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Gendered Frames of Violence in Military Heritagization: The Case of Swedish Cold War History

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How are opportunities to critically reflect upon military violence and militarization shaped by museal representations of a country's military history? Inspired by a critical heritage perspective and feminist international relations research, this article contributes to the scholarly discussion of the political implications of military memory making. The aim is to analyse how military violence is framed in official heritagization of the Cold War period in Sweden. Based on fieldwork at three military museums, the article discusses how framings of violence affect opportunities to politically and ethically engage with military issues and the use of force. A central question concerns how gender underpins representations of violence at the museums and how this gendering affects politicization. The analysis discloses that military violence is framed as sacred sacrifice, as 'pure' technology, as play and as (male) omnipotence. The argument made is that such gendered frames obscure and depoliticize problematic aspects of military violence.

KEYWORDS heritage, military museums, violence, gender, Cold War, Sweden

Introduction and aim

'I'd love a good ice cream, but first, some sudden, tragic death'. In the summer of 2014, when Stockholm was flooded with tourists and children on school leave, this advertising message from the Swedish Army Museum draped the city's subways and buses. Another poster from the museum encouraged the public to 'complete' their holiday by ticking '500 years of sudden tragic death' off their to-do list. The already ticked boxes – playfully referencing the notoriously unpleasant Swedish summer weather – included 'cold front', 'mosquito bites', and 'burned barbecue'. The advertisements connected the pleasures and mild annoyances of

holidays with the 'pleasure' of consuming the sufferings of warfare. The apparent smoothness with which such a link can be established raises questions of how museums and other heritage actors present historic and contemporary military violence to the public.

What consequences might museal representations of historic military violence and death have for how warfare and militarization today can be understood and reflected upon? How to present the history of military violence constitutes a recurrent theme in today's curatorial and academic discussion of war memory and heritagization of military conflicts. A central ethical concern is how experiences of war and conflicts can be represented in ways that acknowledge the painful realities of war without sensationalizing, aestheticizing or even glorifying military violence (Muchitsch, 2013; Winter, 2013; Echternkamp & Jaeger, 2019). Scholarly work has shed light upon how musealization/curation of war and military conflict legitimise or normalize violence and war and interrogated in what ways such memory-making can encourage or hamper critical reflexion. This literature demonstrates, for example, how displays of military 'technofetishism' conceal violent destruction and suffering and how museums produce 'our' military/militarization as inherently benign and even natural (Raths, 2013; Shah, 2017; Reeves, 2018a). Another discussion concerns the ways in which military museums and memorials encourage visitors to *feel* and to empathize with victims rather than to reflect upon the social and political aspects of warfare and militarization (Lisle, 2016; Cercel et al., 2019; Åse & Wendt, 2021).

One important issue here concerns the political implications of military history and memory-making. With Maja Zehfuss (2006), this means acknowledging the political and ethical aspects inherent in all evocations of the past and being attentive to the connection between remembrances and policy choices. In relation to the history of war and conflict, Duncan Bell (2006: 3) underlines how representations of a violent past 'influence contemporary political attitudes and identifications, and […] these dynamic processes shape prominent aspects of world politics'. For example, past military conflicts are frequently used to rationalize engaging in contemporary warfare or rearmament. This means that memorialization of past violence may influence decisions on whether to go to war (Wellington, 2017: 7). Ultimately, as Tua Sandman puts it, 'how violence is rendered "seen" and "known" in the public sphere' is a question related not only to our understandings of the use of force but also to ethical and political decision-making about sending people off to war to kill and risk being killed (2019: 2). Recently, feminist international relation (IR) research has contributed to this discussion by theorizing the interface between security politics, memory and gender. More specifically, attention has been directed to the ways in which notions of masculinity/femininity and sexuality support the constructions of the military past and how this gendering affects understandings of security and possibilities for politicization (Szitanyi, 2015; Altınay & Pető, 2016; Welland, 2017; Danilova & Purnell, 2020; Reeves & Heath-Kelly, 2020).

This article contributes to this discussion of military memory-making by investigating and critically reflecting upon how a history of military violence, bipolar conflict and militarization is represented in recent official/state sponsored Swedish initiatives to preserve the memory of the Cold War. I investigate how military violence is framed – made visible and 'known' – at three military museums, with specific attention to how gender underpins such heritagization. I also engage with the question of how these framings condition critical reflection on historic and contemporary conflicts and militarism. The analysis focuses on how physical violence and death are directly displayed (such as stories of soldiers being killed) and on how violent capacities are demonstrated (for example, in displays of military national protection). However, I also, with inspiration from feminist and critical military scholars such as Cohn (1987), Tidy and Turner (2020) and Shah (2017), aim at capturing more indirect forms of violence ingrained in military narratives and displays that, for example, produce technological rationality, intimacy or domesticity.

