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ARTISTS, AESTHETICS, AND ARTWORKS
FROM, AND IN CONVERSATION WITH, JAPAN
PART 2

MUTUAL IMAGES
ISSUE 9 – AUTUMN 2020

MUTUAL IMAGES

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

FOUNDED BY

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ARTISTS, AESTHETICS, AND ARTWORKS
FROM, AND IN CONVERSATION WITH, JAPAN
PART 2

EDITED BY
MARCO PELLITTERI & JOSÉ ANDRÉS SANTIAGO IGLESIAS

Mutual
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MUTUAL IMAGES – ISSUE 9 – AUTUMN 2020

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MUTUAL IMAGES

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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MUTUAL IMAGES

A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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Editorial –

Vale, annus horribilis. Salve, annus mirabilis?

Marco PELLITTERI | Xi'ian Jiaotong—Liverpool University, China

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Dear readers, students, fellow scholars,
welcome to this ninth instalment of *Mutual Images*.

Say goodbye to 2020, say goodbye my baby

This issue is a peculiar one, for three reasons. The first: it is the second and last of 2020, and we know how difficult a year this has been. When you will read these lines, it will most likely be 2021 already, and even though some most relevant improvements in our lives may be still yet to come — such as being vaccinated, travelling freely, jumping into the caressing sea waters, and storing inside a drawer all the unused masks, hopefully forever — at least we will have this nasty creature, 2020, behind us. The double-twenties has been a difficult object to handle also for *Mutual Images*, both the association and the journal. We had to first postpone the eighth edition of our yearly international workshop to this upcoming January 2021.¹ Then, although we managed to put together the eighth issue of the journal last spring and organise a special autumn workshop, that instalment was quite a short one because of various problems many authors and reviewers were busy with due to the global situation, and the workshop — this time, by features and size, perhaps a symposium rather than a workshop — had to be conducted *via* digital information technologies, through a software of video-conferencing that some of you may have vaguely heard of, its name is Zoom.²

Nonetheless, the symposium was a success and a prestigious one, organised with and at the University of Padua (Italy), and with other Italian cultural institutions, and the University of Vigo (Spain), thanks to the enormous help of Marco Bellano and José Andrés Santiago Iglesias. José, as you have seen in the frontispiece of this issue, is also,

¹ <https://mutualimages.org/mutual-images-8th-international-workshop/>.

² <https://mutualimages.org/2020/10/19/program-the-journey-around-the-world-through-images>.

like it happened in the last issue, the co-editor of this instalment of *MIJ* and co-author of this Editorial.

The second reason is that besides being the last issue of 2020, this is also the last that belongs in a six-monthly periodicity. The main board of the association (president and vice-presidents), with the general approval of the editorial board, has deliberated and then resolved that *Mutual Images Journal*, from 2021, will assume an annual periodicity, so to allow us to devote more time to our various projects and put together one single yearly issue, but one thicker than the two 2020 instalments. In fact, largely due to covid-19, also this issue comes to you in a reduced format. While doing our best to secure scholarly content of high quality for the international research community of readers in the humanities, social sciences, media and art studies, cultural studies, and area studies, we had to face two sad realities: substantial delays or definitive withdrawals of articles by authors who had to cope with personal challenges, and an almost sinister conjuncture of submissions of unsatisfactory quality, which we saw ourselves obliged to reject, in accord with our expert peer reviewers.

A third reason, not directly connected to the journal but more broadly impacting our association, is that we could not organise our second summer school in 2020, after the nice experience and good success of the first summer school in July 2019 at the University of Messina (Italy). Let us indulge for a moment in sweet nostalgia for a special summer full of learning, scholarship, valuable colleagues and students, and sun, good food, and sea.³ Moreover, among our honourable lecturers, we had Professor Tiziana Lippiello, who has been recently appointed Rector of Ca' Foscari University of Venice ([Unive.it/data/people/5591147](https://unive.it/data/people/5591147)). Congratulations, Tiziana!

Nonetheless, 2021 will be the year of the second Mira international summer school: we change continent entirely and, on 22-26 June, the didactic and scholarly event will be held at Xi'an Jiaotong – Liverpool University in Suzhou, 90 km westward of Shanghai, co-organised with the Department of Media and Communication, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and with the patronage, among other institutions, of the AAIC (Association of Italian Academics in China). The event will be on-site and should enjoy the participation of a relevant number of Chinese and international students living and studying in China currently; in this sense, assuming that international mobility will be still difficult next summer (both within Europe and between Europe and various eastern

³ <https://mutualimages.org/archives/international-summer-school-2019>.

countries), at MIRA we thought that it would be sensible to change scenario and plan, this year, an Asian event: moreover, having China, everything considered, kept the epidemic under control within its national borders better than any European nation can claim, the situation down here is indeed safer.⁴

In the following lines you are briefly introduced to the contents of *Mutual Images*, no. 9.⁵

On this issue's contents

This issue of the journal may be short, but not *that* short. We have the pleasure to offer to you three full-length articles and the reviews of two highly interesting books.

The reviews are written by Tyrus Miller, Dean of the School of Humanities at the University of California (Irvine), and “our” Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández, who serves on *Mutual Images'* Editorial Board. The first, at pp. 91-94, discusses a book by Christopher Reed focussing on (mainly) European/American “bachelor Japanists” and their displays of alternative masculinities. The review and the discussed book deal with the links between Japanism — framed as a set of fascinations for, and inspirations from, Japanese modern and contemporary forms of visual arts — among western men and their peculiar, and/or overtly homosexual, masculinities; here we could just add that the appeal of Japanese visual/pop cultures indeed attracted and still attract various European artists — we refer here mainly to comic artists in Europe — who may display or indirectly suggest a set of different, dandy-ish masculine identities in tight connection with their appreciation or love, evident in their artwork, for Japanese culture and its artistic and daily-life aesthetics. The main artist who comes to our mind is Igort (b. 1958), with his masterworks *Quaderni giapponesi* ('Japanese notebooks', 2015-20, 3 vols) and the more recent instalment of them, *Kokoro* ('Heart', 2019).

The second review discusses a collection on Japanese cinema edited by Fujiki Hideaki and Alastair Phillips, which we can frame as a “reader” in Japanese film or a handbook of sorts, although not being exactly all-comprehensive. The epistemology that informs the book's structure, as thoroughly illustrated in the review, is well balanced with the goal of

⁴ Clearly, for updates on the summer school, you can check in the future our website Mutualimages.org as well as the webpages of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Department of Media and Communication at Xi'an Jiaotong – Liverpool University: Xjtlu.edu.cn/en/study/departments/school-of-humanities-and-social-sciences and Xjtlu.edu.cn/en/study/departments/academic-departments/media-and-communication respectively.

⁵ For those who noticed and those who did not: yes, the title of this first section of the Editorial homages a 1980 Billy Joel hit.

exploring the various angles from which to discuss the object, and therefore the collection can be both a starter for students of cinema (and/or of cinema in Japan) and a theory-thick reading for academics, be they film researchers or area studies scholars. However, we second the comment by Armendáriz-Hernández about the too common cultural and scholarly limitation of this book's selection of contributors, who are usually either Japanese or Anglophone scholars, which turns this volume into a quasi-exclusive dialogue between Anglophone "white" culture (from the UK, the US, and Canada) and Japanese authors' reflections on local cinema; but pleasing presences are also Swedish, Hongkonghese, and Korean scholars. The absence of European authors from France, Germany, Italy, and Spain — whose traditions of production of auteur cinema and theoretical innovation and advancement of cinema theory are by far the most relevant worldwide in the history of the medium and whose historical output has been inspired by or has provided inspiration for many Japanese filmmakers across the last century — is appalling because it is a too frequent culturally monistic habit. Another last limit of the book seems the choice of giving space to animation only in one chapter, only in relation to "anime" (which is one sub-category of animation made in Japan), and only through the theory-specific eyes of a non-Japanese scholar; more relevantly, because the history, industry, production routines, and aesthetic features of cinemas of animation in Japan are not reducible to one single view and essay, and need to be handled — as they indeed have, elsewhere — in separate comprehensive books, or else the impression will be implicitly suggested of a too peripheral position in the Japanese industry of the moving image, which is far from being true. But putting aside these diverging opinions on the desirable balance of a composite and complex work as this, *The Japanese Cinema Book* is a great piece of collective scholarship and as such, it is highly recommended, as the reviewer effectively explains at pp. 95-101.

The main courses of this issue's menu are, however, and as always, the articles.

The first article, by Karim El Mufti, pp. 3-37, addresses the deep influence of the anime series *Ufo Robo Grendizer* in the Arabic-speaking sphere (paying special attention to the Lebanese case) since it was first broadcast in the late 1970s and early 1980s, becoming a symbol of resistance during a harsh war period. Following a thorough analysis of the arrival and broadcasting of *Grendizer*, El Mufti highlights two core issues with regard to this discussion. Firstly, the iconicity of the character and series, exceeding the original narrative to resonate with the daily brutal situation many kids had to deal with. With an

undergoing civil war and the Israeli occupation, many young Lebanese viewers found true similarities with the events described in *Ufo Robo Grendizer* — a people losing their home planet to an invasion force from outer space — and the series became a beacon of resilience, self-sacrifice and resistance. Secondly, El Mufti highlights the important role *domestication* played in the dissemination process, freeing *Ufo Robo Grendizer* of some of the original Japanese references in order to appeal to a larger audience not necessarily (and unlikely) familiarised with them — thus allowing for a deeper empathic connection with the viewers, despite their different backgrounds and personal situations. The author's in-depth review addresses some issues sometimes overlooked in this kind of analysis, including the importance of the dubbers and the challenges faced by the production team in Lebanon. However, one of the most interesting aspects of this article lies in offering a perspective on a market that has been largely overlooked and unknown in the dominant discourse by European and American scholars. While most seminal works on anime outside Japan focus on the largest anime markets, it would also be wise to acknowledge the tremendous social impact many anime series have had on other markets — like the Arabic-speaking world, or South-East Asia and Latin-American countries — over the last decades.

The second article (pp. 39-65) takes as a starting point the reports published in two US newspapers in the late 19th century (*The San Francisco Chronicle* and *The Chicago Tribune*): Aurore Yamagata-Montoya covers the two-months journey, from San Francisco to Washington, of five Japanese girls, sent to the US as part of the Iwakura Mission (1871), focussing on the representation by American media. The girls were meant to be educated in the US system so that Japan could be perceived as a civilised country on par with the western nations. Yamagata-Montoya's article relies on textual analysis of dozens of columns published in both journals (paying special attention to the choice of words as well as the consistency of the referred pieces of information) and visual analysis of the very few existing photographs, confronting the aestheticised and romanticised notion of Japan by Americans with the actual facts. This thorough analysis of the media sources covering the role of the five girls is part of a larger undergoing research project by Yamagata-Montoya, focussed on Japanese women in US newspapers during the first years of the Meiji period. The article, most importantly, traces similarities with the idealised image of Japanese women today, which — in many regards — reinforces the same clichés.

Finally, the article by Ziwei Shuai addresses the Lolita fashion phenomenon from a variety of cultural approaches (pp. 67-88). Shuai begins with a comprehensive guide to Lolita fashion, paying attention to its history — born in Japan during the 1980s — and cultural background, its development within the Japanese popular scenario, and its main traits as a movement. The core issue addressed is the role played by Lolita fashion in challenging many of the preconceived notions of Japan's culture. Nonetheless, Shuai suggests how the performative self-reaffirmation behind Lolita fashion can be understood as an act of defiance (and individualism) against Japan's collectivist culture. However, the article also explores the contradictions of such self-reaffirmation within the international scenario and — most importantly — a globalised marketplace.

We began this Editorial by addressing why this issue is a peculiar one, calling attention to three different reasons: the dreadful 2020 and the overwhelming challenges it has posed for everyone on a technical, professional, emotional and psychological level; the upcoming change of periodicity in the journal, being this the last six-monthly issue; and the impossibility of holding the *Mutual Images* summer school in 2020. However, this issue is also peculiar since it is the second instalment (issues 8 and 9) in which José Andrés Santiago acts as co-editor, following the collaboration between *Mutual Images* and the *dx5-digital & graphic art research* group at Universidade de Vigo, which hosted the 7th *Mutual Images International Workshop* in 2019 and supported the autumn symposium held at the University of Padua in 2020. A partnership which will hopefully lead to exciting new projects in the future.

Please enjoy this 9th issue of *Mutual Images* and let us say farewell to 2020.

ARTICLES

Influence and success of the Arabic edition of *UFO Robo Grendizer*: Adoption of a Japanese icon in the Arabic-speaking world

Karim EL MUFTI | Saint Joseph University of Beirut, Lebanon

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ABSTRACT

UFO Robo Grendizer, a Japanese anime character produced in 1975, was immensely popular in Arab countries. Adapted into Arabic in Lebanon as it was enduring a devastating civil war, the program was broadcasted in 1979, then during the 1980s across many Arab audiences (mainly Syria, Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf). The cartoon's narrative of alien invasion and heroic resistance, using cutting-edge technology in the form of Grendizer the super-robot, mirrored the harsh reality of war and occupation that so many Arab populations endured during the same period. This paper aims at uncovering why Grendizer struck such a profound echo in the minds and hearts of the generation of children who found in the character a super hero figure as an escape route to their world's problems. It will also address the impact of this Japanese cultural reference onto Arabic audiences and highlight how the cartoon came to be domesticated for an Arab context, thus leaving its original universe and encompass the mindset, reflections and expectations of many Arab generations.

KEYWORDS

Grendizer; Anime; Japan; Lebanon; Palestine; Occupation; Peace; Resistance.

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1. Introduction

UFO Robo Grendizer is a Japanese anime series for television, produced in 1975 by the Tōei Dōga studios, with the creative contribution of Nagai Gō (born in 1945), who would reuse the character in various manga instalments (Pellitteri and Giacomantonio, 2017). This cartoon series came after the Tōei Dōga, interconnected science-fiction sagas *Mazinger Z* and *Great Mazinger*, and runs over 74 episodes. But only *UFO Robo Grendizer* would be met with gigantic success in the Arab world, as it was in Italy and France. Adapted and re-voiced in Lebanon by the Arts Federation (*Al Ittihad Al Fanni*], *UFO: Moughamarat Al Fada* ('*UFO: Space Adventures*', the title of the cartoon in Arabic) was first aired by Télé Liban in 1979, as war, invasions, and occupations were raging through the country and the region.

No one had anticipated such fascination with the show in Arab societies. Nagai Gō, often considered in the Arab world as the creator of the anime even though he is only the holder of the franchise through an arrangement with the animation studio, had not realised this success among Arab audiences before 2008. When he did, he requested from the Japanese Embassy in France to organise a visit to some Arabic-speaking countries, which he conducted in 2009, travelling to Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates (namely, Dubai) (Daily News Egypt, 2009).

Even Lebanese artists involved in the adaptation and localisation in Arabic were impressed with such captivation. Voice actor Jihad El Atrash (born in 1943) and singer of the opening and closing credits, Sammy Clark (born Hobeika), both prominent stars of the Arab edition of *UFO Robo Grendizer*, did not expect for the cartoon to gain such popularity. As put by journalist Hala Tashkandi, “*Grendizer* memorabilia still sell like hot cakes in the region, and its popularity has barely declined” (Tashkandi, 2019). The attraction to the Arabic version of the show can be measured on YouTube, where dubbed episodes amass millions of views. The videos from the opening theme by Sammy Clark also generate massive viewership on video sharing platforms. El Atrash, who gave his voice to the anime series’s hero Daisuke/Dayski¹ (Duke Fried/Doq Flead, *UFO Robo Grendizer’s* pilot), characterised the show as “anticipating our modern times” (Abbas: 2005). From a technological standpoint, he stressed on how “huge efforts were put in the production phase with limited means and resources” (Abbas, 2005), as the adaptation of this anime continues to be celebrated as a tribute to the Arabic language and culture.

Looking into the *UFO Robo Grendizer* phenomenon in the Arab world isn’t quite novel, as abundant media resources (press and television) have routinely covered the extent of this anime’s success as TV show in the region, namely Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates). In addition to extensive media celebrations of involved artists, which will be used as a reference in this article, *Grendizer’s* fame escaped the narrowness of television to become an Arab cultural reference, speaking for the underdogs and denouncing oppression.

The main innovation of the present research is to introduce a sociological perspective behind what is recognised today as an Arab pop icon, given how little was actually written from the vantage point of this anime’s influence in the Arab world. As such, this essay will

¹ For the purpose of this article, the names of the cartoon’s characters will first be rendered in both the Japanese and Arabic versions, before being referred to in their Arabic names.

heavily rely on the extensive media sources that had given voice to those most active in commenting the Arab adaptation of this anime, whether from contributors to the production works or external commentators, in addition to the review of all 74 episodes of the series in Arabic.

This calls for a first round of limitations, as this article has not resorted to written and formal documentation relevant to the cartoon production (television archives, for instance). The research gathered analytical content from the anime's Arab script as developed by Lebanese and Palestinian producers and actors, sociological literature on the regional historical, geopolitical and social context, technical information from relevant broadcast online sources, in addition to different testimonies and analysis from multiple supports (television shows, documentaries, cultural events, festivals, press) from the past 15 years, namely between February 2005 and May 2020.

The article shall look into two essential questions when observing a Japanese cultural influence onto the chaotic Arab scene, one being how the cartoon *Grendizer* came to be purchased and adapted into Arabic in Lebanon and what were the success factors for the show to be much praised by Arab audiences. Then, the analysis will try to uncover, in a sociological perspective, why it became this contemporary "legend" and cultural icon in the Middle East, which influence escaped the Japanese original cultural set to encompass the reflections, dreams, and expectations of a cross-generational viewership, as the tale, characters, symbols, and values carried by the anime quickly enrooted in the Arab psyche.

As such, the story is pretty straight forward. El Atrash describes it as "the traditional battle between Good and Evil" (Future TV, 2018b), with each episode unfolding a perfectly sequenced plot: Duke Fried, Prince of Fried (in Arabic: Doq Fleed), arrived on Earth on board of a flying saucer carrying a giant super robot named Grendizer, after the aggressive and violent Forces of Vega ravaged his planet (Fried; in Arabic, Fleed). From his new home, he and his Earthling comrades shall quash the new invasion plans of the Armies of Vega to control the Earth and its resources.

The specific context of the Middle East is here key to grasp the cultural resonance of a cartoon about alien invasions against one's homeland. For adults living in the Middle East and their children in the 1970's, the anime story is closely connected with

the historical occurrence of the “*Nakba*”.² Between 1948 and 1973, Arab armies were defeated by Israel in different wars and battles trying to free Palestine from what was considered a foreign occupation. Israel actually succeeded in occupying further land from neighbouring countries, whether the Egyptian Sinai (1967-1978), Gaza (1967-2005), Southern Lebanon (1978-2000), the Syrian Golan, East Jerusalem and large parts of the West Bank (still occupied until this day).

From their side, Arab children came to deeply identify with the cartoon, its plot, the invasion of Earth, the gigantic battles and the superhero characters in *UFO Robo Grendizer*, whom they were looking up to in their daily ordeal as they could feel and observe how the adult generation was struggling to uphold the different Arab causes. And yet the cultural factors that influenced the original anime were very different. Nagai Gō is the only known contributor to the show among Arab audiences, even though, as said before, he is not the actual sole creator of *Grendizer*, which originates within the animation studio Tōei Dōga. Nonetheless, Nagai played an important creative role in suggesting several narrative elements. He was born the month after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and grew up in Japan immediately after World War II. In an interview to *Egypt Today*, he specifies:

the reason why I depict the effects of war in my comics is because I strongly believe that a person should learn from childhood how war can be destructive and how much people and societies may suffer from it, just the same way I learned it from the stories of adults around me when I was a little child. (*Egypt Today*, 2009).

In the same way, the message carried by the cartoon against war and destruction found its way into the Arab context, offering an imaginary hero to those plunged in the daily ordeal of conflict. In that, the Arab adaptation of *UFO Robo Grendizer* somehow dispossessed the origins of the Japanese context inspired by the country’s war and history (such as considering planets Earth and Fried as representations of the contemporary Japanese and American alliance, as suggested in Pellitteri, 2009), to anchor it into the realm of more contemporary sufferings, such as the occupation of Palestine by Israel and the wars in Lebanon.

² *Nakba* means “disaster” in Arabic and refers to the military defeat of Arab armies against Israel and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the aftermath of the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948.

2. Factors of success for the “Arab Grendizer”

2.1. From a business transaction to a cultural myth

Following the success of the *Arabian Nights: Sindbad's Adventures* anime film (*Arabian Naito: Shindobatto no Bōken*, 1975) adapted to Arabic in 1976, Arab producers searching for animated cartoons at a low cost looked through the International Market of Television Programmes (*Miptv*), the “one and only market that is dedicated to Content Development & Distribution for Drama Series (Original and Scripted Formats), Kids Content (Animation & Live Action), Documentaries and Formats (Scripted & Non Scripted)”. At that time, it was considered as one of the greatest annual trade settings, held in the French town of Cannes.

It was Nicolas Abu Samah (1939-2016), a Lebanese director and actor, who brought *Sindbad* to the Arab World. Graduate of the Higher Institute for Cinema in Paris, he worked at Levant Tv³ in Lebanon, where TV production was much more advanced compared with the rest of Middle Eastern countries (Encyclopedia.com, 2020). Abu Samah had established his company Filmali in the late 1970s as the first dubbing company in the Middle East (Khoder, 2020), which dubbed films and series into Arabic, such as *Sindbad* (1976), *Jazirat Al Kanz* (“Treasure Island”, 1983, or *Takarajima* in the original Japanese version, 1978) and *Al Sanafer* (*The Smurfs*, 1981).

As pointed out by Wiam El Seaidi, director and later co-founder of Future TV in Lebanon in the beginning of the 1990s, “Nicolas Abu Samah was a real merchant: he brought *Sindbad* to Lebanon; hundreds of series were adapted thanks to him. He started this trend in the country” (Future Tv, 2018a). Later on, “many producers came to be interested in the foreign cartoon business, such as Wissam Ezzeddine, who is the main producer [of *UFO Robo Grendizer*], while also being among the founders of Télé Liban” (Future Tv, 2018a). The move was full of risk and challenges. If *Sindbad* appeared rather safe to spark interest among the Middle-Eastern audience given the corresponding features, importing different anime such as *UFO Robo Grendizer* wasn’t an obvious business transaction.

Producer Wissam Ezzeddine (passed away 2002, aged 73) jumped the gun and tried to reproduce Abu Samah’s success with new products coming from the Japanese field (Future Tv, 2018a). Ezzeddine was, back then, a close partner of businessman and billionaire Rafic Hariri (future Prime minister after the war and assassinated in February 2005). He was behind the first television channel in Arabic in Lebanon, Télé Liban, which

³ Levant Tv (*Telvizion Lubnan Wal Mashreq*) was established in 1961 and merged in 1977 with Télé Liban, the first TV channel in Lebanon, founded in 1956.

came to gain great experience in producing and distributing cultural programs and series in Lebanon in the 1970s, most of which could then be exported to the entire Arab region.

