for complaint than

the opposite. It may be suggested that soldiers' high morale and altruistic motivations make them especially vulnerable to conflicting emotional demands. However, if the mission goes by without anything extraordinary happening, there is likely room for both reflection on and relaxation from the clear-cut self at work role and, as we will also see, from notions of one's own contribution to the mission at large. Narratives will also show that various strategies are employed to handle their emotional engagement, from the trespassing of formal rules to rationalizations as a shield towards too much involvement, especially in connection with civilians' needs. That some soldiers also referred to a professional stance towards their role and the necessity to harden themselves to do a good job would nevertheless indicate that the strategies suggested by both Hochschild and Bolton & Boyd are partly applicable.

Disorientation and its Emotional Expressions

A presentation of the experiences of disorientation is summarized below under three main dimensions. The first, *Reality Check*, highlights those new commitments and feelings aroused after having left the I-world bubble and encountering civilian poverty. This wake-up call is mostly regarded as positive and some soldiers had already expressed hopes pre-deployment that the mission would bring about a sounder perspective on return. Nevertheless, these perspectives contribute to feelings of disorientation, when the world back home is seen as utterly protected. The second dimension, *Personal Growth*, reflects the fact that expeditionary service is generally seen as a greenhouse for personal development. Although this is most often regarded as very positive, it can also be a cause of social disorientation on return, when the individual is unable to share this development with friends. The third dimension, *A Pocket in Time*, refers to the impact of having lived in an environment where the contrast between intense operations and more tedious work tasks has made possible unusual self-reflection. Expressions herein often referred to a metaphor of a time with special qualities. Although the soldiers are, in principal, always on duty, they often have much time for thinking during transportation and waiting around the camp. Having time for reflection, in a broader and deeper sense, is likely one distinctive feature differentiating high and low-intensity missions. We will now look at how the premise of the operational context interferes with the soldiers' emotion work on their return, the reasons behind PDD being outlined in more detail.

A Reality Check

This dimension aims to illustrate how encounters with the civilian situation have affected the soldiers in several ways. On their return to Sweden, having been re-introduced to the comforts and affluence of a western lifestyle, soldiers expressed how their experiences had made them more humble. The change of outlook also spurred feelings of moral indignation in situations highlighting disparate frames of reference. This is in accordance with Crang's (1998) reasoning that people interpret different places from particular social positions and for particular social reasons. That Swedish troops are abroad to help civilians is a well-known part of the official rhetoric, and soldiers' accounts also testify to how partaking in these missions brings a sense of purpose and importance to

individual identity (Britt, 2003). In Peace Support Operations (PSO) at large, it is nevertheless well documented (Klep & Winslow, 1999 ; Tripodi, 2006 ; Blix, 2007 ; Thomas *et al.*, 2006) that altruistically motivated soldiers often get caught in a crossfire of personal expectations and operational realities when mission prerequisites restrict the opportunity to do good. The participants under study experienced no exception to this rule and their narratives gave rich accounts of how the service had affected them emotionally.

By omission or commission, in thought, word, or deed, members in any strong corporate culture, explicitly or tacitly choose a stance toward what is attributed to them (Kunda, 2006, p.213sq). Interviews here reflect how the soldiers also came to different conclusions. As mentioned previously, there was a difference between the two theatres concerning the character of the contact with the local population. Whilst the mission in Kosovo contained recurrent social patrols and humanitarian work, the mandate in Liberia did not involve any of this although the soldiers met and engaged with civilians during long-range patrols for reconnaissance or when patrolling the streets of Monrovia. However, the ongoing humanitarian projects aimed at easing the civilian situation in Kosovo partly seemed to moderate feelings of unease. In Liberia, where the giving of gifts to civilians was strictly forbidden, many soldiers, especially during the end of the tour, simply trespassed formal rules or found alternative ways of giving, like paying ‘ridiculous money’ for souvenirs outside the main gate. Worth noting, regardless of mission context, is that soldiers in both groups expressed feelings of dissatisfaction with the limitations of their respective work situation on return. Examples of conflicting feelings that invited moderating reasoning were also forthcoming. One narrative stated that the professional soldier role requires a certain amount of dissimulation and that it is important not to go too far down this empathy track so that you prevent feeling too bad about yourself and can function in your role. Presenting an organizational self as distinct from one’s authentic self seemed to at least partially mediate feelings of unease (see also Hochschild, 1983 ; Kunda, 2006 ; Bolton, 2005):

You see people who have nothing. They only have the clothes on their back and nothing else – it really puts things in perspective. But you can't stop living your life in Sweden just because of that – you have to get on with your life anyway.