While the construction of military heritage has been thoroughly investigated in postwar societies (Macdonald, 2009; Gegner & Ziino, 2012; Rampley, 2012), these milieus are only marginally examined in countries that lack extensive experience with war/warring legacy, such as Sweden. This country is distinguished by a peace narrative, as evidenced in the often reiterated phrase that Sweden has not been to war for more than 200 years. Even though the country's neutrality doctrine has been formally abandoned, Sweden is still non-aligned, and national self-understanding relies heavily on ideas of peacefulness and neutrality (Agius, 2006; Åse & Wendt, 2019b). Nonetheless, Sweden has been involved in several UN military operations since the 1950s and lately also in NATO-led missions, such as the one in Afghanistan (2002–2012). During the Cold War, a large-scale rearmament was initiated in the country, and the period was characterized as one of 'deep militarization' (Kronsell, 2012). Military strength was combined with a pronounced ideal of non-aggressiveness and of military capacities only to be used in self-defence. Such tensions between a massive militarization and a self-perception connected to non-belligerence makes Sweden an intriguing case of states coming to terms with their military history.

In the first section below, I spell out how the analysis relates to critical heritage studies (CHS) and to feminist IR. Following an overview of the Swedish Cold War heritage context, the subsequent sections present the empirical analysis in terms of four different *framings* of military violence found at the heritage sites – violence as sacrality, as technology, as play and as male omnipotence – each of which conceptualizes a distinct and central mode of making violence visible and tangible to visitors. The final section elaborates the discussion on how these gendered representations of the (violent) past affect possibilities to politically engage with military issues and the use of force.

Perspectives on military violence as heritage

In critical heritage studies, a widely held perception is that 'the past' is always a story informed by the present and that the ways collective memories are shaped inform future courses of action (Harrison, 2013; cf. Bogumil, 2015). This means that what is at stake in research about heritagization is not to establish 'how things were' but to analyse how memory and history are mediated and created in present social and political contexts and with what consequences (Smith, 2008; Harrison, 2013: 38). In this text, I adhere to Sharon Macdonald's understanding of heritage as the active shaping of the past into something visitable, 'turning the past into The Past' (2013: 18) and museum narratives as authoritative *claims* about a certain common past.

Underlining the interrelated processes of constructions of memory and history with collective identity formation (cf. McClintock, 1995), several scholars conclude that memories of war are cornerstones in most narratives about nationhood (Ashplant et al., 2009; Hutchinson, 2009). According to this perspective, military museums are important not as providers of historical truths but as key sites where 'master narratives' of the past contribute to the (re)production of collective/national identities (Echternkamp & Jaeger, 2019). In the feminist IR literature, an important argument is that such connections among war, memory and politics are deeply gendered and that a feminist perspective is necessary to grasp these linkages (Altınay & Pető, 2016). Feminist scholars have long revealed how war making and militarism are intertwined with masculinity (Enloe, 2007; Hearn, 2012; Higate, 2018) and that the concept of security relies upon gendered, sexualized and racialized protector/protected relations (Young, 2003; Sjoberg, 2016; Wibben, 2016), where the legitimacy of war relies upon the idea that 'honourable' men safeguard their women and children from the enemy.

In recent years, this feminist theorizing has increasingly investigated gendered aspects of war memory and heritage. The literature shows how musealisation of military memory often 'works towards prioritizing the military rationality and aggressive combat masculinity' (Danilova & Purnell, 2020: 290). Military memorialization tends to silence women's experiences and naturalize violent conflict as an inherently male domain (Noakes, 2009; Graff-McRae, 2017). Research has also underlined the importance of investigating how military memorialization relies upon colonialism and racialized gender notions (Basham, 2016; Reeves & Heath-Kelly, 2020; Tidy & Turner, 2020), reinforcing military masculinity as distinctly ethno-national (Novikova, 2011). In military memory-making, the (native) combat soldier, prepared to die to protect 'his' women and children, is presented as the 'ultimate citizen' (Szitanyi, 2015: 265). When sacrificial death is elevated and beautified, the brutality of war violence is obscured and depoliticized (Wendt, 2019; cf. Welland, 2017). Military memory-making thus constructs militarized, racialized and masculinized citizenship, where women are stereotypically portrayed as idealized passive victims or mourning mothers lacking political

agency (Repo, 2008; Åse & Wendt, 2019a). Such tropes establish gender hierarchies, where women appear 'naturally' and legitimately subordinate to men. In line with the perspectives outlined above, this paper analyses how gender notions enter into negotiations of military history and draws out the political implications of such (gendered) heritagization.

The context: Cold War heritage in Sweden

During the last decade, the Swedish state, as well as private and commercial actors, has taken great interest in military remnants from the Cold War period. The end of the bipolar world order and the subsequent radical downsizing of the Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) left numerous fortresses, bunkers and military bases abandoned across the country. In 2008, a state-sponsored network of 23 selected military sites across the country was founded (the Swedish Military Heritage Hands-on History Museums, SMHA, today encompassing 27 sites), representing typical military expressions of the Cold War era. Sweden's Cold War period was one of high military expenditures, a large domestic weapons industry and weapons exports (Åselius, 2005). The strategy of 'Total Defence' involved state institutions, companies and the majority of citizens (Cronqvist, 2012). Despite this history, Sweden has a strong reputation as intrinsically non-belligerent and invested in international disarmament (Jonter & Rosengren, 2014). For a country identifying as peaceful (Sandman, 2019), representing a Cold War history of massive militarization is potentially challenging.

