

***MILITARISING RAPE: A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF BOSNIAN
RAPE CAMPS AND THE JAPANESE "COMFORT WOMEN"
SYSTEM***

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Introduction

War and rape in armed conflicts are both ancient phenomena of human history.¹ However, as the human experience has become more industrialized and technologically advanced, traditional notions of warfare, security, and strategy have been challenged. Academics have now conceptualized the ancient act of war in the modern era by introducing new theories and broadening the scope of the field of strategic studies. The approach towards the phenomenology of wartime rape is no exception. The discourse on wartime rape has shifted from its understanding as an inevitable consequence of war to an important issue of international security.² As a result, the strategic rape theory has

¹ Elvan Isikozlu and Ananda S. Millard, "Wartime Rape: Identifying Knowledge Gaps and their Implications," *Sicherheit & Frieden* 28, no. 1 (2010): p.35.

² Dara Kay Cohen, "Explaining Rape during Civil War: Cross-National Evidence (1980-2009)," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (2013): p.461.

emerged as the most the influential conceptualisation of mass wartime rape.³ The understanding of wartime rape as a weapon of war has contributed to transformative implications in the fields of international criminal law, women's rights, and strategic studies. This paper will apply the relatively novel strategic rape theory to the traditional phenomena of war and wartime rape. More specifically, this paper will focus on the particular question, "What is the strategic objective of institutionalising wartime rape?" A deep investigation through existing literature will be conducted for understanding the factors and conditions that instigate militaries to adopt systematic rape into its wartime policies.

The methodology employed in this paper is a comparative case study analysis of the Bosnian War in the 1990s and the actions of the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II (WWII). These cases were specifically chosen because of their key similarity in implementing systematic rape. In the Bosnian conflict, rape camps were utilized as a distinct element of the Serbian military strategy. Similarly, the Japanese military established the "comfort women" system throughout Asia to support its military conquests and activities. While the two cases share this key similarity, an examination of their differences will provide a greater comparative analysis for determining the strategic intention of systematic wartime rape. Before the comparative case study can be undertaken, a theoretical foundation must first be established to gain more understanding of its causal factors.

The Theoretical Framework

As the field and academic interest of wartime rape developed, different theories that attempt to understand this phenomenon have emerged. In the past, when rape was considered an inevitable by-product of war, this reflected the of this violence through a controversial biosocial lens. The biosocial theory of wartime rape strongly emphasised emphasized the sexual nature of the act as it expected men to be unable to handle their sexual aggression during the pressures of conflict.⁴ Instead of sociocultural and political factors, this biological determinist perspective asserted that genetics was the primary

³ Jonathon Gottschall, "Explaining Wartime Rape," *The Journal of Sex Research* 41, no. 2 (2004): p.131.

⁴ Gottschall, *Explaining Wartime Rape*, p.133.

causal factor of the perpetration of wartime rape.⁵ This allowed the popular assumption of rape during armed conflicts as “natural” and inevitable. However, limitations and criticisms of this theory were quickly established, especially through the rise of feminist scholarship. By strictly conceptualising men and women within their biologically determined roles, critics have argued this theory to overemphasise sexual aspects without addressing other potential factors.⁶ In addition, contrasting the biosocial expectations for rape to be committed by males in all forms of armed conflicts, it has been established that there is variability in the occurrence of wartime rape, including some situations that did not experience any widespread rape by armed groups.⁷ To respond to the weaknesses of the biosocial theory, different of this phenomenon have emerged, and the strategic rape theory arose as the most influential in current scholarship.⁸

The development of the strategic rape theory owes its prominence to feminist academics and activists that were the first to identify connections between the history of war and widespread rape.⁹ In addition, the 1990s brought this issue into the general international sphere of discourse with the highly publicised reporting of the Bosnian and Rwandan mass rapes. This has led the development of the strategic rape theory as it was becoming more recognized that rape could be tactically used by the military to achieve strategic objectives.¹⁰ As a result, by framing rape as a weapon of war, it has become officially through international law and resolutions and has been established as a key issue of international security.¹¹ The ideas and concepts associated with the strategic rape theory focus on the militarised utilisation of rape during armed conflicts.

⁵ Ibid., 133.

⁶ Nicola Henry, “Theorizing Wartime Rape: Deconstructing Gender, Sexuality, and Violence,” *Gender and Society* 30, no. 1 (2015): p. 48.

⁷ Elisabeth Jean Wood, “Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When Is Wartime Rape Rare?” *Politics and Society* 37, no. 1 (2009): p. 132.

⁸ Gottschall, *Explaining Wartime Rape*, p. 131.

⁹ Paul Kirby, “How is Rape a Weapon of War? Feminist International Relations, Modes of Critical Explanation and the Study of Wartime Sexual Violence,” *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 4 (2012): p. 799.

¹⁰ Gottschall, *Explaining Wartime Rape*, p.131.

