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White Women. White Nation. White Cosmopolitanism: Swedish Migration between the National and the Global

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ABSTRACT
Emerging from the concepts of white cosmopolitanism and white cosmopolitan femininity, this article analyses “cosmopolitan narratives” of Swedish migrant women who lived abroad for an extended period and eventually returned to Sweden. Based on eight months’ ethnographic work, including 46 in-depth interviews with migrants who had returned in Sweden, the article explores how national boundaries are both maintained and traversed in the construction of a “world citizen”. It is argued that the women’s self-identification with a cosmopolitan ethos is structured by whiteness, nationality, and class that grants uninterrupted mobility and “worldliness”. As symbolic bearers of the Swedish nation, national ideals act on the white women’s bodies internationally, in ways that both uphold and re-inscribe the nation into the global. Thus, apart from obscuring global inequalities, white cosmopolitan femininity is imbricated in both national and global politics as a place where global structures reconnect with the white nation, thereby enabling Swedish migrants to re-install themselves into contemporary global settings as self-defined cosmopolitan subjects.

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Introduction
Cosmopolitanism is intrinsically associated with the traversing of national boundaries and confining borders (Vertovec & Cohen, 2002). Broadly, the concept has come to define a condition of contemporary times, overriding dichotomies such as global/local or transnational/national, and performing the function of a “globalization from within” (Beck & Sznaider, 2006), along with an ethic that rejects conventional views of defined national, community, or cultural boundaries (Appiah, 2007). In this sense, the concept of cosmopolitanism can be loosely described as an imperative of becoming “a citizen of the world”, involving certain ethics, values, a stance of openness towards differences, multiple affiliations, and levels of civilization (Appiah, 2007; Hannerz, 1990; Nava, 2007; Vertovec & Cohen, 2002).

The concept has been criticized for its inherent Eurocentrism and elitist dimensions of the “cosmopolitan class” as representing the embodiment of transnational capitalism, the class-conscious “frequent traveller”, or “the world citizen” within a borderless economy (Bhabha, 2011; Calhoun, 2002; Kanter, 1995; Lasch, 1995; Sklair, 2001), as well as for overlooking international labour migration and global families as part of cosmopolitan processes (Werbner, 1999). In line with this critique, scholars have pointed to the particular interrelations between whiteness and cosmopolitanism, through a blend of symbolic notions, nationality, and class in conjunction with formal aspects, such as passports and visas (Hage, 2000; Shome, 2014).
Drawing on the concepts of white cosmopolitanism and white cosmopolitan femininity, the article analyses “cosmopolitan narratives” among white Swedish migrant women who have lived abroad for a considerable time and eventually returned “home” to Sweden. The women had lived abroad in one or several countries, as part of a circular migration, before returning to Sweden and generally saw themselves as more “open-minded”, “tolerant”, and “curious” than their nationally based peers. Using white cosmopolitanism and white cosmopolitan femininity as analytical tools, the article asks: How do migrant Swedish women present themselves as cosmopolitan subjects, and why is it important for them to align themselves with cosmopolitan ideals? How are their cosmopolitan narratives constructed around a Swedish national identity, and how are national boundaries both upheld and traversed in this process?

These questions do not investigate whether the Swedish women are “real” cosmopolitans or not, nor do they imply that working-class people, migrants, or non-Western subjects have no relation to cosmopolitanism (see Werbner, 1999). Rather, the article explores cosmopolitan narratives among Swedish migrant women with a particular focus on how a Swedish national identity may facilitate such narratives. As symbolic bearers of the Swedish nation, it is argued that national ideals act on the women’s bodies as white or even blonde and blue-eyed, in ways that both uphold and re-inscribe the nation into the global. Furthermore, the article analyses how the women’s narratives of cosmopolitanism are structured by whiteness, nationality, and class that grant uninterrupted mobility and “worldliness”. Thus, apart from obscuring global inequalities, white cosmopolitanism and white cosmopolitan femininity is here understood as imbricated in both national and global politics as a place where global structures reconnect with the white nation, thereby enabling Swedish migrants to re-install themselves into contemporary global settings as self-defined cosmopolitan subjects.

Be/coming cosmopolitan

The extensive critique of a narrow cosmopolitan concept raises the issue of who can “be/come” a cosmopolitan subject and what the characteristics of such a position are. The literature on white cosmopolitanism captures the intersection between whiteness and cosmopolitanism and the inherent production of nationality in this global participation (Hage, 2000; Hübinette & Arvanitakis, 2012; Shome, 2014). Even though cosmopolitanism itself is perhaps only conceivable through some form of traversing of national boundaries—be it through diaspora, migration, international labour, or global families—the article foregrounds how the idea of the nation continues to form the basis for a “borderless” cosmopolitan existence, for example through passports, access to certain places, etc., as well as through the production of symbolic nations and femininities (cf. Shome, 2014).

The article examines how national boundaries are confined, yet traversed, in the construction of a cosmopolitan self, as part of the transnational dynamics amongst privileged migrants/nationalities. Ghassan Hage (2000, p. 232) discusses how “whiteness operates as a symbolic field of accumulation” to which aspects of cosmopolitanism are attached, in ways that differ from non-white cosmopolitans. According to Hage, cosmopolitans are characterized by the class-derived ability to intermix with other cultures. In contrast, non-cosmopolitans, who according to Hage are often non-white, non-Western “locals”, and white working class, are depicted as being “stuck” in their culture, community, or nation and thus unable to move beyond these logics. In Hage’s (2000) analysis, white cosmopolitans are perceived as being sophisticated enough to transcend their own culture and incorporate cultural “difference” into their lives. Such encounters are not surrounded by friction and cultural conflicts, but rather openness, curiosity, and tolerance. Hage advocates that the very language of cosmopolitanism is structured by whiteness in a way that “presupposes a ‘cultured’ and sublimated approach to otherness devoid of a too materialist functionality which the upper classes use to distinguish themselves and exclude less ‘cultured’ people” (Hage, 2000, p. 204). This provides the white sophisticated upper classes with a kind of “cosmopolitan capital” that is denied to the “working class” and “white trash”, i.e. those who have
not had the chance to live abroad and expand their world views. In this logic, the language of multiculturalism and mobility is mediated through a white cosmopolitan body in order to become legitimate and intelligible and where whiteness itself represents both cosmopolitanism and transnational mobility (Saraswati, 2010).