Another problematic contradiction concerns the history of male conscription with its associated ideals of masculine protection vis-à-vis the importance of gender equality for contemporary national self-understanding. Mandatory male conscription (inactivated in 2010 but partly reinstated for both men and women in 2016) for over a century educated virtually every male Swedish citizen in military masculinity and values such as strength, boldness, and 'controlled' ruthlessness (Malm, 2019: 91). In Sweden, the gendered protector-protected dynamic has been connected to the combination of conscription and the doctrine of neutrality. During the Cold War, upholding neutrality was seen as conditioned by a strong capacity for violence (Agius, 2006), imagined to deter intruders. This security doctrine produced 'neutral warriors' (Kronsell, 2012) who should engage in violence only in self-defence. The renouncing of offensive violence and proximity to (feminized) passivity charged this military masculinity with gender ambivalence (Åse, 2016). Even so, the 'neutral warrior' was masculinized in terms of embodying the loyal protector of the people, and a central idea was that boys were transformed into citizens when fulfilling their duty to preserve democracy and the welfare state (Sturfelt 2014: 33). In this way, the practice and meaning of Swedish citizenship was deeply gender differentiated. In relation to Sweden's contemporary self-perception as particularly invested in gender equality (Jezierska & Towns, 2018; Strand, 2019) – recently expressed in its renowned feminist foreign policy – the masculinized

militarized history of the Cold War constitutes a potentially 'dissonant' heritage (cf. Dittmer & Waterton, 2017).

Materials and methodological reflections

This paper builds upon fieldwork conducted at three Swedish Cold War military museums that was carried out within the multidisciplinary project 'Making a Military Heritage. Gender and Nation in Sweden's Cold War History' (2019–2021). The sites are members of the state sponsored military heritage network described above and represent what Harrison (2013: 14) conceptualizes as *official heritage*: 'authorized by the state and motivated by some form of legislation or written charter.' In that sense, I consider the museums as producers of authoritative 'claims' about the past. The sites analysed capture a variety of heritagizations in terms of military branches, location, ownership and type of museum. The Air Force Museum in Linköping, run by the National Swedish Museums of Military History, can be described as professionalized and educational. The museum hosts two permanent exhibitions connected to the Cold War. The first focuses on the Soviet downing of a Swedish DC-3 plane in 1952. The second presents the development of Swedish defence and military aircraft, as well as displays home settings from the period. The other two museums have a more entrepreneurial leaning. The 'experience centre' Aeroseum in Göteborg, located in a vast Cold War underground military airplane hangar, displays aircraft and exhibitions related to Swedish military history and provides experience-oriented activities, such as flying simulators. Finally, Arsenalen in Strängnäs is a private foundation that, in addition to exhibiting a large number of tanks, offers a built-up replica of a Cold War shelter bunker and a computer game section.

My analysis does not aim to give a comprehensive overview of the Cold War narratives in these extensive exhibitions or to perform a structural comparison of the sites. It is delimited to conceptualizing different ways in which past military violence and death are made present in the museums. The ambition is to uncover, with Judith Butler (2016: 17), the 'selective and differential framing of violence'. In her understanding, frames are to be seen as operations of power, seeking 'to contain, convey, and determine what is seen' (p. 20). Frames should not be understood as merely regulating visual experiences but as affective technologies that produce our abilities to apprehend, and ultimately, ethically and politically relate to, military violence (Koureas, 2018).

Since museums typically make use of a range of different materials, elements and curatorial techniques, scholars often use a combination of research practices (cf. Tidy & Turner, 2020). In line with this, I have used varying techniques, such as observations, analysis of narratives and visuals, the curatorial use of physical space, light and sound and informal and formal interviews with visitors and museum staff. Primarily, however, I focus on artefacts and textual and visual exhibition materials, with attention to the objects themselves and the way objects are

