

The Inglorious Offenders: a postcolonial feminist analysis of war/combat to understand sexual violence in conflict

Michelle Dyonisius

Department of International Relations

The appeal of understanding sexual violence in conflict as a weapon of war is evident from its popularisation. This paper, however, emphasises the limitation of this framework in its perpetuation of gendered and colonial knowledge through problematising the conception of war and combat. This is not to negate the strategic aspect of sexual violence in conflict completely but to find a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the matter. To begin with, this paper shows how framing sexual violence in conflict as a weapon of war reproduces the hetero-sexist and essentialised understanding of women's reproductive function to the nation, whose attack legitimises war that institutionally reproduces hegemonic masculinity of soldiers in combat. Alternatively, this paper rejects the duality of "war" and "peace" by adopting a revised

framework of "battle" and "repression" based on postcolonial thought. Such approach avoids the theoretical slippage in positioning sexual violence solely in the public sphere without acknowledging the continuing violence within greater oppressive gendered relations regardless the extent of conflict to conventionally qualify as "war". Thus, the securitisation of sexual violence in conflict would not homogenise all experiences. Moreover, this allows to break the racialised bias in emphasising sexual violence committed by non-Western states while overlooking that of the West. Therefore, sexual violence in conflict would not be overlooked regardless of its nature, context, and perpetrators. This paper would draw from cases of sexual violence committed by Japan during World War II and the US during its occupation of Japan.