

Follow Us Into Basic Training: Post-Feminist Aesthetics and Militarization in Germany's Recruitment Campaign *Die Rekrutinnen*

By
Anna-Lena Commer

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

*In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in
Women's and Gender Studies (GEMMA)*

Main Supervisor: Julia Carolin Sachseder (Central European University)

Second supervisor: Alina Danet (Universidad de Granada)

Vienna, Austria

2025

Follow Us Into Basic Training: Post-feminist Aesthetics and Militarization in Germany's Recruitment Campaign

Die Rekrutinnen

By

Anna-Lena Commer

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

*In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's
and Gender Studies (GEMMA)*

Main Supervisor: Julia Carolin Sachseder (Central European University)

Second supervisor: Alina Danet (Universidad de Granada)

Vienna, Austria

2025

Approval signed by the main Supervisor: Julia Carolin Sachseder

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference. I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 23.733 words

Entire manuscript: 26.890 words

Signed: Anna-Lena Commer

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Copyright © Anna-Lena Commer, 2025. Follow Us Into Basic Training: Post-feminist Aesthetics and Militarization in Germany's Recruitment Campaign *Die Rekrutinnen* - This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC BY-NC-ND) 4.0 International license.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how the German Bundeswehr's YouTube series *Die Rekrutinnen* (2019) employs gendered representations to legitimize military service in a society with a historically skeptical stance toward militarism. Against the backdrop of increasing efforts to culturally rebrand the military and rising public discourse on remilitarization, this study analyzes how *Die Rekrutinnen* mobilizes post-feminist sensibilities—such as individual empowerment, gender equality, and personal choice—to frame the Bundeswehr as a modern, inclusive, and morally progressive institution. Drawing on theoretical approaches from Critical Military Studies (CMS), post-feminist media theory, and postcolonial feminism, the thesis examines how representations of both femininity and masculinity function ideologically to depoliticize military service and obscure its structural violence. Methodologically, the thesis combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Feminist Media Analysis to critically examine how visual, narrative, and affective strategies in the series contribute to a broader process of “soft” militarization. The analysis shows how military values are naturalized within civilian cultural frameworks through close readings of individual characters and thematic tropes, including fitness, teamwork, and weapon training. The study further situates these findings within the Bundeswehr's evolving media strategy and Germany's shifting political context, arguing that *Die Rekrutinnen* participates in a long-term project to normalize militarism through entertainment media and emotional storytelling. By integrating masculinities into post-feminist critique, the thesis contributes to feminist media studies and CMS, highlighting the relational nature of gender constructions in legitimizing military institutions. Overall, the thesis sheds light on how contemporary militarization operates not only through policy and politics but through culture, emotion, and gendered media narratives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The list of people who supported this project is long and far too extensive to capture fully on a single page. Still, I will try to offer a non-exhaustive but heartfelt acknowledgment of those who helped bring this thesis to life. First, I want to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Julia Sachseder. I am incredibly thankful for her trust, guidance, and generous support throughout this process. From navigating several topic changes to helping me find and commit to this final direction, she gave me space to figure things out when needed, and yet, she was always, truly always, there when I reached out for advice or support. Her astonishingly fast responses to my emails and draft revisions became a source of envy among my classmates. More importantly, she never made me feel small, even when I doubted myself. Thank you for your kindness. It made all the difference. I would also like to thank my professors at CEU and my classmates at CEU and Granada, whose critical insights and passionate conversations shaped how I think about feminist research. Your work, curiosity, and generosity of thought continually inspired me to think more deeply and keep exploring—not only for this thesis but also far beyond.

To my friends and roommates: thank you for being the perfect balance of academic comrades and emotional caretakers. Some of you debated theory with me, others patiently listened to endless ramblings about militaries; many of you cooked for me, grounded me, and reminded me to rest. Most of you did all of that and more. Maryam Hasanova, Juliana Marín, Anna Heckhausen, Mira Reilama, Vijetha Ravi, Mar Guardiola, Clara Gördes, Padmaja Pati, Anne van den Heuvel, Maya, and all the others whose names don't fit on this page: thank you for everything.

My deepest and most personal thanks go to my mother, Vera Commer — my greatest supporter in every way, and the reason this project was even conceivable. You are my hero, the person I worked hardest for throughout this journey, without ever needing to earn your approval. I honestly would not have made it without you.

And to the seven who, through their music, reminded me to love myself when focus was fleeting, to rest without guilt, and to hold onto my resilience — thank you. Your presence and art offered rhythm, refuge, laughter and strength across oceans and long writing nights.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	ii
COPYRIGHT NOTICE	iii
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgements	v
List of Figures	ix
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Brief Overview of Historic and Political Context	4
1.2 Thesis Overview	7
2. Literature Review	10
2.1 Topical Literature Review	10
2.1.1 Women's integration into the military	10
2.1.2 Critical Military Studies and Gender	12
2.1.3 Military Media recruitment	15
2.1.4 Germany, militarization, antimilitarism	19
2.2 Theoretical Framework	22
3. Methodology	29
4. Gendered Military Storytelling in Die Rekrutinnen	37
4.1 Centering Female Narratives in Format and Content	38
4.2 Enni the Cool Girl: Performing Post-feminist Femininity	42
4.3 Post-feminist masculinities: Recruit Maik	50
5. Post-feminist Militarization: Empowered Femininities and Nonviolent Masculinities	55
5.1 Portraying Gender Equality	57
5.2 Fitness, Discipline, and the New Soldier	64

5.3 Teamwork and Gender Relations	70
5.4 Weapons, War, and the Technical Sanitization of Violence	73
6. Discussion: The Nation and the Global Soldier: Gender, Post-feminism, and Germany's Nation Imaginary	78
7. Conclusion.....	86
Bibliography.....	91
References	91
Literature	91

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Die Rekrutinnen Introductory Sequence (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019)	38
Figure 2: Sloth animation (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019).....	40
Figure 3: Enni riding her motorcycle (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019).....	50
Figure 4: Military equal opportunity sign (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019).....	62

1. INTRODUCTION

“We just hope she finds her path. I mean it, I’m really proud of her—proud that she chose this path, that she decided to take on such a job” (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019^a 2:46)

These words—spoken by a parent in the opening episode of the *Bundeswehr’s* (German Forces’) YouTube series *Die Rekrutinnen: Komm mit in die Grundausbildung* (2019) (Female Recruits: Follow Us into Basic Training)¹ - set the tone for a military recruitment narrative centered on personal choice and empowerment. The scene encapsulates the series’ overarching narrative: military service is framed not as a grim necessity or political duty, but as a personal path to empowerment. Such a human-interest portrayal is no accident. It reflects a deliberate communication strategy by the *Bundeswehr* to recast soldiering in an appealing light and to not only recruit potential personnel but also the German public (Kaempf & Stahl, 2023) - to literally and symbolically follow them into basic training. In this thesis, I interrogate that strategy by paying attention to what kind of gendered representations and discourses are embedded in *Die Rekrutinnen*, and what work they perform.

In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to how militaries communicate with the public to recruit personnel, "recruit" public approval, and reframe what military service means in

¹ From here on out referred to as *Die Rekrutinnen*

contemporary society (Kaempf & Stahl, 2023). This shift is part of a broader dynamic in which military legitimacy is increasingly managed through emotional narratives and cultural representation rather than traditional appeals to national duty (e.g., Stern & Strand, 2024). In the German context, where public attitudes toward the armed forces remain shaped by postwar skepticism, researchers such as Shim & Stengel (2017, 2022) have shown how the *Bundeswehr* turns to platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to present itself as professional, peacekeeping, and socially inclusive. At the same time, feminist scholars such as Cynthia Enloe (2000, 2016) and Victoria Basham (2008, 2013) have emphasized the centrality of gender to how militaries function, not just in terms of who serves, but how institutions imagine the nation, power, and violence. While much of this work has focused on military masculinities and the symbolic role of the soldier, representations of female soldiers and femininities have begun to receive more attention (e.g., Gopal, 2023; Vavrus, 2018). In Germany, however, the gendered dynamics of recruitment media about female soldiers remain comparatively underexplored.

With *Die Rekrutinnen* as its case, this thesis aims to examine these dynamics by asking: How does the *Bundeswehr*'s YouTube series *Die Rekrutinnen* (2019) reproduce gendered representations to legitimize military service in contemporary Germany? By examining how the series constructs both its female protagonists and the male recruits, the study reveals the subtle ways in which the *Bundeswehr* presents itself as an inclusive and normalized institution within German society. I argue that *Die Rekrutinnen* reproduces post-feminist sensibilities in its gendered representations — particularly those of empowered femininity and softened, military masculinities—to depoliticize military service and frame militarization as compatible with values like gender equality. Ultimately,

it shows that the *Bundeswehr*'s adoption of post-feminist aesthetics marks not a rupture but a continuation in the slow cultural normalization of militarism in Germany.

The timing of this research is particularly significant. Although *Die Rekrutinnen* was released in 2019, the issue of military recruitment—and militarization more broadly—has gained heightened public and political attention in Germany in recent years. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and Chancellor Olaf Scholz's declaration of a *Zeitenwende* ("watershed moment") in security policy, recruiting efforts, including initiatives aimed at increasing the number of women in the *Bundeswehr*, have become more widely discussed (*DW*, Nov. 2023, o. J.; *DW*, Jul. 2023, o. J.). These developments make it especially relevant to examine Germany's recruitment strategies and representations, including how they are gendered. Scholz's speech in February 2022—committing an extra €100 billion to the *Bundeswehr* and vowing to make it a "powerful, ultra-modern" force—has often been described as a turning point, marking the end of Germany's military reticence (*Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz*, 2022; *Policy Statement*, 2022). In public discourse, a narrative quickly took hold that Germany was abandoning its so-called post-WWII antimilitarism¹ and embracing a new era of strength. However, as Stengel (2023, 2025) and others have observed, this popular framing exaggerates the novelty of the shift and obscures the continuity in Germany's gradual militarization. Arguably, militarization and military normalization were well underway long before 2022. I will briefly trace this by going over some of the historical developments of the *Bundeswehr* since its creation.

1.1 Brief Overview of Historic and Political Context

Founded in 1955, the *Bundeswehr* was designed as a conventional defense force amid Cold War tensions, particularly in response to the Warsaw Pact. In an effort to distance itself from the legacy of Nazi militarism, West Germany embedded its new military within international alliances—most prominently NATO—and imposed constitutional limits to ensure democratic accountability. At the heart of this reconfiguration was the principle of the *Staatsbürger in Uniform* (citizen in uniform), reflecting a model of the soldier as a guardian of democratic order and legal norms rather than an instrument of authoritarian power. This foundational ethos contributed to the development of a predominantly military-skeptical civilian culture in postwar Germany (Leonhard, 2019). While this did not preclude the Bundeswehr’s participation in foreign deployments, particularly in the decades following reunification, it nonetheless underscores how military-skeptic attitudes have persisted within German public discourse and social identity (F. Stengel, 2023).

During the Cold War, West Germany—often labeled a “civilian power”—maintained a large conscript army that was heavily armed and generously funded, spending more on defense than even the most ambitious current proposals envisage (F. Stengel, 2023). After reunification, the *Bundeswehr*’s role expanded significantly: over the past three decades, it has transformed from a “non-interventionist, conscription-based territorial defense force” into an “army on operations” involved in conflict prevention, crisis management, and combat deployments abroad (F. Stengel, 2020). Deploying troops beyond NATO’s borders—once a political taboo—became normalized. By the 2000s, participation in out-of-area missions, from peacekeeping in the Balkans to protracted counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, had become routine and was endorsed by most mainstream political actors (F. Stengel, 2020). Indeed, Germany’s military engagement in Afghanistan after

2001 arguably eroded its culture of restraint more profoundly than the post-2022 shifts (F. Stengel, 2020). It is also notable that the Federal Republic maintained compulsory military service until 2011, meaning generations of young men—and, after 2001, women volunteers—passed through basic training and served in the military (Leonhard, 2019). Since the suspension of conscription in 2011, the *Bundeswehr* has transformed into a professional volunteer force. Recruitment numbers dropped significantly, prompting the adoption of strategies from the private sector to boost enlistment, including marketing campaigns, participation in job fairs, and structural reforms (Apt, 2011). All this undercuts the notion that postwar Germany was ever truly anti-militarist in a strict sense. As Stengel (2025) concludes, Germany “has never really been pacifist” (p. 4) in any meaningful way (see also Jakub Eberle, 2022). Rather, the country’s military posture has fluctuated within the bounds of a society that publicly disavows militarism even as it incrementally normalizes military institutions and practices. The current expansion of the *Bundeswehr*, accelerated under the banner of the watershed moment, thus continues this long-standing pattern of legitimizing militarism to a skeptical public. This paradoxical context—a society discursively committed to military-skeptical values while steadily remilitarizing—forms the backdrop for the *Bundeswehr*’s recruitment efforts of the last decade. The end of conscription in 2011 intensified the difficulty of recruiting volunteers, prompting the *Bundeswehr* to reinvent its public image. In the mid-2010s, its public relations strategy shifted toward social media and entertainment formats to reach younger audiences raised in a largely demilitarized popular culture (F. Stengel, 2021).

The result was a series of YouTube-based reality mini-documentaries aimed at making soldiering appear not only palatable but positively appealing. The first and most successful of these was *Die Rekruten* (“The Recruits”) in 2016, which followed a platoon of mostly male recruits through basic

training (*Die Rekruten*, o. J.). Professionally produced with entertaining editing, personal confessionals, and cliffhanger endings, *Die Rekruten* was designed as much to entertain as to inform. It went viral, drawing over 40 million views and hundreds of thousands of followers to the *Bundeswehr*'s YouTube channel (F. A. Stengel & Shim, 2022). The series's success validated the *Bundeswehr*'s strategy of militarizing entertainment and inspired several follow-up formats showcasing different facets of military life. Within this trend, *Die Rekrutinnen* ("The Female Recruits") was launched in 2019, focusing on a group of mostly female recruits during their basic training. By foregrounding women, the series explicitly centers gender in its narrative, functioning both as public relations and as a cultural text (Stein, 2019).

Although women have been permitted to serve in all roles, including combat, since 2001, they remain underrepresented, comprising only 13% of total military personnel and 9.5% in combat roles (*DW, Jul. 2023*, o. J.). With ongoing political and institutional pressure to increase female recruitment, both policy and media messaging have evolved accordingly. A key development in this context is the revision of the *Soldatinnen- und Soldatengleichstellungsgesetz (SGleiG)* - Military Equal Opportunity Act. Originally introduced in 2004 and updated in 2023, the *SGleiG* aims to bring *Bundeswehr* equality policies in line with broader national and international standards, such as the *Bundesgleichstellungsgesetz (BGleiG)* and the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda (*Bundestag*, 2023). The law sets out four main goals: to achieve gender equality between female and male soldiers, eliminate existing and prevent future disadvantages, reduce underrepresentation, and improve the compatibility of service with family and caregiving responsibilities (*SGleiG*, 2024). A central focus is to raise the proportion of women in the military, especially in combat roles, by introducing pay reforms and better support for caregiving,

particularly during overseas missions, as the main measures. These measures are designed to make the Bundeswehr more attractive to potential female recruits while, I would argue, leaving feminist, structural critique sidelined.

Against the backdrop of Germany's expanding military commitments, framed as a response to Russia's war on Ukraine, understanding the gendered dynamics of military recruitment is significant. Germany's commitment to increases in military spending and personnel has reignited debates around the reintroduction of conscription, with preliminary proposals already circulating (Hauck, o. J.; *Tagesschau*, o. J.). This thesis seeks to illuminate the complex recruitment dynamics in a military-skeptical society by examining how gender, militarization, and media intersect in Germany through the case study *Die Rekrutinnen*. The following section outlines how this will be done in this research.

1.2 Thesis Overview

Investigating the intersection of gender, recruitment, and militarization, my research is guided by the question of how the *Bundeswehr's* YouTube series *Die Rekrutinnen* (2019) reproduces gendered representations to legitimize its military in contemporary Germany. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents my literature review and theoretical framework. In Section 2.1, drawing on interdisciplinary literature from Critical Military Studies, focusing on military recruitment, the German military, and gender, I identify key gaps and position my research within the existing body of work. Section 2.2 outlines the theoretical grounding of the thesis, which adopts a (post-)feminist and critical military studies lens. Here, I establish my main conceptual

frameworks: post-feminist sensibilities (Gill, 2007) and hegemonic, military masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). By outlining the fields of Critical Military Studies and post-feminist theory, alongside relevant postcolonial theory, I clarify the frame that informs my research (see Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Duncanson, 2009; Gill, 2007; Higate, 2003; McRobbie, 2009). For my methodology chapter (Chapter 3), I introduce Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013) and Feminist Media Analysis (Van Zoonen, 1994) as my primary methods. While CDA enables a critical interrogation of the power structures and ideological content embedded in the series, Feminist Media Analysis allows for a gender-sensitive reading of representation and narrative framing. The combination of both allows me to understand not only how gender is represented, but also how these representations contribute to and are informed by broader institutional goals and discourses. My two analytical chapters (4,5) present my findings by focusing on the individual level in Chapter 4 and then broadening it to the series' overall narratives and wider institutional workings in Chapter 5. Chapter 4, after an introduction to the series and the workings of its format, focuses on the female recruit Enni (4.2) and how she represents post-feminist sensibilities in conjunction with the male recruit Maik (4.3). It illustrates how masculinities and femininities are entangled and complement each other to portray post-feminist aesthetics. Taking these insights, Chapter 5 engages with the overarching framing of the series by tracing how the series constructs an image of gender equality (5.1) and reconfigures fitness (5.2), teamwork (5.3), and weapons (5.4) through gendered representations to obscure violence. In the following chapter 6, I take the analysis more significantly to the discursive level by discussing how female recruits become symbolic carriers of national modernity. It illustrates how the image the

series creates of the *Bundeswehr* and the German nation state legitimizes militarization in this context.

The conclusion reflects on the implications of the findings for feminist and critical military studies, emphasizing the contribution of analyzing masculinities within post-feminist frameworks and demonstrating the value of integrating post-feminist theory with critical military studies. It reflects on how post-feminist sensibilities are entangled with military masculinities and femininities in ways that obscure structural violence and reframe militarism as personal development. Gender plays a key role in this process. By displaying empowered female soldiers and non-violent men, *Die Rekrutinnen* presents a vision of the *Bundeswehr* that is deliberately constructed to align with values of equality and democracy. It helps normalize military service in a country where the use of force remains politically sensitive. I argue that in doing so, the series contributes to a broader ideological project: re-legitimizing militarism in Germany by aligning it with liberal, gender-progressive national identity. This study joins scholars like Stengel (2020) in showing that militarization has advanced gradually through discursive and cultural means. Ultimately, arguing that the *Bundeswehr*'s turn to post-feminist aesthetics represents a continuation in the process of militarization in Germany.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review maps the key scholarly terrain that informs this thesis, situating it within Critical Military Studies (CMS) debates, feminist theory, critical masculinity studies, and postfeminist media analysis. The review proceeds in two main parts. The first part focuses on the topical literature review: outlining relevant research fields and identifying gaps in scholarship on gender, militarization, and military recruitment. The second section develops the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of *Die Rekrutinnen*, focusing on post-feminism, critical military studies with military masculinities, and concepts from postcolonial theory. These literatures illuminate my study's positions within the outlined academic fields and key debates.

