‘Selling’ national security: Saab, YouTube, and the militarized neutrality of Swedish citizen identity

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ABSTRACT

Producers of large conventional weapons systems are significant actors in politics and their presence in everyday life is a potential site of militarization, yet they remain remarkably understudied in International Relations (IR) research. Though the public cannot purchase their products, 88 of the top 100 arms producers use official corporate YouTube channels to reach the public. Their YouTube videos are political artefacts that these companies use to ‘sell’ national security as military security, framing the military as a ‘good, natural, and necessary’ part of society. Examining these videos reveals how this messaging can be conceptualized as a type of militarization because of the relation ‘good, natural, and necessary’ has to national security constructions. I use an intersectional lens and a multi-modal audio-visual approach to understand how images, sounds, and texts work together to tell a version of Sweden’s national security story as constructed in Saab’s official corporate YouTube videos. These videos illuminate a view that Sweden does (and should) have militarized national security that seems counter to images of a peacekeeping nation. This national security is centred on a citizen identity that consists of masculinized, heteronormative, and nationally hierarchical constructions of militarized national security.

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… [T]he corporation itself is not simply a passive object within the domain of citizenship, but acts to shape and construct relations of citizenship – sometimes actively or deliberately, at times accidentally or passively. Either way, and for better or for worse, corporations are transformative in the arena of political identity.

Crane, Matten, and Moon (2013, 61)

Introduction

International Relations (IR) research, by and large, neglects the powerful role that corporations play in international politics and identity construction. Producers of large conventional weapons systems are a prime example of why IR needs to take corporations seriously. Not least, arms producers contribute to national and international constructions of militarized citizen identity that underlie the (active or passive) acceptance of the military as the protector
of national security and, therefore, as a natural part of foreign policy formulations. This naturalization points to the universal notion of the military as ‘good, natural and necessary’ (Jackson 2012, 2016, p 69), a notion that is central to the widespread assumption that national security is military security – an important aspect of militarization more broadly. As with ‘commonsense’ assumptions more generally (Krugman 1995), this ‘good, natural, and necessary’ assumption makes it difficult to question the military and its role in national security. In this way, because arms producers contribute to and are an important part of official constructions about national security as military security, these particular framings make it difficult to question the use of the military in foreign policy, funding of the military, and ongoing state support of domestic arms industries not least through subsidies and multilateral trade agreement protections, and in this way lend themselves to promoting and sustaining militarism (Enloe 2014; Jackson 2012; also see Stahl’s 2010 work on normalizing tropes).

As a process of bringing military values into civilian life, militarization often relies on everyday items to shift these values into the everyday (e.g. Enloe’s can of soup [2014]; Martin and Steuter’s GI Joe doll [2010]; and Tidy’s military charity food brands [2015]). Similarly, arms producers upload official corporate videos to YouTube, often uncritically categorized as entertainment or science, making both universal and local claims about citizen identity that can appeal to broad audiences on the Web. According to an industry representative, arms producers use social media ‘to educate and inform key audiences’ that include politicians and their staffs, journalists, current and potential employees, investors, and community members (cited in Power 2013). In this way, these videos are part of the everyday and have the potential to normalize military values in civilian life (i.e. to be constitutive of militarization as a process both in content and in location) through their creation and maintenance of specific types of national security and citizen identity (Jackson 2016). This article examines a set of Saab’s videos to demonstrate how arms producers’ corporate YouTube videos construct militarized citizen identity.

The research presented here contributes to the IR literature in several ways. Stavrianakis and Selby (2013) state that after the Cold War, conventional IR seemed to forget about the central role of militarism in state identity construction. They state that militarization and militarism are as relevant today as they were at the height of the Cold War, not least because of the number of ongoing wars coupled with increases in worldwide military spending. I emphasize the role of arms producers as corporate political actors because of how and when they work with the state to develop and sell weapons, but also because they construct specific militarized views of citizen identity and national security. States do not act alone to promote national security as military security. Indeed, in order to maintain or spread militarism, states ‘rely centrally on the deep implication of large parts of the mainstream television and press media’ and on other actors to buy into and circulate notions of national security as military security (Stavrianakis and Selby 2013, 30). Further, Davies and Philpott (2012) argue that popular culture is a key element to militarization.

Since social media posts are political artefacts of popular culture (Jackson 2016), the intersection of popular culture and IR provides a basis for examining arms producers’ promotional videos on YouTube as political artefacts that both reflect and contribute to I/international R/relations. Here, I am particularly interested in how these videos are part of militarization in the sense of bringing messaging about militarized citizen identities into public civilian spaces (i.e. YouTube). By thinking of militarization as something embedded in society (Stavrianakis and Selby 2013) along with YouTube
videos as political artefacts, the research presented here addresses IR’s visual turn by taking seriously Weber’s (2008, 138) points about contemporary literacy and popular visual language as necessary in order for IR to grasp ‘contemporary subjectivity, spatiality and temporality’ in identity construction. At the same time, O’Loughlin (2011, 74) calls on IR scholars to locate the visual within the broader context in order to explore the ‘complex relation between specific images and the underlying beliefs, narratives and ideologies’ of the audiences involved. By adapting a multi-modal approach from media studies (based on Machin 2010), I address the role of ‘audio’ in the audio-visual aspects of these videos, something often bypassed in the IR literature. I suggest that the audio aspects of YouTube videos can be as important in meaning construction as the visuals are, and that the two often go hand in hand.2

I first provide some context and justifications/motivations for the paper. Following that, I outline my audio-visual approach that draws on David Machin’s (2010) work on popular music, and suggestions from Roland Bleiker’s (2015) work regarding pluralistic approaches to visual analysis. The approach I develop here fits well with William Callahan’s (2015) critical aesthetic as a shift from ‘normal’ IR objects to artistic genres (though arguably I am combining the two here by using artistic artefacts – YouTube videos – produced by semi-official actors – arms producers). I then provide an overview for each of the videos before discussing the citizen identity constructions in the videos. The final section offers conclusions and some next steps.

