



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e. g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

- This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.
- A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.
- This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.
- The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.
- When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

Reasserting Martial Masculinity through Postmodern Militarism – Military Fantasies, Subculture and Gender in Portrayals of the Japan Self-Defense Forces

Miklas Fahrenwaldt

Politics PhD
The University of Edinburgh
2025

Abstract

The Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF) are a deeply paradoxical entity. They are a military but must not be called one. They have advanced weaponry but must not use it. Previous studies have explored this paradoxical existence through lenses that focus on political or social constraints such as the difficulty of justifying the JSDF's existence to a sceptical public, with Sabine Frühstück (2007) famously labeling them "Uneasy Warriors". Yet, analysing JSDF YouTube videos, the military anime GATE, the JSDF magazine "Mamor" and three JSDF museums, I find hardly any uneasiness at all. Instead, weapons and fighting are unabashedly portrayed as cool and attractive, and a rather traditional warrior masculinity is promoted in all the different sources. Through (visual) discourse analysis, my project interrogates this surprising assertiveness, finding that throughout very different texts, the JSDF consistently presents a commodified, pleasurable version of militarism that reframes military violence as an exciting and thrilling game, escaping the confinement of the JSDF's paradoxical nature by constructing subcultural fantasies of a heroic and beloved Japanese military. To understand this dynamic, the project draws on Japanese postmodern theorists Asada Akira and Azuma Hiroki to show how popular culture and gender are leveraged to construct, maintain and speak to a military-friendly subculture, where traditional military values are promoted but stripped of their overt political content. Coining the term "apolitical militarism", my project explains this development as a JSDF embrace of postmodernism, leaning into increased societal siloisation, fragmentation and individualisation to replace the nationalist grand narratives of modern militarism with a shared subcultural database of military tropes. Individuals in the subculture can then draw from this database in highly personalised ways to construct their own, personalised narrative of militarism, thus outsourcing overtly political meaning-making from the content creator to the content consumer. In this way, the project builds on and further develops existing analyses of JSDF militarism and gender to show how the JSDF of the 21st century has created an illusion of consensus that allows it to simply sidestep its underlying paradox without resolving it. But while the strain resulting from the JSDF's fundamental paradox might be extraordinary, the existence of such underlying tensions between adhering to a society's democratic values and exercising military violence is not unique to Japan and in fact a challenge faced by other postmodern militaries as well. Rather than an "exception" or "abnormality", as it is sometimes described in International Relations discourse, the JSDF then is "avant-garde" (Frühstück, 2004), a pioneer and prototype for new kind of "apolitical militarism" that is located first and foremost in the cultural sphere rather than national politics.

Lay Summary

The Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF), Japan's quasi-military, are one of the world's largest and well-equipped militaries, but due to legal restrictions and anti-military attitudes in Japanese society, they never enjoyed the legitimacy and support of e.g. the US armed forces. However, in my analysis of JSDF YouTube videos, the military animation series GATE, the JSDF magazine "Mamor" and three JSDF museums, I find hardly any uneasiness at all. Rather, weapons and warfare are shown proudly and framed as exciting, cool and attractive. All of this is underpinned by gendered imagery that is rather traditional, with soldiers shown as tough men, hardened fighters and martial paragons. Studying these visual, textual and in some cases more broadly interactive and multisensory forms of JSDF-portrayal, I interrogate the JSDF's assertiveness, attributing it to a new, specifically postmodern form of militarism, which I call "apolitical militarism". It is apolitical in removing discussions of the JSDF and militarism from the realm of public politics and into one of culture and consumption instead. I find that throughout the different sources, the JSDF transforms itself into a cultural entrepreneur, crafting and amplifying versions of militarism that turn military violence into an exciting and thrilling game and freely deal in fantasies of the JSDF as a heroic and beloved military force fighting and besting various enemies. Here, "apolitical militarism" and its embrace of postmodernism means embracing societal fragmentation and increased individualism, crafting a militarism that does not rely on a larger "grand narrative" of the military as the heroic saviour and defender of the nation, as for example the UK military does in its ritual commemorations of the World Wars. Instead, apolitical militarism involves a retreat into subculture, which relies on a "database" of shared tropes, visual elements and ideas for crafting individualised narratives of militarism that are not the same and sometimes even outright contradictory but ultimately made from the same materials. I argue that power is externalised in this process, hidden in the question of what is included in the database and what not rather than being more obvious in a large unifying narrative. JSDF portrayals can thus claim to be apolitical and neutral, as the overtly political process of meaning-making is outsourced to consumers who buy into the military subculture. By thus only engaging with a select slice of society – its own subculture – the JSDF can simply sidestep its own precarious status. And while this specific iteration of apolitical militarism is derived from the unique case of Japan, I also argue that it is not inherently Japanese in any way but rather inherently postmodern. Thus, it could also apply beyond the Japanese context wherever militaries face the unique challenges coming from an increasingly fragmented postmodern society. The JSDF could then be considered the "avant-garde" (Frühstück, 2004) of a new form of militarism that plays out in culture rather than national politics.

Table of Figures

Figure 1 Examples of "Ahoge" from different anime. Source:

<https://www.japanesewithanime.com/2017/05/ahoge.html> (Accessed 20/06/2024)

.....	41
Figure 2 Full frontal of tank on unknown battlefield in episode 1 opening.....	89
Figure 3 View from the cockpit, facing a dragon.	90
Figure 4 Videogame-like first-person-perspective of the helicopter controls. The pilot remains unseen and unheard, thus allowing and encouraging full viewer immersion.	91
Figure 5 Soldier shooting enemies from helicopter, including a game-like first person perspective.....	93
Figure 6 First-person-shooter like display of combat later in the anime.	93
Figure 7 Imperial troops ignoring a JSDF warning sign before being annihilated by artillery and machine gun fire.	94
Figure 8 Traditional Japanese products delivered to Imperial nobility by Japanese diplomats.	95
Figure 9 King Elbe, an ally of the empire, standing amongst the bodies of his slaughtered men, with machine-gun fire continuing to cover the area.	96
Figure 10 JSDF soldiers defending Tokyo from troops that invaded through the gate.	98
Figure 11 Tarō confronting Morita over the latter's indecision in authorising a rescue mission. Morita's stiff bookishness is visually contrasted to the masculine and dynamic Tarō.	100
Figure 12 Naked figure of prince Zorzal facing the viewer, showing off his confidence and muscular physique.	101
Figure 13 Itami immediately punching Zorzal upon discovering the latter's Japanese slave.....	102
Figure 14 Kuribayashi beating up prince Zorzal for information after discovering and saving the abducted Japanese woman.....	102
Figure 15 Protesters gathering in Tokyo, carrying signs demanding that the gate be closed and opposing the JSDF's deployment to the Special Region.	105
Figure 16 The American president on the phone with the Japanese prime minister, threatening the latter with the exposure of incriminating information (bottom left) if JSDF special forces are not told to stand down.	107
Figure 17 Princess Pina being proclaimed the Empire's heir. The scene's vivid colours, blurred edges and upbeat soundtrack clearly mark this as an instance for celebration.	108
Figure 18 American and Russian presidents shown observing the televised hearing of Itami and the others. Just after this, the Chinese leader is also added to the watchers.....	109
Figure 19 Female parliamentarian Kōhara Mizuko questioning Itami, insisting on getting an admission of guilt over the 150 villagers' deaths.	111

Figure 20 Kōhara Mizuko shown as a villainous character taking delight in twisting a narrative to her purposes, though why exactly she wants to take down the JSDF so badly is never touched upon.	111
Figure 21 Male journalist determined to create a bad image of the JSDF, expressing doubt at the positive relations with locals portrayed in the base and looking to sell a narrative for financial gain.	112
Figure 22 JSDF shown doing humanitarian work, scenes appearing on screen during Rory's speech in the hearing at the Japanese parliament.	112
Figure 23 An injured Itami being cared for by a group of human and demi-human maids at the mansion of an imperial noble. This scene is explicitly staged as him living the otaku fantasy, with another soldier walking in on him like this expressing his envy.	116
Figure 24 Rory walking in front of JSDF helicopters, preparing to engage a rival demigod after having taken down a group of dragons with the JSDF's help. Symbolically significant positioning of her "leading" JSDF forces.	117
Figure 25 Leilei, Rory and Tuka, the group of girls usually accompanying Itami, dressed up in JSDF uniform and partaking in military life during the anime's second ending theme.	117
Figure 26 Rose Knights facing Imperial secret police and defending the Japanese embassy and its inhabitants.	118
Figure 27 JSDF soldiers carrying female knights to safety.	119
Figure 28 Group of Rose Knights riding towards the viewer. Their design blends elements of martial knighthood with courtly femininity.	119
Figure 29 Sleeping Kuribayashi with half-exposed chest, shown in an extended shot for the viewer's pleasure.	120
Figure 30 Female knight Bozens and her male JSDF partner revealing their relationship and Bozens' pregnancy in the last episode.	121
Figure 31 Shocked reactions by those left single. Note the prominent inclusion of the only two named female JSDF soldiers here, with Kuribayashi in the middle.	122
Figure 32 Male characters shown bathing in the second outro, paradoxically blending jokes about homosexuality with an erotic appeal to homoerotic desire at the same time.	123
Figure 33 GSDF backpacks and bulletproof vest laid out for visitors to try on/try to lift, illustrating the heaviness of GSDF equipment.	133
Figure 34 Infoboard on the second floor labelled "National Defence Strategy" (kokka bōei senryaku), laying out JSDF security strategy in relative detail.	133
Figure 35 Landing page of the museum's website. (https://www.mod.go.jp/gsdf/eae/prcenter/ , accessed 20/01/2024)	135
Figure 36 Characters painted on wall of museum, leading up to entrance. The large, central character in the picture is "Soldier Chick", whose image is the most prominent in the museum.	136
Figure 37 Cardboard cutout of the character "Soldier Chick" in front of an armoured vehicle in the exhibition.	137

Figure 38 Info board showing the daily schedule of female GSDF recruits as well as some photographs of their training.	142
Figure 39 Collection of posters celebrating successful GSDF athletes.....	143
Figure 40 Front page of the visitor flyer for the GSDF Museum, showing its official name at the top as well as the official "Rikkunland" name at the bottom, as well as including the "see, touch, experience" slogan. Prominent in the flyer are the gendered characters.....	145
Figure 41 Photograph taken from elevated walkway of hangar annex to the Air Park exhibition, showing roughly half of the large hangar.	147
Figure 42 Very simple flight simulator pods (basically a joystick with a simulation game on a screen) set up on the 3rd floor of the main building. A more complex guided simulator experience was also available in the hangar hall, requiring a booking for a spot.	148
Figure 43 An example of an info board featuring detailed technical information, in this case showing a cross-section of an F-1 fighter jet, naming a large number of technical components.....	150
Figure 44 Jet engine where side panels were removed with glass to allow for a look inside, including labels (in red) for the functions of different parts of the engine.	150
Figure 45 F-2 fighter jet shown with fitting armaments and 5 information boards giving detailed technical information about various aspects of the plane.....	151
Figure 46 Missiles and pilot gear being displayed on the 2nd floor of the main building.	152
Figure 47 F-2 fighter jet and missiles it might carry in the first part of the main exhibition.	153
Figure 48 Two large, high-quality prints of modern JSDF F-35 jets doing aerial manoeuvres and (slightly cut off here) two pilots sprinting towards their planes in a jet scramble.	154
Figure 49 Information board about women in the ASDF on the main building's 3rd floor.....	157
Figure 50 "Eggplane" models of jet fighters, which are made thicker and rounder for a cute aesthetic, accompanied by illustrations of female pilots to further push the "cuteness" (kawaii) factor.	159
Figure 51 Display case of plane models, decorated with figurines of girls in military uniform.	159
Figure 52 View of the ASDF Kure Museum with the "Iron Whale" prominently visible from the walkway leading there from the station. On the lefthand side of the picture, one can just see the corner of the Yamato Museum's building.....	161
Figure 53 Explanation of the JSDF's purpose near the museum entrance.....	162
Figure 54 Information board about minelaying with an example of a sea mine to illustrate. Contrary to the GSDF Museum, touching the exhibits is explicitly prohibited.	164
Figure 55 Information board about the importance of minesweeping operations in starting the reconstruction of Japan after the end of the war.	166

Figure 56 Reproduction of the meals a submariner might eat during a workday put on display to illustrate how it is like to live on a submarine.	167
Figure 57 Reproduction of the Hahajima's deck in the background with a minesweeping drone used on the vessel in the foreground.	168
Figure 58 Light gun serving as the main armament of the minesweeping vessel "Hahajima" and now on display in the MSDF Museum.	170
Figure 59 Timeline of submarine classes operated by the MSDF with associated key facts.	171
Figure 60 Poster of cast for the submarine-film "Silent Fleet", showing the main antagonist (left) and hero (top right).	172
Figure 61 Display case forming part of the promotional section for "Silent Fleet". In this display, a photo of the female first mate of the pursuing submarine is displayed, alongside some of the props used for her role, like rank insignia.	175
Figure 62 Excerpt from article on tanks, showing tanks from different countries with a short description and a table on the bottom-left comparing technical data.	182
Figure 63 First double page of article about science fiction JSDF, making strong use of fantasy in its action-manga approach to the topic.	184
Figure 64 First two pages of a manga about the JSDF fending off a ballistic missile attack from a neighbouring country.	185
Figure 65 Various military equipment pieces being appraised by three military enthusiasts.	187
Figure 66 First 2 pages of the manga on AI technology in the JSDF. The initial scenario on the righthand side is transitioned into two different scenarios (red: without AI; blue: with AI) on the lefthand side.	190
Figure 67 Manga and article about GSDF infantry defending a Japanese island from foreign invasion from the 01/2022 issue of Mamor.	191
Figure 68 GSDF soldiers and their amphibious vehicle shown during a combat exercise. The headline of the accompanying article stresses their "will" (ishi).	192
Figure 69 Military commanders of all three JSDF branches involved in the exercise photographed together on board one of the landing vessels as part of the article.	193
Figure 70 First page and top 5 of the ranking of military commanders done in a Mamor survey of JSDF members from all three branches.	194
Figure 71 Last double page of a manga about hard military decisions. The manga presents two scenarios (A and B), not telling readers the outcome but encourages them to engage on Twitter before the outcome will be revealed online.	194
Figure 72 First two pages of an article about GSDF combat medics, showing them saving their comrades in a dramatic scene of blood and gore.	195
Figure 73 JSDF pilot shown saving heavily injured young girl in a dramatic manga, extolling JSDF heroism.	196
Figure 74 Timeline of women's participation in the JSDF as printed in Mamor.	199
Figure 75 First page of article proclaiming occupational equality between men and women in the JSDF, featuring an interview with three senior female officers.	200
Figure 76 Female MSDF cadets shown doing a boat race.	201

Figure 77 Female pilot on the left shown as part of a larger article about her unit, features in it in a way that is very much like her male comrades.....	202
Figure 78 Female ASDF cadets shown in a cute and decorated style associated with "purikura".	204
Figure 79 Cover page of interview of the three JSDF singers and the civilian singer, evoking both the idea of peace and their femininity through labelling them "divas".	204
Figure 80 Manga about a senior (senpai) who usually uses the masculine pronoun "ore" but uses the neutral pronoun "watashi" with her boyfriend mixing them up....	207
Figure 81 First page of a 4-page article about a survey among 100 female and 100 male JSDF members. This first page immediately focuses on JSDF women's romantic preferences and embraces traditional heterosexual dating norms, as are reflected in the (shorter) male.....	209
Figure 82 Manga about the "life model" (raifu moderu) of a working mother in the JSDF.....	210
Figure 83 Example of some of the kind of additional photos of the celebrity on the cover found in the first pages of the magazine, here from the 05/2016 edition.....	212
Figure 84 Full-page photograph of the actress and singer Nagao Mariya in front of a T-4 plane. The photo was originally taken for the 11/2020 issue.....	213
Figure 85 First page of an article about couples with at least one soldier. It starts with people who have married through the advertisements in Mamor, but goes on to include a lot more couples.....	214
Figure 86 Half-page about JSDF-fans that shows the story of a woman so fond of the MSDF that she married one of them.....	215
Figure 87 Manga that is part of a brief article about MSDF family life, showing various aspects of how the work of MSDF husbands affects their civilian wives and families.....	216

Tables

Table 1 Key information on JSDF/MoD channels summarised.	51
Table 2 Number of videos in each category, sorted by channel.....	53
Table 3 Important characters in GATE.....	86

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Lay Summary	2
Table of Figures	3
Tables	7
List of Abbreviations	9
Introduction	10
Literature Review.....	20
Framework and Methodology	33
PR & Recruitment: The JSDF on YouTube.....	49
Unshackled Fantasy: The JSDF in the Anime “GATE”	82
Militarised Spaces: JSDF Museums.....	126
“Mamor” and Military Commodification	178
Conclusion.....	219
Bibliography	231

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
JSDF	Japan Self-Defense Force(s)
GSDF	[Japan] Ground Self-Defense Force(s)
MSDF	[Japan] Maritime Self-Defense Force(s)
ASDF	[Japan] Air Self-Defense Force(s)
MoD	[Japanese] Ministry of Defense

Introduction

In December 2023, when doing fieldwork in Japan, I visited the Japanese coastal city of Yokosuka, headquarter of the Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF), Japan's de-facto navy, and home port to the United States Navy's 7th Fleet. During a guided tour of the military harbour, after pointing out a number of American and Japanese vessels in port, our guide pointed to an MSDF destroyer anchored at the docks, unmistakably navy grey and complete with main gun and multiple missile tubes. With this sight in front of us, he told us: "You might think this is a warship, but it actually isn't. The MSDF is not a navy and it doesn't fight, it protects. So their ships aren't 'warships', they're 'protection ships'!". Cue mild smiles all around. Said in a casual manner and overall but one small part of a practiced tour guide routine, this comment nevertheless illustrates well the inherent contradictions of the Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF). How is it possible that this state-of-the-art warship with its 127mm main cannon, torpedo-launchers and plentiful guided missiles could be anything but a warship?

Fundamentally, that paradox lies at the heart of this study. The JSDF is a military that is not a military. It operates modern military equipment, is integrated into a global alliance structure through the US-Japan Alliance (*nichibei dōmei*) and employs almost a quarter million men and women. Yet Article 9 of the 1947 Japanese post-World War II constitution explicitly forbids the Japanese state from waging war and maintaining armed forces. In order for Japan to nevertheless operate one of the world's most powerful armed forces, it was therefore necessary to employ some legal creativity, separating the right to self-defence from the right to wage war and gradually expanding the remit of what is covered by self-defence (Panton, 2010; Liff, 2017). With post-war Japanese identity embracing the civilian ideal of the "salaryman" and blaming the Imperial Japanese army and navy of World War II for the deaths and deprivations suffered by the Japanese people during and after the war, some researchers have described Japan as a country with an anti-militarist culture (Berger, 1993; Orr, 2001; Hidaka, 2010; Izumikawa, 2010). At the same time, Japan's geopolitical position at the frontline of the Cold War resulted in strong American pressure for Japan to rearm and become a steadfast capitalist ally against both the Soviet Union and communist China (Kapur, 2018, p. 9). From the moment of its establishment as a quasi-military force, the JSDF therefore had to contend with opposing pressures to become more of a "real" military in the mould of the American military, whilst also struggling for acceptance and legitimacy in a Japanese society still marked by post-war antimilitarism (Mulloy, 2021, p. 266). Caught between international and domestic demands for Japan to become a "normal" state with "normal", internationally deployable, fighting armed forces and a society largely averse to such military ventures and focused on economic matters, the JSDF was then, from its inception, a deeply paradoxical entity (Soeya, 2011; Skabelund, 2022).

One of the consequences for the JSDF of this paradoxical status was an inability to access the overtly masculine and elevated status enjoyed by men in most other military institutions. Militaries are intimately associated with masculinity, serving as core sites for defining hegemonic masculinity, shaping societal gender roles and distributing power along gendered lines (Arkin and Dobrofsky, 1978; Barrett, 1996; Duncanson and Woodward, 2017). But as masculinity in the military context is associated with war, violence and agency (Peterson, 1992, p. 48), this poses a fundamental problem for the JSDF, as it is legally and politically barred from engaging in these very activities. And so, with military masculinity constructed in large parts by male engagement in combat, men in the JSDF face the problem that they are excluded from the battlefield as the site of masculine affirmation (Enloe, 1983; Kodamaya, 2023, p. 4). Japan's international embarrassment for conducting "checkbook diplomacy" and failing to put "boots on the ground" in the 1991 Gulf War illustrates the negative consequences of this, injuring Japanese pride and confidence (Nakanishi, 2011). Besides the paradox of legal status and the associated troubles that brings to the JSDF as a military institution, it is therefore also troubled by an identity problem, rooted in its inability to access a "normal" form of military masculinity and thus proud warrior status. Observing this identity struggle has led Sabine Frühstück (2007) to poignantly describe the JSDF as "Uneasy Warriors", caught between their own aspirations for an elevated hypermasculine status like their counterparts in the American military and a constant need to soften their image and underplay their martial capabilities in order to placate a sceptical Japanese public. In this context, the JSDF has also embraced the image of women as part of the JSDF or as tools in promoting the JSDF to emphasise its identity as a normal, open and democratic employer far removed from the rough masculinity of its Imperial predecessor (Frühstück and Ben-Ari, 2002; Satō, 2004, 2010, 2022; Frühstück, 2007).

Yet, to what extent is this still the case in 2024? International relations discourse on Japan has been dominated by the idea of "normalisation" in recent years, discussing, either in normative or analytical terms, Japan's seeming move away from its "abnormal" pacifist, demilitarised state and towards a "normal", militarised state that can send its armed forces abroad and act autonomously as well as in multi- or bilateral international alliances (Cooney, 2002; Middlebrooks, 2008; Soeya, Tadokoro and Welch, 2011; Hagström, 2015). In the realm of public opinion too, extensive JSDF assistance after the 2011 triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown has been credited with generating a more positive public image of the JSDF, paving its way to becoming generally accepted by the Japanese public (Koikari, 2013, 2019; Frühstück, 2017, p. 167; Midford, 2017). Recent polling does indeed suggest that most Japanese people generally support the JSDF, with about 40% of people even believing that it should be expanded and about 78% of people stating that they are "interested" in the JSDF. Such interest seems to be particularly present among younger generations, with the formative impact of the 2011 disaster and an increasing number

of media about JSDF characters being raised as possible explanations (Takahashi, 2023). Analysing manga about the JSDF, Max Warrack comes to a similar conclusion, stating that contemporary Japan is “culturally remilitarising” (2023, p. 235).

And indeed, this seems to be reflected in JSDF portrayals, with even a cursory glance at JSDF PR-materials showing very little unease and a lot more overt militarism than previous research would suggest. In this dissertation, I want to investigate this seeming shift in how the JSDF is portrayed, looking at post-2011 JSDF portrayals to find out what exactly has changed, what has stayed the same and what the implications of those changes/continuities might be. Looking at JSDF portrayals across different types of media, ranging from “official” portrayals like JSDF YouTube videos and museums to the semi-official military magazine “Mamor” and the mostly unofficial portrayal of the JSDF in the commercial animation series “GATE”. Tracing the discourse(s) constructed throughout these different media allows for a tracking of ideas about military work, the JSDF’s status in Japanese society and the role of gender in constructing JSDF identity. Concretely, I ask the following questions:

- 1) How is the JSDF portrayed in JSDF YouTube videos, the military anime GATE, JSDF Museums and the military magazine Mamor?
- 2) What are patterns or themes emerging from that portrayal?
- 3) How are these patterns or themes gendered?
- 4) What does JSDF portrayal tell us about the larger structure and development of militarism in post-2011 Japan?

In taking this approach, I view the JSDF as an example of a “postmodern military”, which needs to maintain active and consistent self-narration to gain or maintain social approval and even just interest (Moskos, Williams and Segal, 2000b; Satō, 2022, pp. 126–127). Consequently, my answers to these questions are based on a study of culture, which I argue is an essential site for analysing the meanings and identities constructed through images of the JSDF. Visual media are not just increasingly important in postmodern society (Coole, 1998, p. 118), but also carry an “emotional potentiality” that makes them particularly impactful in shaping social attitudes and understandings (Adler-Nissen, Andersen and Hansen, 2020, p. 77). Put simply, I argue that in the context of a postmodern military like the JSDF, understanding the dynamics of militarisation and “normalisation” requires one to pay attention to the creation of images and ideas through visual culture.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework for this dissertation is tailored for such a culture and visibility focussed project, drawing on Japanese postmodernist thinkers and concepts to analyse JSDF portrayals. Studies of popular culture and “otaku” subculture in particular are important here, as the JSDF itself draws heavily on otaku culture in marketing itself (Sudō, 2013; Sugawa-Shimada, 2015). Otaku subculture here describes a subculture of dedicated manga (Japanese comics) and anime

(animation series often based on manga) fans, who have cultivated distinct subcultural modes of interacting with each other and with the objects of their interest, constructing alternative social standards in the process (Azuma, 2009, p. 27; Galbraith, 2019). For a postmodern military in a postmodern society increasingly marked by social fragmentation (Moskos, Williams and Segal, 2000a), such as the JSDF in Japan, adopting subcultural elements might then be a valid adaptation strategy.

This postmodernist and cultural studies body of theory is combined with feminist research from international relations, sociology and Japan studies on the role of gender in militaries and militarism generally, as well as gender in Japan and the JSDF specifically. Already mentioned above, core figures here are Sabine Frühstück and Satō Fumika¹, who have both written extensively on the JSDF and the role gender plays within it, including how the JSDF has strategically used gender to portray itself to increase societal acceptance (e.g. Frühstück, 2007; Satō, 2010, 2022). I also draw on foundational works from beyond the Japanese context about how militaries maintain gender differences and the way gender is used to maintain military power structures and justify military violence (Enloe, 1983, 2000; Sasson-Levy, 2003a; Duncanson, 2015). Melissa Brown's 2012 book on the use of gender in US military advertising, with its focus on the central role of military masculinity serves as an important inspiration for this study and I aim to adopt elements of her work in my study of the JSDF, whilst also going beyond just direct advertising and examining JSDF portrayals beyond the most direct self-promotion too. This broader focus also extends to the way sources are analysed, which is primarily visual, but tries to nevertheless cast a wide net, taking in aspects like sound, tactility, etc. when relevant, as well as supplementing the direct observations made with insights gained from interviews, fieldwork experiences or relevant existing literature. The goal of this relatively loose and open approach is to remain receptive to the intertextual construction of JSDF militarism, which cannot be expected to neatly limit itself to one source or way of perception (Rose, 2016, pp. 187–188).

In my research, I will look at four distinct sources' portrayal of the JSDF. First, I will analyse videos from JSDF YouTube channels, doing some simple screening of video contents to assign tags and categories which I then use to conduct more in-depth visual discourse analysis on the most popular videos in the different categories. Second, I will analyse the 2014 military animation series GATE, which is based on novels written by a former JSDF officer and received some JSDF cooperation in its production but is produced and distributed entirely as a for-profit entertainment product. Third, I look at three JSDF museums in Japan, one for each branch of the organisation. To analyse the very different physical environment of the museums, I will draw on ethnographic observations of not just the exhibitions, but also visitor

¹ Japanese names will be given in the surname, given name order that is custom in Japan. In this case "Satō" then is the surname and "Fumika" the given name. Western names are rendered in the given name, surname order instead.

interactions and staff dynamics observed during my visits. Fourth and last, I will analyse the JSDF magazine *Mamor*, which is produced and commercially distributed by private publisher Fusosha, but deals entirely with the JSDF, has JSDF staff on its editorial board and relies financially on an agreement with the JSDF to purchase a set amount of each month's magazines. These four sources differ in the degree of control the JSDF is able to exercise on their content and the way in which JSDF narratives are experienced, but they also have significant overlap, not just in the material they portray, but also in how they portray it. For example, videos feature in the museum exhibitions too and *Mamor* often features short manga to illustrate its articles, drawing on the same visual language as *GATE*. Ultimately, this mixture of overlap and difference makes the analysis of the sources more productive though, as it facilitates the tracing of certain database elements across different media contexts, thus helping to establish an intertextual understanding of the sources.

With the above-described approach, I seek to make three distinct contributions in this dissertation. First, through including not only a variety of different sources but also covering them in depth over the full 13 years of the observation period, I seek to fill a relative gap of wide-scoped analyses about contemporary portrayals of the JSDF itself. Building on previous works by Sabine Frühstück and Satō Fumika to provide an up-to-date and widely-scoped overview of gendered imagery and military identity construction patterns in JSDF portrayal. Compared to specifically Frühstück and Satō's work, the empirical importance of this study is twofold. First, the most comprehensive, "general" works by the two authors are both from before the 2011 disaster, with Satō's pioneering "The Military Organisation and Gender" being released in 2004 and Frühstück's "Uneasy Warriors" in 2007. And whilst both authors (as well as others) have continued to write about the JSDF and gender in the JSDF, their more recent works generally have a somewhat different focus, with Frühstück for example writing on play and the militarisation of childhood in Japan (2017) and Satō using her latest book to address military women and gender in the JSDF in an even broader context, comparing it with gender in the US military and locating it in global social and political contexts (2022). Taking full advantage of the breadth of argument possible in a long dissertation like this, this study thus brings broad empirical insights to studies of the JSDF, gender in military institutions and gender in the JSDF specifically.

Second, I also contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate about Japanese "normalisation", arguing that in a postmodern society dominated by the cultural (Coole, 1998), paying distinct attention to that cultural dimension is essential to understanding whether or not the political project of militarisation can drum up the necessary support to succeed. Much of international relations discourse on Japan has recently been focused on the question of Japanese remilitarisation and the prospect of a more military assertive Japan emerging in the near future, a stance prominently advocated by former Prime Minister Abe Shinzō (Hughes, 2015). This discourse has most commonly employed relatively traditional realist or foreign policy analysis

epistemologies and thus focused very strongly on the state and leadership level, e.g. in looking at Japanese political leaders' attitudes to normalisation (Funairole, 2015; Easley, 2017). Critical scholars like Linus Hagström and his colleagues, however, have focused more on discourse instead, drawing on poststructuralist approaches to international relations to highlight the importance of reconstituting identities and creating new strategic narratives to remilitarise Japan whilst maintaining a normative (or perhaps even performative) commitment to pacifism (Hagström, 2015; Hagström and Hanssen, 2016; Gustafsson, Hagström and Hanssen, 2019; Hagström and Gustafsson, 2019). I follow their example of taking a critical perspective and centring discourse, but apply it to the JSDF itself, taking seriously its role in Japanese politics as a possible agent of change in itself. Additionally, in drawing heavily on cultural studies, I also double-down on de-centring traditional means of statecraft and security politics, focusing instead on how culture serves to shape the range of possibilities in security and the crucial role it has in maintaining "ontological security", i.e. security of knowing and meaning in one's identity (Delehanty and Steele, 2009). Considering culture central in this project of securing the self, this dissertation then adds an important component to normalisation discourse in adding perspectives that focus not just on what is said or done, but also how it is communicated to the civilian population.

The third and central contribution of this study is to show how portrayals of the JSDF construct a distinctly postmodern militarism which I describe as "apolitical militarism". This militarism is postmodern in its embrace of subculture and societal fragmentation, building on patterns from otaku subculture to construct a distinct military subculture. This subculture does not rely on a unifying grand narrative of militarism but is rather constructed around a shared "database" from which those in the subculture can construct their own, personalised "small narratives" as they see fit (Azuma, 2009). In this dynamic, power is obscured, as small narratives are seemingly constructed freely and in diverse ways. But in fact, power is merely externalised into the axiomatic assumptions baked into the content included in the database or left out of it. Such a militarism is therefore highly individualised and almost anarchic, but only in the confines set by the larger, gendered power structure (Asada, 1989). This militarism is also apolitical in that it removes militarism from the realm of politics and transforms it into an entertainment product instead. As an entertainment product, militarism is no longer scrutinised on the basis of whether it is right or wrong, justified or excessive, but merely on whether it is pleasurable or not. The JSDF as an institution is thereby transformed from a political actor in a difficult and contested social environment into a cultural entrepreneur, whose main responsibility is no longer to assuage fears about militarism but simply to provide thrilling and pleasurable content to draw people from an often apathetic crowd into its subcultural orbit. "Apolitical militarism" then describes a militarism that is aestheticized, individualised and commodified, something which individuals construct freely from in itself apolitical database

elements and which can therefore contain entirely contradictory elements without issue. This quintessentially postmodern “apolitical militarism” is, I argue, a current example of the JSDF as an avantgarde force (Frühstück, 2004), heralding a development that might in various forms come to other militaries around the world who also face the problem of navigating increasingly siloed postmodern societies.

To make those contributions, the dissertation is divided into a total of seven chapters, including this introduction. After the introduction, the first chapter will give an overview over the literature, starting by addressing the international relations literature on Japanese security and the idea of Japanese “normalisation”. Here, the focus is on showing the general state of the discussion in international relations and political science, demonstrating what “conventional” perspectives on the JSDF and Japanese remilitarisation look like and what sort of critical, particularly post-structural interventions have already been made. After that, the focus shifts to a discussion of Japanese gender roles to give important social context to the ways gender is used in JSDF portrayals. The discussion of gender will then be continued with an outlining of the general literature on gender and the military, including military masculinity and the integration of women into armed forces around the world. After that broad discussion, I then specifically look at what has been written on gender in the JSDF, thus rounding out the presentation of the wider context of this dissertation’s analysis.

In the next chapter, I then lay out the dissertation’s underlying theoretical framework and the methodology derived from it, ending with a description of the specific methods and sources used. To outline the theoretical framework, I start by introducing the concept of the postmodern military, explaining the concept and how the tensions present in all postmodern militaries are exacerbated in the Japanese context. Following from this discussion about the JSDF as a postmodern military, I will look at how one can understand the underlying power mechanism in operation here, using Asada Akira’s theory of infantile capitalism to show how power is obscured through the creation of a “protected area” of play and consumption. Asking how to grasp that “protected area” then leads me to discussing Azuma Hiroki and Japanese cultural studies more broadly, showing how Azuma’s concept of the subcultural database can help to understand and observe the protected area in practice. With the theoretical framework thus explained, I then turn towards methodology and methods, first outlining my general methodological assumptions following from the previously described theoretical framework and then discussing visual discourse analysis as the concrete method used in this dissertation. Lastly, I give more details about the sources used, explaining the specifics of each and how they fit into the larger project.

After the literature review and framework and methodology chapter, the first substantial empirical chapter addresses JSDF YouTube videos. This is a good place to start the empirical work of this dissertation, as JSDF YouTube with its many channels and overall thousands of videos not only offers one of the most plentiful

sources for portrayal of the JSDF, but also one of the most direct, with YouTube enabling the JSDF to speak directly to a wide audience that, nevertheless, needs to be engaged and entertained to stick around. With a number of different channels, including independently operating channels for all three main branches of the JSDF and a recruitment channel, JSDF YouTube also offers an interesting view of differences between different parts of the JSDF, thus giving an initial impression of JSDF portrayal that goes beyond viewing it as a monolithic institution. With multiple hundred thousand subscribers on its main channels and thousands to even millions of views on its videos, JSDF YouTube is also one of the sources with the furthest potential reach. Being, in many ways, a very traditional form of self-promotion through producing advertisements, mini documentaries or image films, it is also an excellent basis to ground the observations of the other sources in.

The second empirical chapter then moves to a rather different source, studying the 2016-2017 animation series "GATE: Thus the JSDF fought there". Written by a former GSDF officer and produced in cooperation with the JSDF, GATE is certainly close to the JSDF, though it is ultimately still a commercial entertainment product that is made by an animation studio for purely commercial purposes and broadcast on television, streaming services, etc. for that very purpose. This makes GATE decidedly different from JSDF YouTube and with its lack of direct association with the JSDF and its fantasy setting of the JSDF travelling into a pseudo-medieval European fantasy world, it enjoys much greater liberty to portray an aggressively militaristic and masculine JSDF, taking great pleasure in showing military violence in a very direct manner, but with the ultimate goal of giving pleasure. The study of GATE will also be used to further introduce the theories and methodologies of cultural and particularly anime studies, working to start drawing intertextual links between it and JSDF YouTube as well to begin outlining the contours of JSDF apolitical militarism.

In the third empirical chapter, I will then return to a more directly JSDF-orchestrated portrayal of itself, looking at three JSDF museums in different parts of Japan. With one museum for each branch of the JSDF, this once more offered an opportunity for seeing how the portrayal of the JSDF changes depending on which of its component parts does the portraying. Additionally, as physical institutions, museums offer a distinctly different experiences than YouTube videos or an animation series ever could, allowing for a multisensory and interactive experience quite unlike any of the other sources. At the same time, this physical nature also makes the museums the least accessible of all the sources analysed, despite them usually being located in major urban areas and open to the public for most of the year at no cost, they still need to be specifically sought out and travelled to, generally limiting their visitors to only those most interested in the JSDF. Consequently, they can most unapologetically cater to a JSDF friendly audience, making them an interesting case to compare to more broadly accessible portrayals like JSDF YouTube. Grounding the study of JSDF museums in existing literature on museums and specifically war museums, the chapter shows how

JSDF museums on the whole construct militarism as an exciting experience, playing heavily into the pleasure component of apolitical militarism. Gender features in this as part of the exhibitions, but also in observing visitation patterns, seeing for example the prominence of families.

Fourth and last of the empirical chapters is a chapter on the military magazine "Mamor". Published by the private commercial publisher Fusosha but produced with direct cooperation of the JSDF and MoD, who also guarantee the magazine's continued existence by consistently buying a set number of magazines each month, it is an interesting hybrid between the "top-down" PR products like JSDF YouTube and museums and the "bottom-up" entertainment product with JSDF-cooperation that is GATE. Offering a wide range of issues to draw from and a wealth of different articles, usually accompanied by extensive visualisation, Mamor is also a particularly rich source to draw from. It has also deliberately been placed last in the order of chapters, as Mamor in many ways ties together the strands and patterns observed in the other sources in its issues. This is not fully unique, as the consistent presence of the themes of technology, masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality is ultimately one of the key takeaways from this dissertation, but this larger observation is nevertheless particularly prominent in Mamor. In a way, Mamor thus helps to bring together the different sources, showing how apolitical militarism is present throughout the dissertation's different sources, showing a degree of fluidity in adapting to the specific medium and its circumstances, but ultimately remaining distinctly identifiable. Being also particularly friendly to those yet uninitiated into the military subculture by including glossaries of military terminology, descriptions in non-specialist language of military equipment that featured in each issue as well as other "accessibility" features, Mamor can thus be understood as both a gateway into military subculture and a core publication for military enthusiasts to congregate around.

Closing the dissertation, my conclusion will summarise the study's finding and further develop the core idea of apolitical militarism, linking what has been found in the empirical chapters back to the three contributions outlined further above. It finds that if considered in its entirety and thus seeing the full intertextuality of its portrayal, the JSDF of the post-2011 period has come far from softening itself, instead constructing a commodified and pleasurable version of militarism that solves its paradoxes by ignoring them, creating and speaking to a subculture in which they simply do not matter. Through commodification, militarism is moved from politics to culture, creating a highly individualised and, as the term "apolitical militarism" suggests, depoliticised version of militarism-as-entertainment. The gendered and violent nature of the JSDF as a military institution is then obscured through the power structure of the "protected area", enabling the JSDF to embrace contradictory elements like gender equality and hypermasculinity at the same time. And while the JSDF's apolitical militarism is an adaptation to the specific challenges faced by the JSDF as a Japanese

postmodern military, it is not a uniquely Japanese adaptation in itself, but rather a model for a pathway that other postmodern militaries might take or are already taking.

Literature Review

Introduction

Tracing the postmodern construction of a fantasy of apolitical militarism through a power structure hiding distinctly traditional warrior masculinity, my dissertation draws on a number of different literatures and academic debates. It is also situated in the distinct geographical and social context of contemporary Japan. Therefore, the literature review in this chapter will provide some context about the specific situation of modern Japan, particularly for those not already familiar with it, as well as on some of the general work on military identity produced by feminist and other writers. For that purpose, the first two sections will give broad context for Japan, the first about the Japanese security environment and current debates on Japanese international relations, and the second about gender roles and patriarchal structures in Japan. These will then be followed by sections on feminist research about gender and the military, as well as an overview over existing academic work on military and gender in Japan especially.

For general context, I will start off with contemporary debates on and around Japanese security. As a country on the “frontline” of a potential great power conflict between the US and China and a core American ally, Japanese security has drawn increasing attention recently, further facilitated by legal changes towards increased military proactiveness and record defence budgets in Japan (Takahashi, 2021). Academia frames this development as “normalisation”, i.e. a Japanese move away from “abnormal” pacifism and towards a

foreign and security policy with a “normal” military that can be deployed abroad and partake in multilateral military operations (Saltzman, 2015; Sam-Sang, 2018). The first section of this literature review will outline Japan’s current security situation with regards to its historical genesis, going back to Japanese defeat in World War II to explain lingering anti-military sentiment as well as the attempts to dislodge it. Understanding the general outline of Japanese security and particularly military situation then helps to make clear the social environment the JSDF operates in, and the constraints still placed on it.

In the second section, I will continue with elaborating the specifically gendered context of Japan. Japan, as any other nation, is a highly gendered society. But it is important to look at the details of how Japanese gender roles and relations are set up to understand the structural role of gender in the case of JSDF self-portrayal. Japan’s contemporary patriarchal structures are, as with its security posture, largely a product of its post-war reconstruction and require some explanation to show the ways in which gender roles are constructed in the Japanese case. For a study centrally interested in gender, this is particularly important to avoid erroneously imposing Western notions of gender difference on a non-Western context as well as for understanding the invocation of socially prevalent gendered themes in JSDF self-portrayal.

The third section will move towards more specific literature by looking at academic writings on military and gender, including works on how the military institution is gendered, military masculinity, as well as the impact of women's integration into armed forces throughout the world. The writings discussed in this section are not Japan specific and usually focus on other geographical contexts but are nonetheless important for understanding the larger literature on military and gender, a field on which writers like prominent military sociologist Satō Fumika are explicitly basing their own Japan-focused research (2022, pp. 8–9).

Rounding out this literature review, the fourth section introduces the works of Satō and others to show what has been written about the JSDF in particular, especially in regard to the role of gender in it. This section will introduce some of the key works in this specific subject area, explaining what they have found whilst also highlighting where my own research is looking to fit in and expand on these preceding works. The main purpose of this section then is to show the immediate foundations on which my dissertation is built, emphasizing how this project iterates on previous works to show how certain patterns occasionally observed before have become far more prevalent than previously assumed, illustrating a transformation in the JSDF's social role and status which I seek to explain through the term of a-political militarism.

Japanese Security and the “Normalisation” Debate

Japanese security considerations often start with its geography, which, as an island country with very few resources just off the coast of large and increasingly powerful China, suggests a view of Japan as a site of potential conflict (Smith, 2009). Nevertheless, for most of its post-war history Japan has spent very little on defence and maintained only a relatively small armed force, which, due to its constitution disallowing the establishment of regular armed forces, is euphemistically named “Self-Defense Force” (*The Constitution of Japan*, 1946). Talking about Japanese security then starts with Japan's remarkable turn from a highly militarised society in and before the Second World War, to a pacifist nation whose constitution explicitly renounces war as a sovereign right and does not allow for regular armed forces (Smethurst, 1974; Kikkawa and Todoroki, 1996; Kawakami, 2020).

On both the American and the Japanese side, the Pacific theatre of World War II was radical in its brutality and total mobilisation of minds and resources (Dower, 1993). After the war, Japan's Imperial Army and Navy were thus considered not only defeated enemies, but a criminally guilty party, whose fate must accordingly be discussed in terms of punishment and rehabilitation. Trying Japanese officials and officers as war criminals at the Tokyo trials was the direct consequence of this, although the trial has remained controversial, with some decrying it as “victor's justice” whilst others point out to the lack of charges against the Emperor himself or many other senior Japanese elites who the occupation authorities under general Douglas MacArthur wanted to incorporate into Japan's post-war government (Fujita, 2011, pp. 17–18). This is in line

with the so-called Potsdam Declaration, which set out the Allies' terms for Japan's surrender, which settles the question of guilt for the war in its fourth article:

"The time has come for Japan to decide whether she will continue to be controlled by those self-willed militaristic advisers whose unintelligent calculations have brought the Empire of Japan to the threshold of annihilation, or whether she will follow the path of reason." ('Proclamation Defining Terms for Japanese Surrender', 1945)

By making this separation between the Japanese military leadership as guilty of the war and the common people as innocent (which also extended to the Emperor as the symbol of the people), the Allies laid the groundwork for the American occupiers' later ambitious democratisation policy by basically exonerating most Japanese people from war-guilt as they were framed as unenlightened and oppressed masses duped by their leadership (Dower, 1999, p. 77).

In the immediate post-war period, where the Americans' prime objectives were the democratisation and demilitarisation of Japan, the idea of Japanese victimhood was therefore politically useful to get Japan's population on board with the occupation authorities ambitious reform programme, which included sweeping legal, economic and political changes (Kingston, 2001, pp. 12–13). This way, both the war and the following occupation of Japan could be framed as benign acts ultimately serving to liberate the Japanese people from an oppressive system (Igarashi, 2012). In Japan itself, this found mixed reception. On the one hand, Japanese political elites abhorred most of the reforms, resisting them to the best of their abilities (Dower, 1999, pp. 81–84). On the other hand, the American narrative of a duped people of childlike (very much racialised) innocence finally able to taste freedom and become a "mature" society in the American image did find significant resonance among the wider populace, with the long-suppressed Japanese left being an early supporter of the occupation's reforms for example (Dower, 1999, p. 69). For Japanese civilians "heroizing" individual experiences of victimhood during the war (e.g. during the nuclear bombings) and turning them into symbols of victimhood for the entire nation, was an effective way of avoiding personal responsibility for the war's atrocities and hardships, framing themselves as passive victims instead (Orr, 2001, pp. 71–72).

The most prominent product of this period of demilitarisation and democratisation was Japan's constitution, which not only codified a liberal democratic system of government but also famously renounces war in its Article 9. This constitution was drafted and imposed upon the Japanese government by the Americans by linking acceptance of the constitution to the preservation of the Imperial institution (Richter, 2016, pp. 1230–1232). Later though, even erstwhile opponents of the new constitution like Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru found use in it, with his famous "Yoshida doctrine" using domestic pacifism and Article 9 as a shield against American demands for military contributions whilst focusing on economic development, allowing a continued

American presence on the islands in return for security guarantees and favourable economic terms (Samuels, 2007, pp. 38–39). But as many international relations studies have demonstrated, this does not make Japanese pacifism a simple political tool or unwanted foreign imposition, as it has continued to powerfully shape Japanese foreign and security policy (Miyashita, 2007; Cai, 2008; Hatakeyama, 2021). One widely cited article here is Thomas Berger's (1993) study on what he called "Japan's culture of anti-militarism", in which he argued Japan would not aim to become a major military power like the United States due to an entrenched anti-militarism stemming from its post-war history. Other studies too have highlighted this Japanese pacifism from various angles, painting a picture of modern Japan as an economic power unwilling to militarise (Katzenstein and Okawara, 1993, 2001; Miyashita, 2007; Izumikawa, 2010; Gustafsson, Hagström and Hanssen, 2019; Le, 2021).

This pacifism was, however, always contested, starting again with the Americans who, with the emergence of the Cold War and communist governments now in China and North Korea, began pressuring Japan to rearm, with MacArthur himself going on record stating that Article 9 should not be interpreted as a total renunciation of the right of self-defence (Maki, 1955, p. 547). Part of the so-called "Reverse Course" in occupation policy, which saw a sudden shift away from radical democratisation policies and towards greater incorporation of pre-war elites into Japanese governance, this was part of a larger strategic reorientation where Japan became an important Cold War asset (Kingston, 2001, pp. 13–14). Accordingly, building the core of a modern army was a key point of discussion between the Japanese and Americans around the negotiation of a formal peace agreement in 1950 and Japan committed to modest rearmament (Yoshitsu, 1983, p. 86). However, the forces thus established and euphemistically called "National Police Reserve" did not satisfy the American side and using the leverage of aid payments, they moved the Japanese government to change the official interpretation of Article 9 to now recognise the right to self-defence and in turn transform the National Police Reserve into the "National Safety Force" and later into the "Self-Defense Forces", as they are still known today (Maki, 1955; Richter, 2016, p. 1239).

Against the backdrop of a far-reaching domestic popular embrace of pacifist and antimilitarist ideals, this shift in security policy was highly contentious, with conflicts coming to a head in 1960 over the renegotiation of the US-Japan Security Treaty. Officially called the "Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan", the treaty was widely opposed by Japanese leftists and those fearing that its provision for mutual assistance in case of attack might draw Japan into a war between the US and one of its communist enemies (Miller, 2011, p. 108). As a consequence of this intense public reaction, involving rioting and the largest popular protests in Japanese history, Japan's new Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato promised that the dominant Liberal Democratic Party would no longer seek to revise Article 9 as his predecessor had wanted (Panton, 2010, p. 135; Kapur, 2018, p. 1). And despite more

recent initiatives for constitutional revision, Article 9 has remained unchanged to this date and has become an object of pride and aspiration for parts of Japanese society (e.g. Itō, 2007). It remains domestically contentious though, with both the Cold War and the contemporary rise of an increasingly assertive China fuelling narratives about the danger of pacifism (e.g. Shimizu, 1980) and (often international) complaints about Japan not making its “fair contribution” to international security (e.g. Armitage and Nye, 2012).

The contentious nature of Japanese pacifism and consistent pressure from the United States in particular have contributed to a gradual expansion of the JSDF’s role and capability without the need for constitutional revisions (Richter, 2016, p. 1240). A major catalyst in this regard was international criticism of Japan’s “chequebook diplomacy” in the 1991 Gulf War, where Japan contributed financially but did not send troops for combat or support roles. In this case, strong negative reactions from allies shocked Japanese security elites, causing a strategic reorientation allowing for non-combat JSDF deployment in UN peacekeeping missions, starting with the 1992 deployment of JSDF forces to Cambodia (Cooney, 2007; Easley, 2017, pp. 70–71; Heang, 2024). In the 2010s, the eight-year tenure of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, who had been a vocal opponent of pacifism (Abe, 2013), saw a renewed push for revising Article 9 or at least change the official interpretation of it. Abe initially favoured constitutional revision, but the high hurdles to such an endeavour (two-thirds majorities in both chambers of parliament and a majority in a national referendum) and doubtful parliamentary and popular support ultimately deterred him from taking that course (Ueda, 2014; Flores, 2017, p. 12). Instead, the Abe government opted for a further reinterpretation of Article 9 in 2014, expanding the JSDF’s role and permissions in international peacekeeping operations and, most importantly, tacitly acknowledging the concept of collective self-defence, enabling Japan to militarily assist a close ally even if Japan itself is not under attack (Akiyama, 2014; Ueda, 2014). This is a significant change, as previous interpretations of Article 9 only considered an attack on Japan itself as a legitimate cause for exercising the right to self-defence. Unsurprisingly, this change was praised by US officials, who lauded it as an opportunity to further deepen and extend security cooperation between the two countries (Richter, 2016, pp. 1248–1249).

Internationally, English-language academic discourse often uses the term “normalisation” to describe these developments as part of Japan’s move away from pacifism in both narrative and material terms (Cooney, 2002; Hirata, 2008; Middlebrooks, 2008; Oros, 2008; Soeya, 2011; Easley, 2017). Entering the 21st century and especially the 2010s, the academic consensus now is that Japan has already significantly changed. Contemporary research is therefore most concerned with one of two things: explaining what to expect in terms of policy from the “new” Japan (e.g. Hughes and Krauss, 2007; Hook and Son, 2013; Singh, 2013; Hughes, 2015; Oros, 2015) or showing why the Japanese security environment has changed, for example

by referring to a specific international relations theory (e.g. Funairole, 2015; Saltzman, 2015). After Abe's 2014 revised interpretation of Article 9, this development towards greater militarisation and increased responsibility for the JSDF was further accelerated by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which raised fears of a great-power war between China and the US over Taiwan, shifting Japanese policy and public opinion firmly towards favouring a greater role and capability for the JSDF (Smith, 2022; O'Shea and Maslow, 2024). An immediate consequence of this shift was the lifting of restrictions on the JSDF acquiring certain types of weapons systems like first-strike capable missiles as well as a commitment to achieve a minimum 2% of GDP defence budget by 2027 (Kuhn, 2022; Liff, 2023).

The JSDF is therefore located in a still contentious, dynamic and quickly changing security environment. On the one hand, increased budgets and increased responsibilities indicate a stronger role for it, on the other hand, the need for continuously discussing the prospect of "normalisation" and the inability to more fundamentally reform Article 9 also clearly shows the continuing legacy of Japanese post-war pacifism, thus presenting the JSDF with a more favourable, but still difficult social environment to navigate.

Corporate Warriors and Good Housewives: Japanese Gender Roles

As well as shaping its security policy, Japan's post-war experiences have also shaped the country's gender regime. Whilst being one of the most developed societies in the world, Japan is also a particularly unequal one when it comes to gender. In the 2021 Gender Gap Index, Japan was ranked 120th out of 156 assessed nations, far below comparably developed Western European nations, mainly due to the very low degree of female participation in political and economic leadership positions (World Economic Forum, 2021, p. 233). This can at least partially be explained by Japan's post-war development trajectory. As the military has almost completely lost its social status, it was also no longer able to shape Japanese hegemonic masculinity. With an explicit political focus on economic recovery, the corporate sector and civilian bureaucracy then took on the military's role as the primary arena for shaping hegemonic masculinity, even taking on military rhetoric and turning male office workers into "corporate warriors" (LeBlanc, 2012, p. 863). Accordingly, the "salaryman", a normally college educated white-collar worker with a lifetime employment contract became the masculine ideal. Loyal and devoted to the company, the salaryman is expected to work long overtime, readily accept transfers to other parts of the country, and participate in regular, after work socialising. Spending most of his time away from home, the salaryman is therefore constructed with the heteronormative assumption of having a wife who does the vast majority of household and childrearing tasks (Brinton, 1993; North, 2009). And even though the salaryman as a distinctly middle-class ideal has been unattainable for many Japanese men, its social and cultural impact is still extensive (Gagné, 2021, p. 64; Frühstück, 2022, p. 36).

Consequently, a strictly gendered division of labour is symptomatic of Japan's post war political economy, where women were systematically marginalised in the labour market through legal, welfare, and cultural means (Macnaughtan, 2019). Women's primary role was motherhood; being a successful woman was therefore defined in a patriarchal way as having a good husband, keeping a neat household and devotion to childcare. Career achievements were not part of "successful" womanhood and women were expected to quit work for the entirety of childrearing, leading to an M-shaped labour force participation curve, where women would work in their younger years, quit work upon marriage and childbirth, then re-enter the workforce in their later years once the children have left home (Takeda, 2005, pp. 118–120).

Regardless of whether a woman planned to become a housewife or not, the expectation that she would do so became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, as in her early career, she would likely be relegated to menial tasks and evaluated with bias, precluding any meaningful career advancement and thus making marriage the seemingly more attractive choice (Nemoto, 2016, p. 4). In recent years, neoliberal reforms have increased female labour force participation, but the M-curve persists as women are still expected to shoulder caring duties by themselves (Takeda, 2008). To maintain life support for the patriarchal model of the nuclear family with its male "salaryman" breadwinner, women thus continue to shoulder the vast majority of unpaid domestic work, are much more likely to be in part-time employment, and only make up less than 10% of company board members (World Economic Forum, 2021, p. 234). And despite the 1987 Equal Employment Opportunity Law, which was further revised and strengthened in 1997 and 2006/7, women's position in the Japanese labour market has not improved much, with weak enforcement mechanisms, lack of support for women workers and their needs as well as a persistently conservative and sexist social climate all undermining any push for increased economic equality (Assmann, 2014).

There are indications that the salaryman model is gradually breaking down, as young men increasingly disapprove of the model and are neither willing nor able to become salarymen themselves (LeBlanc, 2012). But with no new model set to displace the salaryman, even this apparent cultural shift and state policies explicitly aimed at increasing economic equality have not actually had much impact on lessening Japanese gender inequality (Roberson and Suzuki, 2003; Hidaka, 2010; Kano, 2011; LeBlanc, 2012; Kawaguchi, 2013; Dalton, 2017). Instead, regular full-time employment is still the most economically profitable way of working and largely limited to men, whilst women are often relegated to being a buffer workforce in irregular and part-time work. Indeed, neither women's share in domestic work, pro-male biases in career advancement, male working hours, nor women's share in irregular work seem to have become any more equal in recent years (Macnaughtan, 2019). Kumiko Nemoto's 2016 study on persistent inequality in Japanese shows that women are systematically relegated to lower ranks in the corporate ladder, with a rigid labour market and

corporate culture that only allow a small number of women to advance as “honorary men”, i.e. through negating their own femininity, particularly through eschewing motherhood. Nemoto argues that this persistent inequality is difficult to address through policy intervention, as it is fundamentally rooted in the institutional relations between state, business, labour market and families in Japan. Economic gender inequality is therefore no mere by-product, but rather foundational to Japan’s economic model (Nemoto, 2016, pp. 3–5).

Somewhat ironically, some women disillusioned with gender discrimination in the corporate sector have turned to the JSDF, believing the relatively low-status armed forces to offer more career opportunities and a higher degree of meritocracy than large corporations (Frühstück, 2007, p. 97). Analysing gendered narratives of the JSDF requires awareness of all this context, as it will be necessary to situate them in Japan’s wider gender regime and show how they relate to existing conceptions of hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, which are quite different from e.g. the more martially influenced ideal of citizen-defender masculinity in the United States.

Gender and the Military

Before looking at gender in the JSDF in particular, this section will consider the connections between gender and militaries more broadly. In their introduction to the *Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*, Claire Duncanson and Rachel Woodward write that “Militaries in terms of their organisation, their personnel, their activities and their effects are gendered institutions. This bears being baldly stated, because the gendering of military institutions is not a peripheral, additional or incidental issue but is foundational to them.” (2017, p. 2). I included this quote in its entirety because I believe it well encapsulates just how crucial gender is to militaries. One prominent manifestation of this is the military’s important role in constructing masculinities and maintaining male/female hierarchies. Arkin and Dobrofsky (1978) have shown how military service socialises men into traditional masculine role conceptions and since then, a number of studies have elaborated on the different and sometimes conflicting masculinities present in the armed forces (Barrett, 1996; Sasson-Levy, 2003b; Rones and Fasting, 2017). The role of military service as “the fullest expression of masculinity”, as Charlotte Hooper puts it (2001, p. 81), has thus come to be largely accepted as a social reality, just like its central role in constructing and maintaining hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 2002, 2005).

But the importance of masculinity should not imply a quasi-essentialist divide between men as drivers of militarism and women as peacemakers. Instead, women and femininity too can be considered essential in militarisation discourses, as highlighted by several different feminist researchers. One very direct way in which women participate in militarisation is by joining the armed forces themselves, which in turn poses the question how increased female participation in military work over the last years has impacted military gender constructions. Feminist researchers have approached this question from a number of different angles. Some studies have

looked at organisational aspects like division of labour and organisational hurdles female soldiers face, thus focussing more on practical questions of organisational transformation (Robbins and Ben-Eliezer, 2000; Carreiras, 2006, 2017; Apelt, 2014; Obradovic, 2014; Woodward and Duncanson, 2016). Others have looked at the individual experiences and social strategies of women soldiers, finding that in many cases women in the armed forces adopt a similar approach as their male comrades in disparaging femininity and reproducing military masculinity, which these women get limited access to as “honorary men” (Sasson-Levy, 2003a; Dittmer, 2015; King, 2017). Women’s precarious and oftentimes contested status in the military is also detectable in depictions of female combatants. Women’s presence here often follows a similar dynamic as in the actual armed forces, with female soldiers either being shown as feminine and therefore ultimately unthreatening, or as masculinised in habitus and/or appearance, combining a claim to martial competence with markers of masculinity (Brown, 2012; Tasker, 2017). What one concludes from this overview is that military women, both real and fictional, are often forced to navigate a tight space of maintaining femininity, whilst not being too feminine to potentially undermine their military credentials, thus highlighting the consistent potency of gendered logic in structuring the military as an organisation.

This gendered organisational dynamic is well illustrated by Melissa Brown (2012) in her exhaustive analysis of U.S. military recruiting adverts between 1973 and the early 2000s. She shows how, even as the military increasingly opened up to women and as critics decried perceived attempts to “feminise” the forces, affirming masculinity remained the constant message found throughout all adverts. Rather than abandoning masculinity, the U.S. military reformulated it, adapting to wider social changes. From the early 2000s onwards, studies show a shift in hegemonic masculinity which has been described as part of a transition caused by the increased importance of peacekeeping and other military missions outside of large-scale combat. However, paying particular attention to race and the utilisation of imperialist practices, feminists have criticised such emergent “soft” military masculinities for merely perpetuating racialised and gender differences whilst employing progressive language and allowing access for a small number of relatively elite white women (e.g. DeGroot, 2001; Razack, 2004; Khalili, 2011; Katt, 2014; Christie, 2017; Wadham, 2017; Sztanyi, 2020).

Additionally, a large body of feminist military studies goes beyond analysing women actively in the military only, seeking instead to highlight the obscured ways in which women are involved in supporting the military and drive militarisation. The most prominent figure in this discourse is Cynthia Enloe, who has highlighted the ways in which women’s lives are militarised, as well as how this militarisation is separated from usual discourses of military and security (Enloe, 1983, 2000, 2014). Besides women in uniform, her work also looks at women’s crucial roles at the periphery of militarisation, e.g. military wives, sex workers near military bases, etc, demonstrating how the military apparatus is also sustained by a large and diverse group of women providing various marginalised but essential services. Enloe’s work is explicit in its

anti-militarist position. She cautions that it is necessary to remain critical of the military and stresses its ultimate purpose as an agency for the exertion of state violence (Enloe, 1983, 2010, 2015). Following this fundamentally critical position, the military is not only an inherently violent institution, but also intrinsically opposed to feminist goals as an institution born out of a patriarchal system (Cockburn, 2007, 2010). Gaining empirical credence from the aforementioned studies of how seemingly “softer” military masculinities still come with their own set of gendered and racialised hierarchies, anti-militarist feminism thus combines feminist research and anti-war activism to expose violence and misogyny in the wider military system (Duncanson, 2017).

This anti-militarist approach, however, has not gone unchallenged. Contrary to the anti-militarist position, some liberal feminists have highlighted the potential to change the military through female inclusion, thus eroding military gender roles and eventually achieving military gender equality. Prominent in this regard is Judith Hicks Stiehm, who has theorised that women’s equal participation in military affairs would erode the boundary between “protector” and “protected”, which currently serves as one way to justify male power over women (Stiehm, 1982, 1989). Liberal feminists are therefore mainly interested in tearing down institutional barriers and achieving full parity between military men and women. This focus on integration in the military has been criticised by anti-militarist feminists for allowing the militarisation of liberation discourse (Enloe, 2000, p. 18), but, as Caroline Kennedy-Pipe puts it, “[liberal feminist achievements] may also herald a rethinking of the purposes of national militaries” (2017).

Taking a slightly different perspective, Claire Duncanson and Rachel Woodward have engaged with the anti-militarist/liberal debate, arguing against overly pessimistic views on the military whilst also maintaining that there is a need for critical attention to and deconstruction of military masculinities. Acknowledging the validity of many anti-militarist feminist observations of continued inequality and often rigidly unequal military systems, they nevertheless assert that a gradual reduction of gender difference might reshape hegemonic military masculinity and contribute to increased gender equality as well as more efficient security institutions (Duncanson, 2015; Duncanson and Woodward, 2016). Duncanson specifically draws from theorisations of change in gender regimes developed by Francine Deutsch (2007) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), who try to map out ways for a gradual erosion of gender hierarchies leading to eventual full equality. Applying this to a military context, Duncanson posits that new military masculinities should be examined to ask whether they represent progress towards more equal and effective peacebuilding institutions. Given the propensity for progressive peace-supporting masculinities to be constructed in contradiction to aggressive, primitive, backward masculinities attributed to ‘other’ men (see e.g. Whitworth 2004; Razack 2004), a fully gender equal and democratic military for the purpose of security and protection is deemed unlikely, but, for Duncanson and Woodward, not impossible.

