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Cosmopolitanism and individual ethical reflection – the embodied experiences of Swedish veterans

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to enable a conversation between cosmopolitan thought, with focus on individual ethical experiences and reflections, and research on embodied military experiences. While we derive our ethical reasoning from cosmopolitanism, we concede that it lacks sensitivity to individuals' other-regarding reflections and acts. Moreover, it does not sufficiently problematize the ways in which cosmopolitan deliberations are mediated in consideration of other desires and interests – what we define as mediated cosmopolitanism. To illustrate and substantiate our theoretical claims we draw on a selection of interviews and other material. We provide a two-step analysis, first by identifying the key themes in Sweden's cosmopolitan military self-narrative, enabling us to determine the extent to which it intersects with individual veterans' ethical reflections. Second, we conduct a discursive analysis of veterans' embodied ethical reflections, that have emerged from their participation in international operations. We identify a cosmopolitan sense of obligation amongst Swedish veterans across our material, with such individuals articulating a wish to do good beyond borders. Notions of cosmopolitan responsibility, moreover, arise from veterans' actual human encounters with civilians on the ground and through support for small-scale aid projects. However, veterans' ethical reflections are rarely purely cosmopolitan, rather mediated through their wish to serve the nation, support fellow soldiers as a key part of the operation, acquiring new professional skills and the desire to seek new adventures. We argue that the concept of mediated cosmopolitanism captures such mixed ethical sentiments and embodied experiences. We conclude by summarizing our key arguments.

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Introduction

Cosmopolitan thought holds that the rights, security, and freedom of individuals should trump those of sovereign states. The article is located within debates on cosmopolitan obligation to distant other citizens beyond borders (Beitz 1979; Caney 2005; Erskine 2008) and the ways in which Swedish veterans envisage such obligation (Duncanon 2012). Swedish soldiers have served on international missions that have been discursively framed within broad cosmopolitan principles of rights and obligations since the 1950s,

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though the move towards the ‘cosmopolitisation’ of the national military was more pronounced in the post-9/11 era (Bergman Rosamond 2012, 57). Even if cosmopolitan thought tends to place the rights of individuals at the centre of its analysis, ironically, scant attention has been paid to individual ethical reflections and acts. This article aims to further the conversation between cosmopolitan thought, with focus on individual ethical experiences and reflections, and research on ‘war as experience’ (Sylvester 2013a, 2013b), and using empirical material to illustrate the fruitfulness of such a dialogue. We locate our study within feminist-inspired critical military studies, in particular scholarship on military embodied experiences (Mads and Refsund Sørensen 2016; Dyvik and Greenwood 2016; Bulmer and Jackson 2016; Holmes 2019). Such research tends to focus on experiences, emotions, and narratives, often through ethnographic ‘close encounters with the military’ (Catherine et al. 2016; Kronsell and Svedberg 2001) or by studying ‘traumatizing sensations’ (Näser-Lather 2018) that soldiers might harbour or the issue of ‘social justice’ in the context of ‘veteran activism’ (Schrader 2019).

Yet, the field of critical military studies, broadly defined, has engaged less with the cosmopolitan-minded experiences of individual soldiers, though Claire Duncannon’s (2012, 2013) work on British soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq and Maya Eichler’s (2012) study of Russian veterans include components of cosmopolitan reasoning. It is also worth mentioning here the work by Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell (2018) on Danish and Swedish women soldiers’ cosmopolitan reflections on their engagement in dialogic peacekeeping in Afghanistan. Also of relevance is Sandra Strand’s (2018) research on the invention of the Swedish war veteran as a professional category, as part of the overall transformation of the Swedish armed forces, and the ways in which such she/he is constituted as a good citizen who deserves public praise and respect. Underpinning our study is the assumption that individual soldiers possess moral autonomy (Sensen 2012) and capability, enabling them to engage in ethical relational reflection and care in the context of pressing situations associated with humanitarian operations. As we shall develop below Swedish veterans appear to have a sense of their own moral autonomy, enabling them to pursue ethical reflection (Interviews 1–10). Below we couple our investigation of the ethical deliberations and embodied experiences of Swedish veterans with an analysis of the discursive linkages between veterans’ individual stories and the cosmopolitan-minded aspects of Sweden’s military self-narrative, focusing on the post-Cold War era and beyond. We identify a constitutive relationship between individual veterans’ embodied experiences and ethical reflections and the key normative underpinnings of the Swedish military.

We commence by unpacking the key tenets of cosmopolitan theory, pointing to the blurry relationship between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism and suggesting ways in which the dialogue between these two ethical traditions can be furthered. Here we introduce the concept of mediated cosmopolitanism, which refers to the myriad of sentiments and judgements that affect an ethical position, some of which are other-regarding and others of a more personal or interest-based kind. We also discuss cosmopolitanism’s lack of precision regarding individuals’ ethical reflections and experiences. We posit that our study of veterans’ ethical experiences and reflections can add rigour to cosmopolitan thought, in particular if it is paired up with research on embodied military experience.

