

## Research Article

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Jarkko Kosonen\*, Puustinen Alisa and Tallberg Teemu

# Saying no to military service – obligation, killing and inequality as experienced problems in conscription-based military in Finland

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**Abstract:** While studying citizen-soldiers, their dual identity as a soldier and a civilian have been highlighted. A citizen-soldier's role is linked to citizenship and its obligation. The dual identity or critical voices of conscription or reserve forces have neither been recognized in research nor been debated publicly in Finland. The aim of this article is to analyse the reasons why some conscripts raise critical voices concerning their relationship with conscription and their role as reservists. The study is based on the interviews of 38 non-military service men and 33 men who resigned from the reserve in 2017. The data was analysed using content analysis. According to the results, the main problems with regard to conscription and armed defence, among the conscripts, relate to inequality of the conscription system, obligation to serve and lack of discretion. For individual conscripts as citizen-soldiers, the problem of killing has special weight when they reflect upon their own role in the possible act of war. Conscripts and their expertise could be used more extensively in a wider range of security-related issues than in armed defence alone.

**Keywords:** citizenship, conscription, conscript service, citizen-soldier, non-military service, comprehensive security

## 1 Introduction

Defence in Finland is based on the general conscription<sup>1</sup> of men and voluntary military service for women. The majority of Finnish men are citizens and reservists at the same time. This results in a specific interface in the relation between citizens and the Finland Defence Forces (FDF). In recent decades, an average of 70–75% of each male age cohort has completed their mandatory conscript service between 6 and 12 months and 6% have conducted non-military, civil service (Finnish Defence Forces Statistics 2018).

According to the survey of Advisory Board for Defence Information (ABDI), general conscription enjoys widespread support in Finland. Three out of four Finns support retaining of the current system. The highest support for conscription, for a large reserve and military training for the whole male age group, comes from Finns over 50 years of age (84%). The support is decreasing among young people under the age of 25 (77% in 2017 and 56% in 2018). Support for a professional military is around 10% and it has increased by a few percentages since millennium (ABDI 2018: 29–31; ABDI 2017: 43–45).

The current topics in the debate about Finnish defence policy, and especially conscription, are gender (in)equality of the conscription system and increasing political support to introduce gender neutral conscription or mandatory civic service system to supplement conscript service in Finland. According to the latest survey poll by ABDI, 17% of Finns are in favour of conscription for both men

\*Corresponding author: Jarkko Kosonen, National Defence University, Finland. P.O.Box 7, FI-00861 Helsinki. Tel +358 299 800. Fax +358 299 410 760. E-mail: jarkko.kosonen@mil.fi.

Puustinen Alisa, Pelastusopisto – Emergency Services Academy, Finland

Tallberg Teemu, National Defence University, Finland

<sup>1</sup> In this article, we use the established concepts in the Finnish context. Conscription is defined at the system level as a roof concept, cf drafting (U.S), National Service (U.S) or Military Service (U.K). Conscript service is the mandatory service for conscripts, cf the draft (U.S). Non-military service is being used in Finnish Act of civil service. Reservist training includes all forms (mandatory and voluntary-based) of military training for reservists.

and women. Altogether, 13% of Finns think that voluntary military service for both men and women could be the best model for developing the defence system in Finland (ABDI 2018). There is also an ongoing debate on the equality of conscription in the context of religious conviction. Since 1985, Jehovah's Witnesses were exempted from the military service. A Government proposal was submitted to Parliament for changing the Jehovah's Witnesses exemption law in September 2018 (Ministry of Defence 2018) and the law came into force in 1 April 2019.

The Finnish Government and its advisory body, the Security Committee, have presented a model of comprehensive security to provide a basis for preparedness and taking necessary actions in the event of different disruptions (The Security Committee 2017). The comprehensive security model identifies the security obligations of various authorities and activates citizens to take responsibility for promoting safety and security. The contexts and concepts of comprehensive security and military defence focus on different security threats. The ongoing public discussions about the future of military service and possible new models of security service reflect the dynamic between the concepts and the different roles they suggest for citizens in the societal division of security labour (Tallberg 2017). Furthermore, in addition to traditional military threats, Finland prepares to meet increasingly complex challenges that fuse both military and non-military means. External and internal securities are being intertwined more than ever (Finnish Government 2017: 14–15).

Several European countries have significantly reduced general conscription, developed it to be more selective, or transferred completely into a professional military system in the post-Cold War security environment. Some countries, for instance Sweden and Lithuania, are currently reintroducing conscription. Finland, Greece and Switzerland implement conscription and conscript service among the whole age cohort of young men. In Finland, the citizens' will to defend the state or willingness to defend the country has been considered to have a significant role in maintaining general conscription. There exists decades of tradition in researching the citizen's will to defend the country (see e.g. Kosonen 2019: 15–15; Kosonen et al. 2017: 95–99; Leimu et al. 2008; Huhtinen and Sinkko 2004, see also MSB 2016; Törnqvist 1975; Valtanen 1954).