2.1 Topical Literature Review

This literature review maps the key scholarly terrain that informs this thesis, situating it within Critical Military Studies (CMS) debates, feminist theory, critical masculinity studies, and postfeminist media analysis. This first section outlines relevant research fields and identifies gaps in scholarship on gender, militarization, and military recruitment.

2.1.1 Women's integration into the military

Women's rising participation in Western militaries starting in the second half of the 20th century has been attributed to different circumstances, mostly a growing need for numbers in professional armies and women's rising education levels and workforce participation. What followed shortly after was the integration of women's rights into international and national policy doctrines while

at the same time using violence against women as a legitimization for foreign intervention, especially in the U.S.A. (Stachowitsch, 2013). Although feminist scholarship examining women's military participation is not strictly divisible into radical anti-militarist and liberal integrationist positions, scholarship still oscillates between them while considering more multi-layered complexities (Stachowitsch, 2013). So, many scholars argue that women's military participation signifies civic equality and full citizenship, framing equal access to combat roles as a vehicle for advancing gender equality within both military institutions and society at large (Kennedy-Pipe, 2017). However, many feminist scholars have long cautioned against simplistic linkages between gender and security. They note that such framings often reinforce a specific gender order that portrays women as inherently peaceful and vulnerable, thereby essentializing their roles and interests (Goldstein, 2001). Anti-militarist feminist scholars such as Enloe (2000) and Eisenstein (2007) offer particularly critical perspectives on liberal narratives. Eisenstein (2007) notably argues that militaries are fundamentally patriarchal and colonialist institutions that utilize women's inclusion as "sexual decoys," distracting attention from militaristic violence and reinforcing dominant structures rather than transforming them (Eisenstein, 2007). Similarly, Enloe (2013) describes these dynamics as the militarization of women's liberation, highlighting how feminist language is often co-opted to advance militarist agendas. In her earlier work, she underscores that including women in military institutions frequently serves strategic objectives, rather than reflecting a genuine commitment to feminist principles (Cockburn & Enloe, 2012; Enloe, 2000). Whitworth (2004) further deepens these critiques by demonstrating how international military missions, particularly those presented as peacekeeping, can reproduce

neocolonial power relations. Through superficial gestures of inclusion, they obscure the deeper structures of imperialism and gendered violence (see also Mäki-Rahkola & Myrntinen, 2013).

Together, these critical interventions reveal an unresolved tension in feminist engagements with militaries—between the symbolic and material gains of inclusion and the practice of reinforcing militarized, patriarchal, and neocolonial logics. This thesis engages in this tension by analyzing how gendered inclusion is strategically mobilized in recruitment media, not simply as a policy goal, but as part of a broader cultural rebranding of militarism, how it is made emotionally appealing, visually normalized, and depoliticized.

2.1.2 Critical Military Studies and Gender

Many antimilitarist scholars, e.g., Enloe, have laid the groundwork for the field of Critical Military Studies. Critical Military Studies (CMS) is an interdisciplinary field that has emerged as a response to traditional military and security studies in recent decades. These earlier fields often treated the military as a legitimate, technical institution, primarily focusing on strategic policy or research to improve military institutions. While overlapping in some regards, CMS interrogates how militaries shape and are shaped by broader social, cultural, and political structures. CMS scholars emphasize that militaries are not just physical institutions but discursive formations that work ideologically to secure legitimacy (V. Basham, 2013; Howell, 2018). CMS is not simply a rejection of traditional approaches, but a proactive, evolving field that, as Basham, Belkin, and Gifkins (2015) argue, engages in "skeptical curiosity" about the character, representation, application, and effects of military power. It challenges the binary distinction between military and civilian spheres and prioritizes the "in-between"—those blurred boundaries and transitions

that reveal how militarism permeates everyday life (V. M. Basham et al., 2015). CMS is characterized by methodological plurality, interdisciplinarity, and a commitment to critically interrogating how military power is constructed, represented, and contested. This includes examining the politics of representation, memorialization, and the aesthetics of military violence, as well as how military practices produce and manage social identities, bodies, and geographies. CMS also emphasizes the positionality of the researcher, recognizing how scholars are entangled in the very power relations they seek to study (V. M. Basham et al., 2015). This orientation makes CMS particularly well-suited to examining military media, including recruitment campaigns, as instruments of institutional communication and as sites where military identities and ideologies are produced and contested.

Within CMS, gender is foundational, not just as a variable of analysis, but as a structuring principle of military institutions (Eichler, 2014). Feminist research in particular has emphasized the role of masculinities in legitimizing armed forces, violence, and the nation-state. The military has long functioned as one of the most powerful institutions for producing and sustaining hegemonic masculinity, as both Cynthia Enloe (2000) and R.W. Connell (1995) have argued. Representations of the male soldier as warrior and protector remain central to both national identity and gender hierarchies. Belkin's work (2012) notably illustrates how military institutions actively produce and perpetuate militarized masculinities, emphasizing aggressive heterosexual norms as integral to military identity and effectiveness. Additionally, whiteness and heterosexuality are central to racial (national) hierarchies, seeing that hegemonic military masculinity is understood as white in most Western countries (Prividera & Howard, 2006). The "emotionally constrained, physically fit combat soldier" (Chisholm & Tidy, 2017, p. 101) has

been identified as a newer form of hegemonic military masculinity in the last decade. Deviating further from traditional, military masculinity, Duncanson (2015) outlines how UN peacekeeping has facilitated the emergence of “soft” or hybrid masculinities, characterized by care, emotional sensitivity, and cultural awareness. While her analysis concludes with optimism about the transformative potential of such shifts for both military institutions and masculinities, critics have found this optimism unconvincing, particularly due to her limited engagement with the neocolonial dynamics and Western imperialist agendas embedded in many peacebuilding missions (Unsworth, 2019). As others have noted about new and softer military masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Higate, 2003), these hybrid forms often reinforce male authority by demonstrating that men can now also perform traditionally feminized traits without relinquishing institutional power, ultimately more so legitimizing militarism by adjusting to changing societies. Feminist scholars have emphasized that military masculinities are not monolithic but multiple and context-dependent (Chisholm & Tidy, 2017; Christensen & Rasmussen, 2015). Drawing on Connell’s (2005) theory of gender hierarchies, recent work has focused on the plurality of masculinities within military institutions and the differentiated ways these are embodied and experienced (Jester, 2021). Nevertheless, the image of the elite male soldier—physically dominant, emotionally controlled, and heterosexually desirable—continues to exert cultural power, especially in media representations (Hinojosa, 2010). Training is a key mechanism through which this form of masculinity is imposed on the soldiering body, aligning physical fitness, emotional restraint, aggression, and risk-taking with military competence (V. M. Basham, 2016; Higate, 2003). This process figuratively (and historically, literally) excludes femininity and constructs the ideal soldier as masculine and militarized.

Although the integration of women into combat roles has shifted the landscape somewhat, research on gender dynamics in militaries still tends to treat women as exceptional cases in a masculine domain. A significantly smaller strand of feminist CMS has asked how femininity itself is constructed, managed, and instrumentalized within military contexts. Brown (2012) begins to address this gap by showing how female soldiers often navigate gender by selectively performing both “feminine” and “masculine” traits (Brown, 2012). However, more work is needed to understand how femininities—not just individual women—are produced and circulated as part of institutional strategies, particularly in media contexts. This thesis contributes to that emerging area by examining how specific forms of femininity and masculinity are constructed through military recruitment media to legitimize military power in a culture marked by ambivalence towards the military.

2.1.3 Military Media recruitment

Åhäll (2016) and Zalewski (2016) stress the importance of examining how military masculinities are represented and consumed in civilian culture, not just within military institutions. Research on military recruitment has stressed the importance of recruitment efforts and marketing in legitimizing armed forces and violence (Strand & Berndtsson, 2015). This legitimacy is increasingly managed through media and cultural representation, especially in volunteer militaries under neoliberal governance (V. M. Basham & Bulmer, 2017). Representations of soldiering in media and popular culture play a significant role in sustaining militarized masculinities and supporting militarism in broader society. This includes the way military-themed media produces a pleasure culture of war (Dawson, 1994) and contributes to the “military-

entertainment-industrial complex” (Derian, 2009), blurring the boundaries between entertainment, recruitment, and ideological formation. Reality-TV productions have gained significance in the military media landscape and in furthering militarization. Reality-based military formats play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of the armed forces and have been the subject of recent research. By inviting audiences to witness military life firsthand, these productions encourage a sense of involvement and identification with the experiences of soldiers (Kaempf & Stahl, 2023). Filming techniques, such as first-person perspectives and personal monologues, do more than document experiences—they actively guide how audiences interpret and relate to the content. They are “enlisted into a story told not about the military institution but through it” (Kaempf & Stahl, 2023, p. 660). The result is a shift in storytelling that does not just depict the military from the outside but integrates viewers into the narrative, making them feel as though they are part of the journey by positioning them as virtual citizen-soldiers (Kaempf & Stahl, 2023). This approach is key to understanding how media like *Die Rekrutinnen* operate and recruit public sentiment.

With changing recruitment strategies, media, and recruiting for all-volunteer forces, research has noted a shift in narratives around patriotism and masculinities in many Western militaries, attuning military recruitment closer to private company marketing strategies. Stern and Strand (2024) analyze military recruitment testimonials from Sweden and the United States, identifying narrative tropes around overcoming personal hardship, developing agency, and achieving self-growth through military service rather than aggression or patriotism. Bringing a gendered lens to these tropes, Vavrus applies a postfeminist lens to analyze military presentations, *Postfeminist War* (2018). Vavrus’s concept of *martial postfeminism* highlights how gender is mobilized in

contemporary military media aimed at public persuasion and recruitment in the U.S.. She argues that in civilian media representations, military women are central to a broader strategy of legitimizing militarism and maintaining support for the all-volunteer force. Through selective feminist rhetoric—highlighting empowerment, inclusion, and equality—these narratives obscure structural inequalities, gendered violence, and the realities of warfare. Vavrus demonstrates how such media discourses produce “martial postfeminist subjects” who appear empowered while ultimately serving the interests of the military-industrial complex. These representations function within a media-military-industrial complex (MMIC) that normalizes military service and banalizes militarism by embedding it into everyday cultural products, including family dramas and documentaries (Vavrus, 2018). Her insights are especially valuable for understanding recruitment-focused content in post-feminist cultural settings, as it reveals how military institutions strategically manage gendered perceptions to enhance legitimacy and appeal, without disrupting patriarchal or imperial power structures.

Regarding recruitment media, the shift of militaries and state institutions to social media has slowly sparked scientific interest over the last decade. In Germany, Jacobs (2016) provides an early descriptive account of the Bundeswehr’s evolving use of social media, emphasizing its growing relevance in youth outreach and professional orientation. He highlights how digital platforms became integral to the Bundeswehr’s communication strategy, laying the groundwork for a shift from conventional public relations to more personalized and targeted messaging (Jacobs, 2016). By 2019, Jacobs had refined his analysis, pointing out that even when state communication aims for objectivity, it is increasingly inseparable from public relations and employer branding. He also observed that individual soldiers with their private accounts often

appear more trustworthy on social media than official communication departments, enhancing their narratives' persuasive power (Möllers & Jacobs, 2019). This shift reflects the broader mediatization of military legitimacy and the growing importance of social media as a tool for communication and affective influence.

Shim and Stengel (2017) took a more critical approach in analyzing the Bundeswehr's visual representation of its Afghanistan mission on Facebook and YouTube. They found that content largely sidestepped themes of injury, death, and ethical conflict, presenting a sanitized, controlled view of military life (Shim & Stengel, 2017). This visual strategy, they argue, renders German military engagement more acceptable to a public marked by historical antimilitarism. In a follow-up study, Stengel (2021) emphasized that social media enables the Bundeswehr to bypass traditional media filters and communicate directly with the public, using visually appealing and emotionally resonant narratives to legitimize the institution and military violence. Stengel and Shim's (2022) more recent work focuses on German recruitment media, analyzing *Die Rekruten*, the predecessor to *Die Rekrutinnen*. They argue that German military recruitment functions through what they term militarizing antimilitarism: by framing service through civilian values, like teamwork, personal growth, and career opportunity, violence is softened and the Bundeswehr becomes more palatable to a skeptical public. Their analysis underscores how this rebranding is gendered: "civilianized" masculinities marked by kindness, professionalism, and emotional control depict the military as modern and socially inclusive. This work provides an essential foundation for this thesis, which builds on these insights by shifting attention more explicitly to the representation of femininities, female recruits, and gender relations.

2.1.4 Germany, militarization, antimilitarism

In addition to the debates in critical military studies, military masculinities and femininities, and recruitment media, this thesis is situated in scholarly work researching the military and militarization in Germany. One important strand of this literature examines German antimilitarism's specific cultural and historical dynamics and its transformation over time.

Jakub Eberle (2022) argues that Germany's foreign policy elites were never truly pacifist in a strict sense. Rather than stemming from deep ideological pacifism, German foreign policy restraint has often been a pragmatic response to historical responsibility and public skepticism (Eberle, 2023). Public opinion, too, is more complex than the pacifist label implies. Research has shown that attitudes in the German population reflect not outright pacifism but a historically grounded reluctance toward military engagement, especially outside NATO territory, which has softened considerably since reunification

ADDIN ZOTERO_ITEM CSL_CITATION {"citationID":"lg3c8BuN","properties":{"formattedCitation":"(V. M. Basham et al., 2015)","plainCitation":"(V. M. Basham et al., 2015)","noteIndex":0},"citationItems":[{"id":1399,"uris":["http://zotero.org/users/16479695/items/QNJ5K8FX"],"itemData":{"id":1399,"type":"article-journal","container-title":"Critical Military Studies","DOI":"10.1080/23337486.2015.1006879","ISSN":"2333-7486, 2333-7494","issue":"1","journalAbbreviation":"Critical Military Studies","language":"en","page":"1-2","source":"DOI.org (Crossref)","title":"What is Critical Military Studies?","volume":"1","author":[{"family":"Basham","given":"Victoria M."},{family":"Belkin","given":"Aaron"}, {"family":"Gifkins","given":"Jess"}],"issued":{"date-

parts":[[{"2015",2,2}]]}}], "schema":"https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"} (V. M. Basham et al., 2015) (Stengel, 2025).

Frank Stengel (2023) expands on this by analyzing the shifting societal positioning of the Bundeswehr. He shows how the military's legitimacy in German society has historically been low and contested, shaped by the country's post-WWII antimilitarist identity. However, this skepticism has not prevented the Bundeswehr from becoming involved in extensive out-of-area missions, indicating a slow normalization of military operations despite continued rhetorical distance from militarism. In a recent contribution, Stengel (2025) critiques the popular narrative that Chancellor Scholz's 2022 Zeitenwende speech marked a sharp break from German pacifism. He argues that militarization was already underway before Russia invaded Ukraine and that the notion of German pacifism often operates discursively to mask this ongoing remilitarization. According to Stengel, the Zeitenwende should be understood not as a rupture but as a moment of discursive realignment that builds on pre-existing trends of military normalization.

Additional insights come from Graf and Kümmel (2023), who study how gender equality perceptions influence the Bundeswehr's employer appeal, particularly among women. Their findings are that perceived gender equality is the most important factor determining how attractive the military appears to women, surpassing even pay and promotion opportunities. However, the Bundeswehr continues to suffer from a negative image, especially regarding gender equality and the handling of violence against women. This research widens the backdrop of this thesis by highlighting not only a general military sceptic culture that recruitment efforts must address, but also women's specific distrust toward the institution. In sum, the thesis situates itself

within this nuanced context and discourses: a Germany navigating between historical skepticism towards its military, political normalization of military engagement, and gendered critiques of its armed forces.

Despite a growing body of scholarship on gender and militarism, research in Critical Military Studies (CMS) has centered on masculinities, particularly hegemonic military masculinities, as the dominant framework for understanding gender in military institutions. While there has been increasing attention to the plurality of masculinities and their evolving forms in contemporary military settings, analyses of femininities remain comparatively underdeveloped. When femininities are addressed, they are often treated as supplementary or exceptional, rather than as central to the reproduction and legitimization of military power. This imbalance is especially notable in the German context. Although some scholarship has examined German military media and recruitment strategies, studies rarely place femininities at the center of analysis or examine how gendered representation intersects with the country's historically rooted skepticism toward militarism. The Bundeswehr must carefully curate its image in a society where antimilitarist sentiment still shapes public attitudes. This makes Germany a wealthy site for exploring how gendered media narratives work to normalize and legitimize military service under the guise of inclusivity and modernity.

Another significant gap lies in the limited engagement with postfeminist theory in CMS. While postfeminism has been widely applied in media and cultural studies to interrogate representations of gender, agency, and empowerment, particularly in neoliberal contexts, its potential to illuminate the ideological functions of military media remains underexplored. With few

exceptions, such as Vavrus's (2018) concept of martial postfeminism" developed in the U.S. context, postfeminist sensibilities have yet to be systematically examined within militarized narratives, especially outside Anglophone settings. This thesis responds to these gaps by bringing postfeminist theory into conversation with CMS to analyze the Bundeswehr's gendered recruitment media critically. It centers femininities as a primary site of ideological work. It examines how they are constructed, aestheticized, and instrumentalized to align military service with values of empowerment, equality, and personal growth. At the same time, the thesis treats gender as relational, analyzing how masculinities—particularly hybrid masculinities—operate in tandem with femininities to produce a postfeminist logic that depoliticizes structural inequality and obscures the military's core function as a site of organized state violence. By examining *Die Rekrutinnen* through this lens, this thesis offers an original contribution to feminist and critical military studies. It sets out to provide a detailed study of how postfeminist sensibilities are mobilized in German military media to legitimize military institutions in a national context where military skepticism remains culturally salient.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This thesis takes a feminist, critical, and inductively grounded approach to examining gender representation in military recruitment media. While feminist and anti-militarist positionality informed my approach to my research, key concepts like post-feminism and military masculinities emerged as tools for interpreting recurring patterns, aesthetics, and discourses in the

series through the analysis over time. This section outlines the theoretical framings and concepts that informed my research and analysis.

