ABSTRACT  The role of the military in Canadian society has long been an issue of debate. Particularly since the Somalia scandal of 1993, the Canadian military has attempted to repair its damaged reputation among Canadians. Since that time, the Canadian Forces has represented itself as an organization based on quality leadership, strong ethics, and commitment to international security. But have representations like this changed with the increased combat-focused role the Canadian military has played recently? The 2006-2008 Canadian Forces television ad campaign presents an interesting opportunity to analyze the Canadian military's construction of identity. This article interrogates the representations constructed in the Fight recruitment campaign and finds that while some shifts have occurred, the Canadian Forces appears to be fighting a representational change overall.

KEYWORDS  Representation; Military; Canada; Identity; Television advertising

RÉSUMÉ  Le rôle de l’armée dans la société canadienne a longtemps été un sujet de débat. Particulièrement depuis le scandale de la Somalie de 1993, l’armée canadienne a tenté de réparer sa réputation endommagée chez les Canadiens. Depuis ce temps, les Forces canadiennes ont représenté lui-même comme une organisation basée sur un leadership de qualité, une éthique forte, et l’engagement à la sécurité internationale. Mais comme ce sont des représentations changé avec la mission de combat axé sur l’augmentation de l’armée canadienne a joué récemment? La campagne 2006-08 des Forces canadiennes de publicité à la télévision présente une opportunité intéressante à analyser la construction de l’armée canadienne de l’identité. Cet article interroge les représentations construites à la campagne de recrutement de combat et conclut que si certains changements ont eu lieu, les Forces canadiennes semble être la lutte contre un changement de représentation globale.

MOTS CLÉS  Représentation; Militaire; Canada; Identité; Publicité télévisée

What role the military should play in Canada has long been an issue of debate among policymakers, academics, and citizens alike. Frequently, that debate is framed within the discursive parameters of whether the Canadian Forces should be utilized primarily as peacekeepers or as soldiers in the international context. Since the Suez Crisis in 1956, peacekeeping is often portrayed as the most important foreign policy role that the Canadian Forces have abroad (Maloney, 2003). Reflected within news
discourse, as well as in government and media culture discourse more broadly, the “myth of the Canadian peacekeeper” is one that is deeply entrenched within the nation's culture (Granatstein, 2006; Maloney, 2003).¹

And the Canadian peacekeeping myth seems to be a particularly palatable one for the country's citizens as well. Public opinion surveys continue to show that the majority of Canadians view the military's foremost role as peacekeeping at the same time as they voice concerns over a perceived shift from peacekeeping to more active combat roles (Ipsos Reid Corporation, 2010). Furthermore, Canadians frequently claim that the top focus of the Canadian Forces should be international rather than domestic, acting as the “good citizen of the international community, being the friendly, helpful provider of humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping services” (Ipsos Reid Corporation, 2010, p. 3). In all, peacekeeping as a role for its military tends to get valorized for and among Canadians, further embedding peacekeeping as a fundamental Canadian myth.

The idealization of peacekeeping as an important Canadian international role appears to remain despite the fact that Canadian participation in traditional United Nations–led peacekeeping missions has been on the decline for some time.² In addition, Canada most recently participated in a combat mission in Afghanistan. With this shift in its military role abroad, have representations of the Canadian Forces changed as well? In other words, with the more combat-focused role the Canadian military has recently played in countries like Afghanistan, have representations of the role of the Canadian Forces followed suit? Has the construction of Canadians as peacekeepers been replaced with Canadians as soldiers, for example? Is this part of a greater shift toward re-constructing Canada as a “warrior nation,” as some have recently argued (Richler, 2012)?

The Canadian Forces recruitment campaign from 2006 to 2008 is a rich site of imagery that can be mined to help answer these research questions. At a time when the Canadian Forces continued to attempt to repair its damaged reputation from the Somalia Affair³ and was facing all-time recruitment lows, its award-winning advertising campaign for television and film audiences during the latter half of the decade marked a brief moment of change in the representation of the Canadian Forces. Presenting an image of who and what the Canadian Forces are, the commercials appear to construct a different model than what has been presented in the past. Drawing on cultural studies and semiotics to critically analyze the advertising campaign, I argue that despite an initial shift in the representation of the Canadian Forces—where the Canadian Forces’ members are represented as participating in dangerous, fast-paced, internationally oriented combat missions, particularly in the first ad—the overarching representation within this recruitment campaign is one in which the Canadian Forces are constructed as “helpful heroes,” focused not on the action of combat, per se, but instead on helping civilians, both at home and abroad. As such, the representations that are uncovered through close analysis reveal a more traditional representation of the Canadian military than some may suspect. Before describing this analysis and argument in detail, I will first examine the informing literature, theoretical framework, and methodological approach that inform this study.
Representing the Canadian military

The literature on the representation of the Canadian military in popular dramatic media culture is limited to date. While culture(s) of militarization and representations in traditional commemorative realms such as museums, monuments, or archives have been examined (Cahill, 2010; Gough, 2002), the concentrated analysis of fictional or dramatic entertainment texts is yet relatively unexplored. Beyond some work on representations constructed within a Canadian video game, a feature film, and television docudramas, sparse attention has been paid by scholars to the way that Canadian media culture has represented its military history (Carr, 2005, 2007; Dick, 1993; Epp, 2000; Goldie, 2014; Sloniowski, 2002).

