Chapter 8

Moral Judgement in War and Peacekeeping Operations: An Empirical Review

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The mission of the Netherlands Armed Forces in Afghanistan included training the Afghan police and renovating their police stations by installing some basic safety measures. One of these measures included installing a munitions locker in the police station so that firearms, mines and explosives found in the police district could be stored securely. Imagine a situation in which Dutch personnel are carrying out a regular patrol mission, making contact with the local population and checking in on several of these police stations. Upon arrival at one of the police stations, the soldiers discover a woman who had been arrested earlier that day locked up in the munitions locker. The Afghan policemen inform the Dutch soldiers that, according to Afghan principles, the woman's honour is compromised if she is in a room with men other than her husband or other male relative. So, while waiting for her husband to arrive, her honour is protected by allowing her to wait in the munitions locker. For the Dutch personnel on site, this situation creates a dilemma: should safety concerns or sensitivity to cultural norms prevail?

This real-life example was described by a Dutch non-commissioned officer (NCO) in an interview session with the authors (2013) discussing dilemma situations during deployment. The NCO's narrative reflects the day-to-day challenges of servicemen during military operations. The scientific field that addresses such dilemmas in work contexts is that of business ethics, leaving ethics to a variety of scientists such as psychologists, sociologists, theologists and philosophers addressing ethical issues in work-contexts from their own perspectives. The domain of business ethics is commonly divided into two realms: that of normative ethics on the one side and that of empirical ethics on the other. The normative realm focuses on organizational ethics, whereas the empirical realm addresses morality at a personal and individual level (also see the distinction made by Paine\(^2\)). Within organizations and societies, organizational ethics

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largely result in behavioural codes that guide individual actions. This field also addresses conceptual and contextual issues regarding putting ethics into practice. Research in this area deals with issues such as moral character building and training programs and business ethos and considers the legitimacy of the use of force. Only a few scholarly papers addressed the effects of these training programs and behavioural codes on the soldiers’ moral judgement. Studies that address such ‘transfer’ have their place in the empirical realm. Research in the empirical realm – regarding individual personal morality – addresses individual behaviour by studying and explaining events in the past and by predicting individual behaviour in the future. Research in this area focuses on issues such as individual ethical decision-making behaviour, moral reasoning, and moral disengagement or abusive behaviour.

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7 O’Fallon and Butterfield 2005, n3.