This thesis is grounded in a feminist, anti-militarist perspective and a critical military studies approach that views the military not as a neutral workplace but as a gendered institution rooted in hierarchical and patriarchal power. Scholars such as Cynthia Enloe (2000, 2016), Carol Cohn (1987), and Cockburn (2010) argue that militaries function through practices that normalize violence, masculinist authority, and exclusionary nationalism. From this perspective, the inclusion of women—or the softening of military masculinities—does not necessarily signal transformation but often legitimizes the institution under new terms. It interrogates military power from a place of skeptical curiosity and draws on critical conceptualizations of militarism and militarization: Cynthia Enloe's (2000) definition of militarization as a gendered social process is central to this analysis. Militarization extends beyond visible signs of military life; it involves normalizing military values—discipline, hierarchy, nationalism—within civilian spheres. Enloe emphasizes that this process is always gendered, shaping ideas of who protects, serves, and supports. Understanding militarism as a material and symbolic power system allows this thesis to assess how gender is strategically mobilized critically. These insights shape the critical stance of the thesis, guiding its interrogation of how gender inclusion works with militarism.

Feminist theories informed this thesis's understanding of gender and masculinities/feminites. It analyzes gender not as a fixed binary category but as a performative and relational structure of meaning and power. Drawing on Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity and

Connell's (1995, 2005) relational model of gender hierarchies, it understands femininities and masculinities as co-constitutive, produced through social practice and institutional regulation (Butler, 1999; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Gendered identities in military contexts are performed and operationalized to serve institutional logic.

One such institutional logic is the production of hegemonic masculinity—a central concept from Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally dominant form of masculinity that secures patriarchal dominance both over women and subordinated masculinities. Militaries have historically been a key site for reproducing this form, privileging strength, discipline, emotional control, and the capacity for violence (Higate, 2003; Szitanyi, 2012). In military contexts, this is often referred to as hegemonic military masculinity, a concept that recent scholarship has expanded to recognize the multiplicity and coexistence of different hegemonic masculinities. This thesis adopts this understanding, working with hegemonic, military masculinities as plural, relational, and context-dependent. The concept informs this thesis's understanding of how masculinity/ies are constructed, represented, and adapted in recruitment media.

While not the initial framework guiding the beginning of this research, the concept of post-feminism—and more specifically post-feminist sensibility—emerged during the analytical process as highly relevant to understand the gendered representations in *Die Rekrutinnen*.

Following Rosalind Gill (2007, 2016), post-feminism is not understood as a historical backlash or discrete ideology, but as a cultural sensibility that permeates contemporary media. Gill (2007, 2016) conceptualizes postfeminist sensibilities as a set of recurring discursive features across media and culture that signify a shift in how feminism is publicly articulated and appropriated. It

is a dominant but uneven and contested set of ideas, feelings, and representations that both draw on and disavow feminist politics. Core characteristics of postfeminist sensibilities include a strong emphasis on individualism, choice, and empowerment, where women are portrayed as autonomous agents freely making decisions about their lives. However, these "choices" are often shaped by normative expectations around femininity, beauty, and success. Central to this framework is the makeover paradigm, in which personal transformation, particularly through work on the body, is depicted as both necessary and fulfilling (McRobbie, 2004). Closely tied to this is a culture of self-surveillance and emotional self-discipline, where success is measured by one's ability to self-regulate and remain resilient, aligning with neoliberal ideals of responsibilization (McRobbie, 2009). A defining feature of postfeminist sensibility is also the repudiation of feminism itself: feminism is frequently framed as outdated, unnecessary, or even antagonistic to personal freedom and pleasure. Structural critiques of inequality are replaced by personal narratives of triumph, recasting systemic issues as individual challenges to be overcome through self-work. Gill and Elias (2014) describe this sensibility as part of a broader "confidence culture" in which women are expected to overcome challenges through positivity and self-belief. In this thesis, postfeminist sensibilities are used as a key concept in understanding the gendered representations and the work they do in *Die Rekrutinnen*.

Postfeminist discourse is often tied to a broader ideological project of European modernity, in which gender equality becomes a civilizational achievement that marks the West as superior. McRobbie (2009) identifies the substitution of modernization for feminism as a key feature of contemporary gender politics: institutions claim to have achieved gender equality through market reforms, education, and liberal democracy, rendering feminist activism obsolete and the nation-

state superior. Acknowledging this connection, this thesis also draws on postcolonial feminist critiques that warn against treating gender equality as a neutral or universal value. Scholars such as Mohanty (1984), Grewal (2005), and Yuval-Davis (1993) emphasize how feminist rhetoric can be instrumentalized in the service of Western nationalist and imperialist projects. Gender inclusion is often framed as a hallmark of modernity, thereby contrasting the “civilized” West against a racialized, patriarchal “Other” (Grewal, 2005; Mohanty, 1984; Yuval-Davis, 1993). The thesis draws on this insight to remain attentive to how representations of gender in the Bundeswehr may reproduce racialized and neocolonial imaginaries.

As gender is always intersectional with other identity markers, race and class are intersecting categories I focused on in my analysis (See Crenshaw, 1989). This thesis understands race as a socially and historically constructed category, shaped through processes of colonialism, nationalism, and global power relations (Omi & Winant, 2014). Rather than viewing race as a fixed biological category, it treats race as relational and ideological, continually produced and reproduced through representation and institutional practices. In particular, the thesis draws on critical whiteness studies to interrogate whiteness as a historically constructed position of privilege and invisibility, rooted in colonial histories and structures (Ahmed, 2007). As scholars have argued, whiteness is typically normalized and naturalized within European contexts, functioning as an unmarked yet dominant racial identity that structures access to power, legitimacy, and national belonging (Bonnett, 2018). Class is similarly theorized as a historically and culturally contingent structure of inequality and identity. Drawing from feminist class theorists like Skeggs (1997) and Tyler (2013), class is viewed not only in economic terms but as a deeply symbolic form of cultural capital, status, and morality (Skeggs, 1997). Military

recruitment narratives often mobilize classed tropes of respectability, upward mobility, and individual improvement—values particularly resonant with neoliberal and postfeminist discourses. Applying this perspective to the Bundeswehr’s recruitment media, the thesis critically examines how whiteness implicitly defines who is imagined as a legitimate subject of military service and national citizenship. This approach thus allows the thesis to uncover the subtle but significant ways racial hierarchies persist within ostensibly inclusive institutional narratives. Integrating these insights from critical race theory, postcolonial analysis, and feminist class critique enables the thesis to examine how race, whiteness, and class intersect to shape gendered representations in German military recruitment media.

This chapter has outlined the scholarly and theoretical landscape that frames this thesis. It demonstrates how *Die Rekrutinnen* operates at the intersection of militarization, post-feminism, and media representation. It focuses on post-feminism, militarized masculinities and femininities, and postcolonial feminist critique. These lenses enable a layered analysis of how gender, power, and national identity are constructed and managed in military media. By extending existing work on CMS, postfeminist theory, and feminist media studies, this thesis provides an original contribution: it shows how postfeminist femininities and masculinities converge to rebrand the German military as inclusive, empowering, and apolitical. In doing so, it highlights how gender is not only represented but instrumentalized to re-legitimize militarism in a military-sceptic cultural context. This framework will guide an analysis of *Die Rekrutinnen*, showing how gendered narratives serve institutional interests while foreclosing critical feminist inquiry.

In the following chapter, I will outline the methodological approach to applying these theoretical insights. Building on feminist media and critical discourse analysis, the methodology chapter details how narrative, language, and representation in *Die Rekrutinnen* are examined to reveal the gendered and ideological work performed by the Bundeswehr's media production.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological foundations and research design that guide this thesis, which explores how the German Bundeswehr constructs gendered and ideological narratives through its YouTube recruitment series *Die Rekrutinnen*. In examining this series, I ask how gender - femininities and masculinities are deployed to normalize militarism and produce seemingly progressive, inclusive narratives that obscure the realities of institutional power. The thesis argues that this form of militarization is not sudden but a continuation of efforts to remilitarize Germany by appealing to postfeminist ideas of individualism, empowerment, and choice.

To explore these questions, I employ a qualitative, interpretative research design, grounded in feminist, critical, and post-structuralist epistemologies. My analysis is rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 2013) and Feminist Media Analysis (Zoonen, 1994). These approaches provide the practical tools to investigate how institutional narratives and gendered constructions are produced in the specific context of the series *Die Rekrutinnen*.

To conduct my analysis, I draw primarily on Norman Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice that reflects and constitutes power relations. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework—textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice—offers a comprehensive approach to examining the series. At the textual level, I analyze the language used in narration, interviews, and interactions, focusing on vocabulary choices, tone, and rhetorical structures. Particular attention is paid to how gender is established, how discipline is narrated, and how emotional responses are framed. At the level of

discursive practice, I examine how the series is produced and consumed, considering editing choices, visual framing, and narrative pacing. This includes analyzing how scenes are cut to emphasize particular themes, such as camaraderie, strength, or vulnerability, and how these themes align with recruitment goals. At the level of social practice, I situate the series within the broader context of Germany's military history, gender politics, and current geopolitical positioning. CDA is complemented by Feminist Media Analysis, particularly the work of Liesbet van Zoonen (1994), who argues that gender is not a fixed attribute but a product of representation. In this framework, media are not neutral transmitters of information but active constructors of gendered identities. Using van Zoonen's insights, I examine how femininity is portrayed in *Die Rekrutinnen*—whether it aligns with traditional roles, challenges them, or reconfigures them in new ways. I also interrogate how the visual language of the series contributes to these constructions: how are women's bodies framed? Are they shown as strong, vulnerable, disciplined, or desirable? Who holds narrative agency, and who is shown as dependent or peripheral? By combining these perspectives, I am able to analyze not only what is being said but how it is being shown, and why it matters in the broader ideological project of militarization. While CDA (Fairclough, 2013) enables a critical interrogation of the power structures and ideological content embedded in the series, Feminist Media Analysis (Van Zoonen, 1994) allows for a gender-sensitive reading of representation and narrative framing. The aim is to understand not only how gender is represented, but also how these representations contribute to broader institutional goals, particularly the legitimization of military power in a country with a historically complex relationship to its armed forces.

The thesis takes *Die Rekrutinnen* as a case study to examine a specific, bounded example of state-produced media within its real-life context. Case studies are particularly effective for exploring the dynamics of media representation and institutional communication, especially when the objective is to uncover how meaning is constructed rather than to measure or generalize findings. Following Robert K. Yin's (2003) conceptualization, a case study is appropriate when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not evident, as is the case with a media production that blurs the lines between documentary, entertainment, and propaganda (Yin, 2003). *Die Rekrutinnen*, released in 2019 on the Bundeswehr Exclusive YouTube channel, follows four women—Leah, Enni, Melanie, and Lea—through their basic training in the German Air Force. Structured as a reality-style series with 50 main episodes and supplementary content, the series positions itself as both an authentic portrayal of military life and a modern tool for recruitment (Stein, 2019). Its gender-specific focus makes it an ideal subject for analyzing the intersection of militarism, media, and gender politics in contemporary Germany.

The Bundeswehr Exclusive channel, launched in 2016, is explicitly designed for recruitment, targeting a digitally literate, younger demographic that consumes media primarily online. Unlike the broader Bundeswehr channel, which provides informational and historical content, Bundeswehr Exclusive uses narrative-driven series, livestreams, shorts, and curated playlists to engage its audience. This channel marks a significant departure from traditional military public relations strategies by embracing the aesthetics and formats of entertainment media to convey its message. The first significant success of this channel was *Die Rekruten*, a series that documented the basic training of mostly male recruits. Following its popularity, *Die Rekrutinnen* was released as a gendered counterpart, offering a curated view into the experiences of female recruits.

Among the four recruits featured in the series, Enni emerges as the most compelling subject for analysis. Her presence is marked by emotional openness, narrative consistency, and significant screen time, all of which contribute to a storyline that invites identification and empathy. Enni's journey through training is depicted as one of personal growth, resilience, and transformation, aligning closely with postfeminist ideals that celebrate individual empowerment while glossing over structural conditions. Her visibility and emotional expressiveness make her an ideal focal point for examining how the Bundeswehr constructs a feminine subjectivity compatible with military discipline and national service. Through Enni, the institution can craft a simultaneously relatable and aspirational narrative, using her experiences to normalize the idea of women in combat roles without engaging with broader structural issues. She is not depicted as specifically different from the other female recruits. However, her consistent screentime and additional content on her (Home Story video) make her portrayal rich for analysis.

The analysis proceeded in several iterative stages. Initially, I watched the entire *Die Rekrutinnen* series without a clearly defined methodology or theoretical framework, taking general notes on themes, emotional responses, and moments that stood out. This early engagement allowed me to familiarize myself with the series' narrative structure and visual style without imposing analytical assumptions too soon. As I rewatched the episodes—some of them multiple times—patterns gradually emerged, particularly regarding the portrayal of gender, emotional tone, and how military life appeared relatable and appealing. In a second phase, I began to view selected episodes more purposefully, identifying key moments that exemplified the series' ideological and gendered dimensions. At this point, my theoretical concepts began to crystallize, especially those related to postfeminist sensibilities, hybrid military masculinities, and the broader discourse of

militarization. My engagement with the material became increasingly structured as I applied the methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and Feminist Media Analysis. While I did not follow a formal coding scheme, I used detailed note-taking and thematic reflection to trace how gendered meanings were constructed through narrative and aesthetic choices. Rather than proceeding linearly, the process was iterative—that is, I moved repeatedly between watching, note-taking, reflecting, and theorizing, with each round informing and refining the next. I focused closely on how female recruits were represented: their appearances, clothing, how they were filmed, what they talked about, how they described themselves and their roles in the military, and how they were positioned in relation to the male recruits. Similarly, I examined the depiction of male recruits, noting how their presence and interactions with the women were framed, and to what extent traditional military masculinities—such as strength, aggression, and competition—were displayed or reconfigured.

Although I engaged with the entire 50-episode series, I gradually concentrated on particular types of scenes and episodes. These included episodes focusing on physical training, such as the Basic Fitness Test, the swimming test, the obstacle course, and the Army Combat Test, where physical strength and bodily performance were emphasized in ways that connected to both postfeminist femininities and rearticulated masculinities. I also closely analyzed scenes involving weapons and technical training, paying attention to how the presence of violence was downplayed or reframed as a form of technical competence. Group and team exercises, which appeared across episodes, were examined in terms of their representation of camaraderie, emotional dynamics, and gendered hierarchies. I also paid special attention to the first and last episodes of the series, which frame and conclude the overarching narrative and are central to the construction of viewer

identification and emotional closure. Throughout the analysis, Enni emerged as a useful focal point for tracing how postfeminist ideals—such as individual growth, confidence, and empowerment—were visually and narratively embedded into the series. I examined her self-presentation, language use, body language, and interactions, and how the editing choices amplified or softened certain traits to align with the Bundeswehr’s recruitment goals. Her character was particularly instructive in revealing how emotional openness and determination were curated to model a desirable, modern, and gender-progressive military subject. Ultimately, this analysis was shaped by a qualitative, interpretive logic that privileged depth over breadth and reflexive insight over mechanical procedure. While the process was nonlinear, it allowed for a sustained, layered engagement with the material sensitive to subtle visual, narrative, and affective cues. This interpretive approach enabled me to explore how *Die Rekrutinnen* constructs gendered subjectivities in the service of military recruitment, using stories of personal transformation and equality to render militarization palatable to a skeptical public.

In line with feminist methodological principles, I recognize that knowledge is never produced from a neutral standpoint. Feminist research foregrounds the researcher's positionality as a critical component of the research process (Jackson et al., 2024). As a researcher, my positionality inevitably shapes how I approach and interpret my material. I identify as a white, middle-class woman pursuing a master’s degree, with a background that has afforded me educational and social privileges. Importantly, I have never been in a position where military service was one of the few viable career paths available to me. This positionality allows for critical distance but requires constant self-reflection (see Haraway, 1988, on the partiality of situated knowledges). My stance is explicitly feminist and anti-militarist, informed by a belief

that militarization and the military institution are inextricably linked to violence. However, I also recognize the need for empathy and ethical engagement, particularly when analyzing real individuals who may be enmeshed in systems beyond their control.

Focusing on Enni raised specific ethical questions. Her emotional vulnerability, physical presence, and youth make her a subject who is both highly visible and potentially exposed to the violence of interpretation. Especially analyzing her appearance could easily reproduce the very dynamics of objectification and scrutiny that feminist scholarship seeks to dismantle (Kaplan, Ann E. (1983). "Is the Gaze Male?" In *The Film Theory Reader. Debates and Arguments.* (2010). Routledge). To mitigate this risk, I directed my critique toward the institutional mechanisms of representation: editing decisions, narrative structures, and strategic framing. I treated Enni as a media subject constructed through institutional goals, rather than as a private individual whose inner life could be accessed or judged. I also refrained from speculating about her motives or personal history beyond what was presented in the series, recognizing the limitations of my access. All individuals analyzed in this thesis are public figures featured in state-produced media. Their names are used with the understanding that they are already part of the public domain, but this does not eliminate the ethical responsibility to engage respectfully and critically (See Guenther, 2009). The broader concern is the ethical challenge of working with reality-style media, where the line between authenticity and performance is blurred. While the series claims to offer an unfiltered look into military life, what is shown is the product of selective editing, institutional oversight, and strategic storytelling. My analysis seeks to unpack these layers without collapsing the distinction between character and person, representation, and reality (See Zoonen, 1994 on feminist media research)

There are, of course, limitations to this approach. First, my access is limited to the final, edited version of the series. I cannot access raw footage, behind-the-scenes decision-making processes, or internal production notes, all of which would offer valuable insights into how narratives are constructed. Second, my interpretations are necessarily subjective, shaped by my theoretical framework, personal background, and political commitments. While I strive for analytical rigor, I do not claim objectivity (See Haraway, 1988 on situated knowledges). Third, my lack of insider knowledge of military life means that specific nuances may be lost or misinterpreted. However, this also allows for a critical distance that can reveal ideological patterns obscured by direct involvement objectivity (See Haraway, 1988 on situated knowledges).

Despite these limitations, the methodological framework outlined here provides a robust and ethically grounded approach to understanding how media, gender, and militarization intersect in contemporary Germany. The combination of CDA and Feminist Media Analysis allows for a nuanced reading of *Die Rekrutinnen*, which takes seriously both the power of narrative and the stakes of representation. By focusing on a single case study, I can trace the contours of a broader ideological project that uses stories of female empowerment to soften and sell militarization. This analysis contributes to ongoing debates in feminist media studies and critical military studies, offering insight into how modern militaries adapt their strategies to recruit soldiers and gain public approval.

In the process of writing this thesis, I used AI tools—specifically Grammarly, DeepL, and ChatGPT—as a form of academic support. These tools helped me translate and proofread parts of the text, organize ideas more clearly, and locate relevant literature during the research phase. At

no point did I rely on AI to generate analyses or arguments; all interpretations, analyses, and conclusions are my own. Sources cited were individually checked, cited, and verified by me. During the writing process of this thesis, the consequences and resources required for AI tools became more publicly known, which led to my decision to use AI very sparsely and almost exclusively for proofreading as a non-native speaker. Nonetheless, AI was used for this Thesis, and in hindsight, the ethical implications of this made me question my use of AI for attempted feminist research.