But perhaps even more surprising than the lack of scholarly attention paid to this area is the number of actual representations of Canadian military engagement within Canadian media culture. As Dornan (2010) has recently noted, Canada is unique among G8 nations for its pointed avoidance of using its military past and present for dramatic entertainment. Dornan (2010) argues that the reluctance to explore military experiences as narrative material may be explained by a deep Canadian cultural ambivalence—an ambivalence that comes at a loss. While depictions of war and the military can valorize, question, and critique, all of these entertainments are nonetheless necessary. They are means by which a society confronts its military actions, for good and for ill … Whether they are jingoistic screeds, baleful laments or absurdist comedies, they are invitations to a culture to consider an aspect of itself, and one every bit as important as the other staples of prime-time entertainment: the police, the judiciary, the intelligence apparatus, or the health care system. (p. 364)

Overall, it is a significant statement about Canadian culture that so little consideration of its military history is presented within its media products. This is, in part, why it is imperative to study the few representations that do exist within popular media culture. Examples such as the Canadian Forces’ recruitment campaigns, artifacts widely advertised on television, film, and via the Web in Canada, may begin to help us understand the general lack of narrative material elsewhere.

Beyond the Canadian context, much has been written on the representation of war (Baraban, Jaegar, & Muller, 2012), specifically within the genre of film (Virilio, 1989). A pertinent work within this field of research is James Chapman’s War and Film (2008). In it, Chapman examines how films across nations often represent war in three thematic ways—as spectacle, tragedy, or adventure. His discussions of both spectacle and adventure are useful conceptual frameworks for this article.

As spectacle, the relationship between actuality and artifice in the war film is germane. Chapman (2008) describes the historical movement from the early war films to today’s films as displaying a “tension between the desire to capture ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ images of war and the tendency to aestheticize war through aspects of film form and style” (p. 12). Chapman argues that the realism in war films is acutely constructed and that most people only have a mediated conception of war rather than an idea of what is realistic or not—only that it is realistic according to other representations of
war they have seen. Relying on various cinematic techniques, “the emphasis is not on realism but on spectacle: what the film offers is not the reality of war but a sensory simulation of it. In this way the spectator is allowed to experience the thrill (or nausea) of battle without the inconvenience of actually being shot or blown to pieces” (Chapman, 2008, p. 26). Via such reasoning Chapman argues that “realism is a set of representational conventions that conform to our expectations of what an event should be like” (p. 30). Drawing on the conventions of realism, then, can convey authenticity in war films. In combat films, for example, the directors often draw on techniques of cinema-vérité such as hand-held cameras and telephoto lenses to create the look of television news coverage so that the two forms often appear to collide. This documentary-realist aesthetic has been the dominant mode of expression since the Second World War in combat films.

In referring to representations of war as adventure in film, Chapman (2008) terms this “the pleasure culture of war,” which includes the “representations of war as an adventure narrative and a site of heroic actions” (p. 14). Within this trend, there is a tendency to valorize war, rather than stress its hellishness, as in anti-war films. Rejecting the Marxist explanations for this trend, Chapman suggests that more likely than being used as an instrument of hegemony, “popular culture is merely reflecting back our fascination with war” (p. 185). Children and their war play hold similar narratives of pleasure around acts of killing, as do the recent spate of war-related video games, such as Call of Duty. As Chapman explains, “When few of us have the opportunity to participate in real war, it seems that we are increasingly obsessed with playing at war” (p. 186). Film relies heavily on the narrative conventions of popular war literature in this regard, so that camaraderie of the service, honour and duty (patriotism), and an ideal of heroic masculinity are presented in this category.

Roger Stahl’s Militainment (2010) is another important work to note within the literature on war representations. In a similar way to Chapman’s (2008) discussion of the pleasure culture of war, Stahl (2010) examines the way that war is presented and viewed as entertainment, what he calls militainment. Importantly, Stahl argues that rather than present war as a spectacle, so that audiences are disengaged and distanced, “the new interactive militainment presents war as something to be played and experienced vicariously” (p. i). Stahl argues that rather than the citizen playing the war, this mode is a sophisticated way in which the military-entertainment complex “plays the citizen.” In all, despite the lack of explicit explorations into Canadian representations of its military, there is a strong base of literature on war representation, particularly in the film genre, to utilize in the investigation of the Canadian Forces’ Fight advertising campaign.

Cultural studies, advertising, and mythmaking
Advertising products such as the Canadian Forces recruitment campaign are a part of media culture (Kellner, 2011). The products of media culture that we experience, such as radio, television, and film, play a sometimes subtle, but important role in society. As Kellner explains:

The products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality,
of sexuality; and of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture. (p. 7)

Media culture is important to explore because it does fundamental societal work. It enables us to understand our place in the world, according to social norms and values, and it helps us to learn what it means to be a social being. While it is clearly not the only site within which social learning occurs, the pervasiveness of media culture within North America means that it often plays a predominant role. Thus, media culture products such as television programs or even magazine advertisements work as a kind of cultural pedagogy that “educate us on how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear, and desire—and what not to” (Kellner, 2011, p. 7). Because of its pervasiveness and ubiquity, media culture can be a particularly powerful agent of education, covering all sorts of social norms and values.