In the latter part of the article, we employ a two-step approach to the analysis of our material, which is composed of interviews, a large-scale survey of veterans' experiences conducted by the Swedish Defence Research Agency in 2014, and documentaries as well as non-fictional accounts. In the first instance, we unpack the themes in Sweden's contemporary military self-narrative to contextualize our study, which enables us to illustrate the ways in which that narrative intersects with veterans' individual ethical reflections on cosmopolitan obligation. Second, we provide a feminist-inspired discursive analysis (Shepherd 2008) of Swedish veterans' ethical reflections on their embodied military experiences. The purpose of the analysis is not to make generalizable truth claims, but rather to sustain our position that the study of individual ethical reflections can reduce the abstraction embedded in cosmopolitanism, while contributing to work on the ethical underpinnings of embodied military experiences (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). We show how such an approach can produce new insights into the links between individual soldiers' wish to support their nation's security, and, global stability more broadly, while being ethically inspired by their personal encounters with suffering in conflict zones. This involves studying veterans' ethical reflections on their attempts to wed their cosmopolitan sense of obligation with such things as realizing their professional dreams or simply acquiring a sense of adventure. We suggest that the concept of mediated cosmopolitanism is productive in capturing the multitude of sentiments and experiences that inform individual ethical reflection. . To conclude we summarize our key arguments and reiterate our position that the analysis of individual ethical reflections can reduce the silence within cosmopolitan thought on individuals as carriers of moral obligation. We suggest that research on embodied military experience can be enriched by more thoroughly considering what motivates soldiers to engage in other-regarding behaviour.

The cosmopolitan location of the study

Cosmopolitanism assumes that humanity is located within a shared moral order, in which national borders have little, or no significance, as we are unified through our ability to conduct moral reasoning and in our shared ability to suffer (Shapcott 2010). Proponents of cosmopolitanism posit that the rights and security of all human beings should take precedence over those of sovereign states. This should be contrasted with the ethical position of communitarianism which holds that it is the preservation of political community itself and the wellbeing and security of its members that ought to be prioritized (Walzer 1994; Erskine 2007). Communitarianism distinguishes itself from cosmopolitanism by viewing moral obligation as socially constituted within political communities, rather than within a shared universal moral order (Walzer 1994; Beitz 1979; Erskine 2008, 2007). Yet, most attempts to further the cosmopolitan intellectual agenda do not involve promoting the idea of a wholesale transformation of global society whereby national boundaries and structures of governance become redundant in favour of world government. Rather, cosmopolitan-minded philosophical interventions seek to mediate between cosmopolitan and communitarian principles of justice (Linklater 1998; Nussbaum 2000), acknowledging our dual sense of obligation to citizens and non-citizens alike. Toni Erskine (2007, 44) promotes the idea of an embedded cosmopolitanism 'that would sustain an account of moral agency, judgement and value as radically

situated in particularistic associations' and which 'would ... remain inclusive and self-critical enough to take seriously the moral standing of those beyond ... home, neighbourhood and nation'. Eduardo Medieta (2009, 255) puts forth a notion of cosmopolitanism that is 'enlightened, reflective and rooted' as well as 'dialogical', expressed 'through local cosmopolitan iterations'. This emphasis on dialogue is echoed in Andrew Linklater (1998) cosmopolitan reasoning and grounded in his efforts to put forth a notion of political community that is dialogical and transcends national borders, but does not seek the dismantling of the state. Though feminists are cautious in making universal ethical claims (Bergman Rosamond 2013) there are several attempts to reconcile universalism and the particular by positing that

it is possible to describe a framework ... that is strongly universalist, committed to cross-cultural norms of justice, equality and rights, and at the same time sensitive to local particularity, and to the many ways in which circumstances shape not only options but also beliefs and preferences ... universalist feminism need not be insensitive to difference. (Nussbaum 2000, also see Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018)

Global ethical engagement, moreover, involves engaging in the act of listening to the unheard (Robinson 2011) and creating deeper understandings of the experiences and needs of marginalized communities.

We propose here that cosmopolitan notions of obligation are rarely purist. Rather they are meditated through a variety of sentiments, some of which pertain to one's own sense of wellbeing or that of one's community, while others transcend those immediate spheres of loyalty. As noted by Chris Brown (2001, 21) 'behaving ethically ... involves being aware of, and sensitive to the interests of others – but self-abnegation is not mandatory' (Brown 2001, 21). Below we illustrate this argument by unpacking the multitude of experiences and motives that underpin the ethical thought processes of Swedish veterans who have served beyond borders. To capture this complexity we put forth the concept of mediated cosmopolitanism, building on the notion that ethical conduct and reflection are rooted in actual human encounters and experiences, rather than abstract moral reasoning (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018).

Yet cosmopolitan scholarship, despite being centred on the significance of safeguarding the well-being of all human beings, tells us surprisingly little about the very individuals who are wedded to the idea of furthering global ethical obligation—the cosmopolitan selves (Bergman Rosamond 2019). Feminists directly take on board the relationality of ethical obligation and care (Robinson 2011) and the significance of actual human embodied experiences and encounters (Sylvester 1994; Sjoberg 2008) in arriving at individual moral judgement (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). More specifically, feminist security studies and critical military studies provide fertile ground for the analysis of embodied ethical experiences by focusing on actual human relations between people (Wibben 2011, 100). Such research focuses, amongst other things, on the ethical relations emerging from the encounters between soldiers and local victims of war (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018) or between locals and peacekeepers (Newby 2018) and/or the structural factors underpinning relations between soldiers and their home nation or armed forces (Kronsell and Svedberg 2001; Kuehnel and Wilén 2018). Common to such research is that it does not neglect individual embodied experiences within the military or in the context of conflict and war (Sylvester 2013a, 2013b; Enloe

2010; Wibben 2011, 2016; Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). Christine Sylvester (2013a, 65) argues that '(t)o study war as experience requires that the human body come into focus as a unit that has agency in war and is also the target of war's violence'. The study of such personal narratives and embodied experiences is 'essential because they are a primary way by which we make sense of the world around us, produce meanings, articulate intentions, and legitimate actions' (Wibben 2011, 2).