In her book *Diana and Beyond*, Raka Shome (2014) deepens the analysis of the relations between white cosmopolitanism, femininity, and nationhood. Shome argues that white women have an important role in the construction of the racialized nation and, subsequently, in the acting out of a white cosmopolitan femininity, which is “naturally” tied both to the national and the global. Looking at the specific case of Princess Diana, Shome argues that white cosmopolitan femininity becomes an expression of white multiculturalism, multicultural fashion, charity, and global motherhood, all of which draw on the ideas and ideals of femininity and nationhood (cf. Hübinette & Arvanitakis, 2012). A white woman who dresses in a multicultural way, provides love and care for (non-white) children, or creates a global family through international adoption, is here seen as the perfect embodiment of a white cosmopolitan femininity (Shome, 2014; cf. Hübinette & Arvanitakis, 2012). Such expressions and subject positions of white upper-middle-class women are further re-installed through other women’s work in the domestic and the family, whilst the former acquire cosmopolitan capital by travelling around the world (Lundström, 2014; Shome, 2014).

Apart from obscuring global inequalities, Shome (2014) claims that white cosmopolitan femininity is imbricated in national politics and in a global racial hierarchy with their specific expressions of gender and whiteness. She suggests that white cosmopolitan femininity could be a place in which global intimacies reconnect with a white nationalism that re-inscribes the nation into the contemporary, neoliberal, global soul. Departing from these arguments, the article examines how white Swedish femininity facilitates the participation in a white cosmopolitan project, providing Swedish women with a particular kind of symbolic capital and an asset for the accumulation of cosmopolitan capital, by the means of gendered dimensions of the embodiment of the racialized nation, including the importance of (Swedish) family ties as well as clothing and fashion.

Building on empirical data from privileged Swedish migrants who have returned to Sweden after having lived abroad, the article adds to the existing literature on white cosmopolitanism and to the analysis of how national, racial, and gendered aspects intersect as they are enacted in a global arena. Adding to existing literature, the article shows that, paradoxically, the women foregrounded and protected national boundaries and borders in their cosmopolitan projects, which included feelings of being “at home” and “welcomed” in the world (which, further, are important aspects of inhabiting the same), and the significance of these aspects for cultivating attitudes of tolerance and openness towards “others”.

**Data and methods**

The research project is based on eight months of ethnographic work in Sweden with returning Swedish migrant women who had lived abroad for many years. The data consists of 46 in-depth interviews and participant observations conducted in *SWEA Sweden*—a network for returning migrant Swedes, located in five Swedish cities. Most often, the women had returned to Sweden due to age or their husbands’ completed expatriate contracts. The women participating in the study had lived abroad in a total of 33 different countries, some of them in more than one country, and some up to 45 years.

*Swedish Women’s Educational Association* (SWEA) is a network consisting of some 7,000 members worldwide, which facilitated participant observation and the recruitment of informants. Interestingly, some of the largest SWEA chapters are to be found in Sweden, the women’s “home” country, which points to the need to share experiences from abroad and maintain a cosmopolitan identity as a (former) “expatriate Swede”. Participation took place at lunches, dinners, and
network meetings organized for members of SWEA Sweden. Through contact in the SWEA network, the participant observations in Sweden also included the network *Swedes back home*. This network is not exclusive to women, but was formed as a sub-group by a group of women from the SWEA network. Participant observations at lunches and “after-work get-togethers” were also facilitated by the “Swedes back home” network. Many of the network’s members meet for cultural activities, such as theatre trips. It is important to note that the women in this study are not representative of Swedish migrants in general, in that they have deliberately chosen to be part of these networks. The interviews with them were carried out in places chosen by the women themselves: in cafés, in their homes, and, more rarely, at their workplaces. The semi-structured in-depth interviews were transcribed in full and included questions about why the women had migrated, what their experiences of migration were, and why they had moved back to Sweden, as well as about their spouses, employment, housing, finances, feelings “at home” when abroad and in Sweden, and their current life situations after having returned to Sweden. The analysis is built on their narratives of cosmopolitan identities and attitudes, and the ways in which gender, whiteness, class, and nationality made these narratives possible.

The women interviewed constituted a strikingly homogeneous white group, a composition that mirrors the SWEA organization overall (see Lundström, 2014). All women identified as white and/or ethnic majority Swedes. Only one identified as non-white. As an adoptee, she identified herself as Swedish. Thus, the group as a whole do not represent different perspectives linked to ethnic or racial positions. However, I have included the story of the adopted woman to provide another view on race and cosmopolitanism. The majority of the women were in their 60s or 70s at the time of the interviews, with a privileged lifestyle that can be described as (upper) middle-class or upper-class-oriented when abroad. However, because of their privileged lifestyles abroad as “housewives” married to wealthy men, the women had to face a life back in Sweden with a low or no pension. The majority of the women were married to Swedish men and had been homemakers or “trailing spouses” abroad, where their lives were mainly structured around taking care of the children, supporting their spouses by arranging social events and dinners, employing and being in charge of domestic staff, taking part in voluntary work and charity work, and getting involved in different social activities arranged by SWEA or other social clubs. Eight of them were widows or divorced, and three were single at the time of the interview. None of them was married to a foreigner. A few of the women had their own international careers and had worked for Swedish or international companies or international organizations, but the vast majority were married to Swedish men working in transnational companies. The research therefore reflects deeply gendered transnational migration patterns, in that the women inhabited different social spaces and networks than men (cf. George, 2005; Lundström, 2014; Parreñas, 2001). Their lives mirror the ways that privileges are always relational, multifaceted and flexible resources that change over time and space (Twine & Gardener, 2013).