4. GENDERED MILITARY STORYTELLING IN *DIE REKRUTINNEN*

This chapter begins the empirical core of the thesis by offering a reading of *Die Rekrutinnen*, a 2019 YouTube series produced by the Bundeswehr in collaboration with SpinTV. It serves as a central case study to question how the *Bundeswehr*'s YouTube series *Die Rekrutinnen* (2019) reproduces gendered representations to legitimize its military. This chapter takes the first steps to explore the postfeminist logics mobilized within this state-produced military media and their work to portray the German armed forces as attractive, inclusive, and morally palatable. As a form of strategic storytelling, the series advances this through highly individualized journeys of self-improvement, offering recruitment as a career choice and personal transformation. In this chapter, I mainly concentrate on the individual level through individual recruits. To structure this analysis, I begin with an introduction to the series' content, filming, and editing style (4.1). Illustrating what work they perform in the series and what impressions they create will give a sense of the series before I focus on the individual characters of Enni (4.2) and Maik (4.3). Both characters are central figures in the series. They offer rich entry points for understanding the

gender representations of the series and how broader cultural post-feminist discourses, such as self-discipline, choice, and individuality, are interwoven into these representations of femininity and masculinity.



Figure 1: *Die Rekrutinnen* Introductory Sequence (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019)

4.1 Centering Female Narratives in Format and Content

The YouTube series *Die Rekrutinnen* consists of 50 main episodes that document the basic training mainly of four young women—Leah, Enni, Melanie, and Lea—in the German Air Force. The viewer follows them from the moment they leave their home, through their experiences of getting accustomed to military life and schedules, through theoretical learnings in classrooms, weapons training, fitness challenges, and exams – theoretical and practical, excursions, and to the end of their 12-week basic training with the German Air Force (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019e). Released via the Bundeswehr Exclusive YouTube channel, the series is embedded in a broader

media strategy designed to reach digitally versed youth through engaging formats. Following the success of *Die Rekruten*, which focused on male recruits undergoing basic training, *Die Rekrutinnen* serves as its gendered counterpart, offering a seemingly intimate and unfiltered view of women's experiences in the Bundeswehr (GmbH, o. J.). The episodes blend formal interviews, training footage, personal reflections, and self-filmed video diaries. The series borrows heavily from social media aesthetics—GoPros, handheld phone recordings, jump cuts, and emoji-style animations—to simulate authenticity and relatability. While this is nothing entirely new in social media marketing, Germany coined this specific style of reality TV recruitment series (Kaempf & Stahl, 2023). The series's visual style mimics vlogs or reality television, obscuring the production's heavily curated and state-sponsored nature while presenting it as spontaneous and honest.

One frequently used technique is “breaking the fourth wall”, where recruits directly address the audience in vlogs or interviews. These personal modes of communication strengthen the emotional connection between viewers and the recruits, making the military experience feel relatable and accessible. This technique aligns with Kaempf and Stahl's (2023) observation that interactive conventions foster a stronger identification between the audience and the institution. Ultimately, the emphasis on authenticity and human-interest stories through the genre of Reality TV and the vlogging format serves to obscure the extensive and heavily funded production behind the content, as well as the political and ethical complexities of military service. Instead, the series directs viewers toward individual stories, sidelining broader institutional, ethical, or geopolitical questions. This narrative framing recasts military service as a personal journey rather than a complex and often controversial political endeavor. It reinforces a simplified and notably

depoliticized perspective on war. In addition to this realism-driven aesthetic, the series incorporates humorous editing and animations, which not only heighten its appeal to a younger demographic but also work to obscure violence. For instance, colorful, cute animations produce a comedic effect and invoke a sense of childishness, especially in sequences following more violent or intense moments. For example, in episode 33 after a scene of weapons and shooting training it cuts to two laughing female recruits and a humorous animation of a sloth slinging across the screen following the joke they made is added (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019q min. 3:07). By employing humor and cuteness to humanize and soften weapons and the military, the series appeals to a military-sceptic culture while, paradoxically, facilitating the militarization of such sentiments.



Figure 2: Sloth animation (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019)

Each episode opens with a montage that teases its emotional highlights—tears, laughter, physical struggle, and interpersonal tension—creating suspense and anticipation. This technique draws

viewers into the recruits' narrative arcs as emotionally engaged participants. The repetition of an introductory sequence featuring the women in full uniform, standing in formation, and holding rifles immediately frames the series within a militarized aesthetic. However, this militarization is softened through vibrant colors, upbeat music, and scenes of casual camaraderie. The juxtaposition of strict military visuals with lighthearted editing constructs an ambivalence evident throughout the series. Where tension, aggression, and violence come up – typically associated with traditional military masculinities – they are instantly resolved again through humorous editing or focusing on more fun or feminized parts of military life: the Bundeswehr is tough but fair, disciplined but fun. An example would be in Episode 2 when the recruits are aggressively woken up by a male instructor screaming and hammering against their doors. This sequence is followed by a cut to Enni – one of the female recruits – who is very sleepy, with closed eyes, brushing her teeth with the caption: Enni – wide awake (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019c).

Particularly striking is the series' strategy of placing women in the frame and in the foreground of narrative agency. Female recruits are depicted as narrators of their stories, often speaking directly into the camera, holding the camera as they share their thoughts, doubts, and hopes. This narrative device positions them as trusted insiders—relatable, young women whose perspectives implicitly validate the Bundeswehr as a gender-equal and inclusive employer. Against a backdrop of persistent reports of discrimination and sexism in the Bundeswehr (Graf & Kümmel, 2022), the choice to let female recruits "speak for themselves" functions rhetorically as an endorsement of military life. Through this framing, the institution harnesses the cultural capital of postfeminist sensibilities—individual empowerment, emotional authenticity, and self-determined ambition—

to rebrand itself as a space of opportunity rather than discipline, maleness, and state-sanctioned violence like much of CMS research has discussed (see lit. Review).

By following Enni throughout the chapter, I trace how such a figure is constructed and deployed within the series to make militarization appear acceptable and desirable to young women and the German public. Her story functions as a linchpin in the narrative of military service as personal development and national belonging. Through her, I will trace how the Bundeswehr stages a vision of gender equality that is emotionally resonant and simultaneously depoliticized. The following section explores this portrayal of Enni in more depth, reading her as the embodiment of a “cool girl” figure whose narrative anchors the broader post-feminist logics of *Die Rekrutinnen*.

4.2 Enni the Cool Girl: Performing Post-feminist Femininity

“I wanted a career. I wanted to experience something. The cool thing is that you can go abroad if you want to... I mean, I could even get stationed in America.”

— Enni, *Die Rekrutinnen*, Episode 2, 06:48 (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019b)

The first time we meet Enni is emblematic of the series’ calculated blend of personal warmth and institutional messaging. In Episode 1, the viewer is introduced to a scene of domestic tranquility: a white suburban house with flowers in bloom, a tidy garden, and a patio grill—visual signifiers of middle-class comfort and stability. Enni sits on the terrace with her mother, eating a traditional bread breakfast with cold cuts and cheese. Filming herself with a handheld camera, she smiles and explains: “We’re still having breakfast, but I’ll head off to Roth soon” (Bundeswehr

Exclusive, 2019a). This gentle, familiar scene portrays Enni as warm and approachable while simultaneously easing the viewer into the idea that she is about to enter military service. The juxtaposition of the private, soft space with her impending move into a masculinized, institutional setting reflects one of the series' key strategies: positioning women as bridges between civil and military life. Enni appears relatable and aspirational—a young woman at ease in her domestic setting but about to leave it behind.

Enni is 20 years old and joins the Bundeswehr as an *Offiziersanwärterin*, a candidate for officer training (cite Home story). She shares her plan to study history while serving, which indicates her high educational status. Her primary motivation for joining the *Bundeswehr* is the career prospects and the possibility to travel in her work:

The opportunities for career advancement are the highest in the Bundeswehr—let's not kid ourselves—and that's what it was about. I wanted a [successful] career. [original: Ich wollte Karriere machen.] I wanted to experience things. The cool part is that you can go abroad if you want. That you have so many options. That I, for example, could go to America, get stationed there. (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019a min. 6:48)

Here, the military is framed as a platform for self-development, worldliness, and career mobility. The possibility of upward class mobility through the Bundeswehr is communicated in two key ways. First, the protagonists, including Enni, are shown to come from comfortable, middle-to-upper-middle-class backgrounds, as evident in the visual presentation of their home environments (see more on this in Chapter 6). Second, Enni explicitly emphasizes the Bundeswehr's promotion prospects, underscoring its appeal as a pathway for professional advancement. This representation reveals how upward mobility is closely intertwined with contemporary constructions of ideal femininity. As scholars such as McRobbie (2009) and Gill (2007, 2016)

have argued, the postfeminist subject is typically imagined as white, middle-class, and empowered—qualities Enni embodies and actively performs. At the same time, her narrative implies that this socio-economic positioning is not simply inherited but can be achieved through personal ambition and institutional opportunity. In this way, the Bundeswehr is presented as a space where modern, empowered women can improve their class standing through hard work and dedication, showing the close relation between post-feminism and neoliberalism (See Litosseliti et al., 2019). Using promises of social mobility to attract recruits is not new. This strategy has been widespread across different recruitment contexts and times (Maartens & Bivins, 2020). What is new in *Die Rekrutinnen* is the way these classed appeals are wrapped in the aesthetics of postfeminist empowerment and aspiration. These aspirations closely mirror what Rosalind Gill (2007) describes as core sensibilities of post-feminism: individualism, self-improvement, and consumer choice. Through Enni, the *Bundeswehr* is presented as a lifestyle enhancer, an enabler of cosmopolitan femininity rather than a site of discipline or violence.

Her father further emphasizes another dimension in Enni's stated motivation to join the *Bundeswehr*:

My daughter is the type who doesn't stay at home. It doesn't matter where in the world—if it's about a vacation or like now, seven weeks in America... she's eager to go on foreign deployments. That was always her goal: to do something like that. (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019a min. 1:23)

Enni and her father equate military deployments with travel and adventure. Her father even implies that going on a vacation or a foreign deployment is ultimately the same for her. They describe deployments in terms more commonly associated with leisure than with war. The reality of being stationed abroad in *violent* foreign interventions is never mentioned. Instead, they are

rendered benefits of a desirable career that resonate with the post-feminist ideal of the independent, career-oriented woman. Enni becomes a figure of ambition, upward mobility, and international aspiration—a blend of femininity, competence, and cosmopolitan attitudes. Nevertheless, this portrayal also echoes a much older marketing strategy embedded in military recruitment: the promise of seeing the world. Military institutions across national contexts have used global mobility as a recruitment incentive, especially targeting young people with limited economic prospects (Maartens, 2020). The idea of joining the military to travel abroad and gain life experience has been a persistent trope in military advertising. I would argue that what is novel in *Die Rekrutinnen* is the gendered reframing of this trope: rather than presenting foreign deployment through masculinist tropes of conquest or duty, it is imagined as an expression of youthful desire, feminine ambition, and self-exploration. I argue that this meshing of post-feminist aspirations with traditional military marketing strategies blurs the boundaries between empowerment and enlistment, presenting the military as both an adventurous lifestyle and a legitimate pathway to femininity.

Another important scene that emphasizes her agency is during her home story video. Here, she tells the viewers that she has signed up for a 13-year commitment as part of her aspirations to be an army officer. Speaking directly to the camera, she reassures the viewer that one has six months to withdraw from the contract (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019a). Any worry or critique associated with committing to the *Bundeswehr* for 13 years, especially at that age, is not only negotiated by the 6-month trial period she mentions but also by her vocation of her personal choice and agency. Her emphasis is on having agency and making this her personal choice. At this moment, she endorses the military as a viable path and performs post-feminist logic: Her invocation of agency

and choice makes her seem empowered, and the military seems like a place for empowered women. Her assured tone, career orientation, and readiness to commit establish her as a model subject: self-determined and committed. She is portrayed as a modern, independent woman who knows what she wants – here, the Bundeswehr. She asserts that long-term military service is a personal choice for empowerment rather than a structural decision shaped by institutional logic or necessity. What is notable about the scene is the way she tells this: Instead of emphasizing the magnitude of the decision, she appears unbothered. She assures the viewer that she is not worried about the length of the commitment because she knows what she wants (cite homestory). Her nonchalance and emotional restraint position this not as something exceptional but as common sense in a world where being an empowered woman in the army and using your agency to commit to state-sanctioned violence is normal. As McRobbie explains in a culture marked by post-feminist “[...] there is a process which says feminism is no longer needed, it is now common sense, and as such it is something young women can do without” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 8).

The same is echoed when Enni is questioned about gender equality in her Q&A, which is the only time she even directly comments on this: “Do women and men get treated equally in the Bundeswehr?” Her response: “Women and men in the Bundeswehr? So there's no difference there. We still use different toilets. That remains. And different showers. But that's about it. We all wear the same uniform. We all do the same tasks” (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019m min. 5:36). Enni's reaction exemplifies this disarticulation of feminism by making it a common sense: her reducing sexual politics in the Bundeswehr to using different toilets paired with a rhetorical shrug implies that gender equality is an outdated concern and equality already common sense. Her

answer exemplifies a postfeminist sensibility that acknowledges feminism only to render it redundant. As McRobbie (2009) and Gill (2007) argue, post-feminism operates by taking feminism into account only to declare its goals as already achieved and thus unnecessary.

Additionally, I would like to draw attention to Enni's portrayed nonchalance, which invokes a certain coolness. Coolness, though intangible to a degree, is usually associated with emotional restraint and confidence (Bartlett, 2002). McRobbie notes about coolness:

There is quietude and complicity in the manners of generationally specific notions of cool, and more precisely, an uncritical relation to dominant commercially produced sexual representations which actively invoke hostility to assumed feminist positions from the past, in order to endorse a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure. (McRobbie, 2009, p. 18)

Throughout the series, this representation of coolness is carefully cultivated through visual and narrative choices. One striking example, which also brings into focus McRobbie's (2009) notions of sexual representation and pleasure as enjoyment, is the use of long, stylized shots of Enni riding her motorcycle. These sequences are especially prominent in her *Home Story*, where she is shown navigating winding roads, her long blonde hair flowing behind her, often captured from above using dramatic drone footage. The imagery is saturated with gendered meaning: the motorcycle, a traditionally masculine-coded object, signals Enni's toughness, independence, and nonconformity. At the same time, women riding motorcycles is a well-established "dominant commercially produced sexual representation" (McRobbie, 2009) that is here reconfigured through tropes of choice and pleasure. By highlighting her toughness alongside her physical appearance—white, feminine, and conventionally attractive—the series aligns Enni with the archetype of the postfeminist subject: a woman who excels in male-dominated spaces while

remaining sexually appealing and unthreatening (McRobbie, 2009). The extensive focus on her motorcycle hobby is thus no coincidence; it crafts a particular form of femininity that is aspirational and palatable to a broad audience. In this portrayal, Enni is not merely a soldier but a particular kind of woman- a “sexual decoy,” according to Eisenstein (2007). Her image legitimizes the Bundeswehr’s claim to gender equality without fundamentally challenging the institution’s underlying structures.

Alongside depictions of Enni’s male-coded hobbies and toughness, it is emphasized how Enni cares about her looks and is excited by the new clothes she will get through the military. Her femininity is highlighted but not at the expense of military credibility. She is teased for bringing “so many cosmetics” (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019b, Ep. 2, 09:02) when she moves into the barracks with her new bunkmates, but laughs it off, never appearing vain or frivolous. In contrary, every time a military rule regulating women’s appearance comes up – for example concerning piercings, or which specific Makeup is allowed – she reiterates that it is her personal choice and just common sense to willingly move within these limitations – for safety (piercings) or because it is simply appropriate (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019a). She maintains a feminine appearance with long blonde hair and subtle makeup while undergoing training exercises. This balance—between maintaining feminine presentation and excelling in a masculine-coded environment—makes her the ideal female soldier, a postfeminist figure who embodies empowerment without disrupting dominant gender norms.

It is crucial to note that my analysis targets not Enni as a person but as a deliberate narrative constructed around her. The series carefully curates her story to align with popular post-feminist

tropes, using her as a vehicle to make the Bundeswehr appear modern, diverse, and in step with contemporary gender norms. I argue that Enni's narrative is appropriated to mask the institutional realities of the military—its hierarchy, violence, and patriarchal underpinnings—and replace them with a narrative of opportunity, freedom, and modern womanhood. By following her journey, the viewer is subtly invited to see military service as an attractive, empowering option for young women. At the same time, the political and ethical stakes of militarization remain largely invisible. This form, post-feminist in nature, values individuality over collective struggle, personal success over feminist critique, and stylized empowerment over structural analysis. Enni's military service, in this light, becomes another consumer choice—a form of self-branding through which she can “experience things,” “make a career,” and “go abroad.” As Angela McRobbie (2009) and Rosalind Gill (2007) both argue, post-feminist culture often functions through a double entanglement: it appears to take feminism into account while simultaneously undermining its structural critiques. I argue that Enni embodies this paradox. She speaks the language of empowerment, career ambition, and self-determination, yet her role is confined within a system that ultimately reproduces traditional gender hierarchies. She is not rebelling against patriarchy—she is succeeding within it, becoming its poster girl. Her story individualizes deeply institutional dynamics, turning military recruitment into a personal narrative of confidence and choice. In this way, Enni becomes a crucial figure in the Bundeswehr's effort to feminize and depoliticize its image. Her cool but approachable demeanor, visual aesthetic, and carefully crafted narrative make her relatable to potential female recruits and appealing to a German public still shaped by military skepticism. She is modern, yet not political; empowered, yet not feminist;

ambitious, yet unthreatening. Through Enni, the Bundeswehr constructs a post-feminist image that makes militarism appear not only acceptable but desirable for women.



Figure 3: Enni riding her motorcycle (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019)

4.3 Post-feminist masculinities: Recruit Maik

While the female recruits are the primary focus of *Die Rekrutinnen* (2019), analyzing how male recruits are represented in relation to them is essential to understanding how the series constructs a supportive and non-threatening image of the military to potential female recruits. This subchapter explores explicitly the portrayal of recruit Maik, examining how softer, military masculinities - here characterized by friendliness, humour, helpfulness, physical competence, and emotional expressiveness—are strategically mobilized. His character exemplifies how post-feminist logics are entangled with the representations of masculinities in the series, rendering them conducive to an inclusive and modern image of the military that empowers women. By

portraying men as supportive and respectful towards women, feminist critique is implicitly rendered unnecessary. Who needs feminism without patriarchy and sexist men?