Below we do so by focusing on Swedish veterans' ethical deliberations on their time served abroad, in particular their conceptions of other-regarding obligation to civilians in conflict zones. It should be noted here that our main focus is on Swedish veterans who have served in post-Cold War 'post-national' military operations that centre on what could be defined as the cosmopolitan protection of the rights of civilians beyond borders (Gilmore 2015; Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). The post-national cosmopolitan-minded soldier is not simply a warrior or a defender of national borders (Kronsell 2012), but engages in humanitarian care work, delivering food and other essentials to those in need and instilling dialogical relations with local populations (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). Such individuals are 'key protagonists in the negotiation of relations between geopolitics, the state, the military, and society' (Bulmer and Jackson 2016, 27) and upholders of universal norms pertaining to global peace, security, and order. Indeed, soldiers participating in cosmopolitan-informed operations, what we define as cosmopolitan military selves – are often charged with the task of translating their nation's military orders and universalist ambitions into ethically permissible acts on mission. This is not an easy task as Daniel Daniel's (2010) research on Western soldiers' diverse motives for participating in UN peacekeeping missions for the purpose of protecting civilians indicates. Worth mentioning here is the 'cosmopolitisation' (Bergman Rosamond 2012) of the Swedish Armed Forces in the post-Cold War era, which required soldiers to assist civilians in war zones, promoting human security and rights globally (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). The veteran stories that we explore in the latter part of the paper are located within the context of the wider cosmopolitisation of the Swedish military in the post-Cold War era. By deconstructing and listening to their stories we can generate knowledge about personalized sentiments of cosmopolitan obligation which is in line with the overall ambition of this article. This involves not being entrapped within scholarship that typically focuses on the veteran as a 'problem' to be dealt with (Shay 2002; Kilshaw 2009; Nickerson and Goldstein 2015) nor within accounts on the psychological consequences of post-traumatic stress (Sherman 2010; Murakami 2014). While we do not deny the significance of such sentiments we contend that by solely focusing on post-traumatic experiences or approaching the veteran as a problem other readings of their embodied experiences are silenced. Since our ambition here is to explore the ways in which veterans' embodied ethical reflections can contribute to new knowledge about the ways in which individuals conceive of and relate to cosmopolitan obligation it seems appropriate to refrain from focusing on trauma and problem-centred discourses alone. It is our hope that our study, in some modest way, can add rigour to ethical reasoning within the wider field of critical military studies by showing how notions of global ethical obligation are articulated by veterans post-homecoming. We further these propositions below in our two-step analysis of the Swedish cosmopolitan-minded military self-narrative and the ways in which veterans relate to that story.

The self-narrative of the Swedish Military

Studying national narratives enable us to identify the ethical underpinnings, norms, capabilities, and values of a particular political community and its institutions (Roselle, Miskimmon, and O'Loughlin (2014). For example, Sweden has often depicted itself as an exceptionally peaceful and other-regarding state in global politics capable of making the world a better place through its foreign and security policies. In an effort to contextualize our study within the specific Swedish national context we unpack the key defining features of its self-narrative and those pertaining to the adoption of an explicit veteran policy in 2010.

Sweden's external self-narrative has been normatively couched within its 200-year history of peace, UN activism, internationalist tradition, support for international law and proportionately generous provisions of overseas development assistance (Bergman Rosamond 2015; Agius 2006) and more recently the adoption of a feminist platform for the conduct of foreign policy (Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond 2016). Scholars have identified a link between Swedish internationalism and peace-orientated foreign policy and its security doctrine of non-alignment, and previously neutrality (Bergman Rosamond and Agius 2018).

While Sweden maintains that it is not a war-fighting nation, and, as such is committed to international peace and humanitarian values, it has since the Cold War and post-9/11 taken part in international operations that are warlike, including its relatively recent engagements in Afghanistan (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). Moreover, it is one of the world's leading exporters of arms, with those arms, at times, being exported to regimes whose democratic credentials are seemingly rather dubious (Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond 2016). Such national commercial interests have not prevented Sweden from constituting its overseas military engagements in peace missions within cosmopolitan language (Kronsell 2012; Bergman Rosamond 2012), with 60–70,000 soldiers having participated in international missions since 1960 (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014, 27, 25). Sweden's cosmopolitan military self-narrative from 1996 onwards, when a range of official declarations were issued, has advocated the significance of using the national military to promote peace globally, and 'saving strangers' (Wheeler 2000) in the name of human rights (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2001, 46; Proposition 2004/2005, 5, 2008/2009, 140). Defining such moves is the tendency to construct Swedish military as a defender of 'universal norms and values such as democracy, human rights, gender equality and human dignity and development' (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014 27, 187 *our translation*). Soldiers were envisaged as forces for good charged with the task of dispersing universal norms and values beyond borders (Försvarsdepartementet 2003, 8, 2004, 30, 2007, 46, see also Kronsell 2012). Moreover, there is a tendency within the Swedish military to assume a strong link between the values and norms underpinning Swedish 'everyday life', and its efforts to promote peace, human rights, and democracy through its global military commitments (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014, 187). There is, however, less self-reflection on how Swedish military engagements overseas for the sake of promoting human rights and peace in places like Afghanistan might also be construed as western interventionism, with Swedish soldiers offering protection in a masculinist sense (Agius 2018) to suffering others in faraway places (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018; Bergman Rosamond and Agius 2018). Still, the Swedish

military has sought to gender mainstream its military institutions, most importantly, by recruiting more women to international operations, which is in line with its ardent support for the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda (Kronsell 2012; Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018; Försvarsberedningen 2004; Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2016; Government Offices of Sweden 2018; Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014, 27). The gender mainstreaming of the national military, moreover, has resonance with the Swedish societal tendency to promote gender equality and justice within and beyond borders (Bergman Rosamond 2013). In sum, the Swedish self-narrative tends to be couched within the language of internationalism, progressive values, and the conduct of gender-friendly policies, at home and abroad, and, at times being willing to employ military measures to promote those values globally (Strand and Kehl 2019; Aggestam and Bergman Rosamond 2016).

