

**ALCHEMISTS, WARRIORS, SOLDIERS: RE-
IMAGINING MILITARISM THROUGH SHOUNEN
MANGA**

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of International Relations

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in International Relations*

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Word Count: 13146

*Vienna, Austria
2023*

Abstract

Manga and anime are considered one of the main cultural exports of Japan, attracting a considerable international audience due to their relatability. This thesis project is dedicated to pinpointing how manga informs its readership on militarism and state violence. It focuses on the analysis of shounen manga, i.e., a genre of comics targeted towards young male audiences and exploring a variety of topics connected to the International Relations scholarship, such as war and peace, ethnic grievances, political functioning of the military etc. In this project, the genre is represented by *Fullmetal Alchemist* (2001) and *Attack on Titan* (2009) – critically acclaimed bestsellers. The thesis aims to broaden the academic debate on the so-called “military-entertainment complex” and engages with scholarly literature on the Aesthetic Turn in International Relations and Critical Military Studies. Representations of militarism in the cultural artifacts are assessed based on the definition of militarism coined by Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby (2012). Methodologically, this research relies primarily on Critical Discourse Analysis and Visual Analysis. While following the tragedies of the characters in the manga, this thesis deconstructs not only how militarization and militarism are portrayed in manga on a surface level, but also points out the more subtle and personal consequences of these phenomena.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Erzsebet Strausz, and my Academic Writing instructor, Vera Eliasova, for believing in me and supporting my project no matter what.

To my family for their unconditional love and support.

To my friends (especially my neighbors from room 6605) for pushing me forward and teaching me to never give up.

To the IR Department for inspiring me and challenging what is and is not International Relations.

And to everyone I met on this journey.

Table of Contents

Abstract	II
Acknowledgements	III
Table of Contents	IV
Introduction	- 1 -
Chapter I. Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of the Research	- 5 -
1.1. Literature Review	- 5 -
1.2. Theoretical Foundations of the Research	- 9 -
1.3. Methodology	- 12 -
Chapter II. How Shounen Manga Portrays Militarism	- 16 -
2.1. Synopsis of the Plot	- 16 -
2.2. Defining Militarism	- 17 -
2.3. Militarism as an Ideology	- 18 -
2.4. Aesthetics of the Military	- 20 -
2.5. Militarism as a Social and Institutional Phenomenon	- 22 -
2.6. Militarization of the Civilian Life	- 25 -
Chapter III. The Antimilitaristic World of <i>Attack on Titan</i> and <i>Fullmetal Alchemist</i>	- 29 -
3.1. Lived Experiences of War as the Highest Form of Militarism	- 29 -
3.2. Mentors and Pupils – Personal Relations and the Everyday Under Militarism	- 38 -
3.3. Connecting Manga with the Real Life	- 43 -
Conclusion	- 45 -
Bibliography	- 49 -

Introduction

A popular saying goes: “*Tell me who you go with, and I’ll tell you who you are.*” We can apply the same logic to our favorite popular culture products: “*Tell me which media you consume, and I’ll tell you who you are.*” Popular culture, alongside social media and news channels has practically become an essential part of the modern life. No matter the purpose, whether it is to relax after a difficult day at work or to find comfort in fictional worlds, the content we indulge in serves both as a learning site which informs and shapes our worldviews and as a projection of our biases, a lens of sorts, through which we communicate with the world around us.

Since culture is inherently political, it is not surprising that political ideas appear in popular cultural artifacts. There are various ways which demonstrate how popular and political culture are intertwined. Some cultural artifacts are informed by real-life historical events and provide valuable interpretations of those, while others use fiction as a creative means to explore certain historic and contemporary socio-political phenomena. Since over the last decades International Relations scholarship is not only following various manifestations of inter-state relations, but also strives to incorporate insights from the everyday lives of ordinary people, as evident by the works of Bleiker, Shapiro and other scholars, popular culture, as something every one of us enjoys to an extent, is becoming an vital part of its research agenda.

Manga is a promising area of research on popular culture and international relations due to how versatile it is. Relations between manga as a cultural artifact on one hand and theory and practice of International Relations on the other can be explored from both top-down and bottom-up perspectives. Manga is both an important cultural export of Japan and a vital part of Japanese soft power, e.g., such initiatives as *Cool Japan*¹, and a staple of the modern internet fandom

¹ A soft power initiative of the Japanese government in the 2000s, aimed primarily at promoting its modern cultural exports, such as manga and video games.

culture, gaining momentum among teenagers and young adults. National Publishing Association of Japan reports, that in 2021 Japanese comic book market was worth approximately 5.9 billion USD (Anime News Network 2022). At the same time, North American comic book market was worth 1.28 billion USD in 2020 alone (ICv2 2021).

Shounen manga is of particular importance to International Relations scholarship. This genre of manga is targeted heavily towards tween and teenage boys, which is reflected in the Kanji characters (少年漫画) used in the term, as 少年 symbols can be translated as “few years” (Animanga Wiki, n.d.). Among the common themes explored by the shounen manga one can separate adventure, action, friendship and coming of age (Pagan 2018). Some other key features of the shounen genre are a significant focus on action and worldbuilding, an extent of competitiveness, a predominantly young adult or teenage main character cast (TV Tropes, n.d.), *henshin* (変身, lit. 'transformation'), i.e., an ability of the main characters to switch between two personas or entities, persistent main character, who gains success by hard work (Wikipedia, n.d.). Because “politics and war have been the activities of men more than women and are especially suited to exploring the historical nature of masculinity” (Dudnik, Hagemann and Tosh 2004, 22) gendered media, such as shounen genre of manga, explores the role of the military in the society and ideas of political violence.

Although shounen manga was originally created primarily for young male adults and teenage boys, it is currently enjoyed by a wider demographic of readership. For a lot of people, shounen was their first introduction to anime, since it was the first among anime and manga genres to be exported to the West *en masse* (TV Tropes, n.d.). Due to the censorship differences in Japan (meaning that the rules are much more lenient in terms of young viewership and their exposure to mature content than in the US or Europe), shounen manga does include a lot of explicit imagery, e.g., gore or nudity, therefore it is often marketed towards the global readership as an adult or mature media (TV Tropes, n.d.).

The main research question of this thesis project is *what are the ways in which shounen manga as a cultural export informs its audiences about various aspects of militarism?* I will evaluate militarism according to a theoretical framework introduced by Stavrianakis and Selby (2012) in *Militarism and International Relations*, more specifically by examining militarism as an ideology, as an aesthetic and as an institutional and social phenomenon (Stavrianakis, Selby 2012, 12-13). My research also focuses on the everyday manifestations of militarism, both in manga and real life, which demonstrate “how war and preparing for it become desired and desirable in everyday life so that social practices become ‘fully compatible with a credible justification for violence’” (Basham 2022, 3).

Mangas central to my research are *Attack on Titan* (2009, AOT) by Hajime Isayama and *Fullmetal Alchemist* (2001, FMA) by Hiromu Arakawa. There are two main reasons behind this choice of research subject. Firstly, these mangas are considered bestsellers, with *AOT* reaching 110 million copies in print by September 2022 (Oricon News 2022) and *FMA* reaching 70 million copies in print worldwide (Dengeki Online 2021). They are favored by both critics and the general public.

Secondly, *FMA* and *AOT* are textbook examples of the shounen genre, as they follow typical for this type of literature tropes. In both cases readers follow the stories of teenage outcasts, who are different from their peers in both physical characteristics and magical abilities. Since the very beginning they set out on a magical, action filled adventure to achieve a greater good. As they get older, the characters and readers alike discover, that the initial magic and charm of their universes hide dark secrets, such as political and ethnic violence, aggression, imperialism and totalitarianism.

Just like the characters learn through their respective journey, this thesis paper will, part by part, provide readers with lessons on militarism and its harm. Therefore, it will consist of three chapters. Chapter 1 is dedicated to outlining the theoretical and methodological

foundations of the research. Firstly, it provides a literature review on the Aesthetic Turn in International Relations and its relation to militarism, as well as scholarly engagement with shounen manga in general and *FMA* and *AOT* specifically. Then, it proceeds with an introduction to the Aesthetic Turn as a theory and contemporary scholarship on Critical Military Studies. Finally, the first chapter discusses methodology and research design.

The following chapter 2 provides an in-depth analysis of the representation of militaristic practices and militarization in *FMA* and *AOT* respectively. Firstly, I assess militarism in two cultural artifacts as an ideology and governmental practice. In addition, I focus on militarism as an affective personal response to said practices and how it influences the society as such.

Lastly, chapter 3 deals with the critique of militarism and militarization in the cultural artifacts. I examine this criticism by looking at the personal tragedies of the characters, which were at one point, or another involved in the military service. Not only this section illustrates, through the experiences of the characters, how militarism interferes with our everyday realities, but also what readers can learn from those fictional universes. In the conclusion, I will briefly assess, how manga impacts its audiences, as well as its benefits for the field of International Relations.