The citizens' relationship to national defence is a multidimensional phenomenon. The goal of our research was to study the relationship between citizenship, state and national defence in the context of the Finnish welfare state and the conscription system. We suggest that citizens' relationship to national defence is based on various factors framing the relationship and positioning an individual in

it (Kosonen et al. 2019: 300–319). In the Finnish defence system, the state sets obligations, duties and tasks for an individual citizen. Conscription is seen as an integral part of citizenship and the package of civil rights and duties. If there were a large-scale crisis or war in the extreme case, each citizen would be obligated to participate in national defence tasks according to his/her competences and skills (Constitution of Finland 1999, Chapter 12, Section 127).

In this article, we focus on the problematized experiences of citizen-soldiers in the margins of the conscription in Finland: men liable for non-military service and reservists who have completed military service and later resigned from the reserve.<sup>2</sup> Reservists or their retention has not attracted much attention in research, neither in Finland nor internationally (see e.g. Griffith 2005: 354). It has been suggested that the military should be studied in three segments: regulars, conscripts and reservists. This allows examining different patterns of motivation, cohesion, political commitment and awareness and long-term considerations that characterize each segment (Lomsky-Feder et al. 2008: 593, 609–610). In professional military contexts, the reserve forces are merely units that complement or support the operational “true professional” forces (see e.g. Lomsky-Feder et al. 2008; Griffith 2005).

The aim of this article is to analyse which issues are problematic for the conscripts in their relationship to conscription and national defence in Finland: How do conscripts relate to compulsory military service and non-military service as part of conscription? What roles do the men liable to non-military service and those resigning from the reserve see as appropriate within national defence?

## 2 State, citizen-soldiers and conscription

Retention and organizational commitment have been the central research topics in military sociology in the context of professional and conscription military

<sup>2</sup> Supplementary service means supplementary training provided to persons approved for non-military service after completing their military service under the Conscription Act or the Act on Women's Voluntary Military Service. After completing the supplementary training their military reserve position will be decommissioned and they will become liable to non-military service. We use the expression “resign from the reserve” because interviewees primarily felt that they were leaving the reserve rather than applying for civilian service, as Finnish law states.

(e.g. Cancian and Klein 2018; Griffith 2005; Hauser 2018; Johansen et al. 2014; Salo 2008). The choice between the professional and conscription military has been analysed from the political, economic and military strategic perspectives (e.g. Kanninen and Ringbom 2016). Conscription and universal military service have been seen as an economically reasonable solution to get manpower for the armed forces (AF) to defend the state and nation (e.g. Cohen 1985; Kestnbaum 2008: 117–119).

## 2.1 Conscription in Finland

Conscription has always been both recruitment for military purposes and a type of relationship between citizens and the state. Kestnbaum (2008) summarizes three inter-linked political–societal processes that have affected the development of citizen conscription in Europe: the emergence of the national citizen as an organizing principle in politics, the formation of state policies of compulsory service in the line army based on national citizenship and the initial mobilization of a wide swath of the people for war by the state (Kestnbaum 2008: 119). Conscription has been closely related to the establishment of democracy in most of the Western European countries.

The Finnish model of conscription took shape at the end of 1800s. The role of the state has been significant in the history of general conscription, and conscription has been argued to be a supporting process for the construction of the nation state in Finland. It has been a state-centric way to recruit the soldiers to fight for the state as a part of their civic duty. According to Kari Laitinen (2005), conscription and military service are the citizen's duties and obligations for the nation and the state. Conscription incorporates the question about the power of the state, the nation or the ruler and the subjects, who make personal sacrifices for the state (Laitinen 2005: 9, 20–21).

According to the Conscription Act, every Finnish male citizen is liable for military service starting from the beginning of the year when he turns 18 years old, until the end of the year when he turns 60. Fulfilment of military service includes service as a conscript, participation in reservist training, extra service and service during mobilization, in addition to participation in call-ups and examinations assessing fitness for military service (Conscription Act, Chapter 1, Section 2).

Women can also apply for voluntary military service. The number of women in military service has increased in recent years. In 2018, 1,156 women applied in military service, which is the highest number yet (The Finnish Army 2018). Military service lasts 165, 255 or 347 days for

both men and volunteer women.<sup>3</sup> After the conscripts (men and volunteer women) have completed their military service, they muster out into the reserve. Reservists can be ordered to attend reservist training and, when required, to defend Finland by force of arms (Conscription Act of Finland 2007).