Classical Arabic, also known as Literacy Arabic, was the main language conveyor for the different shows produced, including foreign cartoons. Its uniformity throughout Arab countries comes from its Quranic origin, whose rhetoric can be very distinct from national Arabic dialects, shaped in mainly spoken forms. In that sense, the programs in Literacy Arabic could be understood, hence purchased, in the larger Arab markets throughout the region. As actor Jihad El Atrash recalls:

back then, there were only public and governmental [television] channels. Télé Liban was the main provider of cultural content on television, with documentaries, cultural shows, family series and educational programs, either directly in Arabic or dubbed into Arabic. And I had the great privilege of participating in this great work. Programs were exported from Télé Liban all the way to the Gulf countries [namely Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia] and their television channels. (Al Kout Tv, 2016)

In 1978, Ezzeddine takes hold of the *UFO Robo Grendizer* anime at the *Miptv*, inspired by its great success in France and Italy during the same year and sets to adapt it into Arabic, probably attracted by the alien invasion story, which resonated so closely with his own country, Lebanon. Back then, the dubbing production was still in its early stages and such technology was mainly being used for cinema, radio shows and television documentaries. To succeed in adapting *UFO Robo Grendizer* to an Arabic audience, Wissam Ezzeddine partnered with two important stakeholders of the cultural scene in Lebanon in that period.

First, the Arts Federation (*Al Ittihad Al Fanni*), a Palestinian-owned production group that specialised in Arabic adaptation of cultural programs. The group was commissioned to translate the anime's transcript from English into Arabic, based on Wiam El Seaidi's testimony stating that the scripts acquired for the anime were in English (Future Tv, 2018a), before proceeding with the dubbing process. The Arts Federation, which is mentioned in the series' opening credits, was owned by what the milieu called "the three knights" (*Al Fursan El Thalatha*), i.e. Palestinian artists Abdel Majid Abou Laban, Sobhi Abou Loghd, and Ghanem El Dejjani. They were the ones who gathered the greatest radio hosts and speakers back to adapt the show into Arabic, including themselves, as Loghd and Dejjani had endorsed for each of them a dubbing role in *UFO Robo Grendizer*. The first played evil characters Blaki (Blaki in the original

series) and Minister Zoril (Zouril in the original version) and the second the benevolent Dr Amoon (Umon in the original series), the director of the research centre and adoptive father of the hero figure Dayski/Doq Fleed, though not mentioned in the opening credits (see table 1 below).

Table 1 – List of Non-credited Voice Actors in *UFO Robo Grendizer's* Arabic Adaptation

ARABIC VOICE ACTOR	CHARACTER NAME IN ARABIC (TRANSCRIBED)	CHARACTER NAMES IN JAPANESE (TRANSCRIBED)
Sobhi Abou Loghd	Blaki Al Wazir Zoril	Blaki Zouril
Ghanem El Dejjani	Doctor Amoon	Shiyochiyo Genzo Umon

As a second step, Ezzeddine also relied on notorious director Wiam El Seaidi⁴ (born 1931), who had already worked on the *Sindbad* adaptation. As of 1978, the consortium started the adaptation of *UFO Robo Grendizer* and had recruited a number of dubbing artists, whose names appear in the opening credits of the show (see table 2), for a first season, namely the episodes from 1 to 26.

Table 2 – List of Voice Actors in *UFO Robo Grendizer's* Arabic Adaptation (by order of appearance in Season 1's opening credits)

ARABIC VOICE ACTOR	CHARACTER NAME IN ARABIC	CHARACTER NAMES (ORIGINAL JAPANESE)
Jihad El Atrache	Daisky Amoon Doq Fleed	Umon Daisuke Duke Fried
Abdallah Haddad	Kouji Kabuto	Kabuto Kōji
Aida Hilal	Al Sayyeda Gandal Nayda	Lady Gandal Naïda
Salah Mokhallalati	Vega Al Kabir	Vega Kyōsei Daiho
Nazih Qattan	Al Qa'id Gandal	Gandal
Nawal Hijazi	Hikaro Makiba	Makiba Hikaru
Marwan Haddad	Dambi Makiba	Makiba Danbei
Rima Salameh	Goro Makiba	Makiba Goro
Mohamad Hijazi	Al Qa'id Harok	Haruk [episode 29]
Ali Safa	Hayashi	Hayashi
Mohamad Haidar	Al Qa'id Yara	Lara [episode 15]

⁴ Who will later co-found aforementioned Future Tv, owned by former prime minister Rafic Hariri.

The initial broadcast started at the end of 1978 and beginning of 1979 on the Lebanese channel Télé Liban, before it was exported to the rest of the Arab world starting 1980. The immediate success of the show prompted the development of what is considered the second “season” of the show (episodes 27 to 74), with some slight changes in the dubbing artists and the joining of artists Omar El Chamamah, Sobhi Eit, and Sawsan Birkedar, who excelled, alongside veterans Jihad El Atrash, Abdallah Haddad, and Nawal Hijazi, in rendering the show’s depth and emotions to iconic levels (see table 3).

**Table 3 – List of Voice Actors in *UFO Robo Grendizer’s* Arabic Adaptation
(by order of appearance in Season’s 2 opening credits)**

ARABIC VOICE ACTOR	CHARACTER NAME IN ARABIC (TRANSCRIBED)	CHARACTER NAMES IN JAPANESE (TRANSCRIBED)
Jihad El Atrache	Daisy Amoon	Umon Daisuke
	Doq Fleed	Duke Fried
Abdallah Haddad	Kouji Kabuto	Kabuto Kōji
Marwan Haddad	Dambi Makiba	Makiba Danbei
Nawal Hijazi	Hikaro Makiba	Makiba Hikaru
Sobhi Eit	Vega Al Kabir	Vega Kyōsei Daiho
Omar El Chamamah	Al Qa’id Gandal	Gandal
	Ken	Ken [episode 68]
Rima Salameh-Haddad	Goro Makiba	Goro Makiba
	Roubina	Rubina
Sawsan Birkedar	Al Sayyeda Gandal	Lady Gandal
	Maria Fleed	Grace Maria Fried
Ismail Nahnouh	Boss	Boss
	Al Qa’id Boz	Ergos [episode 34]
Mohamad Hijazi	Secondary characters	N/A
Mohamad Haidar	Secondary characters	N/A
Riyad Yazbek	Al Wazir Dantos	Dantos
	Zoril Al Ibn	Zouril Ziya

Many of these artists, despite being very experienced in their different lines of work, whether in radio shows, theatre, or even cinema, were new to the voice-acting business, since there was little experience in Lebanon except for *Sindbad*, in which most of *UFO Robo Grendizer’s* voice actors were not associated. For instance, Hikaro’s voice (Hikaru in the Japanese version) was handed over to Nawal Hijazi, a first timer in dubbing,

discovered by Sobhi Abou Loghd. Lebanese artist Omar Chammah joined in the second season of the cartoon, passing from comedy roles for children to personifying the evil and iconic voice of Gandal, one of Vega's top lieutenants (Erhad Channel, 2017). Jihad El Atrach was recruited by Abdel Majeed Abou Laban for the role of the hero Dayski, who reveals himself as Doq Flead (the Prince of Fried) to fly the giant mechanical warrior/armour *Grendizer* against the invasion of Vega's armies. The late Aida Hilal (1925-1987), a very famous Egyptian actress who had performed in the well-known Lebanese motion picture movie *Mary the Sinner* in 1966, was also invited to the crew of the first season. Another important name was added to the list during the production phase: the collaboration with the famous singer Sammy Clark (Khalaf, 2017), who was chosen to be the lead performer for the credits songs (opening and closing). His fame grew even larger with his interpretation of the *UFO Robo Grendizer* lyrics, as he continues to perform the anime's songs, joining in celebrity the original performer Sasaki Isao in Japan.

The production team faced many challenges from a technical perspective, as the dubbing business was still in its early stages in Lebanon. Because of technological limitations, the voice-over technique involved the presence of all actors relevant to the same segment in the studio at the same time. Any mistake, mispronunciation, or slip-up by any of the voice actors would mean having to record the entire segment from the top once again. There was no computer or electronic assistance possible back then. Due to absences, sometimes because of shelling or security incidents in Beirut around the studio's neighbourhood, voice actors would be eventually replaced in a particular episode in order not to waste time in the production phase. This occurs in many segments for the characters of Vega, Gandal or Lady Gandal, for instance, whose voices vary in some episodes. In the early episodes, the voice-overs of the dubbing lack precision and accuracy and some clumsiness can be observed in a few dialogues and situations, before stronger consistency was observed over the course of the second season, as the producers noticed the huge success of the series.

Despite the shortcomings and the challenges of the production works, the show turned out to be a state-of-the-art adaptation, be it for the precision of the language conversion and the proficiency of the actors playing their characters.

2.2. A state-of-the-art “Arab” cartoon:

High proficiency of the adaptation into Arabic

According to El Atrash, “*Grendizer’s* creator [wrongfully referring to Nagai Gō in that capacity] told me personally that the Lebanese version of *Grendizer* is much better than the original Japanese version and the other dubbed versions” (KaizuLand, 2012). The dubbing work was actually taken very seriously by the producers and professional artists who joined the show. Director Wiam El Seaidi pointed to the fact that “Lebanese actors had this great ability of living the role. Other voice actors in other Arab countries tried to replicate our work but never succeeded. They were real actors playing their role fully” (Future Tv, 2018a). This, noticeably, stands among the success factors of the anime with the Lebanese audience, followed by the Arab viewership.

The high proficiency of the language conversion from English into Arabic is linked to the significant engagement of the Arts Federation, which managed the difficult tasks of translating the cartoon, matchmaking the characters and the artists’ voices and recording the dubbing of the original show in Arabic. As a result, the cartoon played a role in spreading what was considered as the “correct Arabic language” to the Arab audience throughout the region, according to journalist Faysal Abbas (Abbas, 2005). Ten years later, journalist Ahmad Adnan highlighted that “the level of the Arabic language in *Grendizer* is spot on and of high calibre, which provided richness to the cartoon series in that period, whereas we lack such proficiency today” (Adnan, 2015). According to Lebanese TV host Zaven Kouyoumdjian, the cartoon “helped bring the children of the Arab world closer to the classical Arabic language and helped them master it” (Future TV, 2018b). In multiple occasions, El Atrash expresses how very proud he is for his contribution to the educational purpose of the cartoon within Arab societies:

The *Grendizer* series was a great work in the Japanese cultural world, which was transmitted to us so that we could translate it into a well suited language to a very high degree. Both the language and the emotions were well framed, as well as the principles of fighting for the good against oppression, the enemy, and evil. These are values that we must root in the minds of children and citizens to make them human beings committed to their homeland, culture and values [...]. In addition to the entertainment and cultural aspects of the cartoon, it disseminated the beauty of the Arabic language, which could be engaged in by children and adolescents because it was used in an attractive and captivating way, while remaining fun. (Saudi Television Cultural Channel, 2015)

One example can be given in regards to the sophisticated resort to the Arabic lexicon in the very first episode:⁵ after Dayski uncovers the imminent attack of the Vega forces, he runs in the fields, shouting: “I refuse to accept this”. The Arabic adaptation used the expression “Arfoudou an Artadiya Hadha”, from the verb “Irtada” (‘to choose, embrace’), whereas much simpler linguistic formulas exist at the children level. We can present another example using a segment in episode 2,⁶ where Dr Amoon narrates to Kouji Kabuto the secret story of his adopted son Dayski, revealing that he is in fact the Prince of the planet Flead (Fried in Japanese). In Arabic, the performance of Palestinian producer Ghanem El Dejjani is outstanding and carries the *gravitas* of the tragedy, helped by the remarkably elaborated level of Arabic’s lexicon (for a children’s cartoon). The dubbing performance, in line with the tradition of the Arab *hakawati*,⁷ accentuates the rendering of the tragedy and accelerates the assimilation of the story by the audience, while projecting a colossal load of empathy to the plot (Alameddine, 2008).

The audience will further identify with the cartoon’s hero correlating his narrative line and role with the context of a tragic period during which the anime was initially broadcast. As the people of Lebanon were going through a destructive civil war, children watching the show would look up to a hero figure that had the power of restoring peace and justice onto his, and figuratively, their, shattered world.

3. Contextualising the arrival of *UFO Robo Grendizer* in 1978 Lebanon: Real and imaginary wars and invasions

“*Grendizer* was very much appreciated in the region because it was a very credible program. It resonated so deeply with the context of the region”, said El Atrash in a 2016 television interview (MTV Lebanon, 2016). A decade earlier, the show’s star had pointed to the “context of the broadcast of the program, as we were enduring a war back then and the entire Arab world was suffering from the occupation of Palestinian territories. And suddenly comes along *Grendizer* and the values he represents relevant to peace seeking, the defence of one’s nation, and the resistance facing one’s enemies” (Abbas, 2005).

⁵ Episode 1, *Kouji Kabuto and Doq Flead* (same title for both Japanese and Arabic editions)

⁶ Episode 2, title in Japanese ‘Ah! My Land That Was So Green’; title in Arabic: *Ô Green Earth*.

⁷ The *hakawati* or storyteller derived from the Arabic word *hekaya* and literally means the one who tells stories. A *hakawati* is a teller of tales, myths and fables, a storyteller, an entertainer. In the old days, villages had their own *hakawatis*, but the great ones left their homes and travelled around the country to earn their living.

At the time this animation was broadcast in Lebanon before being exported to other Middle Eastern countries, Lebanon is in the middle of a bloody civil war. The conflict roots in how political forces consider the country's geopolitical role, whether it should support the Palestinian armed resistance⁸ standing up against Israel or maintaining Lebanon away from the Israeli-Arab conflict.⁹ As there is no formal history book in Lebanon covering this bloody period, each camp continues to cultivate and transmit its own narrative as representing the most patriotic and nationalist stand.

The Palestinian presence in Lebanon resulted from the Israeli occupation of Palestine (Morris, 1994) from both wars of 1948 (what Arabs call the *Nakba*; Barthe, 2018) and 1967, which is referred to in Arab culture as the *Naksa*¹⁰ (Nuseiba, 2017; Tahhan, 2018), and which both led to large displacements of populations, with Palestinian refugees ending up fleeing to neighbouring countries. The Israeli attack of June 1967 added up to the humiliation of the Arab armies, which lost the Syrian Golan, the Egyptian Sinai, East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the West Bank in just six days (Cypel, 2017). The Palestinian armed factions would later be expelled from Jordan during the Black September attack in 1970, leading most of the Palestinian paramilitary to relocate in Lebanon. From there, the Palestinian and pro-Palestinian groups intensified their attacks against Israeli-occupied territories, raising armed resistance as a strategy to demand Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories (UN Security Council Resolution 242, 1967)¹¹ and recognise the right to return¹² for all the refugees who were expelled by the several waves of conflict. Thus, Lebanon was ideally located and politically riped for a proxy war with Israel, fuelling a deep cleavage as to the Palestinian presence and action (Picard, 1988), in a context of heavy regional interference. Militiae eventually took the streets, defending each camp, and hell broke loose in Lebanon for 15 long years (Picard, 1988; Kassir, 1994), with its indiscriminate shelling, massacres of entire neighbourhoods or villages, ethnic cleansing, car bombs, and kidnappings (Ictj, 2013).

⁸ Present on Lebanese soil under the umbrella of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), to which the 1969 Cairo Agreement granted the right to pursue armed struggle against Israel. The PLO was supported by Lebanese and Palestinian leftist, communist, Marxist, progressive, and pan-Arab formations, with the financial support of various Arab countries.

⁹ The position of mainly right-wing Christian formations, like the Kataeb/Phalanges Party and the National Liberal Party.

¹⁰ *Naksa* means 'setback' in Arabic and refers to the Arab defeat of the 1967 Six-Day War against Israel.

¹¹ UN Security Council Resolution 242, S/RES/242, 22 November 1967, expressed the "inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war" and demanded the "withdrawal of Israel's armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict" (Point 1§i).

¹² This right was enshrined in UN General Assembly Resolution 194, A/RES/194 (III), 11 December 1948.

In June 1982, in the middle of the Lebanese civil war, the Israeli army invaded Lebanon and reached Beirut, the capital, in a matter of days, aiming at weakening the Palestinian resistance and expelling the armed factions outside the country to take out the military threat from its northern border. The Palestinian *force de frappe* would eventually relocate to Tunis, but new local and regional paramilitary actors stepped in, such as Hizbullah, which formed in 1985 (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002; Norton, 2007), keeping the idea of military resistance very much alive for the next decades.

The Israelis eventually withdrew from Beirut a few months later, but kept a strip in Southern Lebanon under occupation as a buffer zone (10% of the Lebanese territory) to protect northern settlements in Israel from attacks. The invasion was very destructive, with massive violations of international humanitarian law and the occurrence of war crimes and crimes against humanity, not to forget torture acts, inhuman and degrading treatments in the occupied territory, namely in the well known Khiam prison (Bechara, 2003) operated by Lebanese collaborators, under Israeli supervision. Israel would withdraw from Southern Lebanon in May 2000, maintaining an armed presence in some southern pockets claimed by the Lebanese authorities as falling under its sovereignty.

3.1. Embracing resistance

This rough history fostered and rooted the concept of armed resistance within the Lebanese and Palestinian psyche, in addition to other Arab societies sympathising with the cause in defending one's homeland against an armed invasion. In a 2018 interview, El Atrash stresses how his "generation inside universities was the generation of the *Nakba*. We were demonstrating and expressing our Arab nationalist views back then [...] For us, the *Nakba* of [the planet] Flead was itself the *Nakba* of Palestine" (Future Tv, 2018b). In this very particular landscape, the atomic mushrooms drawn by the artists of Tōei Dōga in *UFO Robo Grendizer* anime have a very different signification for Arab producers and artists, who incidentally conveyed it to the Arab audiences watching the show, thus embracing a particular sense of identification and appropriation.

The makers of the Arabic version of *UFO Robo Grendizer* clearly refer to the influence of this tragic local and regional context in how they proceeded to the conversion of the anime, thus actively participating in the identification process with the hero alien/robot and his fellow allies ready to sacrifice their lives to save Earth. While addressing *Grendizer* devotees in 2012, El Atrash remembers:

there was real work to adapt the content as well as the dubbing techniques as much as the prevailing conditions back then would allow us to do so. When we started dubbing *Grendizer*, Lebanon was in a civil war and we were very socially affected by this situation, just as we were affected by what was happening in other Arab societies such as Palestine. This impacted our work by which we sought the use of the right linguistic expressions [...] that characterized our daily lives and experience in a time of great suffering for the Lebanese society and its immediate surroundings (*True Gaming, 2012a*).

Speaking with an audience of *aficionados*, also in 2012, the artist explained how

at that time, Lebanon was undergoing a devastating civil war. And we were all in solidarity with our homeland that was bleeding and torn apart [...]. We were worried for our country and grateful to whoever would come to our rescue to try to stop this destructive conflict. Thus, my interpretation of *Grendizer* stemmed from my true love for my homeland and for my country, where I lived, thus projecting myself into the situation of Doq Flead who had just lost his homeland by an invasion from space (*KaizuLand, 2012*).

As such, El Atrash considers that “the story of *Grendizer* resembles our story” (MTV Lebanon, 2016). On a related note, performer Sammy Clark considers in a 2018 interview that this anime carries a “message”. “In that period”, he said, “the world was crumbling, people were living through periods of wars, and they needed a hero”, who eventually appeared to “express our rage in that particular context and to give us a glimpse of hope” (Future Tv, 2018c).

Hence, for a significant part of the Lebanese and Palestinian cultures,

Grendizer represented the struggle of the Arab people against colonialism and aggression, [as] the persons behind the Arabic text [of the anime] come from a background of those who fought for the independence and sovereignty of their homeland. Most of the Arab world was going through difficult circumstances. There were strong colonial powers that were eager to control the region [...] before it was met with revolutions and uprisings. So *Grendizer* became an integral part of this history and this heritage. The persons who fine-tuned the main lines of the story were aware that there is nothing more valuable to the heart of man than his homeland, his independence, and his freedom. Even as [part of] the story takes place in outer space, I still feel that the outer space in the cartoon has become part of our homeland [...] as you thrive to defend it and prevent it from being conquered by the enemy, either real or imaginary (*As Sabah Newspaper, 2013*).

For El Atrash, this cartoon is

a phenomenon that affects all generations and all social classes [...], who have identified

with *Grendizer* because its character represents the human condition in all of its aspects, and it is something really important. Doq Fleed and Dayski: they are us; people seeking freedom, people set on protecting their homeland and building their society” (*True Gaming*, 2012a).

3.2. Embracing sacrifice

This urge can come at a high cost, as the anime series doesn’t shy away from the idea of sacrifice in the realm of duty and war. In episode 49,¹³ Doq Fleed reunites with his sister Maria [Grace Maria in the original version] who, like him, survived the Vega attacks and ended up on Earth. A flashback takes the viewers back to the moment when Doq Fleed decides, in a split of a second, to abandon his sister calling for his help, as he rushes away planning to seize the super robot *Grendizer* from the hands of the Evil Vega, to prevent further destruction through this ultimate machine.

It is interesting to note an important amendment in the French version from the original version, in which Doq Fleed asks Maria forgiveness before running off. In the French version, the producers felt this act needed justification, as *le Prince d’Euphor* asks Maria (Phénicia in the French version) to “stay with the preceptor”. This posture of the French version radically downplays the sacrificial aspect of the situation, displaying a reassured hero who feels his sister is already in good hands and can focus on getting back into the ring of fire. In the Arabic version, Doq Fleed just utters the name “*Grendizer*”, concentrating all his energy, focus and intent on getting the robot, even if it means losing his sister, who’s just meters away.

In many of the anime’s episodes, the notion of self-sacrifice is invoked, whether the act is actually carried through or not. In episode 73,¹⁴ Doq Fleed decides to engage in a final battle alone after his comrades discovered where the Vega headquarters are located, in order to avoid putting his friends’ lives at risk. As he flies away from Earth, he enounces a poetic testimony praising the planet and his adoptive father: “the only way to thank you is to offer my life to this Earth”, announces Doq Fleed to his inner self.¹⁵ His self-sacrificial plan is ruined by Kouji Kabuto, who catches up with him, forcing him back to base, so they can plan the final attack “all together”.

¹³ Episode 49, titled in both Japanese and Arabic editions ‘I saw my brother in the red sunset’.

¹⁴ Episode 73, title of the episode in the Japanese edition: ‘In the name of the beautiful Earth’; title in Arabic: ‘Grateful to this wonderful Earth’.

¹⁵ Episode 73, at 18’29”.

The most poignant act of sacrifice of the series is Doq Fleed's former fiancée, Roubina, daughter of evil King Vega. Roubina discovers that Doq Fleed is still alive and joins him towards the end of the series, to take him back to his planet and fulfil a promise of peace. The happy ending does not occur; she is killed by Minister Zoril, as she was protecting Doq Fleed, dying in his arms.¹⁶

3.3. Embracing—not so imaginary—emotions

UFO Robo Grendizer series plays out the strong side of emotions, specifically in its Arabic adaptation, striking considerations related to real life for the generations watching it back then, such as the fear of occupation, the sense of loss, the mourning of parents and loved ones, the state of exile, etc. The Lebanese and Palestinian voice actors were successful in expressing the entire range of sentiments carried by the series. They were “sincere”, notes El Atrash in a 2012 interview (*True Gaming*, 2012a). Hence the show “entered the hearts of people”: “through *Grendizer*, everyone sides with the Good versus combating Evil”. For El Atrash, “our war memories remind us of the stubbornness of the Lebanese spirit, who never surrendered in the past and shall never surrender in the future” (Al Kout Tv, 2016), remembering the ordeal of troubled times.