**Constructing ‘Swedishness’: cultural identity and armaments**

Because the immaterial aspects of citizen identity are tied to material outcomes, they are an important area for IR. Evaldsson (1998, 60) argues that cultural identity is in flux and needs maintenance, the formation of cultural identities is a process, and identities are ‘situated in intersubjective local spaces and [are] part of global flows’. There are social implications for the representations used in identity construction (Lagerqvist 2014), which supports Bureychak’s (2012, 139) point that ‘continual reiteration and institutional reproduction’ of specific representations are important mechanisms in maintaining the ‘hegemony of this imagery’. Before examining issues around arms production and neutrality, this section presents some key assumptions about ‘Swedishness’ that are evident throughout Saab’s videos and in that way act as a means for maintaining dominant views on which characteristics of being Swedish are valued more highly.

Regarding ‘Swedishness’, studies show (white, male, middle-class) Swedes to be reserved; rational; conflict averse; socially autonomous; positive towards loneliness, planning, and compromise; and strict in maintaining boundaries between private and public life (e.g. Evaldsson 1998, 60). From a linguistic perspective, Barinaga (1999) reflects on many of these same terms as used by Swedes in everyday life. In particular, she reflects on the use of words that have no meaning in other languages or are used differently than in other languages; for instance, ensamhet (loneliness or solitude) and lagom (a balance of not too much and not too little). Further, the individual’s responsibility to self and society functions along a continuum that reflects a general Swedish perspective of ‘socially concerned individualism’ in which Swedes are expected to balance their individual wants and needs with the wants and needs of those around them (Barinaga 1999, 5; see also Bergman 2007). These types of terms are ways of understanding how Swedes can
balance between high levels of individualism while still having a broad understanding of responsibility for others.

Swedishness in the sense of citizen identity stems from and is reified by a number of societal actors. Ferrada Stoehrel (2013) addresses the role of online entertainment developed by the Swedish Armed Forces in their efforts to increase recruitment via YouTube videos and mobile apps (see Swedish Armed Forces 2011 as an example; and Crilley 2016 for a UK perspective). Ferrada Stoehrel links these efforts to statements made and policies formulated by the Swedish government via such figures as the minister of foreign affairs and prime minister(s), who have argued for the same ‘hero’ qualities mirrored in the Swedish Armed Forces videos. These qualities (e.g. ‘making a difference’) are echoed in the Saab videos. These types of values and qualities help to obfuscate the tension between a political class that, on the one hand, officially supports neutrality/non-alignment and, on the other hand, promotes Sweden’s arms trade and involvement in international military missions, i.e. ways of indicating sides taken rather than a straightforward neutrality.

This Swedishness is reflected elsewhere in public life, for example in a video Sweden produced for the 70th anniversary of joining the United Nations (UN; Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016). In the video, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon offers that Sweden’s national identity is inextricably entwined with peace and the UN, a statement that concludes with a panoramic image of a Swedish forest and lake. Just prior to that statement, Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven claims that Sweden is on the perpetual mission to contribute to the greater good (his statement a voice-over of an image of him with Germany’s Prime Minister Angela Merkel implying Sweden’s contribution to European unity as partnership). The video ends by emphasizing Sweden’s role in UN peacekeeping missions.

Stenlås (2008) links the materiality of Sweden’s Cold War neutrality (i.e. the policy for high levels of Swedish government support for a self-sustaining domestic arms industry) to the immateriality of neutrality (i.e. the ideal used to justify the lack of participation in defeating Nazi Germany). Af Malmborg (2001, 170–71) refers to neutrality as the combination of military security and identity (or, ‘a certain idea of Sweden’) that is present in everyday language even as Swedish officials tend to state ‘non-participation in military alliances’ instead of ‘neutrality’. Agius (2006, 156) refers to Swedish neutrality in practice as ‘active internationalism’. In this material/immaterial context, Stenlås suggests that Swedish arms production is a physically visible practice of ‘neutral’ weapons. However, weapons are not neutral (whether it is choice of which countries to sell to or of when and how to use them), thus pointing to a tension between neutrality in practice and as an ideal. Further, in the post-Cold War era, though Sweden has slipped into a ‘non-aligned’ policy, there are several situations in which it has shown itself to be otherwise – for example, participation in International Security Assistance Forces (Afghanistan) (Haglund 2008) and the Swedish government’s secret support to build an armaments factory in Saudi Arabia (Svenskafreds 2012).