## 2.2 Citizen's relation to the state in the context of conscription

Citizenship is a key concept while studying the citizen's relation to the state. Citizenship is defined as a legal status of a person recognized under the constitution as being a legal member of a sovereign state or belonging to a nation. Citizenship can be inherited from parents or it can be obtained through various processes. Citizenship is assumed to be linked to the nation state and its civic, political or societal rights (Turner 2001: 192; Kuusela 2006: 33). Finland is a Nordic welfare state where the state's responsibility for health and social services, social policy, social security, equality between citizens and genders, high levels of education and employment is significant (e.g. Kettunen 2001; Pesonen and Riihinen 2002: 42–51; Saari 2006: 13–62). A democratic welfare state guarantees equal civil rights for all its citizens and persons staying legally in the country.

Individualization and globalization have dismantled the relevancy of nation states in Finnish society and Western democracies during the last decades (Helkama 2015: 220; Adres et al. 2012). Conscription amalgamates the defence obligation with the civil rights. Conscription based on citizenship and civil duties creates a citizen-soldier who can expect reciprocity from the state and society (Danielsbacka 2015: 274). Being prepared to die and kill on behalf of the nation is seen as an ideological cornerstone of national belonging and a sound qualification for gaining the rights to material benefits. This creates a mutual obligation between the nation, the military and each individual soldier; an unbreakable common bond of identity, loyalty and responsibility (Ware 2010: 321–322).

In the context of conscription, conscripts have a dual role and identity as a civil citizen and civilian-soldier. Referring to Levi (1997) and Peri (1993), Adres et al. (2012: 95) argue that studying military service in democracies reveals critical elements of the relationship between the citizens and the state, and that military service ceases to be a symbol of citizenship only in modern nation states

<sup>3</sup> The obligation to complete conscript service or non-military service ends at the end of the year, when the conscript turns 30 years old.

that no longer fight wars, or where the likelihood of conflict is remote. Over 70 years has passed in Finland since the last war. Changes in the security and military–political situation in Europe, and a global environmental crisis have been assumed to affect a citizen’s relationship to national defence and comprehensive security. In Finland, all citizens have a general defence obligation, but military service obligates only men.

## 2.3 Civilians, soldiers or citizen-soldiers

While studying citizen-soldiers we are dealing with such classic themes of military sociology as the relations between the AF and citizens, and the military as an institution (Ouellet 2005: 2; Rukavishnikov and Pugh: 2003, 131). The relevant issues in civil–military relations are civilian and state control of the AF. A revised conceptualization of civilian control has distinguished between two modes of civilian control over military affairs: control of the military and control of militarization (Levy 2016). It may also be control from within, when the soldiers or combatants take some form of control of military actions, deployment or policies framing military operations (Levy 2017). On the one hand, conscription can be seen as one form of civilian control. A conscription system might ensure civilian control of the military; yet it does not automatically ensure mutual understanding (Cohen 1985: 67). On the other hand, conscription expresses the power and control of the state over the citizens. Cohen (1985: 68) argues that peacetime conscript (military) service is often as much a political institution as a method for procuring men for the armed services. So, nations will accept penalties in military efficiency in order to preserve military obligation as an integral part of citizenship (Cohen 1985).

We argue that one particular forum of civilian control is the citizens’ or conscripts’ negotiation of their individual role, attitudes, values, identity and agency in national defence and within the conscription system. Civilian control has been associated with citizens, conscientious objectors, conscripts or combatants’ attitudes and actions towards AF or war (Fisher 2014).

Military service is also associated with an individual’s identity, loyalty and willingness to cooperate with the state. To be a soldier, one must be a member of the community of citizens and prospective soldiers are raised from wider non-military society in order to be merged into an AF (Kestnbaum 2008: 121). Cohen (1985) argues that a conscript is not merely a soldier who can vote, but a sort of civilian-soldier. Hence, the bulk of the AF consist of men whose main pursuits are pacifist, who are fresh from their

civilian lives and look forward to their swift return to those lives, whose main identity is as citizens and not as soldiers, whose loyalty lies with home and community and not with the military as a corporate body (Cohen 1985: 123–124).

Due to the dual identity – as a citizen and soldier – reservist or conscripts may encounter a role conflict while negotiating between these roles, identities and values. The military roles and the demands of these roles create personal distress and interpersonal conflicts for reservists. Studies have pointed out the roles that reservists assume, such as family member, worker, recreational athlete or friend. Actual or potential conflicts may complicate commitments and sets of behaviour in military service (Vest 2012; Griffith 2005: 357).