Chapter I. Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of the Research

1.1. Literature Review

A substantial body of literature exists on the Aesthetic Turn in IR and militarism, cultural representations of violence and the so-called “military-entertainment complex” (Bos 2016, 4). Among the topics, discussed in studies of aesthetics and militarism, one of the most prominent is the study of videogames and debate around the common narrative of violence in video games being the promoter of violence in real life. Felix Ciută argues that the current approach of International Relations scholarship towards studying video games, most specifically war blockbusters, is rather unproductive and problematic, as it only reinforces this narrative. He claims that this approach “involuntarily undermines the agenda of aesthetic IR, which is built on the understanding of ir [*sic*] “as a complexly multilayered domain of which IR is actually a constitutive part” (Ciută 2016, 202). Instead, he promotes examining videogames as “practical-theoretical spaces” (Ciută 2016, 197), which help us look at a theoretical framework from a completely new and creative angle.

Daniel Bos aims to use the Aesthetic Turn and videogames in order to challenge the popular understanding of geopolitics. His analysis is based on a videogame called *This War of Mine* (2014) which urges its players to reflect on the impact of war on civilian life and urban spaces, unlike the more mainstream representations of war in modern popular culture artifacts. Then the author concludes, that although “there remains limited exploration of the diversity of oppositional cultural media” (Bos 2021, 19) he is positive that “digital games can encourage a novel form of critiquing, and raising public consciousness towards a range of (geo)political issues” (Bos 2021, 19), as well as provide an alternative account on the true price of violence and consequences of military practices.

Nick Robinson ties militarism, the narrative of US exceptionalism and video games. The author analyses war video games, which were produced after the 9/11 attack and the War

on Terror, declared by then US president G.W. Bush. Robinson argues, that analyzed games reinforce militaristic US policies by transforming the player into a “representative of the US state, upholding national values through the kinds of secret military action argued for by the Bush administration during that ‘war’”. (Robinson 2015, 452). By switching on the computer game, the player not only entertains themselves, but also unconsciously delves into the American nation-building mythology and uncovers main narratives surrounding contemporary US politics.

Military videogames discussed in the aforementioned articles have many elements in common with shounen manga, since both media deal with creative renditions of state and military violence. Therefore, research on video games and aesthetics of militarism can inform us about various trends already existing in the scholarship on cultural artifacts and military, as well as ways in which we can problematize such knowledge. Cultural artifacts allow audiences to immerse into a new setting and put on a persona, whether that be a *Call of Duty* fighter or a main character of a shounen, which helps us scholars determine how we think about politics and political violence. Oftentimes Visual Turn scholars criticize their colleagues for engaging with such media on a rather surface level, ignoring its nuance to fit a mainstream political science narrative. Therefore, analyzing manga in a similar framework to the analysis of video games and the aesthetic of militarism helps us to enrich the scholarship by making it more nuanced, since manga oftentimes does not follow conventional narratives around militarism.

Considerable scholarship exists on International Relations, Visual Studies and comics/manga. David Shim discusses the South Korean comics brochure *The Truth about the Cheonan Attack* dedicated to the sinking of *Cheonan* military vessel, which was allegedly hit by a North Korean missile. He stresses the importance of comics for the modern Political Science and International Relations scholarship, since “linking of a “serious” matter of “high politics” with an “unserious” item of popular culture reveals that comics affect political practice

because they are deemed fit by governments to represent matters related to national security” (Shim 2017, 399).

Among the notable examples one can mention Akos Kopper and his article titled *Pirates, justice and global order in the anime “One Piece”*. In this piece he follows the adventures of Monkey D. Luffy, his relationship with the World Government and how this antagonism symbolizes deconstruction of the liberal international order. The author explains that “stories never stand in themselves and are not produced in a vacuum, but tie into already existing deeply rooted narratives” (Kopper 2020). Therefore, Monkey D. Luffy’s adventure is not only a mesmerizing romantic pirate action, but also “a story linking up with popular narratives calling to resist power and to raise questions concerning political order” (Kopper 2020). Militarism and manga is explored by Takayuki Ōhashi in the article *The Relationship between Yakyū (Baseball) and Militarism: Baseball Discourse in Japanese Shōnen (Boys’) Culture*. In this piece, the author discusses the transition of pre-war militaristic values of Japan into the modern, pacifist post-war Japan through the lens of a boy sports manga. He applies the philosophy of *bushidō*, i.e., the training and code of conduct of samurais, to representation of baseball in the manga *Star of the Giants*. The author managed to capture this relation and demonstrated that this manga is successfully “drawing attention not only to the militaristic elements of baseball training, but also its relationship with the patriarchal system and the male gender in Japan” (Ōhashi 2022, 255).

As representatives of Japanese comics, *AOT* and *FMA* have attracted scholarly attention from many fields, varying from literary studies to social sciences and international law. Tim Brinkhof praises Hajime Isayama for his sophisticated critique of totalitarianism and imperialism, most specifically Nazi ideology, in a world with “a growing attraction for autocratic—often sociopathic—forms of governance” (Brinkhof 2021, 21). The author draws on various historical examples, e.g., sociological writing of Carl Schmidt or antisemitic

propaganda novels written by Hans Zöberlin in order to demonstrate how Isayama has incorporated Nazi ideology elements into his critique of fascism.

Marta Fanasca criticizes the shounen genre for its heteronormativity and argues that *AOT* proposes a valuable counter-hegemonic and non-normative contribution to it, which is relatable to the queer and female readership (Fanasca 2021). She primarily focuses on the topics of female empowerment and queer, most specifically, lesbian subtext in the manga. Kukhee Choo discusses not only the *FMA* manga's multimedia character and variety of fan cosplay inspired by the title, but also cross-racial implications raised by the 2017 Netflix movie adaptation (Choo 2020).

Vanessa Halim and Setefanus Suprajitno apply the framework of dehumanization to the oppressed people of Eldia, whose struggle constitutes the majority of the plot of the second part of the manga. They apply Nick Haslam's dual model of dehumanization and demonstrate how Eldians are both treated as animals and as innate objects. The authors also look at the reasons behind the dehumanization of Eldians and conclude that it happens due to their powerlessness and the fear induced by them in the Marleyans (Halim and Suprajitno 2022). Abhijeet Shrivastava and Anujay Shrivastava use the main character's struggle to demonstrate the complexities behind the term genocide and how it is informed by unique circumstances. The authors claim that the manga has "great pedagogical potential for unravelling fundamental assumptions behind legal norms and offering hypotheticals to trigger the re-imagination of the law for those who may wish to" (Shrivastava and Shrivastava 2022).

Therefore, we can separate two distinct trends in the study on aesthetic turn in IR and the popular media which would be important for our project. First of all, cultural artifacts discussed in the previous articles allow consumers to put on a hypothetical mask and play a role they wouldn't otherwise play in real life. This is one of the reasons as to why some of the main characters in such media are rather bland in appearances and/or character - they are made that

way so that it is easier for the consumer to cater that fictional persona specifically to themselves. Nick Robinson and Marcus Schulzke claim that militaristic entertainment serves as an attempt to “sell the experience of war to consumers” (Robinson and Schulzke 2016, 996). By indulging in such media, readers also engage in political concepts, such as militarism, in a much deeper way that they would normally do in real life circumstances. It is one thing to read about the war on the news, however it is a completely different thing to take part in one - even if it is only inside of a computer game or a comic. Secondly, popular cultural artifacts allow their creators to express complicated political and social topics in a manner accessible to the general public. Considering the fact that many politicians themselves resort to using comics or cartoons as their means of communication with the citizens, it is safe to say that those artifacts provide an exciting research site for our scholarship.

Since shounen manga combines the two previously discussed insights, it is worthy to introduce *AOT* and *FMA* to the literature on militarism, international relations, and popular culture. Whereas *FMA* perfectly captures the complex balance between the military and the civilian, *AOT* shows the readers the realist cruelty of the military. Now, I will move on to the theoretical foundations behind the study as well as methodology involved.

1.2. Theoretical Foundations of the Research

This research operates within two primal theoretical frameworks, i.e., the Aesthetic Turn in IR and Critical Military Studies. Discussing the theory will allow me to create a foundation for my study and to determine specific notions I will be focusing on in the future.

Aesthetic Turn in IR is a part of a modern post-positivist school of thought in International Relations scholarship titled the Practice Turn in IR. The main aim of this approach is to move away from the conventional positivist imagining of international relations towards a more nuanced and critical understanding of them as “bundles of individual and collective practices woven together and producing specific outcomes” (Cornut 2017, 2). Roland Bleiker

defines Aesthetic Turn in IR as a type of scholarship which values not only logic and reason, as many other waves of IR scholarship, but also various creative forms of knowledge production. (Bleiker 2018). Laura Shepherd and Cerwyn Moore also emphasize on a responsiveness to sensations, affects, emotions and creativity in scholarly work on International Relations, rather than conventional rational accounts (Moore and Shepherd 2010, 299).

Aesthetic Turn in IR as a research program stands on the side of the aesthetic in the aesthetic vs mimetic divide. Unlike mimetic representations, which aim to capture the world as realistic and authentic as possible, aesthetic representations acknowledge the gap between the representation and the represented and claim that this gap defines the actual location of politics (Bleiker 2001, 510). Researchers subscribing to this paradigm are highly critical towards the mimetic IR scholarship, since it fails to acknowledge that an event or a phenomenon is purposeless for scholarly thought without a wider socio-political or historical context. Therefore, engagement with aforementioned context informs us about how “representative practices themselves have come to constitute and shape political practices” (Bleiker 2001, 510).