Yet the Swedish military self-narrative is not without contradictions, with the cosmopolitan peace logic underpinning its overseas military engagements sometimes being compromised by the militarism and violence that Swedish troops encounter on overseas missions (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). In Afghanistan, the lives of five Swedish soldiers were lost (Åse & Wendt 2016) and many were injured and/or experienced psychological trauma (interviews 7,8,9, 2016–2017). In this context, a Swedish veteran observes that he was ‘almost ... blown up’ and ‘shot at’ leading him to feel traumatized by the pronounced militarism and violence of the Afghan conflict (Swedish Research Defence Agency 2014, 216). Such, traumatic experiences in Afghanistan were rarely debated before Sweden adopted an official veteran policy in 2010 (Interview 1 2016) – it sought to mobilize support for soldiers who had served abroad and who had encountered and been part of violent practices while doing so. The shift towards cosmopolitan notions of responsibility within the Swedish armed forces facilitated this move, with an increasing number of soldiers having taken part in war-like operations, involving robust peacekeeping (Bergman Rosamond and Agius 2018). Against the backdrop of that development, it was no longer as controversial to commemorate the other-regarding acts of Swedish veterans (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2007, 77, 2007, 91). The adoption of an official veteran policy has attracted scholarly interest in Swedish veterans and veteran policy (Petterson 2012; Sundberg 2015), with Sanna Strand’s (2018) scholarship being of particular interest here. She notes that ‘Swedish soldiers have until recently been rather absent from the public domain – and rarely celebrated. While veteran bodies certainly have existed in Sweden for a long time, the term “veteran” was hardly ever employed in Swedish defence discourses and rarely associated with the military institution (Strand 2018, 2). This has changed considerably with Swedish veterans now being publicly honoured and recognized for their other-regarding contributions and professionalism as well as their wider contributions to global and Swedish society (Strand 2018). A national Veterans Day takes place every year on May 29, commemorating the sacrifices and deeds of soldiers who have served on international missions. Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (2019) has spoken on several such occasions, expressing his support for Swedish veterans and their contributions to global peace and security. Whether such ceremonial commemorations have led more members of the Swedish public to support their country’s cosmopolitan military undertakings is hard to know; however, the prime minister’s recurrent participation in the annual celebrations is suggestive of his government’s willingness to celebrate individual soldiers’

efforts beyond borders. These ceremonial moves, coupled with an official veteran policy, also indicate a stronger willingness to cater for the needs of veterans and their families within the Swedish military (Interviews 1–5), ensuring that they receive the social and legal protection that they might need post-homecoming (Swedish Defence Research Agency 2014, 27; Strand 2018). Intimately linked with that sense of protection is Sweden's recognition that veterans play an important part in dispersing what can be defined as cosmopolitan values beyond borders, and, as such, should be celebrated for their other-regarding acts:

every day and every year Swedish women and men serve voluntarily on behalf of the Swedish people (the state) in different peace ... operations, humanitarian and development work around the world. The contributions are made to create peace in conflict zones, rescue people situated in need and suffering in disaster areas and helping ... people to a safer and better life through development work. (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014, 25, our translation)

So far we have established that there are clear cosmopolitan undertones in the Swedish military self-narrative and within its veteran policy. However, that self-narrative has come under pressure in recent years. In 2016, the government articulated a need to securitize its borders by allocating more budgetary resources to national defence and by hosting NATO-led military exercises on its territory (Agius and Edenborg 2019). To this effect, it has positioned troops on the island of Gotland, in the middle of the Baltic Sea, in response to Russian military activities in Sweden's vicinity. Here, the Swedish Defence Commission notes that

the security situation in Europe has deteriorated over time, due to Russia's actions ... an armed attack on Sweden cannot be excluded, nor can the use of military measures against Sweden, or threats thereof. The Swedish total defence will be developed and designed to ensure that Sweden is prepared in order to meet an armed attack against Sweden, including other acts of war on Swedish territory. (Government Offices of Sweden, 2019,1)

This communitarian shift could disrupt the cosmopolitan narrative that has surrounded the Swedish military in the post-Cold War era and beyond. Another consequence of the move towards national defence is that Swedish soldiers are likely to primarily be charged with the task of guarding the boundaries of national political community, rather than humanity at large (Swedish Defence Ministry 2019). This in turn will offer fewer opportunities for Swedish soldiers to serve beyond borders, and, several of our interviewees note that this shift could reduce public interest in maintaining an active veteran policy (Interviews 1, 2, 5, 7 10).

Without denying the tensions between the communitarian and cosmopolitan objectives prevalent in Swedish defence and veteran policy, we wish to note that our main ambition in this article is to explore the ways cosmopolitan values intersect with veteran accounts of ethical obligation, which is the focus of the next section.