One important site of media culture where issues of power, domination, identity, and resistance can arise is advertising. As an integral part of consumer culture, advertising surrounds us and makes up much of the media culture we consume (in addition to frequently financing it). As a “discourse through and about objects” (Jhally, 2011, p. 200), advertising tells us about products, but also about how those products are connected to important domains in our lives. As “advertising promotes images of what the audience conceives of as ‘the good life,’ ” it often re-wraps and sells people’s dreams and emotions back to them (p. 201). In this way, advertising conveys important value information about what society culturally views as integral to make one happy, satisfied, prestigious, et cetera, and so has important cultural codes embedded within its consumer goals.

Advertising’s concern with selling lifestyles and socially desirable identities via products means that it is also tied to issues of identity and myth construction. Kellner (1995) outlines how advertising constantly destabilizes identity, and how it works to establish, affirm, and undermine myths. “Like myths, ads frequently resolve social contradictions, provide models of identity, and celebrate the existing social order” (p. 247). Barthes (1972) famously associated advertising with contemporary mythologies. As he explained, advertising works by “hailing” individuals and inviting them to identify with the products, images, or behaviour being presented, thereby offering the image of an idealized “you,” self-transformation, or a new identity. While advertising works to create an identity for a product (or company, or person, etc.), it also constructs or connotes values such as “health” or “wealth,” for instance, and thus, “in buying products we buy the image and so contribute to the construction of our identities through consumption” (Barker, 2000, p. 62).

**The Canadian Forces—Recruits needed**

In 2001, the Canadian Forces identified recruitment as one of its top priorities and set its sights on expanding its force (McMullan, Rehal, Read, Luo, Wu, Pitt, Papania, & Campbell, 2009). But there were some impediments to these recruitment goals. One was the disastrous effect that the Somalia Affair had on the Forces’ reputation and
image. Ever since the scandal, the organization had been trying to re-establish itself as Canada's appropriate, well-disciplined, tolerant, and trustworthy international military ambassadors (Bercuson, 2009). Beyond its reputational problems, the Canadian Forces were rarely seen as a viable career option for young Canadians. In a study of national attitudes toward the military in 2002, for instance, young Canadians (aged 15 to 24) and adults (over 25) indicated that they viewed the Canadian Forces as a sexist, racist, and less-than-ideal place to work (Aubry, 2002).

The Canadian Forces understood that its recruitment campaigns were one of the primary windows through which Canadians viewed their military, thereby constructing the image and identity of the Canadian Forces “brand” more generally (McMullan et al., 2009). The organization undertook market research to define their primary target audience and to construct advertising that would help overcome the recruitment impediments and attract applicants. Forty-two focus groups were conducted with over 300 Canadians to this end. The research indicated that the Canadian Forces’ brand was not clearly defined and had different meanings for different segments of society, although a pervasive lack of awareness and understanding about their military remained among Canadian youth. In addition, this research indicated that the traditional approach to recruiting that the Canadian Forces had taken was no longer effective. In the past few decades, advertisements for the Canadian Forces had shown the softer, gentler side of military life. But the focus group participants reported that they knew about the hardships of war and found it insulting that the Canadian Forces inferred that they couldn’t handle the realities of the profession, yet wanted them to join. These youth found previous advertising campaign taglines, such as “There’s no life like it,” to be boring, with little resonance. Instead, these participants indicated they wanted ads that portrayed “real-life scenarios” that soldiers might actually face (McMullan et al., 2009).

Responding to these concerns, the Canadian Forces launched the first phase of its Fight recruitment campaign in 2006. The $3-million campaign consisted of three 60-second ads. Fight 1: International Security and British Columbia Search and Rescue was released in 2006, and Fight 2: Disaster Relief in Canada and Rescue at Sea and Fight 3: Drug Bust and Hard Landing followed in 2008. They were shown on television and in movie theatres across the country. The ads focused on the operational side of life in the Canadian Forces and presented a collage of images of Canadians working in various scenarios. Done in a cinéma-vérité style, the ads featured scenes of soldiers rescuing flood victims in Manitoba, patrolling war-torn neighbourhoods abroad, and evacuating people from forest fire–ridden areas. The tagline for the campaign asked viewers to “Fight Distress, Fight Fear, Fight Chaos—Fight with the Canadian Forces.”

It was an award-winning and successful campaign. The Department of National Defence was named one of Canada's top marketers of 2007 by Marketing Magazine following the release of the first ad (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2009). In 2009, the campaign won three more awards, including a third-place finish for the coveted Best Television Commercial category (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2011). Beyond its industry success, the Canadian Forces saw a surge in recruits and eventually met and exceeded its recruitment objectives. In fact, the
Fight campaigns were seen to be so successful that the Canadian Forces began turning away infantry recruits in 2009 (Fisher, 2009).