Sure, maybe there were things you saw down there that weren't so pleasant to see all the time, poor people who can't afford anything but a horse and cart and stuff. But at the same time I can't spend all my time thinking about that, otherwise I'd start feeling bad myself. (...) I mean, of course, you feel bad for them, but I can't spend all day sharing their suffering. It's also about being professional. It's almost like being a social worker. Work is one thing – but when you go home, you have to be able to let it go.

In Liberia, where the mandate was intended to prevent soldiers from engaging practically in the civilian situation, the emotion management from obeying these orders was moderated by reasoning, for example, that humanitarian organizations were in charge of these tasks and that this solution was preferred in terms of both security and fairness. Moreover, it would constitute a systemic error if everybody just gave things away instead

of stimulating local initiative. Nevertheless, it was obvious that soldiers' emotion management needs were substantial when they strove to meet their mixed feelings with reasonable answers. There is some evidence that this could also be worked on intellectually:

So you're in a bit of a dilemma. A hungry Liberian or not (...). And when you dump rubbish and you see people running out of the forest and beginning to dig through it, of course you feel uncomfortable. And of course, we must somehow build up a picture and a reasonable explanation – so we understand why we have the directives we have.

With regard to soldiers' feelings on return to Sweden, one common PDD denominator was reduced tolerance for 'problems of the privileged'. On the one hand this might sound like a positive and natural development but on the other hand it also entailed occasional negative reactions. Also reflected was the experience of not caring for the same thing as your friends, or being able to take their problems seriously, requiring emotion management and a constant reminder that the perception of a problem is always relative:

One's own understanding of the problems in-country was also different. People could complain about the price of milk going up or anything. People's problems depend on what they themselves have experienced and what their world looks like. When you find yourself in the everyday civilian world, then – the problem that me and my girlfriend are arguing about, that's a big problem for us. But when you come from the outside, from such a world – you think "how the hell can you argue about who should wash the dishes". It's simply washing the dishes – what's the problem? It's just not worth it... Of course your perspectives change.

Last time I was home on leave I travelled between Stockholm and Västerås. Something had gone wrong with the ticket system, so a lot of people were booked in the same seat. People got so worked up on the train that in the end I just couldn't contain myself – it was only an hour's journey. I said let the old and pregnant have a seat – the rest of us can stand and I went on to say that I live in a country that hasn't had electricity for 16 years, doesn't have running water or sewage – and you stand here and argue about not being able to sit on a train (...). But at the same time I do get on my high horse from time to time and think people have relatively small problems, but perhaps for them it was the biggest thing that happened to them that month so...

Some soldiers also expressed feelings of obligation to remember, and with few exceptions, their accounts included statements of how service had made them more humble and that social bonds on return had gained importance. The almost universal impact of being put face to face with civilians in need deserves a little more comment. Aside from the fact that this was the first time many soldiers were put in this position, their reactions may perhaps be interpreted as less stigmatized feelings, which are considered 'human' and well-tuned with prevalent societal feeling rules at large (Hochschild, 1979, 1983; Scheff, 2009). Moreover, it might also be suggested that by openly recognizing the emotional impacts from these encounters, soldiers may feel that they are paying retroactive emotional dues (see also Goffman, 1967, 1969) to civilians.

The soldiers' motives for taking part were often expressed in terms of a desire to experience new things and make a contribution. As previously mentioned, some expressed hopes already before deployment that the time abroad would change them in a beneficial way, something that would indicate that the new outlook discussed here can also be seen as a consequence of personal expectations:

Hopefully you can distance yourself from things a little. The small things won't seem so bad when you get home – problems such as making the bed and the like...