Aesthetic Turn in IR is oftentimes used interchangeably with the term Visual Turn in IR, since images and visuals can provoke unique and intense emotions in the viewership. Roland Bleiker, one of the foundational scholars of the Aesthetic Turn, claims that the connection between visuals and intensity of emotions stems from the fact that “pictures of traumatic events, [...], are seemingly able to capture the unimaginable” (Bleiker 2015, 876).

One of the main analytical and theoretical categories in the Aesthetic Turn literature is Michael Shapiro’s notion of the aesthetic subject. He defines aesthetic subjects as those subjects “who, through artistic genres, articulate and mobilize thinking” (Shapiro 2012, 11). Aesthetic subjects are characters whose actions, either purposeful or accidental, alter political domains (Shapiro 2012, xiv). Aesthetic scholarship in International Relations matters for my project because I am focusing on the gap between the reality of militarism and its representation in

Japanese cultural artifacts to arrive at a new understanding of this phenomenon, which resonates with modern audiences. I acknowledge that the previous understandings of militarism and militarization produced by more conventional International Relations scholars might be too straightforward to account for various other important factors, such as cultural differences and modern historical developments.

Another important theoretical framework I would like to introduce is Critical Military Studies. Critical Military Studies is a research paradigm aimed to challenge the contemporary security and military scholarship and their preoccupation with statist understanding of political violence, conflict and peace. Critical Military Studies engages with Queer and Feminist IR, anthropology and various other forms of critical scholarship in order to, in Cynthia Enloe's words, become "sceptically curious" about its [military's] character, representation, application, and effects" (Basham, Belkin and Gifkins 2015). The main idea behind Critical Military Studies is to question military institution and military power and political violence as such as "the outcome of social life and political contestation...at a range of scales from the embodied to the global, rather than as given, functional categories beyond interrogation" (Rech et al. 2015 in Basham and Bulmer 2017, 59). To demonstrate, how enrooted military really is in our society they problematize the erasure of the civilian vs military divide and modalities of the so-called everyday militarism, which is a condition in which militaristic values and images penetrate various aspects of everyday life and erode our understanding of the dangers of militarism (Peace Pledge Union, n.d.). Critical Militarism Studies is an important juncture because it also aims to unravel how common everyday things that we encounter in our civilian lives can be a part of something deeper and more politicized. Since in the words of Cynthia Enloe, even the can of soup can be militarized (Enloe 2000) and serve as a signifier of various structures of violence and inequality which are entrenched in our day-to-day life, popular media, such as shounen manga can also be brought under the critical military studies lens.

An overlap between the two theoretical frameworks can be found in the study of reproductions of political violence and the so-called “military-entertainment complex”. The “military-entertainment complex” is derived from the idea of the “military-industrial complex” (Mills 1958 in Robinson 2012, 508) and is concerned with the active militarization of entertainment and growing ties between the military and artists. One can look at the relations inside the “military-entertainment complex” both from a top-down perspective, meaning impulses coming from the military towards the creative industries, and bottom-down perspective, i.e., the audiences of such content and their engagement with it.

The main ways in which this thesis project engages with the aforementioned theoretical frameworks is by looking at aesthetic subjects present in the cultural artifacts and how they navigate militarism and its consequences in their fictional universes. By examining the fictional, we can also reflect on the real life and what attracts readers to a specific image of militarism.

1.3. Methodology

Main analytical and methodological framework used in my research consists of Critical Discourse Analysis and Visual Analysis, since they are well suited for such a qualitative and post-positivist research.

Critical Discourse Studies is a research school which examines relations between language and social reality. It is primarily interested in the analysis of “hidden, opaque and visible structures of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 12). This approach investigates social and political inequality and how it is reproduced in the mainstream discourse. Critical Discourse Studies is largely influenced by Critical Theory and the Frankfurt School (Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak 2014, 360). Critical engagement with the empirical data is achieved by maintaining a healthy distance between the researcher and the object of study. Critical Discourse Analysis is

distinguished by “not taking anything at face value, taking an interest in de-mystifying ideologies and power relations through the systematic investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual)” (Angermuller, Maingueneau and Wodak 2014, 362).

Apart from its critical potential, Discourse Analysis is a powerful tool to analyze cultural artifacts, such as manga, due to its multimodality. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis aims at acknowledging the “multitude of different materials and “meaning resources” that people use to create and distribute meaningful signs” (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 182). Multimodality is linked with adequacy and appropriateness, as various modes of semiotic data are dictated by societal and cultural norms and contexts. To account for the multimodal character of manga, where visual and textual signifiers are intertwined, I utilize the Systemic-Functional approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. This methodological framework aims at uncovering and analyzing combinations of semiotic resources, among which language, visuals, gestures, architecture and other modes of meaning making, in various three-dimensional research sites (O’Halloran 2008, 444).

A complementary analytical framework to Critical Discourse Analysis is Visual Analysis. As Susanne Langer explains, language is connected to the “discursive symbolism”, while images are concerned with the so-called “presentational symbolism” and allow us to enrich our research by incorporating details ignored by the textual analysis. (Langer in Schnettler & Raab 2009, 273). Therefore, Visual Analysis aims to deconstruct the meaning of visual data and connect it to our interpretations of said visuals (Knoblauch et al 2008, 2).

Gillian Rose in her book titled *Visual Methodologies: An to interpreting visual objects* provides a comprehensive framework for the analysis of the visual content. First of all, her critical approach to visual analysis propagates that one should take images seriously, as their own analytical category, and not simply reduce them to their context. Secondly, it takes into the account both the social conditions of the visual and the effect which it produces. Lastly, it

advocates for addressing and reflecting on the positionality and cultural background of the researcher. (Rose 2001, 15-16). Moreover, she separates three distinct sites which contribute to the meaning making of an image: production, the image itself and the reception of the audience (Rose 2001, 16), as well as three modalities of the image: technological, compositional and social (Rose 2001, 17). Those sites are extremely valuable for social science research since they convey the different discursive levels of examining one single image.

David Campbell proposes a range of analytical questions which help connect the visual analysis and International Relations scholarship. Firstly, we should address, how visibility may be theorized as a specific form of knowledge. Then, which implications our philosophical understanding of visibility might have for our general engagement with visual artifacts. Lastly, he suggests asking how cultural artifacts can be understood as technologies of visibility that condition international relation and how they problematize certain elements of international relations (Campbell 2007 in Grayson and Mawdsley 2019, 434).

This thesis aims to address the question proposed by David Campbell in his analytical framework regarding visual artifacts. Most specifically, I am interested in how *AOT* and *FMA* problematize certain elements of international relations, in our case militarism and reproduction of violence. Primary analysis concerns the two mangas themselves – *AOT* and *FMA*. To add more context to the discussion, I might refer to various lore extending materials, more specifically commentary of the author's regarding their work, derived from interviews or the comments to the chapters.

In this scope of this research, I rely primarily on the production and the image site, while leaving out, to the most part, the audiences and their reception of the image, which might be seen as a limitation to our research. I am examining both the textual components of the manga, e.g., metaphors and symbols used by the authors, utilization of certain historical and socio-political narratives, and their visual components, such as the visual aesthetics of the military in

the respective titles and artistic choices made by the author to enhance certain aspects over the other.

Chapter II. How Shounen Manga Portrays Militarism

2.1. Synopsis of the Plot ²

Attack on Titan is a shounen manga created by Hajime Isayama in 2009. In this critically acclaimed and internationally distributed work the author is trying to engage gruesome gore imagery and difficult political and social frameworks, which have fueled discussion in the society since its earlier days. The readers follow the story of Eren Yeager, who is a young pre-teenage boy living on the island of Paradis. A peculiar thing about the main character's world is the fact that it is tormented by mysterious anthropomorphic giants called Titans. They eat human flesh, lack intelligence, and hardly anyone on the island knows about their exact origin. To protect the inhabitants of Paradis from the Titans three enormous defensive walls were emerged.

After the walls are breached by Intelligent Titans (i.e., a subgroup of Titans, who shift back into humans and have different abilities), our main character loses his mother and fueled by revenge joins a military unit called the Survey Corps. Then we learn some of Eren's friends from the unit, as well as the boy himself, can shift into Titans. We then embark on the journey to the basement in Eren's house and learn from the diaries of his father that the Titan abuse of the island was orchestrated by the Marleyan empire, which is a militaristic regime surviving on ethnic discrimination of Eldians, who bear a titan shifting gene. Enraged by the fact that the world made his native nation of Eldia suffer so much, Eren decides to enable Rumbling – an awakening of numerous controllable Colossus Titans – and ends up wiping away 80% of the human population.