Sweden’s arms industry, and in particular Saab, has been a pivotal component of Sweden’s neutrality policy since early in the Cold War, though more recently Sweden has been re-evaluating its ‘Sweden-first’ armaments policy where the emphasis is on supporting and developing Sweden’s capacity to licence, design and build armaments, to one that buys off the shelf when possible (Bromley and Wezeman 2013; for neutrality
and security in Europe, see Magone 2010). Sweden has high weapons exports primarily through Saab but also through a large foreign presence in the Swedish arms markets (e.g. the UK’s BAE Systems; Bromley and Wezeman 2013); and in 2011 Sweden had the highest per-capita arms exports in the world (Svenskafreds 2011). These types of connections with the global arms market bring Swedish neutrality further into question because weapons production and arms sales have non-neutral political implications.

**Corporate militarization constructs the ‘good’ citizen**

This section lays out the relationship between militarization, the ‘good’ citizen identity construction, and the role of corporations – with an emphasis on corporations due to their fundamental role in citizen identity construction yet their general lack of place in IR research. Through their advertising and other consumer-oriented activities, corporations are central to promoting the acceptance of the assumption the military is ‘good, natural, and necessary’ for national security (a form of militarization of citizen identity), making corporations non-neutral (therefore, political) actors. Arms producers’ YouTube videos comprise a form of this militarization by using everyday YouTube – a popular entertainment site – for tying citizen identity to militarized national security.

Mutimer (2016, 211) identifies militarization as a discursive process and looks to popular culture as a place for asking about ‘the state of, and changes in, the sets of beliefs which constitute society at any given time’, showing how privileging military values in everyday life requires more than official actors. Everyday life and official discourses are linked because popular culture plays a ‘role in the social production of violence’ by removing otherwise ‘contested areas of social life from democratic engagement’ (Davies and Philpott 2012, 57, 42; see also Rowley and Weldes 2012). More specifically, digital popular culture artefacts are a key part of how ideas and information flow (Hamilton 2016), and when representations are repeated on digital media and elsewhere, they become a set of practices that normalize the language or messaging that they repeat (Neumann 2009). Because state policies around the production of violence are tied to the production of weapons technology and the shaping of the political sphere (Shapiro 2007), digital platforms become important sites for IR/ir.

In national security terms, militarization can be conceptualized as the process of normalizing military responses to perceived/actual threats against state sovereignty, a process that relies on decisions and takes active maintenance in part by bringing support for military values into civilian life (Enloe 2000, 2014; Regan 1994; Galtung 1985). National security as military security often is justified because of the widespread assumption the military is ‘good, natural and necessary’ for protecting state sovereignty (Jackson 2012, 2016). Further, national security rests on power constructs that are gendered because of the valuing of masculine characteristics in how we define modern states (Peterson 1992; Kantola 2007). Enloe (2014) discusses gendered nationalism as centring on Us vs Them in ways that are associated with (particular) men as belonging, thus distancing women’s bodies as legitimate parts of the state. Further, if they decline to participate in militarism, thereby rejecting militarized masculinity, men can jeopardize their privilege, making it difficult for them to resist militarism in the first place (Higate 2012; Kronsell 2012; Basham 2016). These marginalizing constructs can intersect in complicated ways that are apparent in corporate representations of citizen identity construction.
How, then, do corporations influence citizen identity constructions in ways that matter to IR? The roles and responsibilities of corporations acting in the public domain increasingly influence governments in terms of regulations and governance, at the same time that governments increasingly rely on business rules, norms, and procedures (Svedberg Helgesson and Mörth 2013). State propaganda of yesteryear is today’s consumerism, with corporations as key actors in nation-branding efforts and the development of national narratives (White and Kolesnicov 2015). They influence how people think with the goal of getting into people’s heads without them being aware of it (Szanto 2007), and through advertising produce ‘experiences’ with which viewers can identify (Floh 2001; Sherry 2001).

This selling of ideas – in particular, the idea that national security is military security – makes arms producers non-neutral actors. I argue that corporations’ consumerist perspective combined with advertising weapons systems as benign, peace-making, and necessary is how arms producers can provide (often implicitly) convincing arguments that national security is military security and that ‘good’ citizens support this notion. The ‘multi-faceted role of the corporation in mediating the nature, meaning and significance’ of citizen identities, by reflecting or inhibiting how identities are expressed, contributes to ‘the effects of corporations, and business more generally, on the propagation and maintenance of distinct identity claims and representations within the political realm’ (Crane, Matten, and Moon 2013, 42).

Often, corporate messaging is indicative of more specific citizen identities tied to the headquarters location of the company producing the video, regardless of whether the anticipated audience is domestic or international. This kind of promotion is evident in consumer areas, such as portraying IKEA as producing ‘authentic’ Swedish home goods or CanadaGoose as producing ‘authentic’ cold weather gear (Crane, Matten, and Moon 2013). This authenticity also is an important characterization that arms producers evoke in their promotional materials. For instance, as discussed below, viewers of Saab videos receive a series of messages that include ruggedness, nature, protection, collaboration, and family – messages that project specific versions of Swedishness that are showcased in parallel with Saab’s signature weapon, the JAS Gripen combat aircraft. The Swedish government sponsors an official web page (Sweden.se) with embedded videos on Swedishness – characteristics that point to how Swedes portray themselves to each other and to non-Swedes (Sweden/Sverige 2016).

