

## “I Just Have to Do What I Can:” *Mobile Suit Gundam 0079* and the Burdens of War

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*Mobile Suit Gundam* is a highly successful Japanese science fiction series. The series creator, Tomino Yoshiyuki (b. 1941), uses the backdrop of space warfare in the near future to illustrate the consequences of war. The series' first run in 1979 foundered, with the first entry, *Mobile Suit Gundam 0079* getting cancelled early. *Gundam 0079*'s cinematic re-releases beginning in 1981, and commercial success with buildable models of various “mobile suits” featured in the anime, resurrected the series.<sup>1</sup> In the years since, *Gundam* expanded into newer entertainment mediums.<sup>2</sup> Tomino survived the Pacific War as a toddler and came of age in the uncertainty and disorienting decades that followed, arguably internalizing an anti-war stance.<sup>3</sup> By the 1970s, he had the chance make a television series resembling World War II, and avoid concerning trends he saw in previous anime he was involved in developing.<sup>4</sup> In the introduction to a longer work concerning *Gundam Wing* (1995), Genevieve Peterson describes *Mobile Suit Gundam 0079* as an illustration of “...the internalized chaos” of Tomino’s “...autobiographical memory.”<sup>5</sup>

*Mobile Suit Gundam 0079* begins in the 79<sup>th</sup> year of the fictional Universal Century. The Earth Federation, a planet-wide government that administers numerous space colonies called “Sides” is currently fighting a war of independence initiated by the militaristic Side 3, now the

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Moore, “Inside the Boy Inside the Robot: *Mobile Suit Gundam* and Interiority.” PhD Diss., University of Oregon, 2017, 3.

<sup>2</sup> John Tennant, “*Mobile Suit Gundam* and the Japanese Memory of War.” PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2006.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272484323\\_Mobile\\_Suit\\_Gundam\\_and\\_the\\_Japanese\\_Memory\\_of\\_War](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272484323_Mobile_Suit_Gundam_and_the_Japanese_Memory_of_War), 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> “David Vernal, “War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction Animation: An Examination of “*Mobile Suit Gundam*” and “*The Mobile Police Patlabor*.” *Animation Journal* Volume 4, Issue 1 (1995): 57.

<sup>4</sup> Tennant, “*Mobile Suit Gundam* and the Japanese Memory of War,” 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> Genevieve Peterson, ““Even If It Means Our Battles to Date Are Meaningless”: The Anime *Gundam Wing* and Postwar History, Memory, and Identity in Japan.” PhD diss., University of Massachusetts Boston, 2020, 16.

self-declared “Principality of Zeon.” The events of *Gundam 0079* are primarily split between a group of inhabitants of a Federation-allied colony, Side 7, and selected high-ranking inhabitants of the Principality of Zeon, whose backgrounds are explored in depth in *Mobile Suit Gundam 0068: The Origin*. *Gundam 0079* opens with an unexpected Zeon attack on Side 7 and the narrow escape of a small group of survivors. The most prominent of these Side 7 survivors, Amuro Ray, Fraw Bow, Hayato, Kai, and three small children Kikka, Katz, and Letz, make up the youngest crew members of the White Base, a powerful Federation ship. The capture of the White Base and the Federation’s secret Gundam, an extremely powerful type of mobile suit, are one of Zeon’s primary objectives. Consequentially, the White Base is constantly pursued and attacked by Zeon forces, who are determined to reverse engineer the ship and the mobile suit for the war effort. The course of the show follows the White Base as it escapes capture in space, to then fight its way across Earth, and eventually return to space in a flurry of missions ordered by the Federation. Against this backdrop are the interpersonal relationships between the crewmembers, their Zeon enemies, and regular people all navigating this conflict.

Mobile suits are large, weaponized pieces of armor entirely under the control of a single pilot sitting in the cockpit. Mobile suits are a broad category of weapons, but the Gundam is a special type of mobile suit created by the Earth Federation. A Zaku is a mass-produced Zeon-originated mobile suit of vastly inferior quality to the Gundam. Green Zakus are assigned to regular Zeon pilots, whereas higher ranking officers pilot other colored Zakus. A Zaku’s biggest weakness, which Amuro quickly learns to exploit against low-level pilots, is that a concentrated attack directly at the cockpit will cause the mobile suit to instantly explode on impact. Char Aznable, *Gundam 0079*’s main antagonist, Zeon’s most talented Commander, as well as one of *Gundam*’s

most popular characters, pilots a bright red Zaku known for its unusual speed.<sup>6</sup> Char earned himself the title, “The Red Comet” prior to the events of *Gundam 0079*, due to his impressive military record.