An Analyzing the Fight campaign

In order to analyze the representations of the Canadian Forces presented within its Fight recruitment campaign, I relied on semiotic analysis. There is a lengthy history of the analysis of advertising within the study of semiotics, just as there is application of semiotics to television and film (Berger, 2012; Metz, 1974; Rose, 2012; Seiter, 1992; Williamson, 1978). In this study, the semiological analysis is closely aligned with the approach of Penn (2000), who describes the process of semiological analysis as “dissection followed by articulation or the reconstruction of the semanticized image” (p. 232). She outlines several stages that are necessary for a systematic analysis, including choosing the materials (stage 1) and conducting a denotative inventory in which the analyst identifies all the elements in the material (stage 2). According to Penn (2000), it is important that the list include all of the constituent pieces systematically, so as to avoid a selectively self-confirming analysis. Next, the analysis of higher-order levels of signification must be conducted (stage 3). Building on the denotative inventory, this third stage investigates issues of connotation, myth, and referent systems and asks what each element in the denotative inventory connotes, how the elements relate to each other, and what forms of cultural knowledges are drawn upon or needed to make sense of the signs. Once the analysis is complete (stage 4), the final stage in Penn's approach is to report the findings (stage 5). While Penn's work is geared toward still images, she nonetheless focuses on advertising campaigns and as such, her analytic approach is pertinent to this study.

Drawing on this, I first conducted an exhaustive denotative inventory for all three of the Fight campaign ads. Here, I followed Metz (1974) in his suggestion that analysis of the sign should be at the level of the shot in moving images (i.e., its smallest sign), what he called its largest minimum segment. Thus, at each shot, I indicated denotative signs and also considered the unchosen alternatives for each element (paradigmatic reconstruction). Next, I used this inventory to investigate higher orders of signification. I examined what each element in each shot signified or connoted. I also examined the relationship of the elements to each other (syntagmatic reconstruction). In all, I isolated and analyzed the important signs in the text (including signifiers/signifieds, systems, codes, and ideologies) as well as the paradigmatic/syntagmatic structures of the text and the use of the medium of television on the text (shots, camera angles, editing techniques, light, colour, music, and sound) in order to begin to decode the meaning being constructed within. This case study was chosen not to be representative of a particular genre, or code, but because of its subject matter, as described in the previous section.

Fighting change

To help situate the analysis, I will briefly describe the ads (at a denotative level) before discussing connotative and mythic levels of meaning, among other analytic issues of note. The first ad, International Security and British Columbia Search and Rescue, holds a lot of signifiers within a 60-second span and is fruitful for analysis. It opens to a dark-purple toned ocean scene, where a large ship is moving quickly out on the ocean. The
text in the right-hand corner describes the geographic location as “The Gulf of Oman.”
The scene then cuts quickly to the inside of the ship, where soldiers are taking machine
guns off of the wall; the soldiers then run down the corridors and out onto the deck.
Next, the ad cuts to a number of soldiers in helmets and fatigues, with guns held in
the ready position, coming out from behind the wall of a concrete building in a line
formation. They are moving throughout what appears to be a residential area with
concrete buildings, a parked rusted truck, and the sound of a dog barking in the dis-
tance. The soldiers move quickly and take cover against walls, looking up and staying
close together in their line.

The next image we see is of the snow-covered Rocky Mountains, with a helicopter
in the middle of the long shot. The text reads “British Columbia.” A shot of a soldier
looking down out of the open door of a helicopter is then followed by a shot back to
the initial ship, where a rope ladder is being drawn up, and a rubber dinghy speeds
off. Next, some soldiers jump out of a plane, and then three men are moving quickly
through the snow-covered brush wearing large backpacks and white helmets. The
next shot is back to the formation of soldiers, who are in a concrete stairwell, moving
up. They kick open a door, throw in a flash grenade, and the next scene is of the sol-
diers rushing out three people, two men and a woman. They are met by a medic (iden-
tified by a red cross symbol on an armband), who puts a blanket over the woman’s
shoulders before going into a medic’s truck. The medic and others are running. The
mid-right of the screen reads “Fight Fear” as the scene is paused. Then the ad cuts to
display one of the white-helmeted males rappelling down a mountainside to the sight
of a plane tail and wreckage in the background. Next, a person in an orange jumpsuit
is tending to a middle-aged woman in a white parka. Her head is being examined and
she is grimacing. Then the camera cuts back out to the ocean, on a dinghy this time,
heading for what appears to be a rowboat with a number of people in it. The Navy
personnel hand a plastic bag to the people in the rowboat and the text reads “Fight
Distress” and the ad pauses here.

Finally, the ad cuts back to the conflict setting, where a tank is moving down a
dusty, wrecked road, before jumping to a scene of a male figure in a balaclava with a
rifle pointed out of a broken window, a quick shot of a car bomb, then a car burning,
and then a shot of a Canadian Forces member in what appears to be a dirt hole with
support beams sticking out. The text now reads “Fight Chaos” and the ad stills before
moving on to the Canadians digging and working in the dirt area. A still shot of an
African-Canadian soldier is presented with the word “Fight” before shifting on to the
scene of a group of soldiers in uniform talking, where the text reads, “Fight with the
Canadian Forces.” The scene then blacks out to show the Canadian Forces logo, with
the text “Join Us,” “Over 100 exciting full and part-time careers,” followed by the web-
site address and the Canadian government logo.