Just like the main character of the *AOT*, *Fullmetal Alchemist* tells the story of young children who were forced to collaborate with a militaristic system. The main characters of the

² The following chapters 2 and 3 incorporate ideas from my Term Paper *State Alchemists and Military Dogs: Critique of Militarism in Fullmetal Alchemist*, written for *International Relations: Concepts and Theory* course taught by Michael Merlingen in the Fall Term of 2022.

manga, Edward and Alphonse Elric, possess an ability to practice magic and alchemy. At the start of their story, the brothers attempted to resurrect their mother with the help of the so-called human transmutation, i.e., an artificial creation of a human achieved by the notion of the equivalent exchange. Unfortunately, they failed and, moreover, had to sacrifice their bodies to come back to life. Parts of their soul are trapped in metal – in the case of Edward, he has got a prosthetic arm (hence the title *Fullmetal Alchemist*), whereas his brother Alphonse appears to the readers in a metal gear.

Yet, the Elric brothers were far from giving up. They persisted in reclaiming their bodies and resurrecting their parent and to do so they needed the philosopher's stone – a mysterious artifact granting its owner ultimate command of alchemy. The only way to access this resource is by enrolling into the military and becoming a state alchemist. Throuout their journey, we encounter multiple older servicemen, among whom is Roy Mustang, responsible for recruiting young Edward. It is through his voice that we first learn about the repercussions associated with the military service: state alchemists are known as military dogs, because not only their service is very gruesome, but also society despises them for abusing their power to make profit. Edward still agreed to bear that title and enroll into the military as a state alchemist at the age of 12, making him the youngest state alchemist to ever exist.

Now, by engaging academic literature on militarism and International Relations, I will demonstrate how both mangas engage with this phenomenon on various levels. By moving along the plot, readers are able to explore this concept in different forms, which will be unpacked in more detail in the following subchapters.

2.2. Defining Militarism

Before I proceed with describing and analyzing militarism as it is portrayed in *Attack on Titan* and *Fullmetal Alchemist*, I should establish theoretical foundations of what is considered militarism and provide a set of criteria which will help us critically engage with the

cultural artifacts. Our cultural artifacts rely on different types of militarism, which can be traced back to existing scholarship on International Relations and Security Studies.

Anna Stavrianakis and Jan Selby made probably the widest description of militarism and militarization. They declare militarism as one of the main characteristics of international politics and define it as a domestic and foreign policy of preparing for and conducting structured political violence (Stavrianakis, Selby 2012, 3). According to them, militarism encompasses a numerous range of ideological, institutional, behavioral, military and sociological phenomena, which are often characteristics not only of high politics, but also of everyday life. This classification demonstrates that militarism is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, which encapsules a lot of different factors and changes according to the demands of time and place. Therefore, militaristic regimes portrayed in the *FMA* and *AOT* mangas is also tailored to the specifics of the fictional universe.

Now, I will move on to discussing how specific elements of militarism manifest in the worlds of *AOT* and *FMA*. For this project, I want to capitalize on such features as ideological components of militarism, aesthetics behind it, sociological and institutional dimension of militarism, as well as militarization of the civilian, since those topics are portrayed in great details in my source material.

2.3. Militarism as an Ideology

Certain scholars believe that the study of militarism should primarily focus on its ideological foundations. One should begin with an ideological standpoint, which is portrayed by James Eastwood. This scientist introduced the term 'ideological penetration' and in general stated that ideological legitimization of violence is a significant determinant of militarism (Eastwood 2018). This is achieved by introducing policies which make it easier for society to adopt a militaristic regime and agree with the state monopoly on violence. Laura J. Shepherd

writes, that militarism is an ideology which structures the society around the toleration of the use of force and glorifying military institutions (Bleiker et al. 2018, 209).

The antagonistic force in the *AOT* manga, Marley, is an imperialist and militaristic regime, which has been utilizing the Titan shifting abilities of Eldians, a marginalized minority, to wage expansionist wars. Unlike Paradis, Marley has military technology for waging aggressive wars. The Eldians live in secluded areas, reminiscent of the World War Two era ghettos and must wear an arm band with a star-shaped insignia which serves as a marker of their ethnic belonging. Militarism is heavily used as an ideology by the Marleyans. When new Titan shifters are chosen and when they embark on missions, people gather for huge to celebrate them. Military service is becoming a commodity, since many Eldians, in order to achieve higher status and escape the poverty of the ghetto, opt their children up for military training in hopes that they will be chosen to represent the Marleyan empire.

Upon finding out that there are other nations outside the walls of Paradis, many of which acknowledged the fact of cleansing of the Eldians, everyone was shocked and disgusted. After being reunited with his older brother, Zeke, who was a descendant of the royal line of Eldia, Eren decides to proceed with the so-called Rumbling, which would wake up an army of Colossal Titan and exterminate most of the population of the world. Inspired by an aggressive shift in his personality, the islanders come up with the new militaristic ideology and rebel regime, which is called Yeagerism. The self-proclaimed Yeagerists believe that Eren and Zeke will help Eldia restore its former glory and avenge those responsible for its downfall. Therefore, in his attempt to destroy the very same order that is responsible for the death of his mother and his closest friends, Eren Yeager has come full circle and resorted to the same violent militaristic techniques to achieve his goals.

Unlike in the *AOT* manga, where the enemy of the main characters comes from outside, in *FMA* the antagonistic force comes from within – the regime in scope of which our main

characters should operate. The home country of the Elric brothers, Amestris, is a highly militarized society. The ideological dimension of militarism in Amestris is signified by the fact that the ruler of the state, King Bradley, is a part of the high-ranking military personnel and, moreover, a war veteran. In the beginning of the plot, commander-in-chief is portrayed as an embodiment of the best leadership qualities: precision, cold-heartedness, analytical abilities, skill in battle and many more, which help him gain respect of his inferiors.

Not only the state of Amestris is ruled by military personnel, but also violent policies and a militaristic ideology are key features of its political organization. Since Amestris is an empire, their policies, both domestic and foreign, are rather aggressive and violent. Therefore, it is not surprising that people, brought up in a regime with a commander-in-chief and the head of the state being the same person, view war as a matter of pride. One of the main narratives in the contemporary nation building of Amestris is their victory in the Ishval Civil War. Since it has affected the lives of virtually every citizen of the country, it is one of the strongest national myths.

I put such an emphasis on militarism as an ideology since it is one of the main drivers of said phenomena in general and the reason why the society adopts violence as a main code of conduct so easily. We cannot focus on other characteristic of militarism, especially more materialistic, such as militarism as an institutional framework without the backbone of ideology. A connected aspect to the ideology is militarism as an aesthetic, which will be described in detail in the following subchapter.

2.4. Aesthetics of the Military

Another framework to discuss militarism is an aesthetic one. It can be vividly traced in works of Julian Schofield, who believed that militarism can be described through aesthetic and social characteristics (Schofield 2007, 1). The author has emphasized that militarism is not only a set of economic and political factors, but also a phenomenon that has to do with the

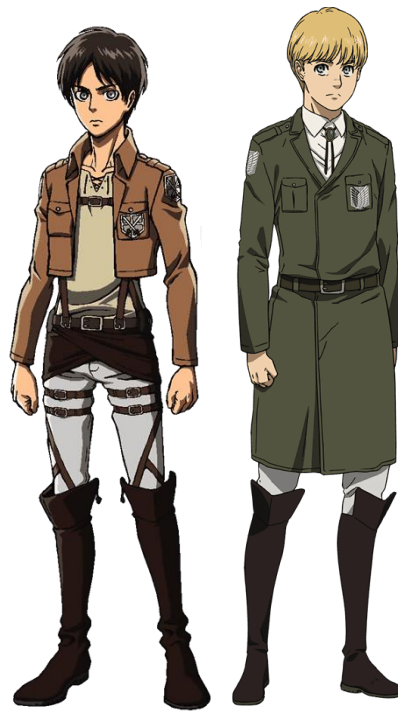
glorification of war by the government and society in general. Therefore, the military becomes aestheticized and, to an extent, fashionable.

Aesthetics of military in *AOT* and *FMA* can best be explained by the style choices made by the respective authors of the cultural artifacts. In *AOT*, we are dealing with two opposing camps – the Marleyans and the Eldians, which both have opposing identities and aesthetics. This is reflected in their uniforms as well: in the case of Marley are beige, well-tailored and rather strict, with an arm band on top, if the person wearing the uniform is Eldian. This comes into sharp contrast with the uniforms worn by the Survey Corps, especially in the first part of the manga. No wonder their emblem is called the *Wings of Freedom* - they wear surprisingly light clothing, since they need to be able to go into combat using the vertical maneuvering equipment.

Later in the plot, when the island of Paradis is opened to the outside world and the characters learn to live in a nation-state system, the style of their clothing changes as well. The uniforms of the Survey Corps adapt to a more modern, stricter type, like the ones worn by Marleyans. This change is only cemented when the Yeagerists enter into rule over the island. An adoption of a new uniform also symbolizes Paradis entering the nation-state system and no longer being isolated from the international community. The following images demonstrate the difference between the old uniform of the Survey Corps and the new garments, adopted after discovering other nation states.

In *FMA* as well the clothing of the character signifies their belonging to the military. The military uniforms in the manga express prestige and power granted by service as a state alchemist in the military, as they appear rather elegant and use the color blue, frequently associated with royalty and status. On the other hand, since the uniforms are universal for every serviceperson, apart from the Elric brothers, they can also mean that the militaristic machine

imposes uniformity and compliance. The following image from the anime adaptation of the manga demonstrates the stylistic choice behind the uniforms of the characters.