Scholarly analysis of *Mobile Suit Gundam 0079* spans about three decades. The 1990s mainly consisted of comparative analyses of popular contributions to the science fiction genre and their implications for 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese society. Susan Napier follows numerous science fiction entries from the 1950s onward, connecting these pieces of media to Japan’s sense of identity in the post-war decades. Napier highlights the ways that sci-fi anime illustrates the formation of Japanese identity in the 1980s, cynicism and anxiety towards the future, how the country grapples with the unnerving reality of destruction and rebirth, the persistence of the national sense of “uniqueness” from the rest of the world, and the growing distance from America’s unequal relationship with its former enemy. *Mobile Suit Gundam* received a passing reference as being a “more conventionally upbeat...[narrative]” as opposed to comparably darker popular entries into the genre, like *Godzilla* and *Akira*.<sup>7</sup>

David Vernal takes a different approach from Napier. Vernal uses a comparative analysis of selected scenes and themes from the *Mobile Suit Gundam* series with *The Mobile Police Patlabor* to examine how both shows made sense of war within Japan’s extended period of peace.<sup>8</sup> Vernal touches upon a range of topics concerning *Gundam*: the connection between militaristic dogma and war, human capability to subvert the trappings of militaristic ideals, how and why science fiction works so well in Japan as a genre to explore war, *Gundam*’s careful balance between the believable and the fictitious, and the “newtype” as a means of highlighting the need

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<sup>6</sup> Tennant, “Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War,” 38.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Napier, “Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from Godzilla to Akira,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* Volume 19, No.2 (Summer, 1993): 348-350.

<sup>8</sup> Vernal, “War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction Animation,” 56.

to combat the “problem of miscommunication.”<sup>9</sup> Vernal then branches off into later *Gundam* entries to expand upon these ideas, including Japan’s own history of dehumanization in wartime as well as its intentional omission from the series.<sup>10</sup>

Writing in 2015, Akiko Hashimoto divides Japan’s distinct and ever-present war narratives into three categories, the heroic, victim, and perpetrator. These narratives comprise the country’s “culture of defeat,” whereby the defeat in World War II became a part of Japanese society.<sup>11</sup> Hashimoto examines Japan’s multifaceted and unsettled war memories with special attention given to the 1980s onward, citing the impact made on the country’s international relationships. Although Hashimoto states that the analysis includes an examination of the intersection of war memories and their consequences “in families, popular media, and education,” *Mobile Suit Gundam* is absent from this analysis. However, Hashimoto does examine selected *manga* and concludes along with Watanabe Morio that the medium acts as a very influential “informal tool of cultural learning,” and in particular, Japanese history.<sup>12</sup>

John Tennant attempts an overview of the *Gundam* series into the early 2000s. Tennant’s historical context leading up to *Gundam*’s release is extensive. Tennant focuses on the tension between the various war narratives and how this came to the forefront of Japanese politics. Tennant also argues that SCAP’s censorship, the exoneration of the Emperor and by extension the majority of the Japanese population, and the reverse course largely contributed to the lack of nuance when discussing the war and in turn, promoted the spread of Hashimoto’s victim narrative.<sup>13</sup> More closer to *Gundam* is John Dower’s observation that numerous war *anime* preceding Tomino’s work

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<sup>9</sup> Vernal, “War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction Animation,” 57-59; 61.

<sup>10</sup> Vernal, “War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction Animation,” 66.

<sup>11</sup> Akiko Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat: Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Identity in Japan*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2, 6.

<sup>12</sup> John Tennant, “Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War,” 103.

<sup>13</sup> Tennant, “Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War,” 14-15.

highlighted the plight of minors dealing with a conflict waged by a “faceless” enemy.<sup>14</sup> *Gundam* would diverge from this by balancing the human aspect of war on both sides by for example, assigning names and stories to subjects of Zeon.<sup>15</sup>

William Ashbaugh explores the cinematic remakes of *Mobile Suit Gundam 0079* in a comparative analysis with *Space Battleship Yamato*. Ashbaugh establishes a clear connection between *Mobile Suit Gundam* and elements of World War II and the Pacific War, noting the similarities in the character, combat techniques, and ideologies between *Gundam*’s the fictionalized governments and their historical counterparts.<sup>16</sup> *Gundam 0079* pays attention to the role the teenaged White Base crew and regular Federation citizens play in the conflict. Ashbaugh is also careful to point out that Tomino omits depicting most of Zeon’s military and all of its subjects’ hardships from the show.<sup>17</sup> This decision reaffirms who the “good guys” and the “bad guys” are to *Gundam*’s intended teenaged Japanese audience.<sup>18</sup> This is worth noting due to the plausibility that the show is partially intended to act as a very firm lesson in morality, in tandem with the influence popular culture has on its consumers.<sup>19</sup> In a more prolonged introduction to Amuro Ray, Ashbaugh mentions Amuro’s dramatic and oftentimes painful transformation from an adolescent civilian to an experienced soldier. The chapter concludes with the assertion that *Mobile Suit Gundam* counters the right-wing approach to war anime, as exemplified in *Space*

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<sup>14</sup> Tennant, "Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War," 23.

<sup>15</sup> Vernal, "War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction Animation," 66.

<sup>16</sup> William Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives: Space Battleship Yamato and Mobile Suit Gundam," in *Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film*, ed., David Stahl & Mark Williams (Boston: Brill, 2010), 345-6.

<sup>17</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 347.

<sup>18</sup> John D. Moore, "Inside the Boy Inside the Robot," 33, 40, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Vernal, "War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction Animation" 57; Tennant, "Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War," 10.