The attachment to the Grendizer figure is very present in the heart of many Arab societies. In Iraq, a statue of the super robot was erected in Bagdad in 2012: “there is not a single person in Iraq who does not know or love this anime”, said one of the artists who worked on the piece (*True Gaming*, 2012b). Similar testimonies are countless, and can be picked up across the media coverage of cultural events related to the anime universe throughout the Arab world. In Egypt, hundreds of the show's devotees attended in 2009 a gathering at the Cairo Opera House hosting for the first time Nagai Gō, while many were disappointed not to have been able to get in (Charbel, 2010). Interviewed by *Egypt Independent* newspaper, a 24-year-old fan, Alaa Eddin Abdallah, said: “My favourite [cartoon character] is Grendizer, because he's the most futuristic and powerful, I've been captivated by this cartoon since I was six years old” (Charbel, 2010). For Racha El-Saadaoui, who grew up in Lebanon during the civil war, “Grendizer shaped her entire childhood: ‘It was such a beautiful escape from a horrible childhood in terms of the

¹⁶ Episode 72, at 16'45”, title in the Japanese edition: ‘In the name of the beautiful Earth’; title in Arabic: ‘A citizen from another planet’.

insecurity of the war, and all the things that children don't really understand, but still feel impacted by" (Tashkandi, 2019).

Mirroring the depth of historic tragedies and ongoing slaughters within that specific period, *UFO Robo Grendizer* reflected a set of representations that constructed the image of an iconic, invincible, undefeated and just force, pushing back invaders and evilness. As Arab viewers endured the chronicles of defeat and humiliation in real life, they looked up to Grendizer, this imaginary ally, as they projected onto its fictional universe the antidotes of their frustrations, hopes, and dreams.

4. *Grendizer*, a lost "Arab" hero? Or, the icon defending the underdog

4.1. A figure of Humanity fighting for Peace

Unlike many other (classic) heroes, Dayski/Doq Fleed actually hates war and would rather live in peace caring for cows and horses on the ranch, playing guitar and contemplating his lost planet when looking up at the sky. In the first episode, Dayski is devastated by the news of the Vega Armies reaching his new homeland as he warns those around him that "they" have come to destroy us. He is torn between his urge to live peacefully and the need to resist the incoming invasion. As he realises that there is no other thing to do than unearthing the super robot, Dayski runs off through the fields and laments on his destiny.¹⁷ Despite not being from planet Earth in the formal sense in the anime, Dayski represents all the features and qualities of what a human being can achieve. Peace, tolerance, coexistence, and forgiveness are among the main features carried by the *UFO Robo Grendizer* anime, as the plot unfolds episode after episode. According to journalist Ahmad Adnan, the character of Doq Fleed represents "a unique tribute to humanity. He doesn't end up defending planet Earth from a vengeful perspective despite the killing of his parents by the Vega Armies and the destruction of his planet Fleed [Fried]. Rather, his action is fuelled by the desire of defending the good people of Earth" (Adnan, 2015), whom sheltered him and cared for him after his dramatic escape.

Adapted into Arabic by leftist artistic figures tied together by Arab nationalism and the Palestinian cause, they managed to preserve the anime's original features as an odyssey based on poetry, romance, bravery, courage, and heroism. Yet, *UFO Robo Grendizer* also contains, already in several episodes of the original Japanese version, religious references, namely to God and the Creator. These references, in the Arabic

¹⁷ Episode 1, *op. cit.*, sequence from 11'00" to 12'35".

version, were embraced and culturally readapted on the basis the cultural and religious education and context of the Lebanese and Palestinian figures (Muslim as well as Christian) behind the anime's adaptation. Theist references in the anime—even by Dayski the alien—celebrating the beauty of the universe endowed by the “Creator” were calibrated and aligned with the diversity and the plurality of Middle Eastern societies, home to a large scope of religious and sectarian communities. The fact that the show was adapted into Arabic in Lebanon, land of minorities in the Middle East with 18 communities officially recognised, must have accelerated the consensus-making process in the initial adaptation phases of the cartoon.

The place of religion, however, remains a footnote in the show, which highlighted much more salient features, such as friendship and comradeship. These qualities are celebrated as core values in the battle against the oppressors, starting with the long lasting friendship between Dayski and Kouji, despite rough and bumpy starts.

That said, it is interesting to see how the show introduces some nuances regarding those who side with Good or Evil. In *UFO Robo Grendizer*, the two factions are not hermetically shut from one another. Many Vega commanders are shown as fundamentally good persons and are welcomed benevolently at some point by the defenders of Earth. The tears of Vega's Minister of Science Zoril as he loses his son in battle¹⁸ actually “humanises” the character, as the show insists on the “good” in the universe. In episode 71,¹⁹ Vega Commander Moros from planet Moros turns out to be one of Dayski's best friends during his Fleeed (Fried) era, as Dayski had saved his life during Vega's attack against Planet Moros. Rather than finishing a weakened and wounded Doq Fleeed at the term of the battle, Moros heals him from a past wound and lifts off to blow himself away from Earth in a sacrificial move. Moreover, the rejection of revenge is a constant quality in the acts of Doq Fleeed in the anime. Many Vega commanders are treated as brethren as they are talked out of the absurdity of their actions. Commander Minao is sheltered, treated, and invited to stay at the Ranch for as long as she likes, before Vega general Blaki terminates her for treason.²⁰

If Dayski represents the humane conduct and behaviour, his adoptive father Dr Amoon symbolises Humanity's conscience. Amoon, who runs the space research centre, is a man of science and peace who nearly crumbles to Vega's robots attacks when he is

¹⁸ Episode 69, title in Japanese: ‘Father Offers an Aurora of Love’; title in Arabic: ‘The ordeal of Zoril’.

¹⁹ Episode 71, title in Japanese: ‘Tragedy of Elite Bodyguard Mors’; title in Arabic: ‘Goodbye, dearest of friends’.

²⁰ Episode 9, title in Japanese: ‘Beyond Unforgiven Anger’; title in Arabic: ‘Conquer the forbidden rage’.

reluctant in pressing a switch that would turn his research and scientific centre into a military base to safeguard the world against the invaders' armies: "I don't want the centre to become an instrument of war", laments Dr Amoon before eventually turning on the switch.²¹ Defeating the Vega armies commands that science and technology be developed in order to strike the final blow. For El Atrash, "Grendizer is the ultra-sophisticated robot that managed to escape. This concentration of technology represents the scientific progress, which brings an important dimension to this story" (*KaizuLand*, 2012), to be eventually invested in warfare and armed resistance for survival.

4.2. Armed resistance and restoring balance of power and justice

The centrality of the themes of invasion and external threats in *UFO Robo Grendizer* echoing the reality of the Palestinian and Lebanese ordeal established a mirroring effect, thus durably installing the program in the minds of younger generations watching the show back then. When TV host Zaven Kouyoumdjian asks El Atrash if *Grendizer* represents "an act of resistance", the actor cannot agree more: "there is absolutely no doubt in this, given the period we were living in back then" (Future Tv, 2018b), as the artist is very proud "to have contributed to the attachment of youth towards their homeland and country" (*Cinerama Ifilm*, 2011).

Facing military invasion and the threat to one's homeland, the sense of duty calls to defend it under a universally claimed principle. In the Middle East, this principle has historically taken the charged form of "armed resistance". Whether secular, national, Islamic, or Christian, the emergence of armed *militiae* or armed groups separate from States is a historic constant in contemporary Middle East.

Coming back to the anime, it is very interesting to notice that the main hero (Doq Fleed) and his pals (Kouji, Hikaro, Maria, Dr Amoon) have an unclear status, as viewers could assume that they do not belong to military personnel but form a sort of independent resistance group. In the first episode, as Dayski interprets the Red Moon in the night sky as being a sign of an imminent attack by Vega on Earth, he warns to "alert the armed forces to be ready for the attack" (ep. 1), not feeling initially involved in this fight, as explained in a previous section. The squad initiated at the space centre is actually formed of civilians caught up by war and who use advanced technology to defend their planet against invaders.

²¹ Episode 42, title in Japanese: "Crisis! The Research Institute To The Rescue!"; title in Arabic: "The Space Research Center".

Dayski and Maria are aliens who belonged to a peaceful planet. Kouji is a scientist who manufactured the T-FO, a rudimentary (and initially unarmed) flying saucer, and the son of a renown scientist.²² Hikaro is a farmer and the daughter of the ranch owner Dambi Makiba [Makiba Danbei in the original version], who insisted on stepping into the fight after she was trained to become the pilot of an aerial warcraft (see the next section).

Under a legal terminology, what the French version refers to as “La patrouille des aigles” (‘Squadron of Eagles’, all four heroes with their war aircrafts)²³ would be considered an armed resistance group, siding along the Japanese Armed Forces. They are independent and do not seem to be taking orders from any State or authority. In *UFO Robo Grendizer*, State authorities, the military and formal actors are side tracked and shown powerless facing the ufos and super robots sent to destroy Earth. They are seen in many episodes being wiped away while calling for Grendizer’s help and support. Hence, the anime perfectly mirrors, here again, a familiar situation in the Middle East, where States exist alongside local or regional *militiae* and armed groups that resort to armed violence for a specific cause.

For El Atrash, “Dayski finds on Earth his second home and was ready to sacrifice himself in order to defend it” (*KaizuLand*, 2012), which is aligned with the Lebanese and Palestinian narrative when defending Lebanon from Israel’s military invasions of 1978 and 1982. Before the invasion, Dayski’s real identity is kept secret, as he has settled as a ranchman in Dambi Makiba’s farm. But he is compelled to unearth *Grendizer* in the first episode and returns to his original identity of Doq Fleed, switching from the status of ranch civilian to the one of resistant, as evil super robots start attacking the planet. Hence, it is interesting to observe the relatively quick assimilation of the anime’s storyline into the heavy warring landscape in Lebanon and its surroundings in that particular period. According to El Atrash, Dayski

fled to Earth and meets its inhabitants. He finds important values such as efforts for peace, harmony, prosperity, scientific progress. [...] It is then that the invaders attack the Earth and Grendizer is in a position to defend it across the episodes throughout the different wars between the invaders and the resistance fighters [...]. So, Grendizer represents anyone who loves his homeland, whoever is willing to sacrifice himself for the defence of his nation. (*KaizuLand*, 2012)

²² It is to be added, though, that Kouji Kabuto had already been the hero of *Mazinger Z*, and the pilot of the super robot of this animated series, hence he was already trained to warfare.

²³ The concept was specifically coined for the French version and does not exist in the original Japanese version, nor in the Arabic edition.

In a 2015 interview, El Atrash addresses the issue of violence in emergency situations:

Grendizer was certainly violent, but he instilled the value of citizenship among the viewers, and attachment to homeland, to family. This family around Grendizer was united, its members were working together, resisting together against the enemy and the invader from outer space. It nurtured a very good spirit, a spirit that still continues today. (Saudi Television Cultural Channel, 2015)

Replying to a question on whether *Grendizer* was a show that “incited violence”, El Atrash answered:

on the contrary, Grendizer in fact fought against violence as it defended the Earth from invaders. It’s a show calling for peace. [...] No other cartoon holds so dearly the love of one’s country and homeland and calls for defending it such as *Grendizer*. (Al Arabiya Tv, 2017)

Another idea the show holds dearly is the notion of Justice. Sammy Clark declared in an interview in 2015: “my message through *Grendizer* to the world was to side with the weak” (Ben Rahmoun, 2015). From a military perspective, the disadvantage went clearly to the Palestinian factions and allied *militiae* in the face of Tsahal²⁴ weapons, tanks, and superior aerial firepower. Hence, the military characteristics of *UFO Robo Grendizer* nourished Arab dreams of holding such weaponry to balance the Israeli military superiority in order to restore some justice in the face of the invaders. In a 2018 interview, director Wiam El Seaidi stated: “Back then, one would look for heroes, for heroic acts, the super human, the one who beats up the bad guys. Along came *Grendizer* with this strength. His strength also came from the kids who loved him and loved his strong personality” (Future Tv, 2018a).

The forces of Vega represent the archetype of the peoples’ enemy, the archetype of colonialism seeking to control resources for the continuous expansion of its empire, a narrative that resonates intensively within Arab audiences. Without Grendizer, the peoples of Earth would have been crushed by the military and technological superiority of the Vega armies. In the first episode of the show, general Blaki sneers at the encountered T-FO piloted by Kouji as “an insignificant spacecraft”.²⁵ As the initial Vega attack is fended by Doq Flead who intervenes on board Grendizer, the balance of power is suddenly restored, so that Good can vanquish Evil. Hence, Grendizer’s weapons constitute a decisive factor as armed

²⁴ Tsahal is another denomination for the Israeli Army.

²⁵ Episode 1, *op. cit.*, sequence from 12’50” to 13’00”.

resistance is organised against Vega's offensives. The adaptation of the weapons' names and commands, not just in the Arabic version, greatly participated to the heroic posture of Doq Fleed as "the resistant", while the concept of resistance had come to follow a life of its own in the region. As reflected by TV host Zamen Kouyoumdjian, "this cartoon, which was born but then was forgotten in Japan, actually turned into a legend in the Middle East. Perhaps it is due to the need of this region for superheroes who would keep the bad guys off their land" (Future Tv, 2018c).

In addition to conveying the notions of fear, invasion, armed resistance, and justice, *UFO Robo Grendizer* can also be seen as an agent of modernisation. As the story unfolds and the characters evolve in their respective roles, a gender perspective can be identified at a time when equality between men and women was not a significant priority in the Middle East.

4.3. *Grendizer* as agent of modernisation: Early women's empowerment

The gender balance in the show does not go unnoticed as the strike team from *Grendizer's* side turns out to be formed of half men (Dayski and Kouji) and half women (Hikaro and Maria). The cartoon does not start in this format. The macho face-à-face between Dayski and Kouji in the initial episodes clearly hints at the patriarchal mentality still *en vogue* in the 1970s, not to mention that the scientists in the space research centre (and their director) are all men. Viewers can also remember the multiple times Dayski slapped women, whether a little disoriented girl²⁶ or even his friend Hikaro.²⁷

Maria, the sister of Doq Fleed, doesn't appear before episode 49 of the series, while Hikaro appears at first to viewers as a shy and submissive farm girl, attracted to (alpha male) Dayski (with classic jealousy moments involving Kouji) and obeying her tyrannical father. But as the plot develops, Hikaro's character will increasingly grow. As she enters a state of rebellion, she sets track to becoming a valuable and esteemed addition to the strike team against Vega's armies. "I want my life to have a value" she replies to Dayski when he tries to talk her out of putting herself in harm's way.²⁸ In episode 23, she discovers Dayski's identity as being Doq Fleed, the pilot of *Grendizer* and, a few episodes

²⁶ Episode 12, same title in Japanese and Arabic: 'A Girl crossing the Rainbow Bridge'.

²⁷ Episode 23, title in Japanese: 'Hikaru's Screaming Torrent'; title in Arabic: 'Hikaro is saved through the waterfalls'.

²⁸ Episode 37, title in Japanese: 'Bet Everything on The Wings of Life!'; in Arabic: 'Attach wings to your life', 7'28".

later, resiliently faces off general Blaki at the edge of a cliff (ep. 27),²⁹ before the evil Vega lieutenant is finally eliminated by Doq Fleed. Eventually, after a heroic act taking over the spaceship from wounded Kouji,³⁰ she will train and enrol in the anti-Vega squad alongside Grendizer, in charge of her own spaceship, the Marine Spacer or *Al Silah al Milahi*, in Arabic, in episode 41.³¹

The entrance of Maria in the last third of the saga balances out the gender aspect of the anti-Vega squad team. Very different from Hikaro, Maria is stubborn, combative, and independent, while making sure to project her femininity at all times. Kouji's character will learn this the hard way, as Maria will often humiliate him in sports like challenges or duels. In his analysis of the gender perspective in this anime series, journalist Ahmad Adnan writes:

"I think [the anime's producers and writers] wanted, through the creation of *Grendizer*, to apologise from the poor and stereotyped depiction of women in *Mazinger [Z]* [...] with the introduction of two new characters in *Grendizer* in the form of Hikaro, the daughter of Dambi the owner of the White Birch Ranch, and Maria the sister of Duke Fleed [...] the resilient and modern woman, but at the same time fully retaining her femininity as integral part of her character. (Adnan, 2015)

According to the journalist, the intent behind the rebellious Hikaro and the liberated Maria would have been to "undo the unfortunate link between femininity and weakness through the character of Faten [Sayaka] in the *Mazinger [Z]* anime and replace it with a link between femininity and strength and resilience" (Adnan, 2015).

Also from Evil's side, the viewer can notice many Vega women commanders, as strong-headed Lady Gandal, who plays a major role in strategising and planning a possible fate for Doq Fleed. Her character will prove even more prominent as she nearly ends the Great Vega himself by siding with Doq Fleed in exchange of a promise of asylum on Earth, where she seeks to live in peace.³²

Gender empowerment, though slow and partial, blended perfectly in the Arab context, which gave the series a modernist aspect on the place of women in society and served well

²⁹ Episode 27, title in Japanese: 'Onslaught! Grendizer'; in Arabic: "The counter attack of Grendizer", sequence from 18'05" to 18'10".

³⁰ Episode 37, *op. cit.*, sequence from 17'50" to 22'00".

³¹ Episode 41, title in Japanese: 'Marine Spazer, Intervene!'; in Arabic: 'Launch of Marine Spacer'.

³² Episode 73, *op. cit.*

what will develop into the gender balance issue in the decades following the initial airing of the program.

In fine, the futuristic aspect of this anime wasn't just limited to the technology and the weaponry, but also encapsulated what can be considered inescapable social evolutions today, in particular when looking at the combat for equality between men and women. It is the heavy concentration of social messages in *UFO Robo Grendizer* that eventually forged a name of legend and, for the Arab region, a cultural icon.

5. *Grendizer*, a contemporary legend and an “Arab” icon

Despite being one of the earliest Japanese anime imported after *Sindbad*, *UFO Robo Grendizer* “overshadowed the other cartoons of the same period” (Future Tv, 2018a). Literally hundreds of other Japanese anime flooded Arab television in the 1980's with some levels of success (Reddit, 2018). But no other than *Grendizer* will become an Arab pop culture reference. As Ahmad Adnan explains,

Grendizer isn't just a regular cartoon series, even when comparing it to [other similar shows] that rely on the same very simple narrative: bad guys coming from outer space to invade Earth or destroy it, or an evil figure wanting to control the world. The story in *UFO Robo Grendizer* is much more sophisticated and appears much richer and more realistic. (Adnan, 2015)

“We have sowed a very deep and specific culture” (Al Arabiya Tv, 2017), professes El Atrash, as Zaven Kouyoumdjian pointed to the fact that *Grendizer* “is still celebrated as a rooted symbol for culture, education, and entertainment, that is being transmitted from generation to generation” (Future Tv, 2018c).

As such, this section will highlight two of the stars—still among us today—who contributed in forging the *Grendizer* myth. It will also feature a few of the artists who perpetuate the cult of this iconic robot throughout the Arab cultural scene.

5.1. Clark and El Atrash, the myth conveyors

Among the figures related to the iconic *Grendizer* is the singer and phenomenon Sammy Clark (born in 1948), who managed to assimilate the opening and closing themes of Kikuchi Shunsuke, the original composer of *UFO Robo Grendizer's* soundtrack. Unlike other versions (i.e. the Italian and French adaptations), the Arabic edition kept the

original music from the Japanese composer at all times and even maintained segments in some episodes in the original Japanese lyrics.

Holding a repertoire of 832 songs thanks to his chorister and opera voice, Clark had started to become famous based on his songs in foreign languages from the 1970s and also through anime credits such as *UFO Robo Grendizer*, *Treasure Island* anime series (1983) or *Takarajima* in the original Japanese version (1978), which was also adapted into Arabic, as mentioned before. When he was initially presented with the idea of performing the *UFO Robo Grendizer* theme, he hesitated, since he was mainly known for singing in English, French, and Italian and not particularly in Arabic (Ben Rahmoun, 2015). After he was invited to watch two episodes of the show, he was convinced he had to take on the challenge, and succeeded where three song performers had failed before him (Future Tv, 2018c).

The translation of the song's lyrics is different from the original Japanese, despite keeping the initial melodies from Kikuchi Shunsuke. Clark nailed the vocalising of the song in the Arabic rhythm, a performance that made the lyrics resonate with the stakes and contextual factors of the Arab world. "It's a song about Humanity and Civilisation", Clark explains in a 2015 interview (Ben Rahmoun, 2015).

Adding to that success was "the remarkable dubbing work and the powerful song" (Future Tv, 2018c) as expressed by the artist. Today, there is no festival or concert in which Sammy Clark performs where he is not requested to sing the *UFO Robo Grendizer* themes. "I now systematically start my shows with this song", admitted the celebrity singer to his TV interviewer in 2018 (Future tv, 2018c), as he is constantly invited to anime festivals and anime exhibitions throughout the Arab world. Like Sasaki Isao (born in 1942) in Japan,³³ the Lebanese artist has a special costume for when he performs the *UFO Robo Grendizer* melodies on stage, in order to please his huge fan base.

Another figure constantly celebrated for taking part in the Arabic adaptation of this anime series is the Lebanese artist, actor and director Jihad El Atrash (born in 1943). In 1978, at the time of the adaptation phase of *UFO Robo Grendizer*, he was already a senior collaborator within the local audio-visual scene, namely at the national Lebanese television channel, Télé Liban. He was invited to the dubbing works of *UFO Robo*

³³ Aside singing famous anime opening themes, Sasaki was/is at the same time a voice actor and, in those very years, he was the dubbing performer in Japanese of Hollywood stars such as Christopher Reeve (the protagonist of Richard Donner's *Superman*, 1978) and Sylvester Stallone (*Rocky* and *First Blood*).

Grendizer by Abdel Majid Abou Laban, with whom he had worked in previous radio programs. El Atrash was handed the main character and central hero of the show, the pilot of *Grendizer: Doq Fleed*, who arrived on Earth with his spaceship after his own planet was attacked and taken over by the armies of Vega.

His voice totally personified the deep emotions carried in the storyline, be they grief on the account of the character's personal tragedies (loss of his parents, his planet, his rank, being forced to fly *Grendizer* and defend the Earth against Vega) or joy (reuniting with his sister, long time childhood friends, a former lover, a former fiancée). But the main sensation El Atrash was able to project through his vocal skills, which struck a particular cord in the show's audience, was the rage he would throw at the alien assailants, namely when Doq Fleed would solicit *Grendizer's* weapons by voice command. El Atrash expressed many times how he had directly requested to specifically underline the attack mottos during the production phase.

The central message of the show, defending one's homeland, was further amplified with the use of an impeccable Arab lexicon and specific tag lines, most of which were added in the domestication process of the cartoon, as they were not included in the Japanese version. During the battles, El Atrash's voice would convey Doq Fleed's tenacity and determination against the Vega invaders with specific and unique war mottos. Among those, the famous "Al Laanatou Aalal Ghouzat", translated into 'Curse be upon the invaders'; "Al Waylou lil Mou'tadeen" ('Calamity be upon the aggressors'), "Al Waylou lil Ashrar" ('Calamity be on evil') or "Suhqan lil Ghuzat" ('Let's crush the invaders'), and other tag lines that conferred a particular and genuine signature to the hero character personified by El Atrash. In a shattered Middle Eastern context, the chosen lexicon and phrasing, though foreign to the anime's original spirit and therefore quite problematical in terms of respecting or neglecting the original values and formal aspects of the Japanese work, was consistent with the glorification of armed resistance against real life occupation.