If movement and negotiation between the different roles and identities fail, an individual conscript has various options. The conscripts have wide discretion in the Finnish conscription system. They can choose between conscript service and non-military service. Some of the conscripts are released from conscript service for health reasons. Only conscientious objectors face a legal punishment. Conscription is a statutory civic obligation. As a strand of citizenship, it presents the willingness to cooperate with the state, specifically represented by the military or the government’s conscription agency (cf. Moskos and Chambers 1993: 5).

## 2.4 Evading military service

Most of the countries that have conscription-based military service also have alternative options for those who are conscientious objectors or object to taking up arms. In Finland, a person liable for military service who states that serious reasons of conscience founded on conviction prevent him from carrying out the service laid down in the Conscription Act will be exempted from such service and assigned to perform non-military service. Conscientious objectors that refuse to perform the military and the non-military service are by law sentenced to imprisonment (Conscription Act of Finland 2007; Non-Military Service Act 2007). Persons who have completed conscription service or women’s voluntary military service may apply to non-military service by completing supplementary service<sup>2</sup> (Non-Military Service Act 2007: Sections 2 and 58).

The attitude towards conscription and an individual’s own agency have been seen to relate to individualization, globalization and changes in citizenship (Adres et al. 2012: 93; Kosonen et al. 2019; Puustinen et al. 2018). Previous studies suggest that an individual’s level of globalism, lack of active local ties, as well as higher levels of



consumerism significantly increase the tendency to evade military service (Adres et al. 2012: 95). Changes in citizenship alter the idea of conscription as an obligatory part of citizenship (Eichler 2013; Ware 2010).

In Finland, Valdemar Kallunki (2015) argues that the groups choosing conscript service or non-military service are strongly different. The meanings given to non-military service are: service subordinated to conscript service, a choice grounded in conscience, a choice based on practical reasons and service bringing social benefits. Conscientious ground is required when choosing the non-military service, but it is not investigated by the authorities. The reasons related to conscience are often difficult to justify and differentiate from practical reasons (Kallunki 2015: 31–33, 46).

Soldiers, including citizen-soldiers, face the question of killing and the legitimacy of war or combat. These themes are included as a part of ethical and psychological performance in conscript and reservist training in Finland (Aalto 2016; Toiskallio 2009). Over the centuries, individual soldiers have refused to kill the enemy, even when they knew that it would endanger their own lives (Grossman 1995: 29). The respect for human life is a fundamental basic value for humanity, and the resistance to killing human beings might be stronger for civilian minded citizen-soldiers, obligated to military service and participation in combat, than for professional soldiers.

Citizen-soldiers might be considered transmigrants, moving and negotiating between these different roles and identities (Griffith 2009: 40–41; Lomsky-Feder et al. 2008; Ben-Ari et al. 2004). The dual identity created by conscription may be problematized on the individual level when moving between the civilian and soldier roles. When enough issues become problematized, the individual can use his/her control over the military by deciding to evade military service. In this article, we explore these issues in the context of Finnish conscription.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Participants and data collection

This article is based on 46 individual and 7 group interviews (altogether 71 persons) of Finnish conscripts who were liable for non-military service and the persons who had completed conscript service and had applied for transfer to non-military service. The interviews were conducted in 2017 as part of the TAHTO research project by the National Defence University. All of the interviewees

were volunteers and they were informed about the research, data collection and analysis and reporting. The research permission and research ethics principles were agreed upon with The Centre for Non-Military Service which is responsible for the implementation of non-military service basic training and supplementary service for those resigning from the reserve.

While studying the relations between citizens, national defence and society, we found these groups to be valuable and appropriate to interview and discuss their own views and experiences. We hypothesized that these groups had been pondering their own personal relationship to the dual identity as a citizen and a soldier. These target groups have not been studied in Finland before, excluding Valdemar Kallunki who has analysed the reasons and convictional premises of applying to non-military service (Kallunki 2015) and the societal integration of citizens attending military service or non-military service (Kallunki 2013).

### 3.2 Thematic interviews

The interviews were conducted as semi-structured thematic interviews (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018: 81–89). The interviewees were reservists who were resigning reserve ( $n = 33$ ) and persons liable for non-military service ( $n = 38$ ). We conducted the interviews with non-military service attendees at the Centre for Non-Military Service during the basic training period of non-military service. The interviews with the reservists resigning from the reserve were conducted at the Emergency Services College during two different supplementary training weeks. All the interviewees were men, aged 18–46.

The interviewees were asked to reflect upon (a) their own relationship and position in the Finnish welfare state,<sup>4</sup> (b) their own experienced role as a part of national defence, (c) the process of constructing their opinions concerning national defence and (d) their experiences of comprehensive security in Finland and as part of a global security context.