*Battleship Yamato*.<sup>20</sup> Ashbaugh then closes with the point that death impacts combatants on both sides, which supports the anti-militarist theme in *Gundam*.<sup>21</sup>

John Moore analyzes the animation methods in *Mobile Suit Gundam* to argue that Amuro Ray's emotions and private thoughts were intentionally centered, and as a result, distinguished the show from other science fiction media.<sup>22</sup> Moore introduces the idea of Amuro's "interiority" and juxtaposed with the war around him, creates a type of strain that would otherwise go unnoticed.<sup>23</sup> Moore provides a generous history, analysis, and critique of genre and its relationship with gender as portrayed in Japanese media, as well as a brief description of *Gundam*'s initial struggle towards success, culminating in the show's establishment as a trailblazer in the "real robot genre."<sup>24</sup> While *Gundam 0079* does not devote nearly as much screentime or attention to other characters as much as Amuro, it is worth exploring the decision-making of other characters in or below Amuro's position and as Ashbaugh notes, their impact on the conflict.<sup>25</sup>

Aidan Warlow examines *Godzilla*, science fiction media including *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Akira*, and *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* as an entry point into a wider discussion of Japan's controversial history with the United States, and critiques of America's military policies into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the *Gundam* trilogy analysis, Warlow examines the implication of large robots permeating Japanese culture and why there is a strong connection between these robots and minors.<sup>26</sup> Warlow begins by distinguishing *anime* as not entirely dissimilar from American cartoons, but as a form of media that stands on its own and merits a separate analysis.<sup>27</sup> Warlow

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<sup>20</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 329.

<sup>21</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 348-349.

<sup>22</sup> Moore, "Inside the Boy Inside the Robot," 12.

<sup>23</sup> Moore, "Inside the Boy Inside the Robot," 17.

<sup>24</sup> Moore, "Inside the Boy Inside the Robot," 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 347.

<sup>26</sup> Aidan Warlow, "Radiant Dreams and Nuclear Nightmares: Japanese Resistance Narratives and American Intervention in Postwar Speculative Popular Culture," PhD diss., The University of Western Ontario, 2022, 58.

<sup>27</sup> Warlow, "Radiant Dreams and Nuclear Nightmares," 59, 63.

introduces the analysis of science fiction *anime* with the assertion that animation is open to endless possibilities in expressing the human experience, namely “pain and trauma,” and that this applies to characters and their bodies.<sup>28</sup> Warlow draws upon Ashbaugh’s analysis and a portion of Martin Seltzer’s *Bodies and Machines*, which partially examines “paramilitary organizations for organizing boys into men” combined with the broader observation that society has long embraced the idea of the “technological reproduction of goods,” especially as they concern war.<sup>29</sup> Warlow ties this back to *Gundam* by concluding that Tomino attacks this way of thinking by centering the dangerous situations teenage boys find themselves in within the *Gundam* universe, and that war and the technology used to fight it essentially stunts their growth into otherwise well-rounded and stable young men.<sup>30</sup> Warlow supports this conclusion using examples of Amuro’s development being shaped by decisions both in and out of his own control.

This research builds upon the argument that *Mobile Suit Gundam* is an anti-war message and that war is not to be celebrated. I shift the analysis from Amuro Ray, when applicable, by focusing on other White Base crew members and lower ranked Zeon soldiers. Using a close watching of the first quarter of the original television series with English subtitles, I argue that through these side characters’ stories, Tomino Yoshiyuki subtly critiques the Imperial government and military’s history of forcing young people into war, grieves the losses incurred by this conflict, and commemorates the numerous instances of people attempting to reclaim their humanity.

Conservatives benefit from the heroic and victim narratives, with both well represented in the public sphere. Tennant and Ashbaugh note the rampant conservatism in politics, sports,

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<sup>28</sup> Warlow, “Radiant Dreams and Nuclear Nightmares,” 63.

<sup>29</sup> Warlow, “Radiant Dreams and Nuclear Nightmares,” 75-76.

<sup>30</sup> Warlow, “Radiant Dreams and Nuclear Nightmares,” 76.

education, and media throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> John Dower takes a broader view, citing almost two decades of dramatic international events and their role in Japan's renewed conservatism, as well as the dispirited and disarmed political left.<sup>32</sup> The shift in the country's relationship with the United States, namely the gradual waning of economic privileges Japan previously enjoyed, also fueled the national focus inward.<sup>33</sup>

The state of war anime reflects the politics of the time. Ashbaugh concludes that the 1970s was a reactionary decade to leftist political activity in the 1960s. The late 1960s onward saw an uptick in anime sympathetic to the Japanese, with audiences being shown war-related films on a routine basis by the 1970s.<sup>34</sup> Citing Eldad Nakar, John Tennant dates this pattern further back in time, noting *manga* released in the 1950s and 1960s that promoted feelings that aligned with the heroic narrative.<sup>35</sup> By the time *Mobile Suit Gundam 0079* was in production, the government was already passing measures encouraging nationalism and pro-Japanese narratives of the war.<sup>36</sup> In media, Matsumoto Leiji's intimate involvement in *Space Battleship Yamato* released combines both nationalism and the pro-Japanese war narrative that rehashed an "idealized vision of the War."<sup>37</sup> Among other goals, combatting this nationalism and criticizing how Japan dealt with war is one of *Mobile Suit Gundam*'s top priorities.<sup>38</sup>

In the world of *Gundam 0079*, most of the adults in positions of authority accept that the conflict is essentially a total war. Consequently, an alarming number of influential adults have no

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<sup>31</sup> Tennant, "Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War," 9, 11-12, 17, 18-20; Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 336-337.