In terms of geographical context, most of the above research has focused on the United States or Western Europe, notably the United Kingdom. Still, research has also been done in other contexts and whilst local differences do exist, the general masculinist premise of the military institution is consistent throughout. Many studies have focused on Israel, which due to extending conscription to women, is a particularly interesting case study for military gender relations. However, it seems as if Israeli women face largely the same issues as their counterparts in other countries' militaries, being caught between femininity and the "masculine" requirements of military service (Robbins and Ben-Eliezer, 2000; Sasson-Levy, 2003a; Sasson-Levy and Amram-Katz, 2007; Jacoby, 2010). A significant amount of research is also dedicated to Scandinavian countries, where Sweden is also remarkable as another country where women are included in the reintroduced military draft (Persson and Sundevall, 2019).

Japan and other Asian countries are studied much less, with research on gender in the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) largely limited to Sabine Frühstück and Satō Fumika's work (Frühstück and Ben-Ari, 2002; Satō, 2004, 2022; Frühstück, 2007, 2011). In fact, most research dealing with militarism in Japan does not deal with the JSDF directly, one example being Emma Dalton's work on the ways in which civilian women indirectly help to legitimise and support the JSDF through marriage and other "helpmate" tasks (Dalton, 2022a, 2022b). Remarkably, this continues to be the case even when considering Japanese language literature, which, while rich in its analysis of gender in economics and politics, devotes little attention to the armed forces. Satō Fumika, writing about reactions from Japanese feminists to her research on women in the JSDF, explains that research on the JSDF itself was considered useless or even dangerous by Japanese feminists, who feared legitimising the institution (Satō, 2022, pp. 2–3). This has meant that for a long time, there was very little research on the JSDF, with important works appearing mostly from the 1990s onwards, decades after the institution's founding. The next section then will turn towards these works and lay out the field for my own research.

"Uneasy Warriors" – Gender and the JSDF

With Japan's particular historic gender and military background, it is natural to ask how gender is manifested in the JSDF and how the highly patriarchal, but also strictly civilian social environment has shaped gendered portrayals of soldiering. A few studies have looked at the JSDF, opposition to it, as well as its role in post-war politics (Eldridge and Midford, 2017; Sadō, 2017). Other studies have also addressed military and gender in the context of Japanese responses to natural disasters, particularly the 2011 triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown. Disaster responses facilitate militarisation and, as Mire Koikari has shown, the 2011 disaster has been used to attack Japanese salaryman masculinity as weak, advocating instead for a more martial masculinity saturated with imagery of physical prowess (Koikari, 2013, 2019; Fukushima *et al.*, 2014). Women are visually included in this notion of a "strong" Japan, but Koikari notes that they are depicted as ultimately following a male leader (2019, p. 153). This specific framing of gendered national identity makes use

of a heroic portrayal of JSDF disaster relief efforts, but it does primarily originate from conservative politicians and their allies rather than from the JSDF itself.

For research about gender and the JSDF itself, the previously mentioned Sabine Frühstück and Satō Fumika are by far the biggest figures in the field. On the Japanese side, Satō has written extensively about the role of women in the JSDF and the reasons for recruiting women in the first place. Drawing on Cynthia Enloe's work and anti-militarist feminism, Satō argues that women were included for mainly two reasons: to make up for a lack of male recruits and to create a progressive image for the JSDF (Satō, 2010, pp. 258–259). Similar to dynamics in the civilian economy, women serve as a backup labour force, but are also used to paint a progressive and non-militaristic picture of the JSDF (Satō, 2004, 2010). Located within military sociology, Satō also broadens her discussion of women in the JSDF by comparing their role and status with women in the US armed forces (Satō, 2022). Her work is some of the most comprehensive work done on women in the JSDF and also touches on aspects like the role of women in JSDF self-promotion, which is of particular importance for my own research. Building on her findings about women's role in "softening" the JSDF is crucial to help me understand what I observe in the empirical chapters to follow, notably the remarkably "harder" portrayal of the JSDF and how this connects to what has been previously observed.

Sabine Frühstück, on the other hand, covers a broad spectrum of topics about the JSDF and gender, frequently reaching back in history to look at the Imperial Army and its legacy too. Notable is her book "Uneasy Warriors" (2007), which provided an in-depth ethnographic study of men and women in the JSDF, paying particular attention to masculinity and femininity in the construction of JSDF military identities. The term "uneasy warriors" is particularly fitting, as it neatly describes the fundamental bind placed on JSDF personnel in requiring the use of femininity and women to soften the force's image and gain public acceptance, but which is at the same time undermining the credentials of the JSDF as a masculine fighting force. Looking at historical legacies in the JSDF, Frühstück further develops this by tracing how the JSDF distances itself from its historical predecessor whilst simultaneously drawing on and extolling its legacy (Frühstück, 2011). Overall though, Frühstück observes a JSDF that is cautious and intent on downplaying its violent capabilities for fear of social backlash, despite the negative reactions this causes within the force itself.

Women and femininity are then crucial to the JSDF's management of its own image, with Frühstück finding that JSDF advertising paints quite a different picture from other militaries by aggressively promoting itself with the promise of gender equality and "real" careers for women (2007, pp. 97–100). This serves to set apart the JSDF from its overtly masculinist predecessor and to "soften" the JSDF in the public eye, making it less threatening and more palatable to an anti-militarist Japanese public (Frühstück and Ben-Ari, 2002). This same pattern is also visible in connecting children and militarism, where the JSDF follows a strategy of "self-infantilisation", where the image of (often sexualised) young girls is used to portray the JSDF (Frühstück, 2017, pp. 176–178). Frühstück explains this as part of a revised JSDF recruitment strategy

aimed at younger people and increasingly making use of popular culture (2017, p. 180, 2020). Ultimately, the JSDF is thus discursively removed from the activity of warmaking and weaponry, with war being framed as a matter of the past (Imperial Japan) and not the future (Frühstück, 2017, pp. 166, 199, 209).

Nevertheless, there are also events like the yearly live fire exercise at Mount Fuji where the JSDF, addressing a highly specific, friendly audience, presents an overtly militaristic spectacle in which weaponry is centrally and prominently displayed (Ben-Ari and Frühstück, 2003). This shows a continuing desire for a more overt militarism from the side of the JSDF, i.e. one that re-centres war as the central occupation of the JSDF and thus re-connects JSDF masculinities to the battlefield as a site of masculinity-creation (Kodamaya, 2023). As I will show in the following chapters, this desire seems to have taken a dominant position in the creation of JSDF self-narration during the last thirteen years, possibly marking a significant shift in JSDF self-portrayal, but also in JSDF self-understanding and the role of gender in both. Thus, significant elements from Frühstück and Satō's research will surface in my own empirical work too, but when tracing the discourse in its entirety, I show how points that were periodically present in the past (like overt displays of violence as pleasurable) have become much more prevalent with a corresponding fall in "softening" content. I also integrate separate observations from this previous research, observations that in some cases have even been contradictory (e.g. JSDF as site of gaining maturity versus JSDF self-infantilisation) into a coherent picture of the JSDF as a postmodern military. The tissue to connect these comes from mainly from two influential postmodern theorists, who will be the main characters in the next chapter alongside this dissertation's broader theoretical and methodological frame.

Framework and Methodology

Introduction

Having established the context of Japan and current feminist approaches to studying the military, this chapter outlines the theoretical framework employed by this study and how it links to the study's methodology. That methodology is characterised by a post-structuralist ontology that understands the JSDF as a discursively constructed identity as well as a participant in the reproductions of those same discourses. Discourse and the way narratives are used to construct an understanding of the JSDF, or rather, a coherent JSDF identity, are therefore the main methodological interest of this study. Such an approach implies an interest in uncovering the underlying power structures of JSDF identity creation and what their implications are, looking broadly at intertextual context in order to understand how constructions of the JSDF are used to normalise and promote a specific form of JSDF identity with all its underlying power hierarchies.

To clearly outline this methodological rationale, this chapter is divided into two sections with three subsections each. The first section establishes the theoretical framework for my analysis in the later chapters and which underpins the methodological choices made in this study. Its first subsection starts with the concept of the "postmodern military", outlining its origins, explaining the underlying theory and showing how it applies to the JSDF concretely, making it useful in the study of JSDF military identity. Following from that, the next subsection asks what the shape of the power structures supporting a Japanese post-modern military might be. For this purpose, the subsection turns to postmodern philosophy, drawing on the works of Asada Akira and Jean Baudrillard to show how through creating parallel worlds of play and consumption, actual power structures are obscured. To do this, the subsection first outlines the (Japanese) historical context of these theories, using that context to then outline Asada's diagnosis of it before finally connecting this with Baudrillard's work on simulacra. Employing this sort of postmodern focus on parallel worlds then begs the question of how these parallel worlds might actually look like and what sort of more concrete manifestation of them I might observe in my empirical analysis. The answer to this question comes from the work of Azuma Hiroki and the wider field of anime/otaku studies. In the last subsection of the theoretical framework section, Azuma's "database model" of consumption and his larger conceptualisation of otaku subculture is therefore the focus, starting with an explanation of why I look at otaku subculture specifically to explain JSDF identity construction, highlighting the JSDF's active embrace of otaku elements in its self-narration and the subsequent blending of 3- and 2-dimensional militarism (Sugawa-Shimada, 2015). After thus establishing its relevance, I then proceed to outline and explain Azuma's model, highlighting how it connects with the structures observed by Asada and can therefore help to guide the following analysis of JSDF self-portrayal.

Following this, the second section of the chapter then turns to methodology and methods. With the theoretical framework established, the next question is how I can

actually observe those structures in my empirical analysis. To guide my exploration of that question, the first subsection of this methods section therefore looks at the study's underlying methodology, starting with a look at the methodological implications of my chosen theoretical framework and then discussing and reflecting on the ontology and epistemology guiding my methodological choices. Going from the abstract to the concrete, the second subsection then presents the study's chosen methodology of discourse analysis, explaining its underlying idea, how it links to the larger theoretical and methodological considerations made, as well as specifying what kind of discourse analysis will be conducted. For this purpose, I briefly discuss visual discourse analysis in general, then explaining and justifying my specific choices about the kind of material analysed, the site of analysis (i.e. looking at the discourse itself rather than its production or reception) and how anime studies as a concrete example help to apply this method to the sources studied. The last subsection then addresses those concrete sources, explaining the reasons for including them specifically in this study and discussing how the previous methodological considerations and discourse analysis apply to the specific context of each source.

Theoretical Framework: Postmodernism and Subculture

The Postmodern Military

Following the end of the Cold War, military sociologists developed the concept of the post-Cold War military as a "postmodern military". Prominently advocated by Charles Moskos, the postmodern military of the Post-Cold War era is put into contrast with the militaries of the modern era (early 20th century) and the late-modern era (during the Cold War), describing each era's military institutions as marked by distinct characteristics (Moskos, Williams and Segal, 2000a, pp. 1–2). Differentiating the three different eras based on a number of factors, Moskos (2000, p. 15) describes modern militaries as the mass-conscription armies of the world wars, centred on large scale infantry combat, built on a warrior archetype, constructing itself as a necessary life-step of each man and accordingly excluding women as well as sexual and other minorities. Due to this central social role, the modern military also enjoyed strong public support with conscientious objection considered emasculating and often outright illegal.

In the Cold War era, technological and social developments then require military institutions to adapt to new circumstances. To Moskos, this concretely means a transformation from mass conscript army to a large professional army, operating increasingly international, with soldier identity shifting away from the previous infantry warrior to a more technical and managerial warriorhood. This shift is accompanied by a greater integration of civilians into military work (e.g. as contracted workers), a somewhat increased openness to women and minorities in the military and a generally larger focus on interacting with media to manipulate public perceptions of the military. This in particular is necessary due to public attitudes shifting towards ambivalence, with increasing levels of criticism of and disengagement from the military (Segal and Blair, 1976). In a way, the late modern period can therefore be characterised by the

dislodgment of the military from a previous position of uncontested socio-political power.

After the end of the Cold War, Moskos then identifies a postmodern military emerging. This postmodern military is smaller in size than its predecessors, transitioned from a conscription model to a volunteer force of fully professional soldiers that is better suited to an increasingly technically and socially complex area of responsibility. With relatively less focus on traditional large-scale warfare and more on often international counter-terrorism, peacekeeping or similar missions, soldier identity then shifts again to become even more technical whilst also putting much greater emphasis on “soft skills”, resulting in a “soldier scholar” who combines combat skill with intelligence and compassionate virtuousness (Snyder, 1999; Moskos, 2000, p. 19). A consequence of this is an increased inclusion of women and minorities into the military, though this is in many ways more performance than material reality (Satō, 2010, 2022, p. 194). A need for such performance is in turn tied to the military’s more difficult position in society, with public indifference rather than outright hostility being the main issue, with even those sympathetic to the military often unwilling to get personally involved, e.g. by enlisting (Williams, 2000, p. 269). As a response to this as well as the technological developments leading to the emergence of the 24-hour news cycle, military institutions then have to increasingly court media organisations and engage them directly (Moskos, 2000, pp. 20–21). In the postmodern military, the delineation between military and civilian sphere is therefore eroded. Not only are there more civilians working with the military than ever (e.g. as contractors), but civilian organisational structures as well as values from civilian society are embraced by the military too (Williams, 2000; Moskos and Burk, 2019). From the mass-conscript “national service” model of the modern military, the postmodern military has moved to a professional organisation that in many ways mirrors corporate and bureaucratic organisations. No longer as intimately linked with (male) citizenship, personal development has therefore become the primary motivation for joining the armed forces (Battistelli, 1997).

Moskos and colleagues also recognise that militaries are not entirely separate from the societies they are embedded in, thus stressing that postmodern militaries are also situated in postmodern societies. In practice, this means societies which are less integrated than modern societies and more divided on several axes including fundamental social values. As they put it: “The operative terms are pluralism, fragmentation, heterogeneity, deconstruction, permeability, and ambiguity.” (Moskos, Williams and Segal, 2000a, p. 4) Focusing on this central relationship between military and society, Don Snider argues that at least for militaries in Western democracies, tensions between their “functional imperative” (winning wars, exercising violence) and their “social imperative” (democratic values, reflecting society of origin) have become a defining feature for Western postmodern militaries (Snider, 2000). The terminology of the “functional imperative” is problematic, as it implies an objective operational logic to established military practices like the exclusion of women and queer people, reproducing military narratives about anti-discrimination measures negatively

impacting combat readiness (Bakken, 2013; Goodwin and Chemerinsky, 2019). But despite these terminological issues, the underlying assessment of the fundamental tensions between social demands and established institutional practice is still useful for understanding postmodern militaries that can no longer rely on a steady stream of conscripts or assume their centrality in the state apparatus as given.

Restating the “functional imperative” as an “institutional imperative” and understanding it as an interest in preserving and enhancing institutional influence, prestige and social values then makes the concept productive for the study of postmodern militaries as caught up in a struggle to convincingly reconcile core democratic values, including e.g. gender equality, with fundamentally anti-democratic military values, including e.g. the institutionalised killing of perceived enemies. Japan then is a case where these tensions are particularly pronounced, as the large gap between the anti-military social environment of much of the post-war era and the JSDF historical legacy as the quasi-successor of Japan’s Imperial Army/Navy resulted in a political environment that required the JSDF to be mindful of its “social imperative” from its very foundation. Having to be exceedingly careful in managing its relationship with civil-society and reconciling this with an institutional imperative of aiming to become a “real” military in the American mould, the postmodern tension is heightened to an extreme degree for the JSDF. Through this heightened tension and the adaptations it required, the JSDF had to become a highly postmodern force, making it a productive site for studying how military institutions adapt to the distinct pressures piled on them by postmodern societal development (Frühstück, 2004; Satō, 2022, pp. 127–128). As such, the insights gained from Japan can inform our understanding of postmodern military adaption throughout the Western world at least.

Asada Akira and Japanese Postmodern Society

To trace the workings of power in such a postmodern military, I draw on Japanese postmodern theorist Asada Akira’s idea of Japanese “infantile capitalism” (1989). Asada’s concept is helpful, as it shows how to conceptualise the power structure at work in a postmodern social environment, which in his specific case study is the Japanese economy and corporate world at the height of the so-called “bubble economy”, where rapid rising stock and property prices were the cause of “economic euphoria” (Amano, 2022). But despite this specific temporal and thematic focus of Asada’s work, the power structure he identifies in “infantile capitalism” can be applied more broadly, as it represents a way in which a postmodern society can incorporate seemingly contradictory elements in a harmonious way (Asada, 1989, p. 277). For the JSDF, these two contradictory elements are its societal and institutional imperative, or even more broadly, its constitutional limitations (not a military) versus its real or aspirational status (a “normal” military). The power structure outlined in Asada’s “infantile capitalism” therefore helps to understand the power structure within the JSDF’s construction of itself.

“Infantile capitalism” rests on the distinction between three types of capitalism, which he understands as stages of development in capitalism’s global development

trajectory. These are “elderly capitalism”, “adult capitalism” and infantile capitalism. “Elderly capitalism” is ascribed to countries like France or Italy, which Asada considers both early adopters of mercantile capitalism and places “where a transcendental value system like Catholicism still remains” (1989, p. 274). He considers elderly capitalism as a system that is centred around transcendental values like God and the “hoarding” of wealth, which makes it an ultimately more static and inactive system than adult capitalism. This adult capitalism he primarily identifies with Britain and the United States, stressing how in these systems, values are no longer static and fixed to something transcendental, but rather dynamic, shifting and part of the creation of value themselves. Driven by competition with others rather than the occupation of specific positions or roles, re-investment then becomes the primary purpose of wealth rather than its hoarding, so while the “gold” of “elderly capitalism” possessed a transcendental value in itself, in adult capitalism it is merely a part of a growth spiral. The subject in adult capitalism is therefore more interest in growth than in possession, as they define themselves through contrast with others’ ability to wield the capital they possess for growth. Ultimately, this process leads to the internalisation of competition in the subject themselves, abandoning the more overtly hierarchical structure of elderly capitalism for a discourse of individual responsibility, where each subject is in constant competition with every other subject as well as themselves (Asada, 1989, pp. 274–275). Essentially, under adult capitalism each subject becomes their own boss, taking ultimate responsibility for supervising, motivating and disciplining themselves in order to produce growth.²

“Infantile capitalism” then is the model that Asada associates specifically with Japan. The main difference between it and adult capitalism is that the structure of competition, which is enforced through internalisation in adult capitalism, is externalised in infantile capitalism. Thus, the subject in infantile capitalism is the eponymous child, conceiving of work as play rather than competition. To explain this, Asada uses the example of the manufacturing sector where “Japanese engineers are cleverly maneuvered into displaying a childlike passion whereby they are easily obsessed with machines” (1989, p. 275). But Asada stresses that this play can only take place in a “protected area” which sets the rules and frame of the children’s play, hence the “externalising” of capitalist mechanisms of competition. In Japanese companies, “the clever management, rather than mobilizing the entire company around its positive leadership, functions as an apparently passive medium which prompts agreement to be spontaneously formed from the bottom up” (1989, p. 276). Power, in this example, is obscured through a structure that frames managerial decisions as consensus, albeit a consensus that is achieved by workers in the company anticipating what management asks of them.

² A prime example of this process of internalisation and individualisation of capitalist competition can be found in the neoliberal reforms conducted in early 2000s Germany under chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Part of these reforms was the idea of the “Ich-AG” (Me-LLC), which encouraged jobseekers to literally become their own bosses and sell their services as contractors in the name of “Eigenverantwortung” (individual responsibility) (Manske, 2005).

Consensus then is what Baudrillard (1994, pp. 5–6) calls a “gigantic simulacrum”, where the dialectic of clashing ideas (the exchange of the real for the unreal) is replaced by a circular exchange of the unreal for itself, thus the anticipation of consensus begets the formation of consensus, regardless of the “real” opinions present in the company. Different to the vertical hierarchies of elderly and adult capitalism, static in one, internalised in the other, Japan’s infantile capitalism encourages the “peaceful subsumption” under an “empty centre”, which in the case of the modern company is the idea of consensus and which evolved in a direct line from the “empty centre” of the Emperor and the will of the Emperor in Imperial Japan (Asada, 1989, pp. 266–267). The question of who decides what the company’s consensus is, what the will of the emperor is, and accordingly how power actually works in the Japanese system is then removed from the subject, who is left to play in the “protected area” created by this mechanism and not to question who set its boundaries. Asada’s social mechanism is thus a deeply performative power structure where power works through the anticipation of its own effect (Butler, 2006, p. xv). Asada sees the most extreme manifestation of this dynamic in Imperial Japan’s Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (*dai tōa kyōeiken*), where the liberation of Asia from Western colonialism required its integration into the “protected area” marked by the Imperial “empty centre”, thus equating liberation from imperialism with submission under the Japanese Imperial system (Asada, 1989, p. 277).

Asada describes this “protected area” as “the core of the Japanese ideological mechanism”, putting it centre stage in his typology of Japanese capitalism as “infantile” (1989, p. 276). Beyond the economic realm and specific context where Asada applies this theory, I argue that the underlying structure of the “protected area” and the larger ideological mechanism it belongs to can also be applied to the postmodern military. For the JSDF, “peaceful subsumption” arguably marks a way of solving its underlying paradox and the tensions resulting from it through the medium of “play”. Following this logic, JSDF self-narration could be understood as an attempt at setting up a “protected area”, in which the JSDF is enabled to transcend its fundamental tensions and “play” a vision of masculine soldierhood without ever confronting its complicated history or the difficult political task of bridging the gap between institutional and social imperative. Asada’s concept could be useful to explore how military gender constructions and gendered distributions of power might be obscured through the construction of a “protected area”, with gendered expectations placed in the “empty centre” fabricating a consensus of military masculinity as gender-agnostic. Notably, this performance of military masculinity as gender neutral would not need to be the expression of a specific strategy or even a conscious “act” by the JSDF as a deliberate actor, but could instead be understood as a “reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler, 2011, p. 2).

Understanding the “protected area” and performances therein as the central social mechanism ordering the JSDF thus allows for an understanding of how “peaceful subsumption” can become a powerful way of brushing aside the extreme social

tensions the JSDF was historically under, whilst also enshrining a certain military masculinity at the heart of the institution despite continuously claiming to be gender neutral. What is missing from this picture, however, is the content of the performative acts that make this mechanism as well as the medium which “reiterative and citational practice” takes in the context of the JSDF. This will be the topic of the last section, which will offer a glimpse into the underpinnings of this dissertation’s theoretical framework in looking at cultural studies theories and in particular Japanese popular culture studies research, most prominently through the work of Azuma Hiroki.

Visual Culture, Fantasies and the Subcultural Database

In the previous example of the Japanese company, the medium for performances creating the “protected area” would largely be in-person interaction, particularly through frequent and extensive meetings which, as anyone ever employed in an average Japanese company can attest, serve no point but to performatively reiterate the social structure of the company. For the JSDF, this is slightly different. It is particularly different, since in this dissertation, I am not looking at power mechanisms in the institutional *practice* of the JSDF, but power mechanisms in JSDF *military identity construction*. We are thus not at an institutional level made up largely of interpersonal interactions and relations, but at a societal discourse level, made up of various narratives and counter-narratives where the JSDF as a military institution needs to create and secure a coherent identity (Nymalm, 2024). In a highly visual postmodern society, many of these narratives take the form of images or other visual media (Crilley, 2015; Rose, 2016, p. 4; Freistein and Gadinger, 2020, p. 218).

In Japan “otaku”, hardcore fans of Japanese animation series (anime), Japanese comics (manga), as well as related video games or other cultural products are a subculture that has thoroughly embraced this visuality. And in its construction of military identity, the JSDF very specifically draws on otaku culture to promote itself, as Japanese researchers Sudō Noriko and Sugawa-Shimada Akiko have shown with their work. Otaku subculture and militarism actually have a lot of synergies, making the mobilisation of the subculture for military identity construction relatively easy. Otaku anime and manga have long connected enjoyment of their works and characters with weapons and violence, as prominently pointed out in Saitō Tamaki’s work “Beautiful Fighting Girls”, which studies the association of young girls and violence in otaku culture (Saitō, 2011). This has also been pointed out by Sabine Frühstück, who found that the JSDF uses and even creates sexualised “fighting girl” characters, weaving together fantasies of martial power with (male) sexual desire to increase its public appeal (2017, pp. 178–181). Sugawa-Shimada calls this integration of two-dimensional fantasy (anime/manga) and the three-dimensional “real world” of the JSDF a “2.5-dimensional space”, created by the JSDF to turn nationalist militarism into a consumable commodity (Sugawa-Shimada, 2015, 2019b). To understand the JSDF’s portrayal of itself, it is therefore helpful to draw on the same analytical frameworks used to study otaku culture and its uniquely postmodern social context, which so prominently inspires the JSDF’s military identity construction in an equally postmodern social context.

Here, I draw primarily on Azuma Hiroki, who analysed otaku consumption, arguing that it is uniquely postmodern due to its abandonment of the “grand narratives” found in modern media. “Grand narratives” are larger systems of meaning-making which can be encoded into media, an example being socialist literary works functioning as individual expressions of a socialist grand narrative of class struggle, capitalist oppression and/or utopian socialist futures (Morson, 1979). Another example would be the grand narrative of the “war on terror” and its associated framing of “just war” advanced through various Western media examples (Der Derian, 2009). Azuma argues that these grand narratives have largely collapsed in the postmodern, post Cold War era, leaving a void which otaku have filled through a “grand nonnarrative”, “an aggregate of information without a narrative, into which all viewers could empathize of their own accord and each could read up convenient narratives” (Azuma, 2009, pp. 28, 37). Here lies the core of the synergy between otaku subculture, nationalism and militarism, as a nostalgic yearning for the “good old Japan” destroyed in World War II is embedded in otaku culture (Azuma, 2009, pp. 14–22). As Azuma puts it, “right-wing Japanese discourse has generally survived by allowing itself to become subculturized, falsified, and otaku-ized” (2009, p. 24), thus highlighting the close connection between otaku culture and the nationalist thought propagated through the 2.5-dimensional space. Japanese right-wing ideology (*uyoku*) here goes beyond post-war anti-communism, incorporating elements like social conservatism, nostalgia for Imperial Japan’s collectivist “national body” (*kokutai*) ideology, worship of the Imperial family, anti-Chinese and anti-Korean attitudes as well as a desire for renewed Japanese militarisation (Takagi, 1989; Guthmann, 2015; Tsukada, 2020).

ahoge アホ毛

examples of "stupid hair" in anime



sources:

Full Metal Alchemist
Lucky Star

Chuunibyou demo Koi ga Shitai
Youjo Senki

Bakemonogatari
Ore no Seishun Rabukome wa Machigatteiru

Figure 1 Examples of "Ahoge" from different anime. Source:
<https://www.japanesewithanime.com/2017/05/ahoge.html> (Accessed 20/06/2024)

Understanding how this specific blend of a "grand nonnarrative" emerges requires examining Azuma's conception of postmodern cultural consumption. He argues specifically against Ōtsuka Eiji, who had formulated a model of "narrative consumption", where individual cultural products are consumed as manifestations of grand narratives and where derivative products (fanfiction, etc.) are "small narratives" that are neither copies nor new (Ōtsuka, 2010). Azuma calls this the "tree model" of modernity, where what is observed is regulated by a deeper level of the grand narrative (2009, p. 31). In contrast to this, he proposes a "database model", which no longer relies on a grand narrative in the background. In the database model, there are only two levels, the surface level and the database in the background, but compared to the tree model, the agency is reversed and rather than the underlying grand narrative determining the subject and structure of the specific surface level story, the surface level draws eclectically on the database to construct a pleasurable product for

consumers very much attuned to the double-layer structure (2009, pp. 31–32). According to Azuma, visual products in otaku culture thus “have no independent value; they are judged by the quality of the database in the background (2009, p. 33).

To fully understand this, it is important to ask what is actually “saved” in the database. Azuma refers to the components drawn from the database as “moe elements” (2009, p. 42). “Moe” refers to an otaku term for feelings of strong affection and attraction felt towards a fictional character (Galbraith, 2014, p. 11). Importantly, “moe” needs not be tied to the story a character is originating from or their individual narrative arc. In fact, being part of a story is itself entirely optional as “moe” is not generated narratively, but through the accumulation of “moe elements” that the character draws on. These elements are often visual, one common example being “ahoge”, literally “idiot hair”, which describes a single strand of hair sticking out from the top of a character’s head and which is often used for comic effect (Figure 1). Other moe elements include certain hair styles, e.g. the drill-like curls called “*tate rōru*” in otaku culture and which often denote princess-style characters, types of clothing like black and white French maid outfits, or personality archetypes like “tsundere”, a character who is brash and hostile on the surface but secretly harbours softer feelings that occasionally shine through. For otaku, the level of pleasure derived from a character is then directly related to how skilfully that character combines different moe elements, a consumption process that is at least semi-conscious as otaku deliberately seek out certain moe elements and explicitly draw enjoyment from them. This is also why the few examples of moe elements mentioned above come readily typified and named, they are already sorted and integrated into the otaku cultural database.

The direct consumption of moe elements from the database is significant to Azuma because it changes the dynamic of satisfying desires in a way that he calls “animalisation” (2009, p. 87). “Animalisation” here means an elimination of the interpersonal element of desire, with the individualised consumption of favoured moe elements replacing reciprocal sociality and satisfying human thirst for meaning through “reducing it to animalistic needs” (2009, p. 95). However, this animalisation is not a conscious choice or a “failure” on the part of the otaku, but rather a consequence of otaku culture which, while situated in and connected to the specific context of Japan, is itself not a uniquely Japanese phenomenon but a particular manifestation of “the postmodernization of culture” (2009, p. 10). The phenomenon of otaku culture and “animalisation” is then a feature of postmodern society. Consequently, otaku shutting themselves into their hobby community, in which they interact mostly through the medium and language of moe, is also “not because they deny sociality but rather because, as social values and standards are already dysfunctional, they feel a pressing need to construct alternative values and standards” (Azuma, 2009, p. 27). Otaku culture thus highlights a pronounced instance of the “pluralism, fragmentation, heterogeneity, deconstruction, permeability, and ambiguity” earlier identified as core features of postmodern society (Moskos, Williams and Segal, 2000a, p. 4).

Returning to the synergy between otaku culture, nationalism and militarism, it can then be said that the “otakuisation” of right-wing discourse describes the blending of

database-centred otaku consumerism and militarist and nationalist values, encouraging their consumption as pleasurable, whilst removing it from more overtly political militarist or nationalist “grand narratives” that could cause offence (Sudō, 2013; Sugawa-Shimada, 2019a). In effect, this results in a militarism with, as Sudō puts it, “apolitical politics”, removing the potentially contentious political content from the medium itself and reconstituting it instead on the consumer side, who freely construct their own narratives from militarised moe elements added to the otaku database (Azuma, 2009, p. 38; Sudō, 2018). This also links back to the previously discussed work by Asada Akira, as the act of creating a 2.5-dimensional space is very clearly performative. Such a space might be created, for example, through “pilgrimages” by anime or manga fans to sites which featured in the media they consumed, a pattern that is sometimes encouraged/exploited by the JSDF to make itself an entertaining attraction in such pilgrimages (Yamamura, 2019; Yamamura and Seaton, 2022). This is sometimes combined with “cosplay”, fans dressing up as characters from a show, carrying with it a distinctly gendered component as well, with most cosplay done by young women and serving to attract young men to the militarist sites (Sugawa-Shimada, 2019b, pp. 62–63). Through otaku culture, militarism thus becomes a commodity and through gender, this militarism can then be “sold” as marketable masculinities or femininities are created (Treat, 1996; Darling-Wolf, 2004; Takeyama, 2010). Ultimately, this leads to popular culture becoming a prominent force of militarisation in a clearly gendered way (Warrack, 2023).

Methodology and Methods

Methodology

Having established the theoretical framework for this dissertation in the previous section, this section will then turn towards the practical implementation of that framework into research methods. Before that, however, this subsection briefly draws out the methodological implications of that theoretical framework, which then leads me to the specific way in which I implemented those methodological considerations. Considering this study’s theoretical grounding in feminist military research and post-modern cultural studies, the primary interest here are discourses within the analysed sources and how gender is used to construct and maintain those discourses. This is because in its focus on postmodern manifestations of militarism, this study follows a post-structuralist ontology, that centres the importance of discourses to make sense of military identity construction. Accordingly, even the “real” threat to Japan by war and hostile foreign actors, is considered to be primarily situated in the realm of media discourse, i.e. in the “hyperreal” space of information and speculation, where the collective hallucination of goals and the overflow of information are themselves the goal (Baudrillard, 1995, pp. 75–76). The military identity construction present in the JSDF representations studied is therefore an entirely virtual media event, as the focus on military deterrence itself has made military become an abstract and essentially virtual thing (Patton, 1995, pp. 9–10). But this is also a distinctly otaku ontology, as otaku culture is built on the conscious embrace of the virtual over the real, which is in

turn reflected in the JSDF's own embrace of otaku culture (Azuma, 2009, p. 89; Weiss, 2014; Lu *et al.*, 2021).

Such an ontological position implies an epistemological focus on discourses as well. JSDF portrayal therefore needs to connect different media and sources, analysing which common themes run across them and thus establishing an intertextual understanding of the JSDF's military identity construction. Such an understanding should then enable me to better understand the nature of the "protected area" the JSDF seeks to construct and thus highlight the way power works in JSDF portrayals and what its implications might be. With the predominance of visual media in the otaku subcultural context and its appropriation by the JSDF, the media analysed for this purpose are going to be primarily, but not exclusively, visual (Rose, 2016, pp. 187–188). In practice, this process draws on Azuma's work, tracing "database elements" that are consistently present across different sources. The epistemological approach of this dissertation thus follows the same chain of reasoning as the theoretical framework but reversed, going from the concrete observations in the media examined to the database elements they invoke, to the "protected area" constructed through these database elements, and lastly, how that protected area shapes the JSDF as a postmodern military looking to manage heightened tension between its institutional and social imperatives. To implement these methodological considerations, visual discourse analysis of various JSDF portrayals is therefore the chosen method for this dissertation.

Visual Discourse Analysis and Intertextuality

Images are powerful narrative tools largely because they carry significant "emotional potentiality", i.e. power to evoke strong emotions (Barthes, 2020). This is particularly evident in cases where larger stories are summarised through the image of single person, a prominent example being the deaths of Syrian refugees in the Mediterranean, where the image of dead child refugee Alan Kurdi generated strong narrative power and prompted political responses (Slovic *et al.*, 2017; Adler-Nissen, Andersen and Hansen, 2020). However, the emotional reaction to images is also neither immediately clear from the images themselves nor universally the same, as images are open to different interpretations (Barthes, 1977, p. 39). Images and visual culture then serve as easily circulating means for generating strong emotion which are usually "anchored" through text or other means in a specific narrative context (Hansen, 2015, 2018). Katja Freistein and Frank Gadinger thus describe images as "iconic acts", similar to speech acts that form active parts in discourse and are, despite their overall openness to multiple interpretations, usually focused in a specific direction through their larger context (2020, p. 225). In Japan too, visual culture outputs including popular culture products like animation series, TV drama series, etc. are widely recognised as key sites for social meaning-making and the performative reiteration of a "low-key" form of nationalism which Kayama Rika calls "petit nationalism" (Kayama, 2002; Perkins, 2010, p. 2).

Figuring out how such meanings can be drawn from JSDF portrayals is then the central objective of this dissertation's use of visual discourse analysis, looking to identify key discursive themes present throughout the different media and locating these themes in their particular context (Jordanova, 2012; Rose, 2016, pp. 206–209). With the dissertation's postmodernist theory in mind, identifying the themes running through the videos analysed helps illuminate how JSDF fantasies are constructed and how masculinity runs through the narration of other themes and structures them. Identifying visual patterns in the sources will then also start building an outline of the "database" of militarism I argue is being constructed in JSDF portrayals (Azuma, 2009). Because the database is the primary interest, the type of visual discourse analysis conducted in this dissertation is primarily interested in the images themselves, with other possible sites of analysis like the production, distribution or reception of images featuring occasionally, but not consistently (Rose, 2016, p. 24). This means that the main interest of the study is understanding the database elements present in JSDF portrayals and the underlying larger power structure they imply. That structure need not be constructed deliberately or intentionally in this specific configuration, and it might not always be received in the same manner by different audiences either. Sometimes, this difference will feature in the analysis but on the whole, the focus remains on the images themselves, the database elements they represent and the intertextual discourses thus constructed.

To a degree, this is a practical choice, as the site of production and audience reception are both much harder to access than the images themselves, with research access to image production tightly controlled by the Japanese Ministry of Defense as a gatekeeper. I did manage to secure an interview with ministry officials that shone some light on the process of image production, but such insights are always limited in scope and highly curated. Studying audience receptions meanwhile could be insightful to see how Japanese audiences understand and maybe reinterpret JSDF portrayals, but such a study would imply an entirely different set of research questions and approach, effectively making it an entirely separate project. I believe that such a project would be valuable, but I also believe that to focus primarily on the site of the image itself, working to identify the database elements and power structures transported in them is not only equally valuable, but also does some of the groundwork required for future research exploring to which degree such discourses and power structure constructions are actually translated to audiences, thus explaining my own research focus for this dissertation.

However, as alluded to above, I aim to maintain a degree of flexibility and methodological eclecticism that corresponds to the different sources studied. This flexibility will generally be inspired by the relevant literature on the different sources, when working with an anime for example, I will draw on anime studies to adapt and supplement my broader visual discourse analysis approach. Amongst other things, this also means taking in elements other than visual, as sound in particular plays an extremely important role in both JSDF YouTube and the anime GATE. A celebratory scene of weapons firing and causing massive explosions underlaid with driving rock

or electronic music can for example take on an entirely different meaning if some of the combat sound is muted and the music is changed for a sad or tense soundtrack suggesting an emotional meaning of loss or threat instead. The specific adaptations made are described in their respective chapters when talking about the specific analysis done, so here I will just reiterate this flexibility as a methodological stance taken to facilitate understanding the different sources on their own terms.

Sources

With this methodology, this dissertation's analysis includes four distinct sources. The first of which are JSDF YouTube videos. The JSDF and Ministry of Defense operate a number of different YouTube channels, including separate ones for each branch of the JSDF and specialist channels for recruitment, the combined staff, technology development, etc. JSDF YouTube thus offers a wide range of videos produced by the JSDF (or on behalf of the JSDF) that give an extensive self-portrayal of the JSDF from different perspectives. As a medium where the JSDF has direct and total control over how to portray itself, these videos are a good starting point for my larger analysis of JSDF military identity construction and how it would like to be perceived. Establishing how the JSDF portrays itself directly in an easily accessible public medium can then help to get an idea of the "official" line of JSDF portrayal, its most public face, something that can be usefully compared to the other sources examined later, which often depart from this very public, very controlled portrayal in one way or another. Additionally, with different branches of the JSDF also illustrate both differences and similarities across the different arms of the JSDF. Looking in particular at where the different channels converge in their messaging can then give some first indications for possibly more broadly shared database elements.

The next source of JSDF portrayal offers an entirely different perspective, for while JSDF YouTube is very much linked directly to the JSDF and about the JSDF as it is, the military anime "GATE: Thus the JSDF fought there" is primarily a private, commercial venture that has received JSDF cooperation, but is ultimately an entertainment product featuring the JSDF. Based on a novel series written by former GSDF officer Yanai Takumi, GATE first screened in 2014 as a late-night television anime aimed at an adult enthusiast audience. In other words, GATE was produced primarily for a distinctly otaku audience (Yamamura, 2019, p. 10). Out of the sources studied, GATE therefore draws most directly and explicitly on otaku subculture, making it a particularly suitable case to apply Azuma's database model in a setting where otaku culture and military identity overlap. Contrasting these findings with those from the previous chapter on JSDF YouTube can then help to start establishing larger themes and shared database elements as well as show how the same "protected area" is constructed in very different media.

The third source studied are JSDF museums, specifically one museum for each branch of the JSDF, spread out across Japan. As part of my fieldwork, I visited these museums,

taking photographs and notes on their exhibitions, whilst also observing visitation patterns, staff, etc. with the basic goal of getting as holistic an impression as possible, effectively conducting an ethnographic observation at each museum. This part of my research was very much inspired by Eyal Ben-Ari and Sabine Fröhstück's article (2003) on the GSDF's annual live-fire demonstration, a ticketed event that, similar to JSDF museums, serves as a fun outing for fans of the JSDF. Here, visuality is but one component of the experience, as the in-person experience of the museum includes aspects of moving through the space, soundscapes as well as tactility and interaction with museum exhibits. This in-person experience in particular is what makes museum experiences unique and helps to impress themes promoted by them all the more deeply (Dillenburg, 2011, p. 13). Seeing how these themes map onto the database elements identified in the previous two sources can then show how consistent and present those elements really are and how they might be modified and adapted in the very different setting of the museum.

Lastly, the fourth source I analyse is the military magazine "Mamor", produced in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense and serving as a de-facto public relations magazine for the JSDF. But different from JSDF YouTube or the JSDF Museums, where the JSDF owns and controls the entire production process, Mamor is a commercial product as well as a public relations tool, with writing, editing and distribution of the magazine handled by Fusosha, a private publisher that is ultimately in charge of the magazine. Rather than entirely public or private, Mamor is therefore a hybrid medium, primarily created by civilian staff at Fusosha, but with the JSDF being involved through a direct contact at the MoD and a seat at the editorial table for a JSDF representative. This interesting blend of entertainment and public relations is not the only reason for my interest in Mamor though. For one, from a practical perspective, Mamor's monthly magazine releases over the entire timeframe studied offer an incredible breadth of material to draw into the dissertation's discourse analysis. But more importantly, this breadth of material and Mamor's public-private cooperation produce a source that in itself incorporates all the major database elements identified in the other sources, making it a sort of microcosm of JSDF military identity construction. Studying the usage of database elements in Mamor and its construction of a protected space for militaristic "play" then rounds out this study and brings together all the threads from the other sources to underline this dissertation's argument for a JSDF that is proactively adapting to its postmodern status by constructing an "apolitical" postmodern militarism which reconciles the tensions between "institutional" and "social" imperative by embracing societal fragmentation and a retreat into (military-friendly) subculture.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation's analysis, and thus of the methodology discussed in this chapter, is to analyse what sort of database is being created in JSDF portrayals.

Using the tools outlined above, I describe and contextualise what I find in the sources to illustrate the construction of a superficially apolitical and gender-neutral militarism that actually obscures its distinctly political and gendered nature in the outline of its “protected area” (Jordanova, 2012). I understand database elements and even the construction and maintenance of the “protected area” as performances and discourses, guiding my analysis to focus on the “intertextuality” of messages in JSDF portrayal, showing how the meanings found in one part of my sources are reflected in the other sources as well to trace the outline of the larger discourse (Rose, 2016, pp. 187–188). Applying this methodology to four different but related sources is inevitably bound to produce some overlap, with sources being neither entirely alike nor distinct. However, I believe that this overlap can be productive here, as applying the ideas of the database and the protected area on each case can highlight slightly different elements of each, helping to form a larger picture. Focusing on the broad applicability of the theoretical and methodological frame taken here also demonstrates the wider applicability of findings from this research to a) portrayals of the JSDF beyond those analysed here and, most importantly, b) postmodern militaries outside of Japan. Because just as Azuma believes otaku culture to be uniquely situated *in* the Japanese context but not necessarily unique *to* the Japanese context, I argue that even though the JSDF might be uniquely postmodern, that does not make its postmodern militarism uniquely Japanese.

PR & Recruitment: The JSDF on YouTube

Introduction

In her study of US military advertising, Melissa Brown has pointed out how in advertising, militaries make choices on how to portray military service, the link between service and citizenship, as well as the gendering of said service (2012, p. 33). Looking at JSDF self-portrayal, PR and recruitment materials are then a natural place to start this dissertation, as they represent a way of direct self-narration for the institution. And being available online, they are also most easily able to reach a wide audience within Japan compared to the other sources studied, which generally have a higher entry hurdle of e.g. purchasing a magazine or attending a physical museum. The online videos studied in this section on the other hand only require the viewer to click on a thumbnail and spend as much or as little time watching as they like. Furthermore, in the case of YouTube, videos are already embedded in a frequently visited and intensely popular social media environment (Döring, 2014). In this environment, users need not even seek out JSDF content proactively, as the YouTube recommendation algorithm might well suggest them JSDF or other military related content if it judges such content to be of interest to the user (Davidson *et al.*, 2010; Kirdemir *et al.*, 2021).

Unsurprisingly, YouTube has therefore been identified as a powerful tool for creating and promoting political narratives (Crilley and Chatterje-Doody, 2020), as well as the most prominent platform for military video content in the 21st century, with videos and advertisements played in other contexts generally uploaded to YouTube too (Jester, 2021). As a data source for this dissertation, YouTube is attractive due to its combination of high accessibility and direct JSDF authorship, setting it apart from other PR and recruitment materials like JSDF webpages, which might be interesting sites in themselves but do require proactive seeking out. YouTube videos' neatly packaged content made also makes them particularly suitable for online sharing, both through the JSDF's own channels and through interested users. YouTube therefore offers a very direct way for the JSDF to talk about itself and reach a relatively wide audience who are likely sympathetic to the JSDF or at least interested, all accessible without major hurdles, thus reaching people with only a casual interest as well. Accordingly, PR and recruitment videos are a good basis for investigating JSDF-constructed narratives and can highlight themes to look out for in other bodies of sources as well. Analysing the choices made and themes portrayed in the case of JSDF self-promotion on YouTube can therefore illuminate their specific vision of military service and its gendering, providing a solid basis for later parts of the research and illustrating a core component of the JSDF's narrative strategy.

In practical terms, this chapter, like the rest of the dissertation, focuses on the contemporary JSDF, analysing videos uploaded from 2012 to 2022. There are two main reasons for starting the analysis in 2012. First, on a practical level, 4 out of 7 MoD-related YouTube channels only started operating in 2012 or later and out of the 2216 videos uploaded until 2022, only 129, barely 6%, were uploaded in 2011 or earlier (Table 1). Second, and more importantly, 2011 was a highly significant year for the JSDF due to the “3.11” triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown that hit Japan in 2011. JSDF participation in rescue efforts in the aftermath of the catastrophe has helped to draw much greater public attention to the JSDF, making it an important caesura in its public relations (Midford, 2017).³

The analysis in this chapter will start off with a section designed to give an overview of the kind of content found in the different JSDF YouTube channels, which in the research timeframe amounts to a total of 2087 videos. With such a high number of videos, it is not possible for me to conduct a thorough visual discourse analysis of all of them, so I focus on a limited number of channels and then further narrow my focus by sorting videos into categories and only analysing the most popular videos in a category. The details of this selection process are then explained in that same section. Building on that basis, the next sections will each delve into the content of one of the four major JSDF channels. First, I will investigate the JSDF recruitment channel (*jieikan boshū channeru*), whose portrayal of the JSDF is most closely aligned with the “softening” effort observed in earlier research (e.g. Frühstück, 2007; Satō, 2010). Then, I will proceed to the channels of the three main branches, with the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) and its “Ministry of Defense MSDF Official Channel” (*bōeishō kaijōjietai kōshiki channeru*), continuing with the the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) and its “GSDF Public Relations Channel” (*rikujōjietai kōhō channeru*) and finishing with the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) and its channel of the same name (*kōkūjietai channeru*).

Data and Methods

Taken together, the JSDF and Ministry of Defense operate a total of seven channels, with the oldest created in 2008 and the newest in 2017, all of which greatly vary in the nature and popularity of their content. This is illustrated by Table 1, which lists all channels and some general statistics. Video contents differ, going from policy reports to exercise footage and orchestral performances.

To approach this large number of diverse outputs, I created an Excel table encompassing important information for each video, from generic information like title, views, and likes, to more content related information like the “category” of the video as well as three content-related tags per video. This information was taken from

³ Including videos from both before and after the disaster might thus show very different portrayals before and after. And though these differences are interesting, they fall outside the remit of this research.

short sightings of each video, skipping through its content to get a general impression of what the video is about without engaging in deeper viewing or analysis.

Channel	Created	Videos	Subscribers	Videos in Observation Period	Median Views	Median Likes	Average Views	Average Likes
Combined Staff Channel	05/06/2012	151	2,690	151	36	7	594	21
Ministry of Defence Channel	01/09/2008	406	52,600	365	2,864	50	25,263	532
ASDF Channel	14/02/2014	145	151,000	145	15,771	220	111,262	1,099
GSDF Channel	29/05/2009	614	265,000	558	17,106	119	12,5491	877
MSDF Channel	28/07/2010	734	300,000	702	24,637	344	114,972	1,108
JSDF Recruitment Channel	13/07/2017	134	38,900	134	42,729	242	110,092	419
Acquisition Technology and Logistics (ATLA) Channel	08/12/2017	32	32,700	32	12,539	360	90,827	1,289

Table 1: Key information on JSDF/MoD channels summarised.

“Category” in this case is based on content and likely purpose of the video in question. Being based on researcher judgement, this is no exact science and there is certainly a degree of overlap between categories, but as they do not serve as variables and are instead used to provide a degree of order and structure in an otherwise unwieldy number of individual videos, they still serve an important purpose. For example, videos of the category “Recruitment Advert” are not only made to create a positive image of the JSDF but to explicitly address the viewer as a potential recruit and work to convince them of joining the forces in a more or less direct way, whilst videos in the “Advertising” category often share a similar structure in speaking directly to the viewer, but instead try to create a generally positive image of the forces or promote a specific event, product, etc. Categories are thus mainly useful to get an impression of what type of videos are produced for each channel and to help my empirical analysis capture the breadth of content present in each channel. A summary of all categories can be found in Table 2.

Similar to categories, tags are supposed to give a very simple idea of what kind of content to expect, providing an idea of the content of a video. Tags can refer to both content on format, e.g. a video with the tags “documentary”, “military life”, and “stereotypes” gives documentary-like insights into the JSDF, showing the daily life of

soldiers, and addressing common stereotypes about the military. Just like categories, tags are also based purely on researcher judgement and should thus be understood primarily as an attempt at classifying and ordering the large number of videos by identifying commonalities between videos. Tags were strictly limited to a maximum of three, so for some videos, potentially suitable tags were omitted if three other tags were judged to be more important in describing the video. On the other hand, some videos are only fitted with one or two tags if their content is very limited in scope. This was most often the case with videos of JSDF musical performances, which often did not involve any framing beyond just showing a JSDF orchestra on stage, thus presenting a very narrowly focused type of content. Tags sometimes overlap with categories, e.g. with the “recruitment” tag. This redundancy was necessary in order to properly reflect videos straddling multiple categories, thus a video which primarily documents life in the JSDF and was therefore sorted in the “documentary” category might still be tagged as “recruitment” if an appeal to potential recruits was still a noticeable part of the video.

	Combined Staff Channel	Ministry of Defence Channel	ASDF Channel	GSDF Channel	MSDF Channel	JSDF Recruitment Channel	Acquisition Technology and Logistics (ATLA) Channel
Activities Report	84	109	10	24	94	0	12
Advertising	3	14	23	55	47	2	0
Documentary	36	22	31	17	74	5	5
Events	4	104	27	35	148	0	1
Exercises	14	20	5	39	46	1	0
Historical	0	56	0	0	7	0	0
Interview	0	2	1	123	14	21	0
Music	6	2	14	137	178	0	0
Recruitment Advert	0	0	19	87	36	40	0
Role Portrayal	0	0	8	16	29	6	0
Speech	4	16	1	1	4	0	0
Technology Showcase	0	13	1	12	8	0	14
Tutorial	0	7	5	12	17	59	0

Table 2: Number of videos in each category, sorted by channel.

Tagged and categorised as described above, videos from all seven channels were added to the table and analysed through simple descriptive statistics, e.g. determining average and median popularities of channels by looking at views, likes and subscribers, or determining which categories are particularly popular through checking numbers of videos as well as average views and likes. After this initial analysis, I limited further qualitative analysis to contents from the recruitment channel and the three main branches' channels. This is because as seen in Table 1, these four are by far the most influential in terms of number of videos uploaded and median views received by their videos. In comparison, the Ministry of Defence and Combined Staff channels have very few subscribers and receive few views, whilst the ATLA channel has only few videos and does not upload content regularly.

But even limiting the research to these four channels would still require analysis of more than 1500 videos. For the three branch channels, I therefore focused on only six

categories which are most relevant for the purpose of identifying gendered narratives. These six categories are “advertising”, “documentary”, “events”, “exercises”, “recruitment advert”, and “tutorial”. These categories were chosen because they combine a high number of videos with high median views per video. Additionally, they are the most suitable video formats for narratives, which is why I excluded e.g. the category of “music”, a category comprised almost entirely of JSDF orchestral performances without commentary or framing, even though it contains the single largest number of videos. Within each category, I then chose the three most viewed videos each for in-depth qualitative analysis.

For the recruitment channel, whose more focused role in JSDF public relations results in a much narrower range of video categories, I will only analyse videos in the “recruitment advert” and “tutorial” category, making up for the comparative lack of empirical depth by analysing ten recruitment adverts instead of just three. This approach is not without issue, as basing my selection within categories purely on the quantity of views causes my findings to not represent a pure picture of JSDF-created narratives but rather reflect the preferences of online audiences watching these videos as well as algorithmic influences that drive traffic towards certain types of content. Studying JSDF portrayal in this way therefore mixes in the site of audience reception to a degree, while my focus otherwise is on the images themselves as produced by the JSDF. Nevertheless, this way of selecting based on audience reception also comes with the advantage of focusing the research on videos that have actually been able to reach Japanese viewers. Whilst not a perfect measure, going by views thus comes with overall practical and theoretical benefits which justify it as a criterion.

The qualitative part of the analysis will then be a visual discourse analysis, focused on identifying the key discursive themes present throughout the different channels and locating these themes in their particular context (Jordanova, 2012; Rose, 2016, pp. 206–209). With the dissertation’s postmodernist theory in mind, identifying the themes running through the videos analysed helps illuminate how JSDF fantasies are constructed and how masculinity runs through the narration of other themes and structures them. Identifying visual patterns in the channels will then also start building an outline of the “database” of militarism I argue is being constructed in JSDF self-portrayal (Azuma, 2009). From that database, this chapter will extract a first glance at the larger pattern of postmodern militarism present in the JSDF through analysis of the specifically gendered structure of the database. In this, it follows an established tradition of research looking at gender and particularly masculinity in marketing militaries and driving recruitment (Arkin and Dobrofsky, 1978; Barrett, 1996; Brown, 2012).

Tackling “Misunderstandings”: The JSDF Recruitment Channel

The JSDF Recruitment Channel was only created in 2017 as a unified outlet for recruitment content rather than having advertisement etc. solely on the individual branch channels. It covers all three JSDF branches and includes personnel from each branch in its videos. The videos themselves are mostly generic recruitment advertisements as might be shown on television or in YouTube adverts, though there are also other types of adverts, speaking to specific aspects of service with the JSDF. These are grouped into video series, e.g. “that is a misunderstanding!” (*sore wa, gokai desu!*), a series aiming to dispel “misunderstandings” about the JSDF or “you can do that!” (*sore, dekimasu!*), a series about things you can do working with the JSDF. Apart from recruitment adverts, there are also a number of tutorial-type videos, most of which belong to the “lifehack” series, where the JSDF looks to engage the Japanese public by sharing JSDF knowledge ranging from survival tricks to exercise ideas. Lastly, there is also a small series of short interviews of JSDF staff in various roles, asking them about their work and their role.

In their work on the JSDF, Sabine Fröhstück and Satō Fumika write about the JSDF “softening” itself, employing a non-military framing to avoid anti-militarist scrutiny. For example, popular culture references are used to trivialise the JSDF (Fröhstück, 2007, p. 12), imagery of weapons is omitted from JSDF self-promotion (Fröhstück, 2017, p. 199), and women soldiers are extensively highlighted to create a non-militaristic image of the JSDF (Satō, 2010, p. 262). Looking at videos in the Recruitment Channel, one immediately finds all the above themes reflected within them, combined with an almost defensive attitude towards common perceptions of the JSDF as a harsh and masculine institution. Essentially, the narrative put forward in the recruitment channel then is one where the JSDF can hardly even be identified as a military anymore, with videos routinely abandoning even the pseudo-soldier moniker of “JSDF-member” (*jieikan*) in favour of the more civilian-sounding “civil servant” (*kōmuin*). Accordingly, the Recruitment Channel spends much effort refuting “misunderstandings” about the JSDF and instead paints it as a normal, fun and lenient employer. As one might guess from the title, the “that is a misunderstanding!” series is particularly designed to serve that purpose. Studying the Recruitment Channel thus helps to illustrate the strategic softening of the JSDF observed by Fröhstück and Satō, but it also shows how the softening narrative fails to convince, as Recruitment Channel videos attract a lot of negative engagement, revealing a failure to convince YouTube audiences and weaknesses in its narrative construction. As such, the Recruitment Channel is an excellent jumping-off point for this chapter, connecting JSDF YouTube to existing literature whilst also highlighting the cracks in the existing narrative, which the other channels avoid by constructing a radically different narrative.

Returning to the “that is a misunderstanding!” series, one of the main points it addresses is the idea that military work is exceedingly physical and that soldiers are

all obsessed with athleticism. In the video series, various stereotypes about working in the JSDF are stated by the voiceover to then be refuted by statements from several JSDF personnel shown on screen. In one video for example, replying to the statement that physical strength is everything in the JSDF, a female soldier talks about herself having played competitive card games in school and never done any exercise beyond PE, or, replying to a statement about exercises being incredibly hard, another woman says that you get slowly introduced to it, mentioning adjustments like lower counts of repetitions or being able to do push-ups on your knees in the beginning. A male soldier then adds that most training you do is done sitting down anyway. This is consistent across multiple videos too, as other videos also constantly bring up the point of physical prowess, etc. and then refute it by having various JSDF personnel talk about how they do not fit the stereotype, e.g. by never having been in a sports club in school or by doing mostly deskwork in the JSDF. One video addressing such “misunderstandings” then closes by repeating five times that “normal physical strength is enough” (*tairyoku wa futsū de ok*), the repetition being a pun about the Japanese word for misunderstanding (*gokai*) being pronounced identical to the expression for “five times”.

This refutation of physical strength however also means a refutation of classic military masculinity, which in no small part relies on an idea of male physical strength (King, 2017, p. 308; Jester, 2021). Considering that the refutation is often done by women, this seems to be a conscious choice, demilitarising the JSDF’s image by discursively separating it from the sort of physical masculinity traditionally connected to militarism (Enloe, 2000, p. 48). Further reinforcing this point, the Recruitment Channel is also keen to highlight the presence of women in the JSDF, responding to “there are only men” as another stereotype, which is addressed in a video by showing multiple female personnel who reply that “[the number of] women are increasing!” (*jōsei wa fuete imasu!*). With the presence of women and the rejection of military masculinity, the JSDF is then transformed into a “normal” workplace (Frühstück and Ben-Ari, 2002). Furthermore, it is presented specifically as a progressive and modern employer that offers excellent working conditions, good salaries, diverse careers, particularly for women too, making use of wide-spread discrimination in the private sector to draw women to the JSDF whilst also appealing to young Japanese uninterested in hard military life (Frühstück, 2007, p. 290; Satō, 2010, pp. 260–261).

As mentioned earlier, this de-militarisation of military work in the JSDF extends to rebranding soldiers as “civil servants”, most prominently visible in a series of recruitment advertisements titled “Civil servants: protecting the country” (*kokka wo mamoru, kōmuin*). With one video for each branch of the military, each centred around one individual service member, these adverts are designed to highlight that those serving in the JSDF are just “normal” people by switching between their civilian and military lives. In the first half of the videos, the protagonists are shown in their civilian life, pursuing hobbies like shopping, photography or karaoke singing. At the halfway

point the videos then reveal that the protagonists are working in the JSDF and they talk about their jobs and how they feel like doing meaningful work. Like in other videos, the martial aspects of working for the JSDF are played down significantly. JSDF personnel are depicted in their uniforms, but there are no weapons in sight and the operation of tanks, jets, etc. is never raised as a selling point. In the JSDF Recruitment Channel, the JSDF's purpose is thus defined in two ways through its central slogans: "protect the country" (*kokka wo mamoru*) and "save people" (*hito wo tasukeru*). Military violence as the core purpose of the military institution is glossed over, thus also closing off the possibility of drawing on a martial masculinity established through (potential) participation in combat (Kodamaya, 2023, p. 1).

Reframing itself as essentially civilian and highlighting the presence of women then allows the Recruitment Channel to add an element of heterosexual enticement for men considering to join the force (Satō, 2010, p. 263). But ultimately, by leaning heavily into a "civil servant" angle where the JSDF is just one of many state agencies, an employer that in essence is no different from anything found in the civilian world, the channel ends up in a strange spot. Portraying the least offensive armed force possible might possibly help the JSDF increase its recruitment intake and further secure its social position, thus reducing resistance to further militarisation of Japanese society. On the other hand though, working hard to deny its own military nature, the strategy simultaneously undermines militarisation efforts, as the JSDF is torn between proudly espousing (usually masculine) military values and downplaying them, a tension that leads to anxiety among JSDF personnel about being or not being "real warriors" (Frühstück, 2011). Frühstück has accordingly described the JSDF as inherently contradictory, an armed forces in all but name, with personnel trained for war, but not actually supposed to ever actually fight and often framed as basically civilian instead (Frühstück, 2011, p. 2).

Following a softening and de-militarising narrative, the Recruitment Channel then ultimately works around a central fantasy of the JSDF as a cool and fun employer, a quasi-civilian civil service organisation whose unique perks include (as summarised by the "you can do that! Video series): travelling the world, working flexible hours, making friends for life, learning useful skills and even finding a lover, but not anything related to operating weaponry or military violence. Its response to the JSDF's fundamental paradox, being a military that officially is not a military, as well as the initially formulated postmodern tension between "institutional" (i.e. militarist) imperative and "social" imperative, thus is an all-around denial of its own military identity, trying to reframe military work in the JSDF as not military at all. It is, however, doubtful to which degree this strategy is successful. Whilst the JSDF is reportedly more popular than ever, enjoying strong public support (Takahashi, 2023), it has also consistently missed recruitment targets (Frühstück, 2017, p. 11). Furthermore, looking many of the most upvoted comments below Recruitment Channel videos, particularly

those of the “that’s a misunderstanding!” series, express disbelief of the claims made and ridicule them.

For example, below a video about the “misunderstanding” of exceptional physical strength being strictly necessary and centrally important for working in the JSDF, a number of comments call out this claim. One user angrily rebukes the video’s message, telling the JSDF to “stop lying, if you don’t have physical strength you’re told you’re shit” (*uso ha yamero-tte tairyoku nai to borokuso iwareru*), a sentiment which is, more eloquently, mirrored by another user, who comments “please stop making misleading videos” (*gokai wo ataeru yō na dōga wa yamete kudasai*), saying further into his comment that “if you don’t reach a certain level [of physical strength], you won’t be treated as human” (*ittei reberu ni tasshitenai to ningen atsukai sarenai*). Another comment simply asks viewers to think of the suicide rate and search for suicide rates (presumably of JSDF personnel), implying that suicide rates in the JSDF expose the true conditions the video is trying to gloss over.

Lastly, a very long comment expresses feelings of anger at the video, “this commercial really boils my guts” (*kono CM ha hontō ni harawata ga niekurikaerimasu*). The writer, who identifies himself as an “old boy” of the JSDF and somebody who ideologically supports the armed forces, attacks the claims made as factually wrong or at least misleading, accusing the video of ignoring real issues which make the JSDF unattractive and thus undermine its fighting strength. He also seems to consider a degree of military hazing as rite of passage for becoming a soldier, saying that “Those who were bullied and those who endured the bullying remain in the Self-Defense Forces.” (*ijimete ita hito, sono ijime ni taeta hito ga jieitai ni nokotte iru*). This critique mirrors a traditional understanding of military work and military masculinity, where the weak are separated from the strong in basic training and soldiers’ mentalities need to be broken in order to reforge them as soldiers who are totally loyal to the institution and to each other (Whitworth, 2004; Satō, 2022, pp. 21–22). It thus illustrates the problem of the softening narrative, as it fails to construct a satisfactory vision of military identity, falling victim to the tensions between institutional imperative and social imperative, as neither military enthusiasts nor those with anti-military tendencies are satisfied by what they see.