According to television host Zaven Kouyoumdjian, El Atrash is the person "whose voice embodied the figure of the supernatural hero and granted him an authentic Arab spirit" (Future tv, 2018b). In many media occasions and cultural appearances, El Atrash would recount the anecdote of the Kuwaiti child he had welcomed with his family in his Lebanese village of Ras El Matn in the 1980s. The 6-year-old child, expecting to meet with *Grendizer*, or Dayski his pilot, was greeted by El Atrash the person, not the anime character. "His disappointment was so intense he started weeping and crying. When I

started to speak to him and inviting him into my home to watch some Grendizer episodes, the boy started to calm down. At the sound of my voice, he looked up at me and murmured with sudden brightness in his eyes: Dayski!?!?, before hugging me” (As Sabah Newspaper, 2013; Future Tv, 2018b). He had recognised the anime character voice and let his imagination do the rest.

“We took over Grendizer, his heroism, his superpowers. In each human being lies a Grendizer” (Al Kout Tv, 2016), explains El Atrash in a 2016 interview. A couple of years later, he pointed out to the fact that the battle embodied by the anime carried many layers of understanding, “especially with regard to Earth, to our planet. It carried many directions, both for the children and for adults, such as loving one’s homeland” (Future Tv, 2018b). The show echoed directly into the heart and minds of the Arab world plunged in conflicts: “with the Lebanese war, we were afraid for our country, no doubt in that. In days, we’d arrive at the studio with shelling not so far away” (Future Tv, 2018b).

The cartoon’s aura continues to resonate even today, as the drums of war are still active in the region. El Atrash expressed perplexity as to not knowing

where the Arab nation is heading. It seems that it is heading towards the abyss, which saddens us all and makes us all suffer. Lebanon itself has suffered from 25-30 years of violence, not to mention the destructive civil war [...] and that is what is happening in other Arab countries and in our immediate environment, which saddens me deeply. I am appalled by the fact that we are destroying our homelands, our culture, our language, our thinking, we are in the process of shattering everything in our Arab nation (Saudi Television Cultural Channel, 2015).

Jihad El Atrash and Sammy Clark continue to be invited by anime/manga and *UFO Robo Grendizer* fans in the Arab world, in particular in the Gulf countries, such as in Kuwait or Dubai (UAE), where active fan communities organise regular festivals and shows (*KaizuLand*,³⁴ *Comic Con Kuwait*,³⁵ *True Gaming*,³⁶ *First Saudi Comic Con*³⁷) to celebrate the super robot hero. Through them, the legend of *UFO Robo Grendizer* lives on in the minds of today’s adults who were watching the show in the 1980s and who are introducing the cartoon to their children, as, in different ways, also happens in other national contexts where this anime gained wide and deep success, especially in

³⁴ Instagram.com/kaizuland.

³⁵ Facebook.com/comicconkuwait.

³⁶ True-gaming.net/home.

³⁷ Facebook.com/events/jeddah-saudi-arabia/saudi-comic-con/1089259037886122.

Italy and France (Pellitteri, 2018 [1999]). It is also interesting to observe the nostalgia conveyed through this anime, whereas for the viewers from Lebanon, the broadcast was concomitant with shelling, war, and destruction. As such, one should not underestimate the strong sensations brought by the hero defender of the galaxies in the crucial period of a torn childhood.

5.2. Artists' depiction: an icon with a social agenda

This iconic phenomenon found its way in the arts and cultural scene, with activists resorting to the Grendizer figure to highlight the values of the cartoon and advocate for them in real life. In 2009, for the 30 years of the Arabic version of the show, an anime festival (*Beirut Animated*) was held in Lebanon with *UFO Robo Grendizer* as “the unifying figure for an entire generation of Lebanese who grew up during the country's bitter 15-year civil war” (Lutz, 2009). The poster for *Beirut Animated* featuring the iconic Grendizer (Lutz, 2009) was created by Samandal,³⁸ a volunteer-based non-profit organisation dedicated to the advancement of the art of comics in Lebanon and the rest of the world.

Taking action through arts and culture, younger Arab fellows and artists have used and continue to use to this day this anime character as a means to project the symbol of those defending the weak, the unprivileged, and the underdogs, despite basic copyrights infringements that are common in this part of the world. Within the underground artistic scene in Lebanon, we can refer to the group “Ashekman”, which is the Lebanese dialect for the French word “échappement” referring to cars' exhaust pipes. Born in 1983, Omar and Mohamad Kabbani, the twin brothers who founded the group, had watched *Grendizer* for the first time “in the mid-end 80s in shelters underground during the Lebanese civil war” (*Ale Montosi Blog*, 2016). As such, they resort to street graffiti, painting, rap and arts craft to express their thrive for social justice and denounce inequality and injustice in Lebanon and the world since 2003.

They justified the reference to the *UFO Robo Grendizer* character on the capital's large wall stressing on the fact that

during the Lebanese civil war in the late 1980s, we used to come out from the underground shelter just to watch the 5pm episode of *Grendizer* on the local TV station. He saved our planet from the evil powers and we used to look up to him as the people's champ. Nowadays we travel the world to paint our childhood hero, giving hope for the underdogs, in a world full of injustice (Ashekman, 2018).

³⁸ Samandalcomics.org.

According to the Kabbani brothers, “Lebanon is deeply corrupt and suffers from conflict and war. Grendizer gives hope. During the civil war, the children watched Grendizer on television and became attached to this character. Many youngsters today consider he is more important than Lebanese politicians” (Vincent, 2017). Quickly, the anime character became the twins’ mascot symbolising leadership and the people’s champion, and even appears in a mock shadow government project gathering all pop icon cartoons, with Grendizer in the centre of the Cabinet line-up (Ashekman, 2016).

A known graffiti from the twins stands in the streets of Beirut stating: “Lan Yamouta Shaabon Ladayhi Grendizer”, ‘A Nation that has Grendizer by its side cannot die’ (*Ale Montosi Blog*, 2016). Another, this time in Birmingham (UK), quotes a famous line from the Arabic opening credits of the anime performed by Sammy Clark: “Min Ajli Salamin Alal Ardi”, which celebrates Peace on Earth (*Ale Montosi Blog*, 2016). In 2016, they uncovered a new artistic addition of Grendizer to Arab street art in Kuwait (Streetartnews.com, 2016). The most recent Grendizer-related creation from Ashekman dates from 26 August 2019 in the form of a “*LeoDizer*”, Da Vinci’s Vitruvian man replaced with the super robot (Ashekman, 2019).

The twins also worked on a gigantic art project beaming a deep political and social message in Tripoli, a torn city in the past decade with clashes affecting two neighbourhoods, pro-Syrian regime Jabal Mohsen and anti-Assad quarter Bab Tebbene. Ashekman’s Peace Project in Tripoli was achieved in 2017, which involved painting the word “As Salam” or ‘Peace’ over 123 roofs across both neighbourhoods as a gesture to celebrate coexistence, peace, and security in the aftermath of the armed clashes (Ashekman, 2017; Daily Mail, 2017; Cnn, 2017).

In Jordan, Tamer Al Masri and Michael Makdah founded “Jo Bedu” (in reference to the spirit of the Bedouins)³⁹ in Amman, a “brand that captures the positive energy, voice, and spirit on their Arab culture”. Their agency has designed many items based on the popular Grendizer icon, which are sold in their store, from key chains, t-shirts, mugs and sketchbooks.⁴⁰ They were hugely successful and, as indicated on their website, all *UFO Robo Grendizer* elements are today out of stock. This group later joined graphic designer Mothanna Hussein (followed by Hadi Alaeddin) to open “Warsheh” (literally ‘workshop’ in Arabic) in 2011, a branding agency also based in Amman. The group’s aim is to “deal with political and social topics in their works and [...] also take a critical look at commerce

³⁹ <https://jobedu.com/pages/jobedu-faqs>.

⁴⁰ <https://jobedu.com/search?q=grendizer>.

[...] to send out messages to the world and spur new ideas".⁴¹ Many of the graphic works carrying the message of those artists pass through the iconic Grendizer figure, among which the very popular "Grendizer Poster" (Warsheh, 2014).

Peace-building, social justice and other sociopolitical mottos hence continue to be relayed through the *Grendizer* reference, which continues to be very much alive to this day.

Conclusion

In a famous Egyptian television show celebrating Jihad El Atrash, the host considered that *UFO Robo Grendizer* "has changed the lives of millions of people in the Arab world" (Cbc Egypt, 2018). According to El Atrash, the anime character "represents Arab Culture today, where it is now an icon, even though it was a non-Arab creation" (*True Gaming*, 2012).

In its Arabic adaptation, *UFO Robo Grendizer* has surpassed the initial expectations of its producers. Although the conversion works of the original Japanese version into Arabic had kept the Japanese phonetics, sites and cultural references, the cartoon has actually blossomed into a life of its own. As such, the domestication process of this character and of its whole narrative set was intimately connected to the Arab context and politics at the inception moment of the series, thus mirroring the deep preoccupations of the generations of that time. High exposure to violence, aggression, and injustice in the Middle East had established a hospitable environment for the super-powerful resistance figure and pro-justice hero.

Celebrated still, the Grendizer icon has been concentrating a true power of evocation related to specific Arab issues under the generic and universal themes of peace, war, occupation, and heroism. "When we see what we are enduring today, we can't help but thinking of Grendizer", highlights El Atrash (*Cinerama Ifilm*, 2011), reflecting the fears, worries but also hopes of overcoming these challenges the way Doq Flead could. According to art critic Ali Souly, the iconic character "accompanied many generations, and left an indelible imprint in the memory of the figure who filled their childhood and most beautiful years of their lives, at a time when they are developing courage, integrity, strength and self-confidence within the souls of those who will form the future generation" (Souly, 2018).

This show's power of evocation also echoes the nostalgia for an Arab unity through its language. The generation that enjoyed the hit anime lament today as to relinquishing

⁴¹ Warsheh's website, <https://everydayrebellion.net/warsheh>.

classical Arabic to the benefit of national dialects that are today used in today's dubbing work. Turkish series are adapted in Syrian dialect, Disney productions are rendered in Egyptian dialect, as cultural programs, shows, and performances are also growingly resorting to national dialects instead of classical Arabic. This deep trend is concomitant with the dismay in Arab nationalism as an ideology throughout the Arab world, in which the highlight on one's specific "dialect/language" is fuelling new patterns of narrow patriotism, whereas *UFO Robo Grendizer* was depicted as a defender of the Earth, hence engulfing all populations, religions, and cultures.

This contribution on the *UFO Robo Grendizer* phenomenon has its limitations and shortcomings, namely on the level of formal historic documentation. Unknown elements and even controversies continue to shake the narrow universe of the artists who took part in the show's adaptation into Arabic: how were decisions made?, who was the formal editor of the show?,⁴² who wrote the anime's Arabic song (Future Tv, 2018c)?,⁴³ why isn't Sammy Clarke credited in the anime's introduction? As such, the present work spurs a need to pursue further research relative to the Arabic adaptation era, accessing its official archives with the relevant stakeholders (Télé Liban, Arts Federation, etc.). Additional testimonies with eventually a deeper sociological insight into the anime's viewership could also form the next milestones for better understanding the *Grendizer* phenomenon, which still carries significance in relation to the quest for a better future in the Arab world.

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⁴² The question relevant to the actual role of Wiam El Seaidi in the production phase buzzed over social media and fan forums. This controversy forced many of the anime's artists to issue clarification statements, but this issue remains unclear.

⁴³ It is thought that M. Joseph Fakhoury (today deceased) initiated the song's lyrics, but a TV show uncovered the supposed role of M. Maarouf Sheikh El Ard (Syrian poet, born in 1918) as potentially the real author.

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Japanese Princesses in Chicago: Representations of Japanese Women in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Chicago Tribune* (1872)

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ABSTRACT

In December 1871, the Iwakura Mission was sent by the Meiji government to the US and Europe. One of the aims of the mission was the observation of foreign practices and technologies. If Japan wanted to suppress the Unequal Treaties and be considered a “first rank nation”, it had to adopt the “civilized” manners and rules of North America and Europe (Nish, 1998). Five Japanese girls, aged six to sixteen accompanied the Mission to be educated in the US for a ten-year period. Their presence didn’t go unnoticed by the American Press, and the articles reporting on their stay provided an opportunity to bring up broader themes on Japanese women and Japan.

*The five girls were the first women to officially represent Japan in the US. Identified by the American media as “Japanese Princesses”, their reception was confronted with the American image and understanding of Japan. This article analyses the representations of the five girls, and of Japanese women in general, in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Chicago Tribune* during the two months that the Iwakura Mission travelled eastward from San Francisco to Washington, via Chicago. I identify and analyse the recurring tropes: the girls’ social position, the craze they created among the Americans, their beauty, the exoticism of their kimono, the education they will receive in America. The newspapers’ representation of the girls are full of inaccuracies and mistakes, myths and exoticism. Nonetheless, the representations are overwhelmingly positive and the girls – as well as the whole of the Mission’s members – are warmly welcomed by the American press.*

KEYWORDS

Iwakura Mission; Japanese women; Japanese in America; *San Francisco Chronicle*; *Chicago Tribune*; Meiji Japan.

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The Iwakura Mission was sent by the Meiji government, reaching first America in December 1871 before continuing to Europe in August 1872. It followed a tradition of diplomatic missions starting in the first half of the 19th century by the Bakufu government (1192-1868) and the feudal lords. These missions, among other reasons, responded to a growing need felt by the Japanese intellectuals to experience first-hand the Western knowledge they had been discovering through books. Named after the Minister of the Right and leader of the mission, Iwakura Tomomi (1825-1883), the Embassy was the first

mission sent by the Meiji government. Its official goal was to renegotiate the Unequal Treaties signed in 1858 (Nish, 1998). However, the main and somewhat unofficial aim of the mission was the observation of the practices of the West. Both goals were linked. If Japan wanted to suppress the Unequal Treaties and be considered a “first rank” nation, it had to adopt the “civilised” manners and rules of the West.

The arrival of the Iwakura Mission in San Francisco did not go unnoticed; several newspapers articles mentioned the impressions left by the ‘Japanese Embassy’, as the American media named the Iwakura Mission. They were celebrated across the country, as one newspaper noted: ‘Let us, at least, shell out the oysters, pop the Champagne, ride through the burnt district, visit the cells of the convicted Aldermen, and have a little speech from the Mayor’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 8th February). Another newspaper, two weeks after their arrival, even criticised the over-the-top receptions that each city organised, trying to outdo the previous one the Mission visited: ‘the ambassadors (sic) looked like demi-gods receiving the incense of their worshippers’ (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 3rd February). Large celebrations and enthusiasm at the arrival of the Embassy became a ritual in each city they stopped across the US, where the Mission stayed until August 1872, before leaving for Europe.

The mission travelled for nearly two years, one more year than initially planned, with forty-eight members and accompanied by sixty students, among them five girls: Yoshimasu Ryōko (1858-n/a), Ueda Teiko (1858-n/a), Yamakawa Sutemasu (1860-1919), Nagai Shigeko (1862-1928) and Tsuda Umeko (1864-1929). The latter turned seven years old onboard the ship that was taking her to America in order to pursue a Western education. During the nearly three months of travel across ocean and land, the girls were in the charge of Mrs. DeLong, wife of the American Ambassador Charles DeLong (1832-1876) who accompanied the Iwakura Mission from Japan across the US. The two oldest girls, Yoshimasu Ryōko and Ueda Teiko, returned to Japan due to poor health and home sickness after spending just six months in Washington, where all five girls lived together with a governess. The other three girls were then sent to live with host families and would complete their education in the US. Tsuda Umeko developed a strong, affectionate bond with her host family, Charles Lanman (1819-1895) and Adeline (1824-1914), who instead of sending her to boarding school as originally planned, kept her with them and registered her in a local school.

The girls' mission was not dissimilar to the more general aim of the Iwakura mission: learning Western habits. The initiative of sending them to America was inscribed in the rising consciousness of the need for women's education as part of the modernisation of Japan (Nish, 1998: 11). The Emperor Meiji, commenting upon the need to educate Japanese women as part of a larger vision of society, stated:

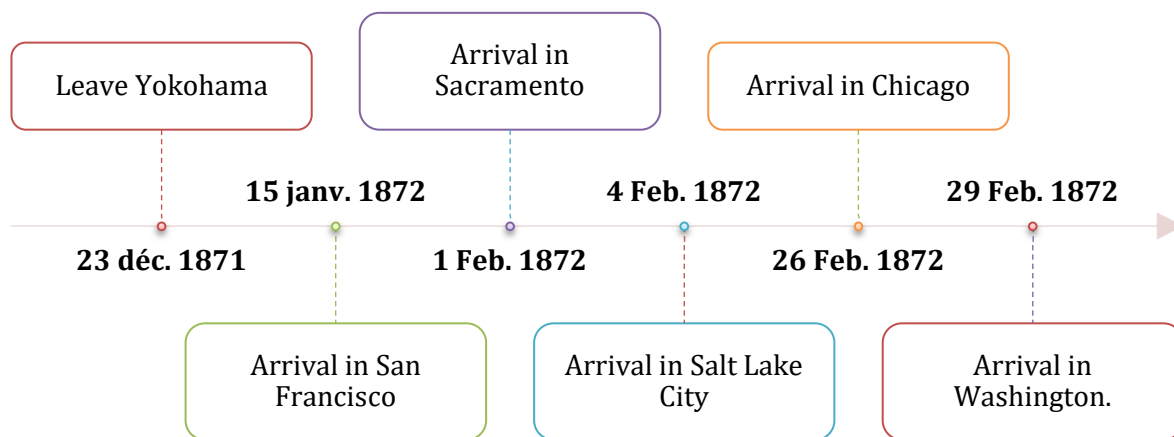
We lack superior institutions for high female culture. Our women should not be ignorant of those great principles on which the happiness of daily life frequently depends. How important the education of mothers, on whom future generations almost wholly rely for the early cultivation of those intellectual tastes which an enlightened system of training is designed to develop. (Quoted in Thomas, 1996: 193-4)

Tsuda's story remains the most widely known because of the diaries she wrote, in English, during her stay in America and her later involvement in the promotion of women's education in Japan¹. However, it was not Tsuda's but her older sister's candidature that had been put forward by their father, the agricultural reformer, Tsuda Sen (1837-1908). After her sister's refusal, Tsuda took her place in order to re-establish the status her family had lost with the Meiji Restoration. Indeed, all five girls were from families affiliated with the former Tokugawa government, and their mission was as much a personal one to restore the family status as a national one (Nimura, 2015: 48).

Tsuda and her companions can be considered the pioneers of what Mark Jones, in his study of modern childhood, calls the 'little citizen' or *shōkokumin* (2010: 4). The essence of the 'little citizen', conceptualised as an altruistic, educated and moral person, can be found in the 1890 Imperial Rescript for Education. This sense of duty toward the new nation can be found in Tsuda's when she writes in 1882, ten years after her arrival in America: 'I feel I must be of use, not because I know much, but because I am a Japanese woman with an education' (quoted in Rose, 1992: 35). Tsuda's sense of duty was shared by Nagai and Yamakawa. During her ten-year stay Tsuda met regularly with the other two girls who were enrolled in Vassar College, to discuss together their future in Japan. They wanted to contribute to Japan's modernisation by funding a school for girls based on the education they received in America (Rose, 1992: 35). However, soon after her

¹ In addition to scholarly publications and biographies aimed at a mainstream audience, Tsuda's life has been narrated in several formats, such as manga (*Tsuda Umeko*, written by Atsuo Sugaya and drawn by Ikuo Miyazoe. 1997. Tokyo: Shōgakukan), film documentary (*Dream surpass Time. Bonds spun by Tsuda Umeko* [Yume wa toki wo koete Tsuda Umeko ga tsumuida kizuna] by Tomoko Fujiwara 2000) and several TV series where she appears as secondary character.

return to Japan in 1881, Nagai got married, putting a halt to their original plans. They also faced a strong opposition in their home country. When the girls returned to Japan, in 1882 for Yamakawa and Tsuda, their knowledge of American customs was not wanted anymore and the girls waited in vain to be called at the service of the nation (Rose, 1992: 49-50). During the ten years their patriotic mission lasted, a wave of conservatism spread over Japan, and Western habits in general, including the American-style women's education they received, were in the 1880s regarded with concern.



Sources and methodology

Several extensive researches exist on the Iwakura Mission that come to complete the contemporary reports of the Embassy by Kumi Kunitake, secretary of Iwakura and chronicler of the Mission and Charles Lanman, tutor of Tsuda Umeko. The most noteworthy and extensive of the English-language research on the Iwakura Mission publications in the past decades has been the work edited by the British historian Ian Nish, *The Iwakura Mission in America and Europe - A New Assessment* (1998) which covers largely the goals, movements and members. It is divided into chapters each covering a country the Embassy visited. Alistair Swale's chapter on America focuses on the progress of the Mission regarding its three official objectives: securing recognition for the new government, investigating the social and economic structures of the countries they visited and examining the possibility to open the negotiations for the unequal treaties. Swale mentions a 'warm and enthusiastic' reception made to the Embassy, remarking briefly that the media took part in it and wrote about the Mission, sometimes inaccurately, sometimes more seriously (1998: 8).

If the articles revel in gossips and anecdotes, they leave out the more disturbing ones, the ones that reveal the difficult reality of the girls' life. The sea journey in winter was rough, they were seasick, crowded into a single cabin and struggling to communicate with Mrs DeLong, whose knowledge of the Japanese language was more than basic (Rose, 1992: 18; Nimura, 2015: 61-2). Aboard the ship, Yoshimasu Ryōko was sexually molested by a member of the mission. Upon the advice of an American officer, a trial was organised to show Japan as a civilised country. Barbara Rose describes it as a 'kangaroo court, only further humiliating Yoshimasu' (1992: 18). Another traumatic event for her was the snowblindness from which she suffered during the snowstorm in Salk Lake City (Nimura, 2015: 85). The snowblockade was largely reported in the newspapers specifying how annoyed the Japanese officials were at the delay (*Chicago Tribune*, 10th February), but no mention is made of the injury suffered by Yoshimasu. Whether sick, attacked or injured, the girls remained figures to admire and the mention of such "trivial events" was beneath women of their condition, especially in the context of a diplomatic Embassy. We see that if the Japanese had 'not been guilty of an unbecoming act since their arrival' (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February), their exemplarity is only an appearance and the sexual assault was either left as a side incident or not known by the American journalists. The girls' public image is much more glorious than the reality actually was.

The long period of travel, the many countries visited, the large number of members and the several goals of the Mission make it impossible for any one publication to cover all aspects. Most researchers have focused on major aspects of the Mission: their most distinguished members, the diplomatic side of the Embassy or the acquisition of technical knowledge in either one or several countries.