<sup>32</sup> John Dower, "Peace and Democracy in Two Systems: External Policy and Internal Conflict" in *Ways of Forgetting, Ways of Remembering Japan in the Modern World* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 217-219.

<sup>33</sup> Dower, "Peace and Democracy in Two Systems," 220-221.

<sup>34</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 337.

<sup>35</sup> Tennant, "Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War," 19-20.

<sup>36</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 336-337.

<sup>37</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 328-329.

<sup>38</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 329.



qualms about using minors as combatants. Vernal divides everyone in the Gundam universe into the powerful and immoral and their diligent and ill-advised subordinates.<sup>39</sup> This division applies to both Zeon and the Federation. For the Earth Federation, implied to represent the Allies, fighting a defensive war and carrying responsibility for everyone on Earth and allied space colonies, there is an impetus if not priority given to the welfare of people caught up in the conflict, especially that of minors.<sup>40</sup> The same can also be said of a handful of Zeon soldiers. Authority figures who are concerned about the general populace are far and few in between. At the very beginning of the show, Tomino introduces a character whose early contributions to the war effort reflect his more humane feelings.

Episode 1, "Gundam Rising" introduces Lieutenant Tem Ray, Amuro's father and a military engineer for the Earth Federation. Amuro feels distant from and often frustrated with his father, admitting that he "wouldn't tell him anything" about updates involving the war, which is understandable given the sensitivity of Lt. Ray's job, but worrying when one considers the rift between the two. Episode 13, "Coming Home" reveals that Lt. Ray is the reason Amuro immigrated to Side 7 as a child, with his mother choosing to stay on Earth. In the present day during the evacuation of Side 7, after Zeon forces were detected in the colony, Fraw Bow, Amuro's closest if not only true friend, affirms Amuro's isolation in his home to their neighbor Hayato during the evacuation, "He's all alone you know." Hayato replies with his own frustrations at their situation, leaving the viewers to conclude that "if military engineers like [Lt. Ray] hadn't moved [to Side 7] in the first place," the civilians might not have been made a target of Zeon. Fraw concludes Hayato's thought with a question, asking if he's "still bitter about them moving us to make way for their research facility." This is not an entirely fair critique to make of Lt. Ray and

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<sup>39</sup> Vernal, "War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction Animation," 63.

<sup>40</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 345.

the Federation's military engineers, but an understandable one for the war in general, considering that top-level decisions greatly impact people who are not involved.

In the research facility, viewers first meet Lt. Ray, who has an opportunity to reveal his own views towards the war and his affection for his son. Lt. Ray is onboard the White Base examining a large set of blueprints. A young man in a military uniform with a serious demeanor enters the room and announces their arrival at Side 7. Lt. Ray turns away from his desk and with a warm smile, immediately clarifies that the young man's name is Bright Noa. Lt. Ray asks him how long he's been in the military, to which Bright replies, "six months, sir." Lt. Ray continues his questioning, "And you're nineteen years old, correct?" Bright answers in the affirmative. Lt. Ray turns back towards his desk concerningly, revealing a framed photograph of a well-dressed Amuro. Returning with a smile, he reveals to Bright that "when we start mass-producing the Gundam, we may be able to end this war without sending kids like you into battle." The camera zooms in on the photograph of Amuro as Bright asks if the boy in the framed photograph is his son. Lt. Ray confirms. He then continues, admitting that "[he] hears there are kids his age fighting as guerilla soldiers." Lt. Ray asks if this is true, to which Bright responds in his usual stoic and dignified demeanor, "Yes, I am told that happens." Lt. Ray's last comment off camera is a simple, "How terrible." The first episode opens with a tragic foreshadowing of events to come. By the end of "Gundam Rising," the exact opposite of Lt. Ray's wishes come to be. Amuro has not only taken command of the very Gundam his father was working on, but he is also essentially stuck in that position for lack of a suitable and preferably older replacement.

In less than ten minutes into the show, Tomino makes a powerful statement disparaging the militarism in a number of Imperial Japan's policies and attitudes that directly impacted the

country's youth. Peterson declares that "*Gundam* suggests questions."<sup>41</sup> Lt. Ray's comments, boldly and confidently directed to the future acting captain of the White Base, answers the question of whether *Gundam* is inherently a militaristic *anime*, which Ashbaugh notes was debated by scholars in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>42</sup> The war is an ongoing reality for every character introduced thus far and there is a tendency for people, especially those in positions of authority to lessen the burden as much as possible.