Paradoxically, even narrative successes achieved ultimately turn out counterproductive when looking at the comments. For example, commenting under another video of the same series, one user summarises the message of the video as “For the time being, we don’t have enough people so anybody can join!” (*toriaezu, hito ga tarinai kara dare de mo ii kara haitte!*), whilst another points out that “if the environment was actually good, I don’t think people would leave” (*hontōni kankyō ga yokattara hito wa hanarenai to omoimasu yo*). These comments highlight that, on the one hand, the Recruitment Channel was successful in framing JSDF military service as a primarily economical rather than political decision, thus reinforcing the notion of

the JSDF as a “normal” employer. On the other hand, they show that most of the commenters are not impressed by claims of the JSDF as a desirable employer and instead see it as an overwhelmingly negative workplace. Accordingly, other comments also focus on economic points, e.g. the claim that there is no overtime in the JSDF, with one commenter joking “there’s no overtime (pay)!” (*Zangyō (teate) arimasen!*) or another saying that the JSDF should raise salaries rather than produce “advertising full of lies” (*uso-darake no kōkoku*) if it wants to boost recruitment. This impression also aligns with my own experiences of talking to Japanese students about the JSDF, with students overwhelmingly viewing the JSDF in primarily economic terms, but also considering it a particularly bad and undesirable employer, adding further anecdotal evidence to the failure of the Recruitment Channel’s narrative.

Choosing to deny the hard, military aspect of JSDF life thus turns out to be a strategic failure for the Recruitment Channel, as the image created in the narrative fails to offer a satisfactory framing for people’s perceptions of the JSDF, making it unconvincing (Hagström and Gustafsson, 2019, p. 397). This is particularly the case for serving JSDF personnel, with the second-most popular comment saying that “A MSDF officer said that after watching this video they had a murderous intent lol” (*Kaiji no jieikan-san ga kono dōga o mite satsui ga waitatte itte ita w*). Using the comments as a venue for venting their frustration, other self-identified current or previous JSDF members complain for example that “The upper ranks [of the JSDF] are mostly rotten.” (*Jōsō-bu wa hotondo kusatterasu.*) or that the video ignores the harsh, unsatisfying and unrewarding realities of life in the JSDF. As another commenter jokes, pulling all-nighters, working massive overtime without compensation and suffering constant denigration from superiors sure makes for a wonderful workplace, closing his comment with the simple assertion that “this is hell” (*koko wa jigoku desu*).

Mirroring this gloomy assessment, another commenter states that “soldiers are treated like trash” (*Rikushi wa gomi atsukai-dōzen*) and another speaks of “suffering from trauma in the JSDF” (*jieitai de no torauma ni kurushimu*), having no freedom (*Jiyū wa nai desu*) and being bullied and assaulted. Traditionally, military masculinity is the narrative tool used to reframe these hardships as necessary character building to make military men (Wadham, 2017). In denying military masculinity in its narrative, the Recruitment Channel forgoes that possible justification, leaving its narrative of military identity in a perpetual state of crisis and dislocation, as military identity is displaced from the realm of masculine warriorhood to that of economy, making the formation of a satisfactory soldier identity reconciling those hardships impossible (Nabers, 2017, p. 421). In the end, this dislocation then causes JSDF members commenting on the videos to construct their own counternarrative to make sense of their identities, reframing themselves as victims of a terrible JSDF workplace with rotten leadership that tries to gloss over problems rather than fix them.

In summary, the JSDF Recruitment Channel tries to push a narrative of an inclusive, welcoming, and fun JSDF where working conditions are great and whose public image is unfairly negative. Fundamental tensions about the JSDF's existence are resolved through denying its military identity entirely, making use of gender in multiple ways to do so, mainly through disavowing traditional military masculinity and centring the role of women in the force. The Recruitment Channel therefore produces a fantasy of the JSDF as an essentially civilian institution in order to overcome apprehensions about military work and attract as broad a spectrum of recruits as possible. When paying attention to the intended audience of the fantasy though, we see a failure of its narrative to take hold, particularly current or former JSDF members are vocally criticising the "softening" narrative in the comments, ridiculing the non-military fantasy as unrealistic and offensive. It needs to be noted that the audience found in the YouTube comments need not necessarily reflect a wider Japanese audience, with more casual, less military-interested viewers possibly less likely to comment. Nevertheless, the videos in the Recruitment Channel at the very least show an attempt at creating a totally softened JSDF fantasy, as well as a fantasy of gender equality in the JSDF. They also show that this fantasy is not convincing, encountering significant resistance in the comment sections and indicating that, at least amongst JSDF-interested online audiences, this sort of softening narrative is not only met with scepticism, but with outright hostility.

"Real Work" for Real Women? The Ministry of Defense MSDF Official Channel

With the "softening" narrative dominant in the Recruitment Channel, the question then is to which degree that same narrative is mirrored in the branch channels. To continue this chapter's analysis, I will therefore continue with the MSDF, which in many ways is closest to the "softening" narrative in its YouTube self-portrayal but ultimately still strays far from that narrative, developing a fundamentally different military identity narrative in its "Ministry of Defense MSDF Official Channel" (henceforth just MSDF Channel). The MSDF Channel was created in 2010, making it the second oldest branch channel after the GSDF's channel. With 732 videos (702 in the observation period) and around 300,000 subscribers, it is the biggest JSDF channel in terms of subscriber numbers and videos uploaded. Having the second highest number of median views after the recruitment channel (whose views are likely inflated by videos being played as YouTube advertisements) and the highest median number of likes for the regularly uploading channels, it is perhaps the most influential of all the JSDF channels.

Observed from the outside, the MSDF seems to be the branch most interested in using YouTube to proactively promote itself. For example, while the ASDF uploads little and seems to treat YouTube as a low priority and the GSDF uploads more regularly but sticks to relatively "standard" PR practice in its uploads, the MSDF is more ambitious, uploading regularly and actively experimenting with different types of content. It is the only JSDF channel that makes use of "YouTube Shorts", the TikTok-like, smartphone

optimised short video service rolled out in 2020 and is also much more consistent in creating series of similar content and reoccurring characters, e.g. Lieutenant Nakamura, a male sailor who hosts the MSDF documentary/interview series “KanTube” (literally meaning “Warship-Tube”). The MSDF thus seems willing to experiment with internet trends and different media, moving away from just traditional PR videos (which they still produce) and towards a more modern PR strategy that makes full use of a platform like YouTube to push military content to Japanese viewers. This strategy also influences the content of MSDF videos, which mainly look to present a modern navy, modern in terms of equipment, but also modern in terms of its values and organisational culture. Taking care to foreground women in MSDF videos, deemphasising hardcore physical training and instead emphasising teamwork as well as perks like good food and fun at work, the MSDF’s messaging is thus the most aligned with the JSDF recruitment channel.

Nevertheless, it is still decidedly different from the Recruitment Channel, as the “softening” is much more muted for the MSDF and portrayals of military femininity are mostly used to create a double fantasy of the MSDF as a gender equal institution and military work in general as non-gendered. In the MSDF Channel, masculinity is thus much more present than in the Recruitment Channel, resulting in a very different resolution to the JSDF’s fundamental paradox for the MSDF, which instead eases the tensions between institutional and social imperatives by framing itself as a competent military force that is strongly rooted in values of democracy and equality, but also able to engage in combat. Gender plays an important role in this, observed mainly through the themes of technology, femininity, heterosexuality and, most importantly, masculinity. The analysis below will then show how these themes emerge from MSDF self-narration in the MSDF Channel, thus highlighting the particular brand of militarism developed by the MSDF.

First, by far the most prominent theme in the MSDF Channel is technology. This mainly manifests in a strong emphasis on military equipment, particularly on MSDF ships but also helicopters and planes to a lesser degree. Roughly a third of MSDF Channel videos feature the “equipment” tag and popular videos like “The 2019 Virtual Fleet Review” prominently feature various ships, aircraft and helicopters. The depiction of military hardware on the MSDF channel is usually done in two forms. First, ships and other equipment are shown in action, often combined with footage of the crews operating them. For example, during the Fleet Review featured in the aforementioned video, there is a parade of vessels, including some firing of their guns, etc. Similarly, footage of international combat exercises prominently features ships manoeuvring and firing their weapons, helicopters landing in difficult conditions and crews operating on deck or in front of the sci-fi-looking screens of a vessel’s combat information centre (CIC). These kinds of portrayal mainly serve to display military potency, both of the MSDF’s equipment as well as the personnel operating it. They show the ships as powerful machines of war and MSDF sailors as highly capable

operatives who have mastered precise control of these machines, aiming to create a sense of awe and admiration in the viewer.

Second, ships are shown in their role as the home and workplace of MSDF personnel. Examples for this can also be seen during the Fleet Review video, which features video tours through a number of MSDF vessels, ranging in size from the carrier Kaga to small missile boats which are built for operating near the coast with only short stints at sea. These portrayals focus on the more mundane aspects of naval life, trying to show the daily life of sailors with portrayals of their work as well as their free time. A lot of attention is paid to their personal quarters but also to their food, whose freshness and quality is highlighted constantly in what seems to be an effort to show that despite cramped conditions, life on a ship need not be too bad. Technology in the JSDF is thus not only a powerful tool of exercising violence, as in the other branches, but also has a much more domestic role as warships literally serve as the home of sailors for the duration of their employment. In portrayals of that “home” life, the MSDF Channel then constructs a similar narrative as the recruitment channel, portraying life on a ship as something that can be difficult, but is ultimately also fun and rewarding, with camaraderie in the mess hall and good food promised as part of the package.

Both kinds of portrayal put together form the image of an intimate relation between human sailors and the vessels they work on, displaying a sort of emotional bond that is highlighted particularly when vessels are referred to as “beautiful” and shown as nurturing communities. The ship then serves as a “protected area” on the micro level, allowing sailors to freely “play” according to their assigned roles in the confines of their vessel. Accordingly, complex military technologies on the vessels become “big boys toys” (Higate, 2003, p. 34), command over which is intrinsically pleasurable for sailors. This is supported by many of those sailors interviewed in MSDF videos stressing that working with rare, cutting-edge technology is an important perk of joining the force. The MSDF Channel’s narration of a fun working environment thus significantly differs from the Recruitment Channel in that it successfully establishes a protected area in which such pleasurable experiences are considered possible. Important for the creation of that particular narrative then is the fantasy of high-tech combat as heroic and masculinity affirming. To achieve this, visual elements like warships firing guns, flying helicopters and tense but precise teamwork by officers working in futuristic command centres are put into the database and can be drawn upon as “moe elements”, to be rearranged into a variety of new narratives consumed for the pleasure of the technological power fantasy. Accordingly, very similar imagery is found across different videos, as they all draw on the same database.

Nevertheless, traditional militarism and martial masculinity is also visibly present in MSDF Channel videos. One example are video diaries of everyday life in MSDF training schools, e.g. the Etajima naval academy, showing cadets jumping to activity from very early in the morning, continuing to be exceptionally busy and (presumably) productive

throughout the day. Cadets are shown to train in various disciplines, both physical and intellectual, including some shirtless morning exercises centring the male body as a “moe element” in itself, denoting masculine military power (Mankayi, 2008). But while physical exercise is important in MSDF Channel videos, there is a greater focus on intellectual and teambuilding exercises, aligning with the idea that frictionless working in a team is the most important MSDF “soft-skill”. A video portrait of Captain Osawa, a MSDF captain in command of an AEGIS destroyer makes this point most forcefully, with him stating that on a ship, nobody is able to control the vessel alone and that in a potentially deadly combat situation, he as commanding officer needs to be able to fully rely on everybody else doing their job without mistake.

Put in a life-or-death context, values that might be coded feminine in civil society like care or mutual cooperation are then reframed as masculine in the military context (Hockey, 2003). Teamwork is therefore in itself turned into a marker of masculine warrior prowess in MSDF videos, something that is further reinforced in the interview of Captain Osawa, as he is presented as an almost ideal masculine leader, showing him making decisive decisions under pressure, displaying a quality and core military value already present in the title of the video: decisiveness (*ketsudan*). Him severely reprimanding a junior officer for a mistake is then framed as necessary and just, highlighting how MSDF teams ultimately work in a highly hierarchical structure, in which masculinised values like decisiveness and the idea of a strict (but fair) attitude are indicative of “good” leadership. Traditional military masculinity then also has a part in MSDF Channel videos, becoming a “moe element” as well through encoding heroism into the actions of sailors and officers, regardless of the narrative context they are placed in. In this example, the question thus is not if Captain Osawa makes the right decision, under which circumstances he makes a decision or who is affected in which way by his decision, he is automatically heroized through drawing on the element of “decisiveness” which, as a character attribute, supersedes any narrative that this decisiveness is placed in.

In another story, it is possible to view how the same element is drawn from the database to link to entirely unrelated stories. With the MSDF unable to assert outright nationalism due to its historical constraints, the nationalist narrative of serving the country and sacrificing oneself for it is replaced by a vague notion of “protection”. This notion, stripped of its overt nationalist content, then becomes a universally applicable sign of military heroism. For example, one video points out the historical example of a Japanese warship captain in the Second World War saving the crew of British vessel despite orders to the contrary, highlighting the separation of the protective action from its nationalist context in the MSDF database. That same element is then picked up in a different story in the same video, showing a contemporary example of such heroism by interviewing a sailor who had picked up a lost girl in a disaster zone and then carried her around until the mother was found. Visibly emotional, the sailor shows photos and a letter he later received from the girl and her family, connecting these experiences to

the then recent death of his own father, who also served in the MSDF and how for him the event signified the importance of doing this kind of work at a crucial time. In many MSDF videos, this notion of protection is then stretched even further by not making not a clearly defined person, but the sea itself the object of protection. "Protection" can thus be flexibly drawn from the database to fit into a variety of narratives where the object and the subject of protection might change, but the action is marked as heroic nonetheless. The nation can be reintroduced into this equation, e.g. when specifying "the Japanese seas", but it is no longer a necessary element of masculine military heroism.

But notably, women also play a significant role in MSDF Channel videos, with a visible effort to include female personnel in its videos as much as possible and even questions of gender and women's participation in the MSDF addressed openly. For example, in the 30-minute-long image film/documentary "Strength and Readiness", the last 6 minutes are dedicated entirely to women in the MSDF. Notably, this means that in practice, 24 minutes of the documentary are dedicated to men in the MSDF but this is nevertheless a significant degree of attention to military women that far exceeds the actual share of women in the MSDF. In terms of content, the segment starts by showing a group of female mechanics working on the carrier Kaga, where, as the voiceover points out, a total of 30 women are working amongst the roughly 500 strong crew. In this instance, the narrative framing of talking about women on the Kaga is the main way gender is put into focus. The women themselves are dressed in standard unisex fatigues, shown working on a helicopter in a way where, without the voiceover and the later interview with one mechanic, their gender would be indeterminable. In the interview too gender does not feature directly, the mechanic is instead talking about how working a job with a lot of responsibility can be hard but also meaningful. Overall, this part of the segment aims to convey two things: First, that women are present in the MSDF and are working directly on ships in technical roles which are often stereotypically male. Second, that women in the MSDF are fundamentally equal to their male counterparts, wearing not only the same uniform but carrying the same responsibilities too. Particularly the latter point is a barb against the often menial work women are given in the civilian economy, promising them greater chances for self-actualisation in the MSDF.

As a theme, femininity in MSDF Channel videos then serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it shows the MSDF as a modern and open employer that can be attractive to women, thereby hoping to attract female recruits. On the other hand, women's strong visible presence and specific portrayal as just another MSDF member creates a fantasy of an MSDF that despite being made up of less than 10% women is essentially gender equal, with a military woman being "just one of the guys". This point is made explicit in the next parts of the segment, which show female recruits at Etajima naval academy and an interview with and portrait of lieutenant commander Tano, a female officer serving as second in command on the destroyer Teruzuki.

Showing groups of female recruits, with the voiceover emphasising that an increasing number of women is joining the MSDF and including a female officer in a relatively senior leadership role, the video aims to counteract notions of the MSDF as a purely masculine force, demonstrating that women are part of the MSDF in its whole breadth and, importantly, able to rise to its top ranks too.

One way in which this notion of women as already equal is visualised is through clothing. As was already the case with the mechanics aboard the Kaga, all women in this section wear standard MSDF fatigues or blue training overalls, a clothing choice erasing visual differences between genders. Historically, uniforms have been deliberately used by militaries to preserve gendered differences between “regular” male soldiers and women serving in the military, the consequent erasure of such differences in garment can thus be read as a political decision about the image the MSDF wants to project of itself (Enloe, 2000, p. 271). Nevertheless, this erasure of difference is not total, as MSDF dress uniforms are still showing clear gender differences, requiring women to wear skirts as well as a different style of cap and jacket than their male counterparts. But in other videos too, dress uniform is worn only a fraction of the time, for example a video about recruits at Yokosuka naval academy shows them wearing dress uniforms for certain events, but unisex fatigues for the vast majority of the video, including in their free time. The same applies to the previously mentioned Lt Cmd Tano, who is shown in her gendered dress uniform only briefly while being interviewed and otherwise is shown wearing practical naval jackets or a similarly utilitarian unisex uniform.

While on the bridge, Tano is shown to interact confidently with an otherwise exclusively male crew, giving crisp orders to subordinates, joking with officers of equal rank and otherwise being at ease, creating the impression that gender is of no importance in MSDF command structures. The idea of gender equality in the MSDF is further pushed through narration in the video, with the voiceover stressing that women and men undergo the exact same training at Etajima naval academy or Tano herself talking about the wide range of opportunities for meaningful work available for women in the MSDF. The MSDF thus portrays itself as open to women and enticingly equal, a place where women are not only welcome but where they are also given the opportunity to grow into leadership positions or technical roles that are stereotypically masculine in wider civilian society. Presenting military work as inherently gender-neutral in this way, underlying structural inequalities and the overt masculinisation of military work outlined at the beginning of this section are pushed to the side.

What makes its way into the database then is a fantasy of a gender-neutral military, which allows for a hypermasculine military masculinity whilst at the same time declaring this masculinity to not be gendered in any way. Thanks to the protected area, this contradiction is not a problem as military identity has moved into a “hyperreal” space divorced from reality, which at removes the basis for any contradiction (Asada,

1989, p. 277; Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 1–2). This way, gender as a variable can be ignored even when talking about women's participation in the MSDF, as is done at the end of the video, where the voiceover closes the segment by stating that the MSDF is increasingly opening itself up to women and is constantly working to ensure that all MSDF personnel, regardless of gender, can fulfil their duties. Women's military participation is therefore not a matter of gender at all, but one of working conditions and organisational structure, a sentiment that was also echoed in an interview with Ministry of Defense officials, who essentially saw gender equality achieved through the opening up of all positions to women and that now the focus should be on ensuring better working conditions. Gender-specific issues like sexism, sexual harassment etc as well as the continued association of military work and masculinity in practice are disregarded in this process. Thus simplifying the notion of gender to mean just women in the MSDF or rather only legal barriers to women in the MSDF, a gender-equal force is talked into existence without actually changing anything about how military work is gendered.

An example embodying this communication strategy is a 2018 recruitment advertisement, specifically targeting women to become air traffic controllers. It draws on many of the previously identified database elements by presenting a female air traffic controller as embodying core military values and showing the MSDF as a workplace where this woman can fully unfold her potential through assimilation into core military values. The video opens by showing the woman enter her workplace in civilian clothing, interceded by text flashing on the screen about "another morning like always" (*itsumo to onaji asa*) and "unchanging everyday life" (*kawaranai nichijō*), leading up to a sequence of her changing into her uniform, a transformation sequence that ends with "now [I] change" (*ima kirikawaru*), just as she puts on her MSDF insignia. Through the transformation sequence, the MSDF's military world is symbolically divided from the "boring" civilian world, a divide which the protagonist bridges by putting on her uniform, transmigrating from the real into the hyperreal world.

This transformation also works on the personal level, as the protagonist might be a normal woman outside her uniform but becomes something special (and elite) when putting on the uniform. That she is no longer bound up in the "ordinary" is made abundantly clear by what follows in the video, as the on-screen text promises "be awakened [by the] extraordinary" (*yobisamasareru, hinichijō*). Under- and outlining this message, the background music is now tense and energetic, fast radio-chatter is added to the sound background and visually, footage from staff working in the control tower is cut together with rapid cuts, interlaced with close-ups of technical equipment, footage of planes and helicopters on the runway, taking off, etc., all serving to convey an impression of a tense and stressful atmosphere in which our protagonist needs to continue operating with calm and precision. She, as well as other (male) personnel, are shown working concentratedly, speaking into a radio receiver, operating technical equipment in the control tower and passing on information between them. The on-

screen text further adds to this, reading “with sharpened sensitivity” (*togisumasareta, kansei*), “rising tension” (*takamaru kinchō*), “composure” (*chinchaku*), “protecting the safety of the sky” (*sora no anzen wo Mamoru*), “this is air traffic control” (*sore ga kankūkansei*). This martialized portrayal of air traffic control then draws on the technology theme identified earlier, putting confident control over high-tech machinery at the centre of the video and imbuing its protagonist with heroic high-tech warrior status, despite doing a relatively safe non-combat job.

The aspects of military masculinity described above then invoke gendered symbolic system where the work of air traffic control is linked to masculinised adjectives like rationality, seriousness, order or confidence (Cohn, Hill and Ruddick, 2005). The female protagonist of the video is therefore included in the wider masculinising framing of the video, being integrated into a masculine symbolic system alongside her male colleagues. Changing into her uniform and becoming “extraordinary” then also means transcending femininity for her, as she assimilates masculine military values and receives masculine respect in return (Sasson-Levy, 2003a). Military work then shows “the meaning of real work” (*honto no shigoto no imi*), a statement prominently displayed on screen during the advertisement’s closing sequence. The female air traffic controller is shown as an equal member of the masculine team, with the advert praising the “bonds of trust” (*shinrai no kizuna*) between pilots and air traffic controllers, finally closing the video with the line “I control” (*watashi ga kontorōru suru*), also translatable as “I am in control”. Drawing on database elements of technology, masculinity and military gender equality, the MSDF thus makes the air traffic controller a martial hero doing “real work”, i.e. masculine work. This is particularly important when considering the deep structural inequalities in the Japanese labour market which result in a high percentage of women being relegated to low-ranking, often menial types of labour (Takeda, 2005, p. 180; Nemoto, 2016, p. 3).

What this video illustrates is the promise of transcending the restrictive and often dysfunctional social norms of contemporary Japan through embracing a military identity (Perkins, 2011). According to this video, that promise also encompasses the possibility of transcending gender norms, though only if one buys into the rules of the protective area constructed around that identity, which here means taking on masculine attributes. By incorporating them into the military database, masculine military values were discursively stripped of the traditional militarist grand narrative of patriotic male soldier identity, leaving only a simulation of the old militarism where those same masculine military values become simulacra which can be performed by either men or women. In that database, ostensibly de-politicised and de-gendered database elements like technological mastery, military firepower, martial values and military egalitarianism maintain a fantasy of fully equal heroic militarism that externalises the politics of militarism into a “passive medium” outside the discourse and thus incontestable, but nevertheless structuring that same discursive environment (Asada, 1989, p. 276). Women espousing military values as seen in the

air traffic controller advert or the previously discussed section on MSDF women then helps to maintain the fantasy, as women themselves are shown to embrace traditionally masculine military values and thus performatively reproduce the notion of these values being gender-agnostic. Through integration into a military database and simultaneously being consumed from that same database, military values can therefore maintain the aesthetics and structure they have in traditional military grand narrative while removing them from that narrative and turning them into simulacra. Through the database, performances of military values like in this video in fact become “perfect simulacra”, no longer symbolically representing a larger transcendental truth. So while the warrior in Imperial Japan might have viewed such performances as symbols of the promise of transcendence through death in service of the Emperor (Mangan and Komagome, 2000), for the postmodern warrior, there is no such larger truth, making performances of military values only symbols of themselves, a circularity that Baudrillard calls “perfect simulacra” (1994, pp. 4–6).

Different from the Recruitment Channel, this fantasy then does not meet with anywhere near the degree of narrative resistance from commenters. This makes sense, as through the construction of a military database, the MSDF is essentially cultivating a subcultural audience. The gendered politics placed into the “passive medium” are then the “alternative values and standards” of this particular community (Azuma, 2009, p. 27). No matter whether there is more truth in MSDF claims than in those made in the Recruitment Channel, the MSDF Channel’s narratives remain accepted by its audience because they draw on an established database of pleasurable content and thus succeed in satisfying a desire for meaning with the consumption of simple visual and narrative “moe elements”, realigned into various small narratives in each video (Azuma, 2009, p. 95). Despite some superficial similarities between MSDF self-portrayal and the “softening” narrative identified in the Recruitment Channel, the MSDF Channel therefore builds on a fundamentally different foundation by narrowing its focus and relying on a subcultural audience. Moving on from the MSDF Channel, we will see that elements from the “softening” narrative become less pronounced in the other two channels, while the themes of technology, masculinity and femininity remain highly relevant, constructing different, but compatible, militarist databases.

Wielding Guns and Values: The GSDF Public Relations Channel

The GSDF operates the oldest YouTube channel, having uploaded 558 videos during the observation period, with most content uploaded leaning towards classic PR material like advertisement videos and specifically recruitment advertising. 55 videos uploaded during the observation period were classified as advertising and a further 87 classified as recruitment adverts, almost double the amount posted by the MSDF and more than triple that of the ASDF. Furthermore, the recruitment tag was assigned to 236 GSDF videos, as compared to 87 MSDF videos and just 30 ASDF videos. This

pattern might stem from the GSDF Channel's legacy as the channel previously used for the entire JSDF, with even videos from after 2014 and thus after the creation of the other JSDF channels still sometimes containing content referring to either the ASDF or the MSDF. During the observation period, the GSDF Channel therefore undergoes a noticeable transition from portraying the entire JSDF to just focussing on the GSDF specifically. However, with increasing video quality and professionalisation, newer videos are on average more successful than older ones, so this transformation of the channel has relatively limited impact on the analysis in this chapter, as outside of the recruitment category, all analysed videos are relatively recent and therefore specific to the GSDF.

Like in the MSDF, technology is a major theme in GSDF Channel videos, though naturally the very different types of equipment used in the GSDF result in slight differences in portrayal too. The GSDF Channel thus centres the destructive power of its equipment, most prominently in videos showing GSDF exercises, which feature large numbers of soldiers running around with guns and wielding various other types of military equipment like infantry fighting vehicles or artillery guns, featuring a large degree of mock combat many rounds being fired. A simple look at the "combat" tag for videos affirms this quantitatively, as 69 GSDF videos analysed were tagged "combat" (amounting to ca. 12% of all videos), compared to 39 MSDF videos (ca. 6%) and just 4 ASDF videos (ca. 3%). For the Recruitment Channel, meanwhile, just a single video features the combat tag, amounting to less than 1% of videos. Consequently, GSDF equipment is usually shown with the soldier operating it, thus creating a firm visual link between military equipment and the person wielding it. Put in combat situations, often underlined by dramatic electronic or rock music, the equipment thus empowers the soldier by showing him utilise his equipment's destructive potential.

This dynamic is most prominently on display in the long videos documenting the annual "Fuji General Live-Fire Exercise" (*Fujisōgōkaryokuenshū*), a choreographed demonstration of military might where different GSDF display their equipment and fire on targets on a hill in front of a live audience of mostly civilians. The exercise is divided into two parts, the first a general introduction of the different types of equipment and the second a fictional scenario where the same units need to be deployed to fend off an attack against a Japanese island. Ben-Ari and Fröhstück (2003) call this event a "celebration of violence", suggesting that it both reinforces the GSDF's claim to warrior status by showing off their destructive capabilities whilst at the same time "taming" that violence by having it happen in a controlled environment that people can watch for their pleasure, an observation that still largely holds up 20 years later. Technology plays a prominent role in this event, many different types of military equipment are shown, with their specific name and function explained by a voiceover. Each of these guns or vehicles then fires on one or multiple amorphous targets on a hill in the background with the audience marvelling at the destructive potential embedded in the bang of artillery fire and the plumes of smoke rising from the hit targets, whose

destruction is further impressed on viewers through close-ups on big screens. Like the MSDF, the destructive power of military technology itself is thus made into a source of pleasure.

In the second of the live-fire exercise, the “scenario”, the GSDF then embeds its performance of violence in a narrative frame, thus diverging from the pattern observed with the MSDF. The scenario is introduced by a voiceover telling viewers that Japan’s international environment has gotten more precarious in the last years and that the country can be threatened in multiple ways (conventional attacks, missile attacks, terrorism). For the exercise, the specific scenario is an invasion of an outlying Japanese island by another, country. The antagonist is not explicitly named but with the nature of the scenario and an image of the Chinese carrier Liaoning shown, China is implied as the military enemy here. The scenario itself consists of small videos describing how the enemy invades a Japanese island and how the GSDF would respond in order to take it back, in-between which various appropriate vehicles and units would enter the exercise area and perform the tasks described in the video (e.g. scouting). The scenario ends with the military destruction and forceful eviction of the invading force, thus concluding with a satisfactory “happy end” of full Japanese victory.

Yet, even with this embedding of military technology into a threat narrative, the overall focus is still clearly on the destructive power of the weapons themselves. Ultimately, the threat scenario is rather vague, and the response portrayed does not significantly differ from the firing exercises shown previously. Providing some framing provides a context of military violence as “just” violence (Donovan, 2010, p. 214), but even without that framing, the violence on display at the exercise is still framed as pleasurable in the first part of the video. In the GSDF Channel, the destructive power of military technology then is still an important database element. However, it is also complemented by a more direct portrayal of war as fighting against someone as well as with someone. Still, the identity of the enemy is only of secondary importance, even in the scenario, the actual information given on what sort of force the GSDF is fighting or why is omitted and irrelevant. An adversary is mainly included to show the GSDF as capable of defeating them, so no more information on them is needed.

In the GSDF Channel, fighting prowess and the capability of defeating a vague imaginary enemy are in themselves database elements, present not only in the Fuji exercise video, but also multiple other exercise and documentary videos. An important part of “capability” as a moe element is international recognition, reinforced in other videos by showing the GSDF working together with other nations militaries, most prominently the US army and marines, but also the Australian military. Such videos usually depict multilateral exercises, showing GSDF soldiers and their foreign counterparts working side by side in intense combat training exercises as well as showing them socialise after the exercise is over. These videos thus serve to show the GSDF soldier as equal to its foreign counterparts, illustrating a desire to be seen as

“real” soldiers, particularly by the Americans who are considered at the pinnacle of military masculinity (Frühstück and Ben-Ari, 2002). This need for foreign validation of the GSDF warrior is most explicit in one video on a joint US marines/GSDF exercise, where a US officer spends more than a minute talking to the camera about the GSDF’s exceptional combat capability, praising the soldiers’ discipline and professionalism. This entire speech is dutifully subtitled in Japanese and left largely uncut, showing a clear (and somewhat clumsy) attempt to legitimise GSDF claims to warrior status through recognition by representatives of hegemonic American militarism.

Once more showing similarities to the MSDF Channel, the GSDF Channel also emphasises traditional martial masculinity in many of its videos, arguably to a much larger degree than the MSDF. Soldiers are shown as tenacious and willing to push through hardships, usually demanding physical exercises, thus drawing on traditional notions of martial masculinity (Barrett, 1996, p. 132). shown in the context of combat exercises or military training units, this tenacity and willpower is further connected to a high degree of discipline and diligence. Videos documenting GSDF recruits usually start with a shot of their sleeping quarters at 6am, just before the wake-up call, showing recruits sleeping peacefully only to then jump up immediately once the alarm sounds, showing no signs of tiredness as they proceed to open the blinds, get dressed and make their beds within seconds of getting up. The camera then follows them jogging down the stairs and into the courtyard where they do their morning exercises. This structure is clearly designed to impress the viewer with the degree of discipline and energy the recruits seem to possess, asserting the recruits’ (and thus by extension the GSDF soldiers’) masculinity by presenting them as incredibly hard-working men, whose discipline has ostensibly allowed them to conquer a human condition like drowsiness. GSDF training thus allows these recruits a high degree of mastery over “nature” in the form of their own bodies, a mastery further underlined through the morning exercises, which are conducted shirtless, thus explicitly presupposing the male body and putting it at the centre of the daily recurring ritual (Wienke, 1998).

Besides this, GSDF videos also show other forms of physical training which follow the same general pattern of posing an extreme physical challenge that recruits overcome, often with support and encouragement from their peers, showing camaraderie and mutual support as values adjacent to military discipline. Camaraderie also serves to show the hardships of training and military life as slightly less daunting, with recruits in multiple videos talking about how they would help each other and how their fellow recruits’ support has made them able to do things they thought impossible, highlighting the great sense of pride and accomplishment they felt in e.g. successfully completing a difficult obstacle course. Putting camaraderie and military bonds at the centre of its portrayal of military exercises then also adds a further element of pleasure to these exercises, showing strong bonds between soldiers as appealing. This aspect of serving in the GSDF is further amplified by portrayals of recruits spending their free time together, laughing, enjoying their meals (which all branches

of the JSDF seem to take a certain pride in) and displaying their bonds through friendly interactions.

“Softening” then is hardly visible at all in the GSDF Channel, instead we see an extended version of the “celebration of violence” described by Frühstück and Ben-Ari in their account of the Fuji exercise (2003). GSDF soldiers are portrayed as masculine, strong and capable in exercising violence alongside international allies. Military violence and different aspects of military masculinity are, however never directly integrated into a militarist grand narrative, but left in several small narratives instead, often presented without much further framing at all. As database elements, all these small narratives are then consumed directly for pleasure by viewers. Following a wider postmodern pattern, accomplishments like capability, overcoming hardship or discipline are individualised, portrayed as individual triumphs. Drawing on Asada, this marks the soldiers portrayed as “other oriented children”, displaying a childlike passion and obsession for their work (1989, p. 275). Of course, the GSDF is portrayed as the structure within which such individual accomplishments are possible, thus making it the “protected area” in which the play of children can take place. Despite portraying a quite traditional military masculinity then, the GSDF Channel presents that military masculinity as neutral “rules of play”, which guide the behaviour of soldiers, but which are not inherently tied to a militarist grand narrative.

This process can be further illustrated with how the GSDF Channel reframes patriotism, following a similar trajectory as the MSDF in maintaining the performance and form of patriotic heroism but changing its discursive framing to a vague notion of “protection”. The nation as the object of protection is sometimes implied through visual symbols of Japanese national identity like cherry blossoms or Mount Fuji, but it is never made explicit. Instead, protection is individualised, with the GSDF providing the frame for protecting somebody and individual soldiers then filling in the object of that protection. Being interviewed in the videos, various soldiers then name various people who they are looking to protect, most prominently their families though in some cases also their fellow soldiers, particularly those younger than them, playing on age-based hierarchies very prevalent in Japanese society. Visual elements and performative actions of patriotic militarism are thus maintained but stripped of the overt nationalism and militarism through replacing the modern grand narrative of nationalism and patriotic duty with a postmodern individualist notion of fulfilment.

Part of that notion of fulfilment and another important theme in the GSDF Channel’s videos is heterosexuality. In depictions of soldiers and their families, the GSDF does show only traditional heterosexual partnerships and nuclear families, strongly linking military identity to a heteronormative family ideal. There is a notable focus on soldiers and their families in multiple videos, with the GSDF seemingly keen to emphasise soldiers as protecting their families and particularly as caring parents. Both male and female soldiers mention their children as motivation and many soldiers’ loving

interaction with their children are shown. By showing both male and female soldiers with children there is a clear effort to appeal broadly by not just casting the man as breadwinner, though ultimately the depiction of male and female soldiers fails to deviate from established gender roles in any significant degree. For example, uniformed male soldiers are usually shown with their children as well as their seemingly civilian female partners whilst female soldiers either only mention their children or are shown with the children but without their partner. Showing working mothers in the JSDF is thus at best a partial concession that still does not challenge the attribution of caring duties primarily to women. The image produced also fits with Fröhstück's observation that whilst male soldiers have primarily civilian wives and female soldiers primarily military husbands (Fröhstück, 2007, p. 104). Heterosexuality then regulates the potentially subversive role of female soldiers, reintegrating into a male-centric order, whilst also further building a fantasy of individual fulfilment through military service, showing successful heterosexual partnership as an element of GSDF service.

With most of the previous discussion in this chapter focused on how masculinity is elevated in the GSDF Channel, the question then is what roles constructions of symbolic femininity play, particularly considering the considerable effort in including female personnel seen in both the Recruitment Channel and MSDF Channel. In GSDF Channel videos, military service is generally portrayed as masculine, with the vast majority of soldiers displayed being male and very little incorporation of female soldiers. There are a few exceptions though, with some videos explicitly portraying and even centring women. In one example, GSDF recruits' tenacity, determination and camaraderie are very clearly ascribed to both male and female recruits, as the video has a female recruit as the main interlocutor and point of view character when talking about the hardships of the recruitment process. This recruit is shown overcoming difficult physical obstacles whilst talking about how in hard moments the encouragement from her comrades has helped her overcome anything. She is visibly emotional saying this and the footage from the exercise similarly shows her exhausted but triumphant in a huddle with her fellow female recruits. This video thus explicitly shows women as also capable of embodying GSDF values, choosing an all-female group to display the "bonds of friendship born from overcoming hard exercises". Furthermore, even usually "feminine" traits like emotionality are presented as positive indicators of the soldiers' commitment and bonds here. The female soldier's visible emotionality is shown as a natural reaction and sets the stage for the video's next segment, where a group of male soldiers who have just completed a particularly hard exercise are shown tearing up in a similar way upon receiving their commander's congratulations.

Notably though, the portrayals of military femininity described above follow the same pattern observed in the MSDF by relying entirely on the adoption of the exact same traits previously identified as making up military masculinity. Combined with the

overall very low number of women present in the videos, their mere presence and adoption of masculine military values then is not enough to undermine these values' masculine status and instead just marks these women as "extraordinary" women who achieved a masculine ideal despite their femininity. Similarly, the portrayal of emotionality as desirable even for men only applies in a narrow set of circumstances, with the examples above relying on first setting up a masculinising context of excruciating physical exercise, overcoming which then makes a degree of emotionality acceptable. The same applies to the group of female soldiers, whose emotional response was also related to overcoming a difficult exercise as a team, thus reinforcing both physical hardiness and camaraderie as traditional military values through their emotionality. Emotionality may even be read as its own "moe element", combined with rousing music and a praising voiceover, to signal to the viewer the sense of accomplishment and pleasure derived from military work, allowing the viewer to vicariously feel similar pleasure.

Overall then, the striking impression from the GSDF Channel is an even more unabashedly militaristic and masculine self-portrayal than the one found in the MSDF Channel. Following the four themes of technology, masculinity, heterosexuality and femininity, one could observe that the GSDF soldier was once more constructed as masculine by default. The "moe elements" in the GSDF's database then overlap in large parts with the MSDF, showing military vehicles and weapons, though putting even more focus on their firing, highlighting military discipline, camaraderie, etc. to elevate soldierhood as a masculine activity. Femininity, on the other hand, is either shown as the civilian other in male soldiers' heterosexual families, or is downplayed when showing military women, who maintain visual markers of femininity, but are effectively assimilated into masculinity as "honorary men", embracing the same military identity as their counterparts. In this, despite its historical baggage and fundamentally paradoxical existence, GSDF narration of itself is thus still mostly aligned with classic military gender roles as found in Western militaries like the US Army (Brown, 2012, p. 52).

However, the GSDF Channel also shows military activity as taking place as play within a "protected area", highlighting the postmodern nature of GSDF militarism. Thus, while the performance of military identity in the GSDF channel strongly resembles a classic militarism in form, it differs in some important points. First, it centres individual achievement and pleasurable experiences rather than a militarist grand narrative and second, it strategically transplants militarist values onto women to reframe them as gender neutral. This way, it discursively distances itself from the modern militarism that marked its historical predecessor without abandoning much of the form and performative elements of that same militarism. Additionally, even more so than with the MSDF, it also becomes clear how the GSDF speaks to a specifically cultivated subculture of military-friendly viewers, extending previously limited visibility events like

the Fuji General Live-Fire Exercise to a wider online audience, but maintaining the same “celebration of violence” in its content.

Of Planes and Pilots: The ASDF Channel

When comparing the ASDF’s YouTube channel to its counterparts from the GSDF and MSDF, one thing that is immediately evident is the comparative lack of priority the channel seems to have in the branch’s communication strategy. Their channel was only created in 2014, a full five years after the GSDF channel and four years after the MSDF channel. It has less than a quarter the number of videos and roughly half the subscribers of the other channels. Furthermore, when videos are uploaded, it is usually in a burst of activity when one or multiple video series are uploaded within a day or two. Outside of these sudden bursts of activity, there are long periods of silence where no content is uploaded whatsoever. In the four years from 2016 to 2019 for example, only 17 videos were put online, with zero videos in 2019. From 2020 to 2022 uploads have been a bit more regular, but still hardly ever exceeded one to two videos a month. This irregular pattern of uploading content is suboptimal for driving engagement, as the YouTube algorithm rewards regular content uploads. Such neglect as well as the relatively simple nature of most uploaded content, which, outside of a couple of more elaborately produced image films, usually follows a simple formula of showing flying jets and occasional interviews with pilots and ground crew, suggest that the ASDF is putting less resources into creating a strong online presence than the other branches. This might be due to the privileged position air forces often occupy in being most attractive to recruits and thus in less need of reaching out to the wider population and garner sympathy (Brown, 2012, p. 149).

In its self-portrayal, the ASDF draws on the same four themes identified with the GSDF. Between these, the theme of technology is the most immediately visible and clearly important. Brown (2012, p. 130) has observed how the US Air Force uses the appeal of cutting edge technology to drive recruitment and this pattern largely holds up in the case of the ASDF as well. 79 out of 145 ASDF videos were given the “Equipment” tag, signifying that military equipment played a significant role in the video and in the 18 qualitatively analysed videos, only three did not show fighter planes at all, with all others featuring military equipment either very prominently or at least as part of its messaging. This presence is often visual, but the sound of jet engines as well as the isolated soundscape of the fighter jet cockpit with its radio chatter and the sound of the pilot breathing through their breathing mask are auditory signifiers of military equipment too. All this makes very clear that planes and primarily fighter jets are generally used as avatars for the ASDF, but this does not mean that other equipment is not also prominently placed, with helicopters, radar stations and surface to air missile systems also being shown in a few videos. No matter the specific type of equipment, the audio-visual language used to portray these systems is very similar, usually relying on rapid cuts in footage to suggest urgency, quick, decisive movements

on screen and low camera angles that make equipment look bigger, all underlined by heavy rock or electronic music and dramatic comments from a deep voiceover.

A prominent example for this is the scrambling of fighter jets, shown in the video "Protecting our Peaceful Sky", an almost 30-minute-long image film introducing various ASDF units, taking up prominent space in the first third of the video. It starts with an introduction of JSDF radar systems, both stationary and mobile, and how they help to detect intruders in Japanese airspace. The video then shows the control centre of a radar base, where a group of uniformed male operators are working, a scene framed through rapid cuts, quick camera movement and hectic movement by the operators themselves. The scene's climax then is the commander's order to "scramble!" After the order is given, the video cuts to pilots at an airbase resting on comfortable chairs while on call, who immediately jump up and start sprinting out of the room as the alarm siren starts blaring. The camera follows the sprinting pilots and shows their quick climb into the cockpits of waiting jets, interceded with quick impressions of ground crews preparing the planes. With the jets driving onto the runway and taking off the scene then ends, at which point the voiceover chimes back in to provide context by stating how threats to Japanese security have increased in recent years and the number of scrambles has tripled. Throughout, the scene is underlaid by tense rock music.

What this scene, excerpts from which can actually be found in many other ASDF videos, shows is the idea of the ASDF as a well-oiled machine where the most advanced equipment is competently wielded by a number of highly disciplined and skilled (usually male) airmen. Technology is thus not an end in itself, but rather the mastery over technology is a promise appealing to masculinity. Masculinity and technology are intimately linked, particularly due to the association of technology with reason and the claiming of reason as a fundamentally masculine quality. The mastery over and understanding of technology, particularly the rare kind of high-tech found in the ASDF and similar air forces, can thus confer greater masculine status on the collective organisation as well as the men associated with it (Massey, 1995; Lohan and Faulkner, 2004). Even more than in the MSDF or GSDF, military technology is thus front and centre in the ASDF, with various types of equipment, most importantly fighter jets, being essential to constructing an ASDF identity.

Once more, there is a play-like element to the portrayal of technology, invoking the notion of military technology as "big boys' toys" to link technology and masculinity (Higate, 2003, p. 34). This is most applicable to pilots, whose exercises and work are portrayed as engaging in an almost playful battle of wits and prowess while fighting in the air, an arena of combat that is framed as a direct masculine contest by the voiceover and the narration of videos focusing on pilots' abilities in controlling their planes rather than the capability of the planes themselves. In uploading content like virtual reality first-person videos of flying a fighter jet or a video promising the "real"

experience of air-to-air combat, the ASDF also allows for a level of remote participation in this sort of play, extending the protected area of play to its subcultural supporters whilst at the same time reinforcing the idea of piloting as exceptional, desirable and pleasurable through inspiring awe in viewers. This awe then, at the same time, reinforces ASDF pilots' status as elite men and aspirational figures. But the videos are also keen to highlight the link between ground crew and technology, be it by working in a control room which is shown linked to massive high-tech radar stations, or be it by working as an airplane mechanic, whose names are written on the planes and who in at least one video refer to servicing a plane as "raising a child", calling the plane "their child". The ASDF thus offers a frame that enables a childlike obsession with machines and play with these machines, embedded in a vague context of heroism for defending Japan's skies, though once more, the exact nature and shape of the threat is left unclear and largely unnecessary as the act of protection in itself is the source of pleasure.

"Play" is quite directly employed in ASDF recruitment commercials as well, with one 2015 recruitment video linking technology, a general lust for adventure, a wish to explore the skies and masculinity. The video shows three different ASDF members at different stages of their life, with the first story being about a boy who looks up in awe at fighter planes and plays with a little toy plane in his room, only to later become a pilot himself. This transformation is accompanied by the slogan "longing for the sky" (*sora wo akogare*), highlighting that the primary motivation for the boy to become a pilot is a desire to take to the skies and attain mastery over a real fighter jet. In this instance, the play of the literal child is directly linked to the work of the grown-up man, thus narratively linking piloting to a notion of play and adventure. Notably, it is also linked to boyhood in particular, with the same advert drawing on very different narratives when presenting ASDF women, which will be discussed further below.

The theme of technology is thus particularly interlinked with the theme of masculinity in ASDF self-portrayal, particularly through pilots' elite masculinity. Beyond this, the ASDF also invokes masculinity in different ways too, with one particular example being the image video "Protecting our Peaceful Sky" mentioned earlier in this section. Part of that video shows a group of ASDF rescue swimmers on a mission. These men are very overtly held up as elite men, with the voiceover talking about them being elite *even within* the ASDF, a turn of phrase that elevates the rescue team whilst also reflecting at least part of their elite characteristics back onto the wider ASDF. The rescue swimmers are shown sprinting to a plane, changing on the plane then jumping into the sea to pull out a person and provide first aid to them. While they are shown doing this, the voiceover extolls their extreme level of physical as well as their ability to remain calm under pressure, referring to them explicitly as "men" (*otokotachi*). Visually, elite masculine status is reinforced through inclusion of footage of one named rescue swimmer working out shirtless, showing off his highly muscular body. Like in the MSDF and GSDF, the naked male upper body then seems to be one of the elements in

its database to indicate masculine power. In another parallel to the other two branches, this display of masculine power is accompanied by a portrayal of that same rescue swimmer as caring and compassionate, with the man interviewed talking about the need to save people and his desire to always help people, not just as part of his work but as a life philosophy. Combining masculine toughness and caring compassion then enables the projection of an elite masculinity that is hard but not brutish and thus more palatable to viewers (Messner, 2007).

Femininity, on the other hand, is often equated to non-military status, with many women shown in ASDF Channel videos not being part of the force themselves but rather cheering on ASDF members in one way or another. One example for this is a video where the ASDF's acrobatic flyers group "Blue Arrows" performs an air show for a group of healthcare workers to thank them for their work during the COVID-19 crisis. The video features (male) pilots in their planes doing various aerial acrobatics for an audience of hospital nurses and doctors in hospital whites. Notably, the audience is majority female and especially the people in focus of the camera are mostly women who are cheering and clapping for the pilots but also getting visibly emotional with tears in their eyes. In this video the ASDF clearly establishes a duality between the masculine world of ASDF pilots and a civilian world with female admirers. Drawing on traditional militarism even more overtly than the other two branches, civilian women's respect and admiration are thus integrated into the ASDF's visual database, highlighting the desirable masculinity of ASDF pilots through showing their female admirers.

When women are portrayed as part of the ASDF, as is the case in the two other stories from the 2015 recruitment commercial discussed above, their role in the ASDF is portrayed markedly different than that of male ASDF members. So while, in the case of this video, the male pilot had been shown as desiring adventure and technological mastery over a complex machine, the women's motivations for joining the ASDF are framed in much more classically feminine terms. One of the women is shown first as a school child, helping another child who fell and later watching a broadcast of ASDF helicopters doing search and rescue in a natural disaster. As an adult the woman then stands in front of a helicopter, likely as its pilot, accompanied by the slogan "mission to help people" (*hito wo sukuu shime*). Thus, even though her ultimate role as a helicopter pilot is similar in content to the male pilot and could also be framed through technological mastery and self-fulfilment, it is framed in an entirely different way, put in the context of feminine care instead. The second woman in the video meanwhile is first shown at her wedding, then with an infant in her arms and lastly in uniform in front of a control tower. Her transformation is underlined by the slogan "responsibility to the future" (*mirai he no sekinin*), rooting her military service firmly in a motherly desire to care for her child and give it a secure future.

Femininity in the ASDF thus serves a somewhat different role than in the other two branches, with very little portrayal of women in uniform embracing and thus supporting masculine military values and much more portrayal of women as supporters and admirers of military men. In also sticking with traditional gender roles when portraying women in the ASDF, showing them primarily as carers and helpers, the elite masculine status of pilots and similar roles is not undermined in the slightest, making the ASDF by far the most overtly masculine branch in its self-portrayal. Women's main role then seems to be as partners of male ASDF members, thus elevating the theme of heterosexuality, which had very little presence in the MSDF and a bit more presence in the GSDF, to a very prominent status in its self-portrayal.

One example for this can be found in a recruitment advert focussed on the personal story of a male fighter pilot. In the advert, the pilot meets a woman photographing his plane in the hangar, they exchange glances and the voiceover/text on screen says, "for me there's an important person" (*boku ni wa taisetsu na hito ga iru*), immediately placing the two in a heterosexual relationship context. The next scene shows the pilot saluting, extending his previously stated motivation to the wider ASDF by using the male first person plural pronoun "bokutachi" to talk about protecting somebody. The link to who he protects is also further strengthened when in the next scene, he is shown in a fancy restaurant with the woman from before, seemingly proposing to her. In portraying this duality of a military man and a woman admiring him apparently at least in part due to his work, the advertisement thus promises fulfilment of heterosexual desire, as by joining the ASDF and becoming a pilot, the man has attained a more prestigious masculinity making him a desirable partner. In closing the advertisement, the possibility of attaining a similarly desirable status is offered to the viewer, with the pilot's voiceover addressing the viewer and stating/suggesting "protecting the sky together with you" (*kimi to isshoni sora wo mamoru*). The pilot thus serves as an avatar of the elite masculinity promised by the ASDF and his female partner in turn shows the heterosexual attention an aspiring ASDF member can hope for if they become part of the institution, a suggestion made relatively clear in the video as the only other person on screen, his partner, is not herself involved in the act of protecting, but rather being protected, making the viewer the one familiarly addressed as "you".

In summary, the ASDF Channel thus portrays a force that freely draws on established tropes of military self-portrayal, with an unrestrained portrayal of military masculinity as elite and femininity as civilian and supporting the male ASDF through heterosexually connotated admiration. While a degree of softening is done through the notion of the caring soldiers, as Messner identified in his study of American "tough but compassionate" masculinity, toughness and masculinity are not present in equal share but rather a small dose of strategic portrayals of compassion is used to soften the edges of an otherwise unapologetically tough masculinity (2007). Notably though, despite this strong focus on masculinity, the ASDF does portray by far the least

amount of actual combat in its videos, relying purely on the image of fighter jets and the romantic idea of ace-pilots heroically battling in thrilling dogfights, hardly ever showing any actual weapon fire or missile detonations in this. As a consequence, fantasy and play are perhaps the most visible in the ASDF Channel, as men are often quite literally encouraged to engage in childlike obsessions with jets or other machines in the ASDF, putting these technologies at the centre of the ASDF's self-portrayal and identity.

In this, the ASDF then does follow the pattern already observed in the MSDF and GSDF, employing the framework of play and the "protected area" to market ASDF service as a way of individual self-fulfilment first and foremost. It does this by foregrounding, perhaps more than the other two branches, the perks of joining the ASDF, reaching from work with rare and powerful technologies, to elite masculine status (or at least something adjacent to it), and finally to potential heterosexual rewards through female attention. It thus employs a very classical and traditional military marketing strategy, largely identical to the one Melissa Brown (2012) observed in the US Air Force's advertising. For the ASDF, this sort of portrayal however is remarkably consistent across the entire Channel, indicating a force that is comfortable with traditional militarism but mostly ascribes this militarism on an individual level as a way for individual self-fulfilment.

Conclusion

What can be seen from the analysis of the four channels then is first a remarkable degree of difference between each of the channels, reaching from a total denial of the JSDF's military character in the Recruitment Channel to full-on unapologetic masculine militarism in the ASDF Channel. Nevertheless, the analysis has also shown considerable overlap between the channels, particularly between the three branch channels (MSDF, GSDF & ASDF), which share important themes (technology, masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality) and are fundamentally working in similar ways, setting up each branch as a "protected area" in which military members can freely exercise a pleasurable and fulfilling military identity without any need to reflect on their constitutional status or any political matters at all. Politics are instead placed into the institution, but not through the means of developing a coherent grand narrative of nationalist militarism, but through performances of militarism that have been scrubbed of narrative connections and are instead drawn directly from a subcultural database where they are consumed for their own direct pleasure.

Each of the channels, including the Recruitment Channel, thus produces a sort of fantasy of soldierhood that tries to elevate it as something desirable. The main difference between the branch channels and the Recruitment Channel however is that for the Recruitment Channel, this fantasy seems to fall apart when confronted by viewers, who react angrily to the fantasy's inability to provide a satisfying narrative frame for their lived experiences or preconceived notions of military service. Thus, the

Recruitment Channel's attempt at resolving the JSDF's fundamental paradox by stripping out its military component and reframing the JSDF as mere "civil service" is unable to provide an explanation for the very much unexceptional conditions imposed by military training and life. In other words, it is not able to reconcile the institutional and social imperative of the JSDF.

The branch channels, on the other hand, seem to manage a successful resolution of the same conundrum by simply narrowing their target audience, only addressing those friendly to them in the first place, which can be deduced from the unabashed militarism on display in all three branch channels. But at the same time, these videos are still fully public and available with almost no entry hurdle, thus marking a significant extension of the audience when compared, for example, to the Fuji exercise observed by (Ben-Ari and Frühstück (2003). What seems to be happening then is both a broadening of the military-friendly audience as well as a retreat of the three branches away from wider society and towards fully embracing a friendly audience as a sort of military subculture. This development is postmodern in its reflection of a wider postmodern social trend of fragmentation and siloisation. As Azuma describes it, with postmodern Japan's social values and standards already dysfunctional, the retreat into subculture and its corresponding construction of alternative values and standards are directly linked (Azuma, 2009, p. 27).

Unshackled Fantasy: The JSDF in the Anime “GATE”

Introduction

While the JSDF YouTube channels studied in the previous chapter represent a very direct way for the JSDF to appeal to a relatively wide Japanese audience, this chapter will focus on a method of portraying the JSDF that in many ways is as indirect as possible. Because where the YouTube videos were clearly marked JSDF self-portrayals, distributed through official JSDF channels, the 2014 animation (anime) series “Gate: Thus the JSDF Fought There!” (*GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri*), which I will analyse in this chapter, was presented to viewers in a very differently. GATE was first broadcast on several pay-tv and publicly available tv stations before eventually making its way onto DVD/Blue-Ray as well as into the streaming catalogue of a number of providers (Hodgkins, 2024; *ON AIR - Distribution Information [ON AIR - haishin hōkoku]*, no date). Despite featuring the JSDF in the title, GATE thus seems to be entirely a product of the entertainment industry and largely unrelated to the JSDF as an actual institution.

However, GATE is also based on a series of novels written by a former GSDF officer and the anime was produced in cooperation with the JSDF’s Tokyo Provincial Cooperation Office (Yamamura, 2019, pp. 8–9). Furthermore, the JSDF has also incorporated GATE characters and artwork into some of its official recruitment materials (Wilson, 2015) and when I visited the GSDF Public Information Center in Saitama, various merchandise goods featuring GATE characters were on offer in the Center’s shop. GATE is thus placed in a grey zone between official JSDF self-portrayal and entirely unrelated popular culture. It is a creative product initially conceived by an individual (previously) belonging to the JSDF, then produced and distributed entirely through the entertainment industry, but nevertheless supported and endorsed by the JSDF as an institution, thus marking it as semi-official. And while the JSDF has endorsed a few military related series, most such series analysed by other researchers like “Kantai Collection” or “Girls und Panzer” focus on anthropomorphising weapons and drawing on World War II military history rather than depicting an actual military, much less the contemporary JSDF (Sugawa-Shimada, 2019a, 2019b).

GATE, on the other hand, seems to offer a more overtly political storyline, where the current-day JSDF is deployed to defend Japan against a high-fantasy empire which had suddenly attacked Japan through the eponymous gate in central Tokyo. Using the military conflict with the empire in the fantasy world and the political conflict over the handling of it in the “real” world, gate’s split setting thus allows it to create a narrative about the JSDF’s “true nature” by showing it in a fantasy setting where it is largely

unshackled from its political and legal constraints, whilst at the same time contrast this narrative with the way the JSDF is being treated and thought about in the real world. This way, the anime creates a space for an unshackled, unlimited fantasy about what the JSDF could (and possibly should) be, literally removing them from the real world and transplanting them into a fantasy world to explore military identities and politics that would be highly controversial in a real-world setting.

That being said, it is also important to acknowledge the series' limited popular appeal, with GATE being a "late night anime" and thus aimed at a niche market of hardcore anime fans (otaku) rather than the broader public (Yamamura, 2019, p. 10). It is part of the so-called "isekai" genre, a term literally meaning "different world" and describing stories featuring the movement between different worlds (usually the real world and one or more occidentally inspired fantasy worlds), commonly offering viewers wish-fulfilling power fantasies (Binimbol, 2020). However, as a product specifically made for otaku subculture, GATE also marks a blending of the JSDF database identified in the last chapter with the "classic" otaku database. With otaku database elements common to fantasy and the isekai genre like demi-humans (elves, cat-girls, etc.), gold-locked princesses, or female knights in unpractically revealing armour, GATE thus is a prime example for Azuma's observation that otaku consume anime less as coherent and distinct texts, but more as sources for popular characters and archetypes that move easily between plots and media (Azuma, 2009; Ting, 2020, p. 313). Combined with military database elements like prominently displayed military hardware, modern weaponry's unmatched destructive potential or a powerful but caring military masculinity, GATE's content then reflects its origin as somewhere between official military self-narration and pop-culture fantasy. This also makes GATE particularly relevant to this dissertation's focus on postmodern militaries and postmodern militarism, as the postmodern is strongly intertwined with popular culture (McRobbie, 1994).

In this chapter, I explore how the themes identified in the previous chapters translate into a completely different medium, tracing continuities and changes between the two sources and how the narration of military identity is adopted to different audiences flexibly through the database model. GATE then highlights Azuma's notion of constructing "alternative values and standards" in a very literal way, as we see the JSDF struggle with dysfunctional social values in Japanese society but being reconstructed in a literal fantasy world. Connecting the otaku database and the military database, militarism is written into the otaku's database and possibly reproduced in other works as well, contributing to a wider-reaching militarisation of otaku culture. In the end, this results in a two-way process: otaku pop-culture is becoming increasingly militarised, but by entering the JSDF into the otaku database, it also becomes "otakuised" itself. In aestheticizing militarism, GATE then reflects Azuma's argument about a postmodern rejection of grand narrative and its replacements with many individualised and aestheticized "small narratives",

separating the performance from the narrative. This way, a modern military like the Japanese Imperial Army might have been able to build on a grand narrative of serving the emperor and extending Japan's "Co-Prosperity Sphere", but GATE's JSDF is a postmodern military which relies on loosely connecting small narratives about itself, drawn from a database of military tropes, thus offering "an aggregate of information without a narrative, into which all viewers could empathize of their own accord and each could read up convenient narratives" (Azuma, 2009, p. 38).

To trace this performance, the chapter roughly follows the same themes identified previously, namely technology, masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality. Supplementing these, it also specifically addresses the role of imperialism and fantasy in GATE, which play an important role in GATE's rather overt right-wing politics and thus demand special attention. The first section following this introduction will, however, start out by giving an overview over the plot of GATE to put later mentions of different parts of the story into some context and introducing readers to the vague outline of the story as well as its main characters. The first substantial analysis section will then address the role of technology in GATE, highlighting the many instances where military equipment is prominently displayed and where the destructive capabilities of that equipment in particular are centred. Even more so than in JSDF YouTube videos, technology plays a central role in GATE and is a core sense of pleasure, leading me to consider the seductive appeal of destructive power and the pleasure of a violent power fantasy as reaffirmations of Japanese military masculinity and national virility. The usage of military technology also marks an important intersection between otaku and military databases, as similar images (like depictions of tanks or jets) travel across different media, whilst different aspects (like portraying military equipment's killing power) are only present in GATE.

In the next section I will further address the role of masculinity that had already emerged from the discussion of technology. In this section however, I will focus instead on the male characters themselves and on the narrative structure of GATE as a "war adventure" set in a colonial frontier where interactions between the characters construct both a superior Japanese civilisation and masculinity (Soltysik Monnet, 2018). This discussion is then followed up by an analysis of fantasies of imperialism more broadly, highlighting how GATE's criticisms of American and Chinese imperialism as well as Japanese pacifism construct a fantasy of a paternalistically benign Japan that performs the actions of imperialism but maintains a discourse of equal cooperation, thus calling to mind Asada Akira's question of whether Imperial Japan's "Great East Asian Coprosperity Sphere" is "the absolute contradictory self-identity between liberation from European imperialism and aggression by Japanese imperialism?" (1989, p. 277). Drawing on Asada, that section will therefore explore right-wing politics in GATE.

Returning to the pattern established in the previous chapter, the section after that will then turn towards femininity and the depiction of women in GATE. It will explore how GATE follows a similar structure to that already seen in JSDF YouTube channels in principally opening up military identity to women and even allowing a few women to excel as paragons of military virtue, but ultimately sticks to conservative gender politics in policing gender roles and maintaining a military identity that is masculine by default and which women can either approximate by assimilating into it or support in designated feminine roles. Arguably the most important component of policing gender roles and maintaining a non-transgressive femininity is heterosexuality, which will then be the subject of the final section of this chapter. GATE prominently features heterosexuality throughout its narrative, using it to reign in female martiality whilst at the same time exalting military masculinity by portraying it as attractive to women. In this section, I will also briefly address GATE's portrayal of homosexuality and the intersections and tensions between conservative military heterosexuality and "perverted" otaku sexuality that result from GATE's attempt at blending two databases and speaking to two overlapping but still separate subcultures at the same time.