Nevertheless, the last round of interviews revealed that there were regrets that this new awareness was likely to be just a phase:

Yes – most of all, money means less to me than it used to... I've always been a real family person, but that feeling has only got stronger. I realized that it really is more important to have good friends, how happy you should be about that. So that's what I've brought back with me. But, sad to say, I suspect this will probably quickly fade away.

You get a completely different view of things, but then you know that after 6 months at home, you're back there yourself. You'll never be exactly the same as you were before, but you'll still stand there annoyed that there are only 500 Kronor notes in an ATM.

The above illustrates how the confrontation with a gross difference in standards of living between the soldiers at home and the civilians abroad have formed the basis for new perspectives that were mostly regarded as a sound wake-up call. However, these new priorities and commitments may also be a source of disorientation, reflected in a vast need for emotion management in both private and societal interfaces. The fact that experiences gained abroad can also be viewed as personal development which causes the individual to feel alienated from the context he once left is dealt with next.

Personal Growth

In this section it is argued that participation in missions abroad involves many task-driven responsibilities and adjustments and that most soldiers, in fulfilling these, emerge more self-assured. Nevertheless, on their return, this experience can lead to feelings of social disorientation, which may make it hard to re-connect and find common ground with friends.

Mission life is generally described as a very special lifestyle, evoking strong and polar feelings, i.e. that soldiers really appreciate it or cannot bear it. From one perspective, it is a comfortable life – most practicalities are taken care of: your meals are served regularly and there are even employed staff to do your laundry. Since you receive recurrent orders in regard to your whereabouts at different hours, with the exception of job requirements, you don't need to plan for tomorrow. From another perspective, mission service also imbues a sense of being a 'means to an end', and is considered a valuable experience to have gained. The main reason is that these operations can be very serious undertakings and are certainly not an excuse for a vacation. Even if the security situation in

theatre is judged as stable, you should always be prepared for the worst and make no mistakes.¹⁴

Soldiers also entertain notions of service abroad as a personal trial that rests on responsibilities from work tasks requiring decisiveness, physical strength and the skills to handle a weapon, but also the need for standing up for yourself and solving anything from routine tasks to unforeseen encounters. The handling of institutionalized giving and receiving of feedback through peer assessment can also be challenging, although not in the same way. Over and above these work responsibilities, soldiers spend most of their time in the company of other soldiers, which in practice means that while deployed they are thoroughly embedded in different social contexts throughout their waking hours. The requirements of vast social adaptation and the forced responsibilities of performed tasks means that mission service will inevitably cause the individual to become aware of his strengths and weaknesses¹⁵:

In the time between starting our training and coming home, which could have been 6-8 months, there were always individuals who you'd notice had developed enormously in terms of their personality, self-confidence and stuff like that.

I've learned a lot about group psychology and about myself. How to handle boredom, for example, and patience, which I found that I didn't have much of – and had previously denied. You found many parts of yourself that you hadn't really seen before.

I've learned a lot about myself and how I work in groups which is really useful (...). I feel that I have become more secure as a person, that I know myself, I have become more self-aware in a way that I have a better picture of who I am and who I want to be.

However, and perhaps needless to say, mission life can hardly be described as an existence with only positive personal outcomes and a place where no one feels isolated. With regard to the previously mentioned peer evaluation, multi-source feedback by superiors, peers and subordinates is taken very seriously, and contrasts sharply with the peer-review process of tacitly traded monthly scores as described in a study by McKinlay & Taylor (1996). A more rigorous procedure in the military is not surprising as the grades will have a significant impact on soldiers' chances of further deployment, and for officers, the future of their military careers. Below, a squad leader describes his disappointment upon receiving a personal evaluation from his own unit at the end of a mission:

So instead of talking to me – and I could have perhaps improved things they weren't happy about – they decided to wait until it was time for the evaluation...(...) we didn't really part on good terms...most of them were actually really good but it felt like they hadn't all been honest (...) something had been fermenting under the surface (...). Yes, a knife in your back I suppose you could call it, a bit like that.