Picture 1. The contrast between the old and the new military wear on Paradis



Picture 2. Uniforms worn by State Alchemists

2.5. Militarism as a Social and Institutional Phenomenon

Apart from the aesthetic and ideological dimension of militarism, I am delving into the institutional aspect of it. Stavrianakis and Selby describe this notion in relation between the

military and political institutions, as well as the influence of the military on the latter (Stavrianakis and Selby 2012, 13). This approach is particularly productive not only because it allows to examine the institutional organization of the military, but also because it opens the floor for the discussion on the military/civilian divide, which will be described in detail in the following part.

Moreover, in recent years, many scholars have examined militarism as not inherently a characteristic of the state and a more political category, but also something from the realm of the everyday. Hugh Gusterson and Catherine Besteman advocate for an anthropological approach to militarism, which entails the following:

“social construction of security threats; the decentering of the state’s monopoly over legitimate violence in an era where guerillas, paramilitaries, and military contractors hold unprecedented sway; the increasing hybridization of war and peace in the context of a permanent war economy; the capillary colonization of social and imaginative life by military processes thanks to militarized media institutions; and the suffering, both bodily and psychological, of those who are killed, injured, bereaved, or dislocated by military processes” (Gusterson and Besteman 2019, 3).

Accordingly, social and institutional dimensions of militarism allow us to dive deeper into the Everyday IR scholarship and examine how the civilian and the military intertwines. Now, I will support my claims with examples from the cultural artifacts center to the research.

We learn about the military organization of *AOT* early in the series. Eren dreams of becoming a member of the Survey Corps – a rather small and exclusive military unit, whose purpose is to defeat Titans and conduct expeditions outside the protection of the walls. The immense desire to avenge the death of his mother motivated Eren to join the Survey Corps even more than his childhood admiration by his heroes. From that point onwards, the readers begin to gain more insights into the militarism behind the world of *AOT*.

The military training that the characters had to overgo is portrayed in the best traditions of military media. The best candidate is allowed to choose between three military units: the Military Police, the Garrison and the Survey Corps. Most recruits opt for the Military Police, since it accounts for a rich and relatively safe and comfortable life in the capital of Paradis. To

separate and train the *creme de la creme* of the recruits, Keith Shadis, who was the military training instructor, oftentimes resorts to violent tactics: pushing basically children to their limits, both physical and mental, depriving them of rest and nourishment, verbal abuse etc.

Regarding the militarism in *AOT*, this specific episode of military training demonstrates which characteristics are valued by the military more than the others. In chapter 15 Sasha, tries to challenge the already well-established conduct of the training and break the militarized status quo by offering Keith Shadis a piece of boiled potato, and by that opting for kindness and compassion, instead of individualism and aggression. The image from the manga below shows this exchange between Shadis and Sasha³.



Picture 3. An interaction between Sasha and Keith Shadis during the training of recruits

³ The following images from the manga were taken from various fan encyclopedias and contain fan translations of the manga, made for educational purposes.

FMA excels in portraying military as an institution and various hierarchical structures that come with it. The hierarchy in the military is highlighted in the episode in one of the earlier chapters. Despite him being twelve years old, Edward Elric is still considered a high-ranking alchemist, therefore everyone respects him and addresses him accordingly. In this episode, Lieutenant Ross and Sergeant Brosh salute him, signifying that the military code of conducts comes before many other societal norms. This scene is illustrated in the following screencap of the manga.



Picture 4. Ross and Brosh saluting Edward

Institutional dimension of militarism has opened us the doors to unpacking the concept of militarization and the distortion of the military/civilian divide. Since military organization relies heavily on the implementation of certain rules and codes of conduct, powered by a strong ideological foundation it might seep easily into the civilian sphere.

2.6. Militarization of the Civilian Life

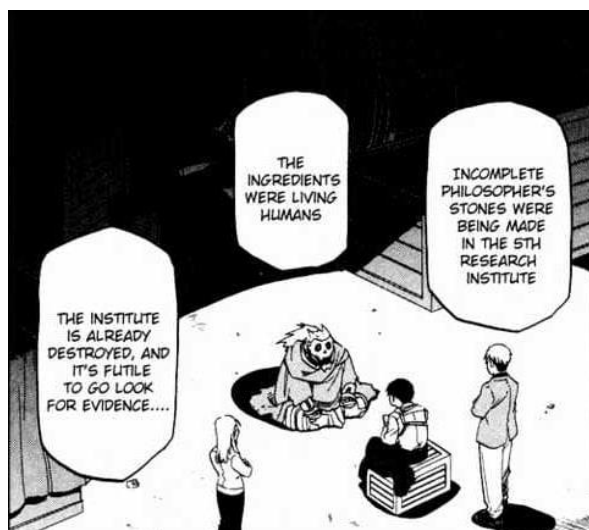
As for militarization, this concept does not only consist of force of military and police institutions, but also of the way the power is authorized and how the life of civilians is carried out. The idea of militarization is another crucial one in this paradigm since it explains how societies embrace militaristic norms. According to Laura J. Shepherd, militarization is linked to general political legitimacy, the exercise of power, and civilian life in a larger sense in addition to the direct use of force by military and/or police institutions (Bleiker et al. 2018, 210). According to Cynthia Enloe (Enloe 2007 in Bleiker et al. 2018, 210), militarization occurs

when individuals tend to regard a military approach to problem-solving as a more realistic and practical option (Enloe 2007 in Bleiker et al. 2018, 210). Militarization matters for the scope of this project, because on multiple occasions readers are confronted with either transformation of the society and adoption of more violent codes of conduct or the consequences of an already existing militarized order.

For this section of the thesis, I would like to focus specifically on the *FMA* manga, since it offers an excellent overview of how something reserved for civilian use, such as alchemy, becomes a weapon in the hands of the military. Moreover, it portrays how violence is commodified by people and transformed into wealth and various social benefits.

One of the first instances when readers learn about the heavy militarization of the fictional universe of the Elric brothers is in chapter 3. Here we meet 1st Lieutenant Yoki, a wealthy state alchemist who due to his military service was able to own a mine and the surrounding village. Because his position as a military dog comes with undeniable power and influence, he used this privilege to tax villagers of Youswell and to profit off their exploitation. A state alchemist in the eyes of the villagers was someone corrupt and malign, which was reflected in their initial treatment of the Elrics.

As the plot progresses, the readers discover that the military has been conducting numerous cruel experiments with human transmutation and alchemy, in the mysterious Laboratory №5. This laboratory was used to research the philosopher's stone and to collect human sacrifices needed for such experience. The laboratory was located next to a prison, which is meant to symbolically provide a moral layer to the actions of the military and justify them. These details are told by Barry the Chopper, a convict who was experimented on and put in a metal body, similarly to Alphonse, in chapter 31. The following screenshot demonstrates interrogation of Barry the Chopper and his confession about the dark secrets of the military.



Picture 5. The interrogation of Barry the Chopper

It should not, therefore, surprise the reader, that among people who corrupted the military and used the laboratory to their benefit was King Bradley himself. His real name is Wrath, and he is one of the main antagonists of the series, homunculi. The story of homunculi and their wrongdoings is important for the understanding of militarization because it demonstrates how a previously civilian good villainized and became a weapon in the arms of the military. Moreover, the Ishval Civil War, central to the identities of numerous characters in the manga, was caused by the homunculi to access materials for the philosopher's stone, i.e., military was commodified as well. Therefore, militarization not only means the coercion of the civilian aspects of life, but also adoption of more violent and aggressive practices, associated with the military, by the civilians.

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated, how intricate militarism actually is, and how the source material captures those nuances in such a way as to educate the readers on this phenomenon. Firstly, I have examined, how *Attack on Titan* and *Fullmetal Alchemist* deal with the ideological dimension of militarism. Both mangas center an aggressive ideology in their plot, however, in the case of *AOT* our main characters start from combating an imperialistic regime to adopting a militaristic ideology as a means of survival, whereas in *FMA* they should

adapt to the demands of a militaristic system to combat it from the inside. Aesthetics of militarism are also defined, primarily by portraying military uniforms and meanings behind them. Institutionally, militaries in both mangas operate with a strict code of conduct, which centers, on one hand, respect and dignity, while on the other promoting violence. Those characteristics combined pave way to the concept of militarization, which portrays how the civilian life is coerced by militaristic values. Civilian attributes in the manga are disguised as magical features, and the metaphor of the military gaining control of a certain magic in the world of the manga can be a parallel to military claiming more and more aspects of the civilian life.

My next chapter will deepen the thinking on militarism expressed previously by engaging with personal stories of the characters of the respective mangas and unravelling the criticisms of militarism introduced by the authors in their work.

Chapter III. The Antimilitaristic World of *Attack on Titan* and *Fullmetal Alchemist*

My previous chapter was dedicated to giving a basic illustration of militarism and its various forms in the mangas. This section, however, will inform us about the more subtle implications of militarism which arise when we follow the stories of the characters. The following chapter will be dedicated to discussing how antimilitaristic agenda is deeply interwoven with the actual worldbuilding and plot mechanics of *Fullmetal Alchemist* and *Attack on Titan*. The respective authors not only succeed in portraying militarism and militarization as a phenomenon, but also in leaving behind intricate and subtle criticism of those experiences of militarism.