presented. Importantly, I also pay attention to events and 'facts not presented' (Bogumil et al. 2015) to capture aspects that are 'unseen' in this heritagization (cf. Harrison, 2013). To be able to detect what is missing, it has been vital not only with an extensive reading up on the context (academic as well as non-academic work) but also to actively reflect upon silent presuppositions and taken-for-granted notions, in line with critical feminist 'denaturalizing' approaches (Kronsell, 2006; Åse & Wendt, 2019b). For example, this means consciously reflecting upon who is included in the national 'we' in military memory-making and whose experiences never seem to 'fit' in these narratives. One way of doing this is, according to Audrey Reeves (2018b), to acknowledge the researcher's positionality and deliberately (and critically) use this as a 'resource'. As a native Swede, I can be seen as a 'national insider' in relation to the sites visited. While this position clearly comes with a risk of reproducing national assumptions and blind spots (Wendt, 2020), it also has the potential to enable an exploration of the often emotionalised curatorial strategies by which the national subject is invoked and called upon (cf. Dittmer & Waterton, 2017). In line with Rech and Williams (2016), I aimed to, as an 'observant participant' (p. 277), take part in visitors' regular activities (to follow the museum trails, listen to guided tours, visit the museum shop, etc.). I took notes of my intellectual reflections as well as of reactions and feelings, for example familiarity, safety or detachment. This material could later be theorized and critically reflected upon, for example, in terms of how different representations naturalize certain subject positions, thereby producing various inclusions/exclusions (Lisle, 2016; Reeves, 2018b; Tidy & Turner, 2020). Since museums are clearly 'locations of embodied experiences' (Tidy & Turner, 2020: 120), it is also vital to consider the forms of physical interaction (for example, touching/not touching, entering into or playing with) the museums' displays invite (Dittmer & Waterton, 2017). The way the visitor is *bodily* positioned in the heritage context – how, for example, what physical movements are encouraged – affects how history/memory is experienced, as well as what form of (critical) reflection is made possible (Reeves, 2018a).

Finally, I conducted a number of interviews with managers, curators and museum guides at the three different sites (visited 2019 and 2020). While these have been important for contextualizing and to gain a deeper understanding of the sites, these interviews are only included as complementary material in this article when they shed light upon curatorial choices or dilemmas connected to presenting military violence to the public.

Framing violence as sacrality

The most elaborate exhibit of Cold War military death is found at the Air Force museum in Linköping, where an entire separate and permanent exhibition covers the Soviet downing of a Swedish DC-3 plane in 1952 that killed all eight crewmembers. This exhibition's centrepiece is the salvaged plane wreck – not located until 2003 – placed in a dimly lit room below ground, where blueish colours and

electronic music give an immediate sensation of descending below sea level. Even though the state-funded museum has a strict historical and educational assignment, and a 'proper' memorial for the dead crewmembers resides in the Air Force Memorial Hall in Stockholm, the exhibition has a certain commemorative aura. The wreck, placed as found on the seafloor, is surrounded by glass, making touching it impossible. The object with all its deteriorated parts is suggestively lit, invoking associations with a grave or a sarcophagus. The atmosphere is sombre and sacral. One museum guide related that visitors, even children, become still and lower their voices when entering this part of the museum (interview, 31/1, 2019). According to the museum manager, the ambition was to signal distance and respect, since the plane is 'the place where they died' (interview, 31/1, 2019).

In the adjacent rooms, detailed descriptions are provided of the violent incident, the many years of searching for the plane, and the lack of state support to the relatives. There are also representations of the belated societal recognition of the dead, as when the aged wives of the crewmembers received the highest military medal in honour of their husbands' sacrifice for the nation. The combination of an ambition to educate and preserve Cold War items and experiences with a will to honour the dead turns this exhibition into what Winter (2013) has termed a 'semi-sacred' museal place. Such a mixture of the preservation of history and the memorialization of sacrifice distinguishes many contemporary war museums in Europe (Muchitsch, 2013). Memorials and museums perform similar functions, Patrizia Violi writes, contending that the boundaries are 'more blurred than overlapping' (2017: 72). Notably, the DC-3 exhibition informs the visitor on the domestic historical context as well as on the diplomatic consequences of the event, and there is a pronounced critique of the state's lack of support to the widows. However, the curatorial mode of elevating violent death, together with the powerful grave-like display of the wreck, invites the visitor to feel grief, reverence and gratitude and to empathize with the bereaved, rather than inciting reflections upon Cold War history, the use of military violence or militarization (Åse & Wendt, 2021). As Debbie Lisle (2016) argues, when commemorative museum displays call upon visitors to identify with victims and inhabit a position of reverence, this simultaneously discourages critical reflection. Moreover, framing violence as sacrality idealizes military death, where dying for one's country emerges as the ultimate citizenship virtue and as an ideal citizenship masculinity (cf. Szitanyi, 2015).

It is also worth reflecting upon whose military death, what types of deaths are made visible and heroized and what violence remains hidden. While the Swedish Cold War is often described as 'the war that never came', there was no lack of military violence or death during the period. Swedish soldiers were dispatched to a number of war zones, for example, in the Congo or Cyprus. Sixty persons from the Swedish International Force were killed during such missions from 1954 to 1990. As many as 537 pilots and navigators died in accidents in the Swedish Air Force during the Cold War (Jacobsson & Ingesson Thoor, 2019), and there were countless accidents and deaths among the approximately 50,000 men conscripted

yearly. The overall statistics are difficult to apprehend, but a debate in the middle of the 1980s referred to 3290 accidents and 19 deaths (7 in service) among conscripted soldiers in just one year (Private Bill 1984/85:596), indicating a large number of injuries and deaths during this time period.