As one can surmise, there is a great deal to deconstruct within this advertisement.
Firstly, much meaning is conveyed in the way the ad is edited. The ad relies on the
codes of both combat war films and news coverage to connote meaning. For instance,
the ad is very much in line with the representation of war as spectacle within the film
genre. Not unlike Saving Private Ryan in its cinematic style, if not its content, the ad is
shot in de-saturated colours, with jerky camera movements and unfocused shots. Relying on the technique of montage as well, the fast-paced quick cuts throughout the 60-second ad convey motion, action, adventure, and even danger. In fact, at times, this ad moves so quickly through the various shots and scenarios that the viewer can feel slightly disoriented as to what is happening. With these various techniques, this ad draws on the conventions or codes of the “war film,” or the combat film, in that the spectacle of battle, or action, is the focus of the ad.

In addition to drawing on war film conventions, this ad also relies on the codes of television news coverage. The colour (dark, grainy blues, purples and greys) as well as the motion and the hand-held bumpy shots all work to connote documentary or news-style filming (i.e., live footage) so that viewers are asked to read this as a kind of reality construction. This cinema-vérité style is often used within combat cinema, as we saw, and thus, the stylistic choices connote realism and truthfulness. They speak to representations of reality.

Interestingly, the ads are also lacking any narration or voice-over—the message is conveyed via graphics or written text, image, and sound effects. This is another often-used technique to construct a realist presentation in the cinema-vérité style, where lack of narration or voice-over is seen to provide a more authentic way of representing reality. As a kind of silence, the lack of narration or dialogue throughout the entire ad is notable. While the background music and sound effects are like underwater drumming alongside sounds made by boats and helicopters, the focus on the action and movement over dialogue seems to indicate that what is important is the action and movement itself, and not a description. Further to this, with the quick cuts and the fast-paced editing, the faces of the individuals are often difficult to see and the scenes themselves are grainy and unfocused. Again, the emphasis appears to be on action and movement, rather than individuals or the characters themselves. Interestingly, in this ad, when a face is in focus or stilled long enough to see, there is both a Caucasian female and an African-Canadian male in the forefront. The remaining majority of individuals represented are young Caucasian males, although, as I indicated above, with the movement and quick cuts in addition to the blurry focus, it is sometimes incredibly difficult to speculate on the actor’s gender or ethnicity in the ad. This seems to connote the meaning that anyone can be a member of the Canadian Forces, allowing the viewer to insert him- or herself into the suggested adventure with more ease. The message that “You too can be a Canadian Forces member” is constructed within, in part, because of the inability to distinguish particular characters in these advertisements. They are everyone and no one all at once. Ideologically, this begins to construct important meaning around who is meant to be a Canadian Forces member, and thus, points to distinct attempts to include females and African-Canadians within that representation. However, these individuals are still underrepresented in general within the ad, as the majority of the Canadian Forces members are represented as young Caucasian males, aged 18 to 29.

Furthermore, there is a strong sense of presence or of “being there,” a convention that is also drawn upon in war films to represent adventure. The ad is shot from a first-person point of view so that the camera, or viewer, is frequently constructed as if they
are also there or involved. The confusion sometimes results from this perspective, as there is very little contextual information provided (in terms of long shots, for instance). This point of view also mimics combat war films or video games, where this perspective is frequently utilized. Like the blurred faces, it suggests a kind of “everyperson” perspective, so that the viewer is asked to insert him/herself into the situation as a direct participant. The ad is shot without context and frequently in a close-up manner, as if we are right behind the person moving, for instance. The emphasis on the first-person point of view is reminiscent of Stahl’s (2010) concept of militainment, so that beyond the spectacle, the audience member is asked to “participate” as virtual citizen-soldiers through the interactive style in this ad. In this way, membership in the Canadian Forces is presented as something to be played and experienced vicariously—a kind of first-person fantasy.

The idea of being involved in a “special mission” draws on another convention of the war film—that of war as an adventure narrative and a site of heroic actions. In this representation, camaraderie, honour and duty, and an ideal of heroic masculinity are often presented. War is also depicted as a test of courage and strength, and a belief in home and nation is present. It is under this framework that the syntagmatic structure of the ad needs to be explored. The opening scenes that focus on guns and combat/danger-types situations (i.e., off the coast of Oman on the ship, and then with the formation in Afghanistan) is a very different presentation of the Canadian Forces than has been constructed recently. The emphasis in this ad is on the combat role of the Canadian Forces, with its personnel being involved in dangerous and fast-moving situations. This is in contrast to representations of the Canadian Forces that have been constructed previously, such as the “There’s no life like it” campaign of the 1990s. While combat, guns, and danger have been downplayed in the recent past, these features are moved to the forefront within this ad. For example, danger is connoted via the fast movements of the scenes, but also by the way the characters are moving with urgency. The various settings also convey danger, whether it is the concrete desolate neighbourhood or the plane crash site. In addition, the actions of the characters themselves connote danger—by taking guns off the wall, or by rappelling down a mountain or jumping out of a plane. The music and soundtrack also connotes danger with its dark undertones and threatening noises. In a number of places danger is signified to be of major importance within this ad. Highlighting the dangerous element of the Canadian Forces has not been emphasized in recent representations and so marks a significant shift.