### 3.3 Analysis

The interview data (47 hours and 48 minutes) was transcribed word for word. The analysis of the data was conducted as a content-based content analysis (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2018: 122–127; Hsieh and Shannon 2005; Weber 1990: 40–58). During the process we constructed 37 categories and 589 subcategories of data, which are

<sup>4</sup> The framework of our study is based on studying the relations between the citizens, welfare state and national defence.

summarized and reported in four distinct categories in the following sections.

## 4 Results: saying no to ...

Our findings suggest that there are three problematic topics in the persons' relationship to national defence: (1) obligation of conscription, (2) inequality of compulsory conscript service and (3) killing. Yet another significant category of findings was the interviewees' high willingness to construct a meaningful societal role as a part of the comprehensive security model, apart from conscription.

Most of the interviewees found Finland a state worthy of defending. The crucial questions were who has to do the defending, and how can a citizen's role in national defence be defined. There was a feeling that social inequality and income disparities, weakening national unity and the increase of psychological and social distress will be threatening Finland and the conscription system in the near future. Increasing terrorism in Europe and the possibility of terrorist attacks in Finland, possible hybrid threats against Finland and climate change with its implications were identified as external threats. Global warming was seen as a global problem, which is already affecting Finland, for example, in the form of increasing immigration. Military threats were found to be the minor risk in contemporary Finland.

Despite the fact that Finland has underlined the functions vital for society and comprehensive security (The Security Committee 2015, 2017), national defence was primarily seen as military defence only. Our interviewees questioned the role of the state to oblige citizens to be conscripts and, if necessary, to participate in a defensive war as part of the military. As opposed to this, the interviewees described their willingness to carry out a wide range of tasks to protect the society and the nation instead of military service as conscripts.

### 4.1 Obligation and discretion as part of conscription

The interviewees reflected on their role in national defence and conscription as well as on the ways to organize the defence system through conscription, all-volunteer forces or a professional military. The idea of conscription was mentioned as one of the civic duties for men, in addition to tax liability and the obligation to comply with Finnish law. Most of the interviewees did not see a reciprocal relationship between the Finnish welfare state, civic rights

and conscription. Conscription was primarily seen as conscript service and the period of time it takes to complete it.

Finnish conscription appeared problematic for the interviewees in relation to compulsion and gender inequality.

*But there is just this, a small thing that goes against your own understanding. It is when you hide the word "compulsion" under the veil of "duty". That is, speaking nicely about things, saying "the duty to defend the country".*

According to the interviewees, there is a need for the existence of the Defence Forces and national defence due to threats in the security environment surrounding Finland, and in Europe in general. Even though compulsory military service was experienced as a one-way obligation by the state, the interviewees did not see an acute need for changes in the short term. There is a reasonable amount of discretion in the system: it is possible to choose between conscript service, unarmed service and non-military service according to personal interests.

*Conscription is a good thing, I support it, and that you can do conscript service or a non-military service. But it's just not my thing by any means.*

*I think it's a good thing to have that duty. That is, when the civilian service is the other option. In my opinion, it does not work purely on voluntary basis, and we do need the Defence Forces in the future, too.*

The interviewees avoided identifying themselves as conscientious objectors.<sup>5</sup> They had neither wanted to be sentenced to prison because of refusing military service nor tried to get exemption from military service due to lack of fitness.<sup>6</sup> They described the stigma related to refusing military service.

*I took time to really think about it seriously, but there is social pressure that "what the hell are you doing", you are terribly disrespectful of everything and that you are an outcast or something.*

*Well, it's an option but it will make your life harder for the rest of your life, so it's not a very good idea.*

<sup>5</sup> A conscript who completely refuses any kind of service provided for in this Act, including unarmed service, and does not apply for non-military service, is sentenced, in lieu of applying the provisions in chapter 45 of the Penal Code 39/1889), to a penalty for refusing military service as provided for with regard to refusing non-military service in the Non-Military Service Act (Conscription Act 1438/2007, Chapter 13, Section 118).

<sup>6</sup> We had no conscripts refusing military service or exempted from military service due to lack of fitness in our interview data.

The interviewees also contemplated upon the criminal conviction from two perspectives: the person in question and social unity and justice.

*I discussed with a friend who is a conscientious objector, in practice he is currently a criminal just because he is a man, which is a pretty rough thing and it is a disadvantage.*

While considering different aspects of conscription, citizenship and his own role as a citizen-soldier, one of the interviewees summarized that conscription is an excellent system for the state and AF, but it is quite greedy for the individual male citizen. Different models could allow a wider freedom of choice for citizens to find their role and ways to take part in national defence or comprehensive security in society. The majority of the interviewees did not believe in all-volunteer forces or the potential of fully professional forces. The fully professional forces might be highly motivated and trained, but it would be too expensive to organize the defence system in Finland. The interviewees doubted the sufficiency and competences of volunteers in recruiting the all-volunteer forces.