In the museums, such violence is virtually invisible, indicating the highly selective framings of military death. Representations of death and violence in the Swedish conscription army are missing, and deaths in the international force are invisible or only briefly mentioned. In Linköping's Air Force museum, however, there is a diagram titled 'A dangerous work', showing that the number of deaths of airmen dramatically decreased from 231 to 24 per year during the Cold War. The most recent number of deaths is represented by a tiny red dot. The diagram is accompanied by a picture illustrating one of the plane crashes, one in which, as the sign states, 'everyone survived'. Death and personal suffering are visually suppressed and inserted into a story of rapid technological progress. One way to interpret the difference between how the DC-3 victims and the 'domestic' airmen deaths are represented is that the latter displays the disturbing cost of militarization (even in peacetime) and of developing the Swedish military-industrial complex. The many home-front causalities indicate a disquieting national failure, a lack of protection of 'our own'. Compared to the DC-3 deaths that resulted from foreign fire directed at 'our' national protectors – and consequently translatable to 'traditional' military sacrifice – the domestic deaths constitute an uncomfortable kind of violence, not as readily possible to heroize and connect to an idealized citizenship masculinity.

Moreover, there is an apparent lack of representations of violence perpetrated by Swedes. As several scholars point out, musealizations of violent conflicts seldom represent *actual* war violence and avoid connecting the national collective with a perpetrator identity (Daugbjerg, 2017; Welland, 2017; Koureas, 2018). While enemy violence is clearly visible in the shattered DC-3 wreck – thoroughly displayed in its disintegrating entirety, with the marks of hostile fire explicitly pointed out by information signs – neither the violence inflicted on others by Swedish soldiers and weapons (for example, during international missions) nor violence inflicted on 'our own' citizens is made visible and tangible in the exhibitions.

Framing violence as technology

A significant part of the exhibitions is dedicated to the display of weapons, framing military vehicles and weapons systems as the main attractions. When passing the massive concrete (atomic bomb-proof) blast-door of the Aeroseum and walking into the huge subterranean hangar – used to hide airplanes during the Cold War – the visitor is met by a long row of military airplanes and helicopters with their fronts turned towards the visitor, stretching further into the mountain than the eyes can follow. At Arsenalen, the tanks are clearly the centrepieces of the exhibition, and the powerful visual impression of the collection is combined with detailed

technical information on the size, weight and technical specifications of the vehicles and of the weapons systems they were designed to carry:

> Maximum range for the gun is 25 km (15,5 miles). The magazine contains 14 complete rounds, which could be fired within 45 s. A new cassette with 14 rounds was hoisted on board using a crane, an operation that took two minutes. Each round weighs 47 kilo.

The exhibitions are void of accounts and visualizations of the damage these weapons can cause to human bodies. Nevertheless, as Nisha Shah pointed out in her analysis of the Canadian War Museums (2017), violence actually resides in the technical details of the weapons displayed, focusing on the range, speed, fire-power, number of bullets discharged per minute, etc. However, these objects are not primarily *perceived* as violent. The weapons are to a large degree presented as singular, clean, orderly and technologically intriguing objects, void of context, in a manner that makes them appear as 'mere' technology (Shah, 2017: 552). As Ralf Raths argues (2013: 86), 'the technical aura of the objects […] is so dominating that people tend to be overwhelmed by it'. The intellectual effect induced is a comparison of the vehicles' technical qualities (p. 92) rather than reflection on the historical context and the practices of war making.

Presenting military violence in technological terms allows *the machine* to function as 'a 'yard-stick' for military 'rationality'', writes Anders Malm (2019: 93). When violence is presented as rational, automatized and value-free, killing and the use of violence are separated from emotions and irrationality as well as from human responsibility, he argues. Such constructions thus shift military agency from persons to technology itself, a maneuver that builds upon a supposed neutrality of technology (cf. Masters, 2005). Military violence is normalized, and the moral and political dilemmas connected to the use of force and to the act of killing are obscured. Another dimension of this is how military technology shapes the enemy as a *target* to eliminate. The focus on the material capacity of the military machine consequently dehumanizes the enemy and 'anaesthetizes any critical stance towards the consequences of armed intervention' (Wasinski, 2019: 354). The combination of technology-as-neutral and military object fetishism – the urge to be near 'the stuff of killing' (Winter, 2013: 37) – leads to museal representations of military violence rarely reaching beyond evoking a sense of awe and object fascination.

The narratives of the Cold War exhibitions build upon a chronology of steady technological progress and frame the improvements in weapons and vehicles in terms of engineering achievements, frequently linked to *national* competence. Swedish engineers are referred to as world leading and as sources of national pride. Specific models of military vehicles are displayed as proxies for the nation, and the weapons technologies themselves can embody the strength, skill and modernity of the nation (Masters, 2005). A large film screen at the Aeroseum, flanked by Swedish national flags, shows a film of the attack plane Jas 39 Gripen flying over

the mountains, forests and archipelagos of Sweden. The film lacks commentary and representations of human beings, and the visuals are accompanied solely by the national anthem, sung a cappella. Arsenalen shows a series of documentaries on tank models, in which one Swedish model is singled out as particularly technologically advanced and referred to as a 'national heritage'. Such discursive constructions enable visitors to feel national pride in advanced technology systems without necessarily having to recognize the violent and deadly aspects inherent in weapons systems.