Lt. Ray risks a permanently strained relationship with Amuro in the hopes that his son will never go to war himself. Following the argument that *Gundam 0079* critiques militarism, as well as Tennant's assurance that "historical truthfulness [as depicted in *Gundam*] can still be examined," it is worth comparing some aspects of *Gundam 0079* to what occurred in wartime Japan for the sake of highlighting the significance of Tomino's criticisms.<sup>43</sup> Lt. Ray's comment against the use of child soldiers, coming from a military engineer and a father, working for the Earth Federation, which is a governing body intended to represent the Allies makes perfect sense to a Western viewer.<sup>44</sup> As for Japan, the social and political structures set in place during the Tokugawa Shogunate demanded unquestioned deference to one's superiors, which in time, took on the form of Emperor Meiji and an increasingly militaristic government. Lt. Ray's comments and Bright's lack of a reaction would have easily raised alarm in a country that by the late 1930s, was engaged in total war. Thankfully for the two of them, this was a private conversation. It is the application of Confucian values that dictate the nature of relationships between subjects and with the state to the repressive atmosphere of twentieth-century Imperial Japan, what Harries refers to as "a clinical piece of social engineering," that successive Imperial governments would fully take advantage of

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<sup>41</sup> Peterson, "Even If It Means Our Battles to Date Are Meaningless," 13.

<sup>42</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 344.

<sup>43</sup> Tennant, "Mobile Suit Gundam and the Japanese Memory of War," 27.

<sup>44</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 345.

for the war effort.<sup>45</sup> In actual policy, this fusing of Confucianism, already familiar in Japan with the nationalist militarism rampant since the 1890s, is exemplified in education structures dating back to the Meiji period that emphasized "obedience to superiors, honesty, frugality, [and] diligence."<sup>46</sup> Bright, one of the few recurring White Base crew members with any military training, does not respond to Lt. Ray with any criticism nor does he reaffirm his wishes. In fact, the viewer does not even get a glimpse at Bright's reaction to Lt. Ray other than answering his questions and showing a small curiosity in Amuro.

As for "[teenagers] fighting as guerilla soldiers," which Tomino finds particularly abhorrent, this would be even more endemic and particularly dangerous as 1942 came to a close.<sup>47</sup> Harries argues that Imperial Japan's inevitable loss began at the point in time when the military strategy shifted primarily to defense.<sup>48</sup> The Imperial Navy began ordering young people around Bright's age, without any proper training, to sacrifice themselves in "special attacks," also known as kamikaze attacks, in an effort to delay the arrival of the Allied Pacific Fleet, by flying their planes directly into the ships.<sup>49</sup> Scattered across small islands were soldiers bound to their defensive positions and ordered to literally dig in and fight to their deaths.<sup>50</sup> Aside from the constant dwindling of available resources, was that the Japanese were at a disadvantage fighting a defensive war in the homeland, which was against the military's broader strategic vision of unabated offense.<sup>51</sup> The final order to defend outlying islands equipped with extremely demanding military training, required that these young soldiers to take full advantage of their environment,

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<sup>45</sup> Meirion & Susie Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun: The Rise and Fall of the Imperial Japanese Army* (New York: Random House), 1991, 259.

<sup>46</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 258.

<sup>47</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 388.

<sup>48</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 386.

<sup>49</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 367.

<sup>50</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 388.

<sup>51</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 386.

using both the surrounding vegetation and available human bodies to delay the enemy's approach.<sup>52</sup> Bright Noa, despite all the stress, responsibility, and pressure he faces in the ensuing episodes, will never find himself in this position, and throughout the show is commonly seen giving orders on an elevated seat on the bridge of the fully furnished, state-of-the-art White Base.

Episode 15, Cucuruz Doan's Island is a side story that illustrates the consequences of a rogue Zeon soldier's war guilt. During a routine mid-air docking practice, Fraw detects an emergency signal from an unknown "Point 305." Bright orders Amuro in the Core Fighter to investigate the signal. Upon landing, he immediately locates and unsuccessfully attempts to nurse back to health two fatally wounded Federation soldiers who were stripped of their weapons and tied to the seats of their plane. From the forest behind the beach, rocks and flaming pieces of wood are thrown at Amuro, to which he responds by shooting at the trees with his side weapon. He tracks down three small, ragged children yelling at him to leave the island. Amuro attempts to peacefully deescalate the situation by explaining that while he is a soldier, he is not "the enemy." The children remain unconvinced and Amuro retreats to his plane. To the children's delight, a large Zaku appears on the side of the beach. The pilot's name is Doan, and he tells Amuro that he does not want to fight and that he'll let him live if he relinquishes his weapons. Amuro does not comply and engages Doan in the Core Fighter. The battle ends quickly. Amuro is knocked back into the ocean, sitting in the cockpit unconscious.

Amuro awakens in what is revealed to be Doan's partially constructed home and gets the opportunity to talk to Doan under more peaceful conditions. Amuro is visibly injured and fixated on locating the Core Fighter. Doan dodges Amuro's questions about the plane's whereabouts by revealing that he wants to protect the kids and Rollan, a young woman who later defends Doan's

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<sup>52</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 170-2; 387-9.

actions. Doan is also concerned about the prospect of Zeon forces eventually locating and attacking him on the island, which explains the dying Federation soldiers left on the beach. Meanwhile, the White Base Crew is visibly concerned about Amuro's lack of communication and sends Ryu on frequent patrols of the area. Back on the island, Amuro is convinced that Doan is "deceiving [the] children to get them to obey," notably by scouting out the island for invaders and castaways. Later that night, Doan experiences a nightmare and immediately rushes to a radar system to check for any nearby Zeon aircraft. He also expresses concern to Rollan about the whereabouts of the "main force" Amuro likely belongs to, as well as a wish to live his life free of his worries about Zeon finding him.