Companies rely on consumers to identify positively with their brands, even in the case where they are ‘selling’ the idea of national security rather than an actual consumer product. In general, people tend to ‘interpret their engagement with [companies] as an act of identification with and solidarity towards their fellow citizens’ (Micheletti et al. 2004 cited in Crane, Matten, and Moon 2013, 49). It is possible, then, to view the arms industry promotional videos as a type of militarization (both in content and in location) because of the link made between national security and military security. It is important to remember these corporations are selling ideas on citizenship and what these corporations want people to value (Ferrada Stoehrel 2013). This ‘suppression of citizenship identity by corporations typically falls into the category of complicity’ because ‘the company itself may not directly suppress a political identity, but […] may be enabling the suppression to take place’ (Crane, Matten, and Moon 2013, 60). In the case of arms producers, the
YouTube videos can contribute to suppressing criticism of militarized national security, thereby suppressing other types of citizen identity (see Campbell 1998 for identity suppression).

**Approach**

In response to a comment I made about the manipulation of accents both to draw on and to create stereotypes to support certain views of ‘Us/Them’ in national security constructions, a student involved in the Militarization 2.0 project (from which this paper developed) commented early in the project on how the opening to the Saab Gripen NG video (described below) is nearly identical in sound and sight to the opening to the Transformers movies.\(^3\) I started to wonder where else sound created an atmosphere or produced the potential for assumptions that would lose effect if stated directly, what this kind of manipulation might mean for IR research, and what a feminist lens about power relations could offer (e.g. Enloe 2004). As a result, I developed a mixed-methods intersectional approach that rests on a multi-modal understanding of the power of images, sounds, and texts in political messaging in the arms producers’ promotional videos. This approach is based on critical discourse analysis that applies Machin’s (2010) work in media studies on political communication and film and adds ‘audio’ into audio-visual analysis in IR research. This approach makes it possible to interrogate the politics of selling national security in everyday life. The discussion that follows here provides more detail on this approach.

**Multiple methods**

Bleiker (2015, 875) addresses the challenge of understanding images in large part because they ‘do not speak for themselves’ but rather ‘need to be interpreted’ (also see O’Loughlin 2011). I answer Bleiker’s call for a pluralistic approach that brings together semiotics (signs and symbols), discourse analysis (power relations), and content analysis (patterns) by adapting Machin’s (2010) understanding of the symbiotic relationship between images, sounds, and texts in the popular music industry to the YouTube videos.

**Video as discourse**

Because discourses need not be represented as a whole but can be signified by their parts, we can analyse how ‘sounds, images and words can have particular meanings and sum to a broader picture or message’ including visual and sound semiotic resources (Machin 2010, 216). Signs (whether in images, sounds, or texts) can connote meaning, so we can use them and their intersections to interpret broader discourses. That is, the dominant discourse about national security is that the military is the entity necessary for state sovereignty. The videos are a useful way to see how arms producers utilize the underlying ‘good, natural, and necessary’ notion to construct and reinforce national security as military security.
Multi-modality

A multi-modal approach is about ‘the choices of signs available to communicators and the way that meaning of the individual signs changes when used in combination with others’ (Machin 2010, 7). Though based on shared understandings of what these signs can mean, they do not have set meanings; rather, they have ‘meaning potential’ such that there is a ‘repertoire of associations built up in our particular culture and also through the relationship of various elements of signs (e.g. sound quality) ‘to our basic […] experience of living in the world’ (Machin 2010, 8). Though we have individual interpretations of what we see and hear, communication is built on shared or common usages from which we interpret meaning. In this sense, multi-modality can be used to assess what is more or less ‘real’ in an image, sound, or text, and how this ‘realness’ impacts the meaning of the individual scene and the video as a whole. Image and sound can contribute to authenticity, or the idea that what the viewer/listener is experiencing is sincere and meant from the heart (Machin 2010). Though feelings ‘from the heart’ might seem distant from what arms producers aim to convey, authenticity is a central component to the messaging in these videos.

Images, sounds, and texts work together to convey meaning. Images are important in multi-modal approaches because they have ‘the potential to shape what can and cannot be seen and thus also what can and cannot be thought, said and done in politics’ (Bleiker 2015, 884). The people/bodies and settings chosen for the videos become important for understanding meaning construction (Machin 2010; see also Hansen 2015; Heck and Schlag 2012). As a semiotic resource, sound is useful in drawing out or inferring discourses (Machin 2010). I coded both the parts of music that might establish a setting or imply context, and the types of sounds that are used to resemble real-world sounds since naturalistic sounds can contribute different kinds of meaning making. As with images, different sounds can be used to add authenticity and can connote different ideas in combination with the images and texts being used, ideas that would not necessarily be part of the meaning construction if the sound were different. Silence also can contribute to meaning making in this way. Because an activity or discourse scheme can ‘reveal the underlying cultural values expressed by bringing out the core sequences of activity’ (Machin 2010, 11), texts (here, spoken/written language and the corresponding means of conveying language) often communicate broader discourses than what is being stated by the words being used. For this reason, we need to systematically start to identify important aspects of speech and activity. Who is speaking? What roles do they play? What action are they performing as they speak, or as they remain silent? What do onscreen words or symbols convey? What are they saying? What do they sound like?