Even though the compulsory nature of conscription was criticized on the individual level, the interviewees were satisfied that someone takes responsibility for the defence of the state.

*But, in my view, the general defence obligation is quite a lot to ask nowadays. However, I hope that as many as possible would come to the conclusion that this country should be defended in some way. Of course, there is a reason to have some form of defence.*

Some of the persons wanted to deconstruct their own role in conscription and armed defence. Most of the interviewees resigning from the reserve noted the deeply rooted tradition to complete conscript service in Finland. They had not experienced real choice in choosing between conscript service and other options during the call-up because of social pressure or the lack of information about the options. Many of them suggested that one is too young at the age of 18 to be able to really understand the meaning of conscript service and the totalitarian demands of conscription.

Getting married, childbirth, life experience and maturing as a person had initiated the processes to question one's dual identity as a civilian and a citizen-soldier. The civilian mindset goes against the obligation to take part in a possible war and even to kill other people if needed. Also, a weak trust in one's own competencies or Finland's ability to act against the likely enemy was related to deconstructing the own role as a part of FDF.

## 4.2 Unequal practices in conscription service

A vast majority of the interviewees described a socio-normative burden constructed by the obligation to complete conscript service as part of the maturation process and of achieving full membership in society. They had experienced social pressure from their parents, grandparents or friends. The historical narratives concerning World War II, the war veterans of the previous generations and fulfilment of the obligation had led to the completion of military service.

*From the very beginning, before the army, I was thinking civilian service as an alternative to military service. And perhaps the only reason or 90% of the reason why I ended up going to the military might just have been social pressure. In any case, I did not feel right in the army, it was not my place, and while there I constantly thought if I was be able to change my mind. I completed conscript service since it was socially an easier solution.*

*... then I went to civilian service, and you heard from your own friends and some relatives that "what are you doing now" and that you are a traitor and should be ashamed of yourself.*

*... my grandfather was a war veteran so they said that now you do not respect his memory, his actions there on the front line when you do not want to do conscript service. It seems quite incomprehensible!*

There had also been normative and ethical clashes between one's own values and abilities in relation to the obligation of choosing conscript service. The interviewees resigning from the reserve (46%) had completed their conscript service, and about 20% of the interviewees had begun but dropped out of conscript service. Almost everyone wanted to tell us the reasons for choosing non-military service or resigning from the reserve although it was not directly asked during the interviews.

The advantages of the non-military service were considered more significant than the ones in conscript service, both for the individual and for the state. The content of the basic training period and community service in non-military service were seen to be more useful in the future in terms of learning, work experience and becoming employed than traditional conscript service.

*I think non-military service is more useful than conscript service. What do you get from completing conscript service, well, you know how to shoot people and to run in the woods [laughs]. In non-military service you get work experience and it will be more useful in the future.*

Non-military service was compared with conscript service. Poor orientation, adjustment and adaptation to conscript service, daily routines, living arrangements, lack

of free time, physically demanding training and military discipline were the problems faced among most of the interviewees who dropped out of conscript service. Due to the experienced low risk of military threat to Finland, it was a typical experience that there is no need for conscript service, or that it is a waste of time for an individual citizen.

*At the same time, I feel that somehow this combination that, the contribution to society in terms of education and other tasks will be much more important and, also because, it makes sense to let those kinds of people who want to (fight) take care of that ...*

The majority of the interviewees expressed positive support for the development of gender-neutral national service alongside conscription. They would not resolve the gender inequality problem of conscription by forcing women also to complete compulsory military service. They suggested that a new model would activate the citizens to take a role in national defence in armed, non-armed or comprehensive security actions, and it would be equal for men and women.

*Yeah, military service. Conscript service is only for men, so I think it is already very inequitable in principle, and then I think that you will be in an unequal position here within the state ... it is quite lame to say only that it's a job for men to defend the country just because it has always been so.*

Some of the interviewees wanted to make a clear distinction between themselves and the AF by choosing non-military service even though convictions were not emphasized in our material. The problematic issues were the ethical question of killing and the obligation to be trained to be part of an organization using violence.

*The original idea was that I did not want to participate in the system that in essence basically teaches people to kill others, and I somehow see the absurdity of the whole system, that you spend one year learning to kill.*

### 4.3 Killing

The third problematic issue – killing – was linked to the legitimization of war, conscription and a citizen's dual role as a citizen-soldier. Based on the interviews, we propose that age, life cycle and life experiences are significant explanatory factors for ethical and convictional premises problematizing killing as a citizen-soldier. There was a difference in the discourse while talking about and assessing one's own attitude towards killing on behalf of the state, or as self-defence as an individual.

Overall, killing was linked to ethical and conscious reflections towards arms and one's own actions in war.