Doan's fears come to be. The White Base detects an unidentified object flying rapidly towards the island and immediately pursues it. A Zaku attached to a patrol plane attacks Amuro and the children, who quickly retreat inland. Above ground, Ryu notices the Zaku concentrating its fire towards a waterfall. Suddenly, a volley of attacks appear from the water and Amuro emerges in the Core Fighter, with Doan in his Zaku approaching. Amuro, who quickly transfers into the Gundam, Doan, and Ryu engage the Zaku with the White Base hovering nearby. Doan insists on fighting the Zaku himself while he explains to everyone exactly why he's gone to such great lengths to protect the kids. The viewer sees a flashback with a large Zaku towering over the three kids crying and hovering over an unmoving body. Doan tearfully admits to killing the children's parents due to a "stray round from [his] gun." He was ordered to kill the kids as well but "couldn't do it." He decided to take refuge on the island with the kids, vowing to "protect these children with [his] life." Amuro smiles as Doan defeats the unknown Zaku and the children celebrate. Doan informs Amuro that Zeon will track him indefinitely, recognizing an inverse relationship between

the children's safety and his survival. Amuro immediately identifies the reason Zeon is constantly pursuing Doan and proceeds to throw his Zaku into the ocean.

Doan's guilt from his actions as a soldier dictates his actions as the war continues. He is determined to rectify the suffering of the children he's hurt by devoting himself to their protection as the war continues. Hashimoto utilizes Japanese veterans' war testimonies to investigate the relationship between family war stories and the formation of a coherent postwar "political identity."<sup>53</sup> Unlike the veterans' own recollections of the war who returned to Japan and tried to live "postwar civilian [lives]," Doan cannot entirely renounce his ways of war. He is stuck on the island where he committed an act of violence towards the children he now wants to protect, by using his old Zaku for defense. Amuro refers to the Zaku as Doan's "scent of battle." Amuro's decision to get rid of it thus frees Doan from at least one reminder of what he did as well as an easily identifiable weapon that continuously attracts Zeon. Japanese veterans writing in the latter half of the twentieth century share Doan's guilt for their wartime actions.<sup>54</sup> Numerous veterans finally began openly talking about the conflict, with reasons including their wishes to feel accepted in a war-weary society, resentment towards the Imperial military, and as an attempt to come to terms with the effects of constant proximity to death experienced in the war, notably in the form of starvation, abandonment, and constant suicides. Not until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Hashimoto notes, did former soldiers begin discussing the atrocities inflicted upon others.<sup>55</sup> In the last decades of their lives, these veterans admitted to the intentional torture and mass-slaughter of civilians and prisoners all over Asia in the last year of the war.<sup>56</sup> In *Gundam*, Doan does not appear to have aged much between his flashback as a soldier and the present day when he admits his guilt to Amuro.

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<sup>53</sup> Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*, 28.

<sup>54</sup> Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*, 30-33.

<sup>56</sup> Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*, 32-33.

Doan also remains near the children he's previously hurt, with the implication that he's created an emotional bond with them as a caretaker. Tomino uses Doan's situation to emphasize morally good decision-making and effectively responds to the hesitancy former Japanese soldiers had in publicly speaking about their wrongdoing.<sup>57</sup> The short turnover between the murder he committed and his decision to try and earn the kids' trust suggests to the viewers that it is a good thing for soldiers to admit their guilt as soon as possible. Doan's position as the children's protector serves as an example to follow in finding ways to come to terms with victims of wartime violence and the easily identifiable relationship between a male protective figure and three small kids, resonates well with *Gundam's* intended audience.

While the teenagers and kids who make up half of the White Base's crew find themselves in dangerous combat situations with no formal military training, what skills they do have prove useful. Early in Episode 3, "Vote to Attack," Bright contemplates an attack with a "50/50 chance" of success against Char, who is closely following the White Base. Hayato discloses to Bright that he has training in Judo and that Kai has experience in operating heavy vehicles. Luckily for the White Base, in Episode 1, the viewer quickly learns that Amuro's main hobby and natural talent is fixing electronics and he that has a reputation of being "well-known for his love of machines." Hayato, known for his determination and optimistic demeanor, warmly reassures Bright's worries about Char that "however big the opponent may be, if he's wobbling or off-balance, then we can topple him." Amuro tirelessly devotes himself to the Gundam's maintenance and inner-workings. On the Luna II base, Amuro summarizes to Kai and Hayato what he's learned from using the Gundam thus far, while also admitting his own combat shortcomings. Amuro explains that the Gundam learns on the battlefield by "[storing] combat case studies in its memory," and that this

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<sup>57</sup> Hashimoto, *The Long Defeat*, 30.



feature makes it possible for “a complete novice at piloting like [him]” to fight professionally trained soldiers like Char.