"Thus the JSDF Fought There": GATE's Story and Characters

GATE's story starts with the "gate" itself appearing in central Tokyo, attracting curious crowds for a bit before an army wielding medieval weaponry as well as riding small dragons bursts forth from the gate and starts indiscriminately slaughtering people. In this chaos, we first meet the series' protagonist, Itami Yōji, a serving GSDF soldier who was in Tokyo to attend an otaku convention, thus immediately marking him as part of that subculture. With civilian authorities overwhelmed, he helps to evacuate people into the walls of the imperial palace before GSDF units finally show up to decisively beat back the invading force with their superior weapons technology. The JSDF then gathers forces for an expedition through the gate into the world that the invaders came from, a high fantasy world full of dragons, magic, various non-human or demi-human intelligent species like elves, orcs or various "beastfolk", who combine a generally human anatomy with animal elements (e.g. cat ears, tails, etc.). They soon find out that the fantasy world, which they term "Special Region" (*tokuchi*) is ruled by a hegemonic empire, consistently only referred to as "The Empire" (*teikoku*), with which the Japanese government then tries to achieve a peace settlement.

Once on the other side of the gate, the JSDF sets up an increasingly permanent base camp on and around the hill where the gate is located. Itami and a few other JSDF characters are then sent out on a reconnaissance mission to learn more about the fantasy world and the empire. On that mission, they encounter a village ravaged by a large dragon, saving roughly half of the villagers, including some characters who then become part of the main cast, including the elf girl Tuka, sorceress Lelei and the demigoddess Rory. After escorting the surviving villagers to the JSDF camp for refuge, the extended party then heads for the Imperial city of Italica, only to find the city

besieged by a bandit army. As it happens, the imperial princess Piña is trapped in the city with a group of her

Name	Description
<i>JSDF Characters</i>	
Itami Yōji	Protagonist, 33-year-old GSDF soldier with special forces certification. Shown as an otaku who is more interested in his hobbies than work but still takes helping others very seriously and is trusted by people around him.
Kuribayashi Shino	Female soldier under Itami's command. Combative and easily resorts to violence. Excels in hand-to-hand combat.
Kurata Takeo	Male soldier under Itami's command. Jeep driver and fellow otaku, often shares moments of excitement over fantasy tropes with Itami. Largely used for comical relief.
Kurokawa Mari	Female soldier under Itami's command. Combat medic with calm and reserved demeanour but occasional sharp tongue.
Yanagida Akira	Serves in the command staff of the JSDF's force in the Special Region. Cold and calculated, concerned with the bigger picture and political implications of Japan's presence.
<i>"Special Region" Characters</i>	
Lelei La Lelena	15-year-old magic prodigy, usually travels with Itami. Quickly learned Japanese and since served as interpreter for Itami's party. Outwardly emotionless but is shown to have a crush on Itami.
Tuka Luna Marceau	High elf who was rescued from village burned by dragon and since travels with Itami. Traumatized by experience and hallucinated that Itami was her deceased father for a while.
Rory Mercury	Demigoddess in service of the god of war, usually travels with Itami. Possesses supernatural strength and powers. Appears childlike but is several hundred years old. Dressed in frilly "Goth Lolita" style outfit and gets aroused by violence.
Yao Haa Dushi	Dark elf sent as emissary to JSDF in order to secure their support against dragon terrorising her village. Offers herself as slave to Itami.
<i>Imperial Characters</i>	
Molt Sol Augustus	Emperor and Piña and Zorzal's father. Initially reluctant about seeking out peace with Japan but eventually convinced by Piña.
Piña Co Lada	Imperial princess and 3 rd in line to the Imperial throne. Founded the Rose Knights with her friends and starts off concerned about the Japanese as a potential threat, to then later realise that peace is the only real option for the Empire to survive.
Zorzal El Caesar	Imperial crown-prince and main antagonist of the series. Shown as brutal and arrogant but also cunning and strong. A sadist and rapist who strongly opposes peace and seeks all-out war with Japan.
Tyūle	Former queen and Zorzal's (sex) slave, whose people had been enslaved and slaughtered by Zorzal. Pretends to be submissive to manipulate Zorzal into a self-destructive war against Japan.
Bozes Co Palesti	Imperial noblewoman and childhood friend of Piña, serving as second in command of the Rose Knights. Gold-locked princess-type character who later has a child with a JSDF soldier.

Table 3: Important characters in GATE

loyal Rose Knights and under pressure from the siege, she accepts the JSDF's help which eventually manifests in a helicopter borne assault on the besiegers, just as they are about to take the city. Awed by the JSDF's firepower, Piña is prepared to make wide-reaching concessions but is shocked to see the JSDF just withdraw with the sole demand that their cooperation serve as the basis for a future peace agreement.

The main characters, accompanied by princess Piña and Bozens, the Rose Knights' deputy commander, are then summoned to Japan for a parliamentary hearing into the deaths of villagers during the dragon attack, having to defend the JSDF's record against an aggressive and hostile parliament and media. While in Japan, American, Russian and Chinese agents attempt to abduct the girls from the fantasy world but are ultimately stopped by Japanese security services. Returning to the fantasy world, the story splits into two parallel plotlines. The first of these concerns the dragon previously encountered and that now threatens a village of dark elves who come to the JSDF to seek help, eventually resulting in Itami and his group departing on an unsanctioned "reconnaissance" mission to fight the dragon, ultimately finishing the creature and its hatchlings with the help of JSDF fighter aircraft. In the second plotline, the focus is put on the internal workings of the Empire, showing intrigues surrounding the current emperor and his children, mainly princess Piña and her older brother crown-prince Zorzal. Zorzal is shown as the leader of the pro-war faction in the empire, while Piña leads a pro-peace faction, putting them at odds throughout the latter half of the anime. After Piña scores an initial success in having a Japanese embassy opened in the Imperial capital and drumming up support for peace amongst the Empire's nobility, whilst Zorzal himself seeks to garner favour with their father to support his course of action.

Violence then ensues when Itami and friends discover that Zorzal had kept a Japanese woman captured during the attack on Tokyo as a slave, leading to them using force to free her and threatening the Empire with severe retaliation if any other Japanese hostages are not immediately returned, a threat that is then backed up by a Japanese airstrike on the building normally housing the Imperial senate. Nevertheless, peace negotiations progress until the emperor suddenly is poisoned by one of Zorzal's slaves, who is seeking vengeance against the Empire hopes to goad him into all-out war with Japan, destroying the Empire in the process. And with his father falling unconscious, Zorzal immediately starts to seize power, brutally purging the pro-peace faction, imprisoning Piña and putting the Japanese embassy in the capital under siege. After some political wrangling in Japan, the JSDF then is authorised to launch a strike against the Imperial capital in order to free the imprisoned nobles of the pro-peace faction and lift the siege of the embassy. With its overwhelming power, the JSDF destroys the Imperial defenders of the city, evacuating all Japanese staff and local allies from the embassy and palace complexes, with Itami defeating Zorzal one more time in the throne room of the Imperial palace. The series then ends with Piña being

made crown-princess by her father, who was able to recover from the poisoning, thus marking the ultimate ascent of the pro-peace faction.

With this, the anime covers only part of the larger story laid out in the novels, which continues on with the JSDF having to manage an Imperial civil war, destabilisations caused by the gate itself, as well as an international conspiracy by Earth's superpowers to wrest control of the gate away from Japan. But due to the wider appeal of the anime series, these parts of the story will not be covered here. GATE does in itself offer a largely self-contained narrative and in any case offers more than enough material for analysis. As laid out in the introduction to this chapter, this analysis will follow different themes, mixing textual analysis that seeks to identify certain story elements and careful consideration of the anime's visual language (Denison, 2015; Bolton, 2018). Following Denison's caution that anime is "a cultural phenomenon whose meanings are dependent on context", cultural and political context will also be included in the analysis where appropriate (Denison, 2015, p. 2).

Pleasurable Fantasies of Violence, Power: JSDF Weaponry in GATE

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, military equipment is a prominent feature in JSDF recruitment and PR material, with each branch of the JSDF having its own slight twist on the role of equipment, but ultimately all of them including complex military technology and weaponry as part of their visual database. Thus, elements like camera shots of tanks or ships, firing naval guns, artillery being fired and reloaded or tanks driving at speed before firing are distinct "moe elements" in the JSDF database, which are included repeatedly to be consumed for pleasure by viewers. The first episode's opening already starts with showing JSDF soldiers in foxholes, machine guns at the ready, only to then move to a frontal shot of a tank (Figure 2), barrel facing the viewer to hammer home the machine's impressive and intimidating power of destruction. Such frontal perspectives are common, the first episode alone features similar shots of armoured infantry vehicles, attack helicopters, artillery guns, etc. Particularly the end of the episode is a veritable parade of military equipment, as the JSDF advances through the gate for the first time, three minutes of the episode are dedicated to showing a succession of military vehicles pass through, interceded with footage of the main character Itami inside one of the vehicles, wearing full combat gear.

The idea of mastery over such equipment has also been identified as coded masculine, employing Paul Higate's terminology of military hardware as "big boys' toys" (2003, p. 34) to show how weaponry serves to both reaffirm military masculinity as well as vehicles for pleasure. This is also the case in *Gate* and in many cases, the viewer is directly spoken to through the series' visual language. Besides the opening, where we observe the opposing fantasy army through what appears to be a gun's magnifying scope, it also features very prominently in the middle of the first episode ('*Jieitai, Isekai e Iku* [The Self-Defence Force Goes to Another World]', 2015). Initially surprised by the invading Imperial army suddenly bursting forth from the gate, the first half of the actual episode is mostly a slaughter of Japanese civilians, but at the halfway point, local JSDF units finally show up to defend the city. Our first sight of these forces is a frontal



Figure 2 Full frontal of tank on unknown battlefield in episode 1 opening.

shot of a GSDF attack helicopter. However, immediately following that, we switch into a first-person perspective from inside the helicopter's cockpit, facing a dragon in front of it (Figure 3). Still in first-person, we then see the otherwise unidentified pilot's hand operate a control stick (Figure 4), followed by a close-up of the helicopter's gatling gun firing and ripping apart the dragon, after which the helicopter flies by dramatically, the imaginary camera gliding over the "Ground Self-Defense Force" (*Rikujō Jieitai*) marking on the helicopter's tail, all accompanied by a dramatic and heroic soundtrack in the background.

Here, *GATE* very explicitly creates a space for self-insertion into the narrative, encouraging viewers to imagine themselves as the pilot of this helicopter and thus to get a taste of how wielding such deadly equipment feels like. Particularly with the videogame-like first person perspective, this scene fits comfortably in a standard otaku database of "self-insert" fantasy and brings to mind visual elements from

military-themed videogames (Grimshaw, Charlton and Jagger, 2011), thus linking the actions of the faceless pilot in GATE with a sense of personal pleasure and accomplishment derived from similar experiences in gaming. Particularly in the narrative context of a foreign attack on Tokyo in the episode, this linkage of “third person” combat (i.e. viewed from the outside) and first person combat connects the viewer to the events on screen as a pseudo-participant in them, encouraging them to feel outrage and despair at the attack on the Japanese capital and then relief and satisfaction at (participating in) the destruction of the invaders.



Figure 3 View from the cockpit, facing a dragon.



Figure 4 Videogame-like first-person-perspective of the helicopter controls. The pilot remains unseen and unheard, thus allowing and encouraging full viewer immersion.

In this, a major difference between the medium of popular culture and the medium of JSDF YouTube emerges. Because whilst the real JSDF can at most tease its weaponry's destructive potential by showing weapons being fired at faceless, imaginary enemies in training scenarios, *Gate* is explicit in depicting military equipment as powerful tools of violence, used against actual human-shaped enemies. In fact, *Gate* does not only show this violence, but positively celebrates it, relishing the JSDF's destructive potential and deploying it frequently for the viewers' pleasure. The JSDF frequently deploys violence in the series and these sequences are depicted extensively, including framing dialogue and musical accompaniment which marks these instances of killing as heroic and satisfying. Two episodes are prominent examples for this pattern. In episode 17 ('Kessen [Decisive Battle]', 2016), a host of JSDF units attack two dragon hatchlings pursuing the main characters, using jet fighters, helicopters, and artillery to take down the monsters. The scene opens with the firing of rockets and guns from two fighter jets, which is then followed by the other weapons all being fired in sequence, leaving only scattered pieces of the dragons. Here, pleasure is derived from modern weaponry easily annihilating mythical entities usually amongst the strongest in such fantasy settings, thus giving pleasure not only through the extreme destructive capabilities of modern JSDF weapons, but also through the almost humorous subversion of classic genre tropes.

The other remarkable example, episode 6 ('Ikusa Megami no Kikō [Ride of the Valkyries]', 2015), meanwhile features a unit of JSDF helicopters sent to save the imperial city of Italica from attacking brigands, blasting Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" from their helicopters in a conscious attempt to copy the enigmatic helicopter assault

scene from Frank Coppola's famous film "Apocalypse Now". The original scene, depicting a US helicopter assault on a Vietnamese village, is complicated in its meaning, offering a rousing joy in American violence and encouraging aggression in viewers, whilst on the other hand still having that identification with the soldiers never be complete (Kinder, 1979, p. 19; MacDowell, 2016, p. 160). In a film that is ambiguous about pro- or anti-war messaging (Tomasulo, 1990), such a scene also carries a deep irony, showing warfare as insanity and thus making it repulsive to the viewer (MacDowell, 2016, p. 161). GATE strips out any nuance from its recreation of the scene however, presenting a much simpler narrative where the people falling to JSDF gunfire are clearly armed enemies who were just about to murder and rape in a captured city, removing any ethical tensions from the scene. With a simple black-and-white dichotomy of good and evil thus set up, viewers get to simply indulge in the extreme technological gap between the forces, with the JSDF simply annihilating their medieval opponents. The act of killing itself is portrayed liberally here, stripped of any moral qualms. As before, the viewer is also again invited to join, with perspective partially switched to a first-person shooter-game like killing of enemies through the gun's sights (Figure 5). As discussed above, such perspectives link GATE to military videogames and encourage viewer immersion, which is why they are found throughout the anime, including at other points in the story as well (Figure 6), making it a relatively common element in GATE's visual language.

However, to maintain the boundary between violence as pleasurable and violence as brutal and despicable, entertainment media need to frame the violence on screen as moral or "just" violence for the audience (Donovan, 2010, p. 214; Soltysik Monnet, 2018, p. 1389). GATE solves this problem in multiple ways. In the previous examples, the first one sidesteps any moral questions by not even fighting a humanoid opponent but rather dragons, i.e. monstrous and dangerous animals. In the second example, the violence is made just by clearly framing the attacking force as evil and seemingly also incapable of surrender, as even in the face of overwhelming JSDF superiority they do not seem to drop their weapons at all, thus providing convenient justification for killing even running enemies (Figure 5). In its bluntest form, the need to morally justify JSDF violence is seen in episode 2 ('Futatsu no Gunzei [Two Military Forces]', 2015), where enemy forces in seeking to attack the JSDF's positions literally trample over a warning sign, completely deflecting any moral responsibility for their deaths away from the JSDF (Figure 7).



Figure 5 Soldier shooting enemies from helicopter, including a game-like first person perspective.



Figure 6 First-person-shooter like display of combat later in the anime.



Figure 7 Imperial troops ignoring a JSDF warning sign before being annihilated by artillery and machine gun fire.

Pleasure in violence is, however, also reliant on a feeling of relief for the viewer which comes from on-screen violence destroying or overcoming things the viewers view as issues in the real world, e.g. corruption, terrorism, etc. (Donovan, 2010, p. 226). In GATE, the issue to be overcome is Japan's previous military defeat in World War II and the associated feeling of Japan as martially disempowered. For Azuma Hiroki, the "trauma of defeat" fundamentally underpins otaku culture (2009, p. 15). With a focus on re-constructing the "good old Japan" destroyed in World War II through pop-cultural imagery of "genuine" Japanese culture, American influence on Japanese culture and the American victory more broadly are narratively brushed aside (2009, pp. 13, 22). This symbolic role of "real" Japanese culture also features in GATE, where the first Japanese diplomats to arrive in the empire notably bring with them products of traditional Japanese craftsmanship to communicate the essence of Japan to the Imperial nobility (Figure 8). Notably, these items include silks, lacquerware bowls and a sword, but none of the more contemporary products Japan is famous for, like consumer electronics. GATE thus draws on an otaku understanding of historical Japan as "genuine" and uncorrupted by foreign influences.

But defeat is also overcome much more directly in GATE, as the cultural theme is reflected, but a much more assertive vision of Japan violently reasserting itself as an independent military power is ultimately at the heart of the anime. Azuma diagnosed that the aforementioned aspects of otaku culture reflect "Japan's inability to come to terms with war defeat", which in turn results in an affinity between otaku culture and right-wing politics, where "right-wing Japanese discourse has generally survived by allowing itself to become subculturized, falsified, and otaku-ized" (2009, p. 24). Through this context, Japanese military violence in GATE then becomes pleasurable,

as it reverses the trauma of defeat by showing Japan as a dominating military power, as being able to act independently with “genuine Japanese” motivations, rather than relying on (and even resisting!) the United States. The otherwise tedious repetition of overwhelming Japanese military power is thus rendered pleasurable through offering fantastical relief for an audience that wants to see Japan’s military humiliation undone and reversed. Travelling through the gate is then a highly symbolic act which frees the JSDF from the constraints of the real world and allows it to fully assert the martial power of the Japanese nation, dishing out humiliation rather than receiving it. This humiliation of the fantasy world’s empire is done in the plot itself, e.g. with the imperial princess Piña expressing shock and fear at witnessing JSDF weaponry in action, but also visually, for example through showing the fear and impotence of imperial soldiers when facing the JSDF (Figure 5) or by having entire armies from the empire and its allies being annihilated by the JSDF before even catching sight of their enemy. In such battles, the human toll Japan’s enemies pay is emphasized, including on-screen texts informing the viewer that, e.g. “40,000” imperial troops were killed. And by showing a desolate commander standing amongst the bodies of his slain men (Figure 8).



Figure 8 Traditional Japanese products delivered to Imperial nobility by Japanese diplomats.

Technology in GATE thus serves a central role, not only as a “big boy’s toy” and object of desire for viewers to enjoy, but also importantly as a tool for exercising violence, which in itself is portrayed as pleasurable. Most interestingly, GATE does not at all shy away from portraying the human cost of that violent potential (Figure 9), even emphasizing it in going out of its way to include information such as numbers of enemies killed in a battle. In fact, weaponry and violence are not shown as pleasurable in spite of this destructive and brutal power, but rather because of it. For only through the military humiliation of the Imperial “other” can GATE construct a fantasy of

cathartic relief for Japanese viewers still occupied with the “trauma of defeat”, using fantasy as a mean to instead show a Japan that is militarily powerful and showing the human cost it inflicts on others, rather than what others do to it. GATE directly taps into right-wing political discourse conserved within otaku culture to construct its fantasy of national renewal through large scale just violence, externalising the humiliation of the Japanese Empire onto the vaguely Western “special region” Empire. The repeated use of weapons and military violence in GATE can thus be understood as a pleasurable database element for its (implicitly Japanese) viewers, satisfying an “animalised” need for meaning and national identity through a power fantasy (Azuma, 2009, p. 95).



Figure 9 King Elbe, an ally of the empire, standing amongst the bodies of his slaughtered men, with machine-gun fire continuing to cover the area.

JSDF Masculinity and GATE as a Colonial Adventure

Masculinity as a theme runs through GATE, as was already in the previous section’s referral to military weaponry as markers of masculine power or “big boys’ toys”. However, to understand how masculinity works in GATE, one needs to look at the series’ narrative structure. In its effort to blend otaku culture and militarism, GATE adopts what Soltysik Monnet calls the “war adventure formula”, where the hero as an agent of civilisation is sent to fight in a savage and dangerous frontier zone (2018, p. 1378). Specifically, it corresponds with the “frontiersman” subtype of adventure stories, which involves a heroes journey into a colonial “frontier”, facing its dangers and bringing their “superior” civilisation to that frontier, i.e. “taming” it (Green, 1991). Adventure stories are designed to create empathy with the protagonist and, despite showing violence as costly, nevertheless maintain that violence ultimately is pleasurable and makes the wielder of violence more mature (Soltysik Monnet, 2018,

p. 1378). The heroes of such adventure stories are embedded in a civilisation/savagery dichotomy, where they occupy the side of the civilised engaging with a savage “other” who can either become a subordinate ally or irredeemable enemy (Green, 1991, p. 36). In classical adventure stories, the hero’s white masculinity is then a central element of the story, marking him as superior to the non-white “savages” surrounding him whilst also disconnecting him from their violent “savage” methods, which he might deploy, but only strategically in order to combat his ruthless enemies (Soltysik Monnet, 2018, pp. 1380–1381).

In GATE, Itami is a classical adventure hero, being presented as relatable (an otaku himself who just wants to pursue his hobbies in peace) but also elite (a highly regarded special forces soldier), he inspires admiration in most people from the uncivilised frontier zone and effectively kills those who oppose him, without displaying any pleasure in violence. He is shown as sometimes flawed, e.g. in his often unserious attitude towards his work or disregard for regulations or strategy, but ultimately reliably doing “what is right”, thus showing a consistent moral compass and high virtue, earning him (sometimes begrudging) respect from fellow Japanese too. As an adventure protagonist, Itami thus serves to assert Japanese superiority vis-à-vis the (in this case fictional) colonial other, whilst also creating an attractive image of war as a place for a real man to prove himself, mature and be rewarded, gaining status through esteem from his fellow men. Itami, for example, is often referred to as an inspiration by other soldiers when desperate people are looking for help and they need to make hard decisions, a pattern so prominent it even features in an episode title (‘Itami nara [What Would Itami Do]’, 2015).

Itami’s role as an adventure protagonist connects to his leadership qualities, which in turn are shown as directly related to his military training and occupation. The earliest instance of this leadership is seen in the first episode, where Itami saves a Tokyo police officer by taking down a charging enemy in close combat, then helps to coordinate the evacuation of citizens to the inner courtyards of the imperial palace, an action for which he is awarded a medal and promotion in the same episode. Following his example, other JSDF soldiers are also shown grimly and decisively defending Tokyo and the Japanese people by efficiently taking down the invaders (Figure 10). This is continued in the Special Region too, where Itami’s scouting detachment is shown building positive relations with locals and assisting as well as protecting them in evacuating their village to escape a dragon attack, despite them not being Japanese. This incident, including a brief battle with the dragon, is shown as an example of JSDF altruistic heroism and with grateful villagers smiling and waving goodbye to the JSDF soldiers after parting from them, the viewer is left in no doubt about the JSDF’s benevolence.

That altruistic good nature of the JSDF is then put into contrast with a political and media environment holding the JSDF back and forcing it to be so cautious in its

actions that they struggle to get permission to do “what is right” on the local level. An example illustrating this is the attack of a dragon on a forest-dwelling dark elf community, which is being killed off bit by bit in the dragon’s attacks, prompting them to send Yao Haa Duushi as an envoy to the JSDF to plead for help. But the JSDF, whilst sympathetic to the elves’ plight, refuses to act as the forest is situated in a neighbouring kingdom and they are apprehensive of the political backlash that an armed foray there might cause. Speaking amongst themselves, JSDF officers express frustration about not being able to help, talking about how the media and opposition parties would hammer the government on this if they did and thus potentially endanger the entire mission. This concern with a critical domestic public mirrors Japan’s “traumatic” experience in the 1st Gulf War, where domestic constraints made Japan unable to contribute anything but finances and some out-of-combat minesweeping support, a contribution that was deemed lacklustre by the international community, resulting in criticism from allies and humiliating experiences like being left out of Kuwait’s published list of countries thanked for its liberation (Nakanishi, 2011). There is some doubt about the degree to which this trauma was actually constructed domestically at a later point, but at the very least the inability to take action certainly was perceived as traumatic by diplomatic and military elites (Bochorodycz, 2024).



Figure 10 JSDF soldiers defending Tokyo from troops that invaded through the gate.

This frustrated feeling of being hamstrung by a restrictive domestic environment is important in GATE, where it is made abundantly clear that the JSDF would altruistically help the elves if not for the political pressure it was under, portraying public oversight of the military as a hindrance to its main protective mission and thus directly endangering lives. Ultimately, this conundrum serves to further set up Itami as a leader and adventure protagonist, as despite the restrictions placed on the JSDF he still ends

up going to try and do something, being sent to the forest without further JSDF support on what is claimed to be a “resource exploration” mission. Illustrated by this story arc is the need for a hero and true leader to also occasionally break with the hierarchy in order to “do what is right”. GATE thus gives some shape to the JSDF’s vague mission of “protection”, identified in the previous chapter. In the series, protection is explicitly framed as the protection of all civilians in Japan and the Special Region, a wide definition that in turn allows for indiscriminate violence against anybody who is armed and even just might be threatening them. Furthermore, as illustrated by the dragon story, it can also mean protecting civilians from the incompetency of civilian government, implying that due to its mission of protection, the JSDF ultimately holds a higher moral authority and standard than any other institution.

Additionally, JSDF commanders shown as the paragons of good leadership, who above all else prioritise serving and protecting the country and care most about the lives of civilians and soldiers under their command, are also coded as distinctly masculine visually. They are exclusively men and generally portrayed as broad-shouldered and burly, imposing masculine figures who embody values of traditional masculinity like strength, decisiveness, and sense of duty. This style of leadership is not entirely limited to officers, but GATE clearly shows proximity to military work as directly linked to strong and moral leadership in other parts of the anime. Japanese defence minister Tarō Kanō, who features both the square physique and loud, masculine leadership style of the JSDF officers, is the clearest embodiment of this. As a friend of the protagonist, he is immediately introduced as a sympathetic character with everyone’s best interests at heart. Placed adjacent to the military sphere as Minister of Defence and visually marked with characteristics of masculine leadership, Tarō then serves as a supporting hero for the story whose power and virtue are both directly derived from martial masculinity.

His antagonist is prime minister Morita, who comes into office halfway through the anime and who both visually and narratively is shown as the total opposite of Tarō, embodying an effeminate and “weak” style of leadership which GATE often associates with civilian authorities. Where Tarō is broad and tough, with a deep voice and a rough, physical demeanour, Morita is shown as gaunt and soft, speaking softly and seemingly without conviction, his signature phrase being “I understand, I understand” (*wakatte imasu, wakatte imasu*). He is also shown to be weak in conviction and indecisive. When, in the last couple of episodes, the Japanese delegation and imperial pro-Japanese politicians are under siege in the Japanese embassy at the imperial capital, Morita is shown to hesitate, refusing to authorise Tarō’s plan for a JSDF rescue mission due to fears over how the media and other nations might take the news. Following Tarō’s repeated pressure (Figure 11), Morita eventually asks him if he is willing to lose the election over this, to which Tarō replies that he believes it to be their duty as politicians to be decisive in situations like these and that a lost election would be a price he is willing to pay. GATE thus clearly contrasts Tarō’s martial masculinity,

suitable for leadership and guided by moral conviction, with Morita's masculinity, that is feminised and shown as incapable of making decisive calls and taking selfless, difficult decisions. Through this, GATE actually shows multiple masculinities at play, acknowledging the multiplicity of masculinity whilst also making a distinct case for the superiority and thus hegemony of the JSDF's martial masculinity (Connell, 2005). This argument picks up Japanese right-wing talking points, resonating for example with former prime minister Abe Shinzō's political writings, where he criticised Japan's post-war business-focused, bureaucratic style of masculinity (LeBlanc, 2012, p. 863), praising the character-building qualities of military service and martial masculinity instead (Abe, 2013, pp. 131–132).



Figure 11 Tarō confronting Morita over the latter's indecision in authorising a rescue mission. Morita's stiff bookishness is visually contrasted to the masculine and dynamic Tarō.

Masculinity also plays an important role in the relationship between the Japanese heroes, most prominently Itami as the adventure hero, and their “colonial others” from the Special Region. As mentioned before, these others become either “subordinate allies” or “irredeemable enemies”, both of which are present in GATE and both of which contain strong gendered connotations. The subordinate allies are most prominently represented by the “peace faction” within the Empire, led by princess Piña. Notably, most of the faces of this faction are women, either the princess herself or some of her loyal companions. GATE here not only draws on the idea of the colonial frontier as a space of (hetero)sexual opportunity, but also draws a distinction between the feminine and caring peace faction, who is capable of recognising Japanese superiority and thus at least principally civilised, with the savage war faction. As subordinate allies, the Empire then is feminised through the characters in the peace faction and shown as looking up to Japan as the superior culture. This is in part done through sexuality as

well, as the positioning of Japanese military men as uniquely attractive to “native” women is a prominent component of GATE discussed in a later section.



Figure 12 Naked figure of prince Zorzal facing the viewer, showing off his confidence and muscular physique.

On the side of the irredeemable enemies, meanwhile, we have the crown-prince Zorzal, who is first introduced through the violent sexual assault of a female slave and then shown facing the viewer whilst still naked (Figure 12). This way of introduction shows him immediately as a detestable and violent, but also potently masculine figure, an impression hammered home by his extremely muscular physique as well as his confident, aggressive demeanour. He acts as the JSDF’s main antagonist, refusing to submit or make peace and indifferent to employing brutal tactics. Thus, whilst princess Piña represents a feminised version of the Empire that willingly submits itself to the superior Japanese and embraces their civilisation, Zorzal represents a brutish sort of “savage” masculinity, which is physically powerful, but much less sophisticated and lacking the civilised morality of Japanese military masculinity. In this, he reflects the racialised colonial other which modern, “progressive” militaries have been observed constructing (Razack, 2004; Khalili, 2011). Being thus built up as an avatar of savage Imperial masculinity, he is ultimately humiliated and beaten by Japanese masculinity, as in episode 14 (‘Teito Gekishin [The Imperial Capital Quake]’, 2016), Itami directly punches him in the face (Figure 13). This humiliation is then further deepened by having Kobayashi, the only female soldier present, thoroughly beating him for information afterwards (Figure 14), emasculating him by having him, literally, beat by a girl (Sjoberg, 2007, p. 95).



Figure 13 Itami immediately punching Zorzal upon discovering the latter's Japanese slave.



Figure 14 Kuribayashi beating up prince Zorzal for information after discovering and saving the abducted Japanese woman.

This scene is particularly notable also for its context. In it, the JSDF soldiers are initially in the Imperial capital for a completely different reason, looking to provide assistance after a recent earthquake and warning about follow-up quakes. Their discussion with the emperor is then interrupted by Zorzal bursting in and delivering a similar warning, dragging with him a female slave who had been the one telling him. It is immediately clear that the slave is a Japanese woman captured during the Imperial attack on Tokyo and kept by Zorzal as a sex slave ever since. Upon seeing this, the JSDF personnel

present immediately attack him to free the woman and demand the immediate release of any other captives. This scene clearly refers the Japanese national trauma of the “Abduction Issue” where North Korea abducted 17 Japanese citizens. Mostly happening in the 1970s and 1980s, these abductions were done from Japanese soil and despite initially receiving little attention, at the latest since North Korea’s admission of the Abductions in 2002, the complete recovery of all abductees have become a Japanese foreign policy imperative (Johnston, 2004; Lynn, 2006). To this day, the Abduction Issue is a strongly felt Japanese security trauma, continuing to occupy an extremely prominent place in both the country’s security policy and national identity discourse (Mason and Maslow, 2015; Krickel-Choi, 2022).

GATE replicates this trauma in its story but offers a different resolution through direct violence and thus immediately recovering the abductees. In this, the series once again taps into a right-wing political narrative about Japan’s supposedly “weak” response to the Abduction Issue, with Abe Shinzō pointedly declaring that the abduction victims were “abandoned by their country” (*kuni ni misuterareta*) (Abe, 2013, pp. 49–50). This discourse about the Abduction Issue is deeply gendered, as Japan is framed as a feminised victim, establishing the need for a new Japanese saviour-masculinity (Fahrenwaldt, forthcoming). GATE picks up this threat and directly shows a way of rehabilitating Japanese masculinity, reacting immediately and violently, thus quickly retrieving the abductee and punishing the abductor. Mirroring the pleasurable fantasy of reclaiming Japanese martial power discussed in the previous section, this scene then serves a fantasy of reclaiming Japanese masculine power vis-à-vis the abductor, highlighting in the process how JSDF martial masculinity provides a more appropriate response to such national emergencies than the weak responses of civilian bureaucrats.

In summary, masculinity is central to GATE’s colonial adventure and much space is devoted to exalting military masculinity as superior in multiple ways, directly contrasting it with multiple different “inferior” masculinities. The setting of the colonial frontier is important for this story in providing an environment conducive to the construction of military fantasies, representing a space “where the laws of the law-promulgating center are relaxed” therefore allowing JSDF to realise its full potential (Soltysik Monnet, 2018, p. 1380). In the next section, I will go further into examining this colonial frontier and Japan’s own version of imperialism therein.

Good Imperialism, Bad Imperialism and Right-Wing Fantasies

The last section showed GATE’s colonial adventure narrative structure, where the “Special Region” serves as a de-facto colonial frontier. But Gate goes way beyond merely embedding its story in a genre with heavy colonialist influences (Soltysik Monnet, 2018, p. 1377). Rather, it very actively and consciously raises the issue of colonialism itself, weaving a contradictory narrative about the JSDF and Japanese government rejecting international pressures for colonial exploitation of the Special

Region and proclaiming a desire for equal and friendly relations with the Empire instead, while at the same time exhibiting a clear colonialist attitude towards the Special Region themselves, e.g. through the use of gunboat diplomacy and planning resource exploitation. The Special Region, by virtue of not being of this world, allows Gate to explore these themes without restraint, drawing on the previously explored aspects of superior JSDF masculine leadership and power to construct a fantasy which portrays Japan's position in the real world as precarious and prayed upon by larger superpowers, whilst also sketching out a path out of this inferior position through engaging in distinctly "benevolent" Japanese imperialism instead, thus breaking the superpowers' hold over Japan. Combined with contrasting portrayals of a weak and corrupt civilian politics and strong and moral militarists, GATE thus creates a right-wing fantasy where both Japan and its new subordinate allies in the Empire are saved through JSDF militarism. This illustrates a unique point about GATE, which, more than any other source analysed in this dissertation, gets overtly political and actually ties in JSDF militarism with right-wing politics, something which all other sources are carefully avoid doing at least overtly.

First, a very notable element of the anime is the contrast it draws between the Japanese approach to the Special Region and other countries' positions. This can be observed from early on in the anime, starting in episode 2 ('Futatsu no Gunzei [Two Military Forces]', 2015), where we are shown a scene from the White House of the American president talking to one of his advisors about the Special Region, complaining that the Japanese progress is too slow and remarking that the special region is a "frontier" potentially rich in resources, potentially warranting America dispatching its own troops there. The advisor then cautions him to wait, remarking that many countries are eagerly waiting for Japan make a mistake. Transparently referencing the colonisation of the American west as a model for dealing with the Special Region, this scene serves to construct an American imperialism as foil for Japan's engagement in the Special region, whilst the reference to "Japan making a mistake" also refers to Japan's own imperial history, the content of the mistake thus being a repeat of Japan's imperial expansion in Asia. This interpretation is visually supported by showing scenes from a demonstration near the gate in Tokyo, demanding that the gate be closed (Figure 15). These protesters thus demand a return to the post war pacifist anti-interventionism Japan embraced as a consequence of its defeat, framing the JSDF's foray into the Special Region as similar to Japanese military ventures during the wartime era (Easley, 2017).

Gate contests this framing by showing the modern JSDF's approach to the Special Region, taking care to portray Japan as responsible and well-meaning, looking for cooperation rather than domination. This is achieved on the one hand through contrasting the Japanese approach with the aforementioned American imperialism or even with Chinese imperialism, as in one scene in episode 4, the chairman of the Chinese Communist Party is shown advocating that China should send a significant

share of its population to the Special Region as settlers ('Mishiranu Chi e [To Unknown Lands]', 2015). On the other hand, it is portrayed through contrasting "superior" Japanese norms and attitudes towards international relations with what is common practice in the Special Region's Empire. Notably, after the JSDF helicopter assault relieved the siege of the imperial city of Italica with overwhelming force, Princess Piña and her advisors are shown deliberating what concessions they might need to make, preparing to send hostages and expecting the JSDF to demand far-reaching concessions. They are then shocked when the JSDF does not attempt to take possession of the city, refuses hostages or payments and simply requests the deal with the princess to serve as the basis for future peace negotiations between Japan and the Empire. Consequently, for the rest of the anime too the JSDF's stated goal remains a peace agreement between the Empire and Japan as equals rather than subjugation or conquest, a fact that is shown to continuously confuse imperial dignitaries who are unfamiliar with this way of thinking.



Figure 15 Protesters gathering in Tokyo, carrying signs demanding that the gate be closed and opposing the JSDF's deployment to the Special Region.

In refusing to treat a materially far inferior enemy as a target for conquest and exploitation, the JSDF and Japan are thus portrayed once more as a morally superior entity, though this time this is extended to the Japanese government as a whole. The Japan portrayed in *Gate* has learned from history, seeking neither dominion nor control, but only peace and cooperation, quite different from both the Empire and the earth's large powers who are only intent on dominating the Special Region for their own gain. *Gate* thus portrays the real world as one of ruthless, zero-sum international politics, where powerful states other than Japan are only interested in domination, meaning that disengaging from the real world and instead engaging with the Special Region

where Japan is hegemonic would be the only way to create a “just” international order. This just order very directly builds on existing right-wing fantasies and historical revisionism about Japan’s imperial past, effectively embracing the idea of a superior, selfless Japanese spirit setting it apart from other fundamentally selfish powers like the US or China (Perkins, 2011).

Despite being Japan’s ostensible ally, the United States plays an antagonistic role in GATE, being shown not only interested in the colonial exploitation of the Special Region, but also exploiting their relative power over Japan. Japan and the US are connected by the US-Japan Security Treaty, cementing a commitment to mutual defence and, as had been shown in the context of JSDF PR and recruitment materials, the Americans have a large profile as Japan’s primary military ally. In GATE, however, this alliance is framed as rhetorical whitewashing of American coercive politics towards Japan. The previously mentioned scene from the White House is one example showing how in Gate, American leadership looks upon Japan as a useful pawn more than an equal ally, aiming to deflect negativity onto Japan before they themselves take any responsibility.

An even more egregious example is shown in a later episode, where after Itami and the group of girls from the Special Region have given testament in parliament, they are treated to a holiday in a hot spring, only for the woods around the hot spring to become a battleground between Russian, Chinese, and American special forces keen on kidnapping the girls, and a group of JSDF special forces seeking to protect them. When the JSDF forces annihilate all foreign agents approaching the location (thus also providing a rare instance showing Japanese martial superiority over other real-world nations too), the American president responds by threatening the Japanese prime minister on the phone. He tells him that if he does not call back JSDF forces and allow the Americans to finish their mission, intelligence reports of the prime minister accepting bribery might make it to the media. In this conversation, the US president makes much use of the language of friendship and partnership, framing the blackmail as a friendly favour by the Japanese for the Americans’ fortunate catch of the incriminating information before it reached the public. The tone of these statements, however, is deeply ironic and the viewer is never left in any doubt about the power dynamics in the scene, making clear that in Gate, the US-Japanese friendship is nothing of the sort. Visually too the unequal relationship is underlined, showing the American president smiling smugly, fully aware of his power, while the Japanese Prime Minister is left floundering, caught off guard by the stack of secret documents suddenly placed on his desk (Figure 16).

Yet, despite GATE’s eagerness to stress the differences between Japanese diplomacy and American or Chinese imperialism, their actual conduct in the Special Region is distinctly marked by their own brand of imperialism. In episode 4, JSDF officer Yanagihara talks to Itami about the political implications of the JSDF’s presence in the

Special Region, stating that as it could potentially alienate most of the real world's major powers, it would need to be able to draw similar or greater benefits from the Special Region. In this, Yanagihara explicitly refers to Japanese exploitation of Special Region resources, an idea that is later put into practice, when in negotiating with one of the Empire's vassal kings to gain access to his country, Yanagihara also pushes the king to concede mining rights for all minerals other than gold and silver to Japan. Engaging in such economic imperialism then puts his kingdom and Japan in a fundamentally unequal and colonial relationship, with the king clearly unaware of the economic value of his concession and in need of JSDF firepower to defeat the dragon nesting in his territory, he readily accedes to Yanagihara's conditions, agreeing to what is in effect an "unequal treaty", opening up his kingdom to Japanese economic exploitation.



Figure 16 The American president on the phone with the Japanese prime minister, threatening the latter with the exposure of incriminating information (bottom left) if JSDF special forces are not told to stand down.



Figure 17 Princess Pina being proclaimed the Empire's heir. The scene's vivid colours, blurred edges and upbeat soundtrack clearly mark this as an instance for celebration.

Similarly, Japanese support of Princess Pina and her "pro-peace faction" is shown as motivated by a mere desire for peace, though ultimately, it amounts to a very clear and violent meddling in the Empire's internal politics with the explicit aim of establishing a friendly government. This effort culminates in Pina being proclaimed the Empire's heir by her father, a scene that serves as the happy end of the anime and is portrayed lavishly as a happy outcome, using highly saturated bright colours, blurring in the shot's frame and elements like falling confetti/petals to visually underline the scene's positive intent (Figure 17). Japanese imperialism then is portrayed as fundamentally different from other imperialisms as it is constructed around what Asada calls the "empty centre" of JSDF masculine values. Submission under this regime then is redefined as liberation, as Imperial subordinate allies are given a distinct role to play in a harmonious system, almost completely mirroring Asada's analysis of Imperial Japan's "Great East Asian Coprosperity Sphere" as the "absolute contradictory self-identity between liberation from European [or in this

case, American or even Imperial] imperialism and aggression by Japanese imperialism” (Asada, 1989, p. 277).



Figure 18 American and Russian presidents shown observing the televised hearing of Itami and the others. Just after this, the Chinese leader is also added to the watchers.

The unquestionable goodness of JSDF military values and unique benevolence of Japanese moral leadership are thus the taken-for-granted elements located within the empty centre around which identities are constructed (protagonist, supporter, ally, enemy) and which ultimately drives Japanese imperialism in the Special Region as a necessary and benevolent action, defending both Japan and the Empire from the greedy and malevolent imperialisms of earth's other powers. GATE thus presents a surprisingly blatant nationalist story that would not have been out of place in 1930s Imperial Japan. However, through the postmodern construction around the empty centre and the transplantation of this narrative into the world of fantasy, it is also distinctly postmodern, a fiction of Imperial Japan constructed in order to reclaim some sort of "genuine" Japanese identity but that is ultimately still reproduces Japanese traumas as a "pseudo-Japan manufactured from U.S.-produced material" (Azuma, 2009, p. 2020).

In its paradoxical attempt to construct this genuine Japanese identity, GATE then tries to return to World War II Japan, just before the last severance of Japanese cultural traditions (Azuma, 2009, p. 22). Thus, the JSDF is put in the place of the Imperial Armed Forces and militarism and masculinity are once more made into core social values. This leaves the JSDF as a fundamentally good and benevolent organisation that is ultimately hamstrung by the foreign imposed non-Japanese political and media environment as its enemy. GATE is not subtle about this in any way, as important democratic institutions like parliament and the press are outright villainised in the

series (Orlando and Hermawan, 2019). Episode 8 ('Mon no Mukō no Nihon [Japan, Beyond the Gate]', 2015) makes this most explicit, as Itami, Lelei, Tuka and Rory are summoned to give testimony before the Japanese parliament about the JSDF's evacuation of villagers fleeing from the fire dragon attack and the civilian deaths sustained therein. It is clear from the very beginning of the proceedings, which are visually staged as highly important through such devices as showing the hearing on a big screen in Tokyo with people stopping to look or displaying it as if filming a television screen, then doubling down on its importance by adding international political leaders watching the proceedings (Figure 18). Questions to Itami and the others are led by the female politician Kōhara Mizuko who, carrying a sign pointing out that 150 people died (Figure 19), is portrayed as uninterested in truth-finding and only desiring to make the JSDF look as bad as possible, constantly asking leading questions and attempting to make Itami admit JSDF mistakes in the operation.

That the parliamentarian is only interested in tearing down the JSDF is left in no doubt, as when calling forth the demigod Rory, she is shown chuckling to herself at seeing Rory's veil and dark clothing, believing them to be signs of mourning and thus representing an opening for her to portray the JSDF in a bad light. To also leave no doubt about her character, the episode includes a long close-up of her face with an evil expression while having these thoughts (Figure 20). Encouraged to feel scorn and frustration at observing a morally corrupt politician trying to tear down the JSDF's selfless heroism, otaku viewers of the series are reinforced in understanding social values and standards as "dysfunctional", thus requiring the construction of alternatives (Azuma, 2009, p. 27). Similar scenes are also present in other parts of the anime, for example in a later episode, a male journalist reporting on the JSDF in the Special Region is shown in a similar way (Figure 21), expressing a fundamental disinterest in truthful reporting and instead saying that his only job is to write stories that sell and making the JSDF look bad is his way to do so.

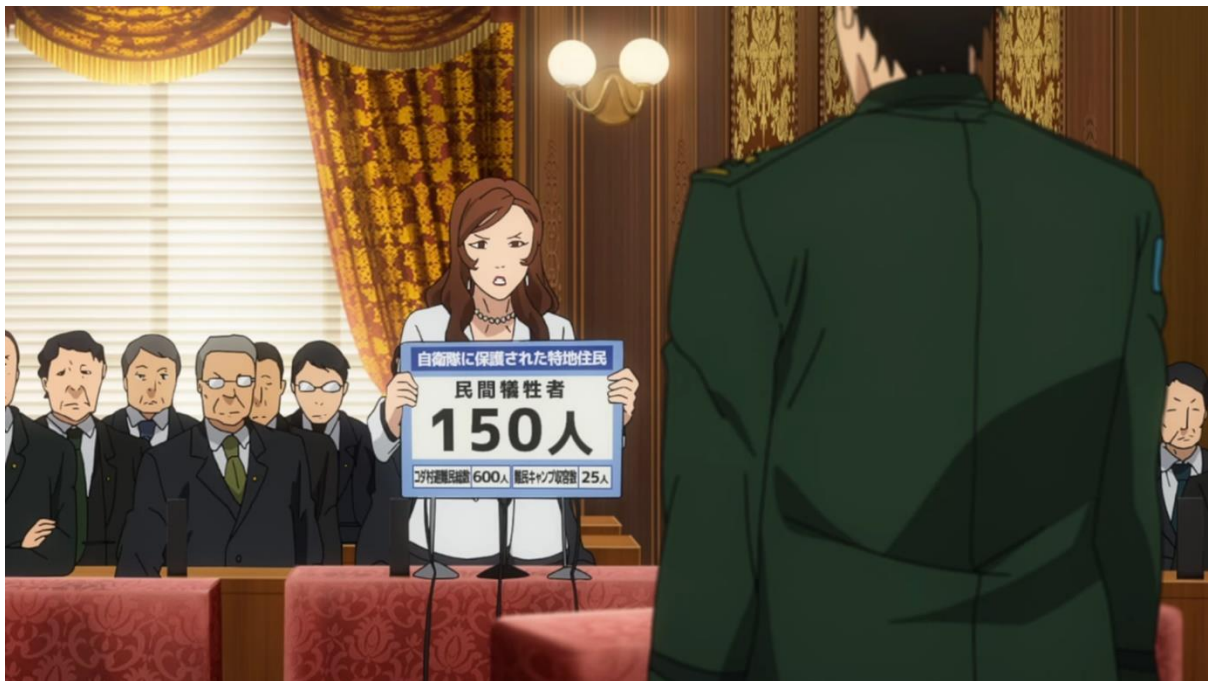


Figure 19 Female parliamentarian Kōhara Mizuko questioning Itami, insisting on getting an admission of guilt over the 150 villagers' deaths.



Figure 20 Kōhara Mizuko shown as a villainous character taking delight in twisting a narrative to her purposes, though why exactly she wants to take down the JSDF so badly is never touched upon.



Figure 21 Male journalist determined to create a bad image of the JSDF, expressing doubt at the positive relations with locals portrayed in the base and looking to sell a narrative for financial gain.



Figure 22 JSDF shown doing humanitarian work, scenes appearing on screen during Rory's speech in the hearing at the Japanese parliament.

Standing against these civilian elites with the JSDF it is mainly the three girls from the Special Region, uncorrupted by the Japanese post-war environment and thus able to see the true benevolence of Japanese militarism, who offer resistance against Kōhara and those like her. In GATE's right-wing fantasy, it is therefore the subordinate allies from the colonial frontier who ultimately bear witness to the superiority and virtue of the JSDF, bringing it back from the frontier to the metropolis in an effort to reform that

very metropolis of its harmful elements. In the story, this is concretely achieved through Rory, who responds to Kōhara's leading questioning by calling her an idiot and explaining how the JSDF in fact heroically defended and saved many villagers whilst also doing their best to care for everyone. This explanation is supported by on-screen depictions of the JSDF fighting the dragon as well as them doing humanitarian work (Figure 22). Underlined by heroic, uplifting music, the scene shows a triumph of good over evil, with Rory scuttling Kōyama's plan through her (foreign) frankness, thus reinforcing the idea of the Special Region as the source of positive change for Japan as well.

Ultimately then, it is only through fighting in the Special Region that the JSDF can fully liberate itself from the paralysing restrictions placed on it in Japan and as a direct product of this, those who get to see the JSDF's true nature (also including the Japanese woman captured by Zorzal) then inevitably come to embrace it and its brand of masculine militarism as positive and necessary. Adopting and adapting Asada's words then, "if this spontaneously spreads, the "Special Region Coprosperity Sphere" [...] will be formed" (Asada, 1989, p. 277). Ultimately, this is achieved through the creation of subordinate allies in the Special Region, where Japanese military and moral superiority then directly produces cooperation and admiration. Imperialism, militarism and right-wing politics in this scenario are all different consequences of the same ideological mechanism, i.e. the empty centre where military masculinity is enshrined. With its superiority and universal goodness declared, any opponent of the JSDF can only be savage, evil, or both. The benevolence of the JSDF and Japanese militarism is axiomatic, accordingly enemies of the JSDF too do not seriously engage with it and GATE only shows them as evil for vague selfish reasons. At the same time, submission of the feminised Empire to a JSDF-led Japan is also a direct and logical conclusion of that same axiomatic superiority as the Empire can at best aspire to emulate Japan and become a lesser (subordinate) version of it.

In the next section, some of the gendered dynamics of this will be further explored through studying the role of femininity in GATE, which is important both on the Japanese and Imperial side.

Militarising "Moe": Fantasy Girls and Women in Arms

Femininity fulfils multiple roles in GATE, often mirroring the role of women in JSDF YouTube videos but also with some genre-specific quirks that are notable. One of those quirk relates to GATE's blending of otaku and military databases, thus resulting in GATE importing and presenting a large number of classical "moe elements" in its visual language and narrative, many of which are tied to female characters in particular. GATE does this in a very self-conscious way, not only incorporating a number of moe elements like demi-human girls (elves, bunny-girls, etc.), magicians, or underage-looking characters (loli) who are in reality multiple hundred years old, but also having its Japanese characters refer to these characters as an otaku would, i.e. identifying

them as moe elements and obsessing over the particular trope-like qualities. In one scene, for example, the Itami and his driver Kurata sit in the front seats of their jeep when spotting the character Rory, a young-looking girl in overly elaborate frilly dress and carrying a gigantic scythe ahead of them. Their immediate reaction is to draw the appropriate moe element from the database in excitedly exclaiming “goth loli!”.

In this scene, we observe an instance of the Japanese characters feeling “moe” in its most direct form, an affective response as a spontaneous reaction to a fictional character (Galbraith, 2019, p. 82). This is somewhat odd as in the context of the anime, Rory would not be fictional, as she literally stands in front of the two men. However, as otaku, the two would immediately recognise the various moe elements of her person, thus inscribing a fictional identity to the real person, similar to the otaku practice of “cosplay”, where people (often women) dress up as fictional characters and are interacted with as those characters while in costume (King, 2019; Ting, 2020, p. 312). Additionally, as this scene takes place in the Special Region it is also physically set in a world understood as fictional, mirroring isekai genre conventions of the “other world” as a reflection of human fantasy (Price, 2021). GATE does then follow typical otaku convention in the portrayal of its characters, albeit with a degree of self-awareness which is a bit uncommon but not unheard of in otaku culture and its related media. With this adoption of otaku convention then also comes a core function of femininity as a source of “moe”, positioning the “beautiful girls” (*bishōjo*) of the Special Region (and the Japanese women to a lesser degree too) as potential objects of otaku love and devotion, i.e. moe (Galbraith, 2014, p. 11).

Every character from GATE’s fantasy world then exhibits some combination of moe-elements, either through dress, body or behaviour. The vast majority of these characters are female, thus working with the assumption of the otaku viewer as male and heterosexual, offering them a fantasy that heavily leans into heterosexual themes (explored more deeply in the next section) as well. In the narrative itself, these characters however pivot around Itami as the main character, who, in line with Isekai genre-conventions, is set up as the centre of gravity in the group and slowly building a harem of admiring women as well (Price, 2021, p. 80), with Lelei, Tuka, Rory and a few other female characters shown to express romantic interest in him. Ultimately though, none of his relationships with any of the girls go beyond fantasy and romantic or sexual scenes are often played for comedy, as is the case when Rory attempts to very aggressively seduce him, only to be interrupted by an attack on their lodgings, or another scene where Lelei declares that she and Itami are married due to having slept in the same room for three nights.

GATE thus creates teasing fantasies, often with distinct heterosexual eroticism and in some cases also catering to darker fantasies such as paedophilic relationships (Lelei, for example, is 15 years old) or sexual slavery, the dark elf Yao for example offers her body to Itami as payment for JSDF assistance against the dragon destroying her

community. These fantasies are, however, never played out to their implied conclusion, Itami never actually engages in any direct romantic or sexual activity with any of the women attracted to him and steadfastly refuses offers like Yao's. Sexualised femininity in GATE then maintains a certain distance as an object of fantasy, reflecting what Azuma identifies as the divide between perverted imagery and conservative sexuality amongst otakus. Self-identified otaku Itami thus desires the fantasy of consuming "moe-elements" and being serviced by e.g. demi-human girls in maid costumes (Figure 23), but there ultimately remains a vague sense of distance, with no character daring or wishing to actually live out these fantasies to the fullest extent.

At the same time, GATE cannot allow to fully engage in sexual fantasy also because of its strong military component. In the previous sections, I have shown how the military men in GATE are held up as paragons of masculine virtue, a role which in turn forecloses any actual realisation of harem fantasies as incompatible with the conservative ideal embodied by these military men. Similarly, none of the Japanese women portrayed in GATE are part of these harem fantasies, highlighting the difference between a domestic Japanese femininity that needs to remain virtuous and the colonial femininity of women of the Special Region, which can be promiscuous and thus offers a potential site for sexual adventure and fantasy. Accordingly, none of the Japanese women in the series are shown in any kind of romantic engagement or even flirtation with others. Instead, they are shown as honest, kind and caring, thus helping to maintain the idea of Japanese moral superiority. In this function, they can even criticise the male characters' behaviour, with the combat medic Kurokawa for example occasionally reprimanding Itami when she suspects him of harbouring undue sexual intentions towards the girls in the Special Region. Such scenes are played for company, as Itami is shown to not actually have any such plans, but they also reinforce the idea of Japanese women as the keepers of moral standards, which Japanese men generally should obey, although the colonial frontier provides some temptations. In this, GATE's portrayal of different kinds of sexualised womanhood mirrors that found in historical instances of colonialism, where distinctions between white women as carriers of virtuous civilisation and colonial women as promiscuous sexual objects were common (McClintock, 1995).

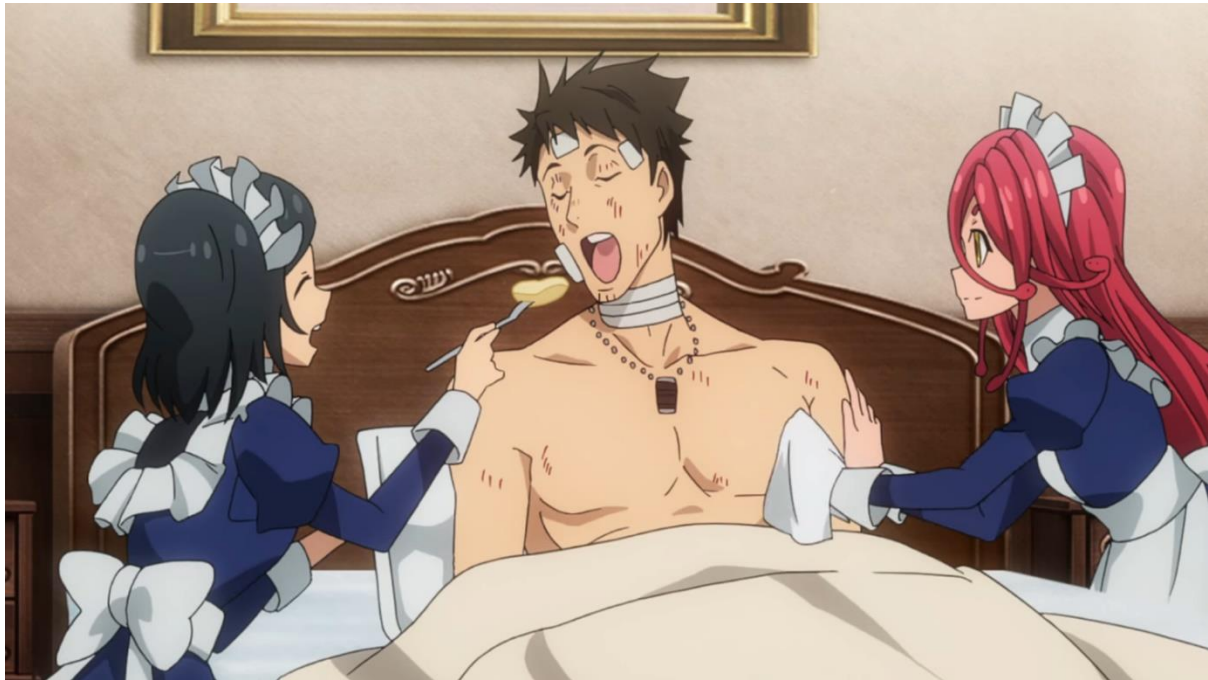


Figure 23 An injured Itami being cared for by a group of human and demi-human maids at the mansion of an imperial noble. This scene is explicitly staged as him living the otaku fantasy, with another soldier walking in on him like this expressing his envy.

Women are not only sources of “moe” or sexualised fantasies though. For example, the group of girls surrounding Itami (Lelei, Tuka & Rory) are also shown as active supporters of the JSDF and its efforts in the Special Region. Both Lelei and Tuka had been saved from a dragon attack by the JSDF, thus starting out as grateful refugees living at the JSDF camp. Expressing a desire to earn their right to stay and assist the JSDF, the two, eventually joined by Rory, become increasingly involved in Itami’s missions, ultimately backing him up in combat too, become something like local auxiliaries to the JSDF themselves (Figure 24). Over the course of the anime’s storyline, they gradually move towards integration with the JSDF and wider Japanese society, an impression that is visually and narratively reinforced throughout the anime by having them adopt various Japanese customs and even going to Japan. During a parliamentary hearing, they defend the JSDF and become even further integrated with the force, symbolically culminating in them trying on JSDF uniform and apparently joining the JSDF (though perhaps temporarily) in the series’ second outro, starting from episode 13 (Figure 25).



Figure 24 Rory walking in front of JSDF helicopters, preparing to engage a rival demigod after having taken down a group of dragons with the JSDF's help. Symbolically significant positioning of her "leading" JSDF forces.



Figure 25 Leilei, Rory and Tuka, the group of girls usually accompanying Itami, dressed up in JSDF uniform and partaking in military life during the anime's second ending theme.

GATE thus also integrates femininity in its militarism, showing that women can also be part of the military exalted in GATE, explicitly also including women from the Special Region. This is most prominently the case with Princess Piña's Rose Knights, whose most prominent faces are all women of imperial descent and who are shown in multiple episodes as dedicated and heroic warriors, tirelessly defending the Japanese embassy in the capital before JSDF reinforcements arrive during the last

few episodes (Figure 26). These women are thus shown to be strong fighters, highly virtuous, embracing Japanese civilisation and willing to sacrifice themselves to defend the embassy with their lives. Yet whilst the Rose Knights embody heroic martial values in a way similar to the JSDF, they ultimately differ in two important points. First, while their fighting is heroic, they are nevertheless reliant on being saved by the (masculine) JSDF forces, marking their status as “subordinate allies” and ultimately still in of protection from the JSDF’s masculine soldiers, with two knights being princess-carried into a helicopter as emblematic of that dynamic (Figure 27). Second, their martial prowess is conditional on them not transgressing gender boundaries, with the Rose Knights shown in full plate armour, but retaining a feminine shape, elaborate hairstyles, as well as make-up and accessories (Figure 28). Thus, they are women first and warriors second, respectable for their martial prowess, but never transgressing gender roles and, as GATE is happy to show and as will be analysed in the next section, always available as potential sexual partners for male JSDF soldiers. Their martial femininity complements martial masculinity without threatening it, reaffirming the hegemonically masculine claim of male JSDF soldiers.



Figure 26 Rose Knights facing Imperial secret police and defending the Japanese embassy and its inhabitants.



Figure 27 JSDF soldiers carrying female knights to safety.



Figure 28 Group of Rose Knights riding towards the viewer. Their design blends elements of martial knighthood with courtly femininity.

The potential threat to the masculine status of soldierhood by women's martiality is managed through the dual strategy of visual feminisation (outfit, hairstyles, etc.) and sexualisation by male characters or the viewers themselves. Sabine Frühstück had observed this same dynamic in her observation of media representations of female JSDF soldiers, finding that bikini photos or other ways of sexualising them and thus returning them discursively to the feminine sphere of society (2007, p. 109). Itami's fellow soldier Kuribayashi is instructive here, as a woman soldier with a tomboyish

appearance, aggressive tendencies, and a strong preference (and capability) for close combat, she might very well transgress gendered boundaries of male and female much more blatantly than e.g. Kurokawa, who serves as a medic (an immediately more feminine role), has long hair, a feminine demeanour, and is hardly ever shown in combat or even wielding a weapon. Kuribayashi's potential transgression is however pre-empted in the aforementioned way, feminising her through giving the character design large breasts and using them prominently to sexualise her in a voyeuristic way. To a degree, this is the case even in scenes with other focus (e.g. Figure 13) but it is most egregious in episode 9 ('Hakonesanchū Yasen [The Hakone Mountain Night Battle]', 2015), which features an extended shot of her drunk sleeping figure, chest half-exposed (Figure 29). With the viewer thus encouraged to take voyeuristic pleasure in Kuribayashi's body, her status as a soldier may not necessarily undermined, but her status as feminine and as a potential object of male sexual desire is cemented.



Figure 29 Sleeping Kuribayashi with half-exposed chest, shown in an extended shot for the viewer's pleasure.

Femininity in GATE thus serves primarily as an object of fantasy, generating moe from otaku viewers. But there is at least a token role open for women in GATE's militarism, provided they do not transgress gender boundaries, thus requiring them to either fill comparatively feminine roles within the JSDF, or at least maintain visual markers of femininity and heterosexual availability in order to integrate into GATE's male-centric fantasy. In the next section, the role that this heterosexuality plays will be further investigated.

Martial Heterosexuality

Sexuality and particularly heterosexuality plays a crucial role in GATE, as has been hinted at in the previous section already. An assumption of a male heterosexual viewer

underlies the construction of fantasy in GATE, where male viewers are expected to feel affection (and attraction) to the female characters. Additionally, it has been shown that sexuality is used as a way of policing gender boundaries, with the potential transgression of female martiality being reigned in through sexualising those same women.

Through this pattern, military masculinity can even be reinforced then, as women who are strong warriors are shown to still look for “a match” in a JSDF soldier, whose masculinity is thus elevated as one so elite that the warrior woman can only be attracted to it. A very prominent example of this is the Rose Knights’ deputy commander Bozens, who, after spending some time with the JSDF and after being rescued from the Imperial capital by being carried on the back of a male soldier, falls in love with that very same soldier, revealing in the last episode of the series (*Kaku tatakaeri [Thus, They Fought There]*, 2016) that they are going to get married and that she is already pregnant (Figure 30). Bozens as a virtuous knight and capable warrior is thus still ultimately prone to a “damsel in distress” sort of romance, immediately developing romantic feelings for her rescuer, whose masculinity is elevated in turn. This last episode is also generally notable for heterosexuality in GATE, as it includes similar reveals of another two couplings between male JSDF soldiers and women from the special region, each being given a couple shot similar to Figure 29 in the episode.