The interviewees reflected on their relationship with weapons and the use of force. The ethical questions concerning the use of weapons or killing another person had been discussed in conscript service, but the dilemmas were not being resolved on the individual level.

*In my opinion, the ethical issues should be addressed more during conscript service. After all, it can be quite confusing with the idea of war and so ...*

In addition, the ethical problems of using weapons against another person in a war had become problematic during different phases of life. Most of the interviewees liable for non-military service had been reflecting upon their relationship to weapons and killing while choosing non-military service during the call-up process or in conscript service. The ones who were resigning from the reserve had thought about these issues in connection with life events such as marriage, childbirth or even the live exercises in conscript service. They argued that 18-year-old youngsters are too young to internalize the attitudes or behaviour of a soldier as part of citizenship and the related obligation. At the age of 24 years or so, many of them began to think seriously about these issues that had not been relevant before. This consideration was associated with the dual identity and transmigration between the roles of a civic-citizen and a citizen-soldier.

*[Finland has to be defended, but] I have noticed during last years that I could not kill people. I do not want to be involved in it.*

The legitimization of war and conscription were combined with the reflections concerning killing and weapons. Also, a significant issue was the obligation of a citizen to act as a soldier and to participate in combat if needed. The only type of legitimate war was to defend and protect the state, especially the society and people. According to our interviewees, defence of borders and nation states is not as legitimate as defending humans and humanity. The preservation of state sovereignty was also mentioned as worthy of defending by force of arms, but the attitudes towards its legitimacy were dispersed.

*The fact that if Finnish citizens are threatened with any danger ... People. Yes, I value people above the country's borders.*

Conscription as an obligation for men in Finland imposes a dual identity on youngsters as civilians and as soldiers. According to the interviewees, there is not enough guidance to deal with the transmigration between these roles in the Finnish conscript training. The obliged soldiers' role may be adopted at the age of 18, but personal maturation may problematize the transmigration between



these roles and identities. Those who do not know how to deal with the role conflicts are more responsive to outside influences and impulses when constructing their own agency as part of national defence.

*It's so normal that we go to conscript service and everyone goes. But it is a real contradiction that you do not know what it is about. Killing people, who kill people, because killing is wrong.*

#### 4.4 ...but, saying yes to

There was a dichotomy in the interviewees' attitudes towards their own role in armed or non-armed roles and actions in national defence and conscription. The majority of the interviewees expressed a personal willingness to fulfil their national defence obligations even though military service in itself was problematized. Only three of our interviewees said that they would flee the country if there was a war.

Most of the interviewees did not know their tasks or duties in war time organizations. Those liable for non-military service and the reservists resigning from the reserve do not have assigned tasks in war time organizations or in abnormal conditions – or they do not know their duties. The most prominent way to construct one's role and agency was to find ways to support the civilian society and people in different crises. Different tasks related to humanitarian aid among civilians were often mentioned as ways to support the society.

*I think of the protection of children. Children are innocent in these things. It is the human cruelty what makes us do many things. I care for the children's security, civil defence and evacuation.*

The role of civilian education and expertise was emphasized by the interviewees when constructing non-armed roles in national defence. The interviewees see the roles through their own personal and professional positions and competences. The utilization of one's personal abilities was related to the individual's values and experiences as part of the national defence obligation. Most of them wanted to find ways to support society, the authorities and their communities by using these skills and abilities. They discussed the complete destructive effect of a possible war and the responsibilities of reconstructing the infrastructure or structures of the society.

*And it is really important not only during the crisis but also in terms of how the crisis situation calms down, that how to get back to the common rhythm of life.*

*I would definitely like to do something to help the civilians behind the fronts. Bringing food, fighting fire, and so on. In a way, to help*

*clean up the mess, because there's so much to do in a war or in any crisis ... Well, the war machine destroys in every case. If it does not destroy people then it will ruin all the infrastructure. Something like this, of public interest.*

The experience of one's own role as a part of the AF sorted the interviewees into three categories: (a) does not want to have any role or connection with the AF, (b) wants to have non-armed tasks based on his civilian occupation, but could act as part of the AF and (c) could act or train to act with armed duties as part of AF. Connections to rescue, security, police and civil defence authorities were found in the non-armed duties. In their role as part of the AF they brought up humanitarian concerns, and many of them were ready to act, for example in logistics and maintenance units. There was a perceived discourse of helping, supporting and securing people when the interviewees reflected upon their roles and duties in national defence and conscription.

The interviewees highlighted the importance of crisis prevention and conflict resolution as part of the activities of states. A few of them considered their role and potential to work with peace and security or with international diplomacy as a feasible option.