What has been represented in more recent representations, however, is the narrative of the Canadian Forces as “helpful,” and this is where the conventions of war as adventure representation play an interesting part. Within the various storylines in this ad there is clearly an adventure being presented. In the Gulf of Oman storyline, the adventure or special mission is to help the stranded individuals on the ocean. In the Afghanistan storyline, the adventure is the rescue of the civilians, and in the British Columbian narrative, the adventure is the rescue of the plane crash victims in the mountains. So, while the representation of war-as-adventure conventions are being drawn upon, the adventure being presented in this ad is actually not the experience
of combat, but of helping or rescuing civilians. This presents an interesting statement about the Canadian Forces. Throughout this ad, the narrative of “helping” dominates. Even in the scenes where there appears to be danger and potentially life-threatening situations (e.g., taking the guns down on the ship or via movement in a combat zone), the end result in these storylines is a rescue. Rather than construct a storyline about the combat dangers the Canadian Forces encounter, then, the dangers that they face have to do with an ultimate, and overarching (i.e., important) goal of helping. Nevertheless, the simple fact that guns and potential conflict and combat are constructed here is a different direction than we have previously seen. But “The ends justify the means” representation often found in the special mission or adventure focus in war films is very much present within this ad. Even if Canadians have guns, for example, the representation suggests they use them to save people, not kill them. This construction of the Canadian Forces as helping people carries a great deal of ideological weight within the political context of Canadian culture.

The representation of the Canadian Forces as helping is further emphasized by the use of colour in the advertisement. Although most of the ad is shot in muted purple, grey, and green tones, the only noticeable colour is red—and this is found most visibly whenever a medic sign is present on an armband, for instance, or on the side of a truck. The colour red clearly has important signification for Canadians, with their red and white flag, which appears to be synonymous with the medic flag, so that one wants to equate Canadians with help. The medic sign is also very similar to the Red Cross sign, a recognizable institution in Canada, and the red cross sign itself is referred to as “an important symbol of humanitarian protection” (Canadian Red Cross, 2014) that can connote a number of things, such as aiding in times of trouble or—perhaps more ideologically important here—representing international neutrality on a political level. The Red Cross makes a point of not publicly taking sides in international conflicts and thus is often thought to be an unbiased or unprejudiced organization that assists civilians in times of trouble. Highlighting the medic sign as an important one within this ad could thus be read as a signal of Canada’s intention to help in a non-politicized way.

In this way, the paradigmatic structure of the text follows a combat/peace or aggressor/helper oppositional structure. Rather than face danger and use guns to kill, for instance, the Canadian Forces do this to save. While extreme conditions are evident and physical and mental challenges are present, no actual combat is witnessed in the ad, or even really suggested. Everything that is constructed is done with the ideological imperative that Canada is a nation that helps. This construction is particularly important within the cultural debate over the role of the Canadian military within Canada, as by displaying a side of the forces that engages with danger/action/guns at the same time that it rescues/saves/helps civilians, the ad aims to appease members on both sides of the debate to some degree. At the same time as combat and military action are suggested to be part of the job, however, the end and overarching result is actually assisting other humans all over the globe.

The themes identified above are continued within the second and third ads as well, but the emphasis is more clearly on helping in a domestic context rather than in an international setting. In Fight 2: Disaster Relief in Canada and Rescue at Sea, the ad
opens to a scene of a forest fire in the distance, shot as if the viewer is in the helicopter. The text reads “Forest Fires in British Columbia.” The next scene is of a truck convoy, driving by the devastation left by the fire, and then we’re taken to a scene of flooding in Manitoba, with army trucks moving forward through great masses of water. Soldiers are digging sand and putting up sandbag walls before a scene of a stretcher with a male on it leads into a scene of firefighters fighting a great blaze. Oxygen is being provided to a woman in the next scene, and then the ad cuts to a shot of two people on the top of a van stuck within the flood. They are waving up to the camera, and the shot is constructed again as if the viewer is in the helicopter (which is also what we hear in the soundtrack). The next scene includes people being rescued off of roofs by Canadian Forces members, while the people on the van receive a ladder from the helicopter and a female medic escorts a woman and a child. Next, there is a “Rescue Off the Coast of Nova Scotia,” where a ship on the ocean is visible, as is a jet flying overhead. We see a smoking ship and navy personnel swimming below a helicopter toward people in life jackets (who presumably are from the sinking ship). Scenes of the flooding, fires, and rescue are played back quickly with the same text as in ad 1—“Fight Fear, Fight Distress, Fight Chaos—Fight with the Canadian Forces,” which is followed by the fade-out images.

Fight 3: Drug Bust and Hard Landing provides more of the same. The ad begins in the cockpit of a plane, looking out over a snowy landscape, and we see a young Caucasian male pulling on an orange jumpsuit. Then the scene cuts to a formation of snowmobilers moving very fast over a barren field of snow. Through the snow, we see a plane tail and the outline of a plane. The next scene is out on the ocean again, on “Canada's East Coast,” where a Canadian ship is rushing toward another. The males on the second ship who see the Canadian ship coming begin rushing around and throwing barrels overboard. Then the male in the orange jumpsuit jumps out of a plane, and the ad cuts to a scene inside the presumed plane crash, where people are covered in frost and it looks very cold. A mother and a child are huddled together in distress. The next scene is one of confrontation, where the ship’s drug runners are overtaken by the Canadians. A press conference is held to show the drugs, and the plane crash victims are saved.