As most of the interviewed women had stopped working in connection with the move abroad, their social locations had to be renegotiated in the various national and regional contexts in which they found themselves, in relation to (their non-existent) working life, the household, the Swedish community, and the local population (cf. Bao, 1998). Although the women in this study are not representative of migrants, or even of Swedish migrants in general, it is important to study the lives and experiences of privileged migrants in order to acquire knowledge about their different migration routes and post-migration experiences, as well as about how migration and national identity are intertwined in the production of white cosmopolitanism (cf. Knowles & Harper, 2009; Leonard, 2010).

In this article, I draw from a narrative analysis in order to investigate the women’s stories of cosmopolitanism (Riessman, 1993). In the interviews, the women were asked to tell their stories about their experiences abroad and when returning to Sweden. These narratives are not scrutinized in terms of “truth”. Was it really like that? Did that actually happen? Rather, I analyse how they structure their arguments and stories. Their life stories are analysed as
organized narratives located within different power relations. The analysis foregrounds the women’s positionality as relational and embedded in complex social structures and aims to understand how cosmopolitan narratives are built up, thus “systemically interpreting their interpretations” (Riessman, 1993, p. 5). How do women talk about their positions abroad? What makes it possible to hold on to, relate to, and dis/identify with certain positions, such as a cosmopolitan one? When and how do they retain their national identity abroad? When is such identity rejected? Such a perspective is informed by a critical view, looking for “patterns of social domination, hierarchy, and social privilege” as well as how power holds patterns in place and “how people accept or struggle against them” (Agar, 1996, p. 27). Thus, the women’s narratives are not analysed as statements of cosmopolitanism, in which the women are perceived as more cosmopolitan than others, but as narratives that lay out the structures of white cosmopolitanism among Swedish migrant women. Nor are they analysed in terms of quantitative measures. Some stories are only told by one woman (like the one non-white woman); others are shared by a majority. In this sense, the analysis favours the structure of what is interpreted as “cosmopolitan narratives”.

“One thousand per cent Swedish”: white Swedish women as symbols of “the good Sweden”

Despite Sweden’s large population of immigrants, there is a lingering (national and international) image that the country is still relatively more homogeneous than many other Western countries (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014). The production of a white Swedish nation is essential for migrating Swedish women, who come to embody a notion of white Swedes, Scandinavian or Nordic—a crucial value when acquiring gendered cosmopolitan capital abroad (Lundström, 2014; Mattsson & Pettersson, 2007; Painter, 2010). The women—who did not pursue a career abroad—maintained their gendered cosmopolitan capital in terms of beauty and representation as the wives of successful business men. The idea of Sweden as “a good nation” was common amongst the women, a view that they felt was reaffirmed abroad. Swedish national belonging could therefore be used as a specific form of national capital outside Sweden and related to a positive racial and cultural stereotyping of “a good people”, which fitted well with the ideas and ideals of a cosmopolitan subject (Lundström, 2010; Skeggs, 2004). Post-WWII Sweden has successfully situated itself as a (white) antiracist and humanitarian country internationally, and as (white) Swedes they felt that they embodied the ethics and values of cosmopolitanism a priori (cf. Hübinette & Lundström, 2014). It is argued that their Swedish national origin facilitated a sense of cosmopolitanism, in that they saw themselves as bearers of cosmopolitan characteristics, such as “humanism”, “tolerance”, “international development aid”, and so forth.

Paradoxically as it may seem, the single and most important feature of the women’s stories was that they felt “so much more Swedish” when living abroad. The Swedish national identity was so important that many women saw themselves as “ambassadors” of Swedish culture. Their Swedish national identity was surrounded by a sense of pride and a deep desire to represent Sweden. As Margit, 62, expressed it: “you are an ambassador, a private ambassador when you are out. […] We want to be the best possible commercial. And you are never as Swedish as when you live abroad”. Her statement reflects the ability to inhabit the world and install herself as “an ambassador” for Sweden abroad and, it seems, without a sense of having to be “integrated” or “assimilated”—political ideas that are generally associated with migration—but with a comfortable sense of being “home” as a proud Swedish citizen of the world. The Swedish women were not expected to have a job—as most migrants are expected/forced to have in order to stay in a country. Nor did they necessarily know the language in the country they lived in, or make friends with locals.

Swedish nationality was first and foremost structured by a sense of cultural features linked to a national identity. Wilma, 71, said that she felt “one thousand per cent Swedish” abroad. For her, this involved cosmopolitan aspects of being “very humanistic, I mean openness for all human
Reinforcing their white features thus became a way of ‘coming and rapping’ their almost everywhere around the world, which in itself enabled a sense of belonging in Germany: In Europe, the perception of Swedish nationality in the world: As Swedish citizens, the women are probably more likely to identify with a cosmopolitan project that travelling is de-emphasizing femininity as well as national identity. 