I will first focus on militarism on a larger scale – how violent policies of the state culminate in a war and how it subsequently affects the lives of people. Then, I will move on to the micro, everyday level of life by focusing on the consequences of militarism for human relations, specifically between mentors and younger people. To tie this discussion to the everyday realities of the readers, I will mention the possible real-life interpretations of the sources and the possible inspiration drawn by authors.

3.1. Lived Experiences of War as the Highest Form of Militarism

In the previous chapter I have already demonstrated that militarism and militarization are processes of engaging citizens, primarily civilian, with militarized ideas and achieving the normalization of violent forms of domestic and foreign policy conduct. Confidently, war is the pinnacle of militarism in all its various shapes and forms. This section will be dedicated to the consequences of war as the purest form of militarism on characters. In the words of Geoff Martin and Erin Steuter: “Militarism wraps itself in a mantle of glory but it conceals the ugly reality that war brings death, destruction, and losses that are physical, financial, and moral” (Martin and Steuter 2010, 17). The characters of both mangas face those ugly realities of war and militarism and must cope with them in their day-to-day life.

One of the defining features of the world of *FMA* is the lived experience of the Ishval War. Before becoming a part of the Amestrian Empire, Ishval was its own nation state, located in the southeastern part of the Amestrian Empire. Expansionist policies of Amestris have led to the nation of Ishval becoming ostracized and facing politics of extreme othering from the central part of the state. As we have previously learned, the civil war began because one of the homunculi, more specifically Envy, has killed an Ishvalian child. Therefore, the actions of a blood and power-hungry individual has begun endless bloodshed and culminated the expansionist militaristic politics of the Amestrian state.

A character who we can interpret as a symbol of this civil war and how it affected the country in general is Scar. Scar is an Ishvalian warrior and a monk, who seeks to avenge the death of his friends and family and therefore targets state alchemists, as he deems them as the main reason of the downfall of Ishval and the immense losses caused by the war.



Picture 6. A portrait of Scar

His revenge does not know any limits, as he even targets Edward Elric, the fullmetal alchemist himself, even though he is far too young to be a war veteran and directly involved in the killing of his loved ones. In the very beginning of the manga, when we first encounter the character of Scar, he is portrayed by the author as an imminent threat to the main characters and the status quo of the world in which they operate, i.e., a militarized imperial state. In this image

from the manga he is seen mercilessly killing one of the military men on his duty with his powerful magic, without even a muscle twitching on his face.



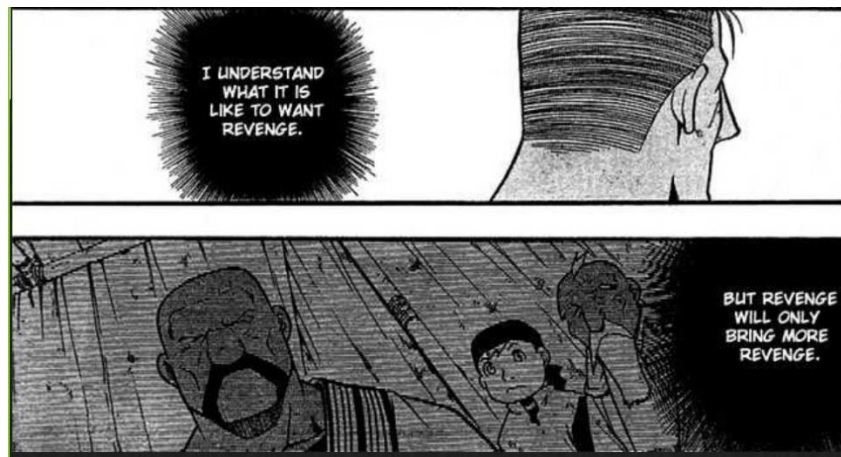
Picture 7. A frame from chapter 6, which ideally demonstrates author's portrayal of Scar in the beginning of the plot.

In chapter 6, one of the very first instances of confrontation between Edward and Scar, the young alchemist questions of the outcome of the battle and how he might not make it alive. He is seemingly scared, which is emphasized by the mangaka in her choices of the visuals, where Edward is below Scar's unbothered and unapologetic gaze.



Picture 8. The first encounter between Edward and Scar in chapter 6

As his character grows, so does the readers' imagining of him and the series in general. They understand that Scar and his character arc is a direct consequence of militarism and imperial policies of Amestris. Comparing to the first chapters, where Scar is portrayed as a dangerous threat, the latter chapters suggest that he was traumatized and that we can sympathize with him due to the origin of his trauma. In the following panel we can see Scar thinking about wanting revenge and realizing that although he's hurting his energy should be used in a more productive way, such as helping fellow Ishvalians he remembers about. Therefore, the author refers us to an antimilitaristic solution to his trauma, which does not involve violence.



Picture 9. Scar understanding that revenge is not the best possible goal in life for him.

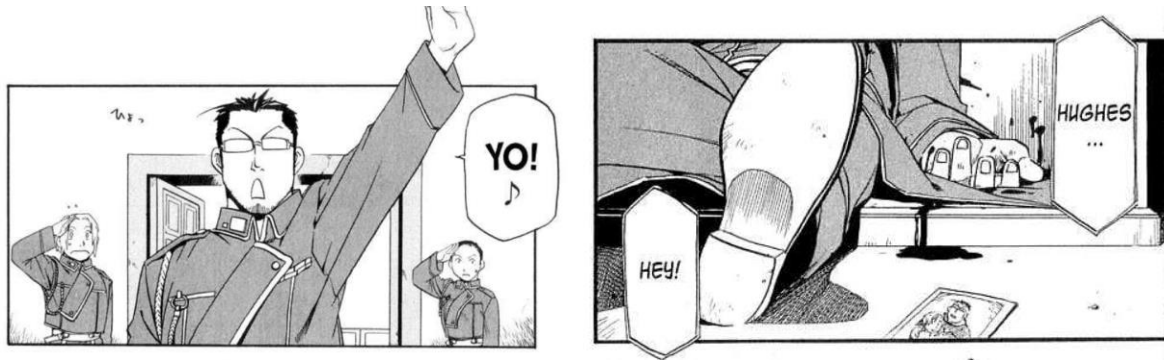
Another prominent episode, which depicts this influence is in chapter 46, when we learn about the details behind the death of Winry's parents. Winry is a friend of Edward and Alphonse, and her parents were medics during the Ishval war. Winry learns about the fate of her parents only accidentally, as she runs into a fight between Scar and Edward, while Edward was calling the latter out for murdering innocent medics. We then see a very dramatic and emotional episode, as the little girl learns that her parents died as a direct consequence of militaristic policies, even though they weren't the one killing people, but saving them. As she cries out "Give me back my mom and dad!", readers realize that those are ordinary people with normal families, who go off to die for the expansionists' sake.



Picture 10. An exchange between Winry and Scar upon her finding out that he murdered them

The author of the manga demonstrates her readers the consequences of war not only from the side of the victim, but also from the side of the attacker. This narrative allows readers to experience the true influence of militarism as an ideology and the effect of militarization. Here, I want to concentrate on three characters—Roy Mustang, Maes Hughes, and Riza Hawkeye—and how their experiences in the military in Amestris shaped their perspectives on life and the world.

Roy Mustang and Maes Hughes became friends while undergoing cadet training at the State Military Academy. They bonded over their noble values and a desire to use the military capacities for a good cause. Their illusions of the military shattered during the Ishval Civil War, where Roy as a powerful wielder of fire magic had to partake in the extermination of Ishvalians. Nevertheless, he became even more committed to his previous idealistic values by promising to transform the state and the military from within. Maes Hughes, who was after the war working in the central government apparatus, was providing his friend with necessary information. Unfortunately, rejection of the current system costed Hughes his very life, as he was killed by one of the homunculi. The death of Maes Hughes, usually portrayed as a charming and kind family man, as seen in the manga frame below, is a heartbreaking tragedy which teaches the readers that militarism punishes those who protest. As he dies, a photo of his family falls out of his uniform as if to support the previous claim.



Picture 11. The contrast between Hughes in life and during his final moments

Riza Hawkeye is another friend of Roy Mustang and Maes Hughes and through her character readers gain ever more insights into how militarism and war affect the individual. In chapter 24, Riza and Winry discuss the fears of a young girl who does not want her friend Edward to serve in the military. Riza has voiced similar concerns. As they share a cup of tea, Riza tells Winry that she despises her service, especially the fact that she has to kill people, however, she endures because there are those she has to protect by making a continuous choice to stay in the military. In the screenshot below we can see the dedication behind the eyes of the young woman, as the mangaka focuses on her during the phrase “There is someone I need to protect”.