There is a wide rift between White Base crew members with training and those without. Bright's six months in the military, while better than none, did not adequately prepare him for commanding the White Base and later in the show, collapses likely from mental fatigue. Ryu is a pilot capable of operating the Core Fighter with only two simulations on record by the first episode. There is no time for any of the Side 7 recruits to adequately prepare before or during the Zeon attack, as the rapidly dwindling number of military personnel on Side 7 are preoccupied. The teenage crewmembers act decisively, but their inexperience impacts their performance. In Episode 5, “Re-Entry into Earth,” Char elects to pursue the White Base during the very risky process of entering the Earth’s atmosphere. Bright orders Amuro to guard the White Base, with Kai and Ryu sent to assist “with rear missiles and machine guns” attached to the ship. Unfortunately, it takes time for Amuro to receive this help. The atmosphere on the ship is tense and Bright yells out asking for the whereabouts of the “rear defensive missiles” to which Mirai, the level-headed helmsman and Bright’s confidant, defends the crewmembers’ inexperience telling him to “Stay calm...no one’s used to this.”

In the first few episodes on the ship, the adolescents sit at various machines on the bridge with wounded soldiers sitting next to them providing instructions. To further underscore some of the new crewmembers’ inexperience are the instances of Amuro and Hayato consulting the ship’s operations manuals during combat situations. Episode 3, “Vote to Attack” featured a decisive battle on the Federation’s Luna II base. During a particularly tense moment when the White Base needed to contact Ryu Jose, Hayato asks aloud, “How do I contact the bridge?” In the end, the White Base successfully escapes and sets a direct course for Earth. During a moment of private

reflection, Char comments on the nature of the White Base crew's capabilities. He aptly states that "their military tactics are awkward, and they fight like amateurs."

The Imperial Japanese government set clear expectations for men training to join the military. Drawing upon physical, mental, and spiritual requirements well in place by the early twentieth century, Harries details an extensive curriculum that aimed to mold a cohesive and rigid army. Students engaged in full-body exercises promoting stamina and endurance, overworked in academics to achieve the highest scores possible, kept a tightly controlled schedule with no personal leisure time, and internalized a carefully crafted program of militaristic propaganda to create a foundation of unquestioned preparedness and sense of discipline.<sup>58</sup> Within the military, soldiers were expected to perform at exceedingly high standards. As the war continued and more Japanese subjects found themselves drafted, the idea of "fighting spirit" which manifested in the ability to endure unending hardship and unquestionable loyalty to any demands made by their superiors, took on more significance than before.<sup>59</sup> The most desired quality of a soldier was a complete disregard for death. Senior officers romanticized the sacrifices soldiers would make in what Allied observers would remark as "foolish" and "galling."<sup>60</sup>

With very few exceptions, most Federation and Zeon soldiers in *Gundam 0079* refuse to boldly sacrifice their lives for the war. Junior soldiers, especially Amuro, go into battle for survival or out of self-interest, forgoing broader 'ideological reasons.'<sup>61</sup> The animators display Amuro's fear and shock from experiencing combat in his first several skirmishes, often stuttering, freezing, and hovering his hands over the Gundam's controls. Moore notes Amuro's occasional emotional break, or "white-hot rage" in the middle of a fight that results in him inflicting unnecessary

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<sup>58</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 170-173.

<sup>59</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 322.

<sup>60</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 323.

<sup>61</sup> Vernal, "War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction," 62, 63.

destruction to his enemy.<sup>62</sup> Amuro is genuinely afraid of what he is tasked to do and his feelings of being under appreciated and overwhelmed culminates, in Episode 20, when he temporarily deserts from the White Base, taking the Gundam with him. This is not an example of Japanese “fighting spirit” and the “suicidal gallantry” that American General Wainwright eschewed in Bataan to save four thousand Allied soldiers stuck in Malinta Tunnel.<sup>63</sup>

Tomino does not depict every regular Zeon soldier as a product of intense mental and physical discipline and adherence to authority. Episode 14, “Time, Be Still” offers a glimpse into a military camp on the “border zone” of Zeon-controlled territory on Earth. The atmosphere appears laid-back as the soldiers mill about discussing whether a successful attack against the approaching White Base will be their ticket back to a “nice, clean, bug-free Zeon.” The ambitious and clever Chief Cuaran leads his devoted team in an offense against the Gundam and could have easily destroyed it had Amuro not painstakingly foiled their plan. Giya is the only Zaku pilot on the team. He is afraid to face the Gundam and complains when Cuaran is slightly late to the rendezvous point, a long shot from the “willingness to die” that Imperial soldiers were expected to internalize.<sup>64</sup>

Kai is one of the clearest examples of a reluctant participant in the war. With little to no filter, he is known for his snide and inappropriate remarks, which at one point earns him a slap in the face from Bright, and copes primarily by belittling himself and criticizing or mocking others. He is fully aware of his comparably cowardly behavior, which is revealed during the initial evacuation of Side 7 in Episode 2. Sayla Mass (secretly Char’s estranged younger sister under a pseudonym who allied herself with the Federation) and Fraw rush around Side 7 “to look for

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<sup>62</sup> Moore, “Inside the Boy Inside the Robot,” 52.

<sup>63</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 315, 322.