Figure 30 Female knight Bozens and her male JSDF partner revealing their relationship and Bozens' pregnancy in the last episode.

It is notable, however, that this pattern of sexual rewards for soldiers seems only available to the men of the JSDF. None of the female soldiers are ever shown in anything even close to a romantic context with a person from the Special Region, a fact that is played up self-consciously in their shocked reaction to the formed couples

too (Figure 31). GATE's portrayal of relationships then reflects a pattern of elevating not just heterosexuality in general, but specifically male heterosexuality as part of the narrative. Just as the JSDF displayed in Gate is primarily masculine, whilst allowing for limited female participation, it also takes a very masculine perspective on sexuality, taking the presumed heterosexual desires of its male heroes as the starting point. Following this logic, female soldiers like Kuribayashi, whose shocked reaction to the couplings is most emphasised and extreme, can only ever be the sexual object, never the subject, as was described in the previous section.



Figure 31 Shocked reactions by those left single. Note the prominent inclusion of the only two named female JSDF soldiers here, with Kuribayashi in the middle.

Female soldiers in the JSDF are thus largely denied sexual agency and portrayed as “still available” for male soldiers to claim as partners. Through this integration into a heterosexual relationship architecture centred around male desire, female soldiers are absorbed fully into their military work, as male soldiers are their only conceivable partners (Frühstück, 2007, p. 107). At the same time, their status within the martially-centred world of the JSDF is linked to that of male soldiers, who are ultimately the only ones framed as having agency in romance and who thus occupy a relatively higher position than military women. Another consequence of this portrayal is that with leaving the women without concrete partners whilst upholding the general idea of who could be their partner, they are effectively partnered with military men as a whole. Such a constellation shares control over military women amongst military men in a dynamic that Carol Pateman identified as “fraternity”, with men being equals in their control over women (Pateman, 1988). Building on the concept of fraternity, Ben Wadham uses the term “fratriarchies” when describing often violent male groups forming in military contexts, which serve an important role in creating bonds between military men whilst

putting down women (Wadham, 2017, pp. 249–250). The dynamic observed in GATE is of course not presented as violent in any way, however the previously described clear divide between masculine and feminine spheres with control of the masculine sphere over the feminine it still provides the benign face of the patriarchy, showing the system of masculine dominance as benevolent but fully maintaining its structure.



Figure 32 Male characters shown bathing in the second outro, paradoxically blending jokes about homosexuality with an erotic appeal to homoerotic desire at the same time.

Homosexuality, on the other hand, is much less present in GATE but does not remain completely unacknowledged. However, male homosexuality is more a recurring joke than anything else and female homosexuality is hardly present at all but for one or two vaguely homoerotic scenes clearly designed for male viewers' titillation. The recurring joke about male homosexuality follows the script of one character (often Itami himself) expressing something to a fellow male soldier (e.g. remarking that it's just the two of them in a bathhouse), causing the other character to get flustered and proclaim his attraction to women. This reinforces the notion so prominent in Gate that the Japanese soldier is per definition heterosexual, allegations of homosexuality thus need to be vigorously fended off. Ultimately, despite their frantic claims to be only attracted to women being shown as somewhat ridiculous and comedic, they are nevertheless portrayed as understandable and normal, with the character causing the misunderstanding too seems eager to assert that this is not what he meant. There is a single scene where this pattern is complicated at least a little, with one shot from the second outro featuring Itami and two other male soldiers in the bath and Itami being hugged by one of the other soldiers (Figure 32). From Itami's shocked expression, it is clear even without any dialogue that this scene generally follows the same pattern of playing homosexuality as a joke. It does, however, also feature

gratuitous views of the soldiers muscular naked bodies. Thinking back to the similar portrayal of prince Zorzal (Figure 12), Gate thus seems to at least indirectly try and cater to male homosexual desire too, presenting male bodies as “fanservice” similar to women’s bodies (Denison, 2015, p. 53). The potential conflict posed between this and the centrality of heterosexuality in defining male soldiers is resolved through homosexual attraction remaining eternally unacknowledged, even when clearly alluded to visually. A male soldier in Gate or male viewer of the series might thus well hold and even pursue homosexual desires privately, but overall public heterosexuality is without alternative for them.

In GATE, heterosexuality is thus without (openly acknowledgeable) alternative. This is because heterosexuality is intimately tied to both masculinity and femininity, demarcating both and maintaining a hierarchical power structure between them that keeps men as active and women as passive, either current or potential sexual partners of military men.

Conclusion

In summary then, what does the analysis of GATE tell us and how does it relate to what was previously discussed regarding JSDF YouTube videos? Identifying the same four themes that already guided my analysis of JSDF YouTube videos, I found that in many points, patterns identified in those videos are present in GATE too. Notable examples include the strong focus on military hardware, positioning weapons technology as one of the core appeals of military work and playing into the idea of masculine control over deadly weaponry as status-affirming. Similarly, masculinity played a crucial role in GATE as it did on YouTube, with military work being portrayed as masculine by default and military men as elite men. On femininity and heterosexuality meanwhile, the divergences between GATE and JSDF YouTube are probably the most extensive, but here as well, many patterns are consistent between the two, including portrayals of a small number of women assimilating into military masculinity, a few other women taking on military support roles, and military men taking on some traditionally feminine qualities like gentleness or care in certain circumstances. Similarly, heterosexuality is portrayed as default in both and despite hinting at several transgressive sexual fantasies, GATE ultimately does follow the same conservative sexual morale found in JSDF YouTube, where happy, heterosexual nuclear families are the only form of relationship recognised.

GATE then differs in certain important ways. First, in trying to speak to both a military enthusiast and anime-otaku audience, GATE blends different databases, which means that we see database elements from the previous section pop up alongside entirely different ones, which are instead drawn from the better known “moe elements” of the otaku database. GATE is also much more unapologetically political and militaristic than the JSDF YouTube channels, creating a right-wing fantasy of a Japan that rediscovers martial virtues and where post-war civilian authorities are put in their place,

where Japan once more acts as an independent military power on par with other world powers due to its quasi-colonial relationship with the Special Region. Lastly, GATE also makes extensive use of heterosexuality in order to maintain gender role boundaries in the JSDF, whilst at the same time drawing on heterosexual harem fantasies present in otaku culture to both entertain the viewer and exalt JSDF masculinity.

A lot of the differences between GATE and JSDF YouTube then connect to the difference in medium. As a commercial production with support *from* the JSDF but not made *by* the JSDF, GATE has significantly more freedom to delve into politics and be direct in its message. Additionally, the medium of anime also contributes to this, as anime viewers will generally expect to be presented with a fantasy or even just the jumping off point for creating their own fantasy, anime can therefore remove otherwise difficult topics from their immediate real-world context, something that GATE even takes literally in transplanting much of the story to a fantasy world. However, with this opportunity also come expectations, as an otaku audience will demand a show that caters to otaku desires, i.e. a show that draws from the otaku database. Therefore, GATE tries to integrate the two, often successful but sometimes resulting in tensions, as in the case of heterosexual fantasies, where GATE is unable to engage fully in otaku fantasy as it comes into conflict with conservative military morals.

What makes the comparison between the two so interesting then is the large amount of overlap between the two, despite that difference in medium. As I argued in this chapter, this is because GATE's fantasy is organised in the pattern of a "protected area" constructed around an "empty centre", as described by Asada Akira. Thus, military masculinity is at the heart of everything in GATE and military masculinity's fundamental goodness and strength is the axiom under which the entire plots operates. In other words, it forms the protective space within which the actors of the story play out the narrative. Both of these sources then let the same seed grow under different soil conditions, resulting in a structurally similar final product in two different shapes. Going forward, the question then is to which degree this ideological core of JSDF militarism continues to be present in the next chapter and what to make of differences found between the various sources.

Militarised Spaces: JSDF Museums

Introduction

The last two chapters have found significant overlap between the JSDF's portrayal in its own YouTube channels and the anime GATE, as well as differences related to the type of media. What is constant, however, is the central narrative axis of military masculinity, which, employing Asada Akira's theory of the social structure of Japanese infantile capitalism, serves as the "empty centre" around which a "protected area" is constructed. This protected area obscures the hierarchical structure and military violence at the core of the JSDF, instead creating an illusion of "equal play" within the "protected area". This commonality in structure then results in a commonality in narrative, as in both previous chapters, certain visual themes or, using Azuma Hiroki's words "moe elements" were consistently present across both media. This indicates that both JSDF YouTube and GATE draw on a shared military database, from which certain visual and narrative elements are taken and presented to viewers of either medium to consume and derive pleasure from, without the need to formulate a larger "grand narrative".

Turning towards an entirely different medium once more, the question then is how this translates to the context of military museums. JSDF museums come closest to the site of direct military-civilian contact Eyal Ben-Ari and Sabine Frühstück (2003) observed in their study on the Fuji Firepower Review. As such, they offer a space for actual interaction with the JSDF, a factor that is integrated into the design of all three museums analysed in this chapter in different ways. This mode of interaction also provide the perhaps most memorable and personally impressive version of JSDF self-narration as a dedicated interactive experience, presenting the JSDF in an entertaining and engaging way. Through the unique characteristics of physical presence and the emotional engagement constructed by it, museums combine discursive as well as sub-discursive elements, crafting "authentic" and impressive experiences (Sakamoto, 2015). In this, they are also constructed directly for the purpose of pleasure, as they market themselves as visitor attractions more so than educational facilities, though different museums sit at different points on the entertainment to education scale.

Military museums do share some similarities with JSDF YouTube videos. First of all, they are all established and directly administered by the individual branches of the JSDF, making them a very direct way of crafting and promoting a self-narrative of each individual branch of the forces. As all of these museums are free, they also do not rely on entrance fees or any other sort of funding by visitors, thus being entirely tools of JSDF public relations. They also require an opt-in by their audience, whilst presenting a hurdle to that opt-in that is much higher than in JSDF YouTube, where a simple click on a video was enough. Instead, as physical structures in only very few places on the

Japanese archipelago, the museums need to be actively sought out by potential visitors, meaning that their audience is likely going to be coming to these museums with an already friendly or at worst neutral disposition towards the JSDF. This reflects the “military subculture” aspect talked about in the previous two chapters to an extreme degree, giving the JSDF branches an avenue to present themselves to a highly sympathetic audience with little fear of criticism, thus making the museums sites of a distilled version of JSDF military identity. It has to be noted though, that this higher hurdle also naturally results in a much reduced reach compared to a medium like JSDF YouTube, as the requirement of physical presence already makes it unlikely for any but the most dedicated ASDF fan to visit places like the ASDF museum in Hamamatsu, a multi-hour train ride away from Japan’s major population centres around Tokyo and Osaka.

The specific museums analysed in this chapter are the “Japan Ground Self Defense Force Public Information Center”, the “Japan Air Self Defense Force Air Park PR-centre” and the “Japan Maritime Self Defense Force Kure Museum”. Notably, these are not the only museums operated by the JSDF and the MoD, as they also operate a number of other physical spaces, including small museums at JSDF bases and open days in various bases and the ministry building in Tokyo itself. I did, however, chose to focus on these three museums, as they are the overall biggest museums and most likely to attract a significant number of visitors. Two of the three (the GSDF and ASDF museums) are positioned as the singular “official” museum of the entire branch, with all other spaces only catering to specific local circumstances. For the MSDF, meanwhile, the situation is a bit more complicated, as it also operates a museum similar to the Kure Museum in the southern Japanese port city of Sasebo. Ultimately, the decision to include the Kure Museum rather than the Sasebo Museum then comes down to three reasons: location, size and content.

Location is important mainly for accessibility, both for me as the researcher and for potential visitors. Kure has a clear advantage here, being located less than an hour away from Hiroshima and thus within easy reach of a major city which also links into the national highspeed rail network, a fact that I made use of by making a daytrip to Kure from Osaka. Sasebo, on the other hand, is over 2 hours away from the closest major city, Nagasaki, which is also significantly smaller than Hiroshima. Kure also has the advantage of hosting the Battleship Yamato Museum as well, which is a major tourist magnet and thus makes the trip to Kure much more worthwhile for military enthusiasts. Size is the second factor, the Kure Museum is simply the more impressive structure, with its landed submarine attachment and relatively generous floorspace, compared to the relatively clinical Sasebo Museum. Third, content matters because the Kure Museum has a lot more diversity in its exhibition, as the Sasebo Museum is almost entirely dedicated to displaying ship models. Overall, with budget and time constraints making a visit of both impossible, I thus decided to only visit Kure.

Regarding structure, this chapter will be divided into 4 main sections. The first section after this introduction will address some of the academic literature on museums and military museums in particular, reflecting on the purpose and status of the three museums studied here and explaining the methodology used in studying them. Following that, each section will look at one of the three museums, following the previously established categories of technology, masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality to guide the structure of my analysis, looking where known database elements are reappearing and where significant differences to previous sources might be. In this, I will analyse the museums in the order they were introduced in above, therefore starting with the Ground Self Defense Force, moving on to the Air Self Defense Force and closing with the Maritime Self Defense Force.

The Museum as a Medium

Museums are special institutions in various ways. Through collecting and displaying artefacts, they emerged to form an important role in modern societies by putting material culture into a narrative framework. Modernity breaks up the experience of community as a “shared topos”, where past experiences were perceived as generally the same as those in the present and questions of temporal direction or development where thus irrelevant in the face of a continuous social fabric (Hetherington, 2006, p. 600). Instead, it creates a sense of past and future, orienting experiences away from the present in a disorienting way, as the present is reframed by the expectation of what is to come in the future instead (Koselleck, 2018, pp. 17–18). Museums as narrative institutions then help alleviate that uncertainty by grouping and displaying artefacts in a particular way that explains “our uncertain and complex set of experiences” by integrating them into a larger narrative where they make sense (Hetherington, 2006, p. 600). In a quintessentially modern way, museums thus plug material culture into “grand narratives” of social or technological progress which serve to orient the present in relation to past and future, seeking to “articulate narratives of experience and identity and to make sense of the relationship between time and space in a modern world where they are thrown continually into doubt” (Hetherington, 2006, p. 601). Museums therefore are “legitimising institutions” (Kavanagh, 1989, p. 36). Nevertheless, modern museums are also sites of potential subversion for such narratives (Hetherington, 2006, p. 602) and war museums in particular have often changed radically in character to more critical portrayals of war and militarism, leading historian Jay Winter to declare that “those who design and run war museums have a moral responsibility to avoid the glorification of war” (Winter, 2017, p. 33).

What then does this mean for the study of JSDF museums? First of all, one can ask whether they even qualify as museums. Two of the three museums studied do not call themselves museums, instead using the term “public information centre” (*kōhō sentā/kōhōkan*). One could therefore argue that these institutions are not museums but rather public outreach centres for the JSDF. However, despite them not claiming

museum status, these two institutions exhibit all the criteria generally associated with museums. Eugene Dillenburg summarises that museums are commonly defined through being non-profit, permanent, open to the public, providing a public service, holding collections, and communicating about those collections through exhibits (2011, p. 9). He then argues that most of these criteria are not actually essential to a museum, saying that ultimately mainly through the creation of an exhibit, which is the core function of museums and which can be defined as “a physical environment designed for the experience of embedded knowledge” (Dillenburg, 2011, p. 13). All three JSDF museums arguably fulfil all the criteria, with the provision of a public service probably the only contentious point depending on one’s political view on whether militaries provide a public good or not. But if we stress the importance of the exhibit as a physical environment where knowledge is experienced, the status of the “public information centres” as museums becomes evident as they are primarily sites where collections of military equipment are arranged into exhibits through which technical, organisational and operational knowledge about JSDF operations is transmitted as part of a distinct visiting experience.

Understanding the JSDF institutions as museums then opens them up to scrutiny based on what can be found in museum literature. Accepting experiential learning in museums as their central purpose, analysis of the JSDF museums should then also focus on the exhibitions and the content and method of their teaching about war and military work. Falling into the larger category of war museums, academic literature on war museums can theoretically guide this chapter’s analysis of JSDF museums. In practice, however, JSDF museums differ significantly from superficially similar museums like the German Tank Museum in Munster (Raths, 2017, p. 84), as they are fully funded and controlled by the respective JSDF branches and therefore not independent in any way. As a result of this, they produce a radically different perspective on war than many independently curated war museums. Following Winter’s previously cited call for war museums to avoid glorifying war (2017, p. 33) many such museums embrace ideas about contrasting the “beauty” of weapons with their “down-to-earth” use as killing tools (Rekdal, 2017, p. 129), or simply re-introducing the human presence in war with its associated “history of blood, guts, misery and despair”(Raths, 2017, p. 88). The JSDF museums, on the other hand, have fundamentally different goals, as their main mission is to create a positive image of the JSDF and boost recruitment, making them fundamentally less interested in portraying war in a realistic way, instead resorting to a sanitised and celebratory portrayal instead (Scott, 2015).

Much of the analysis of the museums will then focus on the differences between them and other museums, with the goal of sketching a clear picture of the role JSDF museums fulfil in a larger promotional strategy. An important question in this analysis then also needs to be how one might best understand the type of exhibition presented. The academic literature on museums highlights their role as a legitimising institution

and a site for narrative meaning-making. However, as the previous two chapters have shown, such coherent narration is not necessarily found in JSDF portrayals, which are instead organised in visual databases making up a collection of “small narratives”, all taking place in a larger gendered “protected space”. It will therefore be important to look at whether JSDF museums are advocating specific narratives or if they instead choose a different approach, e.g. one focused on “rivet-counting”, a style of exhibition that presents technological objects as if existing in a social vacuum, purely pleasurable in themselves, aiming purely to appeal to male machine enthusiasts (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 118). Approaching this question requires a reading of the exhibition as a whole and is necessarily qualitative in nature. Thus, while individual parts of the exhibits will be examined in detail, each section in this chapter will also analyse the aggregated experience of the exhibition, focusing on the structure of the exhibition, the role of the visitor in the experience and, to the degree that it actually exists, the narrative direction of the exhibition.

Going into the specifics of each museums’ exhibition, I then structure my observations by using the previously established categories of technology, masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality as guidelines for the analysis. However, these categories are not to constrain what is observed or force observations into a pre-determined mould. Instead, their main purpose is to relate observations from the JSDF museums to those from the previous two categories. This works both where a category fits well and where it doesn’t illustrating the degree to which the databases from YouTube or GATE can be applied in the case of JSDF museums. Even a lack of observations fitting into one of the categories thus requires explanation, further refining the image of JSDF militarism emerging in this dissertation. Additionally, such an absence can also speak in itself, for example in a situation where military masculinity is well represented but femininity is not made visible at all, the gap in representation says a lot about the gendering of military work and identity. Observations are also defined broadly, focusing mainly on the exhibitions of the museums, but also extending to other aspects of the visiting experience where relevant, for example, museum staff or other visitors are included in the analysis where relevant.

The research in this chapter is then almost ethnographic in character, relying primarily on my own physical presence at the museums and my accounting of the overall experience. To a degree, this is inevitable, as despite the prominent featuring of visuality from extensive photography in this chapter, museums are ultimately multisensory experiences and research of their exhibitions thus requires the human medium (Dillenburg, 2011, p. 13). Accordingly, this chapter is deeply qualitative in nature, providing a particular perspective of the museums that is not only coloured by me as the person experiencing the exhibition, but also by other circumstantial factors like the day of my visit, etc. which might impact the experience e.g. through different workers at the museum or a different visitor profile. My own physical as a tall white person might have also influenced the data gathered as museum visitors in general

where overwhelmingly Japanese, thus making it impossible for me to visit as a “normal” visitor and possibly receiving special attention from staff compared to other visitors, though it is impossible to say to which degree this influenced the data collected.

Going into the museums as a “normal” visitor then came with some practical and ethical/political consequences though. Visiting the museums and later noting as much of what I experienced as possible in my fieldnotes, I effectively became a covert researcher as nothing about my presence would declare my researcher status to museum staff or visitors. This can have possible ethical implications, but I believe that as my focus was mainly on the exhibitions themselves and I only noted information about visitors in regard to broad visitation patterns observed, no harm potential existed. It did, however, have significant practical implications as I became perhaps overly conscious of my researcher status, thus actively avoiding engagement with visitors and staff, particularly in the first museum I visited (GSDF Museum). Thus, I might have actually interacted less with staff and visitors than a normal visitor who is not consciously avoiding such contact.

This dynamic is also situated within a larger power dynamic between me as a researcher and the JSDF and MoD as gatekeepers for my research access. While visiting the museums does not require any special permission, in preparation for my fieldwork, I had reached out to the MoD in the hopes of securing interviews with MoD personnel as well as staff at the museums I planned to visit. And whilst I was granted an interview with people from the MoD public relations team in Tokyo, my request for interviews at the museums was denied with the explicit reasoning that the MoD would not be able to control what is being said in those circumstances. Besides shaping my research design, this also influenced my behaviour at the museums, as I was now hypersensitive to not conduct “illicit” interviews by asking museum staff too many questions. This anxiety was further amplified by the MoD’s request to be informed about the days of my visit in advance, which I took to mean that museums would be aware of my visit. When at the GSDF Museum this was evidently not the case, I struggled to readjust and find a good middle ground of gathering as much data as possible without overstepping what I had agreed with the MoD. As this adaption took time and practice, I was much more willing to have “normal” interactions at the ASDF and MSDF museums than at the GSDF Museum. Besides the ethical and practical questions discussed, this policy of aiming to maintain strict central control is however instructive, showing the importance, a centralised coherent narrative seems to have to the MoD’s public relations team.

War For the Entire Family: The JGSDF Public Information Center

The Ground Self Defense Force’s main museum is located in Asaka city, Saitama prefecture, a roughly half-hour train ride from central Tokyo, making it accessible to a large number of people in the Greater Tokyo area. It is part of “Asaka Camp”, a major

GSDF base which also hosts the headquarters of the GSDF's Eastern Army. The museum itself is at the outskirts of the base and easily accessible by car or foot. It is relatively modern but not particularly large, with the main exhibition mostly relegated to one large hangar-like structure, some smaller, much less frequented, exhibition spaces on the second floor, a separate event room, a museum shop and a small fenced-in outdoor areal for displaying tanks and other vehicles. It is staffed by relatively few staff members, who generally do not interact with visitors much beyond what is necessary to oversee interactive exhibits or manage visitor flows. Museum staff are young to middle-aged and wear GSDF fatigues, therefore seeming to be active soldiers. At a glance there seem to roughly equal numbers of female and male staff members.

The exhibition itself is dominated by large pieces of military equipment like an attack helicopter and an infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) placed inside the main museum hall, as well as a selection of tanks and self-propelled guns in the museum's little outside area. Besides these, much space is also dedicated to interactive exhibits, ranging from a large attack helicopter simulator (with one seat for a pilot and one for a gunner), to an upstairs room dedicated to VR "inside views" of military vehicle and smaller exhibits like pieces of infantry equipment one can pick up to experience how heavy they are (Figure 33). What there was very little of, however, were written information boards. There were some at the margins of the main exhibits and much more in-depth ones on the second floor in a quiet corner (Figure 34). The ones on the second floor contained by far the highest information density, indicating that they are intended for interested adult visitors who want to know about the deeper security background of the GSDF.



Figure 33 GSDF backpacks and bulletproof vest laid out for visitors to try on/try to lift, illustrating the heaviness of GSDF equipment.

第2 国家防衛戦略

我が国は、戦後、最も複雑な安全保障環境に直面しています。国民の命と平和を脅かす脅威の多岐化、その底しに深刻に正面から向き合い、相手の能力と新しい戦い方に奮闘し、新能力の抜本的強化を断行する必要があります。防衛力の抜本的強化とともに国力を総合した国家全体の防衛体制の強化を、積極的推進を持って一体として実施することこそが、我が国の防衛を要するところとなります。

この安全保障の要は、戦後、1976年以降の国連加盟と冷戦「防衛社会の発展」時代を経て、我が国の防衛目標、防衛目標達成のためのアプローチとがその要する安全保障の要に示す「国家防衛戦略」を決定しました。本戦略は、戦後の防衛政策の大きな転換点であり、中長期的な防衛能力強化の方向性と内容を示すものです。その意義について国民の皆様の理解が深まるよう政府として努めてまいります。

防衛上の課題

ロシアがウクライナを侵略するに至った軍事的な背景としては、ウクライナがロシアによる侵略を抑制するための十分な能力を保有していなかったことにあります。

高い軍事力を持つ国が、あるとき侵略という意思を持ったことにも注目すべきです。脅威は能力と意思の組み合わせで顕在化すると、意思を外部から正確に把握することは困難であり、国家の意思決定過程が不透明であれば、脅威が顕在化する余地が存在します。

このような国から自国を守るためには、力による一方的な現状変更は困難であると認識させる抑止力が必要であり、相手の能力に意図した防衛力を構築する必要があります。

また、新しい戦いが顕在化するなか、それに対応できるかどうか今後の防衛力を構築するうえでの大きな課題です。わが国の今後の安全保障、防衛政策のあり方が地域と国際社会の平和と安定に直結します。

顕在化する新しい戦い方

弾道・巡航ミサイルによる大規模なミサイル攻撃

- 飛来するミサイルを回避し、わが国に被害させないよう、することが必要
- 相手のミサイル攻撃を抑制し、ミサイル攻撃を行いにくくすることが必要
- 陸空や海空などミサイルが攻撃しても、被害を最小限に抑えつつ、迅速に回復するなどして粘り強く戦う必要

宇宙・サイバー・電磁波の領域や無人機などによる非対称的な攻撃等

- 宇宙・サイバー・電磁波の領域における探知や防護などの対応能力の強化は緊急の課題
- 陸・海・空で運用できる多様な無人兵器の導入や、相手の無人機に對する能力の整備が必要

情報戦を含むハイブリッド戦

- 不審な異変を速やかに察知し、その情報をできるだけリアルタイムに共有する必要がある
- 察知されてくると予想される場所に、先回りして自衛隊の部隊を移動させる必要。また、危険な場所から国民をすばやく避難させる必要
- 偽情報の伝播などによる情報戦などに対し、混乱などが生じないようにする必要がある

3つの防衛目標

- ① 力による一方的な現状変更を許さない安全保障環境を創出
- ② 力による一方的な現状変更やその試みを、同盟国・同志国などと協力・連携して抑止・対処し、早期に事態を収束
- ③ 万が一、わが国への侵襲が生じた場合、わが国が主たる責任をもって対処し、同盟国などの支援を受けつつ、これを阻止・排除

防衛目標を達成するための3つのアプローチ

- ① わが国自身の防衛体制の強化
“防衛力の抜本的な強化”
“国家全体の防衛体制の強化”
- ② 日米同盟の抑止力と対抗力の強化
“日米の意思と能力を顕示”
- ③ 同盟国などの連携の強化
“一か国でも多くの国々との連携を強化”

Figure 34 Infoboard on the second floor labelled "National Defence Strategy" (kokka bōei senryaku), laying out JSDF security strategy in relative detail.

With interactive exhibits and a focus on military technology as a source of excitement similar to GATE and JSDF YouTube, the GSDF Museum in its main hall then presents itself as particularly entertaining for children. This direction of the exhibit shines through clearly in various design choices, starting with the name of the museum itself, because while its official name is “Japan Ground Self Defense Force Public Information Center”, it actually operates under the name of “Rikkunland” (*rikkunrando*), a wordplay on “riku”, a Japanese term for ground, combined with the informal suffix “-kun” to form a diminutive nickname. This cute, child-friendly name is accompanied by a heavy use of a host of cutesy characters used throughout the museum. These characters are almost omnipresent, from the museum’s homepage (Figure 35), to the entrance way (Figure 36) and the exhibit itself (Figure 37). The museum’s targeting of families is also noticeable in administrative procedures, for example, visitors are required to fill in a small form when entering the museum on which they note down the names of everyone in their group, stating who is responsible for the group and leaving a contact number. This procedure is clearly aimed at visiting families and not found in any of the other JSDF museums.

And indeed, during my visit on a Sunday morning, visitors seemed to respond to these design choices, as the vast majority that day were families with young children, ranging from predominantly from nursery to primary school age, usually attending the museum as a nuclear family with mother and father, though a few larger family units including grandparents were also present. I did not see any older children (middle to high school) during the hours of my visit. Besides families, I also observed a few (heterosexual) young adult couples and all male groups later in the day, with the latter ranging from young to middle age. This overwhelming presence of children and families might very well have been above average, as the date of my visit as a Sunday with good weather was particularly suitable for family excursions. However, considering the adaptations made to create a child-friendly museum experience, it seems likely that families are a distinct target demographic for the GSDF Museum.



Figure 35 Landing page of the museum's website. (<https://www.mod.go.jp/gsdf/eae/prcenter/>, accessed 20/01/2024)

Besides highlighting the museum's target demographic, this style of presentation also serves to narrate military work in the JSDF as fun and exciting, using "experiences" of operating military technology in the museum like simulators or the VR-exhibit to allow visitors, and thus children, to play soldier. This immediately brings to mind the notion of Asada's "protected area" from the previous chapters, where the free play confined to a defined protected area serves as an ideological mechanism hiding and naturalising power structures embedded into that same protected area's rules and assumptions. In its exhibition, the GSDF Museum creates a very literal protected area for children to play war, but it also provides the symbolic protected area in which the adults visiting the museum can *also* play soldier for the duration of their visit. The GSDF Museum is thus narrating military work as primarily pleasurable, adventurous and fun, but it is decidedly not portraying any kind of grand narrative of the sense and purpose of military work beyond such self-fulfilment and the vague notion of "protection" encountered previously. In this, the GSDF Museum departs from a

modernist narration of a grand narrative of progress (Coole, 1998; Hetherington, 2006), to instead deal in postmodernist small narratives of individual fulfilment and pleasure. It the function of the museum as a legitimising institution, but it changes the way this is accomplished by instead focusing on invoking several of the database elements already observed to invoke pleasure independently of a central grand narrative, instead encouraging visitors to construct their own pleasure narratives.



Figure 36 Characters painted on wall of museum, leading up to entrance. The large, central character in the picture is "Soldier Chick", whose image is the most prominent in the museum.



Figure 37 Cardboard cutout of the character "Soldier Chick" in front of an armoured vehicle in the exhibition.

This outsourcing of any legitimising narrative for violence is achieved fundamentally through play. Military violence is baked into much of the experiences at the GSDF Museum and presented without shame as the GSDF's core occupation. Similar to previous observations though, the violence presented is sanitised and gamified. By

putting the viewer into the first person in the simulator or VR experience, they are encouraged to exercise the destructive and violent power of military hardware in a bloodless and “child friendly” game setting, where shooting abstract “targets” is nothing but a pleasurable exercise. The GSDF’s killing power is thus not only normalised but also glorified as fun and empowering, working to create the impression of military service as a “real life” videogame. In this gamified version of the JSDF, a grand narrative is no longer necessary, as military violence has become an end in itself for military play. Importantly, despite roughly similar numbers of young girls as young boys visiting and despite the apparently agender nature of military equipment, this sort of play is still deeply gendered. Play in itself is strongly gendered and in contemporary societies, both technical and military play is strongly associated with boys, highlighting the continued presence of masculinity as the axis around which play here revolves (Dinella and Weisgram, 2018; Heikkilä, 2022).

Technology in the GSDF museum thus plays a central role in its exhibition, taking up almost all the floor space and certainly the most valuable, most frequented areas. Inside the museum, the main attractions are all large pieces of military technology like a light wheeled tank (Figure 37), an attack helicopter, a motorcycle and various pieces of infantry equipment like backpacks (Figure 33), helmets or guns. Besides these pieces of “real” military equipment, this part of the museum also features interactive exhibits that go with these pieces of equipment, including the previously mentioned helicopter simulator and a station where one can look through a sighting device like the one used in the armoured vehicle. In general, all the different pieces of equipment (apart from the small arms and some smaller infantry equipment) are not cordoned off and can be viewed and touched from various angles. This is explicitly part of the museums’ exhibition strategy, as the website landing page (Figure 35) states: see, touch, experience (*mite, furete, taikan shite*). Keeping the technological objects presented as accessible as possible to a (child) visitor’s curiosity then corresponds to these goals, encouraging play with the objects whilst also reinforcing the central role of technology as the main source of excitement in the museum. Context on these objects is usually limited to information about what they are, how they are used in the GSDF and some key technical parameters, embracing what Lawrence Fitzgerald calls an “internalist” approach, displaying technological objects like pieces of art in a gallery and stripping them of any social or political context (2006, pp. 117–118).

Accordingly, exhibits like the gallery of tanks and other military vehicles in the small outdoors area are simple collections of military technology objects accompanied by info boards about their technical details. Among both adults and children, these large pieces of technology then become the focus of “object fetishism”, where imaginations of the objects power and destructive capabilities create a sense of awe and admiration in visitors (Zwach, 1999, p. 310; Raths, 2017). The GSDF Museum thus very explicitly leans into several tropes criticised in the (military) museum literature. It hides the activity of war behind the war machines, leading to a clean and sanitised, arguably

“child-friendly”, version of war and military violence (Raths, 2017, p. 85). It provides a “pseudo-realism”, promising an experiences like real combat, going as far as calling the museum a “real experience museum” (*taiken-gata myūjiamu*), an approach that Jay Winter condemns as dangerous, propagating “lies and illusions” about war (2017, p. 36). Lastly, this sort of approach is also fundamentally gendered. Like outlined previously, exhibitions focusing on an uncritical, purely technical presentation of technological objects ties into traditionally masculinised values and interests, appealing to an audience of male enthusiasts (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 119).

While visiting the museum, I saw this dynamic in practice in a large group of Japanese visitors, consisting of at least two families and an elderly male relative. While the women of the group moved around the exhibition with their small children, the men of the group inevitably formed a small separate group walking around the tanks and other equipment pieces lined up outside, with the elderly man seeming to lecture the younger men as they viewed each piece. Despite being only a small anecdote, this story nevertheless shows the gendered dynamics of the exhibition at play, with adult men *also* playing war within the boundaries of the museum, engaging with sanitised military violence as a source of pleasure. Like in JSDF YouTube videos or GATE, this pleasure is derived from the technological objects themselves, regardless of context and even without context entirely, the destructive power implicit in heavy military equipment in particular is consumed as pleasurable. This dynamic is further heightened in the interactive exhibits, where the play is literal, but present throughout, building on an assumed knowledge of “what a tank does” in the visitors that must be felt as attractive rather than intimidating and that is, most importantly, completely separated from social or political discourse, all while remaining deeply politicised and deeply gendered.

Interactive exhibits like the liftable infantry equipment in Figure 33 also serve to reinforce the link between physical strength and soldiering. Even without any actual soldier depicted, such exhibits also reinforce the assumption of the soldier as masculine by default as physical strength is generally linked to images of masculinity. In showing just how heavy the equipment is, the visitors are then impressed by soldiers’ strength, raising the social prestige and masculine appeal of the soldier role. The complex of physical strength, soldierhood and masculinity is presented in other places in the museum as well. A 3D film shown in the museum’s small cinema presents this complex most blatantly. Located on the ground floor of the main building right beside the entrance, the cinema is prominently placed in the exhibition but also exceedingly small, seating only around 20 guests. Due to its size, visitors have to get an extra (free) ticket to view a film, making it a comparatively hard to access part of the exhibit. There seem to be different films on rotation, but the film shown during my visit fit in very neatly with the strength/soldiering/masculinity complex described above. The film was about GSDF paratroopers, their training, fighting and motivation, putting an extreme emphasis on paratroopers’ physical strength. Divided into three segments

respectively headlined “strong”, “smart”, and “kind”, the first two segments made extensive use of footage of paratroopers doing demanding physical drills and parachute training as well as live-fire military exercises. This physical and martial portrayal is then rounded out with the last segment showing troops at work in natural disaster scenarios as examples of kindness. Almost needless to say, all the soldiers featured in the film were men.

As one of the few examples where actual soldiers are shown, the film then immediately draws upon many of the database elements already seen in JSDF YouTube videos, using the paratroopers as avatars to portray an elite soldierly masculinity. Database elements drawn on are physical strength, with the portrayal of paratrooper exercises in the video calling to mind similar depictions of GSDF exercises on its own YouTube channel. The film also stresses mastery over both weaponry and one’s body, another element seen in GSDF videos, e.g. of recruits training, and in including the element of “kindness” it also aims to slightly soften the otherwise hard image of GSDF soldiers, following wider trends in the development of “tough but caring” masculinities (Messner, 2007). Importantly, the video does not in any way shy away from the depiction of military violence, freely showing paratroopers shooting their weapons and training for combat as the core of military work.

This violence is, however, cast as legitimate, which in large part is due to its connection to the idea of “protection”. In stressing protecting something as the motivation of GSDF personnel, violence exercised by them is reframed as an act of protection, though the object of that protection continues to be vague. In this, the GSDF Museum leans into a wider trend of shifting the language of security to inscribe terms like “peace” with a need for military buildup or “protection” with the need for increasing violent capacities (Hagström and Hanssen, 2016). But failing to fill in any context about what needs to be protected or against whom, the use of protection here too does not result in a coherent narrative in and of itself, instead requiring the visitor to fill in the gaps as they see fit, thus resulting in a do-it-yourself militarism where the museum provides the building blocks (military technology, masculinity, protection) but leaves their assembly into a narrative to the visitor. As a result, much of the overtly political content is stripped out from the museum’s side, to be re-inserted at the visitors’ side in their construction of individualised narratives.

Masculinity is an inevitable part of these narratives, as is made clear in the film itself too, when at the end, the three core qualities highlighted through GSDF paratroopers are symbolically extended to the entire GSDF by frankly stating that without these, one cannot be a part of the GSDF. Paratrooper masculinity then serves as an elite masculinity whose masculine aura is supposed to elevate other GSDF roles’ status as well, something that the film does by underlining that last part about all soldiers having these qualities with footage of various other people in the GSDF doing different work, including work entirely removed from frontline combat like technical or medical roles.

Interestingly, this brief section also contains the only woman shown in the film, namely a female nurse or doctor shown for a second as one of the parts of the GSDF. She is, however, one of the few people shown not in some visibly military uniform but rather in standard hospital whites, thus setting her apart visually while including her in the GSDF at the same time, presenting an image similar to the earliest days of the JSDF where women were allowed into the force but did not wear uniform (Satō, 2022, p. 100).

Yet, despite the miniscule female representation it gives, this brief scene is nevertheless remarkable, as women besides it, women are only present in three places in the exhibition. Gender is addressed most directly in a small info board about female GSDF recruits (Figure 38), which depicts the daily schedule of these recruits alongside of them doing their activities. The info board is placed on the margins of the main hall ground floor, so in a relatively prominent position and also shows a very similar overview for a group of male recruits training. Both halves primarily serve as poster versions of the video documentaries of JSDF training facilities analysed in the JSDF YouTube chapter, focusing strongly on the recruits packed schedule and showing them doing demanding physical training, exercises with guns, as well as other training activities, all while seemingly bonding over their shared experiences, e.g. by depicting groups of recruits smiling at meals. It is somewhat paradoxical to contrast this portrayal of women as “just some of the guys”, where they are explicitly shown to do the same or similar tasks to military men with their almost complete exclusion in the paratrooper film. However, this contradiction does not matter in a style of military self-representation grounded in a database model. With women relegated safely to the sidelines, the GSDF is defined as male by default, the soldier is constructed as an elite male protector of an unspecified but implicitly feminised other. However, at the same time, those who are inclined to do so are also encouraged to see this as a position at least potentially open to women, i.e. women are shown as able to assimilate into masculinity. And because the final assembly of the narrative is outsourced to the individual visitor, they are free to weight masculinity and femininity as they please, either ignoring the women (as most visitors are likely to do) or stress their presence, even if minor. In this, the contradiction is resolved through what Asada calls the “topology of subsumption” (1989, p. 277), where an illusion of consensus, and in this case, equality, is created.

Besides this instance, women are also shown in one other, quite remote part of the museum, specifically the corridor leading to the toilets on the second floor. There one finds portraits of various soldier athletes who have one Olympic medals or similar sporting glories. Following a similar pattern to the depiction of female recruits, female athletes are here simply shown with their successes, side by side with similar portraits of male athletes (Figure 39). The overall pattern then is for gender to not be explicitly acknowledged, instead portraying a masculine GSDF that some women can assimilate into. The role of femininity then is negligible, as even when women are shown, they are

shown assimilating into an organisation and work that is consistently framed as masculine. Femininity does, however, play a significant role outside of the formal exhibition.



Figure 38 Info board showing the daily schedule of female GSDF recruits as well as some photographs of their training.



Figure 39 Collection of posters celebrating successful GSDF athletes.

This role outside the exhibition itself is as symbols and characters, as 2-D women rather than 3-D ones. One prominent example of this is the character “Riku Girl Yuu-chan” (“riku” being the character meaning “ground” in Ground Self-Defense Force), who is depicted on the free museum flyer one picks up at the entrance (Figure 40). On the front page of the flyer, she’s depicted on top of a tank, positioned behind the male character “Riku Boy Takuma-kun”. She is visually marked as feminine through her hairstyle, a pink blush and a large red flower on her helmet. Takuma-kun, on the other hand, wears just GSDF fatigues and protective goggles on his helmets, as soldiers in many contexts do. Visually, this suggests a divide between the “genuine”, i.e. male soldier who is dressed for duty and the “decorative” female soldier, who, while wearing the same clothing and helmet, is marked as feminine at the cost of her martiality. This divide is further reinforced by their positioning in the image, with Takuma-kun being in front on the tank, pointing forwards as if giving an order whilst Yuu-chan leans out from behind him, smiling at the viewer. In this image, portraying one character as feminine distinctly marks her as not a serious soldier, but rather a decorative element, an appealing symbol of the GSDF. The same dynamic can also be observed in the museum’s store, where female characters from the anime GATE, studied in the previous chapter, appear on various goods, serving as de-facto mascots of the GSDF.

A different role of women outside of the formal exhibit is tied in with the last category of heterosexuality. This is because there were far more women amongst the visitors than in the exhibition itself and within this group of women, the vast majority were there as mothers. Heterosexuality, which does not feature directly in the exhibition, was then still present in the museum in other ways, particularly in its targeting of families and the associated role given to women primarily as mothers of visiting children. Here, the GSDF plugs into existing societal gender norms with the expectation of excited children going through a range of “boys’ toys” on display, all while being shepherded by caring mothers. In this setting, the omnipresent recruitment JSDF flyers can be understood as being aimed at the mothers of potential soldiers just as much as at adult or young adult visitors who might be potential soldiers themselves. In creating an environment of positivity and excitement, the creation of a positive image of the GSDF in mothers is an important component of facilitating recruitment, neutralising resistance or even generating maternal support for children deciding to join the JSDF when growing up. Women in the GSDF Museum are thus also addressed in their reproductive role, an established strategy employed by different militaries to generate manpower (Enloe, 2000, pp. 252–253).

Showing itself as a child-friendly environment, the GSDF Museum then seeks to contribute to the development of military families, whilst rooting itself in the notion of the heterosexual nuclear family. This implicit rooting and drawing upon an established societal gender order (Ezawa, 2019, p. 108), then further colours in the notion of “protection”, so prominent in the exhibition, with that heterosexual family context. Just as the soldier is implicitly male, the “protected are implicitly female or infantile, thus

maintaining a thoroughly traditional masculine protector narrative without being explicit about it. As variously pointed out in feminist research, this protector-protected dynamic conceals a stark power disparity between the two categories, investing the “protector” with powers not just against the external threat, but against the “protected” themselves as well (Stiehm, 1982).



Figure 40 Front page of the visitor flyer for the GSDF Museum, showing its official name at the top as well as the official "Rikkunland" name at the bottom, as well as including the "see, touch, experience" slogan. Prominent in the flyer are the gendered character

Overall, the GSDF Museum then repeats many of the same patterns already seen in the GSDF YouTube Channel but elevates them to another level. Women's presence is further reduced, technology is dominating the exhibition, military violence is shown without embarrassment as pleasurable and masculinity runs through the entire exhibition as a core assumption, maintaining the GSDF soldier as male by default. For the GSDF, it seems like the more exclusive nature of the museum with its associated assumption that the average viewer is likely to be friendly or at least interested in the GSDF to a degree where they are willing to make the trip did indeed result in an environment where militarism can be openly celebrated. As was said to me by a café-owner in nearby Wako-city, "There's no JSDF allergy here." (*koko ni jieitai no arerugi wa nai yo*). However, the construction of this militarism still seems to differ from a modern grand narrative in prioritising individual fulfilment and leaving much of the narrative construction to visitors, thus exhibiting central aspects of the "database" and "protected area" concepts presented in the previous chapters.

Pilots and Planes: ASDF Hamamatsu Air Park

The ASDF Hamamatsu Air Park is located, as the name suggests, in Hamamatsu, a city of almost 800,000 inhabitants in central Japan. Like with the GSDF museum, the ASDF's museum too is located on an existing base. The Air Park building makes use of that location by having large windows open to the runway, allowing visitors good views of jets landing and taking off from the base, possibly whilst having some food or drink from the museum's small café on the 3rd floor. The Air Park is much harder to access than the GSDF museum, not only being in a much smaller metropolitan area, but also being quite a way outside the city centre, requiring a 45-minute bus ride and walk from the city centre. Access is also much easier by car than by public transport as the nearest bus stop is far, busses are relatively infrequent and one needs to cross a busy road to even be able to walk to the museum entrance. The museum itself is very large, having easily more than triple the floor space of the GSDF museum. It is housed in a dedicated, relatively modern complex with a three-floor building for the main exhibition, a sizeable 120-seater cinema with a large domed screen, designed to emulate an open sky, and a large hangar where a number of planes are exhibited (Figure 41).

Not only was the museum much larger than its GSDF equivalent, the number of staff present was also much higher, with museum staff at every interactive exhibit, the museum entrance and strategically spread throughout the exhibition. At least during my visit, the vast majority of Air Park staff were women and just visually, they already present a stark contrast to the fatigue wearing, somewhat stiff soldiers staffing "Rikkunland". Instead, they present visitors with an almost ideal example of expected Japanese service worker femininity: young, conventionally attractive, wearing a feminine uniform of pencil skirt, tights and blouse, and always welcoming visitors with polite and pleasant smiles, they fulfil traditional expectations on women in customer service (Shire, 2000, p. 49). Notably, these women are not themselves ASDF members but civilian employees of the ASDF, working "with" (*issho ni*) ASDF members, as one of the women expressed it to me. This seems to denote a sort of informal hierarchy between the feminised customer-service role fulfilled by these women and the masculinised pilot and airmen roles they are supposed to show to visitors. In this, their appearance and "cute" feminine uniform then serve to "communicate norms which privileges [sic] males over females" (McVeigh, 2000, p. 144), while at the same time implicitly sexualising them (Happel, 2013, p. 95).



Figure 41 Photograph taken from elevated walkway of hangar annex to the Air Park exhibition, showing roughly half of the large hangar.

Similar to the GSDF Museum, the exhibition at the Air Park is dominated by large pieces of military equipment, specifically a variety of different planes put on display in the main exhibition and annex hangar. There is less focus on interactivity, but a few interactive exhibits are still present, including flight simulators (Figure 42), the opportunity to sit in a jet cockpit, a station where one could borrow a pilot's suit and helmet to walk around the hangar, and a VR experience of flying in the cockpit of a "Blue Impulse" plane doing air acrobatics. In this, the museum embraces the internalist, "rivet counting" approach of traditional technology museums, leaning strongly into a celebratory style of presentation as well with planes capabilities and development being uncritically enthused over, a pattern that is particularly common with military technology (Fitzgerald, 2006, pp. 118, 121).

Yet, as with the GSDF Museum, there is also a distinct human component in the museum despite the very minor presence of information about actual humans in the exhibition itself. For one, on the 3rd floor of the museum, one can find a few info boards that touch upon the more human elements of ASDF work like training or the everyday activities of ASDF personnel, but more importantly, once more mirroring the GSDF Museum, the film showed in the museum cinema was focused primarily on an exemplary form of elite masculinity found within the force, which in the case of the

ASDF are (perhaps obviously) fighter pilots. With the prominent size and placement of the film theatre and a much higher frequency of showings, viewing the film can be considered an essential part of the visit of the museum. As in the GSDF Museum, the exhibition revolves around masculinity in two crucial ways then: first, through explicitly centring pilots' elite masculinity as a symbol for the entire ASDF; second, through creating a protected space for male play, an exhibition of planes and technical facts about them created with male enthusiasts in mind (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 119). In this process, many of the database elements identified in ASDF YouTube are present once more, even including the dramatic electronic or rock music underlining the action in many ASDF videos, which is also played in various parts of the Air Park.



Figure 42 Very simple flight simulator pods (basically a joystick with a simulation game on a screen) set up on the 3rd floor of the main building. A more complex guided simulator experience was also available in the hangar hall, requiring a booking for a spot.

Despite being so similar in many ways, the Air Park does not share the GSDF Museum's overt focus on attracting families and catering towards children. In general, this is much more of a playground for men as boys rather than literal boys. Whilst the GSDF Museum for example stressed the accessibility of its exhibits, going as far as featuring "touch" (*furete*) in its slogan, the Air Park does not allow such indulgence, generally fencing off most of its large technical exhibits, only allowing interaction in specifically marked areas, e.g. the cockpit visitors are allowed to sit down in (under supervision though). Instead, the museum is dominated by technical information about various systems present in the aircraft (Figure 43) and aircraft or jet engines with maintenance hatches opened and protective panels removed to allow for a glimpse into their inner workings (Figure 44). This different focus was also evident in visitors to the museum,

which were overwhelmingly much older than in the GSDF Museum and very few children. However, this comparison is flawed as I visited the museum on a Friday morning a time that would naturally be much less attractive for families with school or nursery-aged children. Ultimately, it is likely that the Air Park would hold some appeal to children, but it nevertheless seems created with adult male technology enthusiasts in mind.

Technology as an observational category thus has an overwhelming presence in the Air Park, manifesting most blatantly in the sheer number of technological objects put on display in the museum. Figure 41 offers a glimpse at the large number of real aircraft being put on display in the museum, each usually accompanied by one or more information boards about the craft's technical details. An extreme example can be seen in figure 45, where a single F-2 fighter aircraft displayed on the ground floor of the main exhibition hall is fitted with not one but five information board, each focusing on a different technical component of the aircraft. Besides aircraft, missiles and pilot gear are also put on display, including their own information boards as well (Figure 45). Naturally not every single piece of ASDF equipment could be displayed "in the flesh", so in a quest for a complete experience of ASDF technology, small but detailed models of planes, missile systems, etc. were often included in the exhibition as well, usually still accompanied by information boards with technical details like for larger exhibits.

With the strong focus on technical detail and niche engineering knowledge, the more adult focus of the museum as a site for engaging with "big boys' toys" becomes clear (Higate, 2003, p. 34). The "rivet counting" approach then effectively relies on activating a range of shared subcultural understandings and knowledges about planes and related military technology. In effect, the exhibition at the Air Park is very thin in content for those not immersed in this masculine-connotated subculture of technology enthusiasts, practically only offering a few interactive and viewing experiences with airplanes and not much else. To fully engage in the "play" the museum offers, one thus has to have already at least partially entered the group of enthusiasts, which effectively acts as a subculture of shared interest, one that is almost identical or at least has very large overlap with the subculture of military enthusiasts. The term "subculture" is fitting here, because besides the shared technological interest, full enjoyment of the exhibition also requires a broader "buying into" the values and worldview implicitly (and in some ways explicitly portrayed). Lawrence Fitzgerald has stressed that in portraying technology as removed from society or politics, technological museums are really taking a highly politicised and gendered

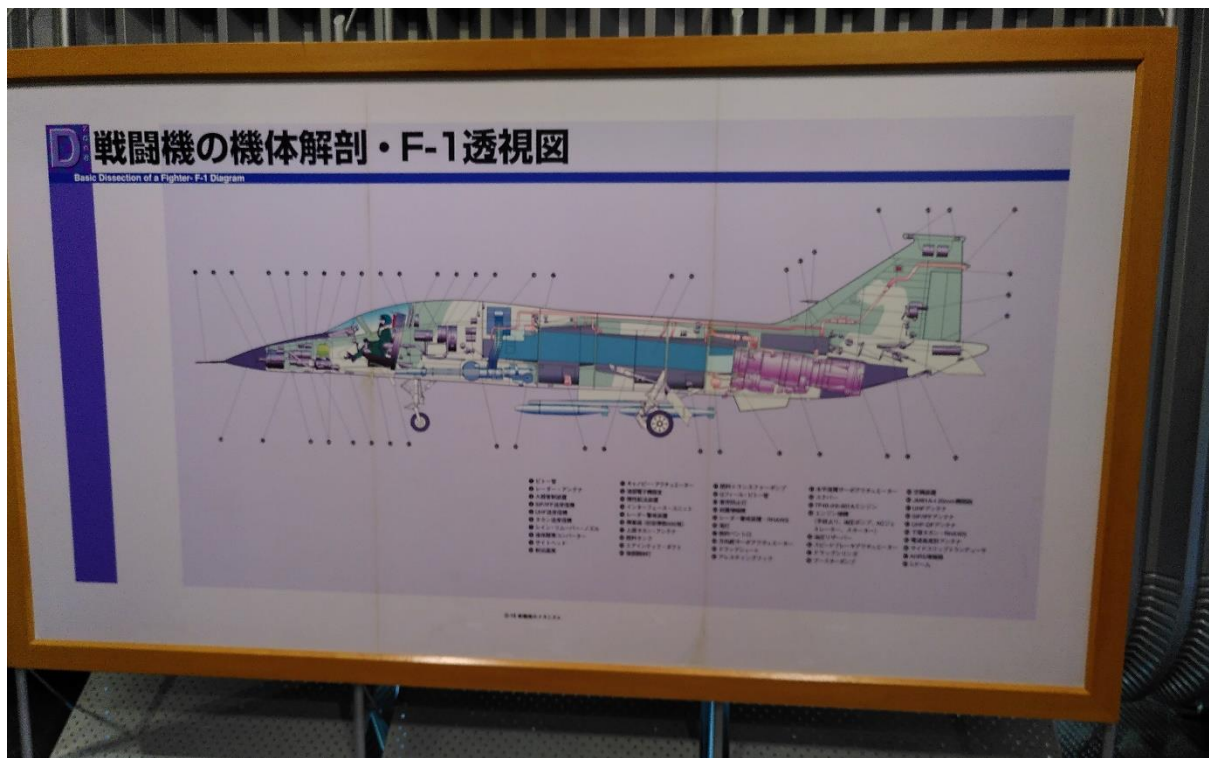


Figure 43 An example of an info board featuring detailed technical information, in this case showing a cross-section of an F-1 fighter jet, naming a large number of technical components.

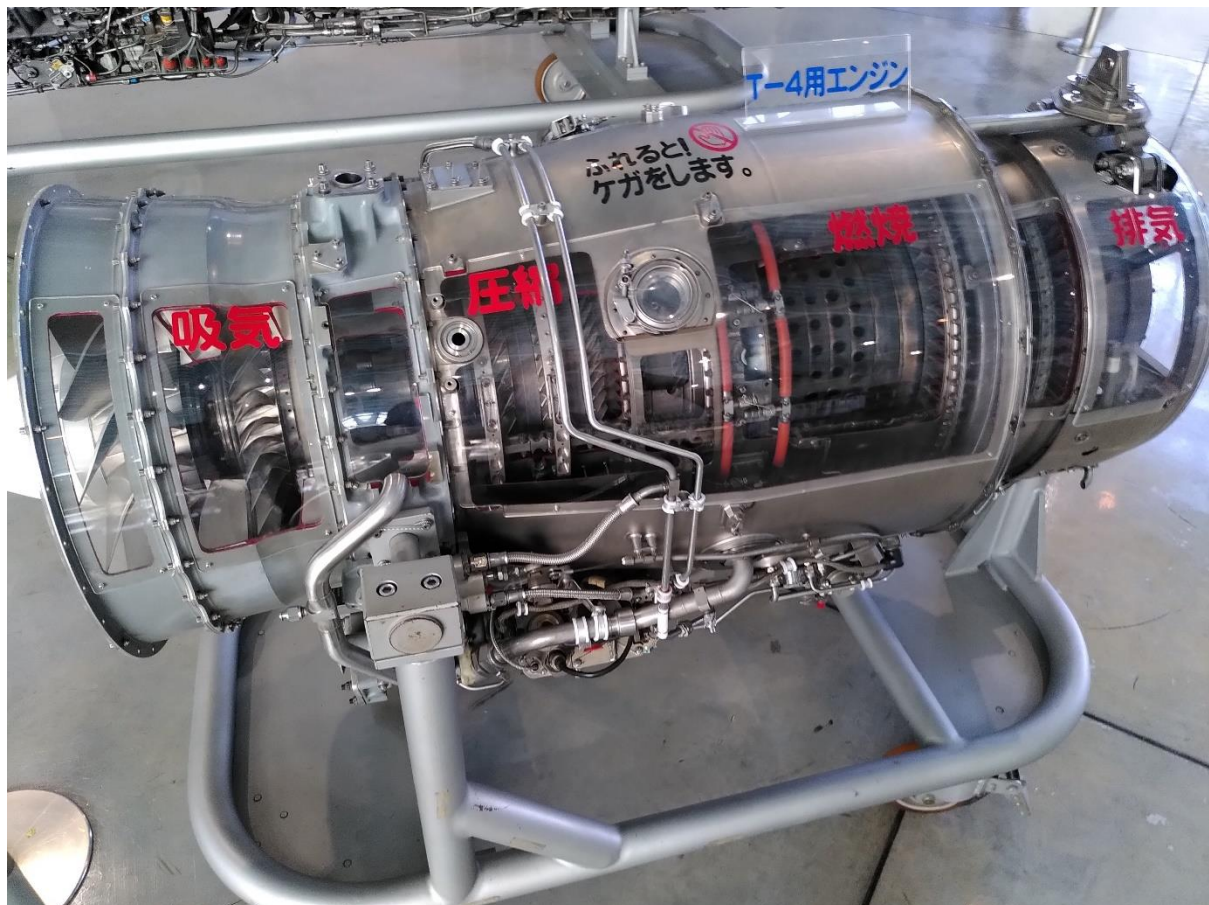


Figure 44 Jet engine where side panels were removed with glass to allow for a look inside, including labels (in red) for the functions of different parts of the engine.

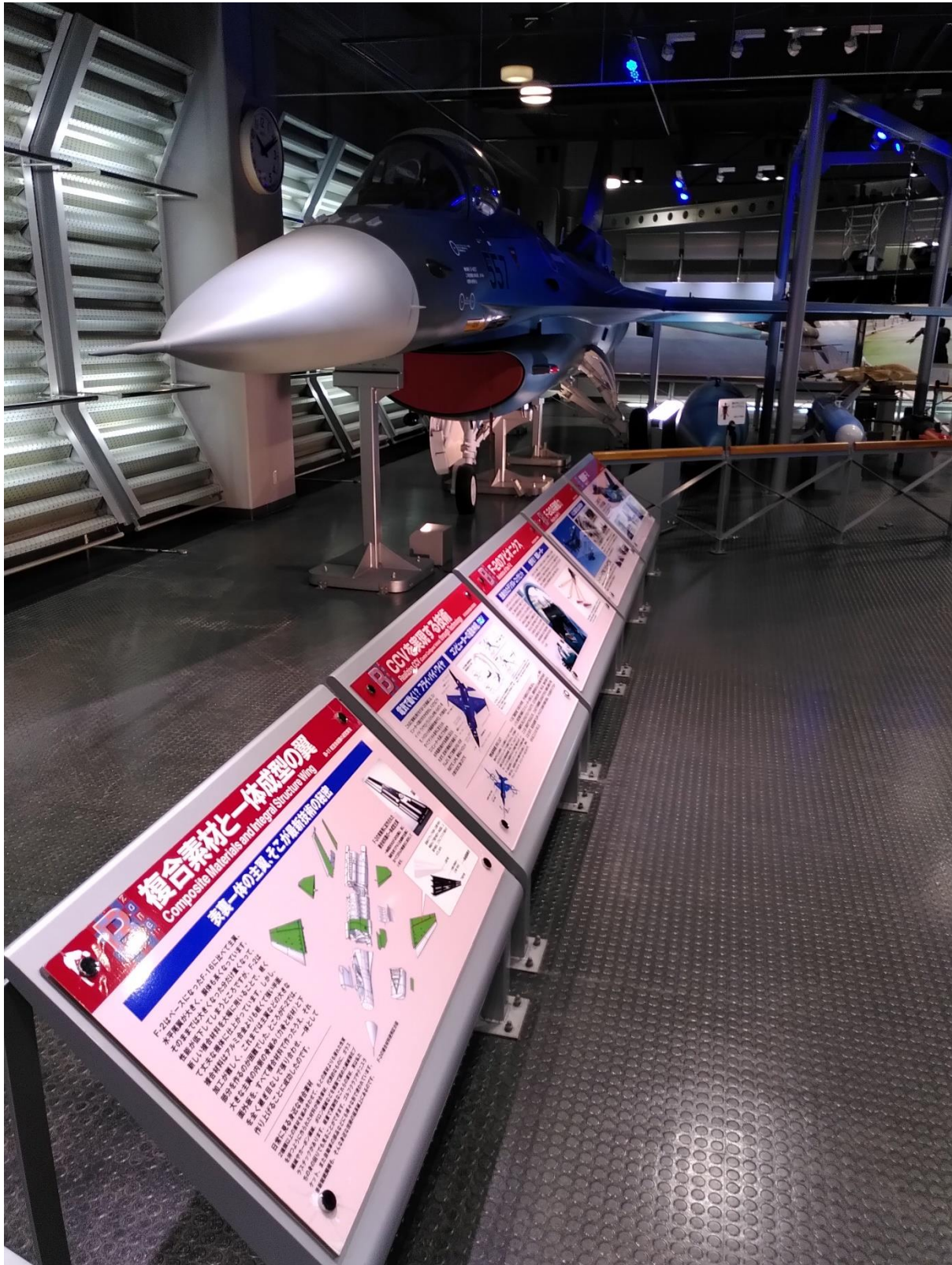


Figure 45 F-2 fighter jet shown with fitting armaments and 5 information boards giving detailed technical information about various aspects of the plane.