In their narratives, nationality becomes an important aspect of the notion of a cosmopolitan lifestyle. The country of origin is a crucial aspect of migration and mobility, its possibilities and orientations, hence of cosmopolitanism. A person who can “go anywhere” is undoubtedly more likely to be a “frequent traveller” (in that travelling is defined as something completely distinct from migrating) and less restrained by local boundaries. As Sara Ahmed (2007) points out, different bodies have different possibilities to move and to feel “at home” in the world: 

The politics of mobility, of who gets to move with ease across the lines that divide spaces, can be re-described as the politics of who gets to be at home, who gets to inhabit spaces, as spaces that are inhabitable for some bodies and not others, insofar as they extend the surfaces of some bodies and not others. (Ahmed, 2007, p. 162) 

Bodies that can move “with ease” are probably more likely to identify with a cosmopolitan project than those that are prevented from moving around. Thus, in Ahmed’s logic, the politics of mobility will most likely facilitate a cosmopolitan project for some and interrupt it for others. A Swedish nationality enabled such mobility and could explain why the women’s strong national identity was not challenged by their migrant status. Instead, they were proud of being Swedish and made a distinction between immigrants (in Sweden) and their own position as migrants abroad. Maj, 75, elaborates on her relation to immigrants in Sweden:

You come to a country in general because you have a certain knowledge, because you are good at what you do, you do not come here to get help or anything like that, but you yourself help. There is a difference between our immigrants here [in Sweden], and we who move abroad, there is a very big difference, I would say. […] We come from a good country, whereas we here in Sweden look at the immigrants and say: “Oh, they come from that sort of place”.

Coming from a “good country” that “helps” others, the women perceived themselves as being “welcomed” almost everywhere around the world, which in itself enabled a sense of belonging to “the world” as well as the feeling of being “at home” in it. As Swedish citizens, the women described themselves as independent and skilful migrants ready to “help”, which mirrors their positions as symbolic bearers of Sweden’s long-term international development aid projects.

Swedish nationality located the women in favourable positions, according to the women. The participants who had lived in the USA had positive experiences of being Swedish, or Swedish women. Anja, 72, recalled that “you are so welcome over there”. Moa, 46, who had lived on the US West Coast said that “being Swedish in the US is not regarded as something negative, but something positive. Honest and decent people”. In Europe, the perception of Swedish nationality shifted depending on the country. The most positive attitudes towards Swedes were found amongst the women who had lived in Germany. Alva, 80, explained that “you felt very welcomed as a Swede”. “They thought coming from Sweden was exciting and associated us with ABBA”. Tora, 30, thought that it was “fantastically positive to be Swedish” in Germany: “They think we are all beautiful and that we have a fantastic nature [in Sweden]”. However, such positive notions did not include all racial positions. Alva identified her own white privileges abroad and explained that: “When you were out buying groceries with the dark-haired, brown-eyed [Swedes], they were not allowed to touch the fruit, then the staff came and rapped their fingers. But that never happened to me, since I have blue eyes”. The women positioned themselves as symbols of the nation and its (racial) qualities, through their looks and their Swedish characteristics. Maj, 62, who had lived in Greece, explained: “Swedes have a very good reputation. Absolutely! Other nationalities do not have as good a reputation as we have”. “If someone asks: ‘are you German?’ I say, ‘No, I am
Oh, aha! If I had said that I was German, then it would have been more negative.

Margit, 62, who had lived in Japan, recalled that:

Being a Swede in Japan is very positive. [...] We are quite similar and we value things, nature, honesty, punctuality, and those things, that is what we have in common. Which is very nice. [...] Japanese people are very interested in and amused by Swedish culture.

Swedes were generally ascribed positive characteristics, such as honesty, punctuality, and valuing nature. These positive views of Sweden generated strong feelings of being “welcomed” and granted a position of being a “citizen of the world”. Encountering generosity, openness, and tolerance towards oneself probably makes it easier to exude a cosmopolitan identity based on global similarity and a sense of having a natural place in the world.

Never mix—never worry?

The women’s descriptions of a white Swedish national identity clearly intersected with aspects of white cosmopolitanism, such as being associated with certain (positive) qualities, able to move across borders, humanism, openness to all human beings and so forth (Hage, 2000). This notwithstanding, the boundaries of nationality and its entangled whiteness were guarded by the women. Thus, being part of a global community does not necessarily mean creating family ties, having mixed children, or even close friendships, within this community. Even though privileged everyday life abroad often involves a range of relations with domestic staff, nannies, chauffeurs, and so forth, it turned out that most of the women socialized with other Swedes, Scandinavians, Europeans, or Westerners (in that order) and/or with members of the same transnational class structure, for example through selected international communities, golf clubs, or gated communities (cf. Lundström, 2014). These patterns of self-segregation were rationalized through the logics of cultural patterns and traditions such as Lucia, Easter, or Christmas. Signe, 70, recalled that she socialized with “Swedes, almost exclusively Swedes. Yes, I can say exclusively Swedes”. The few Swedes interviewed who had lived in Africa had moved to places with a strong Swedish or Scandinavian infrastructure. Hilda, 67, who had diplomat parents, said that “as a child, we lived in Ethiopia and I went to a Swedish school, and Sweden and Swedes, it was very positive, they were very popular, and so you were proud to be a Swede”.

The idea of cultural difference is crucial for the rationalization of self-segregation, just as self-segregating practices are founded in the discourses of traditions and the preservation of cultural patterns. Signe, 70, clarifies that:

If you come to a country like Iran, which is quite tough, then you have a community, you have the exact same way of thinking, you have the same values. [...] We celebrated Christmas, an ordinary Swedish Christmas. And I mean, many nationalities don’t do that. We celebrated Easter. We travelled together. It is easy to stick with your peers.