<sup>64</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 323.

anyone left behind.” Fraw quickly spots Kai running behind her straight to the evacuation shelter and asks him if there were any survivors. Kai responds dismissively in the elevator. “Beats me. I was busy avoiding blasts and barely made it here myself.” He looks at Ryu Jose helping a wounded civilian, turns to Fraw, and Sayla and asks, “You coming?” Sayla rushes to Kai and slaps him. She tells him “And you call yourself a man? Coward!” Before Kai could try and justify himself, she continues “A coward like you ought to be left here at Side 7.” Kai then responds sharply, with a hand covering his face. “Well, look at you on your high horse.” He eventually assists Ryu and the injured civilian while Fraw and Sayla drive off. Kai eventually becomes a combatant on the White Base but his behavior towards others reflects his own insecurities and fears. Like Giya, he does not rush into battle to face the enemy head-on, and certainly not without guaranteed support from Amuro in the Gundam leading the charge, or Hayato and Ryu nearby. All of this culminates in his temporary desertion as well. Regardless of his attitude, he still follows Bright’s orders to drive the Guntank in a supportive role for Amuro. This balance between the ongoing war and his own coming of age within this conflict provides a layer of humanization and sympathy for the White Base crewmembers, even the unlikable ones.

In war, everything eventually reaches a breaking point. The Imperial Army changed dramatically between the turn of the twentieth century and the outbreak of the Pacific War.<sup>65</sup> Harries describes this change as an inverse relationship between gradual decrease in quality in tandem with an increase in time Japan spent at war. Insubordination, disobedience, and particularly heinous acts of wanton destruction and violence were especially rampant in China. The most experienced and efficient soldiers were stationed in Manchuria awaiting orders to rebuff the Soviets.<sup>66</sup> Male draftees in the late 1930s and 1940s faced dire prospects. Harries refers to this

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<sup>65</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 321.

<sup>66</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 260, 320.

group as “the bottom of the manpower barrel,” woefully unprepared for battle.<sup>67</sup> Their superiors found them “useless” and occasionally no better than extra bodies on the field bound for a quick death.<sup>68</sup> Harries references Dr. Robert McClure as well as letters bound for Japan to describe the grim, desolate, and despondent condition of new draftees in China in the late 1930s. A large number of soldiers somehow managed to blame the sexual violence inflicted upon local Chinese women and murders of their own officers due to frustration at their situation, and resentment for their materially better off superiors.<sup>69</sup> In battle, these recruits fought with a clear intention to live another day, if they did not immediately choose to sprint towards enemy fire and surrender.<sup>70</sup> *Gundam 0079* never subjects its audience to the absolute worst possible aspects of war, particularly the Nanjing Massacre, which remains an easy target for media censorship in Japan.<sup>71</sup> The decision to write a character that, when compared with the rest of the White Base crew seems like a detriment to the main cast, drives home the point that war has absolutely no place in a functioning society. Characters like Kai who have little tolerance for man-made suffering, still find themselves thrust into battle.

Tomino Yoshiyuki finds war reprehensible. In *Mobile Suit Gundam 0079*, the war is ongoing at the start of the show. Viewers are immediately dropped into a “realistic fictional setting” of a half-decimated Earth and several flourishing orbiting colonies, where numerous participants, willing and unwilling, navigate this destructive conflict.<sup>72</sup> *Gundam 0079*’s message to reject war’s romanticization, especially within the context of the conservative 1970s, gives characters in positions of authority a level of depth unseen in purely nationalistic war media.<sup>73</sup> Lt.

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<sup>67</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 319.

<sup>68</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 260.

<sup>69</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 260-261.

<sup>70</sup> Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 261.

<sup>71</sup> Tennant, “*Mobile Suit Gundam* and the Japanese Memory of War,” 26.

<sup>72</sup> Vernal, “War and Peace in Japanese Science Fiction Animation,” 60.

<sup>73</sup> Ashbaugh, “Contesting Traumatic War Narratives,” 348.

Tem Ray, Earth Federation military engineer, and father of *Gundam 0079*'s protagonist Amuro Ray, attempts to balance his personal long-term goal of eradicating the need for child soldiers by perfecting the design and production of the Gundam, with the reality of a devastating surprise attack on Side 7. Tragically, his son Amuro takes command of the only completed Gundam to defend his colony and numerous refugees against Zeon. Doan, a former Zaku pilot who regrets murdering a civilian parent, devotes the rest of his life protecting the lives of the children he's hurt on a remote island in fear of Zeon's retaliation. Doan's guilt fuels his determination until he teams up with Amuro to deflect the long-anticipated Zeon attack of the island. In a highly emotional confession of his actions, he releases all his feelings and his Zaku, a physical connection to his regrettable past as a soldier. The unanticipated attack on Side 7 and frantic escape from the colony places a group of untrained civilian teenagers in positions of unreasonable authority and responsibility onboard a military ship. The group adapts as well as they can to an almost non-stop series of stressful combat situations and assumes the type of roles that adults usually spend several years preparing for. The handful of adolescents enter the White Base with somewhat useful abilities and characteristics, but tense moments in combat shake and sometimes dislodge even the most optimistic and determined attitudes. Amuro and Kai in particular stumble and seemingly regress at times but gradually learn to accept their high-stakes responsibilities and perform their duties. Highlighting *Gundam 0079*'s main and side characters' flaws, feelings, and hardships helps shift the audience's focus away from romanticizing war and towards the consequences on regular people, a lesson Tomino intends for the audience to learn.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ashbaugh, "Contesting Traumatic War Narratives," 348.