Two major publications have looked into the experience of the girls that accompanied the Embassy. Janice Nimura's book *Daughters of the Samurai – A Journey from East to West and Back* (2015) retraces the journey of the five young girls alongside the Iwakura Mission in 1872 and continues with their stay in the US and return to Japan. Nimura's book is the only account that focuses on all five girls, with more information on Yamakawa and Tsuda. Barbara Rose's biography of Tsuda Umeko (1992) provides valuable information on Tsuda's ten-year stay, although it represents only a small part of her publication, with a specific focus on Tsuda's life and accomplishments as an adult.

This article focuses on the girls' journey from the moment they land in San Francisco until they reach Washington, that is a two-month journey, mostly by train, through Sacramento, Salt Lake City and Chicago. At the difference of the works aforementioned, I do not adopt a historical perspective nor attempt to provide a detailed account of their whereabouts. This article is inscribed in the methodology of cultural studies and considers the girls through the prism of the American media.

This paper presents the current results of an ongoing research that aims to examine how Japanese women in general, and the five girls of the Iwakura mission in particular, were represented in the American newspapers in the first decades of the Meiji period, with a specific focus on the period of the girls' stay (1872-1882). I analysed the content of the articles, identified tropes and divergences to highlight what discourses of the five girls and of Japanese women in general, were represented in the American newspapers. At a time when Japan was attempting to re-define itself and establish his place in the world diplomatic relationships as a modern nation, the American press contributed to create an Orientalist discourse based on previous discourses of exoticism and new knowledges coming from direct contact with the Japanese, both through American visitors in Japan and the Japanese Embassy and students in the US. Here Edward W. Said's third definition of Orientalism, 'as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (1978: 3) can be applied if we replace for this more specific case study, "Western" by "American" and "Orient" by "Japanese".

For this paper, I focused on two daily newspapers: the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Chicago Tribune*. Both were widely read on the West Coast and Great Lake region, respectively. When the Iwakura Mission arrived in San Francisco, The *San Francisco Chronicle*, founded in 1865 with the name *Daily Dramatic Chronicle*, was growing steadily and about to become the most largely circulated newspaper west of the Mississippi River. The *Chicago Tribune*, founded in 1847, remains, even today, the most-read daily newspaper in the Chicago metropolitan area and Great Lake region. For the purpose of this article, I focused on the issues from December 1871 –when the steamboat *America* left Japan, carrying the members of the Japanese Embassy– to February 1872 –when the Mission reached Washington and the girls were sent to foster families.

I scanned all articles of both newspaper over the three-month period with the keywords: 'Japan', 'Iwakura', 'Japanese Embassy', 'Japanese women'. The *San Francisco Chronicle* contained 59 articles about Japan, whereas the *Chicago Tribune* doubled the

number to reach 121 articles. Among those, there was a total of 57 articles mentioning the Iwakura Mission; 37 for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and 20 for the *Chicago Tribune*. The difference of number of articles on the Iwakura Mission cannot be considered as revealing any kind of difference of interest between journalists of the two cities. The timeframe considered here creates this difference because the Embassy only reached Chicago on the 26th of February, so nearly at the end of the period I researched. This is interesting for the research as it provides two different visions of the Japanese: one based on first-hand encounters and one largely relying on the information published in other newspapers.

For this paper, I retained a total of 31 articles mentioning either the girls and/or Japanese women. The *San Francisco Chronicle* gathered sixteen articles about the girls and five on Japanese women, among which three belong to both categories. The *Chicago Tribune* published thirteen on the girls and none more broadly on Japanese women.

If this may seem little among the more than hundred articles on the Iwakura Mission or on Japanese culture and society², I have to note that the fifty-five male students who also accompanied the Mission were only mentioned four times in the two newspapers. Both newspapers introduced them for the first time alongside other members of the Embassy: 'Thirty students, sons of noblemen, some quite young, accompany the Embassy and will be placed at some of our leading colleges' (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 16th January). The journalist named two of those students, maybe the youngest ones, who are staying at the Grand Hotel alongside the Ambassadors and the five girls, whereas the other students are lodged at the Occidental.

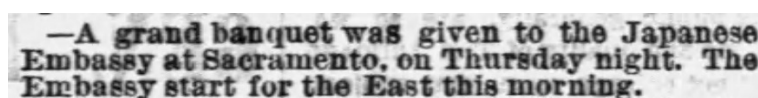
The *Chicago Tribune* provides a more detailed and vivid picture of the disembarking of the Embassy in San Francisco than its locally-based competitor did. It goes on with the longest mention, and only singularisation, of any of the male students: 'Among the Japanese students coming Eastward with the Embassy is a lad of 9 years, who wears light-colored striped pants, a broad-brimmed felt hat, and a long-backed frock coat, with three huge brass buttons on each tail' (*Chicago Tribune*, 5th February). This description was singled out from the whole article and reprinted the next day in the 'Personal' section of the newspaper, making it the fourth mention of the male students in the two newspapers during the eastward journey of the Embassy.

² I discarded from this research the articles that focused purely on Japanese economy, agriculture or political system, which amounted however to a small number.

The third mention – chronologically – dates from the 25th of January and alludes to two unnamed law students who attended a session in Court and were received by a judge (*San Francisco Chronicle*). This is the only mention of an activity done by the male students. Whereas the female students are said to being invited to parties (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 17th January, 9th February, 13th February, 14th February, *Chicago Tribune*, 9th February), to the theatre (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 21st January, *Chicago Tribune*, 26th February) and alongside official visits of the Embassy (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 22nd January), the male students are invisible in the media. We ignore, with that one exception of the two law students, what they did during the journey. The comparison clearly shows the interest the girls raised, and the lack of for their male fellows.

Despite the geographical and political differences of the journalists - who never signed the articles - and the readership between the two daily newspapers, many similar articles were found. Often, the *Chicago Tribune* copies, summarises, and comments on articles published by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, who at the beginning of the Mission's stay had first-hand information with the presence of the Japanese in the West Coast city. Later on, the roles were reversed, with the articles from the *Chicago Tribune* being re-used by the *San Francisco Chronicle*. This practice existed also in other cities and largely contributes to hegemonic discourses.

The length, and thus detail of the articles, vary greatly (see figures 1 - 3), from a few lines often to announce the movement of the members of the Mission or events organised for the Embassy, to half-page articles describing in detail some of the events and sometimes presenting the history and culture of Japan. However, the more usual were half or full column articles narrating the visits and meetings, announcing the program of the next day, sometimes adding some funny or surprising anecdotes about the members of the Embassy.



—A grand banquet was given to the Japanese Embassy at Sacramento, on Thursday night. The Embassy start for the East this morning.

Figure 1. Excerpt of the *Chicago Tribune*, 3rd February 1872.



Figures 2 & 3. On the left (Fig.2), the San Francisco Chronicle, 24th January 1872; on the right (Fig. 3), excerpt of the San Francisco Chronicle, 14th February 1872.

The female members of the Embassy

An analysis of the depiction of the Iwakura Mission and of its more important male members, such as Iwakura himself shows that the Embassy was presented very favourably in the newspapers. They are described, among many other positive and elevated terms, as 'distinguished guests' (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 24th and 27th January). The articles show

the honour of receiving such important emissaries in addition to being the teachers of Japan in its modernisation attempts. The individual behaviour of all members of the Embassy had also contributed to the image of the Japanese as people of moral rectitude, with one journalist pointing out that: 'The conduct of the Japanese officials and their suite is described as having been dignified and appropriate on all occasions' (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February).

The girls were positively described as well. The five girls had the privilege of being mentioned by name, at the difference of the other male students. The only exceptions are Iwakura's sons, Tats (n/a), Asahi (n/a) and Minami (n/a), and their brother-in-law Toda (n/a) who were already in the US to study at Rutgers College and were interviewed by journalists (published in the *San Chicago Tribune*, 9th February and the *Francisco Chronicle*, 28th February) and 'Iwashibo and Matsukato' named in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on the 16th of January. No further details are given about those two boys. They are the only ones named individually among the 30 students (sic) that the newspapers announced were also there. The names usually mentioned were those of the Ambassadors: Iwakura Tomomi (1825-1883), Kido Takayoshi (1833-1877), Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830-1878), Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909), and some high-ranking officials, considered worthier of attention.

The naming and individualisation of the girls in the newspapers is thus an honour. However, the journalists struggled with the spelling of their names. Ueda Teiko is called 'Onyeda' (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 16th January) or 'Ouyeda' (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 22nd January). The most incorrect occurrence is from the *Chicago Tribune*, 27th February, where all five names have been misspelled (and some of their ages are also wrong³): "The names and ages are as follows: Miss Ouyeda, aged 16; Miss Yashiwashi, aged 15; Miss Yawagawa, aged 12; Miss Wagai, aged 10 and Miss Fezda, aged 8". Another article also gives erroneous ages, although different from the previously mentioned occurrence: "The youngest is about ten years of age, the next youngest is about twelve, and the three others are about sixteen" (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 17th January).

This lack of accuracy can be due to the fact that despite the newspapers' interest in the girls, they are not part of the official diplomatic Mission, just travelling alongside it

³ The difference in the calculation of the age between Japan and America at the time contributed to this confusion, especially in the case of Tsuda who, being born on the 31st of December, was according to the traditional Japanese system two years old a mere 24 hours after her birth.

until Washington and less, if any, information has been provided before their arrival. We could suggest that the Meiji government and officials in charge of the Mission were not expecting the Americans to be so besotted with the girls. They were said to be the first Japanese women abroad⁴: ‘Hitherto females of noble blood have not been allowed to leave the country except under extraordinary circumstances’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 5th February), ‘[the girls] visit America as the first of their sex who have ever visited foreign parts’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). And this novelty and the extraordinary chance for the average American to be able to see Japanese women may be in large part the reason of that enticement.

Identification by name is however not the norm, and they are more often referred to using a qualificative that reflect their female condition. Many terms are used: ‘the ladies’, ‘the Japanese ladies’, ‘the young ladies’, ‘the young Japanese ladies’, ‘young and beautiful ladies’, ‘the young ladies of the Embassy’, ‘the ladies of the Embassy’, ‘Japanese girls’, ‘the five young misses’. Other, more inventive expressions, allude to their beauty, a recurrent trope: ‘the Fair ones’ or ‘bevy of Japanese beauties’. Whereas another category focuses on their social status: ‘the Princesses’, ‘daughters of Princes’, ‘Japanese women of rank’, ‘misses of distinction’.

The term ‘Princesses’ to refer to those five girls is intriguing when we know their familial background. It is less when we analyse the global depiction of the girls in the newspapers and see that the San Franciscans and Chicagoans journalists created several myths that enhanced the interest for the girls, and probably increased the sales of their respective newspapers. They were first called ‘Princesses’ by the *Chicago Tribune* on the 16th of January – the day after their landing in America –, contributing to the girls’ exoticism and placing them on an equal foot with Iwakura Tomomi (1825-1883), whom the newspapers also called ‘Prince’. It was repeated by the same newspaper on the 17th January, 27th January and 8th February. The *San Francisco Chronicle* only alluded to it once, on the 17th January. The mistake was rectified quite promptly by the *San Francisco Chronicle* (21st January) who had direct access to the source of information. It took however, an additional month for the *Chicago Tribune* to follow. The rectification was published on the 26th February, the day of the Mission’s

⁴ This is not entirely true, as six Japanese women had been sent in 1868 to Hawaii with 142 Japanese male immigrants. Around the same period, a group of samurai and peasants from Aizu, including women, left for California after their defeat at the Boshin war.

arrival in Chicago, probably thanks to first-hand information available from then on. Although this was quickly corrected, especially in the case of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, an aura of incertitude and grandness remained surrounding the girls. If they were not princesses, they were nonetheless women of high society: ‘The young ladies Misses Yoshimas, Onyeda, Kamagwa [sic], Tsuda, and Nagai, who came with the Embassy, are not Princesses, though daughters of high, wealthy officials and members of the Japanese "upper ten"’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). Their exact background was never established and many suppositions were made, all of them favourably describing them as part of the Japanese elite society: ‘misses of distinction’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February), ‘daughters of Princes’ (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 16th January), ‘belong to the noble families of Japan’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). Such ambiguity in the status of the girls probably comes from a journalist trick to increase sales, as much as from a misguided understanding of the structure of Japanese society in the aftermath of the Revolution. Their status as daughters of the losers of the civil war was never mentioned and such bloodied events as the ones faced by some of the girls, like Yamakawa (Nimura, 2015: 37-38) were better left forgotten.

In an interview conducted with one of Iwakura's son, Tats, a Rutgers College student, the journalist asked him about the girls: ‘-Who are the young ladies with your father's party?’ -‘I don't know who they are. I have seen their names in the paper, but I never heard of them before. I don't think they are Princesses. They may, perhaps, be daughters of Daimios’ (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 28th February, and *Chicago Tribune*, 9th February). However, the term ‘daughters of Daimios’, if transcribed literally in the interview, was never reused in any of the other articles, probably because a *damyo* refers to a strictly Japanese societal structure. In the terms generally used, and listed above, we can see how they are compared to Western equivalents: ‘misses’, ‘princesses’, ‘upper ten’. They are all terms that resonate in the minds of the readers. A similar association was made also for the male members of the Embassy, their titles and position being described in terms understandable to the American public.

Seeing the “Princesses”

In the newspapers I studied, the very few sketches printed are of Iwakura Tomomi. The girls remain described merely with words. There are two known photographs of all five girls, one taken in Japan before their audience with the Empress in November 1871,

and the other one taken in Chicago in Western-style clothes (see figure 4). Whether those photographs circulated among the American audience remains unknown at this stage of the research. However, two of the articles mention that ‘nearly every member of the Embassy’ (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 28th January) had their picture taken at the Bradley and Rulofson’s Gallery in San Francisco (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 25th January). The reader is not told specifically if the girls also had their photograph taken there.



Figure 1. The five girls in Chicago, America, 1872 © Tsuda College Archives

If they are not “seen” in print by the readers, seeing them is a trope across both newspapers. Before their arrival in San Francisco, the girls are largely invisible. In the articles sent by the correspondents in Yokohama and published in December 1871 and January 1872, only once are they mentioned and only briefly: ‘Six (sic) young Japanese women of rank go to America in care of Mrs. DeLong, to be sent to the same seminary of learning, at the expense of the Government’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 16th January). The articles from correspondents in Japan focus on the high dignitaries and the political mission of the Embassy⁵. An article published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* two days

⁵ Further research comparing reports in Japanese newspapers will contribute to show the importance and place of the girls within the Iwakura Mission and how they were seen from their home country.

before their arrival mentions the imminent landing of the Mission under the title 'The coming statesmen- Personnel of the Japanese Embassy'. But whereas all the high-ranking members of the Mission are listed, the girls are not even mentioned (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 13th January). Their presence appears as a surprise for the American public: 'Visitors were surprised to find several Japanese females on the steamer' (*Chicago Tribune*, 5th February). This absence from earlier articles could also be explained by the fact that, like the male students, they are exterior to the Embassy and only travelling alongside it. However, for the American press they are assimilated. This is probably due to the girls being under the care of Mrs DeLong⁶, and so often in close presence with the highest officials, including Iwakura Tomomi, staying at the same hotel or private residence and participating in the visits with the rest of the Mission (mostly the oldest two, Yoshimasu and Ueda). The male students do not seem to benefit from such treatment.

If the girls have a VIP treatment within the Mission, in the newspapers they reach a celebrity status. The description of the girls as exotic beauties attracted crowds in each new city, waiting for the "Princesses" to be seen:

The people of this quiet burg turned out last evening in large numbers to catch a glimpse of the princely representatives of the Empire beyond the seas. They crowded into the Orleans, anxious to gaze upon the strangers, and crowded forward to catch a glimpse of the ladies as they entered their carriages to be driven to the theatre. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 2nd February)

If, in this case, it can be argued that the curiosity also comes from seeing them wander through town, their arrival in Chicago on the 26th of February 1872 is really revealing. Crowds started gathering, waiting for the Embassy train to arrive. People's expectation of seeing the "Japanese Princesses" is thus entirely due to the circulating representations and the attractiveness created by the newspapers: 'The car which contained the young ladies of the Embassy was the centre of observation. Around it flocked young men and maidens, and old men with heavy locks, and ancient matrons in their last quarter of a century' (*Chicago Tribune*, 27th February). The car of the 'young ladies' is actually the main car, the one transporting Iwakura and the main Ambassadors. This shows again, the ambiguous

⁶ At this stage of the research, it is still unclear whether the younger male students were also under somebody's custody.

place the girls occupy within the Mission, being both outside it and integrated to it. But it also highlights how they can upstage the officials. They have become the “celebrities” of the Embassy. Their status even obliged Mrs DeLong to keep them away from the crowds, as one newspaper mentions: “They still continue to take their meals in their room, as their presence at the table would cause too much of a *furor*” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 25th January). Such frenzy was enlivened by Mrs DeLong herself who, according to Rose, kept the girls dressed in their much admired and talked-about kimono (1992: 19).

The girls’ beauty

Their beauty is regularly mentioned, becoming another myth, this one longer lasting than that of the “Japanese Princesses”. They are described as ‘young and beautiful ladies’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February), ‘fair and quite good-looking’ (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 16th January), ‘good average representatives of ladies of the first class’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). The terms used are positive but not exhilarating; they are beautiful but not extraordinarily so.

Although the girls are rarely singled out, beauty is the one aspect that singularises one of them. The most beautiful girl – whoever she was – was made to stand out from the group. That girl, never mentioned by name, attracts everybody’s interest, and adverbs come to emphasise her beauty: ‘one in particular being really handsome’ (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 16th January), ‘One of them is very beautiful and was much admired by the gentlemen visitors who succeeded in catching a glimpse of them as they passed from one parlor to another’ (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 17th January), ‘One of the Japanese Princesses destined for Vassar College is exquisitely beautiful, and will make a sensation’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 17th January). We can only speculate whom they refer to. In her account of the girls’ journey, Nimura uses a similar expression ‘exquisitely pretty’ to refer to Tsuda (2015: 49), however without acknowledging that she could be the one mentioned by the American press.

Like the description of the other four girls, most of the descriptions of that outstanding beauty remain very vague. The readers know extensively about other aspects such as their dress, but their physical features are not often detailed. One of the exceptions reads: ‘The prettiest of the Princesses has beautiful black hair and dark, lustrous eyes, which she uses with considerable execution’ (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 17th January). Even here, black hair and dark eyes were common features of all five girls. So, the adjectives ‘beautiful’ and

'lustrous' are the only elements that, very subjectively, made her stand out from the others. Nonetheless, both adjectives are quite vague and do not provide an exact description of her features. Moreover, 'beautiful' has been used several times to describe not only that unnamed girl, but all of the women of the group. As a result, the girls remain imprecise figures, mythical beauties left to the imagination of the readers. Nevertheless, more political reasons could be put forward to explaining the lack of precision in the descriptions. Let us remember that the girls are in the US for educational reasons, but those emanate from a political decision that aims at modernising Japan following the Western models of society. Although the girls are exterior to the Embassy, they are closely related to it and assimilated to it by the American press. As a result, describing the girls' physical appearance in more explicit terms – both regarding their sensuality or racial differences – could be delicate in a moment of diplomatic negotiations, especially when the American media received in highly appreciative terms the Embassy, its mission of enlightenment and Japan's modernisation in general.

One article of the *Chicago Tribune*, titled 'Our Japanese visitors' and about half a column in length escapes this politically-correct attitude:

Of the quintette of Princesses of the Japanese Empire who come under the escort of the Embassy, at least one is described as very beautiful, and all are full of soul and intelligence, notwithstanding the almond eyes and snuff-colored complexions. We are not to confound these bright-eyed and wide-awake Japanese with their more stolid Chinese cousins. The young ladies, especially, of the Japanese deputation compare very favorably with any five American girls that might be selected. One writer declares that "about their mouths there plays a most ravishing smile, and their complexions are most lovely." Upon the same veracious authority we lean for the assurance that "these young ladies were made when Nature was in its best moods", which implies that some people are made when Nature is not in its best moods. (*Chicago Tribune*, 8th February)

The newspaper article was written about eighteen days before the Mission reached Chicago and the journalist clearly states that he has not seen in person the young ladies and that he is reporting other people's opinions, which however he does not discuss. The first sentence shows a strong racial prejudice toward Asian features: 'the almond eyes and snuff-colored complexions' (*Chicago Tribune*, 8th February). However, this does not compromise their beauty, as the preposition 'notwithstanding' implies. The journalist goes on describing the Japanese girls on a more positive light by differentiating them from Chinese women, which is part of a trope in the American press that distinguishes Japanese

and Chinese. He then continues by comparing them to average American women. Another article published toward the end of the month goes further by comparing them to ‘our own Chicago belles’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). From hearsay, the journalists spread the myth of the Japanese Princesses’ beauty.

The Chicago Tribune’s article from the 8th of February – quoted above – interestingly shows that the “Japanese Princesses” caught the attention of all members of society, not only journalists and that there was much written about them, even outside the more ephemeral newspapers. The reported words by the unnamed writer continues in a more embellished style the trope of their beauty outside the circle of journalism, further affirming a consensus, not only of the journalists, but of all male members of society, about their beauty.

If all opinions seem to agree on the girls’ beauty, it is because they overall match American ideals of beauty. The existing photographs, such as figure 4, show that all five of them disregarded the ancient Japanese beauty customs of teeth blackening and eyebrows shaving. The Meiji government encouraged all women to abandon those habits considered “backward” and “barbarians”. According to Ashikari Mikiko, it is only in 1873 that the Empress appeared for the first time without those ancient marks of beauty and with a more Westernised face, encouraging all Japanese women to follow her example (2003: 64). Considering that it took most of the Meiji era for this practice to stop in urban areas (Ashikari, 2003: 64), the “Japanese Princesses” were in advance in the modernisation and Westernisation of their bodies.

We should not consider the numerous references to the girls’ beauty purely in aesthetic terms. The mention of beauty entails a moral and social connotation. Indeed, as Anthony Synnott (1990) exposed beauty extends to disposition, posture and social standing. This notion of the ‘social power of beauty’ (Synnott, 1990: 72) was embedded in the mind of the 19th century American audience for whom their status as “Princesses” or at least women of high rank increases their beauty. It was also believed that status and beauty entailed morality. So, women of their rank and beauty must be honourable, intelligent and of good disposition (Synnott, 1990: 56). The few mentions of their personalities come to sustain that argument. They are described as ‘very curious’ (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 25th January) and ‘unusually intelligent, bright, and vivacious’

(*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). Both in mind and body, the princesses have charmed the American audience.

The girls' outfits: issues of exoticism and Westernisation

One journalist, less bewitched than his colleagues, notes interestingly and with sarcasm that their beauty is due to their exoticism, which he translates as their outfits:

'If we mistake not, the romance attached to these ladies will all wear off when their Oriental habiliments, are doffed for our more common attire, and the present interest felt will die out. No doubt they are the most beautiful Japanese ladies in the United States to-day – there are no others – but if they accept the garments of our fashionable belles, thousands can be found much more beautiful than they. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 25th January)

The girls were supposed to have Western-style outfits, or *yofuku*, made for them when they landed in San Francisco, however, it is not until they reach Chicago in late February, that they receive them. According to Rose, this delay was probably due to Mrs DeLong who enjoyed parading them in their exotic outfits (1992: 19). Nimura mentions that new kimonos were made in Tokyo at the expense of the Japanese government prior to the girls' departure because unlike the Western-style clothes, they were faster to sew and did not need any fitting (2015: 50-1). This purely practical decision dictated by time restrictions would become in America the source of many laudatory, although Orientalist, comments.