According to Signe, most Swedes socialized with other Swedes. But it was not only the preservation of Swedish traditions that was significant. In non-Western countries, as well as in southern European countries, intercultural or interracial family relations with locals of a lower class in the country of residence were described as a form of “loss” of privilege and status. Perhaps this is why none of the interviewed women had intimate relationships with foreign men. However, their narratives included other women who were married to local native men abroad and how they situated themselves outside the “international” upper-class communities and its inherent privileges. Thus, creating transnational families was not necessarily a sign of cosmopolitanism, in the women’s views, due to the loss of connection to certain international spaces (cf. Werbner, 1999). Signe explained that:
Every one [of us] that lived in Iran at that time had a certain status. There were many CEOs of Swedish companies or engineers in Swedish companies. [...] The ones who were not of that quality in Iran were the Swedish women who married Iranian men.

According to Signe, Swedish women married to Iranian men were not part of the same international space, since they did not qualify for the same “status” as Swedish women married to Swedish CEOs. Maj, 75, explained that relationships with native men could deprive Swedish women of their class positions as Swedes abroad:

I mean, if you have a husband who is the CEO of a big company then you end up in a certain class, if you are married to a Greek who is a plumber, then you end up in a totally different class, you can’t deny it. You are not invited to all the nice dinners at the Embassy if your husband is a Greek plumber. That’s the way it is.

In Maj’s quote, it is the husband that provides the women with a certain class position. This is perhaps where the gendered aspects of the women’s migration are most overt. Since most of them did not work themselves, their racial and class positions were dependent on other criteria than (their own) job positions. As women—in this case with no career of their own—they had to ensure that they had the “right” partner that could provide them with a certain class position. In these narratives, native men are assumed to be from a lower class, in contrast to the transnational capitalist class in which the women themselves were positioned (through their white Swedish husbands). Race and class here become intertwined, in that Iranian and Greek men represent a (national) lower class preventing transnational upward class mobility of the Swedish women. According to Signe and Maj the women who initiated relationships with local men thus became “fixed” in a national—in this case, Iranian or Greek—class structure and “dragged down” to a local lower-class position in the national class structure. In this sense, white cosmopolitanism is an interrelational construct, in that the women living in interracial relationships could be excluded and deprived of both their white cosmopolitanism and their Swedish national belonging. As Maj put it: “I like Greece very much and I think it is a wonderful country in a way. But to become Greek. No, no, no, no!” Here, the women’s roles as “trailing spouses” and symbols of the racialized nation, and its global connotations, assert that these boundaries need to be guarded.

Although the reasons for self-segregation are multiple, such a lifestyle was often justified by the importance of protecting the family, especially the children, from losing their national traditions abroad. As Fanny, 69, explained: “We were very careful to let the children know how things were meant to be done and what it was like in Sweden, and how to do things”. Another reason for self-segregation was to protect themselves and their children from local violence against whites and/or rich people. The fear of being a white minority was a common foundation for their stories of self-segregation, as Hedvig, 69, explained:

In Mexico, there were many expats, mixed with Mexicans, but it was within a gated community located outside of town which was armed. They had armed guards. They had machine-guns on the walls like this, you get used to that too. And there was a gate, you know, where they let people in one at a time and checked their cars. [...] In Brazil, you could never leave the children. I mean you had to watch them all the time. [...] Because they were small blond children, you know, they were kidnapped [...]

In this quote, the fear of criminality and kidnapping is directly linked to a white position. “Small, blond children” are visible targets of local (non-white) violence. Thus, the description of the gated community is one of fear and safety: fear of the surrounding society and the feeling of safety with “peers”. In this sense, international gated communities mirror colonial cities, where the colonizers are separated from the colonized and where the “inscription of whiteness is seen as natural, normative, [and] taken-for-granted” (Low, 2009, p. 79; cf. Cohen, 1977). Undoubtedly, Mexico is a “high-risk country” in terms of organized crime, currently with more than 1,000 cases of kidnapping per year. Due to the complex relation between migration and social inequality, the number of gated communities has risen in times
of transnational migration. Yet, whereas the women are obviously separated from most Mexicans in the gated community, it is here advocated that it is precisely this community that nurtures a sense of cosmopolitan self, as a space which facilitates (cosmopolitan) proximity to other nationalities and “global” subjects. As a trans/national practice, life in a gated community becomes a way of buying into a certain lifestyle and quality of accommodation that is embedded in a class-based racialized space—an international/insider space that is separated from the national/outsider space. At the same time, the international space can represent a transgressive racial and classed space with “expats, mixed with Mexicans”. Due to transnational class dynamics, local upper-class Mexicans could likely live in the same gated community as foreign expats and perhaps be included in the notion of white cosmopolitanism (in contrast to the “Greek plumber”).

**White cosmopolitanism and the embodiment of cosmopolitan qualities**

Stella, 40: “I like people who are more globally minded.”

Even though the women lived in gated communities and primarily socialized with other Swedes or Westerners, the global upper-class structure that these women were able to enter as a result of their national and racially privileged positions provided them with crucial aspects of cosmopolitan capital. As white expats and foreigners, they were suddenly invited to socialize with international celebrities and politicians. Birgit, 77:

I guess that was because we were white . . . So, you were invited to so many weddings, everyone’s wedding and their children’s, to see ceremonies and all that. […] We visited Ali Alatas, and his wife then, and Alatas was a foreign minister at that time.