The display of powerful Swedish technology and engineering skills can also be read as confirming masculinity. Feminist research has pointed out how constructing the national self in terms of outstanding technological capabilities underlines masculine potency and draws attention to 'the fusion of techno-scientific discourse with discursive constructions of militarized masculinity' (Masters, 2005: 119). One interpretation is that the engineering achievements counter the threat of feminization implied in the position of neutrality as well as of the Cold War lack of Swedish military agency. 'The war that never came' gave few opportunities for masculine combative military heroism. Rather, many military practices connoted inactivity: waiting, spying, and hiding. In this context, technological superiority may be seen as a way to restore Swedish masculinity, enabling the country to emerge as potent, strong and active while simultaneously retaining its position as a peace agent (cf. Rosengren, 2020).

Framing violence as play

All exhibitions feature representations and activities directed towards families and children. Recurring events include family-oriented days on which weapons and uniforms are put on parade and children can take rides in various military vehicles. The museums hold birthday parties amongst the fighter airplanes or tanks and provide advanced flying simulator systems (where screens are installed inside genuine aircraft), and the Aeroseum offers an elaborate playground inside the hangar. Children can, for example, ascend a tower from which they can either climb into the pilot's cab of the J35 Draken or slide down the bright red slide. One of the fighter jets, exhibited equipped with missiles, has been rebuilt to enable children to enter its belly. 'Climb into Viggen! The best hideout in the mountain!' a sign states. The museum shop at Arsenalen advertises a wide range of clothing with militaristic designs (such as camouflage-patterned baby overalls, green/grey for boys and pink/white for girls) and a variety of military toys. There is also a specially made Lego-inspired building kit of one of the most renowned Swedish tanks displayed at the museum. These are just a few examples of how war materials and vehicles are turned into attractive items to play in and with.

Proximity to military action and violent potency can also provide a thrill and serve as an exciting backdrop for activities and festivities for adults. The Aeroseum's facilities can be rented for different kinds of events and parties. For an

additional cost, guests can enjoy the opening of the massive atom bomb-proof gates, a spectacle accompanied by smoke screens, suggestive lighting, and the soundtrack from Top Gun (the famous movie starring Tom Cruise as an Air Force pilot). Such activities can be connected to a general trend in the construction of war museums as 'performative spaces' wherein the past is experienced rather than reflected upon (Echternkamp & Jaeger, 2019: 9). The reconfigurations of the weapons into toys and as part of entertaining activities can also be interpreted, with Carol Cohn (1987), as the domestication of war. The weapons appear unharmful and innocent, which in a sense 'tames' and makes familiar – or even intimate (Tidy & Turner, 2020) – the violence and destructiveness of weapons systems. For example, during a guided tour at the Aeroseum, a group of preschool children were invited to 'pat' the airplanes, as if they were pets or cuddly toys. The museum staff, however, defended the pedagogical advantage of children being allowed to touch and play with the exhibited items (staff interview, 22/3 2019). From their perspective, using all the senses – including touching and smelling – makes military history 'more real' to children, and such activities function as an important entry-point for discussing and better understanding historical and technological issues.

Even if framing violence as play is a central feature of the Cold War displays, such heritagization is at times contested by certain military heritage communities. Reconfiguring military items, charging them with cuteness, fun or domesticity, can be perceived as making the sites 'less real' and obscuring the everyday experiences of soldiers. There is a tension between the preservation of perceived 'authentic' military representations of the Cold War and efforts to make this heritage accessible and attractive to a larger audience, for example, to women and children. One informant expressed discontent that people are interested in military vehicles only when they are paraded around with banners and plumes in connection with festivities (staff interview, 24/9 2019). Such 'show-offs' are seen as hiding military and violent realities – what the vehicles and weapons were for and how they were planned to be used. These conflicts can also be understood as negotiations of gender and heritage, where a soldier 'boots-on-the ground' perspective and masculinized (violent) authenticity is threatened by traits and activities coded feminine: the domestic/intimate, the child-friendly, and the act of being dressed up to be (passively) put on display.

However, the museums also display aspects of play that bring back action and violence that help retain a masculine aura of traditional warfare. Arsenalen, cooperating with a Belarussian company, provides a number of computers on which visitors can play the game World of Tanks. For the game, 450 'iconic' tanks were recreated in detail – some of these tanks are also exhibited at the museum. In exchange for access to study and film the tanks, the company provides the museum with computer equipment. Through such offerings, the museum hopes to attract new categories of visitors to the museum (staff interview, 24/9 2019). The attraction is connected to active participation in combat-like and violent scenarios. The game invites the visitor to 'jump into the gunner's seat and storm the

battlefield'. Intense combat is promised, and the setup 'begs you to keep hitting the Battle button'.