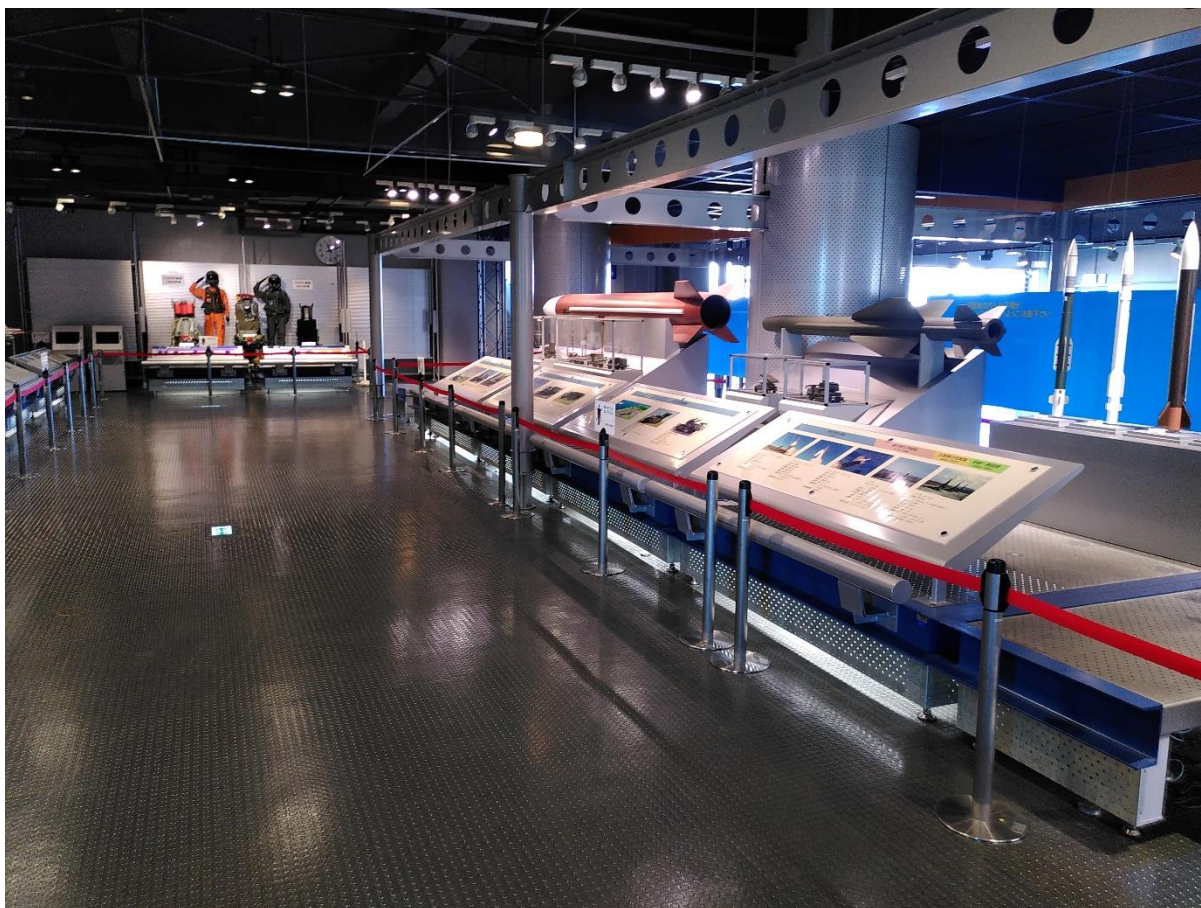


Figure 46 Missiles and pilot gear being displayed on the 2nd floor of the main building.

stance, one that uncritically reproduces gendered, classed and racialised power hierarchies, is used to convey national supremacy and sanitises the past (Fitzgerald, 2006). These shared values are significant, but not yet a real departure from the dominant culture. However, if one adds the Air Park's specifically military nature into the mix, enthusiast visitors are set apart clearer, embracing the idea of war as a masculine practice and craving the excitement of war in their visit of the museum (Winter, 2017, pp. 35–36). Accordingly, the military museum serves as a sort of "military shrine" where "relics" of war are admired with reverence (Raths, 2017, p. 94). In this, enthusiast visitors of the museum are markedly subcultural, with shared values and a shared understanding of how to interpret what they see and experience at the museum.

Technology also dominates the way combat is portrayed at the Air Park. Like the GSDF Museum, the museum does not shy away from displaying the ASDF's martiality in any way, connecting the prominent role of technology with their own role as a fighting force. Fighter jets and missiles are the first thing one sees when entering the main building's exhibition space on the first floor (Figure 46). And in strongly promoting fighter jet pilots as symbols of the ASDF, the museum pushes aerial combat to the forefront of its identity, whilst at the same time linking the role with technology and masculinity,

e.g. through prominently displaying large prints of sprinting male pilots and hypermodern fighter jets



Figure 47 F-2 fighter jet and missiles it might carry in the first part of the main exhibition.



Figure 48 Two large, high-quality prints of modern JSDF F-35 jets doing aerial manoeuvres and (slightly cut off here) two pilots sprinting towards their planes in a jet scramble.

in aerial manoeuvres side by side (Figure 48). The film about ASDF pilots shown in the museum's film theatre picks up this thread by immediately stressing the importance of technology, putting the ASDF in a context of combined arms operations as well as space and digital warfare whilst also using stylised digital models of planes, etc. to code the film in a visual language underlining the ASDF's high-tech acclaim.

This framing then uses technology to display combat as both exciting but also essentially bloodless. In focusing on aerial manoeuvres and plane capabilities, combat is portrayed as a masculine contest in individual capability (elite pilots) and technological power, paradoxically both highly personal (dogfighting as direct skill test vis-à-vis an opponent) and impersonal (focusing only on plane manoeuvres, missiles or guns being fired, i.e. technical operations to blow up an amorphous and essentially non-human target). Combat then is a gamified contest, useful in elevating personal pride and social status of successful "elite" pilots and engendering a sense of supremacy and adoration of the forces' extreme technological capabilities. But in this, a one-sided story is told about firing at an enemy but neither talking about what *really* happens when that enemy is hit, i.e. stripping out the "blood, guts, misery and despair" of war (Raths, 2017, p. 88). In this story, the direction of the violence then is also highly significant as not only is the suffering inflicted on the potential enemy invisible, but also the potential for the reverse to happen is ignored. This is important, as empathy of what it might be like to be on the receiving end of the military technology put on

display would disrupt the enthusiast, pro-military experience of violence as pleasure. As Samuel Batzli puts when writing about the American National Air and Space Museum, “all the missiles in the museum are displayed pointing upward: what a different perspective visitors would have if the missiles were suspended from the ceiling by their tail fins” (1990, p. 836). Unsurprisingly, in the Air Park too all missiles are pointing either up- or sideways (e.g. Figure 46).

What remains then reminded me of the recent fantasy epic “Fourth Wing”, which I had just read at the time of my fieldwork. That work follows a group of dragon riders who, by virtue of the extreme skill and power they wield due to their dragons are perceived by others and themselves as elite, almost superhuman soldiers. The image of ASDF pilots created at the Air Park is largely similar, showing jet pilots as an extremely elite group of (mostly) men, elevated in status above others by virtue of their powerful fighter craft. The film hammers home this elite image repeatedly, giving pilots ample screentime to stress both their moral virtue and physical prowess as markers of elite masculinity. Pilots are shown doing intense physical exercise and high-G training, which underscores their physical toughness and traditionally masculine physique. Combined with this is an understanding of pilots as highly moral leaders, expressed through having pilots talk about being “representatives of Japan” (*nihondaihyō*), protecting Japan and international peace, as well as putting their lives on the line to protect the lives of people in Japan. Imbued with a heavy dose of masculine martial heroism and explicitly cast as protectors of the Japanese nation, the pilots are presented as the pinnacle of Japanese masculinity.

In stressing pilots’ strong physical capabilities, their strong will to protect Japan and their general elite masculinity, the film strongly resembles the one shown in the GSDF Museum, raising a specific, exalted masculinity as the central pillar around which ASDF identity, which is cast as masculine by implication, revolves. And just like was done in the GSDF film, this film too closes out by opening this elite status to other roles in the ASDF as well by showing mechanics and other ASDF personnel at work, proclaiming that pilots are just one part of the larger machine that is the ASDF. Yet despite this final claim, that all roles are needed and therefore equal, there’s a clear distinction between the main role (pilots) and the supporting roles (everybody else). More so than in the GSDF Museum, this focus on pilots extends to the entire museum. As outlined above, planes, particularly jet fighters, are the main focus of the exhibition and even other equipment shown often revolves around piloting, e.g. missile armaments of jets or pilot suits and helmets. Additionally, while the interactive exhibits at the GSDF Museum allow immersion into different roles from helicopter pilot/gunner to infantry on foot, all the interactive exhibits at the Air Park are centred around piloting, be that wearing a pilot suit, sitting in a cockpit or operating a simulator. Everything other role is only there to support the pilots.

Unsurprisingly, this is where women show up in the film, depicted fulfilling various support roles, once more showing similarities to the GSDF Museum, though the ASDF film shows multiple women, not just one, and also shows them in standard grey ASDF fatigues. Additionally, and perhaps surprisingly, considering the outsized importance of hypermasculinised pilots in the museum's exhibition and the general absence of women from ASDF YouTube, the Air Park actually does directly represent its female personnel in the exhibition and gives them much more space than the other two museums do (which is, admittedly, a relatively low bar though). Female representation is relegated to the 3rd floor of the museum's main building, the part of the museum having the fewest spectacular technological artifacts and thus also seeing the least footfall, another parallel to the GSDF Museum. In a marked difference to the GSDF Museum though, women in the ASDF are specifically addressed, with the 3rd floor being the only floor that features information boards about topics not tied to equipment's technical details, one can find there a row of information boards about ASDF international deployments, the ASDF's space operations or Japan's Air Force One, as well as one about women in the ASDF (Figure 49).

Despite the overwhelming presence of masculinity in the ASDF's self-portrayal in the museum, the information board proudly proclaims that in the ASDF, one "can work with pride and fulfilment" (*hokori to yarigai o motte katsuyaku dekiru*), "regardless of gender" (*seibetsu ni kakawarazu*). The text on the board then goes on to state the ASDF's intention of further increasing the number of women in the ranks and naming efforts like the improvement of work-life balance as measures taken to that effect. Below the text, there are also several labelled photographs showing ASDF women in various occupations, including prominent portrayal of two female pilots, one flying a fighter jet and one flying a cargo plane. This information board is also given extra prominence by a large screen placed to the right of it, on which a slideshow of women in the ASDF is shown, using the same photographs as on the info board plus a few others. Lastly, women are also included in a film on ASDF recruits which is shown on loop as part of an information board on the ASDF training system.



Figure 49 Information board about women in the ASDF on the main building's 3rd floor.

What is shown here then is a familiar image to the one seen in JSDF YouTube videos, arguably more so in the GSDF and MSDF than in the ASDF there, but nevertheless present here: the ASDF is fundamentally gender equal, military values and activities do not carry any gendered meaning and women's integration is just a matter of changing regulations (accomplished), improving working conditions (work in progress) and time

(ongoing). Yet it is telling that when the museum represents “pilots”, it presents men, be that in the film or in images found in the museum. Female pilots are only shown under the category of “women”, making the category of pilot male by default but open to some exceptional women as specifically *female* pilots. At the margins of the Air Park’s exhibition, those who are really interested can therefore learn that the ASDF is indeed, in principle, open to women, provided they do not require to much to be changed from the way its being currently done and integrate well into a consistently masculinised institution. ASDF women and femininity in the ASDF is therefore presented as a deviation from the masculine norm, something that can be tolerated, or even welcomed, but that fundamentally does not define the force, which retains an aspiration to elite masculinity.

On the other hand, we once more find femininity as decorative, manifest in the museum’s almost all-female, pencil-skirt wearing staff, but also once more in the museum shop, where one can find figurines of cute female characters from military anime (Figure 50) as well as similar 2-dimensional cute girls on model-plane packaging, giving the planes a feminine personification (Figure 51). This also marks another instance of otaku subculture and military enthusiast subculture overlapping, as has been pointed out in the analysis of GATE, a “2.5 dimensional space”, where the 2-dimensional fantasies expressed in manga or anime overlap with the 3-dimensional reality of the JSDF (Sugawa-Shimada, 2018). In this context, heterosexuality plays an important role in encouraging consumption, as a likely male enthusiast is enticed by the sexualised consumption of an imaginary female other (Azuma, 2009, p. 21). The female museum staff, on the other hand, show a more traditional, non-otaku approach to using femininity in marketing the ASDF, as their performance of an emphasised service femininity in the Air Park appeals to visitors, allows the ASDF to leverage their “erotic capital” to raise its own social status in a hetero-masculine social hierarchy (Hakim, 2010). For this reason, it is even advantageous for the ASDF that their museum staff are *not* ASDF members. As civilian women working to promote the ASDF, they convey an image of ASDF masculinity as desirable in heterosexual romantic market without destabilising the idea of the ASDF as masculine, drawing a clear line between dashing ASDF masculinity (presented in the museum) and the civilian women supporting those ASDF men. In a way, the female staff at the Hamamatsu Air Park thus seem to fill the role Emma Dalton identified as “helpmates”, who legitimise the JSDF through romantic attachment to JSDF men (Dalton, 2022b), though in this case it is rather a para-romantic attachment to the ASDF as an institution that is put on display.



Figure 50 "Eggplane" models of jet fighters, which are made thicker and rounder for a cute aesthetic, accompanied by illustrations of female pilots to further push the "cuteness" (kawaii) factor.



Figure 51 Display case of plane models, decorated with figurines of girls in military uniform.

In summary, the Hamamatsu Air Park puts less emphasis on making itself child-friendly and aims to address a broader audience, but still shares many similarities with the GSDF museum like putting military technology at the centre of the exhibition and portraying combat as an intensely important but at the same time completely depersonalised, sanitised and gamified activity. Most notable was the extreme focus on fighter pilots as an exalted elite masculinity, through which all other ASDF masculinities are elevated. Women are more present in the Air Park than in any other JSDF museum, but still marginalised, functioning either as sexualised helpmates of the ASDF or as tolerated deviations from the standard male pilot who are expected to assimilate into the masculine role, which is framed as gender equal at the same time. In this, the Air Park, while showing subtle difference from the GSDF Museum or the various JSDF YouTube channels, nevertheless stays very much on message, embracing a celebratory, “rivet counter” style of exhibition aimed at male enthusiasts and showing a male-by-default ASDF to visitors, thus creating a “protected space” of play, organised around the once more axiomatic “empty centre” of masculinity.

Dry Facts and Old Sailors: MSDF Kure Museum

Situated in the western Japanese city of Kure, a 30-minute train ride away from Hiroshima, the MSDF Kure Museum is the most important museum of Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force. It is the only museum that isn’t directly located on a military base, instead being right in the centre of town, a mere 5-minute walk away from the station and thus, despite Kure itself being basically no more than a small town, still easily accessible from a major population centre. And while the museum is not directly on an MSDF base, the entire town of Kure has a very strong naval history, being a major military shipbuilding site and still having an MSDF base in town. The museum itself is rather modern and spacious, bigger than the GSDF’s museum but a bit smaller than the ASDF museum. It has a 3-floor main building with most of the exhibition being found on the 2nd and 3rd floor. The museum’s main attraction and immediately recognisable feature is the “Iron Whale” (*tetsu no kujira*) a real submarine that’s been pulled ashore and integrated into the museum (Figure 52). In the immediate neighbourhood of the museum, literally right across the road, one also finds the “Kure Maritime Museum” (*Kure-shi Kaiji Rekishi Kagakukan*), better known as “Yamato Museum” due to the exhibition’s focus on the Imperial Japanese battleship Yamato, a massive, 1/10 model of which is the main attraction of the museum. The museum, which is run by Kure City and has no official connection to the MSDF museum, is famous throughout Japan and attracts many visitors to Kure, a large share of whom are likely to then also visit the MSDF museum.

The MSDF museum has a very explicit focus on two areas of the MSDF: submarines and minesweeping. Accordingly, neither its surface warships nor aviation wing feature in the museum in any way. What is shown then does however go into much more detail and depth than in the GSDF or ASDF Museums, starting from a detailed history of the

two respective arms of the MSDF, going back all the way to the Imperial Japanese Navy and then providing detailed technical information about the vessels and technologies involved. Evident in the level of detail is also a fundamentally different exhibition approach than in the other two museums. As stressed in the last two sections, both the GSDF and ASDF Museums are designed for “play”, albeit in different forms. Consequently, they both put a premium on interactivity and excitement rather than information. Of course, the Air Park in particular also included many information boards with its exhibits, but they were almost exclusively focused on heightening the technical appeal of the “exciting” pieces of equipment put on display. And herein lies the main difference to the MSDF Museum: the submarine part of the exhibition might still elicit a similar excitement and fascination, but this fascination won’t match the outsized, historically grown masculine fascination with fighter aircraft. And the intricate technical details of mine warfare are certainly nowhere near the top of military enthusiasts’ favourite discussion points.



Figure 52 View of the ASDF Kure Museum with the "Iron Whale" prominently visible from the walkway leading there from the station. On the lefthand side of the picture, one can just see the corner of the Yamato Museum's building.

Education then seems to be the first and foremost priority of the Kure Museum, resulting in a much higher density of information boards than in the other two museums, resulting in a much more text heavy style of exhibition. Opting for such a style of exhibition then also has practical implications, making the museum

comparatively less attractive as a place to bring pre-teen children. Accordingly, despite me visiting the museum on a beautiful Saturday noon and despite the museum being well visited overall, there were only a few families with children, most of which were significantly older than the children in the GSDF Museum. On the other hand, the number of adult and especially elderly visitors to the museum was far higher than in the GSDF Museum in particular. The museum had almost no employed staff when I was present, being generally staffed by volunteers, usually (male) MSDF veterans who not only watched over the exhibition and answered visitor questions, but also often proactively sought out visitor groups to explain certain aspects of the exhibition, frequently drawing on their own experiences in the process.

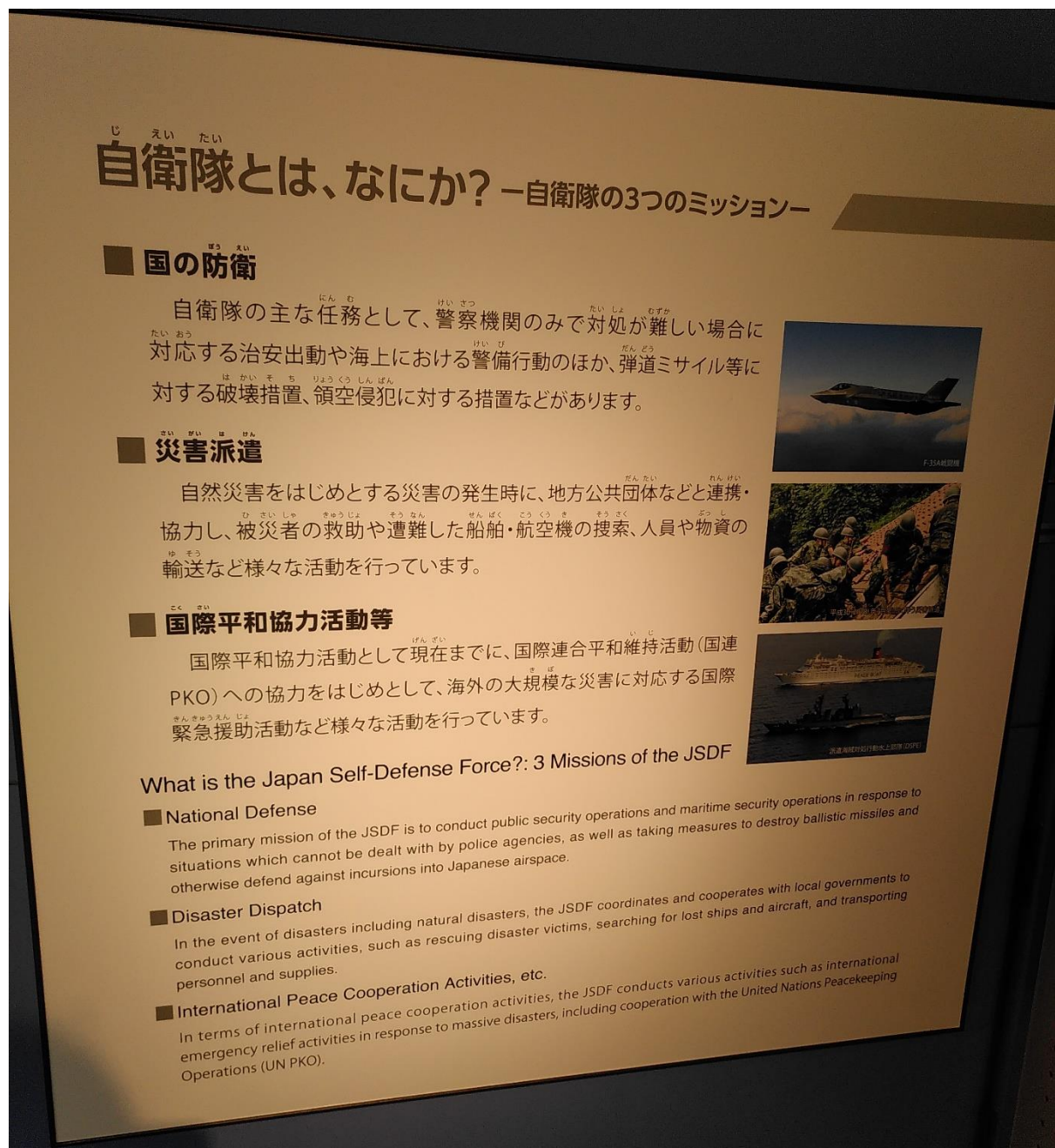


Figure 53 Explanation of the JSDF's purpose near the museum entrance.

In its educational mission, the MSDF Museum reaches back much broader and faster than the other museums. Before even entering the main exhibition, one walks past information boards explaining about the museum and the JSDF in general, narrowing down the JSDF's purpose to "National Defense", "Disaster Dispatch" and "International Peace Cooperation Activities etc." (Figure 53). Before launching into the detailed depiction of its two chosen arms of the MSDF, the museum then also offers a detailed timeline of the MSDF's presence in Kure and Kure's naval history more broadly, showing a timeline, underlined with various photographs, reaching back all the way to 1868. Even before entering the two main sections of the exhibition, a visitor can thus spend ample time reading about the history of the MSDF and Imperial Navy in Kure. In another major departure from the other two museums, the text on information boards in the MSDF Museum is consistently bilingual, showing the same text in Japanese and English, with the "headlines" of different sections of the exhibition even shown in Chinese and Korean. The educational focus is continued in the two main sections, which also rely on many detailed information boards and historical timelines. Added here are explanatory diagrams and technical exhibits like sea mines, serving to illustrate the information found in the information texts (Figure 54).

As a result of this dry technical portrayal, combat is strangely absent from the exhibition, marking a major difference to the two museums with their unabashed embrace of the potential for exerting military violence. This is not completely absent from the exhibition, with the submarine section in particular showing torpedoes and describing how combat works with submarines, but this retains the dry, technical, tenor of the rest of the exhibition. Combat then remains entirely theoretical, which in turn undermines the MSDF Museum's own attempt at constructing an exemplary elite masculinity like the GSDF's paratroopers or the ASDF's fighter pilots, as the tough living conditions and high-tech skills of manoeuvring a submarine are stressed, but ultimately blunted by not having access to combat as a masculine proving ground (Kodamaya, 2023, p. 1). For the purposes of this chapter, this makes the MSDF Museum somewhat of an outlier in the analysis of JSDF museums, as while small differences in strategy and style were present between the GSDF and ASDF Museums, they shared a fundamentally similar way of engaging with visitors. The MSDF Museum, on the other hand, tries to be educational rather than experiential and shows a technical but sober version of war on the seas that, if following Raths' metaphor of hiding the war "behind the war machines" (2017, p. 85), hides it so well that is hard to even find anymore.

What this illustrates is a different approach to self-portrayal in the MSDF Museum when compared to the other two branch museums. This difference lies mainly in who the assumed audience of each museum is. Both the GSDF and ASDF Museums were designed in a way that assumes the visitor to be a military enthusiast or at least vaguely pro-JSDF, therefore focusing on presenting a spectacular and exciting sort of

militarism, where interacting and playing with weapon systems was in focus and combat, or at least

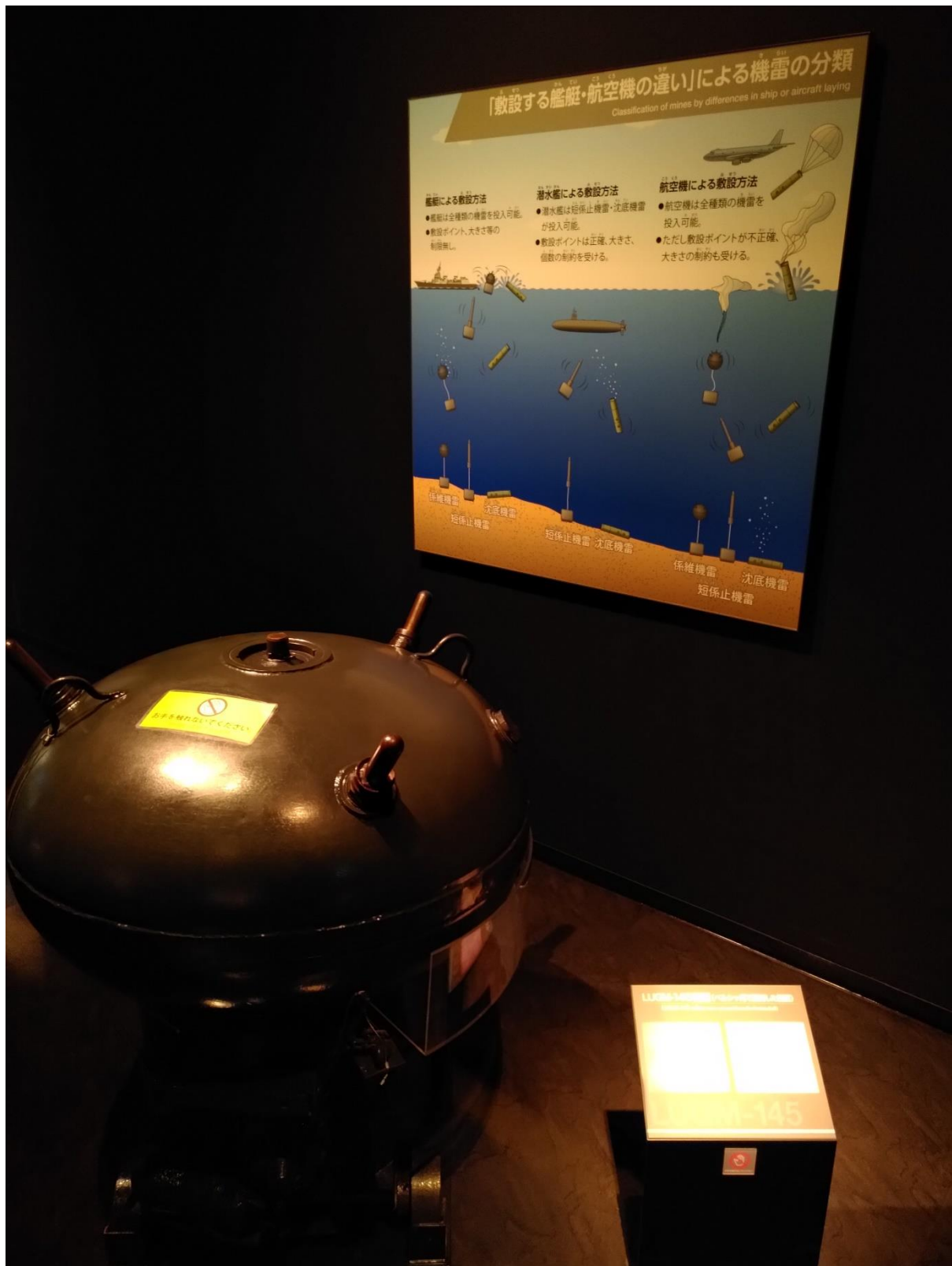


Figure 54 Information board about minelaying with an example of a sea mine to illustrate. Contrary to the GSDF Museum, touching the exhibits is explicitly prohibited.

a sanitised idea of combat, played a prominent role in the exhibition's appeal. The MSDF Museum seems to be designed with a much broader audience in mind, evident not least in the inclusion of multiple languages in the information boards, causing it to tread much more carefully in its portrayal of warfare, taking on a neutral, educational tone in the exhibition as a much "safer" style than that found in the GSDF or ASDF Museums. Accordingly, there is once more a lot of focus on technology, with the MSDF Museum opting for a style heavy on teaching about technology (as described above), transforming war into a dry, technical exercise that is the most harmless way of portraying war (Raths, 2017, p. 85). In the MSDF Museum, the MSDF's martial character is therefore acknowledged, but not invested with the same meaning and potential for pleasure found in the other museums, pointing at a focus away from the "military subculture" described in previous chapters and seemingly addressed by the GSDF and ASDF Museums.

As part of this different focus, the MSDF Museum also pays much more attention not just to history, but also to the civilian and political dimensions of its mission. The minesweeping section of the exhibition for example opens its historical introduction to the topic of sea mines by showing how heavily mined Japanese territorial waters were by the end of World War II and then linking minesweeping to Japan's post-war economic reconstruction (Figure 55). This linkage helps to illustrate the importance of minesweeping in supporting Japanese recovery from the war, therein stressing a specifically peace-time contribution of the MSDF to Japanese history, portraying minesweeping as a sort of peacekeeping and rebuilding mission, placed in the aftermath of war and conflict rather than in its midst. A large information board about Japanese involvement in the 1991 Gulf War does a similar job, framing the dispatch of an MSDF minesweeping vessel as "bringing back the peaceful dawn" (*heiwa na yoake wo torimodosu*). An international component in particular is present in other places as well, one example being the special exhibition running at the time, which focused on the MSDF's international relations, e.g. through MSDF ships dispatched abroad or through other countries participation in the MSDF International Fleet Review event.

Yet this does not mean a complete departure from the patterns identified in the other two museums, as can be seen in the museum's other main section, the submarine exhibition. Here, many of the same database elements as before are found, including the idea of a special group of elite men performing highly technical work, high military discipline and cutting-edge technology. Submariner masculinity is stressed in particular, showing a similar pattern as seen in the GSDF and ASDF where one specific brand of masculinity is elevated to elite level, serving as a symbol for the entire force. Nevertheless, despite these similarities to the other museums, the differences

outlined above still persist. Here too, text and data dominate, leading to a heavy education, rather than excitement, focused exhibition. In addition, combat remains only alluded to in this part of the exhibition too, there is a discussion on sonar and torpedo armaments, but the most actual space is taken up by a reproduction of subway living quarters. None of the other museums even addressed this mundane daily life aspect of military work, but in the case of the MSDF, it is a major focus of its submarine exhibition, including plastic reproductions of the meals a submariner would eat in a day (Figure 56) and various information boards about different aspects of life onboard a submarine. Notably, this is also the most interactive part of the exhibition, with visitors encouraged to try and climb into one of the submarine bunk beds to see just how cramped conditions are.



Figure 55 Information board about the importance of minesweeping operations in starting the reconstruction of Japan after the end of the war.

What emerges then is a somewhat strange mixture, a museum that does in part lean into the unapologetic self-promotion of an elite military masculinity but is cautious of leaning *too far* into it, thus shying away from key elements like the celebration of violence as pleasurable. Ultimately, it then keeps its foot on the brakes, never quite going down the same clear postmodern militarist route as the other museums. Instead, the MSDF Museum encapsulates the JSDF's paradoxical position when it *does* try to speak to wider Japanese society, rather than limiting itself to a military subculture. Here, one can see many of the observations made by Sabine Frühstück and Satō Fumika in effect, as the MSDF's self-portrayal here in Kure overall de-empathises its martial character, instead retreating into "neutral" technology, its services to Japanese civilian society and international missions as examples of keeping a global peace. It

especially around Japan, the second explaining how mine warfare works and what kinds of sea mines exist, and the third addressing the sweeping and neutralisation of sea mines. The last two subsections are both supported by displaying real technological artifacts alongside information boards, as seen in Figure 54. The highlight of the minesweeping exhibition is a reproduction of the hind deck of the mine sweeping vessel “Hahajima” (Figure 57). It is in no way an interactive reproduction, but it nevertheless allows the visitor to get a vague sense of what being on board a vessel might be like. With the overall framing of minesweeping, this is not nearly as exciting as the experiences of ASDF planes or GSDF tanks and helicopters were, sticking to the theme of a safe, technical exhibition on an entirely defensive sort of warfare that directly protects and benefits civilians.



Figure 57 Reproduction of the Hahajima's deck in the background with a minesweeping drone used on the vessel in the foreground.

Yet, even in this relatively tame part of the exhibition, aspects of the MSDF Museum's other goal are shining through. For example, minesweeping is described as a high-stakes technological arms race at multiple points in the exhibition, in one place describing the development of new sea mines and corresponding countermeasures as a continuous “cat-and-mouse-game” (*itachigokko*), conjuring up the image of a high-tech battle of wits. Here, despite the action of minesweeping usually being somewhat removed from an active frontline, martiality is stressed despite the general

theme of the exhibition. That phenomenon is also present in the reproduction of the ship's deck, which also included the ship's main gun (Figure 58). Notably, the main gun is hardly a core component of a minesweeping vessel, being entirely unrelated to its main task, and it is also not located in the area of the ship reproduced in the museum, being located on the bow of the ship instead. The gun is, however, a visual reminder of the vessel's martial role and its inclusion in the exhibition touches upon previously discussed database elements like the pleasure of exerting violence through firing powerful guns like this one. Lastly, some of the information boards also highlight that minesweeping is a highly dangerous profession, stressing that a single mistake can have deadly consequences. This raising of the stakes in minesweeping is then evokes similarities with the elevation of pilots in the ASDF, where the aspect of "putting their lives on the line" was one of the major points marking them as elite.



Figure 58 Light gun serving as the main armament of the minesweeping vessel "Hahajima" and now on display in the MSDF Museum.

We see then that despite the overall focus of the minesweeping exhibition being on presenting a relatively softened, purely defensive and unthreatening vision of the MSDF, elements of fascination with weaponry (Rekdal, 2017, p. 124) and elite masculinity are still present. The same applies in the reverse to the submarine section of the MSDF Museum. Here too, the exhibition can be divided into multiple subsections, starting once more with the history of submarines, then continuing with explanations of submarine technologies like diving and surfacing mechanisms or sonar, before turning to living conditions on submarines and finally the opportunity to

walk through the “Iron Whale”, the landed submarine forming part of the museum. The main focus here is to highlight submarines as high-tech objects, requiring advanced skills to properly pilot them, along with elevating the masculinity of the men who do so to elite status. In this, the analytical categories of technology and masculinity come together noticeably in this part of the exhibition. The history of submarines shown here follows the technical enthusiast model previously shown in the ASDF museum, appealing to fans of submarines by showing a complete genealogy of Japanese submarine technology, including small models of every generation of MSDF-operated submarines as well as a timeline with associated technical facts (Figure 59). Notably, the exhibition focuses exclusively on MSDF submarines, thus explicitly excluding the Imperial Japanese Navy’s submarine arm, avoiding direct association with its wartime predecessor.

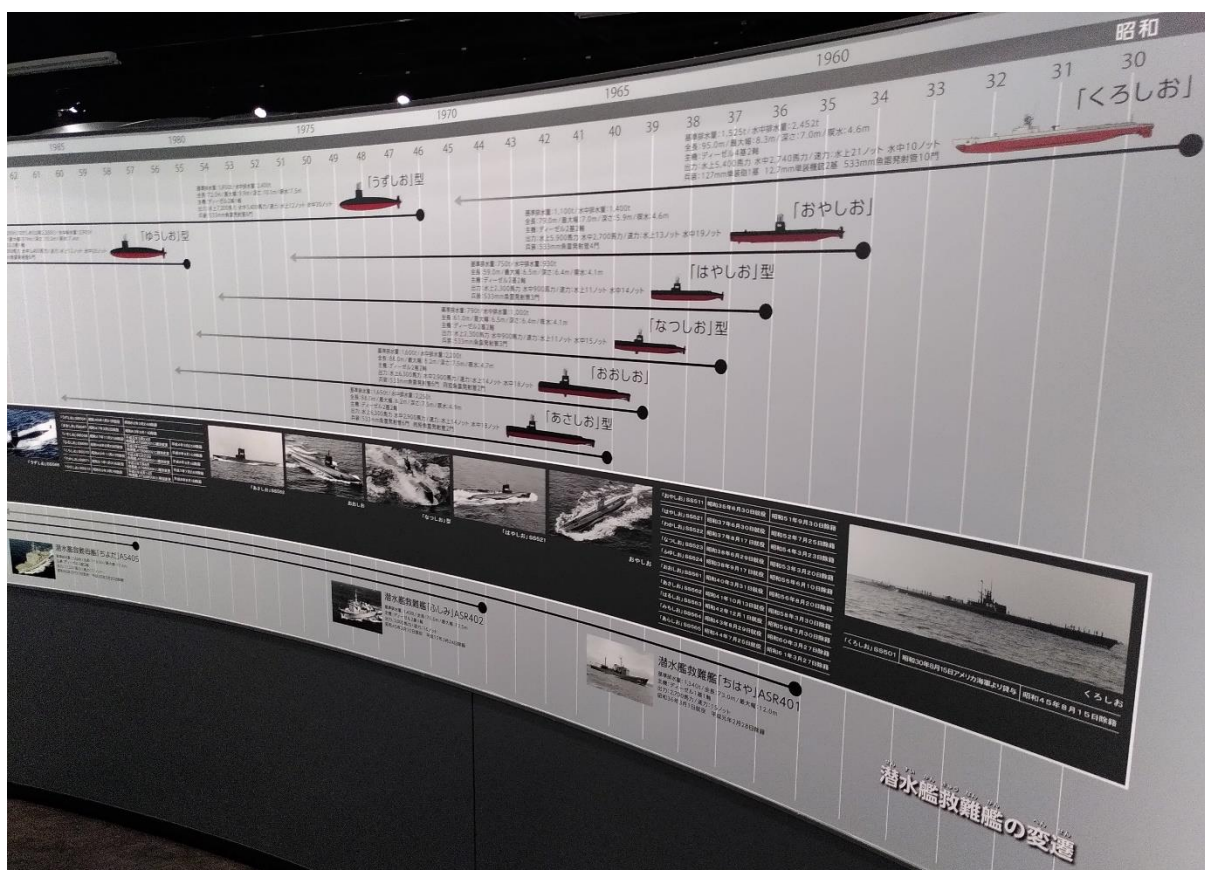


Figure 59 Timeline of submarine classes operated by the MSDF with associated key facts.

This technological enthusiasm is also encouraged in viewing the landed submarine itself, which provides probably the most interactive experience of the entire museum in allowing visitors to see much (but not all) of the insides of the submarine and do things like looking through the periscope out at the sea. In here, a degree of play is encouraged, but it is limited by the small space, further confined by a rigid one-way system ushering visitors through the vessel and encouraging them to not linger too much. Also, at least during my visit, the taking of photographs was prohibited, along with the usual prohibition on touching most things, meaning that most of the

submarine could still only be experienced in a relatively indirect way. The technical mystique of submarines as powerful “secret weapons” is played up in multiple information boards throughout the exhibition, ranging from the introductory text under the headline “What is a submarine?” (*sensuikan to wa*), which describes submarines as “the ultimate stealth weapon” (*kyūkyoku no suterusu heiki*), to an information board on torpedoes, declaring that submarine-borne weapons are “frightening those targeted” (*tāgetto sareta mono ga kyōfu suru*).



Figure 60 Poster of cast for the submarine-film “Silent Fleet”, showing the main antagonist (left) and hero (top right).

At the same time, the crews operating submarines are, very explicitly, declared elite men. As one information board proudly states, submariners are a “specially selected elite” (*erabareta mono*), with the same information board stressing the rigorous training and wide-ranging technical skills required to be a submariner, further underlining submariners’ special status. In the subsection on living conditions meanwhile, reproductions of submarine bunk beds serve to illustrate the cramped living conditions on a submarine, adding a component of almost ascetic self-denial to the myth of the submariner. All this mirrors what the GSDF and ASDF did in their films about paratroopers and pilots respectively, elevating one specific role within the force to the rank of elite masculinity. In the case of the MSDF, this comes with an extolment of submariners’ technical abilities, quick thinking, teamwork, and ability to make do in very limited conditions. Near the exit of the exhibition, this theme was picked up again in promotional materials for the Netflix film “The Silent Fleet” (*chinmoku no kantai*), which tells the story of the commander of an experimental submarine going rogue, with another submarine sent to hunt them down. In the promotional posters (Figure

60), the commanders of each submarine are embodiments of the elite submariner masculinity, hardened, intelligent, highly competent but also somewhat mysterious, adding the human component to submarines as “secret weapons”.

Yet despite all the points outlined above, the framing of submarines as mysterious superweapons and submariners as their elite, technically gifted masters are softened up at various points as well, once more highlighting the differences between the MSDF Museum and the other two museums. In one instance, an information board about submarine missions is headlined in a way that elevates the elite and mysterious character of the submarine force, claiming that little is publicly known about submarine missions and that they are constantly carrying out “secret security operations” (*himitsu no keibi katsudō*). Yet if one reads beyond the headline, the same information board immediately pulls back a little on this, assuring the visitor that all Japanese submarines are only carrying out missions only “in accordance with the constitution” (*kenpō ni nottoru*), stressing the purely defensive usage of Japanese submarines in order to protect Japanese territorial waters from infringement. Here we see elements from the minesweeping section carrying over, stressing the purely defensive (and thus constitutional) nature of the MSDF and taking careful steps to not go too far in portraying a martial and combat-ready force. Similarly, despite submariners’ elite masculinity being repeatedly stressed, the MSDF is also keen to not portray submarine life as *too* hard and ascetic, which is why fresh food (Figure 56) is placed in a prominent place, accompanied by an entire weekly meal schedule. Additionally, community life on board is also shown in large prints on the walls, all serving to somewhat soften the impression of harsh submarine life. Ultimately, this does not fundamentally undermine the masculinity-promoting project of the submarine section, but it illustrates the fundamental differences between the cautious masculine militarism in the MSDF Museum with the unabashed, combat-ready masculine militarism in the other museums.

Masculinity is also present in the form of museum personnel though. As far as I could tell, all the customer facing staff at the museum were volunteers, mostly older men who are veterans of the MSDF. Their role in the exhibition is quite different from staff in the GSDF and ASDF museums, where members of staff were mainly doing administrative work like visitor registration or operating interactive exhibits. Instead, volunteers in the MSDF Museum are mainly there to act as impromptu museum guides, actively approaching visitors (especially groups) and explaining the exhibits to them. These volunteers play an important role in the exhibition, adding a distinctly human element in talking with visitors and engaging with them personally. In my case for example, these volunteers immediately latched onto me not being Japanese, asking questions and tailoring their storytelling in the exhibition accordingly, with one guide for example pointing out a German submariner badge to me once he knew I was German or encouraging me to try to lie down in one of the submarine bunks due to me being tall. They adjusted similarly to other visitors too, providing a sort of tailored story

about the exhibition, adding in personal experiences, as volunteers seemed to generally be drawn from veterans of that specific part of the service the exhibition was covering, in other words, the volunteers in the submarine section were ex-submariners and those in the minesweeping section minesweeping veterans.

Centring male veterans' perspectives, the museum sets them up as authority figures and keepers of knowledge in their respective museum sections. Their own military is then reproduced in the museum through their stories as well as their interpretation of museum exhibits, e.g. with the volunteer in the submarine section using the part on living conditions to tell visitors about how he experienced life and work on a submarine. In these sailors' stories, the MSDF is almost inevitably framed as the entirely masculine space they will have experienced in their service life. This does, however, once more evoke the idea of the JSDF as "male by default", as sailors' stories about their work on board a submarine or a minesweeping vessel, living and working with "the boys", conjures up an image of an all-male force, linking masculinity and MSDF-service for museum visitors. With the privileged position of the veterans in the exhibition, their voices are also given interpretative power for the exhibition. The degree to which military museums need to or should cater to veterans is frequently debated (Winter, 2017, p. 23). In the case of the MSDF Museum, the decision is to involve them prominently, therein also providing an avenue for "off the record" comments about service in the MSDF and the exhibition, giving veterans power to guide visitors experience of the exhibition. Through this, masculine structures within the MSDF are once more reproduced as part of the visiting experience.

If one is looking for femininity or even just any women in the exhibition, one can look for a very long time though. The MSDF Museum is the most extreme of the three museums in not acknowledging or displaying military women in its main exhibition in any way, shape, or form. The only military woman shown was, in fact, fictional. In the previously mentioned promotion of the film "Silent Fleet", the first mate of the pursuing submarine is a woman, earning her a relatively prominent place in the film's promotional materials in the museum (Figure 61). This overall glaring absence is puzzling, considering the attention paid to including women in the MSDF YouTube channel, which suggested a force that was eager to put its female personnel front and centre to push the narrative of a gender-equal force. In the MSDF Museum, on the other hand, this narrative seems to have been completely abandoned. This is, because neither objective of the museum is meant to contain women or femininity. In its aim of presenting an uncontroversial technical exhibition, the MSDF Museum links into a distinctly masculinised discourse of military technological objects as "art objects", explaining women's absence (Fitzgerald, 2006). And when attempting to paint an image of elite submariner masculinity, including women or feminine elements is inherently counterproductive to the objective of portraying hardened, elite men.



Figure 61 Display case forming part of the promotional section for "Silent Fleet". In this display, a photo of the female first mate of the pursuing submarine is displayed, alongside some of the props used for her role, like rank insignia.

The constant female presence is once more found in the shop though, where the MSDF too sells merchandise that is branded with cute female characters. In a distinct parallel to the other two museums, otaku heterosexuality is thus catered to here as well, using images of fictional female characters to encourage consumption of military-themed products. With the overall absence of even women in the exhibition, this then also marks the only real presence of heterosexuality here, making these two analytical categories overall markedly less present than in the other two museums. This leads to an overall rather different impression taken from the MSDF museum. It does not seem to fit in well with the other two museums, picking up some of the same themes, showing some of the same patterns, but on the whole, diverging significantly from their example. Mainly, this difference comes down to the MSDF Museum's attempt to speak to a broad audience outside of the military subculture that GSDF and ASDF seem to be targeting. In this attempt, it gets caught up in incompatible narratives, reflecting the larger JSDF's own trouble between seeking recognition as a "real" military and needing to soften itself for gaining acceptance. In the MSDF Museum, this conflict creates a museum with no clear coherent identity, one that tries to say multiple things at the same time but ultimately says neither of them with conviction.

Conclusion

Emerging from the analysis of the three JSDF museums then are two distinct types of self-representation. On the one hand, in the MSDF Museum, we have a museum that is, on the whole, very much in line with Sabine Fröhstück's description of the JSDF as "uneasy warriors" (2007), presenting a force that tentatively embraces martial "database elements" identified in the previous chapters but does not fully commit to them. The result is an exhibition that often quite literally feels uneasy, presenting an overall incoherent image that reflects the JSDF's inherent paradox. On the other end of the spectrum we have the ASDF and GSDF museums which employ the same strategy found in JSDF YouTube or GATE to avoid that fundamental paradox, embracing military subculture to extricate themselves from social norms and values that do not work for them. As a result, these museums are assertive and unapologetic in their martial self-portrayal, openly placing armed combat at the core of their branch identities through military technology and portraying a gamified version of that combat that casts it as entertainment. In this, these museums are embracing a positive and uncritical version of war "the story of boys and their toys" (Winter, 2017, pp. 35–36).

Already evident in that formulation, the museums are then arenas of play, once more bringing in Asada Akira's concept of the "protected area" as the core ideological mechanism at play here. Governed by the same axiomatic assumptions of militarism as good and masculinity as standard as found in the other two chapters, the GSDF and ASDF museums create physical safe spaces where militarism can be consumed as a pleasurable commodity without the need to engage with its political dimensions. As previously, the ideological mechanism of the protected area is distinctly gendered, with military masculinity being at the heart of the "empty centre" around which the mechanism revolves. This heightens the significance of Winter describing such a vision of war as specifically a story of boys, a pattern that ultimately resulted in the most extreme marginalisation of women in all sources thus far. However, the fact that it is the MSDF Museum in which this is the most pronounced highlights and that the trend has been described for war museums before also highlights that the strong association between war and masculinity in itself is not surprising. More interesting is how the ASDF and GSDF offer the idea of a gender equal force whilst at the same time portraying a masculine one. The MSDF Museum, on the other hand, seems not able to tackle this paradox either, resulting in a complete exclusion of women from the exhibition as the "safe" choice.

More than anything else, the cases studied in this chapter then illustrate the appeal of the postmodern militarist approach of relying on the construction of a protected area and database to speak to a military subculture, avoiding the awkward unease of trying to create a "safe" portrayal of the JSDF when such a portrayal would require a resolution through the "dialectic of contradiction and strive" that is not likely to be achieved (Asada, 1989, p. 277). Instead then, pleasure in the museum as a site of entertainment is centred and the military values previously avoided are recast as

unsaid but axiomatic assumptions, outsourcing the construction of the exact militarist narrative to the visitor's imagination and thus encouraging a peaceful subsumption of individual militarisms under the umbrella of postmodern militarism's masculine empty centre.

“Mamor” and Military Commodification

Introduction

In the previous three chapters, I have covered a broad range of spaces for presenting the JSDF, each differing in terms of ease of access and degree of direct JSDF control over the narrative. And despite significant differences between each medium, several common themes emerged, particularly around the portrayal of a postmodern, “apolitical” militarism that forgoes grand narratives justifying war and violence and instead focuses on military violence as a source of pleasure. In this chapter, the same questions will be posed to another avenue of JSDF-portrayal, rounding out the picture of the JSDF’s identity projection through media. The military magazine “Mamor”, to which I turn this chapter, is especially suitable for that task. It occupies a prominent role in the JSDF’s PR-strategy whilst also presenting another interesting and slightly different case study from the previously discussed media, being the result of a sort of private-public partnership similar to GATE but developed from the opposite direction: While GATE is primarily a commercial entertainment product packaging itself in camouflage greens for business reasons, Mamor is primarily a JSDF PR product packaged into a commercial entertainment product for public outreach reasons.

Mamor is described as “the only public relations magazine with editorial cooperation from the Ministry of Defense (*Bōei-shō ga henshū kyōryoku o shite iru yuiitsu no kōhō-shi*)” (Ministry of Defense, 2023). Its content deals exclusively with the Japan Self-Defense Forces and related topics and even its title is a romanisation of the Japanese verb “*mamoru*”, meaning “to protect”, which, as seen in the previous chapters, features frequently in JSDF promotional materials about the JSDF’s work. Nevertheless, MAMOR is neither published nor created by the Ministry of Defense (MoD) or the JSDF but by the private publishing company Fusosha Publishing, a subsidiary of Fuji Media Holdings and part of the large Fujisankei Group media conglomerate, the owner of major TV station Fuji Television and the large conservative Sankei newspaper (*The Fujisankei Communications Group at a Glance (Fujisankeigurūpu ichiran)*, 2023). This is a significant difference to, for example, JSDF YouTube, which is generally produced directly by the JSDF or its branches. Mamor, on the other hand, is explicitly not an in-house production but rather the product of a commercial publisher. It is also being sold through that publisher’s distribution network and as such, its contents necessarily also need to represent Fusosha’s commercial interest in appealing to as many paying customers as possible. According to a conversation I had with the MoD official responsible for liaising with Fusosha, this translates to him taking part in editorial meetings and access to the JSDF being negotiated on a case-by-case basis, but significantly, much of the initiative and all of the actual writing and designing of the publication is done by civilian workers at Fusosha.

This cooperation was seemingly desired by both sides, as according to Takaku Yutaka, Mamor's first chief-editor, Fusosha reached out to the MoD at roughly the same time when they debated abandoning their own in-house magazine "Securitarian" for a cooperation with a private publisher. (Takaku, 2011) Eventually, this led to a bidding process where Fusosha won out and started publishing MAMOR in 2011. But whilst the MoD uses the language of "editorial cooperation", Takaku is very clear that the idea for Mamor was to create a "soft PR" (*yawarakai PR*) magazine for the JSDF, based on a JSDF PR officer commenting about a previous cooperation that "It seems the Self-Defense Forces will have to do soft PR like this from now on." (*Korekara wa Jieitai mo kōiu yawarakai PR o shinakya ikan darou naa*) (Takaku, 2011). As a result, Mamor presents a rather unique blend of military self-representation and commercial publishing that is showing in the structure and design of the magazine too. For example, one striking feature of Mamor is its cover, which almost always features a conventionally attractive young woman posing in a military uniform. The women on the cover are not themselves soldiers but rather female celebrities like actresses or singers, photographed at JSDF bases, with JSDF equipment, wearing JSDF uniform, but posing in cute or erotic ways similar to Fusosha's softpornographic magazine "Spa!", for which Takaku was an editor before taking on the Mamor project. This has been described as a decision to present women as sex objects for military men (Dalton, 2022b, p. 46) or to recruit young men to the JSDF (Fukuura, 2017, pp. 120–121). However, the use of more-or-less well-known female celebrities also serves Fusosha's commercial interest by marketing its product through commodified female bodies (Penny, 2011).

In terms of structure, one consequence of this marriage between PR and commercial interest is a focus on accessibility, with the usual edition of the magazine containing only two to three leading articles, each coming with plenty of illustrations and written in plain, non-technical language. Leading articles are usually written with the assumption of a reader outside of the JSDF, taking an inside perspective to explain aspects of the JSDF to outsiders. These are then accompanied by several smaller articles, which often form larger series with recurring structures. Some of these are actually written more to address those on the "inside", i.e. current or former JSDF personnel. Examples include dating profiles of single JSDF soldiers, summaries of JSDF events, or favourite restaurants close to bases. Nevertheless, accessibility for civilians is a clear priority, with each issue containing an extensive glossary for military jargon and small descriptions of all types of equipment mentioned. Besides illustrations, manga is also often used to make article topics accessible to a wider audience, featuring as its own segment in almost every issue and often illustrating important points in main articles. A typical leading article in MAMOR might thus start with a large, visually impressive cover page, continue with four to eight pages of text, images, and illustrations, followed by a manga of similar length and closing with two

(greyscale) pages where MoD officials, researchers, or journalists offer some additional (drier) commentary.

Mamor thus functions as a sort of military lifestyle magazine, presenting military and defence related topics as fun and entertaining in a commercialised publication. This makes it an interesting example of the JSDF consciously embracing commodification, transforming itself into a marketable product. Here we see parallels to the JSDF's portrayal in GATE as well as (to a lesser degree) in the museums, where military identity and military hardware are reframed as entertainment and thus rendered pleasurable and desirable. Through this, Mamor is very directly embracing the idea of a military subculture, positioning itself as the central publication around which "JSDF fans" can congregate. Accordingly, the "military database" is quite present in Mamor, with distinct database elements like military hardware, thrilling action or military heroism featuring repeatedly. Just like in the other media discussed previously, this database is used to conceal a distinctly gendered structure, where masculinity is the axiomatic assumption and central axis (empty centre) of the entire military structure but remains unacknowledged as the same structure is proclaimed to be gender neutral.

Mamor thus fulfils Takaku's vision of a soft PR magazine by fully embracing a postmodern militarism that treats the JSDF as an entertainment product to be packaged attractively and marketed to a military subculture, similar to how "moe" is produced and marketed towards the otaku subculture. Appealing to both those inside and outside the JSDF, using women's bodies, glossy and colourful design, and short, segmented texts to create a fun and engaging image of the JSDF that is easily digestible, Mamor sidesteps uncomfortable questions about the JSDF's constitutional status or tensions between its social and institutional imperative. Instead, commodification is leveraged to strip the JSDF of political meaning, reinventing it as a source of pleasure and shutting itself into a friendly subcultural community. Through commodification, Mamor thus fully integrates itself into Japan's "infantile capitalism" (Asada, 1989), repackaging military identity and military masculinity in a new package and encouraging "play" as the primary way of relating to the JSDF. The apolitical militarism identified in the other sources is thus very overtly present in Mamor, packaged in the same themes of technology, masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality.

The analysis in this chapter will then follow those same themes, being structured into four distinct sections, each corresponding with one of the themes. I start with technology, drawing parallels to the use of technologies in JSDF museums in showing how Mamor often functions as a sort of virtual exhibition as well as stressing the important role of military hardware and particularly cutting-edge technologies to be consistently invoked as database elements and consumed for pleasure. Turning towards masculinity, in the next section I once more look at how the masculine soldier is framed as the non-gendered standard despite the simultaneous exaltation

of a particular brand of masculine military heroism alongside portrayals of soldierly toughness. Femininity, which I focus on in the following section, is also quite present in Mamor but in a very different way from masculinity. In the section, I show how women are most often included only under specific “women in the JSDF” headers and are either shown as denying their femininity entirely, claiming military work as gender neutral, or being visually feminised through aesthetic means. Strongly related to this, heterosexuality then is the topic of the fourth and final substantial section of this chapter. Here I examine how heterosexuality is constantly assumed in the magazine, reinforcing its central position in defining JSDF soldierhood. Besides this, it also serves as a primary method of neutralizing the potential threat of military women to military masculinity by sexually tying military women into the JSDF whilst at the same time stressing military men’s attractiveness to women both within and outside of the JSDF.

In conducting this comprehensive analysis of Mamor, this chapter is filling a large gap in existing research. With monthly magazines released consistently since 2007, the magazine has thus turned into an extensive and accessible resource for those interested in studying the JSDF. Despite this, Mamor has thus far attracted remarkably little scholarly attention. The most thorough analysis of its contents thus far can be found in Emma Dalton’s work (Dalton, 2022a, 2022b), though her work is most strongly concerned with how marriage is used to legitimise the JSDF, an effort that is mirrored by Fukuura Atsuko (2017) in Japanese research. Sabine Frühstück too has looked at Mamor in her research, but only in a very limited and passing manner (2017, pp. 189–190). This short overview shows that, whilst all the research so far has been done with attention to gender, it did so in very specific ways, leaving room for a broader content analysis of Mamor. Besides its contribution to the larger argument made in this thesis, providing such a broad analysis of Mamor as a medium for JSDF self-representation will be a key contribution of this chapter. In line with the approach used in studying JSDF YouTube videos, this analysis will however be limited to Mamor issues released from 2011 onwards, with 01/2011 being the first issue studied and 10/24 being the most recent issue studied resulting in a total of 166 issues of the magazine being included in this chapter’s analysis.

Combat Fantasies and Virtual Rivet-counting: Technology in Mamor

The first thing one is bound to notice when thinking about technology and military equipment in Mamor is just how omnipresent it is. There are special series of articles dedicated to military technology and equipment like “My Favorite Equipments [sic] – *koi suru sōbihin*”, which was a double page section of the magazine recurring for many years, featuring one specific piece of JSDF equipment every time with a short text and photos. Other such series include “Challenge to the Future”, another recurring double page section found particularly in the older issues studied, which consists of a relatively long text on the development of military technologies and is usually

illustrated by a drawing of futuristic-looking military equipment. But technology's presence is certainly not limited to these two series, as it also features prominently and frequently in Mamor's main articles. Sometimes this is quite explicit, e.g. with articles on specific types of equipment like an article in the 07/2023 issue asking, "Are tanks effective in modern warfare with drones flying everywhere?" (*dorōn ga tobikau gendai no sensō ni sensha wa yūkō nanoka?*), with the article using this question as a jumping off point to not only tackle tanks' role in combat and tank tactics but also show tanks from different countries with their technical data (Figure 62) and the evolution of tanks throughout history.



Figure 62 Excerpt from article on tanks, showing tanks from different countries with a short description and a table on the bottom-left comparing technical data.

Evident in this article is an approach to military technology that reflects a common military enthusiast approach of understanding of tank warfare as a "data duel" that ultimately comes down to comparing different specifications (Raths, 2017, p. 92). A side effect of this "data duel" approach to warfare is that it removes the human element from war, which then results in a sanitisation of war. Mamor leans into such a sanitised portrayal even when it, in the same article addresses tactics of armoured warfare and the interaction between tank and infantry forces, avoiding the human element through using toy tanks and toy soldiers in its illustrations. Besides de-personalisation and sanitisation, this also once more invokes the idea of military equipment as "big boys' toys" (Higate, 2003, p. 34), reflecting parallel observations made in the previous chapters. Accordingly, technology is shown as shiny and exciting,

with high-tech equipment in particular being a frequent topic of magazine articles, as seen in the previously mentioned “Challenge to the Future” series as well as a number of articles on JSDF research and development or the JSDF of the future.

Strong similarities between the depiction of tanks in Mamor and the depiction of tanks in the German Tank Museum described by Ralf Rath (2017) is no coincidence, as the general approach taken to showing equipment and technology in Mamor mirrors that of the GSDF and ASDF museums described in the previous chapter. In Mamor, military technology is displayed in a sort of virtual “rivet-counting” manner, with articles about military technology usually featuring large, high-quality photographs of a piece of equipment, often from multiple angles, accompanied by key technological parameters (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 118). Social context is only provided in terms of how a piece of equipment is utilised, i.e. on the level of military tactics, or in terms of the technological development of military equipment. This development is presented in a decidedly patriotic manner, celebrating the power domestically designed weapons systems. For example, one article from the 12/2013 issue, featuring both equipment images, technical data and information on said equipment’s development, is proudly titled “Introducing the SDF’s latest world-renowned, domestically produced equipment” (*sekai ni hokoru jieitai no kokusan saishin sōbihin o shōka*). In this, Mamor embraces a celebratory attitude, turning pieces of military technology into “technological icons” that illustrate the JSDF’s power and Japanese engineering strength (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 120).

Such celebrations of power are not self-contained patriotic exercises, but rather a way of drawing pleasure out of the destructive power of (Japanese) military equipment, highly similar to the way military technology was shown in GATE: both a re-assertion of national strength and a celebration of “beautiful” technology. Mamor’s depictions of military equipment then neatly fit into the military database outlined in the previous chapters, with many of the exact same visual elements consistently present in Mamor as well. This manifests in a portrayal of military technology with many of the same characteristics as in JSDF YouTube or JSDF Museums, including extensive articles on specific types of equipment (like the tank article mentioned above) but also giving equipment a prominent place in other articles about the work and responsibilities of certain JSDF units. Such articles are a regular feature of Mamor, often part of the “Military Report” series of articles, which usually makes up the second major article of each Mamor issue. These articles follow the double-layer structure of Azuma’s database model (2009), with the layer of outer signs (i.e., the individual small narratives created about the JSDF in Mamor articles) calling up database elements saved in the inner layer (i.e., military “moe elements” like scrambling jets, powerful tanks or destruction wreaked by modern weaponry).

As Azuma points out, the database model serves to generate pleasure and satisfy its consumers’ need for meaning by incorporating the fictional into lived reality, filling the

void left by the collapse of modernist “grand narratives” (2009, pp. 27–28). In fully integrating itself with the database model, Mamor follows this trajectory by embracing the creation of military fantasies in its articles. One example for this that also shows how Mamor’s implementation of the database model acknowledges and celebrates its origins in otaku subculture is an article in the 01/2024 issue about a hypothetical science-fiction version of the JSDF and its futuristic equipment, that is then transitioned into a (comparatively brief) discussion of real-life technological developments within the JSDF. Opening with a manga where the JSDF of the future fights some undefined robotic enemy force with sinister looking skull masks, the article’s first double page immediately sets the tone as highly visual fantasy of futuristic combat using advanced technologies like powered body suits or miniature drones (Figure 63). Besides the obvious use of fantasy in creating this scenario, it also leans into otaku culture by showing much of the futuristic equipment featuring in the manga as collectible cards on a later page, giving more details on the entirely fictional specifications of each piece of equipment.



Figure 63 First double page of article about science fiction JSDF, making strong use of fantasy in its action-manga approach to the topic.

Connecting this science fiction fantasy to real JSDF technological development within the article as well as with the real contemporary JSDF through inclusion in its semi-official magazine as well as the wider, more reality focused approach of the rest of the issue, the fictional is quite literally incorporated into the individual realities of Mamor readers. This creates a crucial parallel between Mamor’s portrayal of the JSDF and the

portrayal observed in GATE, as the use of fantasy and the medium of manga in particular allows for a much more explicit portrayal of the JSDF as a combat force. This is in part due to the simple technical fact that drawings allow for a much more dramatic and vivid portrayal of violence and combat on a much lower budget than in e.g. normal film, but it is also due to the inherent unreality of manga. Being usually a medium of fiction, portraying armed action through manga might thus be more palatable than doing the same thing in photography. This also allows Mamor to very directly tackle some otherwise politically difficult or contentious issues like war with China or the North Korean nuclear threat by stripping these scenarios of any overt identification of the adversary and then packaging them in manga stories. In one example, a manga from the 02/2017 issue depicts the JSDF tracking, intercepting and finally destroying a (possibly nuclear) ballistic missile fired from a neighbouring “certain country” (*bōkoku*) towards Japan (Figure 64).



Figure 64 First two pages of a manga about the JSDF fending off a ballistic missile attack from a neighbouring country.

Through fantasy and the medium of manga, Mamor is therefore able to construct high stakes combat scenarios with relation to real-world security threats, where the JSDF is able to overcome all that is thrown against it. Here, pleasure is derived from consuming various database elements, including a sense of national pride that has been relocated to the realm of fantasy (as in GATE), as well as pleasure through seeing high-tech weaponry like AEGIS-destroyers or Patriot missile batteries fending off threats towards Japan. Lastly, the violent destruction of the enemy threat is then

another element familiar from GATE that features prominently in Mamor as well. Mamor thus integrates findings from all the other sources examined in this dissertation, drawing heavily on the military database in a way that often strongly resembles the patterns observed in GATE whilst also retaining the appeal of military technology as “beautiful” or “impressive” that is so prominent in both JSDF YouTube and JSDF museums. Through shared enjoyment of these database among its readers, it then helps to construct the very military-friendly subculture to which it appeals, encoding militarism in a largely fantasy-based entertainment product, mirroring the centrality of anime and manga in “traditional” otaku culture (Galbraith, 2019).