Swedish veteran stories through a discursive lens

Feminist security studies, coupled with narrative analysis and feminist discursive analysis (Shepherd 2008; Jennings 2019) enable an investigation of individual soldiers' ethical reflections by centring on everyday experiences and emotions (Linda and Gregory 2015)

and how the latter intersect with the self-narrative of the Swedish military. A key assumption within most forms of discourse analysis is that discourses are not neutral reflections of reality, but rather help to constitute that reality. The ideational and the material worlds are co-constitutive and mediated through texts and visuals (Hansen 2006, 2015). Thus, the ethical reflections offered by veterans on their embodied military experiences are subjective, rather than based on objective truth claims. Such subjective reflections are, nonetheless, central in seeking new understandings of what motivates individual ethical obligation amongst soldiers, but also other individuals charged with the protection of distant other human beings. This involves discursively exploring the ways in which individual soldiers make sense of the military missions which they were part of (Epstein 2008) and the ethical deliberations emerging from those experiences. Below, we intertextually unpack the discursive practices and mechanisms employed by veterans, in particular those pertaining to cosmopolitan reasoning.

Aside from being inspired by Hansen's careful elaborations on research design and robust discussions of questions of method as they relate to such things as selections of texts (Hansen 2006, 2015), we draw upon feminist discourse analysis (Laura 2013; Shepherd 2008) and feminist narrative analysis (Wibben 2011; Duncanson 2013). Feminist techniques enable us to allocate dichotomies in texts and interview material, which can tell us something about the tension between cosmopolitanism and other motives underpinning veterans' ethical engagements, such as the search for a personal adventure or the wish to protect one's comrades from harm.

To sustain our claim that cosmopolitan thought could be enriched by more thoroughly considering individual ethical reflection we have conducted 10 illustrative semi-structured anonymized interviews with mainly veterans. It should be noted that we have respected our interviewees' wish to remain anonymous, and, as such, we have refrained from including their names in the list of interviews below. Furthermore, in some cases, we were asked not to reveal the location of their overseas postings. What is more, the personal ethical reflections analysed below are confined to mainly those of officers. These were selected because such individuals, for the most part, possess dual experiences as military staff on overseas mission and within organizational bodies such as the Swedish ministry of defence, national military headquarters or the Swedish officers' union. As such they are well placed to offer reflections on the discursive relationship between individual ethical reflections and those furthered in the Swedish military self-narrative. A few of those we interviewed also hold positions in Swedish veteran organizations. Our interviews were open-ended with an emphasis on individual reflection on cosmopolitan obligation and other competing sentiments and interests that the individual might harbour. By focusing on veterans' embodied experiences, rather than those in active service, our article ensures temporal distance between that person's actual participation in a mission and his/her deliberation on the ethical experiences acquired during overseas engagement. To this effect, we have conducted retrospective interviews ensuring that the veterans in question have had opportunities to thoroughly deliberate on their ethical experiences beyond borders, and, that their reflections are grounded in reflexive reasoning over time (Sosniak 2006). This, we argue, will produce richer responses to questions on ethical obligation (Fontana and Prokos 2016, 77–82), since such reflection is a 'self-formative' process (Devetak 2018:4, see also Friedman 2000).

In employing a broad intertextual approach we have also made use of a large-scale survey commissioned by the Swedish government and conducted by the Swedish Defence Research Agency (2014), which provides further insight into the experiences and sentiments of soldiers of different ranks. We have complemented the survey with non-fictional books and documentaries.

We have used feminist-inspired methodology (Brooke and True 2008) where reflexivity, care, and sensitivity are employed in relation to the interlocutor. It is worth noting here that our interview material and our analysis of other texts serve to illustrate our theoretical and ethical reasoning throughout the article, rather than functioning as positivist evidence. Thus, our ambition is not to make generalizable truth claims rather to sustain our theorization by discursively unpacking individual ethical reflections. From a methodological discursive perspective, this means that we have identified general themes in the material, rather than unpacking the precise contents of each interview separately.

Unpacking veteran stories – mixed sentiments about the mission

Here we identify the broad discursive themes prevalent in Swedish veterans' individual reflections on cosmopolitan obligation beyond borders and over time. This involves unpacking the ways in which such ethical reflections are mediated in consideration of the values of the home nation and its military, loyalty to one's comrades (Duncanson 2012), personal feelings of adventure, career prospects, and enhancing one's professional knowledge (Interviews 1–10). We propose that the concept of mediated cosmopolitanism captures this diverse and complex ethical process.

In their book *Svenskar i Strid – Veteranernas Historier 1943–2011* (Swedes in Battles – Veterans' Stories 1943–2011), Carlén and Falk (2012) provide a rich account of Swedish veterans' embodied experiences and reflections across time and geographical location, suggesting that even though the international security order and Swedish defence and security policy have changed considerably since the 1940s, soldiers' motives for participating in military missions remain largely the same. Carlén and Falk suggest that Swedish veterans, irrespective of the time period, have typically been motivated by a sense of global responsibility to humanity, while seeking adventures and new career opportunities (Carlén and Falk 2012, 8, Interviews 1–10). However, as we have argued above, cosmopolitan notions of obligation are rarely entirely other-regarding, rather they are *mediated* through a range of personal experiences and reflections. The discursive themes that we have unpacked in our material sustain this theoretical claim (ibid.). To reiterate the claim made above, Sweden has in recent years sought to combine its commitment to the security of the nation with its cosmopolitan wish to further global peace and rights beyond borders (Bergman Rosamond 2012; Kronsell 2012; Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018) – a sense of dual obligation that is echoed amongst Swedish veterans (Interviews 1–10). In this context, a veteran notes that such communitarian loyalties do not preclude a sense of 'global obligation' to other parts of the world, even if 'very few serve abroad on the basis of humanitarianism alone' (Interview 7). Rather, it involves a complex process of having to mediate one's own distinct interests (and those of one's nation), in consideration of those of 'humanity' at large as well as the needs of 'civilians' on the ground caught up in war and conflict (Interview 7,2). It is interesting to note that such mixed motives figure in veteran narratives across time and space (Interviews 1–10).