An intricate interplay between game/play and the 'real' artefacts is at work here. Some of the exhibited objects have signs inviting the visitor to 'test this tank upstairs in World of Tanks'. Specific tanks particularly appreciated in the game have also been put on display because of this popularity (staff interview, 24/9 2019). The game thus becomes an active heritage actor, affecting what history/material becomes visible. The actual tanks 'charge' the game with their technical accuracy, authenticity and material closeness to war, while the game invests the tanks with war-like military action and male (violent) agency. In this game, access to violence, its performance and its control are offered in a way that simultaneously recreates the sense of a strong and active national collective. The visitor/player can choose an authentic Swedish tank, pick an all-male Swedish crew and 'keep hitting' the battle button. This can be seen as a way to illustrate, and for the visitor, to feel, 'our' powerful and violent agency, what we *could* have done (even though during the Cold War we never had to).

Underlining the role of affective and embodied experiences at military museums, Dittmer and Waterton (2017: 47) point to the 'imagined corporeal link' established between the visitor and the soldier in different representational technologies at military museums. Related to the examples above, invitations to play can be understood as invitations to feel and physically inhabit the position of a Swedish soldier by climbing into the helicopter, crawling into the pilot's seat, or manoeuvring military vehicles in simulators and computer games. In this way, visitors become positioned *as* military masculine subjects and predisposed to identify and empathize with the national soldier (Dittmer & Waterton, 2017: 65). Thus, violence as play contributes to establishing a national militaristic perspective, from which military violence and militarization appear fun and unproblematic. This analysis demonstrates the importance of analysing embodied, material and sensual aspects of framings of military violence, as well as of critically scrutinizing the ways in which military objects are turned into play, toys and other desirable consumer goods. While the player/the visitor is offered a certain closeness through the invitation to physically inhabit a military perspective, the construction of war violence as a 'fantasy' also creates a safe distance 'masking the violence of military worlds' and the very real destruction of bodies in war (Rech, 2015: 541).

Framing violence as (male) omnipotence

As previously noted, the foreign policy of neutrality shaped the Cold War understanding of the Swedish military as defensive, nonviolent and professional. Military violence was depicted as 'a controllable and delimited product of military practice' (Malm, 2019: 92). While *access* to violence was a prerequisite of the concept of neutrality, *the use of* violence could not be too obvious or aggressive. SAF's involvement in international military missions has primarily been framed as (non-violent)

peacekeeping and regularly characterized by an unwillingness to disclose violent incidents (Sandman, 2019). The notion of neutrality as conditioned by a developed capacity for violence is reflected in several ways in the museums. Representations of not only technologically advanced but also omnipresent military capability are common, for instance, in the form of the constantly vigilant state, watching over the whole territory. One example is a map of Sweden presented at the Aeroseum. The country is covered by overlapping circles, demonstrating virtually total radar coverage. Another picture is a schematic overview of the Swedish air defence sector during the Cold War, where the territory – represented as forests, green fields and coastline – is crammed with military installations on the ground, below the ground and in the air, complete with arrows connecting the sites. The impression is created of an all-encompassing military protective capacity, permeating the (different layers of the) land. The narrative in this museum is characterized by recurring declarations of the preparedness of the armed forces. One sign states that a weapons system 'ALWAYS was ready for action, every day of the year'. Photographs of airplanes and bases are described (also with capital letters) as 'ON HIGHEST ALERT, ALWAYS READY, in summer as well as winter'.

Such representations, together with the massive display of the long row of military airplanes brooding inside the hangar, create an impression of potency and an extensive capacity for violence. The raw power of nature merges with demonstrated engineering skills: the enormous size of the carved-out underground hangar (protected by the massive blast doors), the mountain sheltering an armada of powerful machines. Military violence appears submerged in nature, residing inside the mountain like a sleeping volcano. At the same time, this 'natural' volcanic power is controlled – possible to activate whenever needed and manage rationally. This interconnection of nature, advanced technology and violence is a powerful display of male omnipotence, where not only access to violence but also the conquering and controlling of nature itself become signs of masculinity (Cohn, 1987; Lloyd, 1992; McClintock, 1995). At Arsenalen, the powerful mountain trope returns in a way that explicitly nationalizes this omnipotence. In the museum's replica of a Cold War shelter, an informational sign links the period's military activities to a long Swedish history of a deep, almost mythological relationship to the mountain:

> In Sweden, we have made a living from the mountain since time immemorial. The treasures taken from its depth built an entire country. During the Cold War, the mountain came to protect us. All around the country, the most peculiar constructions took form. From north to south, the mountains were hollowed. Minor shelters for a few persons, operation rooms and gigantic naval bases were blasted into the Swedish granite.

In this narrative, the mountain appears as a 'natural protector', keeping 'us' both safe and prosperous, in modern and premodern times. The ancient and (granite) solid mountain is intertwined with economic and military capacities, while the

national collective is constructed as a resilient and archaic community firmly attached to nature. These linkages make 'our' way of (militarily) protecting ourselves appear as natural and incontestable as the mountain itself. In a similar way, the military is connected to a national, historical community when constructed as self-evidently part of our traditions. For example, the Aeroseum shows pictures of how a military helicopter flies each year into the city of Gothenburg to put the large public Christmas tree in place. The museum also displays the helicopter that in 1959 brought the world champion in boxing, Ingemar Johansson, 'home', transporting him to the city's main sports arena where a cheering crowd waited. When military and military violence appears and unquestionably feels 'ours' by being part of our history and way of life, it appears normal, self-evident and righteous.