Maik is noticeably introduced in Episode 2 as recruits line up to receive their uniforms and military clothing. He stands out from his younger peers, appearing slightly older. Immediately addressing this, Maik explains, “First, I fulfilled other obligations and now I’m fulfilling my professional wish.” Adding jokingly while half-heartedly saluting: “Soldier Boy” (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019c min. 11:27). This initial introduction establishes Maik as mature, responsible, funny, and goal-oriented—qualities continually reinforced throughout the series. His maturity is further underscored by his marital status, as indicated by his prominently displayed wedding ring, and later explicitly when his wife is introduced during an official military ceremony (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019b, Episode 14). The presence of a married contrasts markedly with the younger, unmarried recruits, emphasizing an image of stability, commitment, and traditional heteronormative masculinity within a modern and professionalized military context (See Enloe, 2000).

Maik consistently performs exceptionally well in physical and technical exercises. Notably, he excels in a critical swimming test, aiming to complete it under four minutes. Despite his ambition, his demeanour remains relaxed and humorous, jokingly referring to himself as a “dying swan” (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019e min. 4:40). His consistent performance is a recurring theme positioning him as extremely fit, dedicated and skilled. Despite this high performance, Maik remains humble, never displaying arrogance or aggression towards other recruits. Even in direct competitions, such as the selection for performing the military vow during the ceremonial

event in Berlin, Maik demonstrates passion and excitement without aggression or overt competitiveness, anxiously stating, “My heart was racing, oh please, please, please, don't let me be next [eliminated]. I don't want to be out, I want to be there. I made it” (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019i min. 16:50). This portrayal of ambition tempered by humility and emotional openness aligns closely with softer, hybrid masculinities described in contemporary critical military studies (Duncanson, 2009; Higate, 2003).

Maik's supportive and cooperative nature emerges most clearly through interactions with his peers, particularly female recruits. In Episode 3, Maik actively assists a female recruit struggling with her equipment. When asked if such help was allowed, he responds casually and inclusively, “It's camaraderie, isn't it? Allowed or not allowed”(Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019d min. 14:24). Another recruit immediately follows Maik's example, reinforcing his subtle authority through peer validation. The female expresses her appreciation of Maik's helpfulness, subtly reinforcing the positive and inclusive dynamic he embodies. Such interactions highlight Maik as a positive, influential presence among recruits, reinforcing his quiet leadership through supportive behaviour rather than dominance or aggression.

Maik's supportive masculinity also extends beyond immediate interactions with recruits, encompassing his relationship with instructors. He maintains a playful rapport with male instructors, indicating reduced hierarchical boundaries. He jokes with them during private times, displaying blurred hierarchies and camaraderie. Maik is portrayed as someone who gets along with everyone and is not shown being involved in any conflict. Nevertheless, he is always on top, being chosen to represent the unit, winning during competitions, and setting an example that the

other recruits follow. Such representations strategically position the Bundeswehr as a welcoming environment, presenting authority figures as approachable and non-threatening, further aligning military masculinity with contemporary postfeminist sensibilities.

Maik's personal life is strategically integrated into the narrative to bolster this portrayal. His devotion to his wife is repeatedly emphasized. In Episode 14, he warmly embraces her at the Berlin vow ceremony, enthusiastically informing her, "Everyone knows you, and everyone wanted to meet you because I talk so much about you" (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019j min. 5:15). His explicit mention of driving 700 kilometers home on free weekends underscores his dedication and responsibility as a husband, reinforcing traditional heteronormative values of marital fidelity, care, and emotional openness (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019l). Such portrayals of married male soldiers have been analyzed extensively in military research as serving to humanize soldiers, rendering military institutions morally acceptable and even admirable (Enloe, 2000; Basham, 2016).

Additionally, Maik is portrayed as approachable, humorous, and emotionally expressive, further exemplified during the medical training exercise in Episode 15. Volunteering to be the demonstration subject, he jokes and laughs along as the instructor playfully removes a rescue blanket from under his clothing, eliciting laughter from other recruits (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019k). This scene highlights Maik's willingness to be vulnerable reinforcing his image of a non-threatening and likable persona that throughout the series is underlined by his humor and joking around.

This specific representation of Maik as an exemplary funny, nice guy subtly maintains a more nuanced hegemony. His consistent excellence in physical and military tasks, combined with his supportive and approachable nature, implicitly positions him as a model recruit and informal leader among peers. Thus, his masculinity does not openly challenge military hierarchies or gender norms; rather, it integrates kindness, support, and humor as new markers of hegemonic military masculinity similar to what recent research has documented for hybrid masculinities (see Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). This subtle reinforcement of hierarchies aligns well with post-feminism: He is nice and supportive without challenging structural hierarchies. His portrayal supports the vision of the Bundeswehr as a place of achieved gender equality, as his niceness implies the absence of violence. If male soldiers like Maik are supportive, respectful, and inclusive, it suggests that the military has already achieved gender equality, implicitly rendering feminist critiques and activism unnecessary.

In summary, recruit Maik's portrayal in *Die Rekrutinnen* serves crucial ideological purposes for the Bundeswehr. His character embodies a form of masculinity that appears compatible with gender equality and inclusivity, strategically obscuring persistent gender hierarchies and institutional violence. By emphasizing his supportive behavior, physical excellence, humility, and stable marital life, Maik becomes a powerful symbol of the new, progressive, and feminized image the Bundeswehr seeks to project—attractive to female recruits while subtly reinforcing traditional heteronormative and hierarchical military structures.

Having closely examined individual portrayals—such as Enni's embodiment of the empowered, postfeminist woman and Maik's exemplification of supportive, softer masculinity—this thesis

now shifts focus from individual representations to broader institutional discourses. Chapter 5 explores how the Bundeswehr strategically constructs an overarching narrative around gender equality, nonviolence, and inclusivity with post-feminist aesthetics.

5. POST-FEMINIST MILITARIZATION: EMPOWERED FEMININITIES AND NONVIOLENT MASCULINITIES

Building on the individual-focused analysis in Chapter 4, this chapter shifts focus from specific protagonists to the broader narrative and institutional logics that shape *Die Rekrutinnen*. While the previous chapter traced how postfeminist sensibilities are embodied through individual characters—particularly Enni and Maik—this chapter interrogates how the series constructs gender at the structural level, emphasizing the Bundeswehr as an egalitarian and modern institution.

Specifically, I examine how representations of gender equality, physical training, teamwork, and weapon handling are organized around a postfeminist logic that recodes military service as self-realization, empowerment, and apolitical. Gender equality is not framed as a contested political demand or collective feminist achievement, but rather as a presumed condition—an already achieved, apolitical byproduct of modernization and individual merit. The portrayal of postfeminist femininities and rearticulated, softened military masculinities serves to naturalize this depoliticized vision of equality. Together, they function ideologically to rebrand the military as a site of opportunity and inclusion, while simultaneously masking its violent, hierarchical, and exclusionary foundations. This analysis situates *Die Rekrutinnen* within a broader ideological

project: the soft militarization of German society through the visual and affective language of liberal modernity. By presenting gender equality as already accomplished and the military as compatible with diversity, self-discipline, and cosmopolitan professionalism, the series aligns itself with postfeminist and neoliberal narratives. These representations not only legitimize military service, but also support the reinvention of German national identity as progressive, peacekeeping, and globally responsible.

The chapter is organized into four thematic subchapters. The first (5.1) explores how gender equality is visually and rhetorically constructed as achieved and non-conflictual. The second (5.2) analyzes how fitness and physical strength are reframed through postfeminist aesthetics of personal development and bodily discipline while obscuring the connection between physical training and the military's capacity for violence. The third (5.3) explores the representation of teamwork as a post-hierarchical, gender-harmonious ideal, portraying camaraderie and sidelining systemic gendered inequalities. The final section (5.3) investigates the portrayal of weapons and technical training, showing how violence is sanitized and reframed as technical expertise, and how weapons are depoliticized through postfeminist and neoliberal logics.

Taken together, these subchapters illustrate how gendered representations do not undermine military logics but sustain and soften them. The Bundeswehr emerges as a national space where gender equality and military professionalism coexist harmoniously. In doing so, *Die Rekrutinnen* offers a sanitized image of soldiering that simultaneously depoliticizes feminist critique and advances the legitimacy of militarization.

5.1 Portraying Gender Equality

“Women and men in the Bundeswehr? So, there's no difference there. We still use different toilets. That remains. And different showers. But that's about it. We all wear the same uniform. We all do the same tasks”(Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019m min. 5:36).

One of the most striking features of *Die Rekrutinnen* is the deliberate representation of gender equality in the series. This happens on several levels that I will go into in this subchapter: narrative power and screen time, visual representation and camera work, and the portrayal of the female recruits in relation to the male recruits. To understand the importance of gender equality in the context of recruitment and women as I have mentioned in the introduction one has look at the broader discursive and institutional context in which the series operates. Recruitment materials like *Die Rekrutinnen* are part of a larger Bundeswehr strategy to attract more women to the armed forces—a strategy informed by internal assessments showing that many women perceive the military as rife with gender inequality and discrimination (Graf & Kuemmel, 2022). Against this backdrop, the visual and narrative choices in the series serve as a counter-discourse: the military is not only modern and professional, but also fully inclusive and equitable. Yet, as Vavrus (2018) notes, such portrayals reflect a key dynamic of martial post-feminism: they “selectively focus on gender equality as it precludes examination of structural problems that differentially disadvantage women both inside and outside the military” (p. 14).

Throughout the series, the illusion of gender equality is reinforced through content and form. Female recruits, including Enni, are given significantly more screen time than their male counterparts. This is on the one hand given considering the title and content centering on female

recruits, specifically; on the other hand, it still serves its purpose: Making women not only seen actively endorsing the German military but also just overly present; making women seem represented in the German military. While male recruits are present, they are largely peripheral and support the portrayal of women soldiers as integral parts of their groups. The predominant focus on female recruits also exaggerates their presence within the depiction of the military institution. This is especially notable in the curated depiction of a gender-balanced representation among recruits, soldiers, and high-ranking personnel. Beyond individual character focus, the series emphasizes this illusion by framing group exercises. Training sequences often feature equal numbers of male and female recruits, while large-scale exercises strategically highlight female participants, particularly instructors, through deliberate camera angles. This selective representation contrasts sharply with the actual gender disparities within the Bundeswehr. For instance, women are significantly underrepresented in higher military ranks, and only 9.5% of combat roles are occupied by female soldiers (GmbH, n.d.). However, in *Die Rekrutinnen*, high-ranking officers and instructors appear to be equally split between female and male personnel. This portrayal distances the series from the Bundeswehr's real gender composition and demonstrates further how, against its claims of authenticity, the image of the Bundeswehr is intentionally and artificially curated in the series. Through these curated choices, the series constructs an idealized vision of gender inclusivity that obscures persistent structural inequalities. This representation reinforces a utopian image of gender equality in the military while glossing over the violence not only in the purpose of the military institution but also in its ranks and structures. It erases the entrenched gender hierarchies that define military leadership in reality. As feminist scholars like Enloe (2004) and Whitworth (2004) remind us, inclusion in itself does

not equate to transformation. The presence of women in visual materials may symbolize progress, but it often masks deeper institutional asymmetries. One of the features of *Die Rekrutinnen* is the deliberate construction of gender equality as an already-accomplished and unremarkable reality within the Bundeswehr. Through a combination of aesthetic choices, editing strategies, and narrative framing, the series creates a seamless illusion of a gender-equal military. Yet, this illusion functions as a powerful rhetorical device—one that selectively engages feminist language and visual markers of equality, while sidestepping the systemic and structural inequalities that continue to shape women's experiences in the armed forces. In *Die Rekrutinnen*, gender equality is (mostly) not discussed—it is displayed. The series deliberately avoids framing gender equality as something that must be achieved, fought for, or critically discussed. Instead, it is presented as an unquestioned reality, made visible through visual cues and performative balance. This unspoken parity is essential to the show's postfeminist logic: equality is shown, not told; and because it is shown, the viewer is invited to conclude that it has already been accomplished. As Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2009) argue, this is a hallmark of postfeminist discourse—one that symbolically takes feminism into account only to render it obsolete and unnecessary. The appearance of gender equality becomes not just a feature of the military's recruitment messaging, but a foundational claim about the Bundeswehr itself.

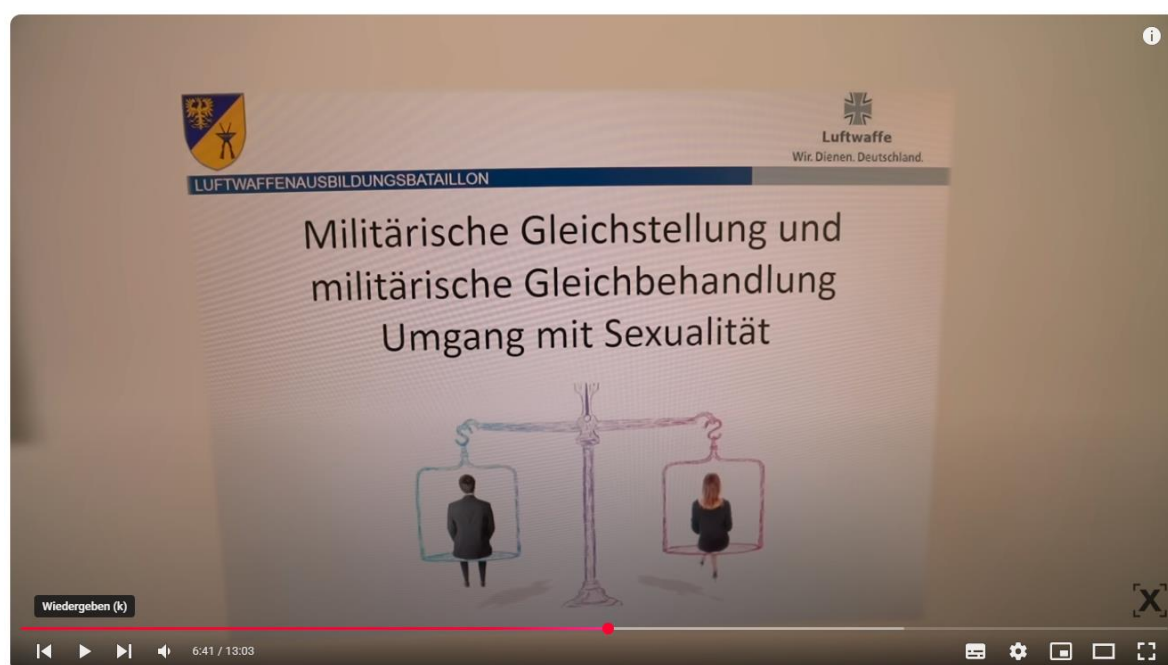
On a content level the series portrays female recruits as simultaneously "one of the boys," adopting a sameness approach to their male counterparts, and as distinctly "female," yet equally valued, depending on the situation and the individual. For sameness: In most exercises, such as marching, fitness training, weapon drills, and cleaning, male and female recruits are depicted as a cohesive, homogeneous group (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019e, 2019g, 2019h). This is also

achieved through similar clothing – uniforms and wide shots on big groups of them. Sequences of them training together, eating together, laughing together, and playing around together. This framing suggests a sense of equality, where all recruits are held to the same standards and share the same responsibilities. The same is echoed when Enni is questioned about equality in her Q&A, which is the only time she even directly comments on this: “Do women and men get treated equally in the Bundeswehr?” Her response: “Women and men in the Bundeswehr? So there's no difference there. We still use different toilets. That remains. And different showers. But that's about it. We all wear the same uniform. We all do the same tasks”(Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019m min. 5:36). Her answer exemplifies a postfeminist sensibility that acknowledges feminism only to render it redundant. One of her friends is even clearer in rejecting feminism as something extreme and outdated: "Personally, I don't think much of all this gender madness going on right now — we're just ONE unit" (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019h min. 3:17) Being perceived as one and equal to their male comrades is emphasized as being important to them.

However, there are also notable instances where female recruits are presented as having distinct needs and rules. Hair, particularly long hair, becomes a highly visible and symbolically charged marker of femininity throughout *Die Rekrutinnen*. - only women are allowed to have long hair in the military – men are not. For example, in the first episode, a sign instructs female recruits to remove makeup and braid their hair (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019b). This moment sets the tone for how female appearance is managed and displayed under the guise of military discipline. While male recruits are required to cut their hair short—a classic military practice symbolizing conformity, discipline, and de-individualization—female recruits are not only allowed to keep their long hair but are shown being instructed in how to manage it according to military

standards. Enni, like many of the other recruits, is repeatedly shown learning and helping others to braid her hair throughout the series. These sequences—styling hair in shared bathroom spaces—receive significant screen time. The emphasis on long hair as a distinctly feminine trait that must be visibly “managed” serves to maintain a gender binary within military uniformity. This approach emphasizes that “a woman in the Army is still a woman” (Brown, 2012, p. 158), reinforcing a form of militarized femininity. Rather than being flattened into gender-neutral soldierly identities, femininity is preserved through these visual markers, reflecting a postfeminist logic in which “doing femininity” is framed as a choice rather than a restriction—you always have the choice of cutting it short instead of the work-intensive, specific braiding. In this context, braiding hair becomes not only a mundane routine but a form of gender performance that reinforces the idea that one can be both a soldier and a woman—strong and disciplined, yet still visibly feminine. The act of styling long hair serves as an anchor for the post-feminist notion that empowerment lies in navigating and reconciling traditional femininity with new professional terrains. This is made especially clear in the final episode when Enni is directly asked whether she finds it annoying to keep her hair tied up all the time. She replies that it was annoying at first because she loves wearing her hair down, but that she got used to it. Emphasizing that it is her own choice to be here after all (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019r). Her statement exemplifies postfeminist sensibilities: discomfort or structural constraint is negated by the referring to individual choice and personal growth. Hair, in this context, becomes the thread through which female soldiers remain legibly feminine while “choosing” to conform—visually and symbolically—to an institution historically defined by masculinist norms.

Despite its surface-level commitment to inclusivity, *Die Rekrutinnen* presents a form of gender equality that is strikingly depoliticized. Moments that ostensibly reflect institutional concern for the specific needs of female recruits are brief, hollowed-out gestures that strip equality of its structural or political meaning. For instance, in Episode 5, viewers are momentarily shown a slide on “military equality and military equal rights, as well as dealing with sexuality” during a classroom session. Yet, this potentially serious topic is immediately undercut by the portrayal of bored, disengaged recruits and framed as tedious by one recruit who labels the session simply demanding.



Der Koppelbau | DIE REKRUTINNEN | Folge 5

Figure 4: Military equal opportunity sign (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019)

Another interesting scene is when the female recruits are attending a separate informational session explicitly for female recruits only. Sold as being a session from women for women the segment—lasting under a minute in an episode of over fifteen—boils down to a single piece of

advice: to find a local gynecologist when deployed (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019k). It reduces the female experience and needs in the *Bundeswehr* to specific medical care. It is one of the few instances where female embodiment is explicitly addressed yet even this moment is presented in a depoliticized way and given minimal screen time. It is used to highlight the military's paternalistic role, appearing to acknowledge and address the specific realities of female soldiers and care for them. Equality is represented as achieved through matters of individual lifestyle adjustment and bureaucratic accommodation. In both configurations – hair and gynecological session –, femininity is both hyper-visible and politically empty: styled, managed, and displayed, yet stripped of collective critique. The implication in both instances is that they are treated equally not because their difference has been eliminated, but because it is safely managed.