Birgit’s story is an illustration of how whiteness can extend itself over social and geographical boundaries, e.g. by integrating itself into powerful networks (Ahmed, 2007). Her extended network enables the extension of social and bodily space, an example of how some spaces are already prepared to embrace (white, upper-class) bodies. Ahmed argues that whiteness—and I would add cosmopolitanism—becomes worldly through reification: “[r]eification is not then something we do to whiteness, but something whiteness does, or to be more precise, what allows whiteness to be done” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 150). For the women in this study, these white extensions were enabled through their husbands, hence the reason for not marrying a “local plumber”. Thus, white cosmopolitanism is intimately linked to class and thus to class mobility and not constructed around a naturalized homogeneous entity, and through their migration (and class mobility) the women became part of exclusive global international communities. Several of the women highlighted their “new” social relationships with upper-class people of different nationalities and races abroad, relationships that are structured by “mixed” international settings that constitute the core in a cosmopolitan lifestyle. Solveig, 69 says that:

In the apartment building where we lived in Seoul we were the only Swedes. [There were] different nationalities: South Americans, South Africans, Swedes . . . It was a mixed group, it was very nice, and sometimes we had garden parties together.

From their experiences of “sometimes” intermingling with an interracial and international upper class, the women proclaimed an identification with individuals that traversed national boundaries and was coupled with a sense of “global-minded” attitudes, such as “tolerance”, “humanism”, “curiosity”, and “openness”. As Hilda, 67, put it: “I have met many, especially in the International Women’s Club, who don’t know their nationality”. A possible interpretation of Hilda’s narrative indicates that, for her, the women in the International Club represent truly international people in that they are not constrained by their own or others’ national boundaries. In this case, “true cosmopolitanism” revoked a sense of a narrow national identity, applying to the imperative of
being a “citizen of the world”, to whom nationality is not narrowing one’s identity. However, the same cosmopolitan narrative structure is built on the encounter of different nationalities and the necessary distance between them in terms of family ties, for instance.

Because the women had lived abroad, they now felt that Sweden was a limited space. Although Swedish nationality constituted a strong base for the women’s identities, Sweden as a country was too “small” to nurture a cosmopolitan identity (cf. Gustafson, 2009). The idea of “open-mindedness” beyond national boundaries, yet rooted in them, was at the core of the cosmopolitan version of the self. Ulrica, 38, framed it like this:

Sweden is so small. I just had a meeting with one person sitting in South Africa, one in Belgium, and one here, and we are all very different, but you learn how to handle it in a very good way when you become a little more open minded.

For Ulrica, as for most of the participants, a cosmopolitan worldview is translated into qualities that lay the foundations for a different human being that is “a little more open minded”. This aligns with Hage’s (2000, p. 54) argument that elements of dominant national capital, such as “language, looks, cultural practices, a class-derived capacity to intermix with others from different cultures”, are at the heart of cosmopolitanism. Thus, as these white women represent a sophisticated Swedishness they are able to expand their (national) white privileges and create a cosmopolitan self, which involves projecting nationalist, non-multicultural, and non-cosmopolitan behaviour onto others, including “local” Swedes back in Sweden, as we shall see later on.

For Stella, a non-white Swede, the international milieu was an opportunity to be accepted as a “real” Swede—in contrast to a history of exclusion from the white, national boundaries of Swedishness. Stella, 40, who was adopted as a child from Asia, explained her relief when attending international schools, where “it doesn’t matter what you look like”. “It doesn’t matter—because you are a person”. For her, this multi-racial setting provided a global transnational and transracial structure that could extend her boundaries of national belonging, defined through a global middle-class enterprise in which class surpassed race. This shows how the idea of cosmopolitanism is structured by both class and whiteness, thus including more subjects than white Western individuals in the construction of the flexible “world citizen”.

**Learning from “the other”—developing “the self”?**

The women in the study stressed how much they had learned during their time abroad. A common story was that they were surprised to encounter non-Western wealthy individuals, people they previously did not know existed. Birgit, 77, who had lived in Indonesia, was astonished when visiting an Indonesian woman’s upper-class home:

She was a member of our club. I was in her home, and they had beautiful silver, and very fine tin … There is so much that we do not know … We don’t know anything about them.

Encounters like this challenged previous Eurocentric views and increased the women’s sense of tolerance for “others”. As Birgit explains: “We have lived in a country […] A very Muslim country. And then people can say ‘I hate Muslims’. […] But I cannot say that. I don’t. You have a different sense of tolerance and a different view on humanity”. Brigit’s statement resembles the idea of tolerance as a core concept of cosmopolitan ethics (Hage, 2000), with the effect that her own preconceptions of Muslims changed fundamentally. Yet, as Wendy Brown (2006) has shown, tolerance is a contradictory concept. On the one hand, tolerance is used as a response to conflicts and racism (cf. Walzer, 1997, 1998) and, on the other, has been depicted as a deeply unpoliticized concept restricted to the liberal Western subject who tolerates “the other”, who then is regarded as tolerable rather than equal. Hage (2000, p. 87) takes a critical stance and describes tolerance as “a
mode of domination [that] is presented as a form of egalitarianism” aimed at “reproducing and disguising relationships of power in society”.

The idea of being tolerant of “differences” is perhaps nurtured by the fact that the women rarely had personal relations with the (majority of) locals in the country in which they lived. Fanny, 69, describes how she developed as a person after having lived in Brazil, although whilst there she did not socialize with Brazilians.

Fanny: Brazilians. [...] They are sensitive people, and it turned out that I had many feelings in me too, and that part was wonderful. I left a part of my heart in Brazil. Fantastic environment and wonderful people.

Interviewer: But you said previously that you mostly socialized with Swedes, didn’t you?
Fanny: Eh, yes we did. Yes. [...]”