I employed open coding of the videos during which I began to notice a sense of ‘fluidity’ between the scenes that impacted my interpretations of the power relations in the videos. This fluidity is a type of meaning construction that is facilitated by the medium of film/video, a type of multi-layered meaning construction that develops as more scenes are viewed. In this way, scenes can simultaneously hold or construct multiple meanings, which contribute to how we understand the underlying power relations being used to construct a militarized citizen identity. The idea of fluidity is presented in more detail in the discussion of the videos below. This concept loosely rests on discussions of intertextuality (e.g. Weldes 2003) or interdiscursivity (e.g. Ferrada Stoehrel 2013) by considering how existing stories about citizen identity
(here, ‘Swedishness’) can colour how we construct meaning when exposed to new images/sounds/texts; fluidity is about how these existing meanings are constructed and potentially revamped during the course of one video when subsequent frames build on and/or change the meaning of previous frames in the stories.

**Data**

I used videos posted by Saab on Saab’s official corporate YouTube channel for understanding dominant views of Swedish identity construction. Out of the 300 global arms producers’ videos I originally catalogued based on a number of factors (e.g. across-industry/regional/weapon representation; Jackson 2016), I selected three Saab videos from the 12 Saab videos on the original list. Each video has a different ‘cinematic’ approach or style and each one focuses on Saab’s so-called signature weapons system: JAS Gripen, a combat aircraft bought by the Swedish government, heavily marketed abroad, and central to Swedish security discussions.

The first video (‘Gripen NG: A New Generation Is Ready. Are You?’) is a Hollywood production-style film with the military as the Good Samaritan, with a pre-release trailer before the main video was posted. The second video (‘Race to Falun 2015’) has no spoken words and showcases a world-class Swedish cross-country skier racing the Gripen (at least metaphorically). The third video (‘We #loveboringmondays’) is about a husband/father on his Monday morning commute, a man who is one of the people who make his family and community feel safe; that he is a Gripen pilot comes later. While other videos in Saab’s portfolio use less-Hollywood techniques, these three videos represent the overall sentiment Saab seems to want to convey: Sweden is (relatively) gender equal but still needs to team up with others to help people elsewhere; Sweden and its people are rugged and reliable, up to the challenge, and in it for the long haul; and Sweden has good family men working at Saab to protect ‘Us’. It seems that Saab is Sweden and Sweden is Saab.

I manually transcribed each video into a Word document, delineating each scene according to the type of content or mode used (image/sound/text) in each scene, demarcating the scenes according to when either an image or sound indicated a shift. I described image and sound in my own words, and recorded the text verbatim. These transcripts were then transferred to an Excel sheet in which each row indicated a scene and each column the image, sound, text, or my impression of the scene. If a scene did not contain a particular mode, the corresponding cell was left blank. I used the Excel sheet (1) to organize the video content in an easily searchable format, and (2) to provide a shorthand side-by-side visual overview of the structure and content of the videos.

**Video discourse schemes and descriptions**

A discourse scheme is similar to a storyline or simple outline of the activities in the video and helps to ‘reveal the basic cultural values underlying’ a video (Machin 2010, 216). These schemes indicate what kinds of actors and actions might be important for understanding the story – here, that these videos do not provide straightforward information on the equipment that is in the advertisements, but rather tell stories...
that we see in other places. For example, these stories include the perceived need to save the ‘Other’; the struggle to push oneself to greatness; and the importance of masculine protection of family/country (the ‘Us’) – standard stories for constructing gendered state and citizen identity. These types of stories rely on relational binaries that value, for example, Us and not Them (Peterson 2007). The ‘good, natural, and necessary’ concept is woven throughout these videos and their messaging, as is apparent in explicit statements about countries needing military protection as well as implicitly in the types of actions taken.

Discourse scheme 1: ‘Gripen NG: A New Generation Is Ready. Are You?’

Setting: An unarmed country in a dangerous tribal region needs saving.

Plan: An international military collaboration led by the US plans to intervene.

Outcome: The international team saves the day.

This video is the most Hollywood-like of the three. It has a pre-release trailer, a variety of characters, real life and computer-generated aspects, exciting music, natural sounds, aerial combat, displays of futuristic technology, and so on. The narrator spends the movie filling in various aspects of the story without explicitly saying what the mission is and why Sweden feels compelled to be involved using Gripen. This authoritative overview provides much of the context for ‘good, natural, and necessary’ since the ‘facts’ actually are quite subjective but not presented as such. The opening sequence begins with a black screen and silence except for light birdsong; then the narrator begins to speak in a low, male ‘North American’ (US?) voice, his statements accompanied by images of military vehicles on the move with a sunrise backdrop and silhouettes of trees on a savannah:

Why are we here? Because we make a difference. There’s much beauty here. But also violence. Brother has turned against brother and the whole region is about to burst into flames. We cannot let that happen. Equipped with the most advanced sensors and weapons wings can bear, we struggle to prevent the conflict from spreading further. An unarmed country, desired for its strategic value, it would be overrun any day. So we fly, to keep them safe.

Saab (2013)

The story continues with a cast of characters who portray an international collaboration which is meant, it seems, to keep the peace. All team members that we see in the command centre are white men (except for the one black woman technician). There is a woman pilot, though she only seems to fly reconnaissance (rather than forward-projecting or offensive piloting which is more ‘masculine’). The president of the country the coalition supposedly is protecting is a black man. There is aerial combat between the Gripen pilots and what seems to be Russian Sukhois (one may wonder who is flying the Sukhoi, for whom…). At the end, there is no reference to what happens to the rebels and civilians after the intervention, though we are told in the last seconds of the
video that the Gripen pilots remain in the country to protect the engineers as they rebuild the ‘important’ bridge that the pilots destroyed.