A bit of context is needed before tackling the analysis of the second and third ads. While ad 1 was well received by marketing professionals and its target audience, it also received backlash from political opponents for being too “American.” Not surprisingly, because of its cinematic conventions, some compared the ad to being of the Saving Private Ryan fashion, with too much focus on combat when the Canadian Forces does many other things (Ittan, 2006). This was a particularly touchy theme at the time because of the Canadian involvement in Afghanistan. There was much debate within the country about whether Canadians should continue to play a role in that conflict while causalities were seen to be on the rise, with very little to no concrete results in the country. Perhaps in response, the representation of the Canadian Forces in the second and third ads of the Fight campaign is slightly different. Rather than a narrative focus on international security and combat (or even weapons), these ads feature a heavy domestic focus, particularly within the context of domestic disasters. Here, the
narrative of “helping” or “rescuing” remains very apparent. Members assist people of
the Forces in the forest fires of BC, in the floods of Manitoba, and in a northern plane
-crash. People are also assisted by the Canadian Forces’ efforts to squelch a drug trade
(thereby helping many Canadians indirectly). In ads 2 and 3, the Canadian Forces are
again presented to be “rescuing” people in peril, in disasters, and in times of danger.

The style and editing of these ads remains very similar to the first, however. Thus,
the ads draw on the conventions of news, documentaries, and war films with their
cinema-vérité style. Also, there is still a great deal of focus on action/adventure/danger,
with the ads’ quick cuts, confusion, and jumpy style. The focus on speed remains (via
snowmobiles or rushing ships), as do elements of danger (members jumping out of
planes, people trapped on vehicles and in planes). The people in the ads are often
blurry, and their faces hard to see. The exceptions are the victims, who are often ex-
pressive in their discomfort. However, the narrative focus is not on combat but on
helping or rescuing—an extension of a theme in the first ad, but without any of the
suggestion of combat or weaponry of the first. So while in the first ad, we see a number
of weapons, the second and third ads have only one quick scene where guns are evi-
dent. This is an interesting shift from the first ad.

These ads contain a great deal of cultural relevance for Canadians, which further
works to create a sense of realism. Geographically, there are important signs such as
the snow-covered and bare landscapes of the North as well as important national sym-
-bols, such as shots of the mountains. The ads also convey important cultural disaster
references. For anyone in the western or the northern parts of the country, sights of
forest fires are all too familiar, unfortunately, and the danger inherent within under-
stood implicitly. Likewise, disasters such as the Manitoba floods speak to many
Canadians who have either directly been impacted or have repeatedly witnessed these
natural disasters via news coverage. The work to construct what Canada is, and how
the Canadian Forces helps Canadians in times of trouble or disaster, is important here.
By portraying scenes of domestic crisis, and in a quick-cut fashion, these ads draw on
the emotions of Canadians.

Together, all three of these ads are grainy, fast-paced, a bit confusing, and action
-oriented. They connote adventure, danger, the importance of the work of the Canadian
Forces as well as the seriousness of the work (via the silence and lack of dialogue).
What is interesting in these ads is the slight difference in the syntagmatic structure.
While the myth of the Canadian Forces as “helper” is certainly conveyed in all three
ads, the first ad has more of an emphasis on international work and combat/gun-re-
lated missions. In ads 2 and 3, the focus remains on “helping” but is situated in a do-
mestic search-and-rescue or emergency-response setting. Ideologically, this latter
representation may be more palatable for Canadians. But ads 2 and 3 are also much
less of a challenge to prior constructions of the Canadian Forces image and myths than
the first.

Conclusion
The representations of the Canadian Forces throughout the initial Fight campaign are
intriguing because they display a moment where the combat role of the Canadian
Forces comes to the forefront, even if it is still presented within a more traditional
Canadian representational context of helping. Perhaps even more telling, culturally, is that despite the fact that this combat role surfaced in 2006, and was considered to be very successful from a recruiting and advertising perspective, it nonetheless was practically eliminated in the remaining 2008 ads. Moreover, while the first ad focused on the role of the Canadian Forces in an international context, the second and third ads shifted to a domestic focus. In all, this is not the reluctant-warrior image that we have seen presented in other popular culture sites on Canada's military (Goldie, 2009). Nor is it the peacekeeper, or even a representation of a “warrior nation” (Richler, 2012). Instead, these advertisements work to construct an image of what may be better termed the “helpful hero”—the soldier who faces danger and adventure in order to help others out of distress. Not the soldier who kills, but the one who ensures that people are saved from rooftops or who puts unwieldy fires at bay, or who battles extreme conditions in the North to save plane crash victims.

This may not be completely out of line with how Canadians often conceive of themselves as a people and a nation. Perhaps the realism that is conveyed through these ads is realistic in part, because it conveys not the reality of the Canadian Forces experience, but what Canadians expect the reality of that experience to be, as Chapman (2008) alluded. That is, as a culture almost dogmatically convinced that Canada's military should be focused on peace rather than combat, it is natural that the image and identity constructed within the military's recruitment campaign should reflect this belief. Thus, while there is a brief moment in 2006 where the identity and image of the Canadian Forces, with a combat-focused international role, was constructed in a different manner than the peacekeeper version that has recently been emphasized, that the image converts to the domestically focused helper speaks to the way that the representations of the Canadian Forces are actually fighting a shift in representation. In other words, while this recruitment campaign appears to try to expand the representation of the Canadian Forces by highlighting the “fight” aspect of the Canadian military, it ultimately reverts to the traditional representations understood and accepted by many Canadians—that of helper, both internationally and at home. In this way, the Canadian Forces appears to ultimately fight the potential moment of representational change.