¹⁴ For instance in March 2004, heavy riots started out of the blue in the Kosovar village of Caglavica.

¹⁵ This is also confirmed in a recent investigation published by the Swedish Ministry of Defence (<http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/17/60/69/c860b8c0.pdf>) where veterans from the Nordic countries and Baltic States claim how an increased self-knowledge is one positive outcome of service abroad.

For the majority, however, the time abroad is generally regarded as a positive personal journey with very strong emotional undertones. On their return, however, soldiers' personal development may mean they have difficulty in finding common ground with friends when talking about their experiences abroad. That people in Sweden also knew very little about the mission environments was indicated by the fact that almost all the soldiers had been asked if they had killed someone. Even if this question was not always a serious one, and could perhaps alternatively be seen as crude male-bonding small talk rather than an assumption, some soldiers were clearly annoyed by the home front's ignorance of the actual state of affairs in theatre. They also expressed disappointment with the fact that people neither understood their situation nor seemed to be especially interested after the first polite exchanges. Difficulties like these often awoke feelings of a certain alienation and formed the basis for arguments for new social choices that in practice meant that some circles of friends were re-furnished:

I think coming home's been pretty tough, on one hand you have so much that you might like to tell people, but on the other, you know – and I have learned – that people aren't interested. People can't take it in because it's so far beyond their frames of reference. Then you feel a bit excluded.

And this has affected my social life, so I don't socialize with as many friends as I used to. Some I've lost contact with. [...] Not that I had close contact with them before, the ones I had good contact with are still there to some extent. But those who I had less contact with, I've simply chosen to ignore.

Previously they were the only ones who counted, but now I feel I exclude some friends from a life that I'm no longer a part of. I feel more certain about what I think and feel about things, and they – my old friends – can't give me some of the things that my friends from Kosovo can. Because they don't understand. It's completely impossible for them to understand.

Another group worked hard to re-engage contacts with old friends and this group also seemed to have more tolerance for the fact that people back home had moved on. Regardless of the context, it seems accurate to state that the return to Sweden for almost everyone is a process infused with ambiguity. Countdowns start from early on and high hopes and aspirations are directed towards the point where your 'real life' starts anew. However, after the first weeks of meeting near and dear, sleeping in your own bed and, not least importantly, being allowed some free, personal space, there often seems to be at least a temporary backlash:

Right now, I'm looking forward to the end of the mission so I can get back to real life. I know now that I'll feel bad when I get home, but you have to go home to get back into the real world.

The first two weeks are great fun but you've got used to a life over the last six or eight months with your mates and their informal rules - and then suddenly you've got to fit in with life at home – and you may have been through things that people at home don't understand (...).

It also became apparent to most soldiers on their return that real life is not something just waiting there for you to jump back into. On the contrary, vast emotion management (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) was required when reworking and refining the quality of friendship bonds:

You have to get back in 'sync' and you have to rediscover your friends. It takes a few months to really regain the close contact you had before going away. So it's quite a lot of work, but this is a plus point – socializing with friends is not a problem, but you have to work at it to get things back to where they were when you went away. So it costs a bit too.

You come home a bit like a stranger – that's the way it is – it's something you have to try and catch up with.

People live their lives and I'll try to get back in there again: it takes a while before you get back into the social swing of things. On the surface it doesn't seem so – I mean, if you look at it from the outside you wouldn't notice it – it's something you feel, when you're home on leave and people say they've met so and so. People tell you and you understand, but somehow you haven't been involved in the same way.

The reasoning above illustrates how service abroad is often an undertaking which tests your skills in a wide-ranging sense. As a result, many come out on the other side as more self-assured and personally developed. This fact, positive as it may seem, might nevertheless be an obstacle in the re-establishment of social bonds on return, and likely the toughest challenge to soldiers reorienting themselves with their old lives. Not everyone is inclined to re-integrate, however, as service is also highlighted as a platform from which soldiers socially move on, for example, by prioritizing mission-friends on return.