Discourse scheme 2: ‘The Race to Falun 2015’
Setting: Skier vs. self and pilot/machine
Plan: Skier remains committed to the race.
Outcome: Skier and pilot rewarded for their efforts.

This video starts with parallel scenes of a world-class Swedish cross-country skier gearing up for a race and a Gripen pilot gearing up to fly. The scenery and other images throughout the video as well as the actions by the skier make it seem as if the skier is racing against both himself and the pilot/Gripen. The skier is white, male, older, and a well-known 1998 Olympic competitor named Torgny Mogren. This video has no spoken words, though occasionally the viewer sees onscreen statistics regarding the skier and Gripen. Except for a brief interlude, the video is set to orchestral music. The video ends with a night-time camera shot of ski poles stuck in the snow next to the parked Gripen, with a lit-up ski chalet in the background, implying the skier and the pilot are enjoying some post-race downtime camaraderie together. The video description sums up the storyline by describing the video as a ‘tug-of-war where two world champions challenge each other in a thrilling race’ (while one commenter suggests instead of war they should call it ‘Tug-of-Peace Enforcement’ – a reflection of the peacekeeping aspect of Swedishness) (Saab 2015).

Discourse scheme 3: ‘We #loveboringmondays’
Setting: Family and country need protecting.
Plan: Pilot works hard to quietly provide protection.
Outcome: Family and country are safe because of pilot’s efforts.

Boring Mondays, we are told, mean Saab pilots are doing their job: keeping Us safe. This video walks the viewer through the morning rituals of a Gripen pilot, from when he first wakes in the morning with a small child’s stuffed bunny hiding in the folds of his blanket, to his near-dawn drive to work, to his suiting up to make a flight. He is talking the whole time in storytelling fashion, sometimes as voice-over narrative, sometimes directly at the camera (or from the side as if talking to someone sitting in front of him). The viewer does not know the man is a Gripen pilot until more than halfway through the video. Almost the entire video is about the man and how he feels rather than about Gripen itself. The hashtag in the title also can be seen as indicating this video as popular or trending, with it placed so that the hashtag phrase is active, a verb, something ‘we’ are doing.

Early Monday mornings is [sic] not my favourite. I just want to stay in bed. Just for ten more minutes… It is easy to get lost in daydreams. Thinking about the weekend…longing for the next one…
I guess that’s what Mondays are for…
… routinely leaving your kids at school…
… sleep walking to the bus
… casually kissing your loved ones goodbye…
not thinking twice.
I love that. In fact, it’s my job.
Because in my world, boring morning means we’re doing all right.
It means we’re safe.
That’s why I’m a pilot. To keep my country safe. To keep my family safe.
To keep everyone’s boring mornings safe.
[smiles] A thousand miles an hour.

Saab (2014)

Discussion

The discussion that follows aims to show how Saab’s videos are a type of militarization because as a non-neutral actor, Saab participates in an everyday construction of citizen identity by narrowing national security to military security in ways that can hide the politics of this narrowing. There are recognizable choices in these videos regarding images, sounds, and texts that reflect and reify basic societal stereotypes that are part of the ‘good, natural, and necessary’ assumption for the construction of citizen identity as it relates to national security. Keeping in mind Crane et al.’s (2013) ideas on how corporations either reflect or inhibit how identities are expressed, I discuss how we can locate, through Saab’s portrayal of the military as ‘good, natural, and necessary’, how these videos constitute ‘good’ citizen identity.

A systematic review of the videos shows that Swedishness can be identified through the representations that privilege the white, male, European/North American, heterosexual military body and the corresponding power relations often projected by those characteristics as told through combinations of images, sounds, and texts. In varying ways, these characteristics are important elements in conveying and contributing to Sweden’s dominant citizen identity as related to military security as something ‘good, natural, and necessary’. This section describes how the videos centre on issues of heroes and belonging, with authenticity and fluidity as important tools for these meaning constructions. The stories in the videos weave gender, race, and heteronormativity in ways that reinforce a militarized masculinity as important to Saab’s Swedish citizen identity. There is a ‘privileging of masculinity that is paradigmatic to militarism and war’ and tied to the modern state (Peterson 2007, 11; see also Tidy 2015) such that militarized masculinity is central to defining the state because of the assumption that national security relies on war itself as well as the threat of war (Heeg Maruska 2010).