The findings of this analysis are imperative to consider within the context of broader discussions around the culture of militarization in the nation. While some have recently argued that a culture of militarization is on the rise in Canada (Fremeth, 2010; McCready, 2010; Richler, 2012), dissecting the textual and visual representations present in the Fight campaign shows that such a distinct shift away from a narrative that emphasizes an “‘unmilitary community’ who value their long history of peacekeeping and humanitarianism” (Fremeth, 2010, p. 53) needs to be interrogated more closely. In fact, the analysis of the first stage of the recruitment campaign actually points to a predominant theme of assistance, humanitarian goals, and emergency rescues—a theme much more akin to the peacekeeping narrative ascribed to be dominant in the 1990s. And while particular governments may shift in focus and representational style, this is not to say that Canadians as a whole have followed suit as well. The Fight campaign and its initial-ad backlash may actually point to a culture
that is more resistant to a change toward militarization than we suspect. Or perhaps not. Perhaps it is only a culture that is slow to shift. But it is integral that scholars look to the texts themselves in order to question whether in fact representations are actually shifting. In this case, we find that while there is a moment of representational change in the role of the military, the overall narrative of Canadian soldiers as helpful, not hurtful, remains intact in this campaign.

Of even further interest in this discussion is how the shift in representation resonated with recruits—the targeted 18- to 24-year-old age bracket. Despite, or perhaps because of, the public backlash, these individuals responded in droves to this recruitment campaign. How can we explain this? Is it because this representation of the military draws on familiar codes and conventions present in media culture products they consume, such as films or video games? Were they drawn to the representation of the Canadian Forces operations as involving danger and adventure? Or were the recruits drawn to the Canadian Forces at this time because of the engagement in Afghanistan rather than the ads themselves? Whatever the reason, exploring the reception of these ads in an in-depth manner is another natural step toward understanding the representations presented within, as well as the representations, image, and identity of the Canadian military more broadly. In addition, a comparative approach that examines whether similar narratives are found in the recruitment materials of other armies across the globe would be particularly interesting, or whether these recruitment narratives are restricted by the political cultures of the particular countries more explicitly.

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Notes
1. For a detailed explanation of how the peacekeeping myth came to exist and how it has been utilized as a strategic political tool in Canada, see Maloney (2003).

2. Canadian contributions to traditional peacekeeping missions led by the United Nations have been steadily on the decline since the 1990s. As of December 31, 2013, Canada contributed 115 Canadians toward UN-led peacekeeping efforts, putting Canada in 61st place in contributions compared to the 122 contributing member nations overall (Koring, 2012; United Nations, 2013).

3. The Somalia Affair centred on the brutal torture and murder of a 16-year-old Somali boy, Shidane Arone, by a member of the Canadian Forces while stationed in Somalia in 1993. The affair included other transgressions, including an earlier shooting in Somalia as well as racially charged hazing rituals in the regiments involved in the scandal. The affair culminated in the disbandment of the Canadian Airborne Regiment as well as a public inquiry into the events of the affair. See Bercuson (1997) for a detailed history.

The literature on war and film is often broken down by conflict, so that analysis has been focused, for instance, on representations of World War I (Kelly, 1997; Paris, 2000) and World War II (Basinger, 2003; Dick, 1996; Whiteclay Chambers & Culbert, 1996), the Vietnam War (Dittmar & Michaud, 2000), or the Iraq War (Pisters, 2010). While these works tend to be culture-specific and frequently locate their analysis from an American or “Hollywood” perspective (Eberwein, 2005; Slocum, 2006; Westwell, 2006), there are also works that cross national boundaries (Godfrey & Lilley, 2009; Hasian, 2001; Paris, 2000; Schubart, Virchow, White-Stanley, & Thomas, 2009; Soloman, 2007). In addition, there are more recent studies that examine conflicts and geographical regions of the world that have until now received less scholarly attention, such as Russian war films (Youngblood, 2010), the Imperial War (High, 2003), or the Civil War (Chadwick, 2009). Beyond the conflict- and nation-centred approach that has been evident within the war and film literature, there have been investigations into the construction of ethnicity and race (Woodman, 2001, 2003) as well as gender more specifically within the war film literature (Brown, 2012; Godfrey, 2009; Straw, 2008). In all, the field is varied and dynamic.

Other cinema-vérité techniques such as using authentic locations, mixing real and mocked-up news footage, and employing jarring devices like jump-cuts and freeze-frames are also often used in combat films to convey realism. Likewise, fast editing and tight close-ups, an established technique of montage, are frequently employed to create an impression of violent combat in film (Chapman, 2008).

Institutions (educational, governmental, religious, etc.) as well as individual “educators” such as parents, teachers, coaches, grandparents, and friends all play an important pedagogical role as well.

A second recruitment phase was launched in 2010.

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