For American audiences, the kimono of Japanese women was an immediately recognizable symbol and as thus, it remains in both Western-produced and Western-aimed visual imagery of Japan as an Orientalist element. Indeed, Brian McVeigh defines the kimono as 'a type of national identity uniform, especially for women' (2000: 105). In the 1870s, a single-mode kimono was already dominating Japanese fashion for women and became emblematic of Japaneseness (Goldstein-Gidoni, 1999: 353). Concerns even arose from certain groups in the late nineteenth century to stop the increasing adoption of Western female outfits. A group of American women led by Mrs. Garfield and Mrs. Cleveland, the wives of former presidents, wrote an open letter to Japanese women in the late 1880s urging them, in the 'interests' of Japan, not 'to abandon what is beautiful and suitable in their national costume, and to waste money on foreign fashion' (quoted in Lehmann, 1984: 764). They describe the beauty of the

'native' dress in a similar way the newspapers did a decade earlier about the girls' kimono. The girls' outfits were described sometimes in great details in the newspapers:

They wear the native dress, with the exception of shoes, which are of American make. The costume seems to be a sort of tunic, cut straight, as the principal garment, and over this a sort of sacque, with flowing sleeves. The apparel of Miss Ouyeda yesterday, consisted on this skirt of striped silk, with the sacque of light blue silk with large flowers. A sort of crimson under handkerchief concealed the upper part of the bust. The others wore dresses of the same style, but the different parts of the apparel were of other colors. No bonnets were worn, and the little brown hands were entirely guiltless of gloves. The hair was brought from all sides to the top of the head, and there fastened with tortoise shell pins handsomely variegated. (*Chicago Tribune*, 27th February)

This description was made for the American readers to visualise the outfit described. The terms relate to what the reader knows: 'a sort of tunic'. It also indirectly compares their outfit to the American customs and fashion, indicating that they wear 'no bonnet' and are 'guiltless of gloves'. Despite such variation to the Western etiquette, the description is not unfavourable. They are described as 'elegantly dressed' (*Chicago Tribune*, 5th February) and their outfits as 'rich, quaint costumes' (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 14th February), which match the portrayal of the girls as members of the Japanese high society.

The switch from Japanese clothes, or *wafuku*, to *yofuku* was documented by the newspapers. A short article in the *Chicago Tribune* notes, as its title, the order of 'A new outfit for the Princesses'. It develops: 'Twenty costly American outfits are being prepared for the Japanese Princesses, and they will not appear in their picturesque Oriental costumes of embroidered satin after leaving here for the East' (*Chicago Tribune*, 27th January). This change in outfit also marks the end of the travelling period for the girls, as once they reach Washington, they will be placed in host families and separated from the Embassy and from their chaperone, Mrs DeLong.

The girls' new clothing symbolises Westernisation and is a visual proof of the Mission's goal. In the photograph of the five girls dressed in Western clothes (figure 4), they have mastered some of the cultural aspects needed for the country to be recognised as a "first-rate" nation: clothing, social conventions and physical mannerisms. At least while the photograph was taken, they had disciplined their bodies to respond to the expectations of the American viewer. They (re)presented themselves as modern Japanese girls. It is interesting to note that this image was taken shortly after their arrival to America, when the girls were – and also their tutor, Mori Arinori (1847-1889)– still uncertain of what

would become of them (Rose, 1992: 19). At the time the photograph was taken, the girls' knowledge of English and American culture was nearly the same as what they had possessed at the time another group photograph was taken before they left Japan. The photograph, more than an achieved cultural reality, is a projection of the perfect 'modern ladies' they could become.

The newspapers – which did not reproduce any image of the girls or their costumes – provide us, through anecdotal details, with a less strict separation between both types of outfits. Although the girls wore kimono all the way to Chicago, they were given Western-style shoes (*Chicago Tribune*, 27th February). Rather than the *haori*, the traditional jacket worn over a kimono which women started wearing in the Meiji period, the girls 'had been provided with heavy woolen shawls, which they wore when out-of-doors' (*Chicago Tribune*, 27th February). It is most likely that Tsuda was wearing her own 'bright red woollen shawl' (Nimura, 2015: 57), a present from her father, Tsuda Sen which he bought when he visited the US in 1867. In any case, the young girls' style was a hybrid one, probably to fit to the exigencies of the weather and situations. The girls actual look probably diverged from the ideal image of a modern nation that the Meiji government wanted to create as well as of that of curious exoticism that Mrs DeLong prolonged by not providing them with Western dresses. Ideal and pragmatism conflicted; and pragmatism won as the journey was already long and uncomfortable in usual circumstances.

As was to be expected, the newspapers in Washington noted the adoption of *yofuku*:

Only one was dressed in any portion of the native costume. The eldest was dressed in black cloth, cut much like the present style in this city, but without the immense panier worn on the avenue, and wore a small black hat set on the front part of her head. The other princesses were dressed in dark stuff, and wore red plaid shawls. (*Evening Star*, 29th February)

The girls - still called 'princesses' in Washington in late February - tend not to be differentiated, except when the age difference makes it noticeable. So, we do not know which one is wearing 'a portion' of her Japanese outfit, nor why.

As expected, the interest they raised since San Francisco was greatly created by their exotic outfit, as the same journalist also noted: 'Leaving the cars as they did before the remainder of the party, they passed through the crowd attracting but little attention, the assemblage not knowing who they were' (*Evening Star*, 29th February). The princesses

were starting to lose their attractiveness as exotic women and started assuming their role as the Western-style modern women they were expected to become.

The article published in the *Chicago Tribune* on the 27th of February largely differs from the others and gives the girls a humanity lacking in the other descriptions. This article does not see them as exotic objects of admiration and it goes beyond the dichotomy between Japanese/American, modern/traditional and sees a more truthful view of the difficult reality of the girls. The author is the only one to see them as “little girls”, rather than women: “They seem to bear the isolation from the parental fireside, and the loss of fond mothers, with firmness. Even the smallest one, who is but 9 (sic), has no tears to shed for her family relatives which she left in Japan’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 27th February). The author insists repeatedly on their solitude, due also to their lack of knowledge of the English language, being the first mention to it: ‘The young mademoiselles occupied one corner of the car, saying little to anyone, but watching the flat, unlovely landscape through the car windows as the train sped towards Chicago. [...] Not having any means of communication with those about them, and having little to say even to the masculine friends from Japan, they seemed isolated and lonely’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 27th February).

In a scathing sentence, the article questions the usefulness of their future education: ‘Their mission is to be educated here, and to return to Japan to assist in rearing female wallflower to adorn the court of the Mikado’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 27th February 1872). This article is quite prophetic of the socio-political situation the girls would encounter once they go back to Japan in the 1880s. Tsuda and Yamakawa were expecting to be received again at the Imperial Court and wrote to the Ministry of Education to offer their services only to be ignored (Rose, 1992: 49).

Educating modern Japanese women

Most journalists depict the “Princesses” not only as exotic objects to be seen, but as modernising and educated women with a role to play in their country. Comments on the girls’ current level of education state that they have gone as far as they could, considering their age and the Japanese educational system (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). The girls’ goal of being educated in the US is repeated several times in the newspapers and the importance of their mission is clearly stated: ‘[they] will be left

here to pursue their studies at some of our educational institutions, and fit themselves to fill stations of usefulness and honor under the new order of things which the Emperor of Japan is inaugurating' (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). The article reminds the reader that the education the girls have come to acquire is not for personal fulfilment but emerges out of a patriotic duty, a fact that Tsuda (Rose, 1992: 35) and Yamakawa (Nimura, 2015: 142) would not forget during their ten-year stay in Japan. The societal changes that Japan was undergoing at the time were reported in the newspapers. The *San Francisco Chronicle* published articles on Japanese women, presenting their condition or specific aspects of Japanese life, such as weddings (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 28th January). The importance of women's education as part of the modernisation of the nation was highlighted and an article even reproduced a long quote from an edict of the Emperor regarding the need to be educated abroad for both boys and girls:

The following is from an edict of the Mikado, which shows that the Japanese are very respectful toward their fair ones: "My country is now undergoing a complete change from old to new ideas, which I sincerely desire, and therefore call upon all wise and strong-minded to appear and become good guides to the Government. During youth-time it is positively necessary to view foreign countries, so as to become enlightened as to the ideas of the world; and boys as well as girls, who will themselves soon become men and women, should be allowed to go abroad, and my country will benefit by their knowledge so acquired. Females heretofore have had no position socially, because it was considered they were without understanding; but if educated and intelligent they should have due respect. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 17th January and *Chicago Tribune*, 5th February)

This self-criticism of the place of Japanese women in society was re-used by American journalists who briefly criticise Japan as backward because a woman lacked freedom and was 'the slave of her husband' (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). Nevertheless, this critic is quickly brushed aside thanks to Japan's will to modernise and educate its young women. Another article highlights, once again, the prevalence of the Japanese over other 'pagan' countries, stating that although considered of a lower rank, girls still received a basic education and were not disregarded by their parents (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). The newspapers carefully avoid any mention of the US's own situation regarding women's education which was still in its early stages, with only a handful of higher learning institutions for women existing and among whose, the oldest, Vassar,

which was attended by both Yamakawa and Nagai, was founded only in 1861 (Nimura, 2015: 128).

Being educated in the US would provide the girls with a possibility to gain respect and a valued place in society as one newspaper expounded: ‘they will receive an excellent education, and then return to enlighten the weaker vessels in Japan in regard to the social equality and superior advantages of the ladies of America’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). It appears clearly that the girls were not being educated to gain academic knowledge, but for societal reasons.

Although all articles applauded the initiative to educate the girls the American way, the journalists noted that not all is good for them to learn. Women’s right to vote, Mormonism and silliness were evils to be avoided. The girls reached America in the year that saw the first vote by a woman at presidential elections, Susan B. Anthony, which led to her arrest. Although the girls – still quite young by then – have not shown support for the suffragettes (Nimura, 2015: 127), they received letters from the Woman’s Suffrage Committee during their first weeks in their new country (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 26th January). One journalist noted with sarcastic relief: ‘The Ambassadorial party did not stop long enough in Wyoming to become imbued with any female heresies, which should be a subject of congratulation to all right-minded persons’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). Indeed, the Embassy’s trip from San Francisco to Washington via Chicago, took them across Wyoming, the first State to legalize women’s vote. Despite the journalist’s – faked or real – concern about the corruption of the Japanese members of the Embassy and the girls, there were little chances of it happening. The girls were out of reach, closed to the outside world because of their lack of knowledge of the English language and carefully cared for by their chaperone, Mrs DeLong. Moreover, Iwakura Tomomi was careful about not displeasing the American president before he even got a chance to meet him and then risk endangering his own mission: renegotiating the Unequal Treaties. During their forced stay in Salt Lake City due to the snow tempest, he refused to meet with Brigham Young (1801-1877), the patriarch of the Mormon Church who was under house arrest for polygamy (Nimura, 2015: 84). The *Chicago Tribune* shares the fear of wrongful contacts ‘it does not appear that they were injured morally by Mormon contact’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). A third and much lesser danger the girls will encounter, continues the journalist, is silliness. He argues that the girls need to experience the private life of the American households and will have ‘to discriminate between what is sensible and what is silly’ (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February).

The Chicagoan journalist acknowledges that the girls' need for knowledge is within the gendered spaces, mostly domestic but also public such as tea-parties, soirees, musicals, the circulating library, shopping (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February). Another American journalist rightfully noted that the education the girls were seeking was not a purely academic one but a more wholly approach similar to the education of a finishing school:

The young ladies who arrived by the steamer will be forwarded to Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., there to receive a thorough education. It is proposed not only to teach the young ladies out of books, but also to instruct them in the manners and customs of the best young ladies in the land. (*Chicago Tribune*, 5th February)

Indeed, although Yamakawa, Nagai and Tsuda would spend ten years in America and graduate from American educational institutions⁷, they learnt many valuable lessons within the households they integrated. The Meiji government sent the five girls to access the gendered space of the home and learn about the role modern women had in it. The American press insisted on this importance of education outside of books, maybe due to the relative novelty of their own institutions for women's higher education. The *Chicago Tribune* even printed a dialogue between Iwakura Tomomi and Charles DeLong – most certainly fictitious – attributing to Iwakura's admiration of DeLong's house the merits of the promotion of women's education in Japan:

Struck with the elegant and orderly arrangement of the interior of the dwelling, and the numerous evidences of comfort, Iwakura became inquisitive and began a series of interrogations. «How is it that your house is so neat and pleasant?» «Because,» replied the Minister, «a lady manages the household. (*Chicago Tribune*, 26th February)

It is the common matters of the household and modern womanhood that the girls had been sent to learn. The goal of women's education in the 1870s was not to create a generation of brilliant academic women, but to inculcate women the values, manners and knowledge necessary to run an orderly, modern home. The girls learn, from observation and participation in their respective households, important aspects of being a modern (and high society) woman, such as private philanthropy (Nimura, 2015: 110).

⁷ Yamakawa graduated *summa cum laude* from Vassar College; Nagai studied music at the same institution while Tsuda was enrolled at the local Georgetown Collegiate School and later the Archer Institute. Tsuda went back to the US in 1889 to attend Bryn Mawr College.

Conclusion

The two newspapers considered for this article, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *Chicago Tribune*, despite ideological divergences, print and spread a similar discourse of the Embassy and the five Japanese girls. The total or partial reproduction of the same material from one newspaper to the other contributes to this homogeneous discourse that creates a 'more realistic "Oriental" awareness', to put it in Edward Said's words (1978: 2). They both depict the girls as high society educated, with a curious mind and of great beauty, especially one of them, who is never named. However, whereas most accept the girls' beauty as an intrinsic quality, a San Franciscan journalist question it and attributes it to their exoticism which, he claims, is entirely due to their Japanese outfits (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 25th January). However, such claim is not reproduced in other articles.

The American newspapers' focus on issues such as the girls' beauty and social class contributes to the positive comparison of Japan with Western nations. Not only does Japan have a structured society, and one that can be understood and compared to the Western ones, using similar titles, such as "Princesses", but also those women of high rank fulfil the expectations of beauty and morality. Although they are not yet educated in the American way, they show the qualities needed to be modern women.

Even in the omissions (sickness, assault) and errors printed we can find a homogeneous discourse. The newspapers' representation of the girls is full of inaccuracies and mistakes, myths and exoticism. During the first days following their arrival, the newspapers printed a series of mistakes regarding the girls, all of them corrected subsequently. They were called "Princesses", their ages vary, as well as the writing of their names. In one instance, an article even mentions that there were six girls (*Chicago Tribune*, 5th February). During all the duration of the trip eastwards, the journalists remind the readers that the girls are aimed to be educated at Vassar (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 16th January, *Chicago Tribune*, 16th January, 5th February and 26th February). If this ended up being true for two of them, Yamakawa Suteyasu and Nagai Shigeko, it seems that their future was less certain at the time. Sending the girls to be educated was a noble, but abstract idea. The practical details were not straightened before their departure from Japan. Nimura boldly writes that 'the girls' recruitment [had been] a hasty afterthought' (2015: 50). Several practical issues arose when they reached Washington and it was time to start their American education. The youngest girls were still too young to attend Vassar College. Moreover, at the difference of the male

students accompanying the Embassy, the girls could not speak English. Nonetheless, the three younger girls fulfilled their mission, coming back to Japan ten years later with both a new academic knowledge and the practical know-how to manage a modern household.

The reading of *the San Francisco Chronicle* and *the Chicago Tribune* following the arrival of the Iwakura Mission and their journey eastward is highly informative of how the diplomatic mission, its members but also all Japanese people and Japan were perceived by the general opinion. This article presented only two examples of the media craze that the Embassy, and the girls in particular, created. Many more newspapers, from cities the Embassy visited or not, daily or weekly, morning or evening, rightist or leftist, reported on their stay in the US.

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Lolita fashion, new media, and cultural hegemony in contemporary Japan

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to present Lolita fashion, which emerged in Japan during the 1980s, as a case study in performed, postmodern identities that are negotiated through consumerism. Opening with a broad stroke introduction to Lolita fashion, with regard to its principal characteristics and its cultural origins, the article attempts to examine the Lolita phenomenon using a variety of theoretical tools and approaches. Firstly, the article considers Lolita fashion in the light of Antonio Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony. I assert that Lolita fashion might usefully be read as a place of rupture or resistance against the orthodox hegemony of Japan's historically collectivist culture, one that provides its users with an alternate set of social values, particularly when it comes to traditional notions of femininity. Next, I lean, particularly, on Stuart Hall's ideas about modernity, and consider the question of agency, with regard to Lolita fashion, and attempt to locate the impetus for it, not in multinational fashion houses, but the participants of Lolita subculture themselves. In a third section, I go on to problematise that agency, drawing on John Storey's cultural theory work. While it is a commonplace to attribute the rise of a totalising, contemporary mass culture to the digital revolution, Storey locates a potential for new meanings to be generated, not so much within the act of buying - for that is largely determined by the market - but in what he calls the 'production in use' of those goods. The fashion adage, 'It's not what you wear, but how you wear it' seems to ring particularly true in Lolita fashion, and I explore that idea further with an in-depth, textual analysis of a select image. I conclude by considering Lolita fashion's exportation, out of Japan and into a globalised marketplace, and the signification thereof.

KEYWORDS

Lolita; Fashion; Japan; Kawaii; Globalisation.

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1. Introduction

'Lolita' style emerged, as a progressive form of street fashion in Harajuku, Japan, during the 1980s, from a unique mixture of Japanese popular cultural movements and a love of the qualities of 'cuteness'. 'Whether dressed in pink, powder blue, red, white or black', Lolita fashion adherents became recognisable through 'their doll-like make-up, frilly skirts, fanciful headgear, ribbons and lace' (Victoria & Albert Museum, 2018, para. 1) (Fig. 1). In the context of the hyper-modern mediatised streetscape of Tokyo, Lolita figures cut a surreal image, dressed in clothes that, stylistically speaking, originate in the nineteenth

century, but which are, at the same time, being glamorously adorned with a knowing nod towards a representation on social media networks that is wholly contemporary.



Fig. 1. Lolita fashion on the streets of Tokyo (ca. 2018). Source: <http://tokyofashion.com/horned-harajuku-girl-gothic-lolita-angelic-pretty/>

As the image in Figure 1 makes clear, Lolita fashion is highly performative. Not only are the clothes and make-up themselves extraordinarily elaborate, but the behaviour of the wearers is also intensely inflected with artifice. Lolita fashion is also, as again the image shows, a communal activity; the two girls, one dressed in black, one dressed in white, form an ideally contrastive pair and their figural and gesticulating language is clearly rehearsed, or at least highly constructed on the basis of a pre-existing familiarity with each other's roles and predilections. When viewed in terms of the backdrop of contemporary Japanese society – one dominated in equal measure by traditional hegemonic values and normative patterns of work and leisure – Lolita fashion stands out (along with a host of other subcultural practices) as a place of rupture or resistance where alternative value systems come into play.

With all this in mind, the aim of this article is to reconfigure Lolita fashion within the context of both Japanese society and a globally widespread culture of new media maintained in images and social networks on the basis of ideas about cultural hegemony

(Gramsci, 1971, 12; Coban, 2018). The Lolita look is obviously indebted to Victorian notions of style, the *jouissance* of perversion/subversion, and the provocative eroticism of innocence in young girls expressed in the novel by Vladimir Nabokov that gave Lolita fashion its name. However, Lolita is also a fundamentally contemporary phenomenon, impossible to imagine outside of a global mediascape to which Lolita followers are attuned. Lolita fashion must also be seen in terms of its crucial relationship with non-Western, Japanese traditions of dress and social performance (the *Geisha* tradition, for example), and these factors all combine to constitute a rich media context of overlapping and convergent networks and practices that will, to the greatest extent possible, be subject to critical analysis in what follows.

By drawing on a range of theorists of popular culture and media, the article will consider the production, reproduction, and transformation of social values while considering the streets (and public spaces more broadly) as ideological battlefields in which dressing up, and performing the particularities of the dress, serve as a means to reinvent the world rather than as a merely reflexive action produced by the dominance of consumer culture, normative trends, hegemonic values, and the passive repetition of corporate advertising imagery. At crucial junctures, Lolita fashion resists complicity with hegemonic tendencies (Fraser and Rothman, 2018, 5).

Lolita fashion cannot be spoken about without reference to its implication in participatory media cultures, as fashion dress becomes inseparable from its mode of circulation through digital media-based social networks (Storey, 2018; Bartlett, Cole and Rocamora, 2018). Dress, from this perspective, includes an ensemble of media operations that 'clothe' the subject and project their identity, making it appropriate to consider Lolita fashion in relation to broader discourses on consumerism and spectacle within media studies (Lister, 2010; Debord, 2016; Baudrillard, 2014).

The structure of this article is designed to weave together the theoretical speculation on the nature of digital fashion and performance cultures with direct object analysis of media texts (in this case, the visual documentation of Lolita fashion). Rather than carrying out these tasks separately and working through the theory before approaching its implication in practice, this article will use theoretical texts as a way of reading Lolita imagery, thereby simultaneously building up a critical theoretical backdrop and a series of case studies that will help us to explore and expand on the phenomenon as a whole.

The Lolita phenomenon is distinctive in that it is highly crafted out of both the materiality of fashion and the immateriality of digital networks, and in respect of this duality, it makes sense not to separate the practices of dressing and networking on digital media. Following the same logic, it also makes sense to consider both dressing and networking as articulations of cultural and social ideologies. These three motifs conveniently map onto established methodological schemes for dealing with fashion and visual culture. Gillian Rose's identification of the three sites at which the image is transformatively constructed and disseminated provides a useful framework for negotiating the particular qualities of Lolita fashion. This framework circumscribes 'the site of production, that is, where an image is made; the site of the image itself, that is, its visual content; and the site where the image encounters its spectators or users [its audiencing]' (Rose, 2012, 19).

These analytic nodes of production, content, and audience, together with a fourth node of geographical locale that might usefully be added to Rose's model, will structure the following analysis of Lolita fashion, enabling us to tackle the complex questions of cultural hegemony that this article is fundamentally designed to engage with. In the same way that exponents of Lolita fashion carefully choose their garments, design and arrange their ensemble and go out and pose in the street or upload images on different social media networks (each of which has its own distinctive appeal), this article will also proceed through a series of critical outfits through which different aspects of the Lolita phenomenon will be explored. These outfits will be chosen to reflect, as required, elements of theory that emphasise different elements of the discourse. Together, the entire ensemble aims to both offer a level of comprehension and a corresponding measure of detailed analysis.

2. The Cultural Origins of Lolita Fashion

Lolita fashion and 'Loli' girls in Japanese fashion represent a nexus of complex cultural origins. The name 'Lolita' was derived from the 1955 novel by Vladimir Nabokov, which was made into a film in 1962 by Stanley Kubrick that featured James Mason and Sue Lyon as Lolita (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Still from *Lolita* (1962), dir. Kubrick. Source: Kubrick (2008).