In its blending of the various database elements seen in the other sources, Mamor works as a sort of gateway into the military subculture, not just through its relatively low stakes and low-price public availability (one issue of Mamor costs 780 Yen, roughly £5), but also through its specifically outsider-friendly design, where core military terminology is consistently explained. Mamor thus manages to bring together military fantasies as well as military “artefacts” like tanks, missiles, etc. in its pages. This makes it what French theorist Andre Malraux called the *museé imaginaire*, a “museum without walls”, where the exhibition is not physical but contained within a distributable medium, e.g. a photo album or, as is the case with Mamor, a magazine (Hetherington, 2006, pp. 597–598). As was highlighted in the previous chapter, museums in the modern sense are sites for generating “narratives and ordering logics” that help visitors make sense of the chaotic and uncertain reality of the actual modern world (Hetherington, 2006, p. 600). However, in the post-modern world, this focused and unified consumption of narrative has been disrupted, leading to what Hetherington refers to as a “disrupted mode of reception”, where the museum exhibition is but one part of a larger pleasure-focused experience that embraces commodification and entertainment (2006, p. 602).

Technology therefore holds central importance in Mamor, with strong parallels to the use of technology in JSDF YouTube and GATE, but particularly in JSDF museums. It is a (if not *the*) central source of pleasure and serves to knit together the military subculture addressed by Mamor and the other media examined previously. With its layman's descriptions of military terms and brief profiles on the nature and function of all the equipment featured in the magazine, Mamor serves as a gateway here, providing an entry into military subculture for those who are interested but might not have the full technical knowledge and command of military jargon required to fully enjoy e.g. a visit to a JSDF museum. However, as in the other sources, technology in Mamor is also closely linked to masculinity, perhaps even more so. In the next section, this connection as well as the broader role of masculinity in Mamor's portrayal of the JSDF will therefore be examined.

Heroic and Manly Warriors: Masculinity in Mamor

Similar to the previous chapters, masculinity is intensely and extensively present in Mamor but is never addressed overtly. Instead, masculinity is once more treated as a gender-neutral standard, inscribing it as axiomatic to military work. In Mamor, this manifests for example in portrayals of military men as hardboiled martial heroes, untiringly defending their country from all sorts of threats. The previous section has shown how pleasure is generated through technology and the creation of fantasies, where Japanese military technology and the destructive power it contains is turned against foreign adversaries, drawing a direct link between military violence and viewing pleasure similar to the one found in GATE. Masculinity is the other element that more often than not features in those same fantasies. This is the case for both examples from the previous section, with the futuristic JSDF of Figure 63 notably being commanded by a hypermasculine muscular and aggressive male commander or the male protagonist of the missile defence in Figure 64. Here, the narrative centres around a calm and strong officer in a missile-defence command centre who, reacting to the launch of a missile targeting Japan, coordinates with various JSDF officers, including a destroyer captain, to intercept the missile. He is designed as a film-star-looking, tough but sophisticated sort of officer, who is displayed as consistently in control of a threatening situation, confidently coordinating the JSDF's high-tech response to the threat without showing any emotion, only allowing himself a tiny smile of satisfaction once the enemy missile is successfully intercepted.

Technology and masculinity are intertwined in Mamor, with technology serving as a key avenue of exercising power and fulfilling the JSDF's mission, thus effectively enabling the masculine heroism shown by JSDF personnel to be effective. This can be seen in another manga example from the 08/2022 issue (Figure 66), printed as part of an article on the current and potential future utilisation of AI technology by the JSDF. It presents a scenario where an MSDF helicopter pilot is looking for a suspicious vessel but is hindered by the sheer number of vessels showing on his radar. The

manga then presents two possible outcomes, one in which an officer on a nearby reconnaissance plane keeps manually looking through the signatures to check which one might be suspicious and another one where the helicopter pilot, through the use of AI technology, is immediately able to identify and chase the suspicious vessel. Both men here are portrayed in a rather intense fashion, using dramatic facial expressions and gestures to communicate the urgency and threat of the situation whilst also illustrating their commitment to the masculine task of defending Japanese waters. Looked at in isolation, the two men here both look rather aggressive with angled brows or gritted teeth. But it is made clear that in this context, such aggression is supposed to be positive, implying dedication rather than hostility, a point that is less than subtly made by the reconnaissance officer who, after failing to locate the vessel, grits his teeth in frustration and exclaims that “I must hurry for peace!” (*heiwa no tame ni isoganeba!*).

Despite this officer’s failure at responding to the threat then, he is still portrayed as heroic, moved by a powerful desire to protect his country and work hard “for peace”, but ultimately, he is let down by factors outside of his control, namely insufficiently advanced technology. His counterpart is in turn enabled by technology, as he is able to more quickly and confidently respond to the threat and thus asserts his martial masculinity more successfully. Notably, in commanding an AI to serve him, he is also linked to tropes of masculine leadership and exertion of power over culturally usually feminised AI assistant systems (Lingel and Crawford, 2020). Technology thus plays a crucial role in enabling military masculinity here, allowing men in the JSDF to satisfy the ideal of “protectors”, which is crucial for their status and legitimacy. A failure to protect can directly undermine claims to masculine protector status (Satō, 2022, p. 241). With its command over technology, the JSDF is then however able to centre images of masculine heroism, where various tools and weapons are used to fend off threats to Japan, usually by the kind of aggressively masculine soldiers featured in figures 64 and 66. Such masculine heroism is a central element in Mamor, invoking a familiar database element seen very prominently in GATE, but also in JSDF YouTube and museums, particularly the ASDF and GSDF museums.



Figure 66 First 2 pages of the manga on AI technology in the JSDF. The initial scenario on the righthand side is transitioned into two different scenarios (red: without AI; blue: with AI) on the lefthand side.

This heroism is often linked directly to the idea of combat. Such a link is very common for most militaries, where the battlefield is a primary site for constructing and upholding military masculinity as a privileged identity, explaining for example the long resistance of militaries to include female soldiers in combat settings (Enloe, 1983, pp. 13–15). However, for the JSDF, such a pattern is remarkable, since, as Kodamaya Remi (2023, p. 4) points out, various political and legal restrictions on JSDF deployments make it nigh impossible for the JSDF to access this source of legitimacy and benefit from it. In Mamor, as in the other sources studied, this problem is solved by moving the battlefield into the realm of fantasy. As shown above, Mamor is rather prolific in this, often featuring various combat scenarios with related to possible real-life battles the JSDF might face. Combat is thus essential to the portrayal of masculinity in Mamor, with Mamor’s masculine heroes being decidedly martial in both the content of their heroism and their aesthetics.

One example where combat very directly features once more uses the manga format to somewhat remove this portrayal of military violence from immediate reality as well as from its political context. Because while the manga shows the GSDF defending one of Japan’s outlying islands against an enemy whose uniforms are remarkably similar to those of Chinese People’s Liberation Army marines, this is not openly acknowledged (Figure 67). However, the combat power of the JSDF and the destructive potential of their weaponry is very openly acknowledged and even celebrated, as it happens for

the purpose of “protecting the country” (*kuni wo mamoru*), as the manga’s headline explains. And while the individual soldiers in this manga remain faceless, they are collectively portrayed in a highly masculinised way in line with traditional ideas of hardened military men who fight and kill for their country. Their heroism is portrayed as an ability to maintain this dedication and hardness under fire and threat to their life, one of the panels for example shows GSDF soldiers firing their guns at an unseen enemy while an officer yells “advance!” (*zenshin!*). Here, we see no “softening” of the JSDF whatsoever, with the portrayal here having rather the opposite effect in showing a JSDF that is both unabashedly masculine and militaristic.



Figure 67 Manga and article about GSDF infantry defending a Japanese island from foreign invasion from the 01/2022 issue of Mamor.

As explained earlier, manga allow for a particularly explicit portrayal of this role, including the depiction of combat, violence and death. But it is not limited to manga. The 04/2020 issue for example contains a lead article that follows the same pattern as the manga, showing a JSDF exercise about defending outlying islands. And while it cannot employ the same level of outright martiality as the manga due to limitations of relying on real-life photography, it nevertheless invokes much of the same images, for example through prominently featuring a double-page photograph of GSDF soldiers in full combat gear kneeling on a beach while an amphibious vehicle can be seen in the background (Figure 68). The image and scenario are immediately linked to JSDF masculine virtues, with the headline of the article boldly declaring “This is the will and power to protect our territory!” (*kore ga ryōdo wo mamoru ishi to chikarada!*).



Figure 69 Military commanders of all three JSDF branches involved in the exercise photographed together on board one of the landing vessels as part of the article.

The image of commanders as masculine figureheads in particular is a recurring theme in Mamor. In the 03/2022 issue for example, there is an article about military commanders now and then, starting out with a ranking of the most respected commanders from a survey of 500 JSDF members, honouring mostly Imperial Japanese military leaders from the period between the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the end of World War II, but also the Chinese general Zhuge Liang or the 19th century Prussian field marshal Helmuth von Moltke the elder (Figure 70). Contained in such articles is a celebration of military commanders as highly skilled and highly capable warriors who have to make extremely difficult decisions under a lot of stress, making them prime material for exaltation as heroes. Commanders then mark the upper end of the hierarchy within the JSDF, not just in terms of rank, but also in terms of their masculine virtue, which in their case is mostly expressed through the concept of responsibility and decisiveness. In the 06/2022 issue, Mamor even offers an interactive scenario to put its readers in the shoes of a military commander with a manga about a fictional war and a commander in it who needs to make a decision about whether to send a small group of soldiers to defend a position where they will almost certainly die but buy valuable time or not (Figure 71). Readers are encouraged to share their thoughts on Twitter, and later pages in the article give further perspectives on the hard decision military leaders face.

What is stressed in that manga is that the underlying component that makes such decisions so difficult is a commander's care for those under his command, with the scenario where he does not send the soldiers having him explicitly give protecting the lives of his "important subordinates" (*daijina bukatachi*) as the reason for making his decision. This shows another pattern found across Mamor, where care is a central virtue ascribed to JSDF members and the institution more broadly. However, this notion of care is presented in a distinctly masculinised manner, distinguishing it from feminine notions of care by putting it in the context of life-or-death situations, like in combat. Here, care is then encoded in the notion of "saving" people, be that fellow soldiers or civilians. Through this, military masculinity is further strengthened, as even in care, the focus is put on extreme danger and heroic deeds by military men. One example for this is an article on combat medics in the 02/2017 issue, which starts with a double page showing dramatic scenes of medics helping a soldier with half of his leg blown off or pulling a wounded man across the ground (Figure 72). Despite these being photographs, they take some inspiration from manga, as speech bubbles and dramatic onomatopoeia, usually used for portraying action scenes in manga, are featured in the article. Masculinity is made quite explicit here, as the article headline speaks in the first person for the medics, using the strongly masculine pronoun "*ore*" in saying "It's okay, we'll save those injured from the frontline too!" (*daijōbu dayo, daiissen no fushōsha mo oretachi ga sukuu!*).



Figure 72 First two pages of an article about GSDF combat medics, showing them saving their comrades in a dramatic scene of blood and gore.



※このマンガは自衛隊による急患輸送の任務をわかりやすく説明するために描いたフィクションです



Figure 73 JSDF pilot shown saving heavily injured young girl in a dramatic manga, extolling JSDF heroism.

Medical work is thus still framed in a distinctly masculine way, making use of the same grimly determined aesthetic language that has already been described for both soldiers in combat scenarios and their commanders more broadly. This pattern

extends to those working outside of direct combat situations as well, extending the notion of care to the wider Japanese population and thus reinforcing the idea of the JSDF as protector of Japan. Gender features more broadly in the masculine/feminine binary here as well, as the hardened but caring men of the JSDF are also shown protecting and saving feminised civilians. One particularly clear example of this pattern comes from the 04/2013 issue of *Mamor*, wherein a manga portrays a JSDF pilot flying a medical emergency transport to collect a heavily injured young girl from a remote island (Figure 73). The story of the manga draws a clear contrast between the heavily injured young girl as victim and the male pilot as her saviour, putting much effort into repeatedly stressing his strength and determination to carry out his mission and save the girl. The first page already shows him gritting his teeth and later pages to consistently show him as a serious and grimly determined person, highlighting his heroism through repeated assertions of the need to save the girl, mentally telling her to hang on (*ganbare*) and aggressively objecting when air traffic control does initially not grant him immediate landing permission. What this manga shows is how the notion of the masculine military hero as protector is usually tied to an implicitly, or in this case explicitly, feminised other (Stiehm, 1982). And while this might be commendable in medical transports for little girls, the underlying logic of the protector/protected binary still contains a power hierarchy that does not fundamentally distinguish between those who need to be protected and those who need to be targeted (Butler, 2015, p. 187).

Ultimately then, masculinity in *Mamor* is closely linked with technology and does take a central role in the magazine's portrayal of the JSDF, just as it did in the other sources examined. Indeed, many of the same patterns observed previously resurface in *Mamor*'s portrayal of military men and the inherent masculinity of military work, pointing once more to the same common database of subcultural "apolitical" militarism being drawn on. And while *Mamor* shows many military men doing various activities, it does not depart from the fundamental association of military labour with masculinity, or the inscription of a traditional masculine warrior image onto those men. On the whole, *Mamor* portrays a very hard sort of military masculinity that is tempered only by an intense stress being put on the notions of "protection" or "peace". However, these do not change the fundamental role masculinity plays in framing the JSDF, rather they evoke the same "tough but caring" masculinity identified in other sources, particularly in *GATE*. Once more, *Mamor* then seems to bring the different strands found in other sources together, drawing on the military database most comprehensively out of all the media studied. Following those trendlines, femininity also plays an important role in *Mamor*'s portrayal of the JSDF, perhaps more so than in many of the other sources even, as shall be explored in the next section.

Success Stories and Fangirls: Femininity in Mamor

One of the first remarkable things about women in Mamor is just how consistently women and especially female soldiers are present in the magazine, which is particularly remarkable when compared to the almost complete absence of female soldiers in the JSDF museums discussed in the last chapter. Mamor, on the other hand, seems to make an effort to include something about military women consistently, for example, from November 2019 to now, a recurring series in every issue was “Women in the SDF” (*josei jieikan-tachi*), with a double page, text-heavy article dedicated to women in the JSDF. Other examples running through earlier years include “Chiiba’s no-make-up interview” (*chiiba ga suppin intabyū*), a manga series with portraits of female soldiers, “12 months of the 60th class of female National Defense Academy students” (*bōeidaigakukō 60-ki joshi gakusei no 12-kagetsu*), a multipage text and photo documentation of female cadets’ lives, or “Visiting a female SDF-member” (*josei jieikan o tazunete*). However, this regular featuring of JSDF women also betrays something else, namely that whilst women are consistently present, their presence is relegated to the background most of the time. Indeed, looking at the actual main articles in Mamor, JSDF women are the subject of less than 5% of articles, a share of publicity that is roughly similar to the number of actual female soldiers in the Self-Defense Forces. Of course, some women also feature in articles which are not specifically concerned with female soldiers, though many of these examples include women in traditionally more feminine occupations like nursing, who are introduced for example as part of an article about a JSDF hospital. In general, it is striking how the portrayal of military women is mostly limited to articles that specifically address women in the JSDF, once more highlighting how the default soldier is constructed as male.

One of the main patterns of portraying women in Mamor is a story of social progress and achieving gender equality. Whenever women are addressed specifically in a leading article, broader questions of women’s inclusion are addressed rather openly, including specifically stressing the recent opening of all combat positions to women and acknowledging the “pioneering” experiences of certain women. One example to illustrate this is an article from the 08/2013 issue, titled “First stories of female SDF members” (*josei Jieitaiin hajimete monogatari*) and covering the early forays of women into the JSDF. It starts with a timeline and basic history lesson (Figure 74) and then moves on to portray of a number of women who have been the first in their respective jobs within the JSDF, illustrating each with a large portrait photograph of the women now and a smaller photograph of them in their respective roles. Here, past gender inequality is used to craft a narrative of achieving gender equality over time in the JSDF, effectively making the JSDF look as if it has already embraced gender equality despite the persistence of distinctly unequal gendered structures in it (Satō, 2010, 2022, p. 153). Mamor embeds this progress narrative in a wider social progress

narrative under the headline “Hardworking women energising Japan” (*ganbaru josei ga nihon wo genki ni suru*).

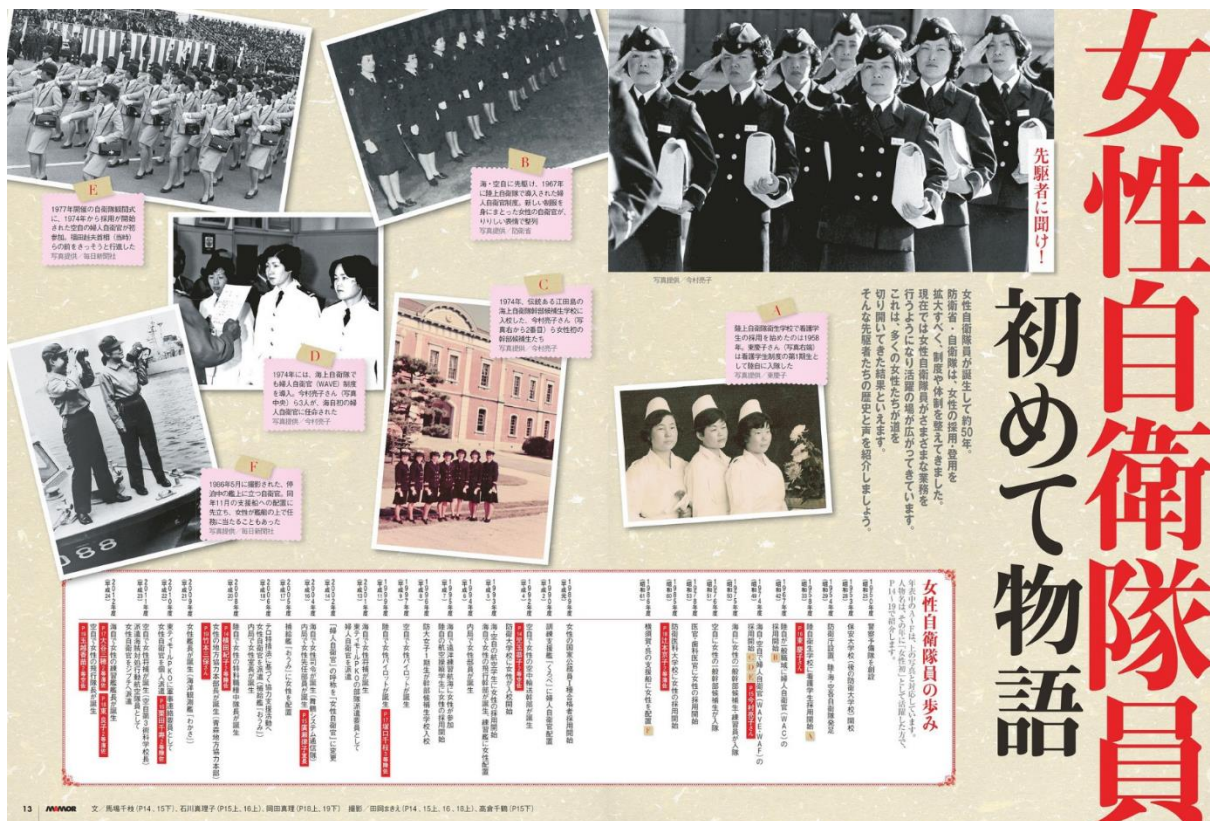


Figure 74 Timeline of women's participation in the JSDF as printed in Mamor.

Such portrayal also works to create a narrative of gender equality as achieved in the JSDF, superficially de-gendering military labour, often through statements made by the portrayed women themselves. In this article for example, gender as an important factor is often denied, with MSDF commander Ōtani Miho, who features in the article as the first woman to command a warship, exemplifying this attitude through stating that that “I want to fulfill my responsibilities as a ‘captain’ rather than a ‘female captain’” (*‘josei no kanchō’ dewa naku ‘kanchō’ to shite, sekimu o hatashita*). This echoes much of the research done on military women, highlighting how successful military women are keen to distance themselves from femininity as a survival and advancement strategy in a hypermasculine institution (Sasson-Levy, 2003a; Frühstück, 2007; King, 2017). Mamor amplifies this narrative that embraces women in the military while at the same time denying the importance of gender by highlighting such statements. Commander Ōtani’s quote, for example, was used as the header for her portrait, printed in large, horizontally written red characters at the top of her quarter page, with the actual text there being in much smaller, vertically written black characters, thus drawing the viewers’ attention primarily to the quote and centring it. This is a consistent pattern, as is made explicit by the 03/2021 issue, which features a lead article (Figure 75) about women in the JSDF tellingly titled “There is no job title called ‘Female Self-Defense Force Officer!’” (*‘josei jieikan’ to iu shokushu wa nai*). That there

is no job title of “Male Self-Defense Force Officer” of course need not be said in this, as a male standard is implied but camouflaged as gender-neutral, as has been shown in the previous section.

国家防衛の最前線で戦うオンナたち

「女性自衛官」という職種はない！

かつて自衛隊といえば“男性社会”の象徴でした。看護職以外で女性に初めて国防の担い手としての道が開かれたのは1974年。防衛大学校が女子学生を受け入れたのが92年のこと。それから幾星霜、現在、女性自衛官たちは自衛隊のほぼ全職種で活躍できるようになりました。彼女たちが一様に口にするのは、「私はイチ自衛官」。

そう、国防を担う身には女性も男性もないということなのです。

航空幕僚監部
総務部総務課
広報室長
吉田ゆかり
1等空佐

海上幕僚監部
人事教育部 教育課
学校延長
小野小百合
1等海佐

陸上幕僚監部
監理部総務課
広報室長
横田紀子
1等陸佐

ここに登場いただく3人の自衛官をご紹介します。

吉田ゆかり1等空佐は防衛大学校女子1期生、横田紀子1等陸佐は2期生、そして小野小百合1等海佐は4期生。3人は防大時代から続く先輩・後輩という関係でもあり、皆、プロフィールに「女性初」あるいは「女性最年少」という輝かしい称号が付いている。

吉田1佐は1996年に浜松管制隊に配属されたのち、さまざまな部隊を経て2011年に松島官制隊長（女性初の管制隊長）に、17年に統合幕僚監部災害派遣班長（女性初の運用系の班長）に、そして19年より現職の航空幕僚監部総務部総務課広報室長（女性初の広報室長）に就任。横田1佐は1997年に宇都宮の第12特科連隊に配属後、さまざまな部隊を経て2008年に第12特科連隊中隊長（女性初の戦闘職種の中隊長）に、19年に岩手の第9特科連隊長兼岩手駐屯地司令（女性初の戦闘職種の連隊長および駐屯地司令）に、そして20年より現職の陸上幕僚監部監理部総務課広報室長に就く。そして小野1佐は00年に練習艦「しまゆき」の通信士として配属されたのち、さまざまな艦や部隊を経て、18年には護衛艦「やまぎり」の艦長に就任（女性最年少の護衛艦艦長）。19年より現職の海上幕僚監部人事教育部教育課学校延長に就く。そんな女性の自衛官としてトップキャリアの道走る陸・海・空の3人が集結し、本音のトークを繰り広げてくれた。そこから見えてくる女性特有の苦労と努力の歴史、そして国を守るべく存在する、自衛官の今の姿とは？

MOMOR 12

Figure 75 First page of article proclaiming occupational equality between men and women in the JSDF, featuring an interview with three senior female officers.

Mamor thus constructs a fantasy of gender equality in its articles. This is not entirely new, as a similar fantasy could already be observed to varying degrees in GATE and most prominently in JSDF YouTube. However, Mamor is the most explicit about developing and promoting this fantasy, establishing itself as a database element in its own right. A fantasy of achieved gender equality as a database element allows the JSDF to consistently use women as symbols, or as Satō puts it, “decoys” (*otori*), reframing distinctly masculine-dominated structures as gender neutral and progressive (2022, p. 251). Importantly, as with all military database elements, this equality is not a necessary component of a larger grand narrative of the JSDF as a progressive military, but rather one of many elements that can be invoked for consumer pleasure. The fantasy of gender equality is thus constructed on an explicitly opt-in basis. In the non-linear consumption model of postmodernity, readers of Mamor are left with the ultimate choice to draw on gender equality as one database element or simply ignore it (Azuma, 2009, pp. 31–32). This way, Mamor is able to contain seemingly contradictory fantasies, embracing both the hypermasculine traditional warrior shown in the previous section and military women as fully integrated and equal to military men in the JSDF. This paradox is resolved through the database model, as the construction of a coherent narrative is outsourced to the narrative consumer, who draws on the database elements circulating in the military subculture that Mamor and the other sources foster to construct their own convenient narrative (Azuma, 2009, p. 38).



Figure 76 Female MSDF cadets shown doing a boat race.

However, this style of portrayal is far from universal and is in fact combined with a style of portrayal that seems almost diametrically opposed to it. One of the main components of this other style of portrayal is formatting. There were some hints of this in the previously discussed article on female cadets in the usage of pink headlines, however compared to other articles, that was still rather tame. For example, an article about female ASDF cadets from the 11/2011 edition of Mamor makes extensive use of pink headlines, light and colourful graphics and “cute” decorations on the page (Figure 78). This cute and girly visual language is made to resemble a *purikura*, a type of decorated polaroid, especially popular among girls and young women. The women in the article are thus, despite their later handling of guns and doing of physical exercise, clearly marked as feminine and ultimately subject to the predominant patriarchal gender order (Okabe et al., 2006). Femininity is fully embraced in other places as well, for example in an article about singers from the various JSDF musical ensembles in an article of the 08/2023 issue (Figure 79). Here, the three women are shown in dress uniform, with long skirts, smiling brightly at the camera while posing with a civilian musician, with the headline using decidedly gendered language in labelling them “divas of peace” (*heiwa wo kanaderu dībatachi*). In both these examples, femininity as a visual marker gives the women portrayed a markedly different identity and status from military men, giving the very distinct impression that there *is* a job title called “female SDF-officer”. Femininity here serves to remove women from the direct context of “serious” military work and mainly that of combat, reflecting Sabine Frühstück’s observation that women’s role in JSDF PR is to soften the JSDF and symbolically remove it from its original and main purpose of inflicting violence (Frühstück and Ben-Ari, 2002; Frühstück, 2007, p. 12; Brown, 2012, p. 64; Brownfield-Stein, 2017).



Figure 78 Female ASDF cadets shown in a cute and decorated style associated with "purikura".



Figure 79 Cover page of interview of the three JSDF singers and the civilian singer, evoking both the idea of peace and their femininity through labelling them "divas".

The database model helps to reconcile these otherwise contradictory visions of women in the JSDF, allowing them to be both just like men *and* highly feminised and distinct from men at the same time. Femininity is then more internally divided than masculinity, where different masculine database elements generally still lead back to the same (or at least a similar) version of masculinity. This is not the case for femininity, which is divided into more distinct strands, as shown above. The reason for this is that as the default soldier is cast as male, maintaining the gender binary requires Mamor to portray women either as soldiers *or* as women. Even where articles attempt to incorporate both of these elements, they still cause tension that leads to some slightly odd results. For example, almost every woman in Mamor will smile at the camera, often showing teeth. In some cases, this even extends to women in exercise scenarios. Men, on the other hand, are of course also smiling in some of the photographs, but are similarly often portrayed with serious or stern expressions, particularly if they are of higher rank. Women are also never shown as only serious, so even on pages which contain seemingly nothing but female cadets carrying guns and doing combat exercises, at least one photograph will have them all huddled up, smiling at the camera and showing peace signs. Women also express themselves in a markedly feminine manner a lot of the time, including references to motherhood and dreams of marriage, or stereotypically feminine hobbies like shopping for clothes.

Femininity also features very prominently in relation to men, as women (both civilian and military) are shown as objects of male desire, whilst military women are also shown thinking about (usually military) men a lot. In fact, this is one of the most remarkably consistent features of women's portrayal in Mamor that they are almost always integrated into a context of heterosexual desire or the standard nuclear family model that is considered the most culturally appropriate outcome of that desire (Hendry, 2012, p. 36). This aspect of femininity is a large and important component of Mamor's portrayal of women which will be explored in detail in the next section, a divide that is to a degree artificial as Mamor's construction of femininity is intrinsically tied to heterosexuality. However, as heterosexuality has been another important analytical category surfacing in previous chapters and as it tied to masculinity too (though in very different ways), this aspect of femininity will be more thoroughly explored in the next section, dedicated specifically to heterosexuality in Mamor.

Mothers, Maidens, and Good Men: Heterosexuality in Mamor

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, heterosexuality is probably the best explored aspect of Mamor, with Emma Dalton (2022a, 2022b) and Fukuura Atsuko (2017) both looking at civilian military dating, facilitated through matchmaking advertising in Mamor. However, beyond this aspect, another important and less explored role of heterosexuality in Mamor is the portrayal of military women's sexuality. This aspect features in most of the articles on JSDF women in some form at least, managing the possible subversion of military women through reintegrating them into

a heterosexual social framework that ultimately reaffirms (military) men's claim to women's bodies. Here, femininity and heterosexuality intersect strongly, as military women seem to assert their own femininity through such heterosexual structures as well. One humorous example for this is a short four panel manga in the 03/2021 issue (Figure 80). It is one of seven such mangas printed side by side and illustrating various aspects of JSDF women's lives, following the previously discussed article on JSDF women from the same issue. The manga is told from the perspective of a JSDF woman observing her female senior (*senpai*) in how she interacts with them compared to her boyfriend, who is also a JSDF member. The first panel shows her interacting with her boyfriend, acting cute and using the neutral to feminine first-person pronoun "*watashi*". The second panel then shows her as stern, reprimanding her juniors, using the highly masculine pronoun "*ore*" instead, which seems to be her custom when talking to the narrator and others in the force. However, as she spots her boyfriend close to them mid-sermon, she becomes confused about which pronoun to use, stumbling over the choice and ending up mixing them together into "*owatashi*", a jumbled combination of the two pronouns.

What is remarkable about this manga is how the senior is shown to essentially switch between two distinct modes of interaction, the masculine military mode and the feminine girlfriend mode, with the humour of the manga coming from the mixing of the two. On the one hand, it reaffirms the idea of military work as masculine by default, as the female JSDF member at the centre of the manga seems to have internalised an on the whole masculinised behaviour that is apparently rather different from the feminine behaviour she shows around her boyfriend. Particularly when interacting with her juniors over whom she has the power of seniority and possibly rank as well, she

seems to consider adopting such a manner of speech and behaviour as the most suitable to her position, thus illustrating the linkage between masculinity and her military occupation. On the other hand, her femininity is preserved through her heterosexual relationship, as she gets to adopt an entirely different “gender appropriate” behaviour and language when around her boyfriend. In the interaction with her boyfriend, her transgression of gender norms is thus managed and contained, her adoption of two distinct modes of interaction allowing her to exist both within the masculinised sphere of military work and the feminised sphere of girlfriend. By demonstrating her “maidenly heart” (*otomegokoro*), as the manga’s subheading puts it, she retains a space within the traditional Japanese gender order (Dasgupta, 2005, pp. 172–173).



Figure 80 Manga about a senior (*senpai*) who usually uses the masculine pronoun “ore” but uses the neutral pronoun “watashi” with her boyfriend mixing them up.

This is also reflected in different articles, for example one article from the 02/2015 issue, featuring a survey of 100 female JSDF members dedicates an entire page to romance (Figure 81). Notably, this is the first page of the article and it immediately puts heterosexuality into its framing by headlining the section as “JSDF women’s choice of ‘attractive men’” (*joseijieikan ga erabu ‘suki na dansei’*). Here, a wider pattern in Mamor is illustrated where any sexualities beyond the heterosexual norm are never even acknowledged as existing or being an option, legitimate or otherwise. Instead, there is a persistent assumption of heterosexuality that extends to all JSDF personnel, including men, as a similar survey of 100 male JSDF members uses the same but inverted framing of “attractive women” (*suki na josei*). Notably though, this takes up only half a page for the men rather than the full page for women, highlighting the increased

importance that romance is assumed to have for women, for whom such heterosexual relationships are tied up intimately with their continued recognition as female. Preferences expressed in the survey also reflect wider societal gender norms, as on the women's side, one of the highlighted responses for attractive qualities in men is "being strong and sturdy" (*tsuyokute, takumashī tokoro*), a statement that is illustrated by a woman looking smitten as a man is carrying two boxes for her. On the men's side, on the other hand, women are compared to planes, with one comment saying that an attractive woman would be like an F-15 fighter jet, "lean and sharp, with outstanding style" (*muda no nai shāpu de, batsugun na sutairu to*). This comment is illustrated by two planes with the top halves morphing into attractive women, evoking the same linkage between military technology and female bodies that is used for example in military anime (Sugawa-Shimada, 2019a), and has been observed in the last chapter as a way of selling merchandise in JSDF museum shops.

Another way in which heterosexuality helps to reassert military women's femininity is through motherhood. Military mothers feature in multiple articles in *Mamor*, including in one of the 4-panel manga from the 03/2021 issue discussed above. It is overall closely associated with womanhood in *Mamor*, an article from the 05/2016 issue focusing on female pilots for example mentions the difficulty of planning for pregnancy and giving birth as one of the unique struggles faced by women pilots. Motherhood and military work are also linked in a positive manner though, with one larger manga from the 08/2013 issue (Figure 82) talking in some length about motherhood in the JSDF, portraying the JSDF as an empowering and supportive environment for working mothers. The fictional protagonist of this story is shown joining the JSDF due to its generous perks for working mothers, as her stated goal is to continue working while having kids as well. Shown married to a fellow JSDF soldier and having three kids, she is shown as an example of female empowerment and self-actualisation through military work *and* motherhood, with the JSDF being portrayed as a very supportive environment in terms of benefits, but also in terms of understanding, as the next two pages of the manga include scenarios show superior officers showing kindness and understanding when the mother has to care for a sick child for example. The manga also ends on a note that specifically frames military work as empowering, as the mother protagonist is briefly overcome by doubt about her being a working mother, thinking that her children might have preferred a stay-at-home mum instead. When she is moved by that doubt to ask her eldest son if he would prefer her to stay home, he however answers that "it is cool that mum is working" (*mama wa shigoto shite iru tokoro ga kakkoī yo*). The manga here refers to the "myth of motherhood" in Japanese society, that particularly since the post-war economic miracle has resulted in strong social pressure on mothers to quit work and become full-time housewives

and mothers (Niwa, 1993). According to the manga, the JSDF then offers a way out, allowing women to combine dreams of motherhood with “meaningful” work.

独身隊員100人に 仕事から恋愛まで アンケート調査!

女性自衛官が選ぶ
「好きな男性」

自衛官はどんな人が好きなの? 恋愛・結婚観は? 仕事の悩みは?
どんな夢を持っているの? 一般の人たちが気になることを
陸・海・空自衛隊の独身自衛官100人に聞いてみました。

**男性のどんなところに
引かれますか?**

テキパキと仕事を行くところ
オフのゆったりとした
ところのギャップ
(航空自衛隊 34歳)

笑顔がすてきで自分を
しっかり持っている人
(陸上自衛隊 25歳)

人間的に大人な人、尊敬できる人
(航空自衛隊 30歳)

強くて、たくましいところ
(航空自衛隊 34歳)

たまに見せる笑顔
(航空自衛隊 25歳)

**自衛官がゆえに
恋愛で悩むことは?**

転属が多いので、
遠距離恋愛になってしまう
(航空自衛隊 34歳)

長期の訓練や
当直などがあるため、
**すぐに彼に
会えない**ことがある
(陸上自衛隊 25歳)

**自衛官(私)と付き合うと
こんないいことがあります!**
といったアピールポイントを教えてください

活動的なので、スポーツやアウトドアを
一緒に楽しめる。BBQの火起こしが速いです!
(航空自衛隊 24歳)

とことん
飲み
付き合えます!
(陸上自衛隊 24歳)

好きになったら一直線、
超一途です
(航空自衛隊 25歳)

重い荷物も自分で持ちます
(航空自衛隊 25歳)

**付き合う相手に
求めることは何ですか?**

完璧過ぎず、ある程度、
適当な部分があること
(海上自衛隊 31歳)

誠実で
優しいこと
(航空自衛隊 25歳)

一般常識があること
(航空自衛隊 34歳)

うそをつかないこと、一緒に
たくさん笑ってくれること
(航空自衛隊 25歳)

自分の仕事に
口出ししないこと
(航空自衛隊 30歳)

**包容力があり、一緒にいて
元気をもらえる人**
(陸上自衛隊 28歳)

イラスト／安藤 直 (asterisk-agency) **MYWOR** 16

Figure 81 First page of a 4-page article about a survey among 100 female and 100 male JSDF members. This first page immediately focuses on JSDF women's romantic preferences and embraces traditional heterosexual dating norms, as are reflected in the (shorter) male



Figure 82 Manga about the "life model" (raifu moderu) of a working mother in the JSDF.

When going beyond actual JSDF women, heterosexuality still continues to play a major role in Mamor, one that is evident from the cover of most Mamor issues. Here, one usually finds a beautiful young woman in uniform, though she is not a JSDF member herself, but rather an actress, singer or other kind of female celebrity who has been

photographed wearing a JSDF uniform on some JSDF base and with JSDF equipment. These women are usually shown saluting on the front cover, then on the first two to three pages, there are more photographs of them in a sort of pin-up style, doing cute or sometimes sexy poses (see example in Figure 83), combined with a mini biography of the celebrity and a short message from them about the photoshoot and their thoughts about the JSDF. These women are labelled as “Defenders’ Goddesses” (*sakimoritachi no megami*), putting them in direct relation to (presumed male) JSDF personnel. They thus fulfil a double function. First, they serve to attract male readers to Mamor, falling in line with the Japanese phenomenon of “gravure” (*gurabia*). “Gravure” describes a kind of erotic photography, where women in the Japanese idol industry (usually singers or actresses) are depicted in magazines (particularly manga magazines) or even tradable cards, often wearing swimsuits and posing in a cute and/or sexy way (Galbraith, 2012, p. 191). With its ties to manga and the idol industry, this phenomenon is close to “otaku” culture, but not necessarily part of it, with masculine enjoyment of popular gravure models’ bodies at least partially normalised (Kam, 2013, pp. 164, 166). The models featuring in Mamor are not shown in swimsuits, but the visual style and poses still follow in the aesthetic tradition of gravure photography. Putting these images on the cover of Mamor then falls into a larger pattern in modern capitalist societies for using women’s sex-appeal to attract male consumers to a product (Blair *et al.*, 2006). In the case of Mamor, this means using the “Defenders’ Goddesses” to attract male readers, marking a clear gendered preference in reader demographics.

Second, the women on the Mamor covers elevate JSDF masculinity through framing (male) soldiers as heterosexually desirable. The labelling as “*Defenders’ Goddesses*” immediately indicates this relationship, but it also features in the women’s messages to the JSDF, where they often express feelings of gratitude or admiration towards JSDF personnel they met on bases, frequently describing them as hardworking, kind, dedicated, etc. In the 07/2024 issue this gets taken a step further, as for celebrating the ASDF’s 70th year of existence, Mamor includes an extended photoshoot with six different models posing in front of various planes. After the initial standard photographs of the cover model, the other photos are done to be a full page each, including some basic information on the relevant plane and the model’s signature (Figure 84). By making each of these a full page, they are designed to be taken out of the magazine and put up somewhere as a literal pinup poster, combining feminine sex-appeal with the appeal of military technology to possibly decorate ASDF locker rooms or other places. A manga from the 10/2011 issue highlights this once more, this time using a woman aircraft mechanic who is drawn in a distinctly sexualised manner, e.g. leaning forward in a way that accentuates her large breasts. She is shown talking to a male pilot, then watching him from the ground when the jets are scrambled, asking him to play a game of Japanese chess with her after he returns. While not made explicit, there is a clear romantic tension in the manga, effectively associating JSDF

work, particularly in a hypermasculinised role like fighter jet pilot, with being able to attract women.



Figure 83 Example of some of the kind of additional photos of the celebrity on the cover found in the first pages of the magazine, here from the 05/2016 edition.



Figure 84 Full-page photograph of the actress and singer Nagao Mariya in front of a T-4 plane. The photo was originally taken for the 11/2020 issue.

This attractiveness of military men also extends to civilian women. Mamor does, for example, include dating advertisements, where three serving JSDF members' profiles are printed in the magazine. Though occasionally a woman's profile appears as well, the overwhelming majority of advertisements are about JSDF men looking for partners. Just like previously discussed, heterosexuality is also immediately assumed as the only possible sexual orientation, so no gender preferences or anything similar are included, as all soldiers are assumed heterosexual. Fukuura and Dalton have both explored this aspect of heterosexuality in Mamor and how it serves to legitimise the JSDF (Fukuura, 2017; Dalton, 2022a). Military-civilian dating also features far beyond the dating section and is celebrated. One article for example is simply labelled "I married a soldier!" (*jieikan to kekkon shimashita!*) and celebrates the stories of such couples, including some who met through the Mamor dating advertisements (Figure 85). The article features many couples and their stories, with the JSDF member in all printed photographs and almost all mentioned stories being male with a female civilian partner, the only exception being a single female soldier, though it is not specified whether her partner is also a soldier or a civilian. The dynamic of male soldier marrying civilian woman is thus depicted as the default here, including in a later section of the article where six civilian wives discuss various aspects of living with their military husbands. Sabine Frühstück has highlighted this dynamic, attributing it to military women's total absorption into the military structure, while military men's masculinity and status is affirmed by a civilian wife (2007, p. 104).



Figure 85 First page of an article about couples with at least one soldier. It starts with people who have married through the advertisements in Mamor, but goes on to include a lot more couples.

Mamor clearly maintains this convention, using female desire for military men as a way of strengthening soldiers' claim to higher masculine status. Accordingly, such desire is celebrated in the magazine, including in an article from the 04/2017 issue on "JSDF Mania", i.e. various kinds of JSDF-fans. One part of the article is titled "I love them [the JSDF] so much that I finally married a soldier!" (*sukisugite jieikan to gōruin!*) and features the story of a civilian woman who became a big fan of the MSDF and then ended up marrying a man currently serving in the MSDF (Figure 86). Here, like in other articles, JSDF masculinity is portrayed as desirable, but the desire is also directly linked to involvement in the military subculture addressed by Mamor in general and very specifically portrayed in this article. So whilst Frühstück's assertion about JSDF women becoming more totally immersed in military culture is reflected here, it also shows that the civilian partners of military men become integrated into the same military culture as well, taking on the role of what Emma Dalton terms "helpmates" (2022b). If thinking in broader terms about Mamor as representing a military subculture though, men and women inside or outside the JSDF are all included, only playing different roles based on their position within or without the JSDF as well as their gender. Military men are at the core of this subculture, but it is upheld just as much by military women, civilian wives and civilian men with enough interest in the JSDF to immerse themselves in its database.



Figure 86 Half-page about JSDF-fans that shows the story of a woman so fond of the MSDF that she married one of them.

Besides reaching out to new people through media, the military subculture is then also self-reproducing, with military families as one of the key sites for such reproduction.

This is reflected in Mamor, as military families feature prominently in various parts of the magazine. In one example from the 04/2022 issue, a female manga artist writes about her own experience of family life with an MSDF officer (Figure 87), with the next double page then adding brief stories by other wives as well, some of them illustrated by drawings. Various oddities of family life are portrayed here, including some problems like the need to settle any fight before the husband departs on another tour again. Notably though, it also contains a story about the daughter of the family picking up a perfect salute from observing her father, highlighting the role such military families play in socialising children into the military subculture. Heterosexuality then has a social reproduction component in Mamor as well, particularly as this sort of portrayal also continuously reinforces the idea of the heterosexual nuclear family as both ideal and natural.



Figure 87 Manga that is part of a brief article about MSDF family life, showing various aspects of how the work of MSDF husbands affects their civilian wives and families.

Stemming from the positioning of a traditional warrior masculinity as the axiomatic “empty centre” of military subculture, heterosexuality thus serves to mark this sort of military men as desirable whilst also integrating their female partners into the military subculture. For the same reason military women are generally absorbed fully into the JSDF, including in the choice of their partner, as by maintaining a hierarchical binary between masculinity and femininity as well as military insider and outsider, them choosing civilian husbands could potentially destabilise the hegemonic position of military masculinity *within* the military subculture, which in turn would threaten military

women's acceptance into said subculture. Effectively, conservative interpretations of Japanese gender roles are thus worked back into the subcultural context. In the case of military women, they are given a fresh coat of paint and reframed as given women an opportunity to combine both work and family life if they stay within the safe area created by the JSDF for them. Heterosexuality in the context of Mamor then draws on deeply sedimented master narratives of heterosexual family life to integrate military and civilian women into its military subculture and keep them in a subordinate position where they can amplify and lend legitimacy to the subculture as both new and a continuum of traditional Japanese gender roles and norms.

Conclusion

In the introduction, I called Mamor a "military lifestyle magazine". This is indeed a fitting title, as the magazine's main role is to serve as one of the core pillars for uniting a military subculture that consists of male enthusiasts, civilian wives, as well as soldiers. In many ways, this role requires Mamor to blend elements from all the sources previously analysed, being a direct example of self-commodification as a strategy to sell a surprisingly hard and unabashedly violent militarism in a way that is fundamentally unthreatening and de-politicised through making it a fantastical pleasure commodity. Mamor's "apolitical militarism" then portrays combat, war and military violence as a game or story, something that is essentially an entertainment product. For this, the potentially serious nature of such combat is actually highlighted rather than hidden but reframed in an unabashedly militaristic manner that is tempered by fun and the veneer of fantasy. Mamor's JSDF encompasses the full paradoxical nature of JSDF apolitical militarism by fully embracing the kind of non-linear consumption the database-model allows for.

Thus, soldiers can simultaneously be hardboiled tough men whilst also being totally open to female participation. Combat can be both gruesomely brutal and thrillingly fun. Women can be hardcore and masculine but also remain totally cute and feminine. Weapons can be just harmless "big boys' toys" as well as frighteningly powerful machines to destroy the enemy. Mamor is free to include these and many other seemingly contradictory ideas and images in its pages as under the database model, it does not need to provide a coherent singular narrative but only attractive narrative fragments, enticing database elements for readers to put together as they see fit, in whatever sequence, shape or intensity that they see fit. In covering such a wide range of database elements and incorporating so many elements from other media, Mamor then becomes a gateway drug to joining the military subculture, offering a wide range of "tasters" for those interested to find their own personal flavour of militarism, be that one that is progressive, gender equal (at least on the surface) and kind and caring, or be that one that is traditional, masculine and aggressively patriotic. Mamor provides all the elements and adds accessibility through explainers and images, but it does leave the assembly of the final narrative to the reader.

Apolitical militarism is therefore, as can be seen once more very clearly in Mamor, the transplantation of militarism into the realm of cultural commodity, replacing ideology with fantasy and nation with subculture. The Japanese nation that continues to feature in this subculture should then not be confused with Japan *as it is*, but rather the idealised illusion of Japan *as it should be*, described by Azuma Hiroki (2009, p. 19). This makes it at the same time quintessentially postmodern, as in this apolitical militarism, as in Mamor, the societal grand narrative has not just failed, but has been entirely replaced by highly customisable personal narratives that are only united by drawing on a single united database, shared through a specific societal subculture.

Conclusion

Article 9 of the Japanese constitution (1946) states that “[...] land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.” Yet, despite this fundamental legal principle, the Japan Self Defense Force was established only a relatively short while after the passing of Japan’s post-war constitution and Japan is now operating one of the world’s largest defence budgets (Tian *et al.*, 2024). This unique historical context has resulted in a situation where, despite its acting, dressing, working, and often speaking like a military, the JSDF is, at least officially, not a military. It wears camouflage and is equipped with heavy weaponry but avoids terms like “war” or “combat”, instead using terms like “peace” and “protection” to euphemistically describe its core business of exercising military violence. The JSDF thus differs from other militaries in countries like the US or UK as its position in the Japanese state and society is precarious and its very existence is fundamentally paradoxical. Accordingly, Japanese security culture has been frequently described as “pacifist” or simply “antimilitarist”, marking Japanese society as sceptical or even outright hostile to militarism and thus, by extension, hostile to the JSDF’s core task (Berger, 1993, 1998; Izumikawa, 2010; Hikotani, 2014; Anindya, 2016).

The JSDF has thus been put in a difficult social position, where on the one hand, it aspires to an American-inspired military masculinity and proving itself as a capable fighting force, while on the other hand having to play down its military identity in order to manage its difficult relationship with Japanese civil society. Having to report to a largely anti-war public, the JSDF is then unable to partake in the masculinity-affirming activity of actual deployment in combat zones, leading to a further paradoxical situation of being a military that does not fight wars (Frühstück, 2011, p. 2; Kodamaya, 2023). From a gender perspective, this begs the question how the JSDF navigates its gendered identity in a situation where the traditional masculine military ideal is disrupted. Feminist researchers like Satō Fumika (2004, 2010, 2022) or Sabine Frühstück (2007) have addressed this question from various angles, arguing that while fundamentally patriarchal structures are maintained within the JSDF, gendered messaging and particularly women are used strategically to soften and normalise the force in Japanese society. Including women into the JSDF served, for example, to portray it as a “normal workplace” and JSDF personnel as “normal citizens” by extension (Frühstück, 2007, p. 96; Satō, 2022, p. 106). Despite women’s actual presence remaining limited and tokenistic, they then still serve to promote the idea of the JSDF as a modern and progressive, marking it as fundamentally different from its Imperial Japanese predecessor and turning women soldiers into JSDF ambassadors (Frühstück, 2007, pp. 12, 96; Satō, 2010, pp. 259–262). At the same time, women also serve to legitimise and popularise the JSDF by stressing its heterosexual attractiveness to women and connecting it to popular culture through the use of

female bodies (idols, manga characters) and the heterosexual messaging associated with them in its advertising (Frühstück and Ben-Ari, 2002; Dalton, 2022a).

Yet, as the analysis in the last four chapters has shown, most of the sources show hardly any “unease” at all and dedicate only relatively little attention to “softening” the JSDF. Instead, the JSDF is portrayed as assertive, masculine and unabashedly militaristic. While the elements observed by Frühstück and Satō are certainly present, particularly in specific sources like the JSDF Recruitment Channel, whose message was largely in line with the idea of “softening” the JSDF, other sources painted a rather different picture. In the GSDF, ASDF and MSDF YouTube Channels, the anime GATE, the military museums and the military magazine Mamor, the picture that emerges is one of a military organisation that is not at all unlike what gender-focused researchers have found about other militaries, namely that they are fundamentally gendered organisations where masculinity is at the core of everything that they are doing and who might strategically make use of women and femininity to positively influence their image without challenging the fundamental supremacy of masculinity within the institution (Barrett, 1996; Enloe, 2000; Brown, 2012; Duncanson and Woodward, 2017). From this perspective, the JSDF seems like a “normal” military where masculinity is the norm and ideal, whilst women are only ever included for “nonfeminist reasons”, as Fumika Satō (2010) puts it, borrowing a phrase from Cynthia Enloe.

The observations from the previous chapters then seem to align with what Eyal Ben-Ari and Sabine Frühstück (2003) observe in their study of the JSDF’s annual “Fuji Firepower Review”. Here, they document the open portrayal of warrior masculinity by the JSDF in an event that is addressing a narrow and curated sympathetic public at that specific ticketed event. But while they explicitly stress the differences between the JSDF’s self-portrayal at that event versus its broader public relations material, that same difference seems to no longer apply to the portrayals of the post-2011 JSDF analysed in this dissertation. Instead, the same dynamic is extended to a much wider audience beyond the narrow confines of a ticketed in-person event, whilst still continuing to operate on an opt-in basis visiting a museum, purchasing Mamor, watching a JSDF video, etc.) that assures a degree of self-selection into consuming military content. Notably, such militaristic portrayal does not appear to be accompanied by any broader, general-public focused narrative of de-militarising the JSDF anymore. At most, what is found in some of the sources is a rhetorical twisting of terms where the ideas of protection and peace are themselves militarised as protecting peace requires a larger and more assertive JSDF (Hagström and Hanssen, 2016, p. 284).

Embedded in a wider rearticulation of Japanese national identity and keeping this fig leaf of rhetorical protection, the JSDF then proceeds to appeal to an audience constructed as military-friendly, military-interested and more supportive than critical. It does not, in any way, engage with critics of the JSDF or its militarism but rather

focuses on appealing to a sort of military subculture, which it is at the same time helping to construct around its media outputs. What is observed in the sources discussed in previous chapters is then not an attempt to overcome or even acknowledge the fundamental paradoxes of the JSDF's existence. Instead, the JSDF shutting itself into a military subculture mirrors what Azuma Hiroki observed about otaku's retreat into subculture "not because they deny sociality but rather because, as social values and standards are already dysfunctional, they feel a pressing need to construct alternative values and standards"(Azuma, 2009, p. 27). In constructing "alternative values and standards", the JSDF then separates itself from wider Japanese society, not addressing its fundamental paradox but simply creating a fantasy in which those paradoxes do not exist or at least do not matter.

Such fantasy is at the core of the JSDF self-portrayal observed in the sources, most bluntly and prominently in GATE's fantasy of a JSDF unshackled through transmigration into a different reality. But it is also present in Mamor, where through manga and articles, a number of fantasy scenarios are played through in which the JSDF inevitably saves the day from foreign missiles, invading forces or natural disasters. Similarly, JSDF Museums and YouTube videos sell the fantasy of a socially accepted, powerful and respected JSDF that is working on eyelevel with the American military to protect Japan and maintain peace in Asia and the world. In fact, even the Recruitment Channel, which is most in line with a project of "softening" the JSDF, still deals in fantasies of the JSDF as a fun and easy employer, which, at least according to the comments discussed in that chapter, actually seems to be the least believable of all JSDF fantasies. The reason for the Recruitment Channel's fantasy seemingly failing to convince while other fantasies about the JSDF go largely unchallenged is precisely because by engaging in softening the JSDF, it fails to speak to the military subculture otherwise addressed in portrayals of the JSDF. This failure is remarkable, as commentators under Recruitment Channel videos seem to call out the fantasy in the videos, calling them lies or otherwise criticising them for being inaccurate. Notably, such criticisms are hardly ever levelled against videos on other channels or other sources analysed, despite them dealing with similarly unlikely fantasies.

What differentiates the Recruitment Channel's fantasy from other JSDF fantasies is ultimately that it fails to construct its fantasy from the right building blocks, i.e. those recognisable to and accepted and enjoyed by those in the military subculture. This is because the military subculture's fantasies are constructed from what Azuma called a "database" of common elements, clustered around the initially observed themes of technology, femininity, heterosexuality and masculinity. In contrast to the modernist model of "grand narratives" to make sense of the world, the quintessentially postmodernist "database" model relies on "an aggregate of information without a narrative, into which all viewers could empathize of their own accord and each could read up convenient narratives" (Azuma, 2009, p. 38). Saved in this database are distinct "moe elements" as Azuma calls them, often referred to as "database elements"

in this dissertation. In otaku culture, “moe” describes a sense of strong emotional attachment to and attraction to a fictional character, whilst maintaining full awareness of that character’s fictionality (Galbraith, 2014, p. 11). For the anime and manga fans in otaku culture, such moe elements would be different attributes of characters or settings like visual designs, character archetypes, etc. which are not consumed as part of a larger narrative or individually appealing character designs, but rather as inherently and independently pleasurable elements drawn directly from the subcultural database. The JSDF and its military subculture adopt the same model of consumption, with portrayal of the JSDF across the four different sources drawing on common database elements like scrambling fighter jets, (male) soldier’s shirtless morning exercise, or the firing of heavy weaponry, which are reproduced in different media and settings as pleasurable in their own right, without narrative embedment, appealing through spectacle and shared subcultural recognition.

That this is a rejection of “grand narratives” becomes particularly clear in the framing of such military “moe elements”. Military violence, be it in GATE or JSDF museums is shown as pleasurable in itself, regardless of the context it is employed in. In some cases (like the JSDF museums) the context is entirely stripped away, but even where some context is given and even where enemies are named (e.g. in GATE) or at least clearly alluded to (e.g. JSDF fighting Chinese forces in Mamor), their identity and motives are ultimately meaningless. That is because assigning the vague roles of “protection” (for the JSDF) and “aggression” (for its enemies) is enough to maintain a setting in which the exercise of military violence is inherently pleasurable. There is no need to even consider the enemies combatted as “real” because the entire discourse has moved to the realm of fantasy, whichever enemy the JSDF faces in its self-portrayal therefore has no more personality or reality than an endlessly respawning wave of enemies in a video game. In this, the JSDF is drawing from the established otaku subcultural database to construct its own, a process that ultimately involves the blending of 3-dimensional and 2-dimensional worlds, described by Akiko Sugawa-Shimada as creating “2.5 dimensional space” (2018). Thus, the JSDF is put into 2-dimensional space (as in GATE or Mamor manga) whilst also drawing the 2-dimensional space into 3-dimensional space by e.g. selling merchandise with GATE characters.

Abandoning grand narratives and embracing fantasy and play then contributes to what Frühstück observed as a strategic JSDF “self-infantilisation” (2017, p. 176). Paradoxically, this self-infantilisation of the force is also combined with a recruitment appeal promising self-actualisation and maturity as perks of working with the JSDF (Frühstück, 2017, pp. 188–191). However, self-infantilisation and self-actualisation need not be contradictory at all in the context of postmodern Japan. In fact, Asada Akira argues that they co-constitutive components of Japanese “Infantile Capitalism”, a social economic system built around the infantilisation of Japanese workers as children playing in a “protective space”, a social power structure framed as horizontal,

consensual and benevolent. Asada stresses this structure as the central organising mechanism of Japanese society, using the example of Japanese corporations to illustrate the illusion of consensus at work in the mechanism by stating that “the clever management, rather than mobilizing the entire company around its positive leadership, functions as an apparently passive medium which prompts agreement to be spontaneously formed from the bottom up” (1989, p. 276). In the case of the JSDF, self-infantilisation can thus be understood as subsumption under the forces’ own passive medium, which in turn creates a “protective space” for soldiers to play war in without having to face the fundamental paradox of their own existence. The military fantasy described above then is that “protective space” at work, isolating the soldier from their problematic existence by replacing the “dialectic of contradiction and strive”, i.e. JSDF engagement with its legal status and Japanese anti-militarism or apathy, with a “topology of subsumption”, where such issues are just ignored and parts of the population not willing to buy into the fantasy are simply disregarded.

But Asada is also very clear about the “protected area” being far from liberatory, but rather at least potentially predatory as was the case with Imperial Japan’s “Great East Asian Coprosperity Sphere”, which promised liberation from European imperialism but in turn required subsumption under the passive medium of Japanese imperialism instead (1989, p. 277). The question then is how the ideological mechanism of infantile capitalism works in practice and what power structure it obscures. Asada refers to the war-time philosopher Nishida Kitarō and his philosophy of the “place of nothingness” (*mu no basho*) as one of the most important expressions of Japan’s postmodern ideological mechanism (Asada, 1989, p. 276). Nishida distinguishes between Western power structures built on the principle of presence (*yu*), where leadership and the exercising of power requires conflict and contradiction that is then resolved, a system based on the principle of nothingness (*mu*) instead allows for the above mentioned “topology of subsumption”, that builds around an empty centre, where contradictory elements can be embraced simultaneously (Asada, 1989, pp. 276–277). In the case of the JSDF, this empty centre is distinctly gendered, a masculinity that underpins nearly everything in JSDF portrayal, but that is never acknowledged as a “presence” (*yu*), i.e. a positive principle of heroic masculinity that is proudly stated but instead being constantly framed as gender-neutral and not actually masculine at all, thus negating itself into nothingness (*mu*).

As the passive medium of JSDF discourse, the gendered and fundamentally unequal nature of military masculinity is thus obfuscated through the illusion of consensus baked into the social structure of the “protective space”. Through subsumption under the place of nothingness, JSDF soldiers play war, use deadly technology as toys and avoid actually engaging with criticism of military values through the usage of fantasy. Azuma observed that in the 21st century, “right-wing Japanese discourse has generally survived by allowing itself to become subculturized, falsified, and otaku-ized” (2009, p. 24). This is precisely the dynamic observed as the ideological core of JSDF

self-portrayal: an embrace of postmodernism to reframe Japanese militarism as one subculture in an increasingly siloed and disconnected postmodern Japanese society, not offering a grand narrative of nationalist militarism like some right-wing politicians do, but rather embracing fantasy and the “place of nothingness” to supersede the very idea of a dialectic between pro- and anti-militarism.

What I term “apolitical militarism” is therefore at its heart a quintessentially postmodern form of militarism that builds on established practices and structures in other postmodern subcultures like Japanese otaku. It is postmodern in that it is highly fragmented, consisting of myriad “small narratives” and a shared “database” rather than a larger unifying grand narrative. This in turn allows it to incorporate seemingly contradictory elements into itself, as the underlying principles and axiomatic assumptions are themselves consistently negated and denied. In typical postmodern fashion, this fragmentation then comes with personalisation and individualisation of narratives, so “small narratives” in this case also means “personal narratives”, i.e. personal constructions of meaning-making narratives from a set of subcultural shared components while retaining uniqueness and individuality in the assembled narrative. Importantly, this transforms the overtly political act of narration into the (seemingly) apolitical one of play whilst also shifting it from the institution to the individual, where narrative choices are guided by and explained through seeking pleasure rather than power. Of course, the institution remains intimately tied up in the ideological mechanism, creating and maintaining the “protective space” within which such play can take place and taking a huge (but not exclusive) part in creating and updating the subcultural military database. However, this results in the JSDF itself producing only small, rather than grand narratives, which individually only ever contain a fraction of the larger narrative consumers construct through putting together a combination of database elements that pleases them.

The JSDF can then be hypermasculine and progressive or feminine at the same time, just as it can be violent and peaceful or ruthless and caring at the same time, as contradictions are simply irrelevant if one does not even aim to construct a coherent grand narrative. What can be seen in the JSDF’s self-portrayal as analysed in this study is thus not a force battling with its own paradoxical nature and justifying its existence and importance to a sceptical Japanese public. Instead, it is a cultural entrepreneur seeking to provide a thrilling, compelling and engaging database contents to an often apathetic and fickle crowd in an “aestheticized, dehistoricized and apolitical state of discourse” (Iida, 2002, p. 260). JSDF militarism thus needs to be understood primarily through the lens of a late-capitalist cultural sphere, where the void left by collapsing grand narratives is filled through the consumption of pleasurable narrative fragments, “moe-elements” drawn from a subcultural database through which a desire for meaning is reduced to “need” (Azuma, 2009, p. 95). “Apolitical militarism” then transplants militarism from the sphere of politics into that of aesthetics, from unified

national culture to siloed, fragmented subculture, and from the collective/state level to the individual level.

Four themes have been identified in this dissertation which underpin the construction of apolitical militarism in the case of the JSDF. These themes were technology, masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality. These themes have emerged as consistently influential throughout the whole range of sources studied in this dissertation, despite the differences in medium, genre conventions and authorship that set them apart.

Technology has been a consistently prominent theme in all four sources, often being put centre stage to attract people to the JSDF's military subculture. In all sources, powerful military hardware was portrayed liberally and celebrated unreservedly, highlighting, rather than obscuring, the destructive and potentially deadly power it implies whilst at the same time sanitising that military violence by turning it into a game or a spectacle. In GATE, that violent potential was fully realised and justified through a scenario of legitimate defence as well as literally transplanting the story into a fantasy world where real world rules need not apply, allowing for a full and uninhibited enjoyment of military firepower. Similarly, Mamor puts such military firepower and the equipment it is associated with in a number of fictional scenarios, sometimes based on possible real-world threats to the Japanese state and sometimes entirely fantastical, but always distinctly removed from real life or deeper political and ethical considerations. Instead, the triumph of victory, the relief of averting catastrophe or simply the joy of seeing JSDF destructive power are called on as pleasurable database elements. Besides this, technology is also portrayed in an art-museum sort of exhibition style, where weapons are presented as attractive in their own right, appealing to an enthusiast "rivet counter" demographic that is interested in minute technical details and that generally comes with masculine connotations (Fitzgerald, 2006; Raths, 2017). This style is, of course, most present in JSDF museums, but can also be found in Mamor articles as well as YouTube videos that dedicate much attention to the act of showing military equipment, albeit accompanied by much less technical data. In all iterations, technology serves to give pleasure and connect those in the military subculture by shared enjoyment of pieces of military equipment. It also serves to assert JSDF masculinity and status by showing the JSDF, and specifically men in the JSDF, wielding powerful high-tech machinery efficiently and with confidence, imbuing them with a certain exclusiveness and aura of power that asserts their masculinity whilst also being shown as fun.