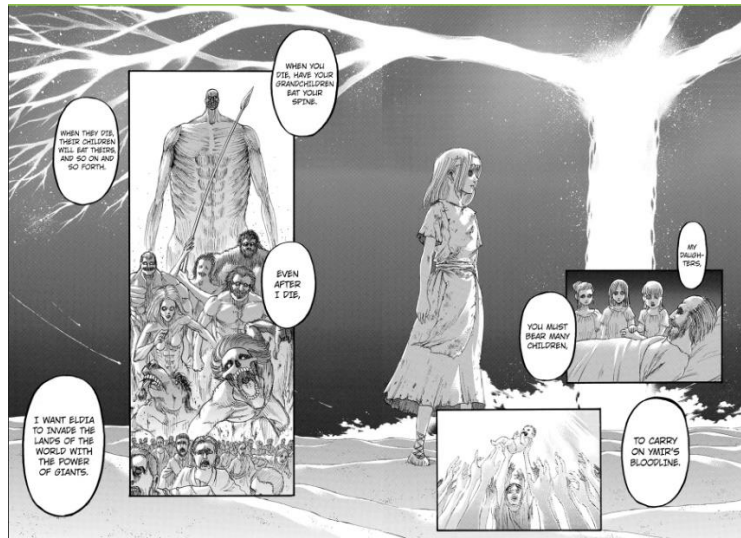
Picture 12. The reasons behind Riza's life in the military

Militarism is also front and center in the *Attack on Titan* manga, as the very foundation of the Titan myth is based on abuse of power. The founding Titan, Ymir, was a villager enslaved by the representatives of the nation of Eldia, which back then was an expansionist empire. She then entered a symbiotic union with a mysterious parasitic creature that granted her superpowers, which would be later known as titan shifting abilities. She returned to Eldia to help it expand and prosper and married the very same man who has enslaved her kind and almost killed herself. King Fritz used Ymir's powers of a Founding Titan to expand Eldia's glory and influence.

Upon Ymir's death, to preserve her powers, he forced their three daughters, Maria, Rosa and Shina to eat her flesh, hoping that it would help preserve the powers that she yielded. It is a rather gruesome panel that demonstrates how power advantage breeds violence and the need for more power advantage and more violence. The horror of this image is a symbolic culmination of Eldia's imperial status and a signifier of the future of Eldian politics. It depicts King Fritz ordering his young daughters to eat the body of their mother to every bit. The second panel demonstrates the last will of the king, which was also given out to his daughters, in which he asks them to continue their imperial conquests.



Picture 13. The daughters of Ymir and Fritz cannibalizing their mother's body to attain her powers.



Picture 14. The last will of King Fritz

The cycle of abuse continued with the doings of the Marleyan empire. As I have already discussed in the previous chapters, Marleyans are responsible not only for expansionist imperialist politics but also for ethnic cleansing of Eldians. They were the ones sending Titans to the island of Paradis to retract the founding Titan. However, the ethnic dimension of this problem doesn't end here. The Titans they sent on the island are Eldians from the mainland convicted at Marley. As a punishment, they are turned into mindless titans. We learn about the cruelty of the Marleyan punishment in chapter 87 when Eren's father is convicted for participating in an Eldian insurgent movement. The hopeless visual of countless Eldians being tied down and sent off behind the walls is reminiscent of the tragedy of ethnic cleansing in a highly militarized regime. It portrays Grisha Yeager, the father of the main character of the manga, and his executioner who tells him about the cruelty of his punishment.



Picture 15. Eren's father as a convict on his way to the island of Paradis.

The final eight pages of the *AOT* manga are arguably the most powerful in showing the antimilitaristic message the author was trying to convey in his writing. After Mikasa and Armin kill Eren and stop the Rumbling, they go on to live their normal lives without the shadow of the war. However, in the end Eren's sacrifice didn't matter, as the island of Paradis was destroyed not by Titans, but by modern weaponry. We then see a little boy stumbling upon the same tree Ymir did when she encountered the parasite and gained the Founding Titan's power. A lot of readers have interpreted this as a sign of the titan curse emerging again and the cycle of abuse continuing anew. Therefore, the last pages of the *AOT* manga contain an important lesson, which is that the war and aggression are deeply woven into the human nature. Here the manga differs from *FMA*, as in that case the main characters were able to transcend the human curse of militarism and build a better world. While in *AOT*, their relief was only temporary.

This section of the chapter has demonstrated how war fueled by militaristic agenda interferes with the lives of the characters. The following part will focus on militarism and its consequences in a more peaceful everyday setting.

3.2. Mentors and Pupils – Personal Relations and the Everyday Under Militarism

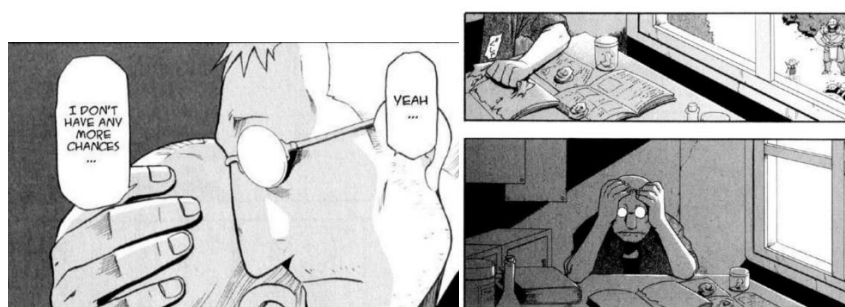
In the previous chapters of my thesis, I have already brought up the notion of everyday militarism. Now, I would like to reintroduce that idea by focusing not so much on the consequences of war in the fictional realities of the manga, but more so on the smaller ways in which militarism play the role in the lives of the aesthetic subjects of the manga. I would like to illustrate this point with various examples from the manga which deal with the relationship between children and their parents or mentors, since it is an ordinary life experience which could also be influenced by the militaristic ideology.

One of the focal points made by the author of *FMA* is the fact that not only military personnel suffer from misunderstanding from the civilians, but also, they suffer from the establishment itself. This is emphasized in the couple of instances throughout the plot. In the very beginning of the manga, we meet the character of Shou Tucker, who is one of the state alchemists. He received his state alchemist license for his success in creating a chimera. The young brothers also meet his daughter, Nina, who is very affectionate towards them and refers to them as her big brothers. While the readers sympathize with the family, they are very shocked upon realizing that later in the plot Shou created a chimera out of his daughter Nina and their family dog. The horror of recognizing a dear person in a chimera, more so a young innocent child, becomes a point of no return both to the Elric brothers and the readers, as we begin to realize that there is much more nuance to the state alchemy than we originally expected. In the following picture from the manga, we see Alphonse apologize to Nina after her transformation into a chimera.



Picture 16. Alphonse apologizing to Nina who was transformed into a chimera in chapter 5.

Shou had to resort to such gruesomeness to stay in his state alchemist position and continue benefiting from it. Although he values his daughter and his family in general, he must resort to killing her because at the same time he values alchemy and wants to continue on with his research. An inability to meet the military demands to state alchemists and productivity of their research has slowly driven him to madness. Here we can see him hugging his little daughter and justifying his choice by claiming that he doesn't have any other chances to prolongate his license. In the 2nd frame, he is seen frantically going through his research notes to find something worthy to save his daughter.



Picture 17. Remorseful Shou debating whether he should end the life of his daughter or give up on his research.

Regarding the personal tragedies of the characters, we can also we can also come back to the example of Marley, since a lot of the characters from the Marleyan mainland operated in such a way to convey the manga's strong anti-militaristic message. Here, I would like to focus

specifically on the character of Zeke, since his story is a perfect encapsulation of the critics of militarism in *AOT*.

Zeke Yeager was the brother of Eren and the oldest son of Grisha Yeager. He was born in Marley into a family of insurgent movement members Grisha and Dina. Since Dina was the descendant of the royal line of Eldia, her son was chosen to infiltrate the ranks of the Marleyan Warriors and help the revolutionaries conduct a revolution against the Marleyan forces. Zeke was brought up as a warrior candidate and his parents were very strict to him. For them the little boy was, first of all, a tool for achieving their bigger goals, and only then a child. The only thing that Zeke has ever wanted was to have a normal childhood and someone to care for him. He bonded with a fellow Marleyan warrior Tom Xavier, who was a carrier of the Beast Titan and a titan researcher. Zeke saw a father figure in Tom and as his parents grew more and more disappointed with him, Zeke found solace in this friendship and decided to tell Tom that his parents are part of an insurgent movement. Eventually, Zeke has turned his parents in to the Marleyan authorities and he was the reason why Dina was transformed into a Titan. Over the years Zeke has adopted a very nihilistic approach to life, as in his opinion the salvation from the curse of the Titans could only be possible if the Eldians were never born in the first place, which is a direct reflection of his childhood trauma.

In the manga panels below, we can see little Zeke crying and hiding under a blanket well his parents discuss his future and his seeming inability to join the warriors. The following panel shows him bonding with Tom and discussing whether he should or should not become a warrior candidate.