The film opens with shots of James Mason's character painting Lolita's toe nails – a powerful cinematic image that demonstrates the peculiar mixture of affection, care, eroticism, and taboo that has, since the 1980s become synonymous, in Japan, with *Lolicom* or *Rorikon*, which translates as 'Lolita Complex'. Increasingly a politically sensitive subject in Japan, for self-evident reasons, 'Lolita Complex' describes an attraction for teenage girls by adult and middle-aged men. In some respects, it has become an umbrella term for a wide range of related predilections, encompassing *Arikon*, an attraction for pre-teen girls, after Alice from *Alice in Wonderland* ('Ari-' means 'Alice'); *Heikon*, an attraction for very little girls (after Heidi of Johanna Spyri's novel *Heidi*, who is 4-5 years old); and *Shōtakon*, the love complex for small boys (after 'Shōtarō', the boy protagonist from *Tetsujin-28 go*, a famous science-fiction manga of the 1950s by Mitsuteru Yokoyama).

Both Nabokov's *Lolita* novel and Japan's 'Lolita Complex', however, obfuscate as much as they inform, and inscribe, meanings onto Lolita fashion. Lisa Blauersouth observes that Nabokov's novel is less read, and therefore has less cultural resonance, in Japan: 'In Japan, where the fashion originated, *Lolita* is less known, less of a problem', she explains, 'In the West, the book's paedophilic associations haunt our community' (Blauersouth, 2011, 314). At least one fashion commentator, meanwhile, views Lolita

fashion 'as a reaction to sexualised representations of women in Japanese culture. It displays', notes Rebecca Arnold, 'an almost confrontational femininity that prizes elegance and modesty over seduction' (Arnold, 2018, 139).

Philologically indeterminate, Lolita fashion becomes an uncanny amalgam of everything that is brought to it. The *affective* quality of Lolita, the young girl who inspires absolute devotion in an older man, the young girl who is simultaneously sexually attractive and innocent, is one aspect of the Lolita style within Japanese fashion. However, as the screenshot above shows, the novel and the film are not the source of the actual sartorial style of the subculture. As Winge (2008) pointed out, the fashion reference points for Lolita style are, in fact, located in Victorian-era girls' dress, emblematised by the figure of Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, the 1865 fantasy novel that was partly inspired by Carroll's own Lolita-esque relationship with the schoolgirl, Alice Liddell (Winge, 2008). In the illustrations to that text, the narrative is mediated by images of lace, ruffles, high necklines, and voluminous skirts on the figure of Alice, who is herself an embodiment of cuteness, albeit one with provocatively long hair, big eyes, and pouting lips. The duality that exists at the root of the cultural origins of Lolita fashion highlights the lack of any 'authentic' genealogy or essence. It is a defining feature of Lolita fashion that it is eclectic, diverse, and internally self-contradictory. It could be said that every iteration of Lolita fashion goes some way towards redefining it as a media phenomenon.

Magazine culture has been instrumental in the circulation of Lolita fashion imagery, both within Japan and internationally, through print circulation networks and digital publishing. The *Gothic and Lolita Bible* is the most widely circulated document of this type (Yoshinaga and Ishikawa, 2007). Winge (2008, 49) has noted, for example, that the 'visual style' rock bands such as Buck-Tick that emerged in the 1980s took on the trappings of the Lolita style, popularising the trend through music videos and fashion shoots. In fact, moving from the street onto screen media had important implications for the further dissemination and appropriation of Lolita style as it was introduced to an increasingly global audience. Here, Gwen Stefani became perhaps the most well-known artist to appropriate the Lolita style through her collaboration with the Harajuku girls who appeared in numerous videos and stage appearances (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Gwen Stefani and the Harajuku girls (2016). Source:

<https://www.usmagazine.com/stylish/news/gwen-stefani-explains-her-harajuku-obsession-w441999/>

An instance of cultural appropriation such as this raises significant questions that must be addressed at this stage of the article. There is no doubt about the directness of the appropriation – the name ‘Harajuku’ comes from the street district in Tokyo that is well-known as the origin of Lolita fashion and its premier fashion and media hub (Kawamura, 2013, 66). There is also clearly a direct appropriation of multiple Lolita fashion traits: lace, embroidery, and nineteenth-century ensembles being the most obvious examples. At the same time, there is something entirely different about the presentation of the Harajuku girls, that is, their flamboyant and overt adult sexual seductiveness expressed through tight, figure-hugging clothes and exposed legs and cleavage, as well as the highly-rouged lips and directly soliciting gazes. These are not traits that are native to the Lolita style as it originated and continues to be performed inside of Japan.

In view of this, Lolita fashion can be seen to inhabit a contested space within the overall socio-politics of media convergence culture (Jenkins 2004, 2006). ‘Convergence culture’ has entered the language of media and communication studies as a means of describing two principal phenomena. The first relates to the expansion within the array

of media, media outlets, and forms of media circulation, combined with the inclusion of users as active media producers, while the second relates to the challenge posed by this new media tumult for 'established forms of organisation across many domains, from political to cultural production, from corporate decision-making to marketing' (Couldry, 2011, 487-488).

3. Lolita Fashion and cultural Hegemony in Japan and Globally

Media convergence raises questions surrounding the extent to which media are able to, or in fact do, challenge established forms of organisation across multiple domains. It is clear that Lolita fashion does indeed participate in media convergence to the extent that it inhabits not only bodies on the street but text, image and video sources of various kinds and genres, all of which are rendered accessible through the internet. If these convergent media are said to challenge established forms of organisation, what, in the context of contemporary Japanese society, are these established forms of organisation? Can they be considered hegemonic? And how does Lolita fashion challenge them?

Gagné (2008, 131) argued that one of the most distinctive features of Lolita fashion is the 'counter-public discourses' of distinctive girls' speech patterns used in online forums as well as on the street. The creation of distinct linguistic sub-groupings has, in fact, a long history in Japan, while it entered the realm of counter-public discourse after the Meiji restoration when the state became a dominant source of modernisation through looking towards Western economic and industrial practices as models for its own development, thereby overturning centuries of cultural isolationism. Partly as a result of the state's dominant intervention into education, new counter-public communities (particularly girls' communities) emerged to contest, in often private but significant ways, the linguistic hegemony of the state. 'Hegemony' is here used in its Gramscian sense, common in cultural studies, as the manufacture of consent among the majority of the population as distinct from the use of physical force by propagating the apparently natural superiority of certain classes above others (Scott, 2014, s.v. 'hegemony'). Here, *Joseigo* became a hegemonic form of women's speech that governed social expectations of what women would say and how they would say it. Against this backdrop, multiple forms of counter-public speech have emerged, including *gyaru*, which entertains exuberant forms of speech, and *noripigo*, which is defined as 'childlike' or 'infantile' (Gagné, 2008, 132).

The emergence of counter-public speech communities associated with Lolita fashion indicates that, to some extent, Lolita fashion represents an alternative narrative, or a way of being that is distinct from the norm. Here, sociology has provided a set of key terms and theories for understanding and conceptualising the idea of the normative, as well as the deviation from the norm. Broadly speaking, as Goodman et al. (2012) have observed, there are two basically opposed sociological explanations of how norms and divergence work. First, norms are considered to be the product of social structures. These structures are necessarily large and collective in scale and their concept ultimately derives from Marxist thinking that considers society to be stratified into classes that are inherently antagonistic towards one another (Goodman et al., 2012, 7). The advantage of a structural explanation of normativity and deviation is that it operates at a very large scale, and therefore promises to explain the tensions within society as a whole. Lying in direct opposition to the structural model is the individual model proposed by Erving Goffman, wherein it is the individual himself/herself whose interactions effectively shape our understanding of everyday reality and social organisation (Goodman et al., 2012, 7).

Japan is frequently considered to be a collectivist society (Doak, 2014, 127). As such, it would seem that structuralist models of understanding its culture would be the most appropriate. However, Lolita fashion appears to directly subvert the expectation of collectivism; indeed, it has certainly attracted criticism for its subversion of standard expectations. Kawamura (2013) argued that what distinguishes Lolita fashion is that it represents a departure from traditional forms of the collective subversion of the norms of race, identity, class, sex, and politics.

Instead of taking a revolutionary, class-based stance, Lolita fashion can be considered a postmodern subculture in which individual agency is modelled through a unique set of consumer choices. Here, Kawamura (2013, 68) argued, with reference to Muggleton, that postmodern subcultures 'involve a combination of hybridity, diversity, and fluidity' where 'traditional points of collective identification, such as class, gender, race, and place, are gradually replaced by elective, build-your-own consumer identities'. This sentiment has led to an understanding of members of subcultures as postmodern subjects, exhibiting a fragmented and individualistic personal style. The social and political implications of such a subcultural position are that it exhibits freedom from structures and control and gives the subject more space in which to express themselves.

Looking at Lolita fashion catalogues certainly seems to correspond with Kawamura's ideas about 'build-your-own consumer identities' (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Classic Lolita style garments from the Body Line fashion catalogue (ca. 2000).

Source: Winge, 2008.

Indeed, the medium of the catalogue embodies the principle of difference within similarity. Whilst it is the advertising device of fundamentally mass-producing corporations, which demand that everything be as similar as possible in order to maximise profits, it presents the illusion that anyone can be – and should be – anything they wish or desire to be. The printed catalogue has now converged with the digital catalogue, meaning that the process of do-it-yourself consumer fashion styling is instantly linked to other media channels for sharing photographs and establishing networks of fellow avid fans. However, it should also be noted that while the catalogue promises infinite variation of self-fashioning, it also provides the possibility of closely-knit fashion communities held together by shared themes and motifs that can nonetheless sustain individual permutation.

This makes them particularly distinct from the class-based sartorial codes exemplified by the uniform (Crane, 2009).

With this, it appears possible for Lolita to be both radical and hegemonic at the same time. It is radical in so far as it permits liberal freedoms of choice and self-fashioning for Lolita consumers through the availability of different dress items, yet it is hegemonic to the extent that it serves to mirror the collective grouping that typifies collectivist societies. While it may look extravagantly different from the ordinary office culture, Lolita fashion nevertheless represents a definite social grouping of an alternative kind, a mirror image, as it were, of the traditional class structures of Japanese society, albeit one that reflects them as covered in lace, make-up, and frills. This would account for the perplexing mixture of critique and acceptance that Lolita fashion encounters within Japanese society. Nakamura et al. (2013, 174), for example, have described in detail how Lolita fashion has 'been perceived as mirroring the wearer's rejection of maturity and social conformity to the normative mode of femininity'. At the same time, Kawamura's (2013, 174) research shows how Harajuku girls find Japan the most accepting of all their behaviours in ways that would not be possible outside of Japan, especially in the West.

4. Lolita Fashion and the Question of Agency

One of the most pressing questions in current media studies is the question of agency. Whether or not people are positioned or controlled by the media, or whether in fact they have agency to resist, make their own meanings, and subvert dominant meanings, are crucial concerns that specifically relate to fashion and consumerism. There certainly exist widely diverging opinions regarding the agency that it is possible to exercise in the context of consumerism, ranging from the idea that consumerism permits minimal agency and, to a large extent, dictates consumer choice, to the idea that consumer culture allows the maximum quantity of individual imagination (Featherstone, 2014). In each case, the idea of agency is closely related to the idea of participation. Here, we must ask, to what extent do Japanese Lolita fans *participate* in the production of style and fashion, and to what extent are they merely passive adherents who consume but do not produce?

Kawamura (2006, 784-785) made the radical claim that inverts the conventional system of agency in the world of fashion media and business: 'Japanese street fashion does not come,' he wrote, 'from the famous Japanese designers, but is led by high school girls

who have become extremely influential in controlling fashion trends'. This leads to the extraordinary situation whereby Japanese fashion is effectively dictated by hyper-conscious fashion youths in a spirit of experimentation and obsession. For Kawamura, not only are fashion subcultures opportunities for liberation from established social destinies, but they are also alternative systems of fashion business that actively participate in setting trends, rather than follow existing ones meted out by corporations.

This point of view stems ultimately from a widely held understanding within media and cultural studies that fashion can serve as a means of agency and empowerment for those who are otherwise shut out of the corridors of power due to their being in some way deviant or perverse in their predilections, or simply in their refusal to conform. This has led to what Hall (2011, 596) has identified as a 'crisis of identity' in that the modern subject inhabits a fractured and fragmented self that experiences the dislocation of the central structures and processes of modern society. Media have played a crucial role in this rebalancing of agency. According to David Harvey, media have worked in both an 'extensional' mode (connecting the individual to supranational global networks of information flow) and in an 'intentional' mode (according to which the most intimate interpersonal relationships are inflected by media use) (quoted in Hall, 2011, 599).



Fig. 5. 'Sweet Lolitas' at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (2012). Source: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/j/japanese-street-style/>

The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has been an important global institutional agent in the dissemination of academic knowledge about Lolita fashion, actively collecting Lolita garments as part of its permanent collection and hosting research and social events connected with the subculture. Documentation of Lolita events at the museum reveal the spectrum of identities that Lolita fashion is able to encompass (Fig. 5), detaching the style from any sense of attachment to Japanese cultural authenticity, and in so-doing, effecting the kind of rupture and displacement that Hall speaks about in relation to identity under the conditions of modernity. The intimate relationship between the disparate Lolita fans gathered in this image, and the function of a digital group portrait circulated online and thereby inserted into the global discourse on Lolita fashion, also demonstrates how extensional and intentional media operate within a single subculture.

However, the question of individual agency is complicated here since the individuals are brought together and documented under the auspices of a media institution and this may, in fact, be evidence for participatory agency being taken away from individuals and relocated within the institution. This predicament at the heart of contemporary media has been discussed by Langlois (2013, 91), who has spoken about the ‘paradox of participatory media’ and the emergence of a ‘new governance of communication’ that has appropriated individual agency. While Langlois acknowledges the enthusiastic claims that have been made on behalf of participatory media cultures in empowering users and raising the potential for democratic agencies to unfold, he also posits a note of caution on the basis that ‘the locus of power and focus of the governance process is not on content per se, but on the conditions within which meaning can emerge’ (2013, 103).

If Lolita fans possess agency over the content of their individual fashion ensembles, do they also possess agency over the conditions within which their identities can emerge on global social networks? The events at the Victoria and Albert Museum would suggest that in a fashion world context where there are so many stakeholders – including museums, fashion labels, pop stars (such as Gwen Stefani) and (it must be said) scholars of fashion and media – individual agency becomes diluted. In important ways, this returns us to the question of hegemony and asks us to think of Lolita fashion in terms of Hall’s (2013) concept of meaning as a social practice, and cultural production as an ‘ideological battleground’.

What is especially unique about Lolita fashion as a cultural phenomenon is that, while it has been consistently appropriated by global media networks, and while social

media, in particular, has exploded the international reach of the style, it still remains fundamentally connected to an urban epicentre in the Harajuku district of Tokyo, where streets, department stores, and print magazines continue to transmit the agency of amateur fans in a rapid, place-specific environment in which participatory agency over a global phenomenon at a local scale is common. If the process of governance on participatory media platforms is about defining meaning through cultural value, shaping cultural perceptions, and ‘the setting up of a horizon of communicative possibilities and agencies’, the process of governance on the streets is still dispersed among the individual agencies of Lolita fashion fans, and this is what makes it so compelling as a cultural phenomenon (Langlois, 2013, 103).

5. Ideology of Mass Culture and the Phenomenon of Lolita Fashion

The issues explored thus far have covered the cultural origins of the Lolita fashion, the relationship between Lolita fashion and cultural hegemony, and the question of agency within Lolita fashion. Having originated in the 1980s, Lolita fashion came of age during the period of postmodernism and has migrated into the digital realm, becoming inflected in the process by media convergence and the emergence of a fully networked society. In order to finally situate Lolita fashion culture within the contemporary context of media studies, it is now necessary to consider the question of ideology and mass culture and to reflect on the more general significance of Lolita fashion within the wider context of global media studies.

Speaking about the current state of global mass media culture, Storey has argued that all consumers should see themselves as cultural producers: ‘selecting, rejecting, making meanings, attributing value, resisting, and, yes, being duped and manipulated’ (2019, 271). The crucial recognition expressed in this statement is that we are all, to some extent, ‘duped’ by mass culture and that we cannot avoid this situation, nor live in hope of revolution. This subtle shift marks a move away from the uncompromisingly political readings of media and cultural studies by figures such as Baudrillard and Hall, who were writing at a time when mass culture had not yet been assimilated by global corporations to the extent that it now has. The ultimately Marxist idea that the illusions of false consciousness projected by a dominant class could be overthrown has gradually been replaced by a more compromised, but perhaps more realistic, notion that ‘we must recognize the difference between different versions of reality, and to know that each can

require a different politics' (Storey, 2019, 271). While earlier theorists may have rejected consumer culture out of hand, thinkers such as Storey have called for the consumer to become reconciled to consumption. However, this acceptance of consumption still denies that popular culture 'is little more than a degraded landscape of commercial and ideological manipulation, imposed from above in order to make profit and secure social control' (Storey, 2019, 271).

Lolita fashion serves as a vivid illustration of the argument that Storey is making. It may, in fact, be the case that the Lolita fashion fan becomes the model consumer. Why should this be the case? According to Storey (2019, 272), 'it is, ultimately, in "production in use" that questions of meaning, pleasure, ideological effect, incorporation or resistance can be (contingently) decided'. By 'production in use' he means a dialogue between the processes of production and the activities of consumption that serves as a way of negotiating cultural hegemony. In 'production in use', the consumer 'always confronts a text or practice in its material existence as a result of determinate conditions of production', that is, the consumer confronts a text or practice in a way that is inflected by the economic system that has brought it into being, manufactured it, distributed it, advertised it, and made it available for purchase. However, this does not imply total passivity on the part of the consumer since just as the consumer is confronted by the commodity, so the commodity is confronted by the consumer, 'who in effect produces in use the range of possible meaning(s)' (Storey, 2019, 271). Consumer and commodity are thereby locked in a reciprocal process of mutual self-definition and this is exactly the logic that is at play in Lolita fashion culture.

A textual analysis will serve to bring these ideas into sharper focus (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. 'Sweet Lolitas' photographed in Harajuku (ca. 2010). Source: Rahman, 2011.

This group portrait of sweet Lolitas (that is, Lolita fans whose attire emphasises the 'sweet' aspects of Lolita, as opposed to the gothic) is one of many globally circulating images of Lolita fashion that testify to a strong set of shared stylistic conventions – a key characteristic of a subculture. What is particularly poignant about this image is its collective nature: seven girls arrange themselves in a tableau, compositionally balanced according to height and colour, displaying both uniformity in the commodification of the body as well as subtly differentiated interpretations of *kawaii*, or 'cuteness' (McVeigh, 2000; Winge, 2008). Dress, from this perspective, includes not only the physical commodities worn by the girls, but an ensemble of media operations that 'clothe' the subject and project their identity in the form of a group performance. This confirms a key part of this argument, which is that media users are media producers.

Another striking fact about the image is the degree to which individuation is created through the repetition of almost identical elements. The shoes are almost all pink but with different bows; the socks are knee-height but with different weaves; the skirts are identically plush but are modelled differently through each girl's individual posture, and so on, up to and including the highly coiffed big hair styles and stylised make-up. The image and its circulation testify to the appeal of the fundamental group affinities of a subculture, achieved through shared practices, rituals, and performances of commodity-based identity construction. It can therefore be concluded that circulation through global media

is vital to establishing collective subcultural identity. It is obvious that such an image could not have been produced without a highly commercialised consumer culture and this undoubtedly accounts for the sameness of the girls' accoutrements, while it is also clear that the exertion of individual agency is so extreme and dedicated in its effects that a range of possible meanings is produced within the group.

I began this article by referencing Vladimir Nabokov's seminal novel, *Lolita* (1955), as the etymological origins from which Lolita fashion's name is derived, suggesting that the word had become a shorthand for what I called 'the provocative eroticism of innocence in young girls'. On many levels, this continues to be a useful interpretative touchstone, making sense as it does, succinctly, of ideas such as the 'Lolita complex', most graphically rendered in the often controversial 'lolicom manga' work of artists such as Junko Mizuno (Pilcher, 2009, 317), with which, as we have noted, Lolita fashion is often mistakenly conflated and confused. What it obscures, however, is the fact that Nabokov's novel is a satire, a first-person narration by Humbert Humbert as he attempts to convince the 'Ladies and gentlemen of the jury' (Nabokov, 1955, 5), whom he repeatedly addresses, of, if not his outright innocence, then the mitigating circumstances of his paedophilic crimes. Unlike the Stanley Kubrick film of the same name, which adopts the viewpoint of a characterless but all-seeing narrator, Nabokov never straightforwardly serves up Lolita, to his readers, as a character in her own right: she is, instead, forever mediated through the distorting lens of Humbert Humbert's persuasive rhetoric ('You can always trust a murderer for a fancy prose style!' (Nabokov, 1955, 5)).

At the start of this article, I also invoked Antonio Gramsci's idea of cultural hegemony, a post-Marxist idea that, closely paralleling Althusserian notions of ideological state apparatus, postulates a system of cultural normatives, upheld by both a network of notable non-coercive social institutions (including schools and nuclear families) and popular consensus. This 'civil society' is in direct contradistinction, of course, to his 'political society, which, like Althusser's repressive state apparatus, includes institutions, such as police and armies, that exercise control on their populations coercively. I considered whether Lolita fashion might be construed as a site of resistance to the cultural hegemony of Japan's historically collectivist state, albeit one that operated, finally, on an immovable and incontestable capitalist impulse, upon which any individualism could only be expressed through consumerist choices, that is to say, combinations of purchases from the Body Line fashion catalogue, or perhaps its digital successors.

Both of these ideas come to the fore as I consider, briefly, the impact of globalisation on Lolita fashion. With its visual exuberance of pastels, frills and archaic garment shapes, there has, since its earliest development, been a danger that Lolita fashion is only ever regarded as spectacle, exploited by a highly sexualised, male gaze, the very same ticking time-bomb sent up by Nabokov's novel. And this happens in spite of Lolita fashion's credentials as a site of broadly feminist resistance in the face of sexualised stereotypes. While Winge observes that 'Japanese Lolitas claim they are not attempting to be sexually alluring' (2011, 50), she usefully questions whether their 'hyperfeminine and hypercute characteristics' (2011, 62) might be liable to easy misinterpretation. Gagné notes he 'often saw middle-aged men (foreign and otherwise) with massive cameras ogling the girls gathered in the Harajuku [...] many people', he continues, 'don't ask permission to take photographs, and just snap away as they stroll around the area' (2008, 140). While the non-visual practice of Lolita, from its ritualised liminality as identified by Winge (2008, 25-7), to the distinctively childlike and anachronistic *noripigo* speech patterns mentioned earlier, has always been precarious, it is all but certain to be lost in translation once exported to non-Japanese speaking countries of the West.