*Well it is possible that I might join an organization that is for national defence or preventive cause, somehow without the arms. It is always possible. It might be a typical way for some people to have an impact. To join a larger cause that thrives to change or maintain something.*

*Well, culture and arts are also important, in so that you can bring up issues like global warming or immigration. These are what I could do, although I've never thought of them as being part of national defence before.*

Based on our findings it would seem that people are ready to serve in various different roles, duties and tasks as part of the comprehensive framework of national defence. It is clear that these tasks include much more than “just” serving as a civilian-soldier, or taking up arms when needed. Almost everyone is willing to do their part, given that they have a choice to define their role.

## 5 Discussion

This article focused on the problematized factors among people liable for military service in Finland. Negotiating and balancing between dual identity and the idea of transmigration between the roles open up a new perspective to study conscription and national defence as an obligation.

Conscription is a societal institution that produces credible manpower for national defence and it places some citizens – men and originally volunteer women – in a strong obligatory and power relationship with the state. In such relation, the individual makes personal sacrifices on behalf of the state and the nation. In our data, there was no straight reciprocal relationship between civic rights and conscription.

There is a strong socio-normative pressure to choose and accomplish conscript service at call-up age. The obligation of conscript service or its purpose is not questioned during that stage in life. Those who choose non-military service in the call-up often experience societal pressure to justify their choice. Normative commitment of youngsters is one of the factors which supports the FDF in getting enough conscripts to training every year. Our results support previous studies, in that conscription and conscript service are being challenged with the questions of personal gains and gender equality. Individualization, globalization, lack of local ties and high level of consumerism have previously been associated with the levels of commitment to military service or conscription (cf. Adres et al. 2012).

In the context of this study, the main problems in relation to conscription and national defence are the inequality of the conscription system, its obligation and lack of discretion. For the individual conscripts as citizen-soldiers, the problem of killing has a special meaning when they reflect upon their own role in the possible act of war. The conscripts and their expertise could be used more extensively in a wider range of security-related issues than in armed defence alone.

Conscription has been studied and the FDF has developed it mostly from a system-oriented perspective (cf. Ministry of Defence 2010, 2007). The government has justified conscription as a cost-effective way to organize national defence. For an individual, conscription appears as a part of one's life cycle and choices made: conscript service, its personal benefits and disadvantages are experienced and evaluated as part of an individual's career. Among the significant shifts during one's life, conscription and its obligations may become questionable by ethical grounds in relation to killing, one's own competencies as a soldier, experiences about a state worthy of defending or in relation to factors threatening the state.

It is tempting to think that the aspects of conscription problematized by our interviewees reflect (a) individualization in terms of saying no to obligation, (b) changes in citizenship in terms of a more active role in security production and a society based on professional and other individual capabilities and (c) globalization and

anti-nationalism in terms of more universal ethics of non-violence. Still, it is not the whole picture. The interviewees are strongly for military defence and maintaining conscription, and they value their home country, especially in terms of people, values and a functioning society. It is as if there are two discourses layered upon each other: the one representing moderate patriotism and mainstream views on defence, supporting the existing organization of the military, and the other suggesting a new role for citizens in the societal division of security labour. This new role is being framed by choice and the equal participation of citizens, but most importantly, it is not tied solely to military endeavours rather to a recognized variety of security threats and what can be called comprehensive security.

We had 71 interviewees and almost as many different experiences and narratives in relation to the welfare state and national defence. The groups were quite heterogeneous. There was wide diversity in the reasons problematized in one's relationship to national defence, conscription and the dual identity as a civilian-minded citizen-soldier (cf. Kallunki 2015). Nonetheless, the system seems to treat conscripts like mass. The individuals questioning the system, obligations or his/her role in conscription or conscript service seem to drift into the margins of national defence. Given that, national defence is most often perceived as armed defence and linked to the FDF, which limits the citizens' ability to seek and find their roles as part of it.

## 5.1 Methodological reflections

Although we studied marginal groups in conscription, Finnish men who were liable for non-military service and who had completed conscript service and had applied to transfer into non-military service, the results can be utilized in a wider conceptualization of conscription, its patterns and the commitment of conscripts. It should be noted that we did not reach all of the groups, for example conscripts performing conscript service, conscientious objectors or women resigning from reserve, who might construct their relation and agency in conscription and national defence in a very different manner. This is a challenge for future research to tackle.

The citizens' relationships to defence are highly contextual, especially in terms of the security situation. Our study is conducted in the context of long-lasting peace and stability. This may stress the role of the individual's freedom of choice and personal gains when making choices concerning conscription and national defence. The experience of threats to the state and society can be associated with the individual's attitude towards national

defence and allocation of society's resources to defence actions. Had the study been performed in a situation with the threat of a military conflict, the results might focus more on one's relation to the armed defence of the state instead of the security of civil society.

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