The documentary *Kongoveteranerna*, (the Congo Veterans), directed by Marika Griehsel (2014), highlights the mixed sentiments and motives harboured by Swedish veterans who served on UN missions in Congo in the 1960s. The documentary shows a clear tendency amongst the veterans interviewed to employ discursive markers that are cosmopolitan in character, though most veterans tended to mitigate those within a range of other sentiments such as the search for adventures and supporting one's comrades. In their accounts, moreover, there was a tendency to concede that the military tasks themselves, at times, trumped soldiers' cosmopolitan wish to do good (ibid). This duality is also present in the ethical reflections conducted by veterans serving in the former Yugoslavia as well as Afghanistan. Here a veteran, who has held leading positions in several veteran organizations, notes that typically Swedish norms pertaining to global solidarity, international law, and peacebuilding tend to intersect with veterans' reflections on their individual ethical responsibility beyond borders (Interview 1). This involves reflecting on the expectations placed upon oneself while on duty (ibid), including having sufficient knowledge of international law, the conflict zone and the ethical underpinnings of the mission (Interview 3; Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014; Hildebrand 2011).

While the veterans in our material tend to recognize that Swedish values, global security norms, and international cosmopolitan values have informed their individual thought processes, they highlight the significance of actual encounters with locals on the ground in shaping their ethical deliberations (Interviews 1–10; Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014, 177). Embodied military encounters with human suffering, violence, and the 'vulnerability' of locals living through the specific conflict (Interview 10) were deemed central to the emergence of cosmopolitan sentiments of global obligation (Interviews 1–10). Key here is also the small-scale hands-on care work that veterans engaged with while on mission, which veterans discursively framed as being vital to their sense of localized cosmopolitan obligation to distant others (ibid). For example, a veteran, posted in Bosnia in the 1990s, concedes that though he was 'motivated by a wish to do good', it was when he had the opportunity to engage in small-scale hands-on assistance of an orphanage that his ethical sense of responsibility evolved. The acts of collecting and donating teaching material to the institution in question and playing with the children, many of whom were deeply traumatized by the war and the loss of their parents (Interview 7) were central discursive features in his reflections on his ethical sentiments. In his view, such small-scale humanitarianism also provided a sense of moral direction amongst the soldiers, who were ethically inspired by their work at the orphanage (Interview 7). Such reflections figure prominently across our material discursively and were expressed in a wish 'to make a difference on the ground' (Interview 10).

The sense of being ethically inspired by local charitable acts is a prevalent theme amongst Swedish veterans who served in Afghanistan (Interviews 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, see also Swedish Defence Research Agency 2014). A Swedish gender advisor, employed by the Swedish armed forces and who served in Afghanistan, notes that Swedish veterans' embodied encounters with locals in Afghanistan figure large in individuals' ethical storytelling and reflections post-homecoming (Interview 3; also see Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). Similarly, a Swedish high-ranking officer concedes that while a sentiment of 'curiosity' first inspired his wish to serve in Afghanistan, his sense of cosmopolitan obligation emerged through the 'making of small contributions to the local community' abroad (Interview 6).

The Afghan case, moreover, is distinctively gendered, with our interview material showing that the veterans who served in Afghanistan conceptualized women and girls as the individuals most in need of their cosmopolitan protection (Interviews 2,3,6, 8 & 9). Swedish women soldiers, in particular, were charged with the responsibility for care work, expressed in the conduct of cosmopolitan-minded dialogue with local women (Interviews 1, 3, 4, 9). The pursuit of ‘dialogical peacekeeping’ was coupled with women soldiers’ engagement in the collection of intelligence about the experienced insecurities amongst local women as well as the threat of imminent insurgencies (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018), lending sustenance to our claim that cosmopolitanism is rarely pure, but mediated through a range of interests and ambitions. In this context, a Swedish veteran observes that it was his impression, while being on mission, that his female colleagues possessed distinct other-regarding and dialogical qualities, enabling them to both care for locals and being good comrades within the regiment, in particular by reducing articulations of military masculinity on missions (Interview 1). This position, however, is contested by an army psychologist who explicitly warns against the use of gendered binaries and argues that women are not inherently better cosmopolitan ‘caregivers’. ‘Men and women are equally good’ (Interview 4). The representation of female and male veterans, and soldiers more broadly, as having distinct gendered qualities, for example, women being particularly good talkers and men heroic and other-regarding protectors needs to be challenged (see Basham 2016; Strand 2018; Caso 2016; Fox et al. 2016; Maiocco and Smith 2016; Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018). Indeed, across our interview material, there is a tendency to discursively construct women soldiers within gender binaries that assign care and love to female troops (Interview 1, 4, 9, 10). Yet, the notion that women have something distinct to offer overseas missions is central to the Swedish cosmopolitan military self-narrative (Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018) and it is also a recurrent discursive theme in the country’s veteran policy (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014).