Belonging

We can view citizen identity as not just an attribute but also a resource upon which corporations can draw, ‘something which is mobilized for political purposes [that can be] a basis for differentiation from the mobilization against either another group or simply those not sharing the same attributes’ (Crane, Matten, and Moon 2013, 47). Corporate advertising uses this kind of differentiation in part to influence how people feel about or identify themselves as well as others — matters of belonging. Floch (2001) reminds us that whether explicitly stated or not, the presentation of a subject (e.g. a hero) implies an anti-subject (e.g. the non-hero). Shapiro (2007) adds that the mapping of violent cartographies involves more than geographic imaginaries and is very much about bodies and biopolitics (as in who counts and who does not).
We can see how subject/anti-subject and biopolitics matter for citizen identity construction in the opening to Gripen NG about brother killing brother and the need (for ‘Us’) to protect an unarmed nation because of its resources, insinuating that only collaborative Western military intervention is the appropriate response in this situation; therefore, only a citizen identity that is supportive of that response is appropriate as well. There also is an element of what is unsaid, and therefore assumptions about who counts. Once the bridge has been blown up, what happened to the people stranded on the ‘wrong’ side? The Gripen is supposed to protect the engineers while they rebuild, but what about the others? The enemy plane does not have national markings, yet a knowledgeable viewer would identify the plane as Russian, and even unknowledgeable viewers likely would assign the plane to an enemy of Western powers because we already have indications about who is assumed to be part of, or at least supportive of, the international collaboration. In the form of national champions, the skier and the pilot are constructed as heroes as well. Through Gripen, the military is equated with everyday rugged life and superior performance. The hero/non-hero also is made apparent through the ironically ‘boring’ Gripen pilot and his claims about protecting family and country. He is the unsung hero as Swedes make their regular morning commutes.

In addition to the hero/non-hero representations, Saab presents several Us/Them constructions that further obfuscate the role of the arms industry in citizen identity construction and in Sweden’s foreign policy more generally by repeatedly portraying who counts and who does not. The video on international collaboration starts with a long statement about how ‘We make a difference’ (also see Ferrada Stoehrle’s [2013] link to the Swedish Armed Forces’ 2011 recruitment video). Making this difference makes people feel good. It helps to support the mission and therefore indicates how to construct ‘good’ citizen identity. The female pilot ‘discovers’ the hidden rebel forces when her ‘all-seeing eye’ (i.e. the aircraft’s systems) captures onscreen a man on the ground who makes the mistake of pausing before he reaches cover. This man is portrayed as being a bit sloppy in action, so not one of ‘Us’ and therefore a justifiable target/threat. The chalet scene in the racing video evokes a sense of belonging by having the skier and the pilot on equal ground following the race, a kind of lagom of pushing oneself followed by the requisite Swedish leisure time (though both skiing and flying might already be considered leisure time). The anything-but-boring Gripen pilot who is protecting ‘his’ family and community seems to imply that the viewer’s family and community are included in that protection if the viewer identifies with the ‘right’ citizen values, limiting citizen identity to a specific set of values and therefore only to those people who embrace those values. The ‘Others’ only matter in that ‘we’ need to keep ‘them’ away.

**Authenticity**

By conveying authenticity, sound plays an important role in how these videos construct a masculine Swedishness through the valuing of some states over others, the ruggedness of Swedish citizen identity, and national security as hard but fun work. Across these types of depictions, viewers draw an understanding of Sweden’s perceived role in international relations as tied at least in part to a militarized national security. The intervention video uses accented speech to communicate the idea that Sweden’s national security is served by participation in militarized international interventions in Africa, and that this participation is in collaboration with other countries, and by
contributing technological know-how via Gripen. Alongside images of a vast savannah, the video brings the viewer to Africa by using a black ‘Mr. President’ who has an aide with a pronounced French-African accent. We are never told that the intervention is in Africa somewhere, but with the images, sounds, and texts (e.g. in the opening scene described above), we are led to think it is.

The commander of the international team has a North American (US?) accent, and the Gripen technician in the control room has a pronounced Swedish accent on his English. The images of the president, the commander, and the technician rely on those accents in order to communicate that Sweden needs to be an active participant in saving the world, but that kind of action should be within an international grouping rather than unilaterally, and in a support, rather than lead, role. This kind of interpretation of the video actually reflects the general Swedish projection that its role in international missions should be collaborative, thereby lending itself to post-Cold War notions of Swedish ‘neutrality’ performed through interventions as militarized (but not offensive, and therefore non-aggressive) actions. The tension between official non-alignment and participation in military intervention is obscured by the attempts of Saab to construct a type of Swedish citizen identity that rests on the ‘good, natural, and necessary’ use of force to protect others. Recall the language from the opening of the video: ‘We cannot let that happen… we struggle to prevent the conflict from spreading further… So we fly, to keep them safe’. There is a masculinized relation being drawn between which countries need protecting and who will do the protecting and in what way(s) (for more on Sweden’s masculine ‘neutral’ soldier, see Kronsell 2012).

As with the intervention video, the skiing video relies on sound to simulate a ruggedness associated with this Swedishness and evokes a sense of solitude (ensamhet). There is non-stop orchestral music in the background for nearly the entire video. This type of music can be associated with civility (Machin 2010) and used to generate authenticity. The music stops abruptly for just a few moments when the skier reaches the crest of the ski trail and pauses to wait for the Gripen to catch up overhead. At this point, there is a brief silence, then the viewer hears the skier breathe heavily, followed by the sound of wind in the background, after which a bird of prey screeches. At the same time, there is a panoramic view of the mountains and a valley where the sun is breaking through the distant clouds and washing the valley with brilliant sunlight, made more brilliant onscreen since except for the rays of sunlight, the video is cast in shades of grey. The image alone is stunning but the sounds really create an authentic moment of being on the trail alone and as part of the race. The bird screech is eerie, almost haunting, as if the skier should not wait too long before moving on. Masculinity is displayed through ruggedness, perseverance, and, to a point, the equating of man and machine (via the Gripen pilot).