Since Fanny had previously said in the interview that she socialized with Swedes, the interviewer was surprised about her comments on Brazilians. What were her conceptions of Brazilians based on? Fanny explained that she did meet Brazilians at “the club” and occasionally chatted with the neighbours “even if we did not socialize that much”. Perhaps the social distance made it possible to construct “the other” as a homogeneous subject, in this case, as “wonderful” people. Or perhaps, as in the case of Hedvig, 69, “others” were constructed as “poor refugees” in a dichotomous relation to oneself:

My grandchild who is nine months old, when she eats Semper porridge and [...] she is chubby and smiling, then I thought: “I wonder what they do in Syria in those refugee camps, how do they do it, they have children but how do they find food for them?”

Using her grandchild as a window on a global reality of inequality and injustice, Hedvig compares her family situation with poor Syrian mothers in refugee camps. Living in this global world, the women said they had become more reflective and could compare their life situations with those of “others” and care for them, which are important aspects of global motherhood. However, “others” were often seen from a distance, such as “wonderful” Brazilians or Syrian refugees in a refugee camp who had little to do with the informants’ own lives (in contrast to, for example, domestic staff, gardeners, or chauffeurs). Undoubtedly, living abroad had given the women tools with which to reflect on their own privileges, although the construction of “them” as deeply different from ourselves also hampered the image of a common “we” as equally capable subjects, albeit positioned differently within global power structures. This echoes Hage’s (2000) argument of disguising inegalitarian relations under the mantle of cosmopolitanism.

**Integrating the global and the national**

While it was crucial for the women to preserve their Swedish national identity abroad, they nevertheless saw themselves transcending narrowing national boundaries and becoming global subjects and “citizens of the world”. In this sense, the national and the global were not mutually exclusive projects—a dimension on the concept of cosmopolitanism which has not been sufficiently discussed in literature. This is clear in Ingrid’s description of her daughter’s view of herself after being brought up in different countries:

You know, she feels very Swedish, she does, but she also feels that she is a world citizen, because she does not hesitate about going anywhere, and her old friends are made up of almost every nationality, and they are still her friends now, so it is actually very advantageous.

In this description of her daughter, Ingrid, 58, captures some of the core elements of cosmopolitanism, such as being a “world citizen” who is used to “going anywhere” and having friends from “every nationality”. As a mother, Ingrid is simultaneously evaluating the upbringing of her daughter as a way of doing global motherhood. Even though her daughter has
retained her national identity (with regard to herself and to her “old” friends), she is a “world citizen” who can “go anywhere”. For Ingrid, the world is an open book, a privilege that is not available to everyone. This demonstrates how some nationalities facilitate a cosmopolitan project, through the type of passports and visa/entry requirements, and how the language of multiculturalism is absorbed into white national identity “through the guise of cosmopolitanism” (Shome, 2014, p. 189).

On their return to Sweden, the women’s undertaking to bring their world back “home” to Sweden as symbolic “ambassadors” of the Swedish nation and re-inscribe the national into a global and perhaps more cosmopolitan project failed. Instead, the return was coupled with a sense of loss of previous privileges, such as fewer telephone calls and a less lofty status. Birgit, 77:

When we came to the Hyatt Hotel, a five-star hotel it was wonderful, with a tea salon and then everybody had to move so we could sit … and that was embarrassing. […] We had status … […] It was fun as long as it lasted but when we came home, nobody cared.

As Birgit recalled, white privilege in Indonesia was at times “embarrassing”, but for the most part desirable. On her return to Sweden, Birgit found that “it was difficult to come back. […] Back here it was empty. Suddenly nobody called. When I lived in Indonesia, the telephone rang all the time”. The encounter with Sweden’s lack of interest was perhaps the most common experience amongst the women and included meetings with friends and neighbours back in Sweden. Hedvig, 69, recalled that “nobody wanted to … You want … You must understand that when you come home and tell people how it was, no-one listens … well, perhaps my grandmother listened”. Ingrid remembered the “horrible experience” of coming home: “You had all these experiences from all over the world, and we had been everywhere, and no-one was interested”.

In response to the “wall of silence” the women encountered in Sweden, they joined the network SWEA for returning migrant Swedes, built around an identity that was “more than Swedish” and where they met people who were interested in their experiences abroad. As Signe, 70, described it: “I do feel Swedish, but an expatriate Swede. Absolutely”. As a result, many of the women joined SWEA Sweden and wanted their children to continue to attend international schools in Sweden to encounter like-minded people.

The terms of post-migration involved constructing a sense of self along the roots of the nation and the routes of the global (Gustafson, 2001). But their self-images did not gel with the Swedish national project. Since the women had missed important aspects of everyday life, they felt marginalized rather than cosmopolitan here (cf. Dürrschmidt, 2016). In response to such feelings of exclusion, they distanced themselves from “ordinary” Swedes, whom they described as less sophisticated, less classy, and less elegant. Harriet, 65, makes fun of (other) Swedes who lack the classy elegance of Italians:

Well, at Frankfurt Airport you see the Swedes arriving in their crude Ecco-shoes with crepe [rubber] soles, and then come the Italians in their nice, fine leather shoes and exquisite clothes. It was a joke we had. When you come to Sweden you shouldn’t blend in too much, nor be too much of an ordinary Svensson either.

In this situation, fashion functions as a demonstration of the facility to move across the world with grace and is a way of distinguishing “world citizens” from ordinary Swedes at the airport. In line with Hage’s (2000, p. 201) argument, cosmopolitanism here shifts from an enlarged capacity for adaptability and openness to all forms of otherness, to a “class figure and a White person, capable of appreciating and consuming ’high-quality’ commodities and cultures”. As Shome (2014) illustrates, the fashionable figure of the white cosmopolitan femininity, embodied through Princess Diana, both confirms and transcends the British context through her embodiment of national perfection and its ideals, in combination with a specific kind of absorption of “difference” that lays the foundation for the emergence of a white multiculturalism in Britain. In Shome’s analysis, such aesthetics of multiculturalism serve to project racism from the upper class onto the working class and non-cosmopolitan people who can neither afford to nor “be” multicultural. For
Harriet, the Ecco shoes denote Swedes with less cosmopolitan (and less feminine) style, in a Bourdieusian logic of capital (rather than its cost). At Frankfurt Airport, a fashionably dressed Italian woman is contrasted with a non-cosmopolitan comfortably dressed Swedish woman, a figure who should be kept at a distance in order to uphold a sense of the “true” white cosmopolitan woman that does not “blend in too much” once back in Sweden.