This dual portrayal of sameness and difference underscores equality in two seemingly contradictory ways, which work together to appeal to a broader audience. A particular scene exemplifies this balance: when Enni and her fellow recruits are asked to carry heavy bags for a trip to Berlin, a female recruit, points out the difficulty of carrying the bags due to her smaller physique, prompting a male recruit to offer assistance. The interaction is framed as general teamwork among recruits, rather than male recruits assisting female ones. Conversely, Enni in the next moment, proudly asserts her strength by carrying her own bags and declaring, “Let me tell you: a woman is self-reliant” (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019h). This juxtaposition demonstrates a language of empowerment and postfeminist affect, celebrating individual strength and self-reliance. The recruit who struggles is gently assisted, reinforcing male strength as benevolent. The one who refuses help embodies a rugged individualism that aligns with neoliberal and postfeminist ideals. Ultimately, the portrayal of gender equality in *Die Rekrutinnen* is not simply

a reflection of changing norms within the Bundeswehr. It is an act of strategic storytelling, carefully curated to present a sanitized, progressive image of the military. The viewers are invited to believe in a military where women are fully included, respected, and empowered – to a point where it is as unnecessary as annoying to talk about it in a lecture. Through such representations, the series not only portrays female recruits as both similar to and distinct from male recruits (yet equal) but also constructs the ideal male recruit as kind, supportive, and helpful. This interplay of gendered dynamics leads me into the construction of masculinities within the series.

5.2 Fitness, Discipline, and the New Soldier

Fitness occupies a central position in *Die Rekrutinnen*, functioning as a key narrative and aesthetic device through which postfeminist femininities and reconfigured military masculinities are constructed, negotiated, and brought into relation. This chapter analyzes how fitness and physical training are deployed to frame military service as a personal development journey rather than a preparation for violence, and how gendered performances of discipline and transformation serve to obscure both the institutional violence within the Bundeswehr and its broader purpose as a state apparatus of sanctioned force. Central to this analysis is the argument that postfeminist sensibilities and hybrid military masculinities do not merely coexist, but co-function within a shared ideological project. Together, they constitute a postfeminist portrayal of the Bundeswehr as modern, inclusive, and morally progressive.

Fitness is depicted as foundational to military identity in *Die Rekrutinnen*, but curiously, its importance is rarely linked to the actual tasks or combat readiness of the recruits. This disconnect is especially noticeable given that many roles within the Bundeswehr—such as desk work,

logistics, or technical operations—do not necessarily require above-average physical endurance. Despite this, fitness is repeatedly emphasized as a non-negotiable institutional requirement. The *Basis Fitness Test* (BFT), for example, must be passed not only during the initial recruitment process but also annually to remain employed by the Bundeswehr. The BFT includes standardized exercises such as running, pull-ups, and lateral jumping, and is framed as a universal metric of military competency. It is not merely a gatekeeping mechanism but a recurring ritual that marks physical discipline as central to soldierly identity. This emphasis is reiterated throughout the series by instructors and editing choices. In Episode 3, as recruits visibly struggle during a morning workout, a male instructor barks: “This isn't senior citizen exercise. This is the Bundeswehr”(Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019d min. 2:11). The blunt distinction communicates that military fitness is serious business—not optional, but essential. Yet, this insistence is never followed by any explanation of why such high levels of physical performance are necessary for all recruits, regardless of their eventual job assignments. I would argue that the absence of functional justification positions fitness as more than a requirement—it is a performative ritual that legitimizes military identity and upholds the militarized aesthetic of discipline and readiness. This dynamic mirrors the insights of feminist scholars in Critical Military Studies (CMS), who argue that militaries have long relied on physical performance to masculinize the institution and exclude or marginalize those who do not conform (Enloe 2000; Duncanson, 2009; Gopal 2023). Connell and Messerschmidt’s (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity helps explain how strength, control, and endurance operate as gendered ideals within militarized institutions. Even when militaries claim to be inclusive, these ideals remain embedded in the structures and aesthetics of military life. Scholars such as Joshua Goldstein (2001) have further emphasized how

militaries use masculine ideals to legitimize state-sanctioned violence, framing aggression, toughness, and endurance as essential components of national security and protection. Goldstein (2001), in particular, argues that the global linkage between masculinity and war is deeply rooted and cross-cultural, sustained by myths of male heroism and sacrifice. Cockburn and Cohn extend this analysis to highlight how even military technologies and strategic discourses are gendered—valorizing rationality, hardness, and control in ways that marginalize alternative, feminist security imaginaries. In *Die Rekrutinnen*, these traditional ideals are not erased but rearticulated through the softer, more inclusive lens of fitness. Strength and endurance are no longer tethered to aggression, dominance, or combat. Instead, they are presented as markers of health, discipline, and self-worth—qualities that appeal across gender lines and align with broader neoliberal values of self-optimization. This shift allows the Bundeswehr to repackaging its military ideals as universally accessible and desirable, while retaining the hierarchical and masculinized power structures that undergird them.

The female recruits in *Die Rekrutinnen*, particularly Enni, are cast as emblematic of postfeminist femininity. These are subjects who are self-directed, emotionally expressive, and committed to personal growth through discipline and bodily management. The post-feminist paradox that gender equality has already been achieved, while simultaneously expecting women to demonstrate empowerment through relentless self-discipline and self-improvement, is portrayed here. Enni is repeatedly shown voicing concerns about her physical capabilities. She frequently remarks that she needs to train more, get healthier, and improve her fitness. In Episode 6, following a strenuous morning run, she comments with visible discomfort on her red face and slower pace, indicating embarrassment about her physical capabilities. The caption on the screen

reads: "Enni wants to get fitter"(Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019f). This framing positions Enni's fitness journey not as a professional necessity but as a personal goal tied to feminine self-worth, bodily control, and emotional growth. Exercise is not framed solely as a skill but as an identity tied to femininity. Enni voices her improvements during physical exercises and notes what she has to work on constantly. We follow all of them as they show their dedication to improving their body over the course of the series. An arch of self-improvement is portrayed from beginning till the end of the series where at the end everyone comes out as their fitter self. Such moments align closely with the postfeminist makeover paradigm, where the body is both the site and object of work constantly. Moreover, Gill and Elias (2014) describe this as part of the "confidence culture," where women are governed not through external coercion but through internalized imperatives to improve, regulate, and optimize themselves.

In *Die Rekrutinnen*, this internalization is visible in the narrative arc that frames physical training not as preparation for combat, but as a lifestyle shift towards health and empowerment. The Bundeswehr's own marketing materials reinforce this narrative. As stated on their career website: "When I simply exercise, I feel significantly better. I'm more productive, I can concentrate longer, and I am more balanced. I also have the social aspect—being together with others" (Bundeswehr, n.d.). Here, fitness is not framed as a means to carry weapons or endure battlefield conditions, but as a way to become a better, more balanced person. The military institution, traditionally associated with violence, is recast as a site of therapeutic self-care. The narrative function of fitness in *Die Rekrutinnen* is also central to the series' recruitment strategy. By highlighting recruits with varying initial fitness levels, the Bundeswehr widens its potential recruitment pool. The inclusion of physically struggling recruits, such as Enni, sends a clear

message: you don't have to be elite to join. The emphasis shifts from performance to progress, from innate ability to motivation. This strategy is not incidental. In early episodes, some female recruits are portrayed as highly athletic, while others visibly struggle with the physical demands of training. These differences are not neutral; they are integral to the visual logic of self-improvement that underpins the series. As the Bundeswehr claims: "Motivation is all that counts" (Bundeswehr, n.d.). This sentiment mirrors broader neoliberal discourses that locate success or failure in the individual, sidelining structural critique. If everyone has the opportunity to succeed, then inequality becomes a matter of effort, not institutional design.

The Basic Fitness Test (BFT) serves as the primary narrative device for displaying this transformation. Administered at the beginning and end of the 12-week training program, the BFT tracks recruits' improvement over time through metrics like speed, endurance, and strength (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019g). The dramatic visual contrast between early failures and later successes constructs a powerful arc of personal transformation. The *Hindernislauf* (obstacle course) and *Holzwand* (wooden wall) operate similarly. Early in the series, Enni fails to scale the wall. These moments are captured in close-up, often accompanied by somber or suspenseful music. By the series finale, the same women – including Enni – overcome the obstacle, to upbeat editing and affirming narration (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019p). This progression is both emotional and physical. Success is framed not as the acquisition of combat skill but as personal victory over one's limitations. The institution positions itself as the enabler of that transformation. But this celebratory narrative masks deeper contradictions. The wall does not change; the recruits must adapt to it. There is no reflection on whether the test is exclusionary or rooted in masculine-coded ideals of soldiering. Instead, its difficulty is reframed as opportunity. This framing

connects directly to the militarized gender order. The Bundeswehr has long been embedded in a culture of hegemonic masculinity, where toughness, physical endurance, and hierarchy are valorized. These ideals are not simply personal traits but institutional codes that regulate behavior and inclusion (see Duncanson (2009), Basham (2016), and Higate (2003)) . Even as military institutions claim to evolve, these codes persist in subtler forms. *Die Rekrutinnen* illustrates how these masculinist ideals are rebranded. Rather than being aggressive or authoritarian, instructors are often portrayed as emotionally literate and supportive, especially toward female recruits. Yet their authority is never questioned. This performance of care serves to naturalize the institution's power, making it appear benevolent and inclusive. In this way, hybrid military masculinities operate within a postfeminist logic. They acknowledge feminism by appearing gender-equal, only to dismiss it as no longer necessary. If masculinity is now kind and fair, the logic goes, then feminism has served its purpose. At the same time, female recruits are not exempt from the burden of performance. They must be strong, but not too strong; emotional, but not weak; resilient, but always smiling. This complex gender balancing act is embedded in the very structure of the training and the visual grammar of the series. The frequent costume changes—from blue workout attire to formal uniforms—underscore the dual nature of the fitness regime: it is both personal and institutional.

In sum, fitness in *Die Rekrutinnen* is more than a requirement—it is an ideological mechanism that sustains the structure of the military while concealing its violent core. Physical training is not linked to warfare, combat, or defense strategy. It is framed as a moral obligation, and a source of personal fulfillment. This framing allows the Bundeswehr to repackage its militarized mission within a post-feminist aesthetic: strength without aggression, discipline without domination,

inclusion without transformation. It not only serves to delink fitness from maleness in the military setting but also conceals violence which serves the idea of recruiting female soldiers as well as making combat more palpable to a military-sceptic German public. This ideological packaging depends on the cooperation of post-feminist femininities and newer military masculinities. Together, they construct a vision of the Bundeswehr that is not only modern but morally superior—a national institution where gender equality has been achieved, and feminist critique is no longer necessary. While fitness in *Die Rekrutinnen* is framed as an individual responsibility tied to self-discipline and personal growth, it simultaneously often serves as a key setting for constructing teamwork and camaraderie—particularly through collective physical challenges. The ways in which these dynamics of cooperation, mutual support, and gendered interaction are portrayed will be explored in more detail in the following section.

5.3 Teamwork and Gender Relations

Teamwork in *Die Rekrutinnen* is portrayed as a central value of military culture, one that ostensibly transcends gender and hierarchy. Through scenes of physical training, shared challenges, and interpersonal support, the series crafts an image of camaraderie that is mixed-gender, post-hierarchical, and emotionally intelligent. At first glance, this representation suggests an egalitarian military environment—one where masculine strength is tempered by empathy and where women are welcomed as equals. However, a closer reading reveals that this representation of teamwork is not only selective, but also strategically depoliticized. While cross-gender cooperation is foregrounded, female solidarity is conspicuously absent, and systemic gender inequalities are left

unchallenged. Teamwork, in this context, becomes a means of ideological containment rather than empowerment.

A recurring trope in the series is the helpful, kind male recruit. The two male recruits who receive the most screen time are frequently shown assisting their female peers—offering tips during training, helping them over obstacles, or reassuring them when they express self-doubt. These performances align with what Jester (2021) refers to as "civilianized" or "inclusive" masculinities: gender performances that emphasize emotional intelligence, collaboration, and care, rather than dominance and aggression. These masculinities are strategically deployed to appear modern, ethical, and compatible with gender equality. As such, they form part of the Bundeswehr's effort to distance itself from its historically violent, hypermasculine image. Yet, while male recruits are consistently portrayed as kind and competent, female interactions are shallowly rendered or completely sidelined. Scenes of female bonding are rare and, when they do occur, are often superficial—such as short conversations about hair, hygiene, or jokes made during shared chores. There are no scenes that depict female recruits forming deep, strategic alliances or engaging in meaningful conversations about their shared experiences as women in a militarized environment. This lack of female solidarity is not incidental; it reflects what McRobbie (2009) identifies as the postfeminist disarticulation of feminist critique. Female recruits are framed as strong, capable individuals, but their empowerment is conditional upon their separation from collective feminist resistance. Enni's narrative again provides a clear example. She often appears in supportive interactions with male recruits and instructors, who guide her through physical or emotional difficulties. These interactions are depicted as genuine, emotionally resonant moments of mentorship or friendship. However, her interactions with other

female recruits are brief, humorous, or emotionally flat. Instead of being portrayed as aligning herself with other women, Enni's narrative centers on her ability to overcome personal challenges—with the occasional, benevolent support of male peers. This reinforces a postfeminist sensibility in which female success is individualized, competitive, and distanced from political solidarity. This selective portrayal serves clear institutional functions. By emphasizing mixed-gender cooperation and de-emphasizing feminist critique, *Die Rekrutinnen* presents a vision of the Bundeswehr as already equal and inclusive. This image masks the reality of gendered violence within military institutions, where women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership roles and continue to report high rates of harassment and discrimination (Horstkötter, 2021; SWR, o. J.). The camaraderie depicted in the series obscures these systemic issues, replacing them with the reassuring representation of general group harmony.

Furthermore, the series' emphasis on teamwork dovetails with the neoliberal logic of military recruitment. As Strand and Berndtsson (2015) argue, contemporary military marketing often highlights professionalism, technical skill, and interpersonal collaboration as key values, replacing traditional markers of masculinity such as dominance and aggression. This shift is especially important in nations like Germany, where antimilitarist cultural legacies persist. By presenting the Bundeswehr as a cooperative, technocratic institution, the series appeals to an audience skeptical of traditional military authority. However, this appeal comes at a price. The feminization of military masculinities—through the incorporation of kindness, teamwork, and emotional openness—is not accompanied by a parallel commitment to addressing systemic gender inequality. Rather, it functions to disarm critique. If men are kind and supportive, and women are strong and self-reliant, then there is no need for feminist intervention. This is the

paradox of post-feminism: it incorporates the language of empowerment while foreclosing the possibility of collective action. The cost of being "empowered" in *Die Rekrutinnen* is isolation. Women may succeed, but they must do so alone.

In sum, teamwork in *Die Rekrutinnen* is less a depiction of egalitarian solidarity than a performance of controlled inclusion. Male recruits adopt feminized traits to appear progressive, while female recruits are framed as empowered individuals rather than potential agents of collective resistance. By prioritizing cross-gender camaraderie over female solidarity, the series disarticulates feminist critique and reinforces the ideological status quo. The Bundeswehr is thereby rendered not only modern and inclusive but also free from the burdens of its violent, masculinist past—a portrayal that is both seductive and profoundly misleading.

5.4 Weapons, War, and the Technical Sanitization of Violence

Perhaps the most striking departure from traditional military masculinity in *Die Rekrutinnen* is its treatment of weapons. In much of military advertising and recruitment media, weapons serve as potent symbols of power, violence, and dominance, reinforcing the military's association with combat and force (Jester, 2021). These images have historically functioned as visual shorthand for soldierly masculinity, emphasizing aggression, strength, and readiness to kill. However, *Die Rekrutinnen* deviates from this norm by portraying weapons in a notably depoliticized and desensitized way. I argue that this strategic shift plays a crucial role in the Bundeswehr's efforts to rebrand itself as a modern, professional, and non-threatening institution, especially to a public with strong antimilitarist sentiments and in attracting recruits socialized into postfeminist ideals of safety, individual empowerment, and moral clarity. Weapons in *Die Rekrutinnen* are

consistently framed as technical instruments rather than tools of destruction. Their handling is portrayed as a matter of skill acquisition and academic testing, rather than preparation for combat. During simulation exercises that mimic war scenarios, language associated with violence is meticulously avoided. Recruits are never said to shoot at people; they are only ever positioned as shooting at objects. The sanitized vocabulary and visual framing effectively disassociate weapon use from its violent consequences, echoing Jester's (2021) observation that contemporary military advertisements often depict weapons as symbolic props rather than lethal instruments.

In Episode 23, a group of recruits prepares for an upcoming test on the components of the G36 rifle. The mood is light, almost comical. Several recruits express frustration over the technical memorization required, laughing and groaning about how much there is to study. The sequence culminates with Enni summarizing the general feeling with a tired smile: "Studying, studying, studying is on the agenda" (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019n). The weapons are not threatening; they are reduced to a set of terms to memorize, like a school quiz. The editing reinforces this academic framing with fast cuts, background music, and upbeat pacing. There is no mention of the weapon's potential for violence, no in depth reflection on its real-world application, and certainly no acknowledgment of its use in armed conflict. This portrayal continues in Episode 25, where a safety lecture is presented with dramatic music and stern warnings from instructors. Yet, this tension is immediately undercut in the following scene: as the recruits review their practice drills, one jokes, "Good thing these things aren't live rounds, or a lot of people would have lost a foot today" (min. 9:03). The laughter that follows is not only accepted but encouraged. The narrative constructs an affective arc in which fear and responsibility are quickly replaced by humor and camaraderie. I argue that this oscillation between seriousness and playfulness is key to

how *Die Rekrutinnen* aestheticizes and ultimately neutralizes military violence. The weapon becomes a prop in a technical performance—not a tool of destruction. This representation intersects with the gender politics of the series in important ways. Female recruits, especially Enni, are consistently shown mastering these technical challenges with competence and focus. Their success is framed not in terms of aggression or martial prowess, but in terms of intelligence, preparation, and emotional control. For instance, Enni's nervousness before a weapons test is framed like exam anxiety: "I hope I'm not too bad. Yeah, no idea, I'm a little nervous"(Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019o). Her pride in passing the test stems from successfully navigating a bureaucratic evaluation, not from gaining lethal expertise. Female recruits are encouraged to prove themselves through technical mastery. They must show that they are equal by outperforming their peers—not by challenging the gendered structures that shape military life. As such, their empowerment remains bounded by institutional expectations and post-feminist ideals. Success is individual, not collective; critique is replaced by competence. This reflects what Gill (2007) and McRobbie (2009) describe as postfeminist subjectivity: empowerment is available, but only to those who work on themselves, play by the rules, and avoid structural critique.