It is also interesting to observe here that Swedish veterans, whose ethical reflections we have unpacked, identify a link between their localized embodied cosmopolitan experiences and their sense of happiness and meaningfulness while on mission (Interviews 1, 2, 7, 9; Swedish Defence Research Agency 2014). For example, a veteran officer, having served in numerous overseas missions suggests that Swedish soldiers who habitually took part in small-scale cosmopolitan-minded care projects beyond the camp were more likely to experience a sense of wellbeing than those who were not taking part in such work (Interview 7). The same discursive theme is present within the Swedish defence establishment that tends to construct the Swedish veteran as a particularly happy, ethically minded and healthy person (Interviews 2, 4, 5, 6), rather than a person troubled by his/her embodied military experiences post-homecoming (Interviews 1, 7; Swedish Defence Research Agency 2014). In sum, small-scale care work and concern for locals seem to be constitutive of Swedish veterans’ sense of ethical direction, purpose as well as their general sense of happiness while serving abroad (Interviews 1–10, Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014). What is more, that general sense of happiness seems in most cases to remain intact in a post-home coming setting (Interviews 2,4, 5, 6).

Yet military embodied experiences are multifaceted, complex, militarized, and masculinized, with the Swedish journalist Johanna Hildebrand (2011) noting in her book *Krigare (Warriors)* that Swedish soldiers who served in Afghanistan were unprepared for the complexities of the conflict. Moreover, that unpreparedness, in particular in the

Mazar el Sharif area, gave rise to blurred reflections on the ethical underpinnings of the mission itself and the tasks that the soldiers were expected to perform (Hildebrand 2011). That complexity is also visible in veterans' reflections on the tricky nexus between their individual ambitions and dreams and their overarching commitment to the dispersion of cosmopolitan notions of justice and rights in the conflict zones in which they were posted (Interviews 1–10).

In particular, the wish to be a good comrade and supporting one's fellow soldiers on mission is a prominent discursive feature in our interview material with veterans rather willingly admitting to friendship and bonds being just as important, and at times, more important than the underpinning cosmopolitan ethos of the mission in question (Interviews 7, 8, 9). Moreover, it is common for veterans to contextualize the significance of friendship within a general sense of the armed forces depending on soldiers' close bonds in conflict zones that are heavily militarized (Interviews 3, 4 9). Being on mission also entails spending a lot of time 'not doing all that much' (Interview 10), and in such situations, veterans appear to have valued the company of their friends in the camp (Interview 1,9). It is interesting to note here that the gender of one's friends within the battalion was generally perceived as being irrelevant (Interviews 1, 8 9).

Moreover, that strong sense of comradeship lives on post-homecoming with veteran gatherings providing a fruitful ground for contemplation on the ethical purpose of the mission and the other-regarding roles' within it (Swedish Defence Research Agency 2014, 215; Interviews 1, 2, 8, 7). A Swedish officer, who has served abroad multiple times, observes that supporting his comrades on mission was just as important a motivating force as the wish to promote global security and human rights (Swedish Defence Research Agency 2014, 215). Another veteran notes that friendships and close bonds between the veterans provided opportunities to discuss embodied encounters and experiences that they acquired as part of the missions they served (*ibid.* Swedish Defence Research Agency 2014, 211).

These discursive themes are consistent with Claire Duncanson's research on the British military which 'claims to be a force for good around the world, prioritising . . . peace and stability in its defence aim . . . and emphasising the humanitarian aspects of its interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan' (Duncanson 2012, 91) while 'the morality of the camaraderie, which involves loyalty to one's own comrades and courage and endurance under fire, is much stronger . . . and trumps the morality of being a force for good' induced by such things as prevailing notions of military masculinities and a failure to win the hearts and minds of local populations (Duncanson 2012, *ibid.*). The failure to win the hearts and minds of local populations is not a key discursive marker in our material, rather, individual ethical reflections tend to centre around the nodal point of pride, arising from their small-scale cosmopolitan engagements with locals in Afghanistan and elsewhere (Interviews 1, 8,9, also see Bergman Rosamond and Kronsell 2018) and conducting oneself in a professional fashion (Interviews 1, 2, 9). This is in line with the Swedish official policy line on veterans, which emphasizes the dual importance of military skills and a commitment to serve humanity at large through peace operations (Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014; Strand 2018). However, that sense of professionalism is not perceived as a threat to the general wish to do good, but rather a way of

ensuring that one is capable of carrying out other-regarding tasks on mission (Interviews 7, 8, 9).

A recurrent theme in our material is also a wish to acquire a sense of adventure abroad, but that sentiment is coupled with a 'wish to make a difference on the ground' in Afghanistan and elsewhere (Interview 9). A veteran notes that the sense of 'not wanting to miss out' on military adventures abroad and wishing to gain professional experiences to further his career were key motivating factors (Interview 7). However, he did not perceive those sentiments as being inconsistent with his overall wish to 'assist locals in need' (*ibid.*). What is more, 'doing good' is generally seen as a collective effort that is conducted 'in collaboration with one's comrades' (Interview 9; see also Statens Offentliga Utredningar 2014).