**Conclusions**

This article examines “cosmopolitan narratives” of Swedish migrant women who have lived abroad and eventually returned to Sweden. In these narratives, their national identity is both nurtured and expanded in the interaction with other nationalities, creating a sense of being “world citizens” and cosmopolitans. Most of the women had experienced upward class mobility through migration, primarily due to their husbands’ new positions in transnational enterprises. On one side of the social spectrum they were introduced to, for them, previously unknown non-Western upper-class groups and celebrities and on the other to abject poverty. Their own privileged locations in these harsh class differences were sometimes embarrassing to them. However, their relational class mobility, in conjunction with transnational interactions with non-Western upper-class groups in gated communities or international schools, was crucial in the construction of their new “cosmosubjectivities” (Shome, 2014). Such a type of class invoked by “cosmo-multiculturalism” is related to the possession of cosmopolitan capital that the women achieved abroad (Hage, 2000, p. 205).

The Swedish women were able to transform themselves outside narrow national boundaries yet preserve their national (white) pride of being Swedish. It is therefore argued that white cosmopolitanism is imbricated in both global and national politics in which the global and the national are mutually enabling so that the “binary relation between the nation and global becomes unsettled” (Shome, 2014, p. 205). In this process, the embodiment of the symbolic aspects of a white Swedish nationality facilitates the sense of being and becoming a “world citizen”. This position involves the potential to extend one’s national identity through institutionalized space and become “worldly” (cf. Ahmed, 2007). This analysis adds to existing literature by showing how privileged migrants from certain (often white) nations are welcomed and “prepared for” and thus enabled to become the cosmopolitan subjects that represent those who are not limited and defined by their culture or nationality. For these women, such white extensions are gendered constructs, in which the women depend on their husbands’ social positions in a transnational sphere.

Although it is argued that a Swedish nationality nurtures the cosmopolitan self by providing entry to certain spaces, such as gated communities and the homes of prominent figures, a “true” cosmopolitan must be able to traverse the same national boundaries. Whereas a white Swedish national position facilitated the achievement of cosmopolitan capital, being stuck in this national paradigm hampers the expansion of the cosmopolitan self. For the Swedish women abroad, the embodiment of the “right” nationality provides a space in which to extend and expand white national privileges globally. In that sense, they embody sites of articulation through which racialized and gendered relations are expressed in the global performance of a cosmopolitan Swede. Thus, a strong national identity and a strong cosmopolitan identity are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rather, the article suggests that a Swedish nationality is an enabling force for the creation of a cosmopolitan identity.

However, a cosmopolitan identity is not necessarily reflected in the Swedish national space. As the women returned to Sweden, their cosmopolitan selves were not affirmed by local Swedes. As former expats, they were neglected and stripped of their accumulated cosmopolitan capital outside the SWEA context. Within the (Swedish) national structure of class and gender, they encountered a lack of interest in their experiences abroad. As the women interviewed seldom had their own professional careers, but had migrated as “trailing spouses”, on their return they were faced with the onerous task of converting their rather firm upper-class-housewife-capital abroad into a Swedish
class hierarchy based on professional titles and careers, which clearly marks their migration experiences as gendered experiences. The loss of capital in the wider society (of non-expats) is probably the reason why they maintained their membership in SWEA Sweden.

In summary, the article reveals how Swedish migrant women use their national identity to inhabit and nurture their cosmopolitan selves within a global structure of whiteness that continues to privilege white subjects. It demonstrates how subjects with a white national identity can identify with a transgressive project that seeks to expand the national into a contemporary multicultural global project without losing their national identity. Nevertheless, such a project is not easily endorsed in a national context in which “old” structures of social hierarchies prevail and place the women outside the same boundaries. Despite the women’s efforts to foreground themselves as cosmopolitan subjects with sophisticated manners and ethics on their homecoming, the response from their domestic peers is, according to the women’s narratives, to silence such features. In response to this silence, the women had to re-define their (female) cosmopolitan identities by not blending in “too much” and instead locate themselves outside narrowing national boundaries and project their national peers as being “stuck” in a national paradigm in their “crude Ecco-shoes”.

Notes
1. The interviews were carried out by Lena Sohl, PhD. Apart from field notes and recorded and transcribed interviews, visual methods included the women’s drawings of their social network.
2. Their different migrant routes are of course important in various respects. Yet, these variations will not be investigated in this article.
3. The group constituted an overwhelmingly white (even blond and blue-eyed) homogeneous group. A small number had dual citizenship in other Nordic or Western countries. Only one identified as non-white, which is why it is not possible to provide diverse statements on non-white racial perspectives.
4. Due to the strong overlap between Swedishness and whiteness in everyday Swedish language and discourse, these concepts are often used as synonyms in the women’s stories.
5. In Sweden, women who are naturally blond often reinforce this feature by dying their hair even lighter. Elderly women might of course dye their hair for reasons of ageing, which does not make them less white.
6. Ten of the women had lived in the USA. Their stories about Swedishness largely overlapped with my previous research on Swedish women in the USA (Lundström, 2014).

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