A Pocket in Time

Of the three main dimensions of PDD, two (*A Reality Check*, and *Personal Growth*) have previously been discussed in more detail. This section concerns the third and last dimension, *A Pocket in Time*, illustrating how life abroad is often perceived as set in non-linear time, separate from the real world. This notion is characterized by the rare logic of speed and interval, where stressful moments are followed by 'KTR activities' (Keep Time Running). Narratives also reflect how the unusual amount of time available for self-reflection stimulates consideration of 'big questions'. *A pocket in time* is thus well-characterized by the overarching statement that 'time is experienced in relation to context rather than to the even ticking of a clock' (Elsrud, 1998, p.330).

The above refers to the impact from living in a time frame with unusual properties. It refers to the impact of the sum of all the things that happen during intense work settings, as well as what happens in-between, i.e. the experience of long hours between operations making room for existential contemplation. In characterizing the missions' attractiveness and why some people repeatedly go back,¹⁶ one soldier referred to service as being

¹⁶ It is also commonly known that repeated deployments can function as a form of escapism from problems and difficult relationships at home. For a closer discussion of this phenomena, see '*The Time Bind. When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*' (Hochschild, 1997).

'spirited by the mountain'. Being an amateur climber, he explained his own experience of conquering the mountain over and over again for very unclear reasons. Thomas Mann's (1927) famous novel *The Magic Mountain* seems to be a well-found point of reference in illustrating the character of the service. The storyline describes the main character Castorp's spiritual journey when, quite unexpectedly, he ends up staying for several years in the reclusive world of a sanatorium in the Swiss mountains. The asylum turns out to be a separate world and, in a similar way, the soldiers' narratives reflect their sense of living in another time and space:

In civilian life you live a life in parallel with everyone else – then when you do service overseas, everyone else's life continues, while I take a step to one side and live a life 'in green'. Everybody else's life moves on socially – there are new things going on, new constellations. Then, when I come back, I'm back in the same box that I was in the day I left or joined up...

As the one who's been away, I find myself in a new world – yet, at the same time, I think that time has stood still for everyone at home.¹⁷

Another thematic undercurrent of Mann's novel that has much bearing for low-intensity mission life is the repetitive character of the service and the abundance of slow hours. Mann's novel describes a very special atmosphere where every day is just like the next in a seemingly endless succession, and where the repetitive character of the rigorous habits surrounding meals and treatments turns into a therapeutic experience that makes patients ripe for existential brooding. By the end of the story, the main character eventually returns to the (mundane) world outside, although it is understood that he has developed spiritually, chiefly by not living in the horizontal experience of time that people generally have.¹⁸ In a similar vein, soldiers' narratives testify to the tedious character of some of the work tasks with its accompanying monotony and boredom (Hancock, 2009), and how this paved the way for self-reflection :

Sometimes it's very boring, depending on your duties. If you're sitting in a watchtower for three hours on your own keeping an eye on an ammunition store that's exploded, then you're glad of the distraction of a dog walking by.

You actually learn a lot about yourself. You have a lot of time to think – what the hell do I want? What am I doing? What do I appreciate in other people? You appreciate your time at home much more. As a whole the mission has been a very positive experience for me, even though sometimes I find it difficult to see the direct benefit of what I'm doing down here.

Notions of time spent abroad counting for more than the time back home were also forthcoming:

You develop a lot in nine months – in a way that is different from what you might have done at home. Some people trundle along and it's another nine

¹⁷ Joe Haldeman's sci-fi novel *The Forever War* illustrates this phenomenon, building on the author's experiences from the Vietnam war.

¹⁸ For a discussion of linear and circular time, see Elsrud, 1998.

uneventful months. For me, it's been a very special nine months. This means that these nine months feel a lot more than they would have done at home. The way you change here in nine months may have taken three years at home.

I've changed quite a lot. I was 20 years old the first time I went. I felt that I matured quickly and felt old among my civilian friends... Yes, that's the way it felt. I felt old. I was 20, but felt like I was 25. People sat and talked about going to Ibiza and partying and bla bla bla, but... I don't know, it didn't seem to have the same attraction.