Having investigated the broad discursive themes prevalent in a selection of veteran stories we can now return to the question whether such individual ethical reflections tend to intersect with the meta-narrative of the Swedish military as a 'force for good' (Bergman 2004) wedded to the protection of humanity at large (Bergman Rosamond 2012)? Having compared the peace and cosmopolitan logic of the Swedish military self-narrative with the broad themes prevalent in our veteran material we suggest that there is a shared commitment amongst individual veterans and military institutions to global security, peace, and justice, themes that are broadly cosmopolitan. However, the sense of comradeship and the wish to seek a personal adventure, two themes that are present in veteran stories (Interviews 1–9, 2016–2018), do not figure large in official policy discourse (Swedish Defence Research Agency 2014). Here one of our interviewees notes that veteran stories are complex and no one story can capture everybody's embodied military sentiments and experiences (Interview 6). In our concluding remarks, we tease out the main arguments arising from our analysis of individual ethical reflections and the ways in which they can enrich cosmopolitan theory more broadly. In so doing we revisit our claim that cosmopolitanism is rarely entirely other-regarding, but rather mediated and located within distinct experiences.

Concluding remarks

In this article we have sought to further the theoretical conversation between cosmopolitan thought and embodied military experiences, and, in so doing making a case for greater scholarly attention being paid to individual ethical reflection, rather than solely centring the analysis on the normative acts and reasoning of collective military entities. This also involves exploring the ways in which such individual reflections intersect with the overarching Swedish cosmopolitan military self-narrative.

We commenced by locating our reasoning within the study of cosmopolitan obligation more broadly, noting that it is surprisingly void of engagement with the very individuals charged with the task of furthering global justice and peace, with veterans being an instructive example of such persons. We also noted that cosmopolitan notions of obligation are rarely entirely other-regarding, but mediated through a range of interests and concerns. We also accounted for this ethical position by introducing the concept of mediated cosmopolitanism that can capture the complexity of ethical obligation, reasoning, and conduct.

To illustrate our ethical and theoretical positions we conducted a two-step analysis, first, by accounting for the wider political and ethical context of the Swedish military and

its veteran policy more specifically, and second, by unpacking the most prominent themes prevalent in veterans' individual ethical reflections, drawing upon official documentation, illustrative interviews, and other texts. While identifying similarities in ethical expression across the two analytical fields, with veterans deriving some of their normative inspiration from the very logic of Swedish military cosmopolitanism, our investigation suggests that localized embodied experiences were more prone to inspire individual other-regarding acts. As we have shown above there is a pronounced constitutive relationship between veterans' exposure to local suffering and peacebuilding while on mission and their sense of cosmopolitan obligation to distant others suffering from violence and conflict. Our analysis also shows that individual veterans derived ethical inspiration from their everyday engagements in small-scale care work. In such embodied encounters with local people, sentiments of cosmopolitan obligation arose. This insight can contribute to new understandings of what mechanisms drive individual cosmopolitan acts, while reducing the abstraction inherent in cosmopolitan theory, in particular by locating the latter within relational ethical encounters. While a lot of cosmopolitan reasoning concedes that human beings are located within different spheres and loyalties (Erskine 2007, 2008), less has been said about the ways in which individual notions of ethical obligation actually emerge. While focusing on the ethical reflections conducted by veterans who have served beyond borders is rewarding, particularly since such individuals have frequently had to take on board pressing ethical dilemmas pertaining to peace and security, there is no reason why our framework could not be employed in other political, security, and professional contexts.

Moreover, it is our hope that our research can add rigour to research on embodied military experiences by drawing attention to the ways in which individual soldiers' other regarding sentiments and senses of ethical obligation evolve within specific contexts and conditions. Hence, we suggest that research on embodied military experience can be enriched by thoroughly considering with what motivates individual soldiers to engage in other-regarding behaviour. Yet individual cosmopolitan-minded experiences and reflections are varied and there is little evidence to suggest that Swedish veterans adhere to a purist vision of cosmopolitan obligation, free from other motives, interests, and sentiments. As we have laid out above, veterans concede that their actions and ethical reflections were also driven by a wish to serve their nation's broader security interests, assist and protect fellow soldiers as well as seeking personal adventures and professional overseas experiences, while serving the locals on the ground (Interviews 1–9 2016–2017). Our discursive analysis then sustains our theoretical claim that cosmopolitan acts are mediated through a range of interests and motives. Such mediated cosmopolitanism is located within the cosmopolitan selves' personal experiences, stories, and desires. Studying those experiences makes cosmopolitan theory more sensitive to the ways in which ethical obligation arises within the individual and through relational encounters with other human beings.

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Interviews

Interview 1: Acting head of the Swedish Veteran Organisation and veteran, served in Bosnia and Afghanistan, lunch meeting, Stockholm, 1 November 2016.

Interview 2: Head of the Swedish Officers Union and veteran, Union Head Quarters, veteran, Stockholm, 1 November 2016.

Interview 3: Acting Head of the Veteran Unit at the Swedish Armed Forces, veteran and gender advisor in Afghanistan, Stockholm, 3 November 2016.

Interview 4: Psychologist and therapist at the Veteran Unit at the Swedish Armed Forces, Stockholm 3 November 2016.

Interview 5: Interview with high ranking officer with managerial responsibilities at the veteran unit of the Swedish Armed Forces, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Mali, Stockholm, 3 November 2016.

Interview 6: Military Advisor and Veteran, Afghanistan and Bosnia, seconded to the Swedish Ministry for Defence, Stockholm, 3 November 2016.

Interview 7: Officer and veteran, Bosnia and Lebanon in the 1990s, 2 May 2017.

Interview 8: Officer and veteran with extensive experience across international operations, gender expert, 15 June 2017.

Interview 9: Deputy Head of Swedish Veteran Federation, veteran and officer, Bosnia, Afghanistan, telephone interview, 17 November 2017.

Interview 10: Peacekeeping soldier, Bosnia and Cyprus in the 1990s, now police officer in Interpol, 8 May 2019.

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