Sound portrays the ‘boring’ pilot as unboring and relatable – an authentic representation of a manly protector. Towards the end of the video of the interview with the Gripen pilot, the pilot can be heard faintly through the communication system yelling ‘Wahoo!’ in flight. The ‘wahoo’ he expresses is reminiscent of fun and a sense of security similar to the child’s toy in the opening scene of the video. The pilot’s lightheartedness almost makes national security seem fun and easy, bringing in lagom (balance), but not necessarily a universal concern since he can protect us and we can go about our day. His masculinity is not based on showing him blowing anything up. His mere presence and vigilance are enough to keep the ‘bad’ guys at bay. This masculinity is tied to...
heteronormative notions about fatherhood and protectors, and is representative of the close links between Swedish welfare/protection and the state and individual (or socially concerned individualism). The messaging here could be seen as appealing to the Swedish audience (as exhibiting a modern Swedish masculinity tied to family and community welfare) and to external audiences (as being a ‘real’ man by flying a Gripen).

**Fluidity**

Fluidity of meaning construction between scenes, for example in terms of hierarchical relations between states, can contribute to a gendered Swedishness. The female pilot in the first video (white, Swedish accent, reconnaissance pilot) has meaning(s) as an early scene in a video that plays out the role of Gripen in an international collaboration. There could be a tension in the initial response at seeing a female pilot until the viewer factors in that she is flying a reconnaissance mission (not as masculine as flying a strike mission). However, when in the scene of the president’s office – a shot that foregrounds a blurred African mask, further reminding us that the mission is in Africa – it is possible to sense the fluidity of the construction of the female pilot when she is juxtaposed with the black male introduced to us as ‘Mr. President’. By flying and protecting, she is superior to the local male actors in this militarized situation. The earlier meaning construction of her role, however, can be modified to take this new information into account later in the video. After all, the ‘real’ men take over and (reluctantly) engage in an air fight with the (implied) Russians, an (in harm’s way) engagement that can seem like the ‘real’ work of the mission rather than the reconnaissance that uncovered the impending invasion. Fluidity here can help us see how even as her role in the video as the female pilot remains, she now simultaneously can be a means to feminize Mr. President, who needs saving/protecting; thereby her body being identified as female becomes more than incidental to justifying the military intervention.

What is striking, though, is the link between gendered and racialized connotations that seem to point to a Swedish sensibility of the ‘White Savior’ in practice. In this sense, these meaning potentials in these scenes intersect in a way that reflects and/or constitutes a Swedish citizen identity that links military technological prowess not with protecting national security through protecting national borders, but rather protecting national security by protecting those others who otherwise are assumed cannot protect themselves.

**Conclusions**

Using an intersectional multi-modal analysis to pull out some of the meaning constructions and to unpack the power of the combinations of the images, sounds, and texts used in these videos, I discussed how Saab constructs a Swedish citizen identity supported by assumptions about ‘good, natural, and necessary’ underlying militarized national security. These videos are seemingly benign representations that any corporation might make and present in the everyday, yet they are tools for reinforcing assumptions about national security and for maintaining certain claims about the role of the military and conventional weapons systems in national security constructions. The basic function of these YouTube videos is to sell ideas that support the arms producers’ corporate bottom line, not through profit from selling the weapons to individual consumers but rather striving to convince the consumer/viewer to support, or at least not question, militarized national security.
Through messaging that privileges white, male, European/North American, heterosexual bodies, Saab’s marketing of Gripen constructs a citizen identity that promotes a usefulness of Gripen in protecting Sweden from Others and Others from themselves. As a common everyday site for many corporations to market their products/services, YouTube offers corporations the potential to influence citizen identity construction. Through both the content of the videos and their location (on YouTube), arms producers use YouTube to sell militarized versions of these citizen identities. Whether Swedish protection through international collaboration, the solitude of the racer, or the balance of a pilot who can have fun and be bored while protecting Us, the Gripen videos remind us that military masculinity is a valued characteristic of citizen identity.

How might our understanding of citizen identity change if Saab had been more direct in its messaging? For instance, what if the video producers simply had stated that an international coalition of Western powers led by the US with equipment from the Swedes would go in and semi-invade (with permission from a ‘weak’ president) to knock out infrastructure that would stop the enemy-from-within from a full-blown invasion of said president’s country – a semi-invasion that would pivot on gendered and racialized ideas about citizen identity and national security? The obfuscation and positive feelings conveyed in the videos can make it more difficult to question militarized national security. By bringing military values into civilian spaces, the videos are a type of militarization through the content they convey and the location where they are found.

Notes

1. Corinne Kovalsky, Director of Digital and Social Media at Raytheon (the world’s largest missile producer).
2. Van Dijck and Poell (2013, 4) discuss how ‘audio-visual grammar’ is used to ‘steer collective emotions and feelings’.
3. Thanks go to Dennis Arndt who made this point during a meeting in 2014. The context he provided helped me to complicate my understanding of how these videos can perform militarization: not only bringing militaristic values into everyday life (e.g. cool combat aircraft as entertainment) but also how civilian aspects become militarized (e.g. Transformers + Gripen). This type of blending is one way that meaning is not fixed.

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