Picture 18. Zeke crying after overhearing an argument of his parents



Picture 19. Tom and Zeke bonding

A particularly powerful antimilitaristic statement is brought to the reader's attention in chapter 129. When Eren, supported by the Yeagerists, decides to begin the Rumbling plan, which was which would end in the death of a vast majority of the world's population, the characters from the opposing factions decide to unite against a newfound common enemy. We follow a conversation between Keith Shadis, who was training the future Survey Corps recruits, and Theo Magath, who was responsible for the training of Marleyan Warriors, such as Reiner and Annie. When they are united on a remaining Marleyan escape ship, they involve in a conversation as to why they have decided to fight against the Yeagerists. Turns out, that both men had rather similar motivations. They have realized that they were sending off literal

children define to fight aggressive war and get involved in politics which was predecided for them. But the only thing that they have truly wanted is for their recruits to be happy and to live a normal fulfilled life without the pressure of the military system. Although they were originally belonging to opposing villainized factions, they have found respect for one another as beneath all of that they were truly similar in character. In the manga scene below, Theo is reflecting on his life and his possible mistakes in the training of the warrior candidates. Although he did act in a stricter militaristic framework, just like Keith, ultimately, he formed a bond with his pupils and only wanted them to live a normal life in a peaceful world.



Picture 20. Theo Magath's confession in the latter chapters of the Attack on Titan

Although from the first glance such experiences may appear irrelevant to the International Relations scholarship, they explain how deeply militarism affects our lives. This truth applies to wartime and peace alike. Even the characters' relationships with the closest people in their lives appeared distorted to the reader, as they see them through a militarized lens.

Therefore, small personal tragedies and experiences of the character can signify just as much as the more obvious references to militarism discussed in chapter 2. I would like to stress

on the role of these more subtle re-imaginings of militarism, since they allow readers to form an emotional bond to the source material. Relation to the manga will also be brought up in my next subchapter.

3.3. Connecting Manga with the Real Life

Before moving on to the concluding remarks, which address the issue of the fans' relationship to the source material, I would like to address the question of possible connections between the real-life events and manga discussed in this thesis project. Although aesthetic subjects, in our case various characters of the two cultural artifacts, guide us throughout the plot in general and the political implications behind it, drawing historic parallels is also fruitful for our understanding of the source material, since they bring up an additional layer of engaging with and understanding militarism.

They each cover is from the nation of the events that happened in our own real-life history, and this is why they resonate so well with the readers. Depending on their cultural background, each reader can relate the events that happen in the manga to their own historic interpretations and inspirations. One of the users on Reddit, has connected the war that happened eight years before the beginning of events in *FMA* to the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. They have commented that "The so-called aid the advanced military brought wasn't really helping anyone as soldiers brutalized the region" (Zetialia, n.d., comment on Reddit, n.d.), which resonates with the history of invasion. Because the invasion of Iraq happened around the time of the release of the manga and the first anime adaptation, it is not surprising that many readers found parallels to that event in the source material. Apart from the obvious World War Two references, a lot of readers assume that day events portrayed in the manga are a reinterpretation of German Empire's ethnic extermination of the Herero. The Herero was a cattle owning tribe in Namibia who were killed by the imperial government for the resources of their lands (Archbold 2023). The author herself has stated in an interview, that the inspiration

behind the history of Ishval and Amestris comes from the history of her own family, who many generations ago have participated in the extermination of the Ainu people, natives of the Hokkaido Island. She has also stated that her relatives, ironically, had Ainu heritage themselves, so, in her opinion, “the truly serious problems in this world are when people don't make any effort to learn about these everyday situations, when they turn away from them or view them from only a single perspective” (Archbold 2023).

Historical references are also apparent in this manga, such as the case with *FMA*. Most of the audiences and critics alike think that the main inspiration behind relations between the Marleyan Empire and the remains of the nation of Eldia are inspired by the Second World War and the events of Holocaust. The references to Holocaust can be found both in the visual imagery, since Eldians living in the ghettos are supposed to wear an arm band with a star on it, and the plot itself, with its decision to separate and ostracize the Eldians from the Marleyans. The author himself did not admit that he references World War II Germany or Imperial Japan in his work. However, he did admit that he used historical references in his writing. In one of the interviews, he said that the history of the fall of Eldia and the rise of Marleyan Empire was inspired by the relations between Germanic tribes and the Roman Empire. The author also said that that his decision to include historic references in his work was very deliberate since “where there’s a hint of truth, it makes a story very believable.” (Leung 2023).

Conclusion

Japanese anime and manga are becoming increasingly popular with young people all over the world, especially considering the rise of social media and short form content. In a highly globalized world, we have a strong desire to connect with people from different social, cultural, and political backgrounds, therefore we are attracted to media that's allows for an outlet of this desire. When in the past the media market was dominated by primarily western products, nowadays the scope of our engagement with popular culture has expanded, which allows for certain non-western perspectives to be heard and acknowledged.

There are several ways in which manga matters for the study of international politics. First of all, it is a strong discursive tool which allows authors to convey certain messages and share their outlook on the world. Both Hajime Isayama and Hiromu Arakawa in their respective works have channeled their strong antimilitaristic views, although in different ways. There are, of course, similarities between their work, which come from the choice of media and the genre itself. Both *Attack on Titan* and *Fullmetal Alchemist* are shounen mangas, which means that they follow certain tropes common for this type of literature. Characters in both cultural artifacts are young boys, who learn to grow up with their conflicting worlds. As a part of their coming-of-age-journey, they learn to accept the contradictory reality of the world they were living in, which involves the military service they were previously a part of.

Over the course of my research, I was able to gain numerous valuable insights into representations of militarism in shounen manga in general and the chosen cultural artifacts specifically. Firstly, I demonstrated, how militarism in *Attack on Titan* and *Fullmetal Alchemist* is not only reflected in the mere facts of a fictional war, but is much portrayed more intricately, as an ideology and aesthetic, as an institutional practice and social phenomena. Secondly, I applied the everyday militarism framework to examine the more subtle manifestations of militarism, expressed from the lens of the personal experiences of the characters. Moreover, I

have mentioned that both mangas pay homage to different historical events as a direct inspiration behind the fictional realities, ranging from the rise and fall of the Roman Empire to expansionist policies of imperial Japan.

However, we have received two very different endings from the authors. Whereas *Fullmetal Alchemist* ends on the rather hopeful note, with characters learning to live in a new post-militarist society, *Attack on Titan* demonstrates, in a way common for the realist International Relations tradition, how war, militarism and aggression are a direct result of the human nature itself and that the cycle can never be broken. Although the outcomes of the plot differ drastically, they both are meant to provoke a strong anti-militarist sentiment in the readers, as we learn that war and fighting only brings suffering to the characters involved in it.

Secondly, manga serves as a learning and formative site for their leaders themselves. Coming from various cultural and geographical backgrounds, every fan of the cultural artifact will have a different interpretation of the events in the manga and what were they inspired by. This can also depend on the time frame in which the reader decides to get acquainted with the source material as it was the case with *Fullmetal Alchemist* gaining momentum around the American operation in Iraq. As Ryo Koarai and Takayoshi Yamamura write, such cultural artifacts have “an important characteristic of fantasy-war contents tourism: its story allows audiences in different countries to read messages from the story into the real social issues around them” (Koarai and Yamamura 2022, 141). This allows us to relate to the characters and their experiences better and to sympathize with them on the another, more intimate, level.

Thirdly, manga creates a sense of a likeminded community among its readers. Fan behavior and fandom studies has been a topic of sociological research for a long time. The main aim of this research is to look at the various productive practices of fans. John Fiske refers to this phenomenon as semiotic productivity and defines it as “making of meanings of social identity and of social experience from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity” (Fiske

1992, 37). Nicolle Lamerichs argues that another key feature of fandom culture is affectivity, “since being a fan is an experience that is grounded in a feeling – an admiration of texts that are used to connect to others and the world itself” (Lamerichs 2018, 18). The community which joins around such media artifacts as manga creates a strong sense of belonging and cultivates a will for engaging in different forms of productive cooperation with said community. The media people consume is a marker of belonging to a group, therefore it becomes a marker of the person's identity. If you are a fan of *Fullmetal Alchemist* or *Attack on Titan*, it is most likely that you will align yourself with the messages implied by the manga or at least will find them appealing.

Here we can make a comparison with western media which deals with the topics of militarism. Although there are plenty of western cultural artifacts which take a rather critical stance towards the military establishment, they still seem rather celebratory towards the military and sympathizing with militaristic values to an extent. However, as we have seen from this thesis, Japanese media takes a much more critical stance towards this issue, focusing on militarism as a tragedy of humanity, rather than something worthy of celebrating. This might be because after the Second World War Japan adopted a new constitution which condemned using military force as a means of foreign policy. But what matters most is that such critical attitudes towards the military in the media is gaining support from readership all over the world, not only in Japan. It means that the anti-militaristic values of the authors are shared globally.

This research has been focused on examining militarism in *Fullmetal Alchemist* and *Attack on Titan* in general. However, due to the intricacies of the plot, the Aesthetic Turn research on these cultural artifacts can be expanded to include much broader topics, such as, for example, ethics of war or politics of ethnic cleansing in both cultural artifacts.

As for the practical usage of the research on manga and its interpretations of militarism, considering the fact that the majority of manga readership consists of young adults and

teenagers, often enrolled in a bachelor's or master's program, such cultural artifacts, or at least parts of them, can be a part of the curriculum of Security Studies and International Relations courses, since they succeed in explaining complicated International Relations phenomena in a digestible and interesting manner.

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