The framing of weapons as neutral tools also aligns with broader shifts in military masculinity. Scholars like Higate (2003), Duncanson (2009), and Basham (2013) have noted the emergence of hybrid masculinities within contemporary militaries—forms of male identity that incorporate traditionally feminized traits like emotional intelligence, patience, and care. In *Die Rekrutinnen*, the instructors who oversee weapons training embody this shift. They are stern but supportive, correcting recruits with firm encouragement rather than harsh discipline. Their authority is never

questioned, but it is expressed through mentorship, not dominance. This performance of masculinity is intended to resonate with public expectations of ethical, modern soldiering. As Woodward (2000) notes, militaries often adapt their gender performances to meet changing cultural norms, particularly when recruiting in liberal-democratic societies where traditional forms of masculinity may be viewed with suspicion. Importantly, this reframing of both weaponry and gender serves an ideological function. It allows the Bundeswehr to present itself as a technocratic, morally upright institution where violence is a distant abstraction rather than an imminent reality. Recruits are not trained to kill; they are trained to pass tests. Guns are not weapons; they are complex devices to be studied, like lab equipment or musical instruments. The series thus participates in what Enloe (2000) and Cockburn (2004) describe as the depoliticization of militarization: the process by which military practices are normalized and rendered invisible through narratives of professionalism, technical mastery, and gender equality.

At the same time, this sanitized portrayal of weapons actively disavows the foundational logic of military institutions: their capacity to exert lethal force on behalf of the state. As Woodward and Duncanson (2017) emphasize, the primary function of the military is to organize, manage, and execute violence. This violence is not incidental; it is constitutive. Yet in *Die Rekrutinnen*, this reality is displaced by a narrative of personal growth, professional development, and sanitized competence. The recruits are not being prepared to participate in war; they are being trained to succeed in a militarized meritocracy. Moreover, the absence or at best minimal of reflection on the ethical or political implications of weapon use reinforces the disarticulation of feminist critique. Although scenes where recruits learn about international law in a lecture are included it is again framed as something the recruits have to study. The content of the lecture is also not truly

revealed as it is fast cuts, music drowning out the lecturer's words and the occasional zoom in on faces where some pay more and others pay less attention to the lecture. The only thing Enni adds in her interview after the lecture is that it's good that there are ground rules in place (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019q).

In sum, *Die Rekrutinnen* renders military violence invisible by aestheticizing weaponry, gamifying training, and reframing the soldier as a rational, technician. The representation of weapons as complex but benign objects enables the Bundeswehr to appear inclusive, ethical, and modern—precisely by distancing itself from the realities of warfare. This sanitized vision of soldiering is seductive, particularly in a national context like Germany where antimilitarist sentiment remains strong. But it is also deeply ideological, obscuring the fundamental violence of military institutions behind a veneer of professionalism and equality. By highlighting the technical aspects of weaponry while omitting its consequences, *Die Rekrutinnen* participates in the broader cultural project of rendering militarization normal, necessary, and morally unobjectionable.

6. DISCUSSION: THE NATION AND THE GLOBAL SOLDIER: GENDER, POST-FEMINISM, AND GERMANY'S NATION IMAGINARY

This chapter discusses how the series positions female recruits as symbolic of a gender-equal, modern German nation, tying liberal gender ideals to national self-representation while excluding racialized and non-Christian subjects from this image of belonging. Together, these analyses demonstrate how *Die Rekrutinnen* does not merely reflect societal shifts in gender roles but actively contributes to a re-legitimation of militarism by aligning it with postfeminist individualism, neoliberal self-management, and liberal nationalism. In doing so, the Bundeswehr's recruitment media strategically transforms gender equality into a depoliticized, marketable sign of national modernity. In *Die Rekrutinnen*, national identity, gender equality, and military professionalism are strategically woven together to produce a sanitized, postfeminist vision of the Bundeswehr that aligns with Germany's self-perception as a modern, peacekeeping democracy. I argue that the representation of female recruits—especially the central figure of Enni—serves as a symbolic condensation of the Bundeswehr's postfeminist and nationalist image: inclusive, apolitical, gender-equal, and globally mobile. This portrayal is deeply ideological. It reinforces a nationalist imaginary that is white, middle-class, and Christian, while projecting military deployment abroad as a form of liberal global citizenship rather than geopolitical intervention or state violence. This subchapter builds on the thesis's central research question by illustrating how postfeminist gender constructions, soft masculinities, and racialized exclusions work together to legitimize militarization as a vehicle for national modernity.

The ideal recruit in military recruitment is not just defined by physical and mental attributes but also by the national identity the military seeks to project – especially considering that this series is directly produced by the German Ministry of Defense. In this case, the Bundeswehr’s portrayal of the recruits reflects an imagined national identity that ties together gender, race, religion and class. An intersectional approach is necessary, as gender systems are intertwined with ethnic, racial, and class-based hierarchies that reflect national ideals (Masson, 2017, S. 26). It is essential to understanding who is made visible in the series and who remains excluded. Although the series claims diversity, a closer look shows a marked lack of diversity in the recruits and instructors portrayed. First of all, *Die Rekrutinnen* highlights a cast of recruits who appear to be overwhelmingly white. Additionally, regarding class, the recruits depicted in the series appear to come from middle-class backgrounds. While the series does not explicitly mention the characters' incomes or educational backgrounds, various indicators suggest this socio-economic status. Scenes filmed in their hometowns show single-family houses, tidy private gardens, and leisure activities such as piano playing or horseback riding—markers of cultural and economic capital (Barbehön & Haus, 2018). The recruits' leisure activities, such as playing the piano or riding motorbikes, further hint at financial stability (Barbehön & Haus, 2018). The series' presentation of recruits from seemingly middle-class backgrounds is not ideologically neutral. In chapter 4.2 I already discussed how not only middle-class status but also the possibility of upward class mobility through the Bundeswehr is represented. This portrayal functions on two levels: it reaffirms the Bundeswehr’s appeal to stability, respectability, and national belonging, while also selling the promise of self-betterment to socioeconomically mobile audiences. In this way, the military is framed as both a reflection of middle-class normality and a vehicle for aspirational

mobility—an institution capable of elevating disciplined, deserving individuals. Notably, class and race play a crucial role in post-feminist logics. As McRobbie (2009) notes:

White women in the UK increasingly live out their class positions, to re-phrase Stuart Hall, through the modality of gender and femininity. They have also become more autonomously feminised (and glamourised) in their class identity, no longer taking this status or adhering to it, from their position as wives of men, or as daughters of fathers. (McRobbie 2009, p. 7)

McRobbie (2009) and Projansky ([2001](#)) note that the ideal post-feminist subject is a white women against which racial hierarchies are reinforced. The white, middle-class, woman is not the only (see) but the main and deserving subject of modern empowerment. The interconnectedness of whiteness, middle- class status and post-feminist aesthetics of the subjects displayed in the series not only constructs the ideal recruit. It represents the image of the Bundeswehr and by extension the German nation state. As instructor Steffi states, "We represent German society" (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019i).

The seeming absence of racial diversity is complimented by religious homogeneity: In Episode 49, a church scene includes a priest acknowledging that all faiths are welcome in the Bundeswehr, and a pop-up informs viewers of efforts to introduce Jewish and Muslim pastoral care (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019r). However, no Muslim or Jewish characters are noticeably depicted. By exclusively showing white, middle-class, Christian, female recruits, the Bundeswehr excludes other identities, shaping an idealized “German-ness” that excludes racial, religious, and class diversity. The church scene, in which the recruits attend Christian mass, exemplifies this exclusion: while viewers hear about the “Other” (someone of a different faith), no recruit of a

different faith is shown. This exclusion marks the recruits as Christian while leaving people of other faiths as invisible “Others” (Bundeswehr Exclusive, 2019r). This is a clear case of what Ahmed (2012) calls “non-performativity”: invoking inclusion rhetorically while structurally sustaining exclusion (Ahmed, 2007). The ideal German soldier-citizen is represented as white, Christian, and middle-class embracing the notions of post-feminist sensibilities.

Enni is a quintessential postfeminist subject (see Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009): empowered, focused on self-improvement, career-focused, yet conforming to military structures. She performs strength not by confronting power structures, but by proving her competence and adaptability within them. Her success is tied to making the ‘right’ choices and constantly improving herself. This narrative reinforces post-feminism’s underlying ideological message: that feminism, as a collective political project, is no longer needed. Gender equality has ostensibly been achieved, and what remains is for individual women to prove their empowerment through choice, effort, and positive attitude.

This portrayal of achieved gender equality in the Bundeswehr and the German nation state through its protagonists invokes discourses on modernity and racial hierarchies. This vision of the empowered female recruit is deeply racialized. By displaying white, Western women like Enni as the face of the Bundeswehr, the series participates in what Abu-Lughod (2002) critiques as the postcolonial logic of “saving” women through modernity. The contrast between the liberated, self-disciplined, mobile Western woman and the imagined subjugated, backward non-Western woman is never explicitly drawn—but it haunts the series’ implicit racial politics (Abu-Lughod, 2002). The lack of visible recruits of color, of Muslim women, of women who might trouble the

visual logic of national homogeneity, makes clear that not all women can embody this postfeminist nationalism. Gender equality becomes a form of soft power, signaling national modernity while sustaining racialized boundaries. Deployments abroad are central to this narrative. They are rarely discussed in terms of combat or geopolitical stakes. Instead, they are framed as opportunities for travel, and personal development. International law lectures stress ethical behavior and humanitarian norms, positioning German soldiers as guardians of peace, not agents of war. As Basham (2016) argues, this constitutes a form of militarized humanitarianism—military action rebranded as benevolent and apolitical. In this model, the empowered female soldier is not a participant in state violence but a cosmopolitan ambassador of liberal values. Masculinity is also reformulated within this framework. Male recruits and instructors are shown as kind, supportive, and competent—performing hybrid masculinities that merge emotional intelligence with professional skill (Higate 2003; Duncanson 2009). These masculinities support, rather than threaten, the presence of empowered women. Yet their authority remains intact. This reinforces the postfeminist illusion that gender equality has been achieved: men are no longer sexist; women are no longer marginalized. Military hierarchy remains, but it is now cloaked in emotional subtlety and inclusivity. By depoliticizing both gender and geopolitics, *Die Rekrutinnen* allows the Bundeswehr to position itself and by extension German nation state as upholders of modern values. This is especially significant in a post-WWII context, where the German military has had to reinvent itself. The Bundeswehr's narrative of peacekeeping, professional development, and gender equality becomes a means of constructing a new, rehabilitated national identity—one that seemingly disconnects from its violent military past

while embracing global moral responsibility. Yet what is presented as national representation is, in fact, an exclusionary construct: white, Christian, economically stable, and compliant.

The vision of gender equality presented in *Die Rekrutinnen* must also be understood within the broader ideological framework of modernity—a concept that binds together postfeminist and postcolonial critiques. Within postfeminist discourse, as McRobbie (2009) and Gill (2007) have argued, gender equality is framed not as an ongoing political struggle but as an already-achieved milestone of modern Western societies. Postcolonial theorists have pointed out how this narrative of progress functions as a civilizational discourse: Western nations are imagined as having attained moral and cultural superiority through their commitment to liberal values like equality, diversity, and human rights (Grewal, 2005; Mohanty, 1984). Leaning on post-colonial theory McRobbie (2009) critiques the way in which Western postfeminist culture “celebrates the freedoms of fashion-conscious ‘thong-wearing’ Western girls in contrast to those young women who, for example, wear the veil,” constructing a new “hierarchy of civilisation and modernity” that reaffirms Western moral authority while foreclosing transnational feminist solidarities (p. 27). *Die Rekrutinnen* contributes to this discourse through its visual and narrative silences: the absence of Muslim women, women of color, and non-Christian recruits reinforces a narrow ideal of the empowered female soldier as white, secular, and Western. In this context, the female soldier—particularly the disciplined, white, heterosexual woman like Enni—becomes a symbolic figure of national modernity. Her presence in the military is not merely a sign of inclusion but a performative declaration that Germany, and by extension Europe, has evolved beyond its violent past into a peaceful, democratic, and gender-progressive polity. This discursive work is especially potent in *Die Rekrutinnen*, where gender equality is framed not as political dissent or structural

critique, but as a visible marker of a reformed, morally superior national identity. In this postfeminist-postcolonial imaginary, Germany is no longer the militarist aggressor of the 20th century, but a liberal, peacekeeping force whose military is now populated by empowered women and emotionally attuned men. Gender equality through the vision of post-feminist sensibilities thus becomes a form of soft power, a way of asserting geopolitical legitimacy and moral authority without addressing the colonial and patriarchal structures that continue to underlie both national and international military engagements. As such, the series rebrands the Bundeswehr in relation to the German nation state and its military-sceptic public. This process of militarizing antimilitarism (Stengel, 2021) is enacted through genre as well as content. By adopting the affective register of reality TV, *Die Rekrutinnen* hides its ideological labor beneath a veil of authenticity. Personal stories appear apolitical, even as they reproduce national myths of gender parity and global morality. The result is a militarized nationalism that uses feminist aesthetics to advance a militarized vision of citizenship and state legitimacy.

In conclusion, *Die Rekrutinnen* reveals how gender, race, class, and nationalism converge in the production of the ideal military subject. Female recruits like Enni function as symbolic proof that the Bundeswehr—and by extension, the German nation-state—has transcended its militarized and patriarchal past. Yet this portrayal is made possible only through strategic omissions: of feminist critique, of racial and religious minorities, of geopolitical realities. The nation presented is not only gender-equal, but morally superior—a peacekeeping force composed of modern, disciplined citizens. This image is seductive, particularly in a postfeminist moment where empowerment is often measured by visibility rather than transformation. It renders militarization compatible with

modern femininity and liberal democracy. *Die Rekrutinnen* reveals not only the aesthetics of inclusion, but the mechanics of exclusion that continue to structure the national imaginary.

7. CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to examine how the Bundeswehr's YouTube series *Die Rekrutinnen* reproduces gendered representations to legitimize military service within contemporary German society. Anchored in feminist, post-feminist, critical military, and postcolonial theoretical frameworks, the research interrogates the discursive mechanisms by which military narratives intersect with gender, media, and national identity. Rather than viewing military recruitment as a functional communication effort alone, this study positions *Die Rekrutinnen* as a cultural text that operates ideologically by contributing to the ongoing normalization and soft legitimization of militarism in a country with a historically fraught relationship to military power.

The empirical core of the thesis, developed in Chapters 4 through 6, unpacks the series' representational strategies in layered detail. Chapter 4 begins by examining the series on the level of individual characterization, focusing on the female recruit Enni and the male recruit Maik. Enni is portrayed through a lens of post-feminist sensibility—she is disciplined, emotionally articulate, driven, and independent. Her femininity is not erased but framed as compatible with military discipline, creating an idealized figure of empowered womanhood. Maik, her male counterpart, embodies a "softened" masculinity: cooperative, emotionally present, and nurturing. This hybrid masculinity, while seemingly progressive, performs a legitimizing function—it neutralizes critiques of patriarchal militarism by presenting male authority figures as emotionally attuned and egalitarian. The chapter argues that together, these figures construct a post-feminist narrative that reconciles military discipline with contemporary ideals of individualism and equality, while systematically omitting any engagement with the structural inequalities embedded within the military institution.

Chapter 5 expands the analysis beyond individual characters to the narrative and visual structuring of *Die Rekrutinnen* as a whole. It focuses on four core themes: gender equality, fitness, teamwork, and weapon handling. In all these dimensions, the series constructs a vision of the Bundeswehr as a modern, gender-inclusive employer. Gender equality is depicted not as a political struggle or collective achievement, but as an assumed and uncontested reality. Fitness, a key aspect of military preparation, is reframed through the language of bodily empowerment and personal discipline—a

hallmark of post-feminist culture. Teamwork is shown to be post-hierarchical and harmonious, sidelining any mention of systemic gender biases or discrimination. Perhaps most striking is the treatment of weapons: they are decontextualized and aestheticized, treated as neutral tools of professional competence rather than instruments of state violence. These discourses combine to produce a sanitized image of militarism that is emotionally resonant and ideologically effective, appealing to liberal sensibilities without exposing the harsh realities of military life.

Chapter 6 situates these gendered constructions within broader national and global discourses. It argues that female recruits in *Die Rekrutinnen* serve as symbolic figures of national modernity and liberal democratic values. Enni in particular is constructed as a carrier of both gender progress and national virtue—she is strong, responsible, and emotionally literate, aligning seamlessly with a reimagined image of Germany as a peaceful but capable international actor. The absence of racialized, Muslim, or non-Christian figures, however, reveals the exclusions embedded in this narrative. The ideal Bundeswehr soldier is implicitly white, middle-class, and culturally assimilated, reflecting a nationalist project cloaked in the language of diversity and empowerment. Chapter 6 further draws on postcolonial feminist critiques to show how this sanitized vision of military professionalism obscures the Bundeswehr’s historical legacy and contemporary engagements, positioning Germany as a morally superior global actor.

Taken together, these chapters demonstrate how *Die Rekrutinnen* functions as a tool of soft militarization. The series aligns itself with familiar cultural genres—reality TV, human-interest storytelling, and personal growth narratives—to normalize the military within the everyday media consumption of its audience. This contributes to what scholars such as Enloe (2016) describe as the militarization of the everyday: the seepage of military norms, values, and actors into civilian cultural spheres (Enloe, 2016). The Bundeswehr’s media strategy, particularly through YouTube, exemplifies this phenomenon. By appearing in users’ social media feeds alongside holiday photos, influencer content, and entertainment media, military narratives become normalized and emotionally integrated into the personal lives of viewers. As Shepherd (2017) writes, “To see the military on a Facebook feed, alongside photos from a family party and updates from friends, brings the military as an actor into the private lives of citizens in a previously unimaginable way” (p. 3).

The Bundeswehr's engagement with digital platforms, particularly since the suspension of conscription in 2011, represents a broader shift in its recruitment strategy. No longer relying on structural obligations to enlist, the Bundeswehr now competes in a crowded attention economy. Social media allows the institution to bypass traditional journalistic scrutiny and construct carefully curated narratives that combine employer branding, national identity, and entertainment. *Die Rekrutinnen* exemplifies this strategy. It is not simply an informative series; it is a public relations product engineered to produce affective investment, symbolic alignment, and aspirational identification. It is part of a long-term ideological campaign to reconfigure military service as a viable, even desirable, life path in a society that has historically maintained a degree of skepticism towards military institutions.

Furthermore, the thesis situates these developments within the broader political context of post-Zeitenwende Germany. While political discourse frequently frames the Bundeswehr's recent expansion as a response to external threats—especially following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022—this thesis argues that such a framing obscures the longer trajectory of gradual, cultural militarization. The Bundeswehr's use of post-feminist aesthetics and inclusive narratives in *Die Rekrutinnen* predates the Zeitenwende and reflects an ongoing strategy of cultural normalization rather than a sudden pivot. The realignment of military values with liberal-democratic ideals, particularly through gender representation, indicates a calculated effort to make militarization politically and socially palatable. This aligns with scholars like Stengel (2020, 2023), who argue that the Bundeswehr's legitimacy is increasingly pursued through emotional, cultural, and symbolic means rather than traditional appeals to national security or duty.