Moreover, there is a sense that working life back in Sweden is a less 'authentic' world :

It felt like I'd returned from reality to some imaginary world – a world where you didn't really do anything of any benefit to anyone. And it felt a bit boring.

Höpfl & Linstead (1997) view organizations as places where, in learning what to do, we also learn what to feel about it and about the people and organizations we do it for. This is not manifest as a mental response to what we are instructed, but as a visceral response to a bodily experience. The emotional patterning of organizations will thus have two dimensions, neither of which is entirely separable from the other: learning to feel and feeling to learn (p. 8). In a similar vein, the interviews also reflected the perception that the reasons for feeling changed on return did not (primarily) stem from the geographical movement or the tasks conducted, but from the experiences of a number of emotional reactions to the environment. For those who had been on a mission before, a certain familiarity with the feelings involved can be noticed, but nevertheless an adjustment phase is needed:

I've heard people say – “I never thought I'd be changed by coming here; I've heard that others have changed but I never thought I would. But now it's happened and I'm not quite sure who I am anymore”. Having been here before I've felt exactly the same thing, but this time I know better... Not just because if you go for a second time, you don't change, rather you change a little bit more. It's not just about completing a task or getting from A to B – it's more about emotions – what goes on in your head and how you react to different things.

To some extent I think this matters... Time is minimized and it somehow slows down. Then I don't think it matters if you go on a hundred missions or five – some rehabilitation time is needed afterwards – and this time can't be reduced to zero.

There's a little confusion and some adjustments have to be made – you somehow have to make sure your head's screwed on the right way. But mostly you can do this yourself, but you do notice that there are differences.

To sum up, this section aims to illustrate how notions of PDD on return are structured around metaphors of having lived in an environment with special and contrasting properties. The consequences of this were quite vaguely expressed by the soldiers as feelings of disorientation that contained notions of how the unusual amount of time available for reflection prompted them to put themselves and the world back home in perspective, and to experience an overall sense of disorientation arising from feelings of having been speed-changed.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this article is to contribute to a complementary view of what it means, in emotional terms, to serve in low-intensity conflict areas. It thereby challenges a seemingly well-established presumption that the execution of ‘traditional’ military tasks (i.e. combat) or exposure to similar traumatic situations is the only legitimate reason for feeling deeply emotionally affected. What this study illustrates is that participation in quite uneventful missions abroad can also cast far-reaching emotional shadows on the soldiers’ return, causing them to feel both cognitively and emotionally changed.

This is not to say that the emotional reactions are of the same kind as those known from riskier and higher-intensity missions. To emphasize the difference between the feelings illustrated here and more severe post deployment stress syndromes, the term Post-Deployment Disorientation (PDD) has been introduced. PDD is caused by the transformative properties of the operational theatres, here seen as constituting three main dimensions. First, there are emotional remains stemming from a reality-check when encountering conditions outside former frames of reference, here referring first and foremost to the civilians’ situation in the mission areas. From one perspective, this might leave a sound, and even desired change of outlook in terms of prior values and priorities, but the existence of disparate reference points may also be the prompt for vast emotion management (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) on return. The second dimension behind PDD summarizes notions of expeditionary service abroad as a greenhouse for personal growth. The work tasks require decisiveness, physical strength and skills in weapon handling but also a need for individuals to stand up for themselves. In other words, the way tasks and living conditions are organized makes them aware of their strengths and weaknesses, something that on the one hand is regarded as positive, but on the other hand can form the basis for social disorientation on return. The third dimension of disorientation portrayed here refers to the impression of having lived in a pocket in time, where the amalgam of both intense operations and more tedious work-tasks has made room for self-reflection. Notions in this dimension were organized around quite vague metaphors such as mission time having special qualities, that time spent abroad counted for more than its nominal value, and that you felt speed-changed on return.

Whilst some soldiers spoke of quite profound feelings of ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1991), others had not recognized any personal change, which in turn was ascribed to a matter of personality and psychological stability. Still, this was more of an exception, compared with the much more common statement that everyone did change comparatively more than if they had stayed at home, a view that was especially put forward by soldiers with previous mission experience. The link some soldiers made between no change and psychological stability may also be seen as an adjustment to the assumption put forward above, namely that the legitimacy of affectedness on return is connected to the mission’s character and how it is defined in military terms.