In his seminal study of *Orientalism*, Edward Said forcefully argues that Gramsci's cultural hegemony is 'an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West. It is hegemony', he writes, 'that gives Orientalism the durability and the strength I have been speaking about [...] a collective notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans' (Said, 2003, 7). In its exportation from Japan to the West, Lolita fashion soon becomes a silenced Other, reduced to a visual, sexualised spectacle. Writing about her experiences as a Lolita in Minnesota, Laura Blauersouth documents the surprise of fellow diners in a tea-room, 'there is a momentary pause while they silently wonder if this is some sort of sexual fetish [...] our culture', she explains, 'sees anything that grabs attention and shows off its *otherness* as a bid for sexual attention. It is also an undeniable fact that our culture objectifies little girls as sexually forbidden fruit. Combine the two, and Lolita seems designed to make people think the worst' (Blauersouth, 2011, 314). American popular culture has fared no better with the Lolita trope. For every darkly complex Darla or Drusilla character from Joss Whedon's multi-series teen-vampire drama, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), there is strewn a litany of failures cut from the same cloth. Gwen Stefani, mentioned earlier, may have been met with opprobrium by Japan's Lolita subculture, but got off lightly compared to

Avril Lavigne's 'Hello Kitty' (2014), or Alisha Attic's career-ending *Japanese Dream* (1997) that came before. None of them failed quite as spectacularly as Zack Snyder's *Sucker Punch* (2011) whose porcelain-faced, pigtailed Babydoll failed to win over audiences and was reviewed as 'Misogyny disguised as empowerment' with just a paltry 22% rating on *Rotten Tomatoes* (Rotten Tomatoes, 2011).

6. Conclusion

Yet, if America gets Lolita fashion wrong, it also holds up a mirror to its limitations. Far from home, the cracks in the apparently flawless face of Japanese Lolita subculture begin to show. Writes Blauersouth:

Lolita subculture, at its worst, is a materialistic, classist, and racist hobby. The sheer amount of money that can be spent on clothes, shoes, accessories, and other paraphernalia is astounding - and for some, a necessary component of the subculture [...] it has internalized a strict Victorian hierarchy, enforced with vicious online forums, scathing critique, exclusion, outright bullying, and racist screeds on how certain races just don't *do* Lolita. (Blauersouth, 2011, 315)

If Lolita fashion challenges the ordered, measured cultural hegemony of Japan with its exuberance and individuated consumerism, it is also challenged by its own vicious online policing. And if Lolita fashion, Orientalised and othered in the way that Edward Said describes, challenges a constant predilection, in the west, to immediately sexualise difference, it is also challenged by its own shamelessly Eurocentric and relentless fetishisation of whiteness. It is telling that, in 2014 as Lolita fashion struck a critical mass as a global phenomenon, Japanese toymakers, Sanrio, shocked by the world by reinforcing that Eurocentricity and advising that 'Hello Kitty' - by far the most internationally recognisable icon to be co-opted by Lolita fashion - was not a cat at all, but a young British girl in the third-grade, living outside London (Petri, 2016, para. 4-5).

In many ways the adoption of Lolita (predominantly Gothic Lolita) fashion in Europe sees the wheel turn full circle: Lolita fashion was an invention by Japanese girls inspired by Victorian or nineteenth-century European fashions; now European women are inspired by Lolita fashion's take on the same. That fashion has always borrowed from the historical past, or, more precisely, re-articulations of the historical past, is nothing new.

What is interesting in the case of Lolita fashion, however, is the ways in that it re-inscribes the importance of settled hierarchies of race and class. Blauersouth observes that

'many of the Japanese Lolita models are white (or are digitally altered to look like it)' (2011, 315). In the hands of 'primarily Caucasian' (Blauersouth, 2011, 315) Minnesotans, or the hands of its European scene, the whiteness of Lolita's own community becomes celebrated and fetishised, an ugly and putrid reflection of the high colonial impulses from which those same fashions derive. And, as we have seen, Lolita fashion does not come cheaply either: whether in Harajuku or Minnesota, the financial cost of mimicking the fashions of porcelain dolls, only ever given to wealthy children, Lolita fashion success comes at a high price, a barrier to entry that effectively operates as class segregation to mirror its racial segregation. Whatever political radicalism was latent in Lolita fashion, however much it ever seemed to provide a countercultural space within which to actively resist a dominant cultural hegemony, either on a national or international level, the built-in conservatism of Lolita fashion, together with its early emphasis on etiquette and deportment, seems to condemn it as an evolutionary, sartorial dead-end, a worn out idea that starts to fade as quickly as it came to life.

As a case study in performed postmodern identities negotiated through consumerism, Lolita fashion lays bare the socio-economic contradictions of its cultural hegemony and milieu, highlighting, too, the ways in which these structures morph and change in the light of the digital revolution and its concomitant globalisation. Equally significantly, it illustrates, perfectly, the phenomenon of 'production in use', defined by Storey, which is a means through which the mediation of the body through consumerist fashion trends enacts the fundamental relationship of the subject of modern identity to the ideologies of mass culture, sometimes with disquieting consequences. In doing so, it renders visible, in an extreme way, the negotiations of self and society that we all, as highly mediated postmodern subjects, must contend with.

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REVIEWS

Bachelor Japanists: Japanese Aesthetics and Western Masculinities **– Christopher REED**

New York: Columbia University Press, 2019, 422 p.

Review by Tyrus MILLER | University of California, Irvine, USA

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Bachelor Japanists offers readers an engaging and richly narrated look at Western “Japanism” of the 19th and 20th century—scholarly, collectionist, and creative engagements with Japanese culture, religion, art, and aesthetics—which, Christopher Reed argues, Western individuals and coteries used to construct queer “bachelor” identities, both male and female, eschewing marriage and evading the domestic norms of their day. The term bachelor, Reed underscores, is not reducible to gay or homosexual, since “deviance from bourgeois family norms” (4) that he considers takes a variety of forms, ranging from highly sublimated spirituality or aesthetic tastes to preferences for all-male associations to outright sexual relations. As he notes, the bachelor Japanists’ “range of experience and expression was neither enabled by the solidarity attached to affirmations of sexual identity nor limited by its definitional boundaries” (5). Accordingly, Reed treats discerningly a wide range of behaviours, relationships, activities, and aesthetic and life choices, some of which movingly express bachelor alienation and a search for congenial spaces for difference—and at the same time, appear notably odd, eccentric, “queer” against the heteronormative context of their times and places.

Reed adopts a perspective on his bachelor Japanists that neither uncritically accepts their self-regarding and often self-serving fantasies nor dismisses them wholesale as merely discreditable instruments of Orientalist oppression and exploitation. Through mosaic-like arrays of references to letters, diaries, journalistic articles and interviews, catalogues, and artistic works, he discloses the personal and social motivations that lie behind these fantasies and reveals their creative force in the fashioning and presentation of otherwise unacceptable queer identities and life-modes. Setting out

from a brief discussion of Oscar Wilde’s “The Decay of Lying” and Roland Barthes’s *Empire of Signs* and progressing through three multifaceted case studies—19th-century French *japonisme*, turn of the century Bostonian elite collectionism and scholarly Japanism, and the West Coast avant-garde Japanism of Mark Tobey and figures including ceramicist Bernard Leach, painter Morris Graves, composer John Cage, and novelist Nancy Wilson Ross—Reed explores the variegated ways in which bachelors used Japan “as a point of departure in an act of self-invention” (4).

A tributary theme running through the book is also the ways in which this tradition of bachelor Japanists parallels and intersects with, but is also excluded by, the critical canonisation of a modernist avant-garde during these two decades, with its valuation of individualism, activity, virility, creativity, and independence. Thus, Reed samples scholarship on the experimental domesticity of the brothers Goncourt, who created an eclectic, subjective juxtaposition of 18th-century French furnishings and Japanese *objets d’art*, noting that their role in promoting *japonisme* in France has been something of an embarrassment to later critics and scholars. He argues, in fact, that despite its subjectivism, “[Edmond de] Goncourt’s eclectic, inverted style was at odds with the look of individualism that characterised modernism” (93); Goncourt’s *Maison* has been “written out of art history” (93) on account of its intimations of what would later be characterised famously by Susan Sontag as the aesthetics of Camp (1966, 277-293). In chapter 2 on turn-of-the-century Boston this tension with modernism drops a bit underground, though the presence of such figures as Ernest Fenollosa and Amy Lowell in the narrative suggests that one of key combatants and canonisers of early 20th-century modernism, Ezra Pound, might have formed a coda to this chapter, even if he was outside the circles of Brahmin Boston on which Reed focuses. The theme comes to its culmination in Reed’s final case, however, which discusses Mark Tobey and his artistic and personal circles. Tobey briefly enjoyed the cautious interest and critical support of the modernist kingmaker of post-World War II painting, Clement Greenberg; but for the New York art establishment, he evidently did not measure up to the large-scale, extroverted masculinity of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still and other abstract expressionists whom Greenberg elevated into *the* representatives of American art. Tobey’s work appeared too diminutive, too impersonal, and perhaps too feely “Oriental” to stand shoulder to shoulder with such muscular New York company.

The book is anchored by better-known figures such as Oscar Wilde, the brothers Goncourt, Ernest Fenolosa, Isabella Stewart Gardner, George Santayana, Mark Tobey, Morris Graves, John Cage, and Roland Barthes, although Reed often focuses on marginalised or even suppressed aspects of their work in light of bachelor Japanist aesthetics. In the case, for instance, of John Cage, he ventures a revisionist hypothesis about the composer's notorious misdating of his first engagements with Zen Buddhist thought (Cage suggested he was introduced to Zen by D.T. Suzuki's lectures in New York, but at a date earlier than the scholar's arrival in the United States). Reed argues for greater appreciation of the role Tobey as an artist and artistic thinker in Cage's adoption of Zen ideas, but also for Cage's experiences of Tobey and his circle personally, as a Seattle "subculture in which philosophies drawn from Japan redeemed bonds among bachelors—and between bachelors and women who offered nonromantic companionship and collaboration" (253). Beyond these major figures, however, Reed also thickens the contextual pictures with a rich pantheon of "minor" figures, texts, collections, and sites that together constitute the weave and weft of the bachelor Japanist networks of Paris, Boston, and Seattle. Sometimes he may focus on actual biographical figures and sites, such as Henri Cernuschi and his house-museum outside the Parc Monceau; or Hugues Krafft's Midori-no-sato, his Japanese home and garden near Versailles; or Okakura Kakuzō and the Japanese spaces designed and installed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts to display highlights of the burgeoning collection. At other times, and with equal weight, Reed takes up fictional characterisations that illuminate the bachelor Japanist culture, from now little-known novels such as the Goncourt brothers' novel *Manette Salomon* and its painter-character Coriolis de Naz, Mary McNeil Scott Fenolosa's *Truth Dexter*, and George Santayana's *The Last Puritan*.

The book concludes with some understated observations about the eventual "exhaustion" of bachelor Japanism. Throughout the book, Reed offers instance after instance of a fantasy-structure by which his bachelor-subjects mediated a relation to their self and their own socio-cultural context through an imagined, aesthetically felt, and artificially constructed version of Japan as an otherplace of art. By the end of a century of bachelor Japanism, in the 1960s, its function had begun to erode and go into abeyance. In part, Reed suggests, this was due to the intensifying dissonance between modern Japanese and Japanese-American identities and the sorts of fantasy projections that animated bachelor Japanism. He discusses, for example, the emergence into middle-

class prominence in Seattle of the art dealer Tamotsu Takizaki and the artists George Tsutakawa and Paul Horiuchi, who had been close to Tobey in the 1950s. As Reed concludes, “the normalization of aesthetics and identities labeled ‘Japanese-American’ brought an end to Japonism’s usefulness as an alternative to normative modes of masculinity in the West” (285). But there was also an erosive dynamic in the rise of distinctive gay minority cultures modelled, as Reed notes, explicitly on ethnicity and organised in urban neighbourhoods with “their own distinctive aesthetics and institutions” (294). Bachelor Japonism, he suggests, went into eclipse when the cultural, sexual, and social desires amalgamated into its aesthetic fantasies could ultimately be addressed by name.

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The Japanese Cinema Book **- FUJIKI Hideaki & Alastair PHILLIPS (eds)**

London: The British Film Institute/Bloomsbury, 2020, 624 p.

Review by Alejandra ARMENDÁRIZ-HERNÁNDEZ | University Rey Juan Carlos, Spain

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Japanese film studies is an academic discipline and research community focusing on the multifaceted aspects of Japanese cinema. Deeply interdisciplinary, it employs theories, critical approaches and methods from different fields such as film studies and cultural studies to understand Japanese films as works of art, cultural products and social practices. What makes a film “Japanese”, and even what is a film, are far from easy questions, particularly in the globalised, transnational and digitalised world in which we now live, but nevertheless are issues that define the discipline and its historiography.

Yomota Inuhiko puts it simply in the preface to the English edition of his *What is Japanese Cinema* (2019), stressing that in the study of “Japanese cinema” the choice of which word to emphasize, “Japanese” or “cinema”, makes a big difference:

Those who prioritize “cinema” will put all filmmakers [...] on one horizontal plane. The history of Japanese cinema is but a portion of the history of world cinema. That Kurosawa [Akira] is Japanese is merely incidental and what is significant is the extent to which his works contribute to the expansion of the global language of technical images. A person who loves cinema transcends ethnic or national boundaries.

In other words, from this point of view Japanese films as any film are universal and share the specific language of cinema, so anyone able to understand that language can appreciate and study them as part of the cinematic art. On the other hand, Japanese cinema can be also considered and studied as part of the Japanese culture. As Yomota argues:

From this perspective, it is impossible to ignore cinema’s intimate connections with Japanese culture, from literature to painting and theater. [...] You need to know not just

the culture but also the realities of Japanese history and society.

For Yomota and this reviewer, a combination of both approaches is ideal. Japanese cinema cannot be understood without taking into consideration its cultural, industrial and historical context of production and reception within the Japanese society and history. However, the study of Japanese films is also intertwined with the histories, theories and developments of films and visual cultures worldwide and thus transcends the national framework to terms of interactions, audiences and meanings. Fortunately, in the past decades, the research on Japanese cinema, carried out inside and outside Japan, by Japanese and non-Japanese scholars, has steadily advanced in that direction. Recent anthologies, such as Miyao (2014) and Bernardi and Ogawa (2021) explore Japanese cinema from multiples perspectives, widening the scope of what is considered a Japanese film and thus Japanese film studies as a discipline.

Belonging to this trend, *the Japanese Cinema Book* departs from any “pre-given, monolithic, self-sufficient and stable” categorisation to question the “national boundary of ‘Japanese’ and the media boundary of ‘cinema’” as something “fluid and contested on a number of levels” (p. 1). In fact, as stated in the introduction by its editors Fujiki Hideaki (Nagoya University) and Alastair Philips (University of Warwick), the book has come together on the consideration of Japanese cinema and its study in terms of multiplicity (of theoretical and methodological approaches), historical contextualisation and cross-boundary relations (p.11).

While contributors in every chapter analyse and engage with Japanese films and the specificities of Japanese cinema, the way *The Japanese Cinema Book* is organised by areas of study and key concepts shows a conscious attempt to position the volume within the general field of film studies. In the introduction, the editors argue that

“the emergence of a more rigorous and empirical Japanese cinema studies has also simultaneously resulted in a degree of marginalisation from the larger field of cinema and media studies. [...] It is still necessary to move beyond language barriers and boost collaboration between Japanese cinema studies and non-Japanese cinema and media studies” (p. 10).

Responding to this challenge, *The Japanese Cinema Book* is structured in seven thematic parts (1. Theories and Approaches; 2. Institutions and Industry; 3. Film Style; 4. Genre; 5. Time and Spaces of Representation; 6. Social Contexts, and 7. Flows and Interactions)

which in fact can be seen as the different categories and frameworks applied in the wide-ranging study of films and cinema industries. Published by Bloomsbury on behalf of the British Film Institute (BFI), its title and structure of the publication are reminiscent of the seminal *The Cinema Book* edited by Pam Cook (first published by the BFI in 1985, and then in 1999 and 2007, co-edited with Mieke Bernink), which has become “a landmark film studies text, presenting in accessible form two decades of intellectual activity on the subject” (BFI 2020). In this sense, *The Japanese Cinema Book* might be seen as an effort to support the reintegration of Japanese film studies into cinema studies, going beyond the barrier of Japanese language and the status of Japanese films as mere objects representing Japanese culture and used to test and demonstrate Western film theory.

Grouped in those seven parts *The Japanese Cinema Book* presents 40 chapters written by Japanese and non-Japanese researchers based in institutions all around the world, mainly in Japan, North-America and the UK. Preceding the title of every chapter, there is a key concept that is analysed through the prism of Japanese cinema. Topics range from canonical elements in film theory, industry and aesthetics, such as Authorship, Spectatorship, Narrative, Technology, Stardom, Cinematography, Acting, Set design, Music and Melodrama, to more Japan-specific issues affecting and emerging from Japanese history and cinematic culture, for example, *Jidaigeki*, Anime, the Yakuza Film, Empire, The Occupation, and Japanese cinema in relation to its post-colonial history, Hollywood and Europe. Other thematic and interdisciplinary topics also discussed are Gender and Sexuality, Transmedia Relations, the Archive, Ecology, The City, Minority Cultures, Globalisation, and Transnational Remakes and adaptations, among others.

In its engagement with these key concepts and topics, chapters in *The Japanese Cinema Book* display different strategies and approaches. Some of the chapters explicitly reflect upon and historicise those concepts within the history of Japan, Japanese cinema and/or Japanese film studies, considering the discourses, meanings and relations permeating those notions. For instance, in chapter 1, Aaron Gerow examines the history and debates surrounding the studies of early Japanese cinema as a site where the notion of Japanese films as something Other, different from Hollywood and European cinemas, is negotiated and complicated by issues of nation, identity and the actual position of film scholars. Similarly, chapter 2 by Alexander Jacoby historically examines the consideration of the director as the film’s primary author by film critics and scholars both in Japan and in the West, illuminating “broader questions about the nature of the medium, the workings of the

industry and the place of a national cinema in an evolving international context” (p.39). Hori Hikari introduces in chapter 6 a historical and conceptual overview of the research on gender and sexuality representations in Japanese film studies through the fundamental categories of analysis in feminism film studies such as representation, women’s film/and women’s cinema (*josei eiga*), spectatorship and authorship.

One of the interesting elements in Gerow, Jacoby and Hori’s chapters, which can also be found in most chapters of *The Japanese Cinema Book*, is their impetus to frame the discussion as a dialogue between Anglophone and Japanese-language scholarships. As Hori eloquently writes, it is a dialogue that “has not always involved direct communication” (p. 94) nor explicit relationships of influence. Nevertheless, she also recognises that “both scholarships have articulated urgent concerns that resonate with each other despite their different temporal and spatial locations” (p. 94). Other examples of this historicising approach are also developed in chapters 3 and 22: In the former, editor Fujiki Hideaki examines discourses and debates encompassing the notion of “spectator” as subject and agent, before studying the specific case of the construction of a racialised spectatorship ideal during the Japanese empire; in the latter, Thomas Lamarre explores different paradigms to situate and define ‘what anime is’ in terms of art history, animation films, television series and new media in contemporary Japan. A more chronological approach can also be found in chapters 7, 8, 9 and 13 which offer historical accounts of the developments of the Japanese studio system, exhibition sites, censorship rules and experimental filmmaking respectively.

Some other chapters focus on specific films, filmmakers, places and practices as case studies to analyse the proposed key concepts and topics, often combining socio-historical and theoretical contextualisation with formal and narrative analysis. Films scrutinised in detail include: *That Night’s Wife* (Ozu Yasujirō, 1930), examined in chapter 23 by Misono Ryoko in terms of modernity and melodrama; *The Love of Sumako the Actress* (Mizoguchi Kenji, 1947), employed by Kinoshita Chika to rethink film acting traditions in Japan (chapter 17); and Ōshima Nagisa’s *Sing a Song of Sex* (1967) analysed by Ko Mika from an intersectional perspective in regard to the representation and position of *zainichi* Korean women in Japanese culture (chapter 34). Among the actors and directors discussed in depth are performer and singer Miwa Akihiro (chapter 12), horror film director Nakagawa Nobuo (chapter 21), yakuza films’ heroine Fuji Junko (chapter 25) and documentalist Ogawa Shinsuke (chapter 26). In addition, there are also

chapters which concentrate on films united by a particular topic or genre, such as chapter 24 on the musical genre with films featuring popular singers and actors Misora Hibari, Eri Chiemi and Yukimura Izumi, and the stimulating chapter on Ecology (27), which analyses the so-called 3.11 cinema (the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami and atomic meltdown) considering their representation of the human-nature interdependency through the visualisation of toxic and contaminated landscapes.

Discussions about places and locations, both physical and imaginary, are one of the main themes running throughout *The Japanese Cinema Book*. In terms of representations, there are chapters investigating the cinematic images of the rural landscapes (chapter 28) and the visual construction of the domestic space (chapter 29) and the city of Tokyo (chapter 30) in 1950s Japanese cinema. Important places for film viewing and preservation, such as film festivals and archives, are examined in chapter 11 and chapter 15. In the first one, Ma Ran adopts a double approach to the concept of *eigasai* (film festival), interrogating the history of screening Japanese films at European-American festivals and the film festival culture in Japan today. In chapter 15 Oliver Dew explores the notion of archive via the examination of home/amateur films and its film festival networks as local, decentred archives which transform the status of the film object. The historical and physical geographies of Japanese cinema are considered in chapters such as chapter 31 in which Yan Ni focuses on film production and reception in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, and chapter 38 in which Andrew Dorman deals with complex representations of Okinawa in Japanese films as defined by core-periphery exchange relationships.

Also, some chapters go beyond and complicate the understanding of Japanese cinema as cultural texts determined by the national boundaries of Japan. They deploy a transnational approach at different levels to highlight the hybridity and global nature of Japanese films and film discourses. For example, in chapter 4, Yamamoto Naoki explores the critical reception and influence of Soviet montage theory in Japanese cinema and film culture in the 1920's and 1930's; Cobus van Staden (chapter 35) investigates the global appeal of Japanese popular culture via fandom communities in South Africa; and Ryan Cook in chapter 40 closes the book with a study of the Japanese adaptation of *Casablanca*. In fact, the seventh and last part of the book discusses the flows and interactions present in Japanese cinema in relation to other Asian countries (chapter 36), Hollywood (chapter 37), Okinawa (chapter 38) and Europe (chapter 39).

As suggested by this, necessarily concise, review of the content, *The Japanese Cinema Book* is a multifaceted piece of work offering the state of art in the study of Japanese films. While it certainly provides a balanced and diverse understanding of the subject, and covers a wide range of theoretical approaches, film and filmmakers, there is surely still room for development. The editors reasonably don't claim the book to be comprehensive nor to be the definitive account on Japanese cinema, but to "provoke stimulating debate and discussion within the numerous academic and cultural contexts around the world where the subjects of Japan and cinema continue to arise." (p.17). In this sense, one direction which could be explored further regards going beyond the English and Euro-American scholarship to include other geographical and linguistic areas in the production of knowledge on Japanese films, for example in relation to Latino American, Arab and African countries.

In any case, the diversity of perspectives available in *The Japanese Cinema Book* makes the volume compelling and relevant to both students and researchers of Japanese cinema, and to those interested in film culture anywhere. Moreover, the structure of the book makes it also a useful teaching material in English-speaking countries, not only in courses on Japanese culture within Japanese/East Asian studies, but also beyond these fields, in film and media courses, which are still too often centred in European and North American (i.e. Hollywood) cinemas and filmmakers. For instance, why not use this book and Japanese films to explore basic concepts in film studies such as film authorship and stardom? Or to discuss genre theories or film style? Publications such as *The Japanese Cinema Book* can surely help to incorporate non-Western cinemas to film studies courses widening students understanding of cinema and film studies as a discipline.

Last but not least, an extra positive point is the compact format and affordable price of the book, which makes it attractive and available not only to institutions or university libraries but to anyone interested in deepening their knowledge of Japanese films.

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