Theoretically, this thesis contributes to several intersecting fields. In critical military studies (CMS), it underscores the importance of analyzing the cultural and gendered dimensions of militarization. It joins scholars who have emphasized that militarization is not just a policy or institutional phenomenon, but a cultural project enacted through discourse, media, and everyday affect. Furthermore, it deepens post-feminist media critique by foregrounding how military institutions adopt post-feminist logics—individualism, choice, empowerment, depoliticization—to legitimize themselves in a post-conscription landscape. A central contribution lies in integrating critical masculinity studies into this conversation. Following O'Neill (2015), who notes that “the

analysis of postfeminism currently represents an acute endeavor for critical masculinity scholarship,” this thesis shows how softened military masculinities operate ideologically within a post-feminist framework (O’Neill, 2015). The co-construction of femininity and masculinity in *Die Rekrutinnen* reveals how gender representations operate relationally to secure institutional legitimacy.

Methodologically, the thesis demonstrates the value of combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Feminist Media Analysis. This dual approach enabled a layered examination of both language and imagery, structure and affect. It allowed for the unpacking of visual tropes, narrative structures, emotional cues, and linguistic patterns in ways that revealed the ideological and institutional logics embedded in the series. The use of reality-TV aesthetics—confessionals, montage editing, background music—was not treated as a mere stylistic choice, but as a political tool for emotional alignment and ideological framing. This methodological integration represents a useful model for future research interested in state-produced media, institutional branding, and gendered representation.

However, the thesis also acknowledges its limitations. Most notably, it does not empirically examine the reception of *Die Rekrutinnen*. While the thesis offers a robust textual and discursive analysis, it does not engage with how actual audiences interpret, internalize, or resist these narratives. Nor does it attempt to measure the series’ effectiveness as a recruitment tool. These are important areas for further inquiry, particularly as public reception is a crucial dimension of cultural militarization. Future research might incorporate audience studies, surveys, or digital ethnography to explore how viewers interact with, respond to, or even parody Bundeswehr content on platforms like YouTube and TikTok.

In addition, the thesis could not incorporate analysis of the Bundeswehr’s latest digital recruitment campaign, “The Explorers – Roadtrip durch die Bundeswehr,” due to the timing of its release. This TikTok-based campaign introduces new dynamics in the Bundeswehr’s media strategy, including the more prominent presence of racialized figures and the use of short-form, influencer-style content. Initial observations suggest that this campaign may rework post-feminist aesthetics by placing them in intersectional contexts, particularly around race and migration. Investigating how

empowerment and diversity are mobilized in these newer formats could yield further insights into how militarization adapts to evolving media ecologies and identity politics.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that *Die Rekrutinnen* is not simply a recruitment series—it is a cultural artifact that contributes to the reshaping of military legitimacy in 21st-century Germany. It illustrates how military institutions strategically use media and gendered narratives to align themselves with liberal values, to appeal to diverse audiences, and to normalize themselves within civilian life. The Bundeswehr’s cultural turn—its use of storytelling, aesthetics, and emotion—must be understood not as peripheral but as central to its contemporary legitimacy politics. This thesis hopes to offer a small but meaningful contribution to the growing body of literature that examines how gender, media, and militarism coalesce in the cultural life of the nation.

As militaries worldwide increasingly rely on cultural narratives and digital platforms to secure public support, critical scholarship must remain attentive to how these narratives are constructed, circulated, and received. In Germany—where historical memory, democratic identity, and military skepticism intertwine—the stakes of this process are particularly acute. By analyzing *Die Rekrutinnen* through a feminist and post-feminist lens, this thesis seeks not only to interpret a specific media product but also to illuminate the broader ideological terrain in which militarization is contested, negotiated, and ultimately made to feel normal.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

References

- Bundeswehr Exclusive. (2019, September 30). Die Rekrutinnen – Folge 1: Die Reise nach Roth [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUYB9Fw3cKs>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive. (2019, November 20). Die Rekrutinnen – Folge 33: Zerlegen und Zusammensetzen [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-whyCjcCHQ>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive. (2019, September 23). Die Rekrutinnen – Homestory Enny [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxn6g0iwylg>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive. (2019, October 2). Die Rekrutinnen – Folge 5: Der Koppelb

Literature

- Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others. *American Anthropologist*, 104(3), 783–790.
- Ahmed, S. (2007). A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist Theory*, 8(2), 149–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139>
- Apt, W. (2011, November 24). *Herausforderungen für die Personalgewinnung der Bundeswehr*. bpb.de. <https://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/59657/herausforderungen-fuer-die-personalgewinnung-der-bundeswehr/>
- Barbehön, M., & Haus, M. (2018). How Central Is the Middle? Middle Class Discourses and Social Policy Design in Germany. In L. Barrault-Stella & P.-E. Weill (Hrsg.), *Creating Target Publics for Welfare Policies: A Comparative and Multi-level Approach* (S. 49–66). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-89596-3_3
- Bartlett, A. C. (2002). Defining the Terms: Postfeminism as an Ideology of Cool. *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 34, 25–30. <https://doi.org/10.17077/1536-8742.1255>
- Basham, V. (2013). *War, identity and the liberal state: Everyday experiences of the geopolitical in the armed forces*. Routledge.

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203758328/war-identity-liberal-state-victoria-basham>

- Basham, V. M. (2016). Raising an army: The geopolitics of militarizing the lives of working-class boys in an age of austerity. *International Political Sociology*, 10(3), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ips/olw013>
- Basham, V. M., Belkin, A., & Gifkins, J. (2015). What is Critical Military Studies? *Critical Military Studies*, 1(1), 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2015.1006879>
- Basham, V. M., & Bulmer, S. (2017). Critical Military Studies as Method: An Approach to Studying Gender and the Military. In R. Woodward & C. Duncanson (Hrsg.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (S. 59–71). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51677-0_4
- Bonnett, A. (2018). *White Identities: An Historical & International Introduction*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315839608>
- Bridges, T., & Pascoe, C. J. (2014). Hybrid Masculinities: New Directions in the Sociology of Men and Masculinities. *Sociology Compass*, 8(3), 246–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12134>
- Brown, M. T. (2012). “A Woman in the Army Is Still a Woman”: Representations of Women in US Military Recruiting Advertisements for the All-Volunteer Force. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 33(2), 151–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2012.667737>
- Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz: Reden zur Zeitenwende*. (2022, Oktober 25). Die Bundesregierung informiert | Startseite. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/publikationen/bundeskanzler-olaf-scholz-reden-zur-zeitenwende-2127768>
- Bundestag beschließt neues Gesetz zur Gleichstellung in der Truppe*. (2023, November 17). <https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/bundestag-beschliesst-neues-gesetz-gleichstellung-in-truppe-5706018>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019a, September 23). *Homestory Enny | DIE REKRUTINNEN* [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zx6g0iwylg>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019b, September 30). *Die Reise nach Roth | DIE REKRUTINNEN | Folge 1* [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUYB9Fw3cKs>

- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019c, September 30). *Willkommen Flieger | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 2 [Video recording].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPeVz7YqcLA>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019d, Oktober 1). *Die Einkleidung | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 3 [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAWxdTVgJKc>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019e, Oktober 3). *DIE REKRUTINNEN | Trailer (kurze Version)* | Bundeswehr Exclusive [Video recording].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0iG1K-cfT4>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019f, Oktober 3). *Meldung machen | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 6 [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmuAAx7pDSA>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019g, Oktober 7). *Basis Fitness Test | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 7 [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GS-Z2X52sHc>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019h, Oktober 10). *Die Verteidigung rückt näher | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 10 [Video recording].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXHN4XXP16g>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019i, Oktober 16). *Die letzte Probe | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 13 [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2mk_FG60Gw
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019j, Oktober 17). *Die Verteidigung | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 14 [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iF7epCIWQmo>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019k, Oktober 21). *Das große ABC | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 15 [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLOGGCdCCnc>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019l, Oktober 24). *Das kleine ABC | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 18 [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSj-fiCvO5s>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019m, Oktober 26). *FAQ Flieger Enny | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | SPECIAL [Video recording].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IJe3aZUxco>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019n, Oktober 31). *Die praktische ABC Ausbildung | DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 22 [Video recording].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9onSo6h2fQ>

- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019o, November 7). *Waffen- und Schießausbildung* | *DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 26 [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJH1IFo1308>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019p, November 14). *Hart, härter, Combat-Fitness-Test* | *DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 30 [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWB4YD70f04>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019q, November 20). *Zerlegen und Zusammensetzen* | *DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 33 [Video recording]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-whyCjcCHQ>
- Bundeswehr Exclusive (Regisseur). (2019r, Dezember 18). *Die letzten Meter* | *DIE REKRUTINNEN* | Folge 49 [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9sRp44pTHQ
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity: Tenth Anniversary Edition*. Routledge.
- CASTENOW | „Die Rekruten“-Serie wirbt für Arbeitgeber Bundeswehr | CASTENOW. (o. J.). Abgerufen 7. März 2024, von <https://www.castenow.de/cases/bundeswehr-arbeitgeberimage-mit-1-youtube-reality-doku>
- Chisholm, A., & Tidy, J. (2017). Beyond the hegemonic in the study of militaries, masculinities, and war. *Critical Military Studies*, 3(2), 99–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2017.1328182>
- Christensen, A.-D., & Rasmussen, P. (2015). War, violence and masculinities: Introduction and perspectives. *NORMA*, 10(3–4), 189–202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2015.1113675>
- Cockburn, C., & Enloe, C. (2012). Militarism, Patriarchy and Peace Movements: CYNTHIA COCKBURN AND CYNTHIA ENLOE IN CONVERSATION. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 14(4), 550–557. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2012.726098>
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, 19(6), 829–859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>

- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 140, 139–167.
- Dawson, G. (1994). Playing At Soldiers: Boyhood phantasies and the pleasure-culture of war. In *Soldier Heroes*. Routledge.
- Derian, J. D. (2009). *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Network* (2. Aufl.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203881538>
- Eberle, J. (2023). Understanding German Foreign Policy in the (Post-)Merkel Era—*Review Essay*. *International Studies Review*, 25(2), viad007. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viad007>
- Eichler, M. (2014). *Militarized Masculinities in International Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.26300/P8M0-SW40>
- Eisenstein, Z. R. (2007). *Sexual decoys: Gender, race and war in imperial democracy*. Zed Books. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350222540>
- Enloe, C. (2000). *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (1. Aufl.). University of California Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt14qrzb1>
- Enloe, C. (2016). *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2. Aufl.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315834368>
- Germany debates „war ready“ Bundeswehr – DW – 11/15/2023*. (o. J.). Dw.Com. Abgerufen 23. Februar 2024, von <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-debates-war-ready-bundeswehr/a-67409877>
- Germany wants more women in the military – DW – 07/30/2023*. (o. J.). Dw.Com. Abgerufen 23. Februar 2024, von <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-women-in-military-bundeswehr/a-66376261>
- GmbH, D. de. (o. J.). *Bundeswehr macht nach „Rekruten“ jetzt „Die Rekrutinnen“*. DWDL.De. Abgerufen 7. März 2024, von https://www.dwdl.de/nachrichten/74225/bundeswehr_macht_nach_rekruten_jetzt_die_rekrutinnen/

- Goldstein, J. S. (2001). *War and gender: How gender shapes the war system and vice versa*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grewal, I. (2005). *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822386544>
- Guenther, K. M. (2009). The politics of names: Rethinking the methodological and ethical significance of naming people, organizations, and places. *Qualitative Research*, 9(4), 411–421. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109337872>
- Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies*, 14(3), 575–599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>
- Hauck, U. (o. J.). *Wie die Bundeswehr „kriegstüchtig“ werden soll*. tagesschau.de. Abgerufen 23. Februar 2024, von <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/bundeswehr-pistorius-100.html>
- Higate, P. (2003). *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Hinojosa, R. (2010). Doing Hegemony: Military, Men, and Constructing a Hegemonic Masculinity. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 18(2), 179–194. <https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1802.179>
- Horstkötter, I. (2021, Februar 10). Sexuelle Belästigung bei der Bundeswehr nimmt zu. *Gleichstellung im Blick*. <https://www.gleichstellung-im-blick.de/sexuelle-belaestigung-bei-der-bundeswehr-hat-deutlich-zugenommen/>
- Howell, A. (2018). Forget “militarization”: Race, disability and the “martial politics” of the police and of the university. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 20(2), 117–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2018.1447310>
- Jackson, K. F., Goodkind, S., Diaz, M., Karandikar, S., Beltrán, R., Kim, M. E., Zelnick, J. R., Gibson, M. F., Mountz, S., Miranda Samuels, G. E., & Harrell, S. (2024). Positionality in Critical Feminist Scholarship: Situating Social Locations and Power Within Knowledge Production. *Affilia*, 39(1), 5–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08861099231219848>
- Jacobs, J. (2016). Nutzung digitaler Medien und die Bundeswehr. In J. Jacobs, N. Zowislo-Grünwald, & F. Beitzinger (Hrsg.), *Social Media in der Lebenswelt und bei der Berufswahl Jugendlicher—Who cares? 1. Auflage*. (S. 77–94). Nomos.

- Jester, N. (2021). Army recruitment video advertisements in the US and UK since 2002: Challenging ideals of hegemonic military masculinity? *Media, War & Conflict*, 14(1), 57–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219859488>
- Kaempf, S., & Stahl, R. (2023). Elimination Games: The Global Rise of Military Reality TV and the Shaping of the Citizen Subject. *Millennium*, 51(3), 643–662. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298231175980>
- Kennedy-Pipe, C. (2017). Liberal Feminists, Militaries and War. In R. Woodward & C. Duncanson (Hrsg.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (S. 23–37). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51677-0_2
- Leonhard, N. (2019). Towards a new German military identity? Change and continuity of military representations of self and other(s) in Germany. *Critical Military Studies*, 5(4), 304–321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2017.1385586>
- Litosseliti, L., Gill, R., & Favaro, L. (2019). Postfeminism as a critical tool for gender and language study. *Gender and Language*, 13(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.34599>
- Maartens, B. (2020). ‘It’s like a good school, only better’: Recruiting boys to the British armed forces under the first Attlee government, 1946–50. In *Propaganda and Public Relations in Military Recruitment*. Routledge.
- Maartens, B., & Bivins, T. (Hrsg.). (2020). *Propaganda and Public Relations in Military Recruitment: Promoting Military Service in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429319624>
- Masson, L. E. (2017). Women in the Military in Argentina: Nationalism, Gender, and Ethnicity. In V. Demos & M. Texler Segal (Hrsg.), *Gender Panic, Gender Policy* (Bd. 24, S. 23–43). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-212620170000024002>
- McRobbie, A. (2004). Post-feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 255–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468077042000309937>
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. SAGE.
- Mohanty, C. T. (1984). Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses. *boundary 2*, 12/13, 333–358. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/302821>

- Möllers, H., & Jacobs, J. (2019). *Bundeswehr und Medien: Ereignisse - Handlungsmuster - Mechanismen in jüngster Geschichte und heute*. Nomos Verlag.
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (2014). *Racial Formation in the United States* (3. Aufl.). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203076804>
- O'Neill, R. (2015). Whither Critical Masculinity Studies? Notes on Inclusive Masculinity Theory, Postfeminism, and Sexual Politics. *Men and Masculinities*, 18(1), 100–120.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14553056>
- Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin.* (2022, Februar 27). Website of the Federal Government | Bundesregierung. <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>
- Prividera, L. C., & Howard, J. W. I. (2006). Masculinity, whiteness, and the warrior hero: Perpetuating the strategic rhetoric of U.S. nationalism and the marginalization of women. *Women and Language*, 29(2), 29–38.
- Shim, D., & Stengel, F. A. (2017). Social media, gender and the mediatization of war: Exploring the German armed forces' visual representation of the Afghanistan operation on Facebook. *Global Discourse*, 7(2–3), 330–347.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2017.1337982>
- Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable*. SAGE.
- Soldatinnen- und Soldatengleichstellungsgesetz (SGleiG), (BGBl. 2024 I Nr. 17 SGleiG 29 (2024)).
https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/sgleig_2024/SGleiG.pdf
- Stachowitsch, S. (2013). Feminism and the current debates on women in combat. *E-International Relations*, 19. <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/02/19/feminism-and-the-current-debates-on-women-in-combat/>
- Stein, S. (2019, September 26). “Die Rekrutinnen”: Bundeswehr wirbt mit Webserie um Frauen.
<https://www.rnd.de/politik/die-rekrutinnen-bundeswehr-wirbt-mit-webserie-um-frauen-G32VM2YXXFAT7OXUQX4RFLYFFE.html>

- Stengel, F. (2020). *The Politics of Military Force: Antimilitarism, Ideational Change, and Post-Cold War German Security Discourse*. University of Michigan Press.
- Stengel, F. (2021). Soziale Medien und die Legitimitätspolitik der Bundeswehr. *ZfP Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, 28(2), 152–166. <https://doi.org/10.5771/0946-7165-2021-2-152>
- Stengel, F. (2023). *Bundeswehr und deutsche Gesellschaft: Die Berliner Republik zwischen Militarisierung und Normalisierung* (S. 139–153).
- Stengel, F. A., & Shim, D. (2022). Militarizing antimilitarism? Exploring the gendered representation of military service in German recruitment videos on social media. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 24(4), 608–631. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2021.1935289>
- Strand, S., & Berndtsson, J. (2015). Recruiting the “enterprising soldier”: Military recruitment discourses in Sweden and the United Kingdom. *Critical Military Studies*, 1(3), 233–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23337486.2015.1090676>
- SWR, J. D. (o. J.). *Diskriminierung in der Bundeswehr—Keine bunte Truppe*. tagesschau.de. Abgerufen 9. März 2024, von <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/report-mainz/vollbild-bundeswehr-sexismus-erniedrigung-101.html>
- Szitanyi, S. (2012). Aaron Belkin. Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire, 1898–2001. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 14(4), 572–574. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2012.726101>
- Unsworth, C. (2019). Forces for Good? Military Masculinities and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Iraq, by Claire Duncanson. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 21(2), 346–347. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2019.1577691>
- Vavrus, M. D. (2018). *Postfeminist War: Women in the Media-Military-Industrial Complex* (Keine Edition). Rutgers University Press.
- Verband fordert Verdreifachung der Bundeswehr-Reserve*. (o. J.). tagesschau.de. Abgerufen 23. Februar 2024, von <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/verdreifachung-reserve-bundeswehr-100.html>
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. SAGE.

- Yuval-Davis, N. (1993). Gender and nation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 16(4), 621–632.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.1993.9993800>
- Zoonen, L. van (with Internet Archive). (1994). *Feminist media studies*. London: Sage.
<http://archive.org/details/feministmediastu0000zoon>