Against this background, it seems accurate to state that Post-Deployment Disorientation (PDD) is a recurrent empirical phenomenon, the facets of which can be

expected whenever people return from a work situation with similar premises. The application of the concept is thus neither restricted to Swedish soldiers nor arguably something exclusive to participation in military Peace Support Operations. Outside the military world, the concept is likely to be just as relevant amongst people deployed in NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), IOs (International Organizations), etc. These presumptions may demand some further comment. The broadening of the PDD concept's application to other groups here amounts to a theoretical (transfactual) generalization (Danermark *et al.*, 2002). The authors describe the existence of two different meanings of generalization – either in the sense of a *generally* occurring empirical phenomenon/event or in the sense of *fundamental/constituent* properties and structures. For instance, the universal concept of 'women' as an empirical category includes all people of a specific gender, whilst 'the elderly' refers to all people who have reached a certain age. With regard to this study, we can reason that the empirical sample is limited and it cannot be argued that the dimensions of PDD addressed generally occur in Peace Support Operations or even in those characterized as low-intensity conflicts. However, on the basis of a theoretical generalization, it can be argued that in circumstances similar to the situations described above, there will also be a tendency for the development of PDD.

The PDD concept derives from Hochschild's (1979, 1983) emotion management theory, a perspective that highlights the encapsulation of emotions in a complex set of culturally and socially grounded feeling rules. This theory explains how soldiers not only transit between the premises of the military and the civilian world during the course of a year, but also between different sets of emotion rules and 'regimes' (see also Wettergren, 2010). Something that sets the soldiers apart from other work communities previously described is their societal discourse on return. It was not uncommon for returning soldiers when facing community outside of their closest circle, to be held accountable for their choice to deploy. This contrasts with the essentially positive public perception of the work of NGOs and IOs. Experiences like these are likely to further reinforce bonds with mission-friends with whom one shares a common history and receives both moral and emotional support (Bolton, 2005). Future research should not only consider a more long-term investigation than made possible here, but also include a closer analysis of the total contexts soldiers return to (i.e. both the private and the societal context).

There are other reasons why further focus on this topic is worthwhile. On 1st July 2010, Sweden put an end to conscription and entered a new human resource management system with contracted soldiers. This means that 6 900 regularly employed soldiers will be supplemented with 9 200 part-time contracted soldiers.¹⁹ Their contracts will imply a six-to-eight-year engagement, during which they will partake in three exercise periods of three weeks each. Additionally, they can be deployed on one to two missions abroad for 9 months of pre-training and deployment. For the remaining time, they will work and live as civilians.²⁰ In the new system, a substantial number of temporarily employed soldiers will

¹⁹ See www.forsvarsmakten.se/upload/dokumentfiler/Budgetunderlag/Budgetunderlag%202011/Bilaga_1_FM_BU_11.pdf.

²⁰ See notably : www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/Jobba-har/Bli-soldatsjoman/Tidvis-tjanstgorande-soldat/Fragor-och-svar/#hur_lange_kan_jag_vara_anstalld.

thus on a regular basis depart from and re-assimilate into civilian life,²¹ i.e. undergo sequential transitions that may expose them to PDD.

While some soldiers may be in need of professional help in dealing with PDD, this is not the main emphasis here. Instead, the article has hopefully outlined the contours of a deep-going emotional and cognitive impact, challenging the official view that coming home from a tour of service where ‘nothing’ has happened has close to zero-impact.

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²¹ All personnel arguably share challenges in connection with this transition, regardless of whether they are former conscripts, contracted soldiers or regular officers. However, the context on return for reservists and ‘civilian’ soldiers is often very different to that of regular officers, who continue to serve with the same people they have deployed with. Returning to a military context is naturally no guarantee that you will either be able to talk about your experiences with your colleagues or receive any active support. The main point here is to recognize the difference between working with people who at least know what service is about and people in a civilian context who do not share this experience (see also Dandeker *et al.*, 2011).

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