Masculinity, on the other hand, is a central presence but at the same time disavowed, despite its importance in actual portrayal of the JSDF. In each of the sources, masculinity played an important role, and portrayals were rather consistent across the different media. The images of masculinity that are present in the shared military database are on the whole following a traditional warrior masculinity, with much

emphasis on physical hardiness, toughness and discipline. In JSDF YouTube and Mamor in particular, technological skill and intelligence are also highlighted, combined with a general association of masculinity with the control of the powerful high-tech machinery that has been outlined above. JSDF museums too showed this pattern, with the films in the ASDF and GSDF museums both centring a hardy and distinctly martial masculinity to serve as avatars for the respective branch. GATE, by virtue of being most directly and comfortably situated in the realm of fantasy, is the most overt in this pattern, extolling broad shouldered aggressively masculine leadership based on decisive strength and martial prowess as superior to weak and corrupt civilian models. In all sources, this masculinity is then tempered by an idea of care though, very distinctly expressed in the GSDF Museum's film describing GSDF soldiers as strong, smart and kind. This kindness is usually expressed either in showing the JSDF providing aid in natural disaster settings, or by embedding it in the ideal of the heterosexual nuclear family, affirming "kind" masculinity by showing JSDF men as caring family fathers, tapping into modernised currents of hegemonic masculinity that emphasise fatherhood as heroic in itself (Scheibling, 2020; Nayak, 2023, p. 176). Ultimately, the idea of soldiers as "caring" then aligns with an international trend towards "softer" military masculinities (Khalili, 2011; Duncanson, 2015). However, as this is at the same time used to reconstitute the masculine soldier as "protector", it does not fundamentally challenge the unequal power hierarchy of masculinised protector and feminised protected (Stiehm, 1982; Satō, 2022, pp. 251–252).

Femininity, meanwhile, serves multiple functions, including underlining the JSDF's progressive credentials, with the presence of women used to mark the JSDF as a "normal workplace" (Frühstück, 2007, p. 90). Women's presence is overall relatively limited, with strong differences between different sources and even within sources, but it still serves an important role of promoting the idea of the JSDF as a gender-equal institution and women soldiers are made into JSDF ambassadors reproducing military values (Frühstück, 2007, p. 96; Satō, 2010, p. 259). Female soldiers were usually shown as either essentially genderless beings, stressing their identity as soldiers, not as women, or they were portrayed in a very distinctly feminine way, linking them with common cultural ideas of femininity. Most often, military women were included in JSDF portrayal particularly as examples of military women, putting their gender in the focus of their portrayal, despite it then paradoxically being denied in some cases. JSDF YouTube and Mamor were most notable in this, but in JSDF Museums too women were always portrayed specifically as women in the JSDF, lacking any presence beyond that. The portrayal of military women then generally aligned with the pattern of women as either honorary men (denying gender) or highly feminine but less soldierly (King, 2017). However, femininity also played a role outside the portrayal of military women, with civilian women and fictional women also featuring prominently in the sources, especially GATE and Mamor. Women as wives or cheerleaders of the JSDF featured consistently, connecting masculinity and

femininity through inscribing women's heterosexual desire onto male soldiers. Women's bodies and especially fictional women also played an important role in marketing the JSDF as well as military technology, be that with showing women from GATE's fantasy world defending the JSDF as a good and honourable institution against parliamentary slander or in anime girls being printed on merchandise in museum shops.

Both of the last paragraphs have already touched upon the importance heterosexuality had in affirming JSDF masculinity and mobilising femininity to support that martial masculinity. Heterosexuality is very present in Mamor and GATE, present in parts of JSDF YouTube (especially the ASDF Channel) and only present very little in the JSDF museums. Despite this imbalance, it can still be considered one of the core database elements as heterosexual desirability for example is drawn upon consistently to elevate male soldiers' status. GATE is particularly blatant in this regard, showing military men as attractive to "native" women in the "Special Region" and even peddling in (genre-typical) harem fantasies, making use of its fantastical setting to explore the unrestrained sexual horizons of its colonial frontier (Soltysik Monnet, 2018). In Mamor, on the other hand, civilian women talk about their JSDF husbands in multiple articles and ASDF YouTube videos show pilots being admired and desired by young women.

And despite GATE's flirtation with harem fantasies, even it does ultimately not break with the conservative model of the monogamous heterosexual nuclear family which features consistently in all sources. Heterosexuality is universally assumed as the only possible (serious) sexuality throughout the sources and features indirectly in ways such as attracting families to the JSDF museum as well as directly in Mamor manga about the lives of JSDF personnel and their families. Yet while heterosexuality serves to raise male soldiers' status and desirability whilst rooting them in a traditional social model, femininity and heterosexuality interact in different ways. Military women in particular are linked with heterosexuality, as the transgressive potential of their work in an otherwise male-dominated field is managed in part through reintegration into a male-centric heteronormative system of desire. JSDF women are then usually shown without a partner, maintaining their sexual availability to JSDF men, or with a JSDF partner, thus already "claimed". Whilst they often continue working, it is shown that they are ultimately still – and perhaps primarily – women. Images of motherhood, childcare, etc. serve to reinforce this notion and thereby reassert JSDF womanhood as relatively privileged, but ultimately still subject to JSDF masculinity.

In all these findings, gender plays a crucial role. Not only is masculinity nestled at the heart of the passive medium and silently declared the non-gendered standard, upholding the militarist fantasy requires the image of women too. I say the image of women, because as a fundamentally fantasy-based project, the portrayal of women as soldiers, thus proving the JSDF to be egalitarian or as enthusiastic supporters and admirers of masculine soldiers is far more important than their physical participation

in the force. In fact, for actual participation, they only have two options. Either they uphold and reinforce the fantasy of military values as universal and gender-neutral by joining the JSDF and becoming apostles of its fantasy (as seen with female officers empathetically denying that there's such a thing as a "female soldier") or they practice motherly indulgence (*amae*) in looking over the soldiers playing war (as seen with the civilian partners or male soldiers). It is thus only men who are allowed to play in the "protective space", where women are not excluded per se, but simply defined out of existence if they aren't willing to wholly buy into the fantasy.

Japanese feminists' disinterest in the JSDF and JSDF disinterest in engaging with feminist or anti-militarist criticisms of it are thus both products of a quintessentially post-modern Japanese society where the double collapse of modern "grand narratives", first with Japan's defeat in World War II and second with the societal malaise following the bursting of Japan's "bubble economy" in the early 1990s has left a void. This void has not been filled by a new grand narrative, but rather facilitated the emergence of multiple, sometimes overlapping, sometimes distinct subcultures essentially constructing social realities separate from one another. In this sense, the JSDF is less restricted by its history or the degree to which anti-militarist and pacifist attitudes are present in the population, but more by the degree to which it can draw people into its subcultural orbit. This is an important distinction, as it implies that the JSDF's main concern is not the arena of politics, but rather the economy of attention. Accordingly, political or legal questions like the JSDF's constitutional status, which have captured much of the scholarly attention in regard to the JSDF are actually only of secondary importance, when compared to the need of commodifying and selling it and its fantasy in a competitive and fragmented market of narrative consumption.

Herein lies one of the shortcomings of the current debate about Japanese security "normalisation", which is mostly focused on those legal or political questions. These are, of course, important for determining what sort of equipment the JSDF has access to or in which contexts it might be realistically deployed. But when considering public attitudes towards the JSDF and thus ultimately public willingness to a) support the JSDF and potentially join it and b) accept an increased role for the JSDF in Japanese security policy, going as far as possibly deploying it in combat, this socio-cultural level matters. Valuable research has been done by critical international relations scholars like Linus Hagström, Karl Gustafsson or Ulv Hanssen and feminist researchers like Satō Fumika or Sabine Frühstück to address this social component of security. This dissertation has added to that project by showing how the JSDF's brand of militarism is postmodern in nature, meaning that it is rooted in both culture and aesthetics, highlighting the importance of providing pleasure and entertainment in, to once more cite Iida Yumiko, an "aestheticized, dehistoricized and apolitical state of discourse" (2002, p. 261). Thus, while political economies and military budget are certainly of great importance, I argue that in Japanese postmodern society, the attention economy is just as important in securing the JSDF's social status and enabling it to possibly

extend its role and capabilities beyond what it is currently able to do. Considering the shift from the “softening” observed by Satō and Frühstück in their earlier works to the surprisingly assertive JSDF observed in this dissertation, this project might already have made significant progress, with the military subculture consolidated enough to give the JSDF confidence to speak to that subculture overtly as a potentially war-fighting military.

However, despite this dissertation analysing the specific case of Japan and the JSDF and despite that analysis’ grounding in theories constructed in and about Japanese society, the “apolitical militarism” embraced by the JSDF is not uniquely Japanese. Both Azuma and Iida are keen to stress that there is nothing quintessentially Japanese about their respective theoretical perspectives (Iida, 2002, p. 261; Azuma, 2009, p. 10). (Iida, 2002, p. 261; Azuma, 2009, p. 10). Instead, the JSDF’s apolitical militarism should be considered quintessentially postmodern in its abandonment of traditional grand narratives of militarism and embrace of subculture and fantasy in their stead. It is specifically Japanese only in the sense that Japan and especially the JSDF are at the forefront of postmodern cultural and societal development. The case of the JSDF should therefore not be considered as unique, but at the “avantgarde (Frühstück, 2004) of postmodern military development, marking a more advanced stage of development towards a new postmodern sort of militarism (Satō, 2022, p. 127). I follow Don Snider’s (2000) assertion that the postmodern militaries of democratic nations, and to a lesser extent non-democratic nations, have to face a fundamental paradox of their own, being caught between their social imperative (mirroring democratic values) and institutional imperative (exercising violence and gaining/retaining privileges). Apolitical militarism in the JSDF should thus be considered as one case, possibly the most pronounced case, of a larger phenomenon of adopting militarism to an increasingly apathetic and siloed postmodern society.

From a feminist and critical perspective, this raises several questions and potential problems. Apolitical militarism enables militaries to ignore and transcend paradoxes and resistance towards them by engaging in fantasies and encouraging a “topology of subsumption” by shutting themselves into a friendly subculture constructed around a shared military database. In this, power hierarchies are obscured and the possibility of a much more assertive and violent sort of militarism is opened up by its displacement into fantasy, thus removing the “blood, guts, misery and despair” from war (Raths, 2017, p. 88). At the same time, siloing and exclusive engagement with military subculture could make militaries less responsive to criticisms, as they are more easily able to ignore any accusations made against them as alternative subcultures morph into alternative societies, constructed around desire for a shared but individualised fantasy. Challenging and questioning apolitical militarism then requires either a penetration of the subculture, which might be difficult as its inherent centre of gravity is adherence to shared “social values and standards” constructed by that subculture (Azuma, 2009, p. 27). The alternative then would be to provide a

(pop-)cultural counter, a disruption of the military database by for example introducing new elements into the otaku database from which military subculture draws or simply developing an attractive cultural vision and aesthetic that can fulfil the same needs but does not hide the same power hierarchies at its centre. The anti-militarism of the future might thus need to start from entertainment, rather than from politics.

Bibliography

Abe, S. (2013) *Towards a new country, towards a beautiful country (Complete edition)[atarashī kuni e utsukushī kuni e (kanzenban)]*. Tōkyō: Bungeishunjū.

Adler-Nissen, R., Andersen, K.E. and Hansen, L. (2020) 'Images, Emotions, and International Politics: The Death of Alan Kurdi', *Review of International Studies*, 46(1), pp. 75–95. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210519000317>.

Akiyama, M. (2014) 'Redefining Self-Defense: The Abe Cabinet's Interpretation of Article 9', *The Tokyo Foundation for Policy Research*, 3 September. Available at: <https://www.tokyofoundation.org/research/detail.php?id=536> (Accessed: 20 February 2025).

Amano, I. (2022) *Financial Euphoria, Consumer Culture, and Literature of 1980s Japan: Dreams of the Bubble Economy*. London: Routledge. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003298250>.

Anindya, C.R. (2016) 'The Evolving Security Policy of Japan and the Adherence to Antimilitarism Culture', *Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional*, 18(2), pp. 152–164.

Apelt, M. (2014) 'Der lange Abschied von der männlichen Organisation. Geschlechterverhältnisse zwischen Formalität und Informalität am Beispiel der Bundeswehr', in V. von Groddeck and S.M. Wilz (eds) *Formalität und Informalität in Organisationen*. Springer-Verlag, pp. 215–236.

Arkin, W. and Dobrofsky, L.R. (1978) 'Military Socialization and Masculinity', *Journal of social issues*, 34(1), pp. 151–168. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1978.tb02546.x>.

Armitage, R.L. and Nye, J.S.J. (2012) *The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia, Policy File*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Asada, A. (1989) 'Infantile Capitalism and Japan's Postmodernism: A Fairy Tale', in *Postmodernism and Japan*. New York, USA: Duke University Press, pp. 273–278. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822381556-015>.

Assmann, S. (2014) 'Gender Equality in Japan: The Equal Employment Opportunity Law Revisited', *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 12(45), pp. 1–23.

Azuma, H. (2009) *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Translated by J.E. Abel and S. Kono.

Bakken, T. (2013) 'A Woman Soldier's Right to Combat: Equal Protection in the Military', *William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law*, 20(2), pp. 271–294.

Barrett, F.J. (1996) 'The Organizational Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity: The Case of the US Navy', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 3(3), pp. 129–142.

- Barthes, R. (1977) *Image, Music, Text / Roland Barthes; Essays Selected and Translated by Stephen Heath*. London: Fontana.
- Barthes, R. (2020) *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. London: Vintage Classics.
- Battistelli, F. (1997) 'Peacekeeping and the Postmodern Soldier', *Armed forces and society*, 23(3), pp. 467–484. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9702300308>.
- Batzli, S.A. (1990) 'From Heroes to Hiroshima: The National Air and Space Museum Adjusts Its Point of View', *Technology and Culture*, 31(4), pp. 830–837. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.1990.a901653>.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994) *Simulacra and simulation*. Translated by S.F. Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press (The Body, in theory).
- Baudrillard, J. (1995) *The Gulf War did not take place*. Sydney: Power Publications.
- Ben-Ari, E. and Fröhstück, S. (2003) 'The celebration of violence: A live-fire demonstration carried out by Japan's contemporary military', *American ethnologist*, 30(4), pp. 540–555. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2003.30.4.540>.
- Berger, T.U. (1993) 'From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-militarism', *International security*, 17(4), pp. 119–150. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539024>.
- Berger, T.U. (1998) *Cultures of antimilitarism*. Johns Hopkins University Press. Available at: <https://www.press.jhu.edu/books/title/1396/cultures-antimilitarism> (Accessed: 21 November 2024).
- Binimbol, H. (2020) 'What is Isekai?', *Manga Planet Blog*, 14 April. Available at: <https://mangaplanet.com/what-is-isekai/> (Accessed: 10 March 2023).
- Blair, J.D. *et al.* (2006) 'Ethics in advertising: Sex sells, but should it?', *J. Legal Ethical & Regul. Issues*, 9, p. 109.
- Bochorodycz, B. (2024) 'The "Invented Trauma": Gulf War Experience and Foreign Policy Change in Japan after the Cold War', in: *Nordic Association for the Study of Contemporary Japanese Society 2024 Conference*, Aarhus.
- Bolton, C. (2018) *Interpreting anime*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Brinton, M.C. (1993) *Women and the economic miracle: gender and work in postwar Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press (California series on social choice and political economy, 21).
- Brown, M.T. (2012) *Enlisting Masculinity: The Construction of Gender in U.S. Military Recruiting Advertising During the All-Volunteer Force*. New York: Oxford University Press (Oxford studies in gender and international relations).

- Brownfield-Stein, C. (2017) 'Gender and Visual Representations of Women Combatants', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 475–492.
- Butler, J. (2006) *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, [N.Y.]; Routledge (Routledge classics).
- Butler, J. (2011) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Florence: Routledge (Routledge classics).
- Butler, J. (2015) *Notes toward a performative theory of assembly*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Cai, Y. (2008) 'The rise and decline of Japanese pacifism', *New Voices in Japanese Studies*, 2, pp. 179–200.
- Carreiras, H. (2006) *Gender and the military: women in the armed forces of Western democracies*. London: Routledge (Cass military studies).
- Carreiras, H. (2017) 'Gendered Organizational Dynamics in Military Contexts', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 39–58.
- Christie, R. (2017) 'Gender, Humanitarianism and the Military', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 305–318.
- Cockburn, C. (2007) *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis*. London: Zed Books.
- Cockburn, C. (2010) 'Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 12(2), pp. 139–157. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616741003665169>.
- Cohn, C., Hill, F. and Ruddick, S. (2005) *The relevance of gender for eliminating weapons of mass destruction*. Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. Available at: <https://www.acronym.org.uk/old/archive/dd/dd80/80ccfhsr.htm>.
- Connell, R. (1987) *Gender and power: society, the person and sexual politics*. Cambridge: Polity in association with Blackwell.
- Connell, R.W. (2002) 'Masculinities, the Reduction of Violence, and the Pursuit of Peace', in Z. Dubravka and C. Cockburn (eds) *The Post War Moment: Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 33–40.
- Connell, R.W. (2005) *Masculinities*. Second edition. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Connell, R.W. and Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005) 'Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', *Gender & society*, 19(6), pp. 829–859. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.
- Coole, D. (1998) 'Master narratives and feminist subversions', in J.M.M. Good and I. Velody (eds) *The Politics of Postmodernity*. Cambridge University Press Cambridge, pp. 107–125.
- Cooney, K. (2002) *Japan's Foreign Policy Maturation: A Quest for Normalcy*. London: Routledge (East Asia, history, politics, sociology, culture). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203952580>.
- Cooney, K.J. (2007) *Japan's Foreign Policy Since 1945*. Armonk: Routledge.
- Crilley, R. (2015) 'Seeing strategic narratives?', *Critical Studies on Security*, 3(3), pp. 331–333. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2015.1103016>.
- Crilley, R. and Chatterje-Doody, P.N. (2020) 'Emotions and war on YouTube: affective investments in RT's visual narratives of the conflict in Syria', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33(5), pp. 713–733. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2020.1719038>.
- Dalton, E. (2017) 'Womenomics, "Equality" and Abe's Neo-liberal Strategy to Make Japanese Women Shine', *Social science Japan journal*, 20(1), pp. 95–105. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ssjj/jyw043>.
- Dalton, E. (2022a) 'Normalizing the Japan Self-defense Forces via Marriage', *Journal of war and culture studies*, 15(1), pp. 106–124. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2020.1738680>.
- Dalton, E. (2022b) 'Women as helpmates: the Japan Self-Defense Forces and gender', *Critical military studies*, 8(1), pp. 39–57. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2019.1707496>.
- Darling-Wolf, F. (2004) 'SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity: Constructing the Perfect Female Fantasy in Japanese Popular Music', *Popular music and society*, 27(3), pp. 357–370. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007760410001733189>.
- Dasgupta, R. (2005) 'Salarymen doing straight', in M. McLelland and R. Dasgupta (eds) *Genders, Transgenders and Sexualities in Japan*. London and New York: Taylor & Francis, pp. 168–182.
- Davidson, J. et al. (2010) 'The YouTube video recommendation system', in *Proceedings of the fourth ACM conference on Recommender systems*. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery (RecSys '10), pp. 293–296. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/1864708.1864770>.
- DeGroot, G.J. (2001) 'A few good women: Gender stereotypes, the military and peacekeeping', *International peacekeeping (London, England)*, 8(2), pp. 23–38. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310108413893>.

- Delehanty, W.K. and Steele, B.J. (2009) 'Engaging the narrative in ontological (in)security theory: insights from feminist IR', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 22(3), pp. 523–540. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557570903104024>.
- Denison, R. (2015) *Anime: A Critical Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing UK (Film genres).
- Der Derian, J. (2009) *Virtuous war mapping the military-industrial-media-entertainment network*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Deutsch, F.M. (2007) 'Undoing Gender', *Gender and Society*, 21(1), pp. 106–127.
- Dillenburg, E. (2011) 'What, if Anything, Is a Museum?', *Exhibitionist*, 30(Spring), pp. 8–13.
- Dinella, L.M. and Weisgram, E.S. (2018) 'Gender-Typing of Children's Toys: Causes, Consequences, and Correlates', *Sex Roles*, 79(5), pp. 253–259. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0943-3>.
- Dittmer, C. (2015) *Gender Trouble in der Bundeswehr: Eine Studie zu Identitätskonstruktionen und Geschlechterordnungen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Auslandseinsätzen*, *Gender Trouble in der Bundeswehr*. transcript Verlag. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839412985>.
- Donovan, B.W. (2010) *Blood, guns, and testosterone action films, audiences, and a thirst for violence*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Döring, N. (2014) 'Professionalisierung und Kommerzialisierung auf YouTube', *merz medien+ erziehung*, 58(4), pp. 24–31.
- Dower, J.W. (1993) *War without mercy race and power in the pacific war*. 7th printing, corr. by the author. New York: Pantheon Books (ACLS Humanities E-Book.).
- Dower, J.W. (1999) *Embracing defeat: Japan in the wake of World War II*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Duncanson, C. (2015) 'Hegemonic Masculinity and the Possibility of Change in Gender Relations', *Men and masculinities*, 18(2), pp. 231–248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X15584912>.
- Duncanson, C. (2017) 'Anti-Militarist Feminist Approaches to Researching Gender and the Military', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 39–58.
- Duncanson, C. and Woodward, R. (2016) 'Regendering the Military: Theorizing Women's Military Participation', *Security dialogue*, 47(1), pp. 3–21. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010615614137>.

Duncanson, C. and Woodward, R. (2017) 'An Introduction to Gender and the Military', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 1–20.

Easley, L.-E. (2017) 'How proactive? How pacifist? Charting Japan's evolving defence posture', *Australian journal of international affairs*, 71(1), pp. 63–87. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2016.1181148>.

Eldridge, R.D. and Midford, P. (eds) (2017) *The Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force: Search for Legitimacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Enloe, C. (2010) 'The Risks of Scholarly Militarization: A Feminist Analysis', *Perspectives on politics*, 8(4), pp. 1107–1111. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592710003233>.

Enloe, C. (2015) 'The recruiter and the sceptic: a critical feminist approach to military studies', *Critical military studies*, 1(1), pp. 3–10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2014.961746>.

Enloe, C.H. (1983) *Does khaki become you?: the militarisation of women's lives*. London: Pluto.

Enloe, C.H. (2000) *Maneuvers: the international politics of militarizing women's lives*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.

Enloe, C.H. (2014) *Bananas, beaches and bases: making feminist sense of international politics*. 2nd ed., 2. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/j.ctt6wqbn6>.

Ezawa, A. (2019) 'Family, Inequality, and the Work-Family Balance in Contemporary Japan', in J. Coates, L. Fraser, and M. Pendleton (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 106–114. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315179582>.

Fahrenwaldt, M. (forthcoming) 'Showing Victimised Women and Nationalist Men: Gender and Visuality in the Narration of Japan's "Abduction Issue"'. Edinburgh.

Fitzgerald, L. (2006) 'Hard Men, Hard Facts and Heavy Metal: Making Histories of Technology', in G. Kavanagh (ed.) *Making Histories in Museums*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Flores, E. (2017) 'The Japanese Constitutional Amendment: National Defense or a Return to Japanese Militarism?', *Harvard International Review*, 38(4), pp. 10–13.

Freistein, K. and Gadinger, F. (2020) 'Populist stories of honest men and proud mothers: A visual narrative analysis', *Review of International Studies*, 46(2), pp. 217–236. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210519000421>.

Frühstück, S. (2004) 'The Avant-Garde Self-Defense Force - Militarized Masculinity in the Future Military [avangyarudo to shite no jieitai - shōrai no guntai ni okeru gunjika sareta otokorashisa]', *Jinbun Gakuho*, 90, pp. 137–151.

Frühstück, S. (2007) *Uneasy warriors: gender, memory, and popular culture in the Japanese Army*. 1st edn. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/j.ctt1ppj85>.

Frühstück, S. (2011) 'After Heroism: Must Real Soldiers Die?', in S. Frühstück and A. Walthall (eds) *Recreating Japanese Men*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, pp. 76–91.

Frühstück, S. (2017) *Playing War: Children and the Paradoxes of Modern Militarism in Japan*. 1st edn. Berkeley: University of California Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/j.ctt1pwtcgx>.

Frühstück, S. (2020) "'Protect someone, become yourself': How the Japanese military reinvents childhood for the 21st century", *Childhood (Copenhagen, Denmark)*, 27(3), pp. 399–412. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568220908632>.

Frühstück, S. (2022) *Gender and sexuality in modern Japan*. Cambridge: University Press (New approaches to Asian history).

Frühstück, S. and Ben-Ari, E. (2002) "'Now We Show It All!' Normalization and the Management of Violence in Japan's Armed Forces", *The Journal of Japanese studies*, 28(1), pp. 1–39. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/4126774>.

Fujita, H. (2011) 'The Tokyo Trial: Humanity's Justice v Victor's Justice', in Y. Tanaka, T.L.H. McCormack, and G. Simpson (eds) *Beyond Victor's Justice? The Tokyo War Crimes Trial Revisited*. BRILL, pp. 3–21.

Fukushima, A.I. *et al.* (2014) 'Disaster Militarism: Rethinking U.S. Relief in the Asia-Pacific', *Foreign policy in focus*, p. N_A-.

Fukuura, A. (2017) 'An aspect of military research: Civil-military relations and marriage hunting (Jieitai kenkyū no shosō: mingun kankei to konkatsu)', *Forum Contemporary Sociology (Fōramu Gendai Shakaigaku)*, 16, pp. 116–130.

Funaiole, M.P. (2015) 'Conceptualizing Japan's Foreign Policy Trajectory Through Social Identity Theory', *East Asia (Piscataway, N.J.)*, 32(4), pp. 361–383. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-015-9249-z>.

'Futatsu no Gunzei [Two Military Forces]' (2015) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri [GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land]*.

Gagné, N.O. (2021) *Reworking Japan: Changing Men at Work and Play under Neoliberalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press,. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501753053>.

- Galbraith, P. (2014) *The moé manifesto: an insider's look at the worlds of manga, anime, and gaming*. Tokyo, Japan: Tuttle Publishing.
- Galbraith, P. (2019) *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan*. Durham: Duke University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1220mhm.7>.
- Galbraith, P.W. (2012) 'Idols: The Image of Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism', in J.G. Karlin and P. Galbraith (eds) *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 185–208. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137283788>.
- Goodwin, M. and Chemerinsky, E. (2019) 'The Transgender Military Ban: Preservation of Discrimination through Transformation Essay', *Northwestern University Law Review*, 114(3), pp. 751–808.
- Green, M.B. (1991) *Seven types of adventure tale: An etiology of a major genre*. Penn State Press.
- Grimshaw, M., Charlton, J. and Jagger, R. (2011) 'First-Person Shooters: Immersion and Attention', *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture*, 5(1), pp. 29–44. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7557/23.6125>.
- Gustafsson, K., Hagström, L. and Hanssen, U. (2019) 'Long live pacifism! Narrative power and Japan's pacifist model', *Cambridge review of international affairs*, 32(4), pp. 502–520. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1623174>.
- Guthmann, T. (2015) 'Religion et nationalisme dans le Japon contemporain : les nouveaux mouvements religieux au sein de la Conférence du Japon', *Monde chinois*, 42(2), pp. 74–83. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/mochi.042.0074>.
- Hagström, L. (2015) 'The "abnormal" state: Identity, norm/exception and Japan', *European journal of international relations*, 21(1), pp. 122–145. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066113518356>.
- Hagström, L. and Gustafsson, K. (2019) 'Narrative power: how storytelling shapes East Asian international politics', *Cambridge review of international affairs*, 32(4), pp. 387–406. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1623498>.
- Hagström, L. and Hanssen, U. (2016) 'War is peace: the rearticulation of "peace" in Japan's China discourse', *Review of international studies*, 42(2), pp. 266–286. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210515000157>.
- Hakim, C. (2010) 'Erotic Capital', *European Sociological Review*, 26(5), pp. 499–518. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcq014>.
- 'Hakonesanchū Yasen [The Hakone Mountain Night Battle]' (2015) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri* [GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land].

Hansen, L. (2015) 'How images make world politics: International icons and the case of Abu Ghraib', *Review of international studies*, 41(2), pp. 263–288. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210514000199>.

Hansen, L. (2018) 'Images and International Security', in A. Gheciu and W.C. Wohlforth (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of International Security*. 1st edn. Oxford University Press, pp. 593–606. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198777854.001.0001>.

Happel, A. (2013) 'Ritualized girling: school uniforms and the compulsory performance of gender', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 22(1), pp. 92–96. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2012.745680>.

Hatakeyama, K. (2021) *Japan's evolving security policy: militarisation within a pacifist tradition*. Routledge. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003017905/japan-evolving-security-policy-kyoko-hatakeyama> (Accessed: 12 June 2024).

Heang, R. (2024) 'Japan's Role and Its First Successful Peace Mission in Cambodia', *Open Access Library Journal*, 11(4), pp. 1–6. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1111301>.

Heikkilä, M. (2022) 'Boys, weapon toys, war play and meaning-making: prohibiting play in early childhood education settings?', *Early Child Development and Care*, 192(11), pp. 1830–1841. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2021.1943377>.

Hendry, J. (2012) *Understanding Japanese Society*. Fourth edition. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge (The Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese studies).

Hetherington, K. (2006) 'Museum', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(2–3), pp. 597–603. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276406023002107>.

Hidaka, T. (2010) *Salaryman Masculinity: Continuity and Change in Hegemonic Masculinity in Japan*. Boston: BRILL (Social sciences in Asia).

Higate, P.R. (2003) *Military masculinities: Identity and the state*. London: Praeger. Available at: <https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/publications/military-masculinities-identity-and-the-state> (Accessed: 26 September 2023).

Hikotani, T. (2014) 'The Paradox of Antimilitarism: Civil-Military Relations in Post World War II Japan'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8P849HZ>.

Hirata, K. (2008) 'Who Shapes the National Security Debate? Divergent Interpretations of Japan's Security Role', *Asian affairs, an American review (New York)*, 35(3), pp. 123–151. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3200/AAFS.35.3.123-151>.

Hockey, J. (2003) 'No More Heroes: Masculinity in the Infantry', in P.R. Higate (ed.) *Military masculinities: Identity and the state*. London: Praeger. Available at:

<https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/publications/military-masculinities-identity-and-the-state> (Accessed: 26 September 2023).

Hodgkins, C. (2024) 'GATE Anime Reveals Key Visual, Premiere Date for Show's 2nd Half', *Anime News Network*, 10 July. Available at: <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2015-12-05/gate-anime-reveals-key-visual-premiere-date-for-show-2nd-half/.96126> (Accessed: 10 July 2024).

Hook, G.D. and Son, K.-Y. (2013) 'Transposition in Japanese state identities: overseas troop dispatches and the emergence of a humanitarian power?', *Australian journal of international affairs*, 67(1), pp. 35–54. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2013.748274>.

Hooper, C. (2001) *Manly States: Masculinities, International Relations, and Gender Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7312/hoop12074>.

Hughes, C.W. (2015) *Japan's Foreign and Security Policy Under the 'Abe Doctrine': New Dynamism or New Dead End?*, *Japan's Foreign and Security Policy Under the 'Abe Doctrine': New Dynamism or New Dead End?* Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 1–114. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137514257>.

Hughes, C.W. and Krauss, E.S. (2007) 'Japan's New Security Agenda', *Survival (London)*, 49(2), pp. 157–176. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330701437850>.

Igarashi, Y. (2012) *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*. Course Book. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400842988>.

Iida, Y. (2002) *Rethinking identity in modern Japan: nationalism as aesthetics*. First issued in paperback. London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group (Routledge/Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) East Asia Series, 3).

'Ikusa Megami no Kikō [Ride of the Valkyries]' (2015) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri* [*GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land*].

'Itami nara [What Would Itami Do]' (2015) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri* [*GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land*].

Itō, M. (2007) *The Power of the Constitution* [*Kenpō no chikara*]. Tōkyō: Shueisha.

Izumikawa, Y. (2010) 'Explaining Japanese Antimilitarism Normative and Realist Constraints on Japan's Security Policy', *International Security*, 35(2), pp. 123+. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00020.

Jacoby, T.A. (2010) 'Fighting in the Feminine: The Dilemmas of Combat Women in Israel', in L. Sjöberg and S. Via (eds) *Gender, war, and militarism feminist perspectives*. Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger (Praeger security international), pp. 80–90.

Jester, N. (2021) 'Army recruitment video advertisements in the US and UK since 2002: Challenging ideals of hegemonic military masculinity?', *Media, War & Conflict*, 14(1), pp. 57–74. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219859488>.

'Jieitai, Isekai e Iku [The Self-Defence Force Goes to Another World]' (2015) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri* [*GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land*].

Johnston, E. (2004) 'The North Korea abduction issue and its effect on Japanese domestic politics', *Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper*, 101.

Jordanova, L.J. (2012) *The look of the past: visual and material evidence in historical practice*. Cambridge: University Press.

'Kaku tatakaeri [Thus, They Fought There]' (2016) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri* [*GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land*].

Kam, T.H. (2013) 'The common sense that makes the "otaku": rules for consuming popular culture in contemporary Japan', *Japan Forum*, 25(2), pp. 151–173. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2012.743481>.

Kano, A. (2011) 'Backlash, Fight Back, and Back-Pedaling: Responses to State Feminism in Contemporary Japan', *International journal of Asian studies*, 8(1), pp. 41–62. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479591410000252>.

Kapur, N. (2018) *Japan at the Crossroads: Conflict and Compromise after Anpo*. Cambridge, UNITED STATES: Harvard University Press. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ed/detail.action?docID=5435243> (Accessed: 24 November 2024).

Katt, M. (2014) 'Blurred lines: cultural support teams in Afghanistan', *Joint force quarterly*, (75), pp. 106–113.

Katzenstein, P. and Okawara, N. (1993) 'Japan National-Security - Structures, Norms, and Policies', *International Security*, 17(4), pp. 84–118. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539023>.

Katzenstein, P.J. and Okawara, N. (2001) 'Japan, Asian-Pacific Security, and the Case for Analytical Eclecticism', *International security*, 26(3), pp. 153–185. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753399754>.

Kavanagh, G. (1989) 'History in the Museum and Out of It', in T. Ambrose (ed.) *Presenting Scotland's Story*. Edinburgh: H.M.S.O. for the Scottish Museums Council, pp. 27–38.

Kawaguchi, A. (2013) *Discussing gender roles in Japan* [*nihon no jendā wo kangaeru*]. First. Tōkyō: Yūhikaku (Yūhikaku sensho, 1667).

Kawakami, A. (2020) 'The formation of the theory of "peace nation" and "peace constitution" in postwar Japan: Focusing on the pacifist theories of post-war

intellectuals (Independent paper) [Sengonihon ni okeru `heiwa kokka`heiwa kenpō'-ron no keisei: Sengo chokugo ni okeru chishiki hito no heiwa-ron o chūshin ni (dokuritsu ronbun)], *Hiroshima Peace Studies [Hiroshima heiwa kenkyū]*, 7, pp. 93–116.

Kayama, R. (2002) *Petit Nationalism Syndrome: Japanism of the Youth [Puchinashonarizumu shōkōgun: Wakamono-tachi no Nippon shugi]*. Tōkyō: Chuo Koron Shinsha.

Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2017) 'Liberal Feminists, Militaries and War', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 23–38.

'Kessen [Decisive Battle]' (2016) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri [GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land]*.

Khalili, L. (2011) 'Gendered practices of counterinsurgency', *Review of international studies*, 37(4), pp. 1471–1491. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026021051000121X>.

Kikkawa, T. and Todoroki, M. (1996) 'School Education and the Democratization of Social Consciousness in Postwar Japan [Gakkō kyōiku to sengonihon no shakai ishiki no minshu-ka]', *Research of the Sociology of Education [Kyōiku shakai-gaku kenkyū]*, 58, pp. 87–101.

Kinder, M. (1979) 'The Power of Adaptation in "Apocalypse Now"', *Film Quarterly*, 33(2), pp. 12–20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1211972>.

King, A. (2017) 'Gender and Close Combat Roles', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 305–318.

King, E. (2019) 'Performing Gender: Cosplay and Otaku Cultures and Spaces', in J. Coates, L. Fraser, and M. Pendleton (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 279–288. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315179582>.

Kingston, J. (2001) *Japan in transformation, 1952-2000*. Harlow ; Longman an imprint of Pearson Education (Seminar studies in history).

Kirdemir, B. *et al.* (2021) 'Examining Video Recommendation Bias on YouTube', in L. Boratto *et al.* (eds) *Advances in Bias and Fairness in Information Retrieval*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 106–116. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78818-6_10.

Kodamaya, R. (2023) 'How to Discuss Military Masculinity in the Self-Defense Forces [Jieitai no gunji-teki dansei-sei o ikani ronjiru no ka]', *Joseigaku*, 31.

Koikari, M. (2013) 'Training Women for Disasters: Gender, Crisis Management [Kiki kanri] and Post-3.11 Nationalism in Japan', *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 11(26).

- Koikari, M. (2019) 'Re-masculinizing the nation: gender, disaster, and the politics of national resilience in post-3.11 Japan', *Japan forum (Oxford, England)*, 31(2), pp. 143–164. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09555803.2017.1378698>.
- Koselleck, R. (2018) *Futures past: on the semantics of historical time*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Krickel-Choi, N.C. (2022) 'The embodied state: why and how physical security matters for ontological security', *Journal of international relations and development*, 25(1), pp. 159–181. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-021-00219-x>.
- Kuhn, A. (2022) 'Eyeing China, Japan lifts longtime restrictions to allow major defense buildup', *NPR*, 16 December. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/16/1143017026/japan-defense-spending-weapons-buildup-rearming> (Accessed: 20 February 2025).
- Le, T.P. (2021) *Japan's Aging Peace: Pacifism and Militarism in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Columbia University Press (Contemporary Asia in the World).
- LeBlanc, R.M. (2012) 'Lessons from the Ghost of Salaryman Past: The Global Costs of the Breadwinner Imaginary', *The Journal of Asian studies*, 71(4), pp. 857–871. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911812001209>.
- Liff, A.P. (2017) 'Policy by Other Means: Collective Self-Defense and the Politics of Japan's Postwar Constitutional Reinterpretations', *Asia Policy*, (24), pp. 139–172.
- Liff, A.P. (2023) 'No, Japan is not planning to “double its defense budget”', *Brookings*, 22 May. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/no-japan-is-not-planning-to-double-its-defense-budget/> (Accessed: 20 February 2025).
- Lingel, J. and Crawford, K. (2020) "'Alexa, Tell Me about Your Mother": The History of the Secretary and the End of Secrecy', *Catalyst (San Diego, Calif.)*, 6(1), pp. 1–. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.28968/cftt.v6i1.29949>.
- Lohan, M. and Faulkner, W. (2004) 'Masculinities and Technologies: Some Introductory Remarks', *Men and masculinities*, 6(4), pp. 319–329. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X03260956>.
- Lu, Z. *et al.* (2021) 'More Kawaii than a Real-Person Live Streamer: Understanding How the Otaku Community Engages with and Perceives Virtual YouTubers', in *Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems. CHI '21: CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, Yokohama Japan: ACM, pp. 1–14. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445660>.
- Lynn, H.G. (2006) 'Vicarious Traumas: Television and Public Opinion in Japan's North Korea Policy', *Pacific affairs*, 79(3), pp. 483–508. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5509/2006793483>.
- MacDowell, J. (2016) *Irony in Film*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-32993-6>.

- Macnaughtan, H. (2019) 'Gender and the Workplace', in J. Coates, L. Fraser, and M. Pendleton (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 168–178. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315179582>.
- Maki, J.M. (1955) 'Japan's Rearmament: Progress and Problems', *The Western Political Quarterly*, 8(4), pp. 545–568. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/441963>.
- Mangan, J.A. and Komagome, T. (2000) 'Militarism, Sacrifice and Emperor Worship: The Expendable Male Body in Fascist Japanese Martial Culture', in J.A. Mangan (ed.) *Superman Supreme: Fascist Body as Political Icon - Global Fascism*. Routledge.
- Mankayi, N. (2008) 'Masculinity, sexuality and the body of male soldiers', *Psychology in Society*, (36), pp. 24–44.
- Manske, A. (2005) 'Eigenverantwortung statt wohlfahrtsstaatlicher Absicherung', *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, 15(2), pp. 241–258. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11609-006-0120-3>.
- Mason, R. and Maslow, S. (2015) 'North Korea and the Politics of Risk-Framing in Japan', in R. Mason, S. Maslow, and P. O'Shea (eds) *Risk State: Japan's Foreign Policy in an Age of Uncertainty*. Routledge.
- Massey, D. (1995) 'Masculinity, dualisms and high technology', *Transactions - Institute of British Geographers (1965)*, 20(4), pp. 487–499. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/622978>.
- McClintock, A. (1995) *Imperial leather: race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial conquest* / Anne McClintock. New York ; Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. (1994) *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. Oxford, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group. Available at: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ed/detail.action?docID=179309> (Accessed: 10 July 2024).
- McVeigh, B.J. (2000) *Wearing ideology: state, schooling and self-presentation in Japan*. Oxford ; Berg (Dress, body, culture).
- Messner, M.A. (2007) 'The Masculinity of the Governor: Muscle and Compassion in American Politics', *Gender & Society*, 21(4), pp. 461–480. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243207303166>.
- Middlebrooks, W.C. (2008) *Beyond pacifism: Why Japan must become a normal nation*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Midford, P. (2017) 'The GSDF's Quest for Public Acceptance and the "Allergy" Myth', in P. Midford and R.D. Eldridge (eds) *The Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force: Search for Legitimacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, pp. 297–346.

Miller, J.M. (2011) 'The Struggle to Rearm Japan: Negotiating the Cold War State in US-Japanese Relations', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46(1), pp. 82–108. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009410383296>.

Ministry of Defense (2023) *I want to know more about Japan's defense! - MAMOR [nihon no bōei no koto, motto shiritai! MAMOR (mamoru)]*. Available at: <https://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/book/mamor/index.html> (Accessed: 20 November 2023).

'Mishiranu Chi e [To Unknown Lands]' (2015) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri [GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land]*.

Miyashita, A. (2007) 'Where do norms come from? Foundations of Japan's postwar pacifism', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 7(1), pp. 99–120. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lci135>.

'Mon no Mukō no Nihon [Japan, Beyond the Gate]' (2015) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri [GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land]*.

Morson, G.S. (1979) 'Socialist Realism and Literary Theory', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 38(2), pp. 121–133. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/430715>.

Moskos, C.C. (2000) 'Towards a Postmodern Military: The United States as a Paradigm', in C.C. Moskos, J.A. Williams, and D.R. Segal (eds) *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces After the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 14–31.

Moskos, C.C. and Burk, J. (2019) 'The postmodern military', in *The military in new times*. Routledge, pp. 141–162. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429312816-6/postmodern-military-charles-moskos-james-burk> (Accessed: 22 February 2024).

Moskos, C.C., Williams, J.A. and Segal, D.R. (2000a) 'Armed Forces After the Cold War', in C.C. Moskos, J.A. Williams, and D.R. Segal (eds) *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces After the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–13.

Moskos, C.C., Williams, J.A. and Segal, D.R. (eds) (2000b) *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces After the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mulloy, G. (2021) *Defenders of Japan: the post-imperial armed forces 1946-2016: a history*. London: Hurst & Company (Oxford scholarship online).

Nabers, D. (2017) 'Crisis as dislocation in global politics', *Politics*, 37(4), pp. 418–431. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395716661341>.

Nakanishi, H. (2011) 'The Gulf War and Japanese Diplomacy', *nippon.com*, 6 December. Available at: <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/c00202/the-gulf-war-and-japanese-diplomacy.html> (Accessed: 20 February 2025).

Nayak, A. (2023) 'Decolonizing Care: Hegemonic Masculinity, Caring Masculinities, and the Material Configurations of Care', *Men and masculinities*, 26(2), pp. 167–187. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X231166900>.

Nemoto, K. (2016) *Too Few Women at the Top: The Persistence of Inequality in Japan*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (Cornell Studies in Political Economy).

Niwa, A. (1993) 'The Formation of the Myth of Motherhood in Japan', *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*. Translated by T. Yoda, (4), pp. 70–82.

North, S. (2009) 'Negotiating What's "Natural": Persistent Domestic Gender Role Inequality in Japan', *Social science Japan journal*, 12(1), pp. 23–44. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ssjj/jyp009>.

Nymalm, N. (2024) 'Sustaining (organizational) identity in times of change? Ontological security and narrative in Swedish military doctrine', *Critical Military Studies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23337486.2024.2377475> (Accessed: 24 January 2025).

Obradovic, L. (2014) *Gender integration in NATO military forces: cross-national analysis*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate (Gender in a global/local world).

Okabe, D. *et al.* (2006) 'The social uses of purikura: photographing, modding, archiving, and sharing', in *Pervasive image capture and sharing workshop, ubiquitous computing conference*, pp. 2–5.

ON AIR - Distribution Information [ON AIR - haishin hōkoku] (no date) *Official website for the TV anime 'GATE: Thus the JSDF Fought There' [TV anime "GATE (gēto) jieitai kare no ji nite, kaku tatakaeri" kōshiki saito]*. Available at: http://gate-anime.com/on_air/index.html (Accessed: 10 July 2024).

Orlando and Hermawan, D. (2019) 'Transformation of JSDF image in recent Japanese animation', *Journal of physics. Conference series*, 1175(1), pp. 12246-. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1088/1742-6596/1175/1/012246>.

Oros, A.L. (2008) *Normalizing Japan: politics, identity, and the evolution of security practice*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press (Studies in Asian Security). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804778503>.

Oros, A.L. (2015) 'International and domestic challenges to Japan's postwar security identity: "norm constructivism" and Japan's new "proactive pacifism"', *Pacific Review*, 28(1), pp. 139–160. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2014.970057>.

Orr, J.J. (2001) *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

O'Shea, P. and Maslow, S. (2024) 'Rethinking change in Japan's security policy: punctuated equilibrium theory and Japan's response to the Russian invasion of

Ukraine', *Policy Studies*, 45(3–4), pp. 653–676. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2024.2309218>.

Ōtsuka, E. (2010) 'World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative', *Mechademia*. Translated by M. Steinberg, 5, pp. 99–116.

Panton, M.A. (2010) 'Japan's Article 9: Rule of Law v. Flexible Interpretation', *Temple International & Comparative Law Journal*, 24(1), pp. 129–172.

Pateman, C. (1988) *The sexual contract*. Cambridge: Polity in association with Basil Blackwell.

Patton, P. (1995) 'Introduction', in Baudrillard, J., *The Gulf War did not take place*. Sydney: Power Publications, pp. 1–21.

Penny, L. (2011) *Meat Market Female Flesh Under Capitalism*. Alresford, Hants, U.K: Zero Books.

Perkins, C. (2010) 'The Banality of Boundaries: Performance of the Nation in a Japanese Television Comedy', *Television & new media*, 11(5), pp. 386–403. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476409358087>.

Perkins, C. (2011) 'Inheriting the Legacy of the Souls of the War Dead: Linking Past, Present and Future at the Yūshūkan', *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* [Preprint].

Persson, A. and Sundevall, F. (2019) 'Conscripting women: gender, soldiering, and military service in Sweden 1965–2018', *Women's History Review*, 28(7), pp. 1039–1056. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2019.1596542>.

Peterson, V.S. (1992) 'Security and Sovereign States: What Is at Stake in Taking Feminism Seriously?', in V.S. Peterson (ed.) *Gendered States*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 31–64. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685859305-004>.

Price, P. (2021) 'A survey of the story elements of Isekai manga', *Journal of Anime and Manga Studies*, vol. 2 [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v2.808>.

'Proclamation Defining Terms for Japanese Surrender' (1945). Available at: <https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/e/etc/c06.html> (Accessed: 19 February 2025).

Raths, R. (2017) 'From Technical Showroom to Full-fledged Museum: The German Tank Museum Munster', in *Does War Belong in Museums?* Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 83–98. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839423066-007>.

Razack, S. (2004) *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press (Heritage). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3138/j.ctt1287sf9>.

Rekdal, P.B. (2017) 'About the Beauty of War and the Attractivity of Violence', in *Does War Belong in Museums?* Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 123–130. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839423066-011>.

Richter, J.P. (2016) 'Japan's Reinterpretation of Article 9: A Pyrrhic Victory for American Foreign Policy Notes', *Iowa Law Review*, 101(3), pp. 1223–1262.

Robbins, J. and Ben-Eliezer, U. (2000) 'New Roles or "New Times"? Gender Inequality and Militarism in Israel's Nation-in-Arms', *Social politics*, 7(3), pp. 309–342. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/7.3.309>.

Roberson, J. and Suzuki, N. (eds) (2003) *Men and masculinities in contemporary Japan: Dislocating the salaryman doxa*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Rones, N. and Fasting, K. (2017) 'Theorizing Military Masculinities and National Identities: The Norwegian Experience', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 145–162.

Rose, G. (2016) *Visual methodologies. An introduction to researching with visual materials*. 4th edition. London: SAGE Publications (Core textbook).

Sadō, A. (2017) *The self-defense forces and postwar politics in Japan*. First edition. Translated by M. Noda. Tokyo: Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture (Japan library).

Saitō, T. (2011) *Beautiful Fighting Girl*. Translated by K. Vincent and D. Lawson. Minneapolis [Minn: University of Minnesota Press.

Sakamoto, R. (2015) 'Mobilizing Affect for Collective War Memory: Kamikaze images in Yūshūkan', *Cultural Studies*, 29(2), pp. 158–184. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2014.890235>.

Saltzman, I.Z. (2015) 'Growing Pains: Neoclassical Realism and Japan's Security Policy Emancipation', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 36(3), pp. 498–527. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2015.1091574>.

Sam-Sang, J. (2018) 'Are Germany and Japan Now Normal States? Debates on Normalization in International Relations Theory [doitsu to nihon wa "futsū no kuni" dearu no ka – kokusai seijigaku ni okeru futsū-ka no giron ni kansuru ichikōsatsu]', *Chuo University Institute of Social Science Annual Research Report*, 23, pp. 179–197.

Samuels, R.J. (2007) *Securing Japan Tokyo's grand strategy and the future of East Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (Cornell studies in security affairs). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801459221>.

Sasson-Levy, O. (2003a) 'Feminism and Military Gender Practices: Israeli Women Soldiers in "Masculine" Roles', *Sociological inquiry*, 73(3), pp. 440–465. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-682X.00064>.

- Sasson-Levy, O. (2003b) 'Military, Masculinity, and Citizenship: Tensions and Contradictions in the Experience of Blue-Collar Soldiers', *Identities (Yverdon, Switzerland)*, 10(3), pp. 319–345. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10702890390228892>.
- Sasson-Levy, O. and Amram-Katz, S. (2007) 'Gender Integration in Israeli Officer Training: Degendering and Regendering the Military', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 33(1), pp. 105–133. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/518262>.
- Satō, F. (2004) *Gender and the Military: Women in the Japan Self-Defense Forces [Gunji soshiki to jendā – Jieitai no josei-tachi]*. Tōkyō: Keio University Press.
- Satō, F. (2010) 'Why Have the Japanese Self-Defense Forces Included Women? The State's "Nonfeminist Reasons"', in S. Shigematsu and K.L. Camacho (eds) *Militarized currents toward a decolonized future in Asia and the Pacific*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 251–276.
- Satō, F. (2022) *The conundrum of the female soldier: the sociology of war and the military from a gender perspective [Josei heishi to iu nanmon: Jendā kara tou sensō guntai no shakai-gaku]*. Tōkyō: Keio University Press.
- Scheibling, C. (2020) "'Real Heroes Care': How Dad Bloggers Are Reconstructing Fatherhood and Masculinities", *Men and Masculinities*, 23(1), pp. 3–19. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18816506>.
- Scott, J. (2015) 'Objects and the representation of war in military museums', *Museum and Society*, 13(4), pp. 489–502.
- Segal, D.R. and Blair, J.D. (1976) 'Public Confidence in the U.S. Military', *Armed Forces & Society*, 3(1), pp. 3–11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X7600300101>.
- Shimizu, I. (1980) 'The Nuclear Option: Japan be a State!', *Japan Echo*, 7(3), pp. 33–46.
- Shire, K.A. (2000) 'Gendered Organization and Workplace Culture in Japanese Customer Services', *Social science Japan journal*, 3(1), pp. 37–57. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ssjj/3.1.37>.
- Singh, B. (2013) *Japan's security identity: from a peace state to an international state*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge (Sheffield Centre for Japanese Studies/Routledge series, 45). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203084038>.
- Sjoberg, L. (2007) 'Agency, Militarized Femininity and Enemy Others: Observations From The War In Iraq', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 9(1), pp. 82–101. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740601066408>.
- Skabelund, A. (2022) *Inglorious, Illegal Bastards: Japan's Self-Defense Force during the Cold War*. Cornell University Press.

- Slovic, P. *et al.* (2017) 'Iconic photographs and the ebb and flow of empathic response to humanitarian disasters', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences - PNAS*, 114(4), pp. 640–644. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1613977114>.
- Smethurst, R.J. (1974) *A social basis for prewar Japanese militarism: The army and the rural community*. Univ of California Press (12).
- Smith, P.J. (2009) 'China-Japan Relations and the Future Geopolitics of East Asia', *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 35(4), pp. 230–256. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3200/AAFS.35.4.230-256>.
- Smith, S.A. (2022) 'The United States, Japan, and Taiwan: What Has Russia's Aggression Changed?', *Asia Policy*, 17(2), pp. 69–97.
- Snider, D.M. (2000) 'America's postmodern military', *World Policy Journal*, 17(1), pp. 47–54.
- Snyder, R.C. (1999) *Citizen-soldiers and manly warriors: military service and gender in the civic republican tradition*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Soeya, Y. (2011) 'A "Normal" Middle Power: Interpreting Changes in Japanese Security Policy in the 1990s and After', in Y. Soeya, M. Tadokoro, and D.A. Welch (eds) *Japan as a 'normal country': a nation in search of its place in the world*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press (Japan and global society), pp. 72–97.
- Soeya, Y., Tadokoro, M. and Welch, D.A. (eds) (2011) *Japan as a 'normal country': a nation in search of its place in the world*. Toronto ; University of Toronto Press (Japan and global society).
- Soltysik Monnet, A. (2018) 'American War Adventure and the Generic Pleasures of Military Violence: Clint Eastwood's American Sniper', *Journal of popular culture*, 51(6), pp. 1376–1397. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12735>.
- Stiehm, J. (1989) *Arms and the enlisted woman*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Stiehm, J.H. (1982) 'The protected, the protector, the defender', *Women's studies international forum*, 5(3), pp. 367–376. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(82\)90048-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(82)90048-6).
- Sudō, N. (2013) *JSDF Collaboration Films: : from 'Today I am in the skies' to 'Detective Conan' [Jieitai kyōryoku eiga: 'Kyō mo ware ōzora ni ari' kara 'meitanteikonan' made]*. Tōkyō: Ōtsuki Shoten.
- Sudō, N. (2017) 'JSDF Public Relations Shifting Towards Entertainment [Entāteinmento-ka suru Jieitai kōhō]'. Available at: https://chikushi-u.repo.nii.ac.jp/record/932/files/13_SUDO.pdf (Accessed: 12 November 2024).

Sudō, N. (2018) '文化政策論：「ガールズアンドパンツァー」にみる非政治的な政治 [A Study of Cultural Policy: Apolitical Politics in Girls und Panzer]', in M. Koyama and A. Sugawa-Shimada (eds) アニメ研究入門: 応用編, アニメを究める 11 のコツ [*Introduction to Anime Studies: Advanced, 11 Keys to Studying Anime*]. Tōkyō: Gendai Shokan, pp. 139–167.

Sugawa-Shimada, A. (2015) 'Interplay with fantasy: the 2.5-dimensional space as performance, and imagination [Fantajī ni asobu: Pafōmansu to shite no ni go-jigen bunka ryōiki to imajinēshon]', ユリイカ[Eureka], 47(5), pp. 41–47.

Sugawa-Shimada, A. (2018) 'Audience, Fan Theory (Fandom) - 2.5 dimensional fan culture practice [Ōdiensu, fan-ron (fan damu)~2. 5-Jigen-ka suru fan no bunka jissen]', in M. Koyama and A. Sugawa (eds) *Introduction to Anime Studies: Advanced, 11 Keys to Studying Anime [Anime kenkyū nyūmon: Ōyō-hen, anime o kiwameru 11 no kotsu]*. Tōkyō: Gendai Shokan, pp. 118–142.

Sugawa-Shimada, A. (2019a) 'Girls with Arms and Girls as Arms in Anime: The use of girls for "soft" militarism', in J. Coates, L. Fraser, and M. Pendleton (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 391–398. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315179582>.

Sugawa-Shimada, A. (2019b) 'Playing with Militarism in/with Arpeggio and Kantai Collection: Effects of shōjo Images in War-related Contents Tourism in Japan', *Journal of war and culture studies*, 12(1), pp. 53–66. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2018.1427014>.

Szitaryi, S. (2020) *Gender Trouble in the U.S. Military Challenges to Regimes of Male Privilege*. 1st ed. 2020. Cham: Springer International Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21225-4>.

Takagi, M. (1989) 'The Japanese Right Wing', *Japan Quarterly*, 36(3), pp. 300–305.

Takahashi, K. (2021) 'Japan Approves Record Defense Budget for Fiscal Year 2022', *The Diplomat*, 27 December. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/japan-approves-record-defense-budget-for-fiscal-year-2022/> (Accessed: 28 January 2022).

Takahashi, K. (2023) 'Poll: Japanese Support for Self-Defense Forces Rises to Record High', *The Diplomat*, 7 March. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/03/poll-japanese-support-for-self-defense-forces-rises-to-record-high/> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

Takaku, Y. (2011) 'A Direct Interview with the Editor-in-Chief of the Unconventional Self-Defense Forces Public Relations Magazine "Mamor" [Katayaburi no Jieitai kōhōshi `MAMOR' henshū-chō ni chokugeki intabyū]'. Available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20220423233613/https://blogos.com/article/23831/> (Accessed: 20 November 2023).

Takeda, H. (2005) *The Political Economy of Reproduction in Japan*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge (Sheffield Centre for Japanese studies/RoutledgeCurzon). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203299616>.

Takeda, H. (2008) 'Structural Reform of the Family and the Neoliberalisation of Everyday Life in Japan', *New political economy*, 13(2), pp. 153–172. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563460802018224>.

Takeyama, A. (2010) 'Intimacy for Sale: Masculinity, Entrepreneurship, and Commodity Self in Japan's Neoliberal Situation', *Japanese studies*, 30(2), pp. 231–246. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10371397.2010.497579>.

Tasker, Y. (2017) 'Military Women in Cinema: War Stories and Future Worlds', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 493–508.

'Teito Gekishin [The Imperial Capital Quake]' (2016) *GATE: Jieitai Kano Chi nite, Kaku Tatakaeri [GATE: Thus the Japanese Self-Defense Force Fought in Their Land]*.

The Constitution of Japan (1946). Available at: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html (Accessed: 12 January 2022).

The Fujisankei Communications Group at a Glance (Fujisankeigurūpu ichiran) (2023). Available at: <https://www.fujisankei-g.co.jp/list.html> (Accessed: 20 November 2023).

Tian, N. *et al.* (2024) *Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2023*. Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

Ting, G.E.-Y. (2020) 'Gender, manga, and anime', in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*. 1st edn. Routledge, pp. 311–319. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315179582-31>.

Tomasulo, F.P. (1990) 'The Politics of Ambivalence: Apocalypse Now as Pro-War and Anti-War Film', in L. Dittmar and G. Michaud (eds) *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*. New Brunswick, [N.J.] ; Rutgers University Press, pp. 145–158.

Treat, J.W. (1996) 'Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home. The Shōjo in Japanese Popular Culture', in J.W. Treat (ed.) *Contemporary Japan and popular culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 275–308.

Tsukada, H. (2020) 'The Process of Concept Formation of the "Religious Right" in Contemporary Japan [Sengonihon ni okeru "shūkyō uha" "shūkyō uyoku" gainen no keisei to tenkai]', *Joetsu University of Education Research Bulletin [Jōetsukyōikudagaku kenkyū kiyō]*, 40(1), pp. 263–274.

Ueda, K. (2014) 'Reinterpreting Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan', *The Constitution Unit Blog*, 28 August. Available at: <https://constitution->

unit.com/2014/08/28/reinterpreting-article-9-of-the-constitution-of-japan/
(Accessed: 17 January 2025).

Wadham, B. (2017) 'Violence in the Military and Relations Among Men: Military Masculinities and "Rape Prone Cultures"', in C. Duncanson and R. Woodward (eds) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (Palgrave handbooks), pp. 241–256.

Wang, Y. (2023) 'Popular Culture Collecting: A Common Phenomenon among Fans', *Academic Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 6(21), pp. 118–124.

Warrack, M. (2023) *Japan's Cultural Remilitarisation: Gendered Representations of the Japan Self-Defense Force in Manga*. PhD Thesis. University of Warwick. Available at: <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/182455>.

Weiss, R. (2014) 'Japan's Imaginary Obsession', in *Proceedings of The National Conference On Undergraduate Research (NCUR) 2014. The National Conference On Undergraduate Research (NCUR) 2014*, Lexington, KY, pp. 134–144.

Whitworth, S. (2004) *Men, militarism, and UN peacekeeping: A gendered analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers. Available at:
<https://books.google.com/books?hl=de&lr=&id=82TxOTLCMK4C&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&q=men+militarism+whitworth&ots=9Nr6sTcJld&sig=gy71vBQXDtNP6P606xXMqatw8GI> (Accessed: 27 June 2024).

Wienke, C. (1998) 'Negotiating the Male Body: Men, Masculinity, and Cultural Ideals', *The Journal of men's studies*, 6(3), pp. 255–282. Available at:
<https://doi.org/10.1177/106082659800600301>.

Williams, J.A. (2000) 'The Postmodern Military Reconsidered', in C.C. Moskos, J.A. Williams, and D.R. Segal (eds) *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces After the Cold War*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 265–278.

Wilson, S. (2015) 'New anime Gate entertains, tries to recruit you to the Japan Self-Defense Forces at the same time', *SoraNews24 -Japan News-*, 24 July. Available at:
<https://soranews24.com/2015/07/24/new-anime-gate-entertains-tries-to-recruit-you-to-the-japan-self-defense-forces-at-the-same-time/> (Accessed: 5 July 2024).

Winter, J. (2017) 'Museums and the Representation of War', in *Does War Belong in Museums?* Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, pp. 21–38. Available at:
<https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839423066-004>.

Woodward, R. and Duncanson, C. (2016) 'Gendered divisions of military labour in the British armed forces', *Defence studies*, 16(3), pp. 205–228. Available at:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2016.1180958>.

World Economic Forum (2021) *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*. Geneva: World Economic Forum. Available at:
https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf (Accessed: 29 March 2022).

Yamamura, T. (2019) 'Cooperation Between Anime Producers and the Japan Self-Defense Force: Creating Fantasy and/or Propaganda?', *Journal of war and culture studies*, 12(1), pp. 8–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17526272.2017.1396077>.

Yamamura, T. and Seaton, P. (eds) (2022) *War as Entertainment and Contents Tourism in Japan*. 1st edn. United Kingdom: Routledge (Routledge Focus on Asia). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003239970>.

Yoshitsu, M.M. (1983) *Japan and the San Francisco Peace Settlement*. New York: Columbia University Press (Studies of the East Asian Institute).

Zwach, E. (1999) *Deutsche und englische Militärmuseen im 20. Jahrhundert, Eine kulturgeschichtliche Analyse des gesellschaftlichen Umgangs mit Krieg*. Münster: LIT.