Concluding remarks

As the empirical analysis discloses, military violence perpetrated by 'us', as well as the tangible and physical effects of 'our' weapons systems, fall outside of the museums' framings of violence. Military deaths, such as the massive loss of airmen during the Cold War, are to a large extent nonexistent. Following Sandman (2019), this can be described as the *disappearance* of violence – a disconnection of (offensive) violence from 'the Swedish self'. The way the museums retain a thoroughly nationalized perspective on the Cold War – inviting the visitor to share 'our' national history – also 'un-sees' the violence perpetrated by Swedish soldiers as well as the massive violent destruction characterizing the era in many parts of the world. In several respects, however, military violence and death are reconfigured into something else rather than rendered invisible; they are framed as sacred sacrifice, as 'pure' technology, as play and thrill, and as (male) omnipotence. As demonstrated above, these framings can serve to make violence fun, neutral, familiar or natural, obscuring problematic aspects of military violence in general and in relation to a Swedish identity centred on peacefulness in particular.

   This heritagization of the violent past also 'un-sees' women and largely equals national experiences with male experiences. The dominance of men and masculine expressions is as conspicuous as it is taken for granted. As argued by Spike Peterson (2010), the common sense privileging of masculinity and foundational perceptions of femininity as 'naturally' in need of masculine protection perform important political work in normalizing and naturalizing violence. The analysis above demonstrates how the reconciliation of prominent Swedish peace narratives with deep militarization and capacity for violence relies on the naturalizing power of gender configurations, for example, in the framing of violence as a 'natural' masculine omnipotence (a Swedish hyperadvanced, masculinized technological capacity to control violence and nature itself). Here, (our rational and defensive) masculinity can be seen as a 'resource' (Hutchings, 2008) in the construction of national violence as intrinsically benign.

Such constructions can also be interpreted as protecting the national self from feminization: the non-agency/passivity connected both to the neutral/defensive stance and to the position of waiting and hiding that characterized the Swedish Cold War experience. At the same time, as 'our' (masculine) military comes forth as rational and technological rather than aggressively violent, problems and dilemmas related to militarism and warfare disappear. The visitor is invited to admire continuous national-technological progress and to re-enact the position of a *protected* citizen subject. While dispositions of reverence, awe and gratitude are readily available (cf. Lisle, 2016), there is a lack of interpellations to the citizen as a *democratic* and deliberative subject, and the fundamentally ethical and political questions concerning the use of force and the militarization of society become intangible.

In her analysis of the UK Imperial War Museum, Welland (2017) pointed out how enemy violence is depicted as inherently vicious and incomprehensible, while 'our' military violence is displayed as deeply recognizable. Violence emerges as self-evident and natural and is therefore easily turned into justifiable violence. My point here is that the museal representations of connections among the military, nature and national (historical) identity create emotional recognition (through familiar tropes of 'our' nature and traditions) that obscures the political dimensions of military violence and security political choices. When violence is nationalized and becomes an indistinguishable part of who we *are*, it is depoliticized – in the sense that different perspectives and conflicts are concealed and removed from the sphere of democratic negotiation (cf. Jenkins, 2011). Inherently political decisions – such as partaking in war missions or engaging in rearmament and weapons production – come forth as self-evident and beyond questioning. It seems natural that the military and more weapon keep us safe. In the Swedish Cold War context, such depoliticizing constructions can function both as a way to produce the country's 'deep' masculine militarization as necessary and as a given in spite of a national self-perception leaning on peacefulness and gender equality. In this way, 'dissonance' and potential contentious contradictions in the country's military heritagization can be dissolved.

In conclusion, the analysis shows how Swedish Cold War military heritagization predisposes visitors to inhabit a national militaristic perspective. Masculinized strength and military violence as forms of protection emerge as central in the construction of 'our' history and identity. Analysing military heritage from a feminist perspective not only helps us see the centrality of gender in societal constructions of the military past but also brings out *how* gender configurations – as in the seemingly naturalness of 'our' men's military protection capacities – help justify and depoliticize issues of violence and war.

As recent Swedish politics reveals, such militarized tropes are also easily (re)activated, as in the radical and swift security politics shift from downsizing and internationalism to rearmament, reinstating conscription and the return of a Cold War rhetoric of territorial defence and the Russian threat. With virtually no political

opposition or critical debate, the Swedish government announced a 40 per cent increase in defence appropriations in 2020, presented as the largest investment in the armed forces since the 1950s (Hultqvist, 2021). This highlights the importance of investigating military heritagization and critically reflecting upon how representations of the violent past influence contemporary understandings of threat and security.

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