¹¹ Ragnhild Nordås and Dara Cohen, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 24, no. 1 (2021): 199; Kerry F. Crawford, “From Spoils to Weapons: Framing Wartime Sexual Violence,” *Gender & Development* 21, no. 3 (2013): p. 510.

The strategic rape theory asserts that “wartime rape is a coherent, coordinated, logical, and brutally effective means of prosecuting warfare.”¹² Through this perspective, it is understood that low costs, ready availability, and high effectiveness of wartime rape make it an attractive weapon for militaries to employ.¹³ Ethnic cleansing and genocidal campaigns are especially recognised as situations where rape is often considered an effective tool. Through sexual terrorism, perpetrators are able to force civilians to flee their territory and weaponize rape by intentionally impregnating women of the targeted ethnic group to end their bloodline and genetics.¹⁴ The strategic rape theory also considers social and cultural factors in understanding wartime rape. Its effectiveness as a weapon is attributed to its abilities to destabilise and demoralise societies by exploiting social and gender stigmas and the reproductive rights of targeted communities.¹⁵ Feminist contributions to this area of study have highlighted the inextricable intersections of patriarchal hierarchies, gender norms, and militarisation as the foundation for wartime rape. The military itself, largely recognised as a masculine institution, is argued to be reinforcing hierarchical power relationships between men and women while also maintaining these gender relations and patriarchal values within the greater society.¹⁶ The analysis presented in this paper utilised the framework of strategic rape theory in order to make sense of policies of systematic rape in the setting of armed conflict. By establishing the theoretical foundations of strategic wartime rape, a more comprehensive analysis of the mass rape campaign during the Bosnian War can be conducted.

The Bosnian War of the 1990s

¹² Gottschall, *Explaining Wartime Rape*, p.131.

¹³ Nordås and Cohen, *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, p.199.

¹⁴ Nancy Farwell, “War Rape: New Conceptualizations and Responses,” *Affilia* 19, no. 4 (2004):p. 395.

¹⁵ Janet Benshoof, “The Other Red Line: The Use of Rape as an Unlawful Tactic of Warfare,” *Global Policy* 5, no. 2 (2014): 147; Crawford, *From Spoils to Weapons*, p. 510.

¹⁶ Farwell, *War Rape*, 394.

The Bosnian War was one part of a series of conflicts in the 1990s that resulted from the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia.¹⁷ Before the war, the Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims were the main ethnic groups that composed a multicultural society that lived in harmony.¹⁸ While they shared similarities in social structure and language, their most prominent difference was their religions as Orthodox Christian, Roman Catholic, and Sunni Muslim respectively.¹⁹ The Bosnian War commenced in the spring of 1992 after the declaration of independence by the Muslims and Croats of Bosnia and Herzegovina.²⁰ This followed the secession of Croatia and Slovenia from the former Yugoslavia a year prior, which also prompted a war with Serbia.²¹ The Serbs desired to either maintain the Yugoslav Republic or establish their own self-determination with a “Greater Serbia” as an ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and religiously homogenous Serbian nation.²² Initially a war of Serbs against both Croats and Muslims, the Bosnian Croats eventually joined the persecution of Muslims in an effort to claim territory for themselves.²³ By 1995, the combined efforts of an American-led operation by the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) and peace negotiations of the Dayton Accords resulted in the resolution of the war.²⁴ As a result of the international media attention to these mass atrocities, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), established in 1993, criminalised rape in an international court for the first time in history

¹⁷ Nathaniel Danjibo and Adebimpe Akinkoutu, “Rape as a Weapon of War against Women and Girls,” *Gender and Behaviour* 17, no. 2 (2019): 13163.

¹⁸ Pascale R. Bos, “Feminists Interpreting the Politics of Wartime Rape: Berlin, 1945; Yugoslavia, 1992-1993,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, no. 4 (2006): p.1010.

¹⁹ Bos, *Feminists Interpreting the Politics of Wartime Rape*, 1010.

²⁰ Todd A. Salzman, “Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing: Religious, Cultural, and Ethical Responses to Rape Victims in the Former Yugoslavia,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1998): p.353.

²¹ Danjibo and Akinkuotu, *Rape as a Weapon of War*, 13163.

²² Bos, *Feminists Interpreting the Politics*, 1011; Danjibo and Akinkuotu, *Rape as a weapon of war*, 13163; Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p. 349.

²³ Bos, *Feminists Interpreting the Politics*, p. 1011.

²⁴ Lene Hansen, “Gender, Nation, Rape: Bosnia and the Construction of Security,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 3, no. 1 (2000): 68.

and marked a significant breakthrough in international law.²⁵ By consistently involving rape in the prosecution strategy of the ICTY, 23 individuals were successfully convicted on charges involving rape and other forms of sexual violence and assault.²⁶ Through this conflict that began with political aspirations, exploitation of ethnic nationalism contributed to the policy of mass rape of Bosnian Muslims.

The widespread rapes that occurred during the course of the Bosnian War shocked the international community. Estimates of the number of women raped during the war widely vary, though generally ranging from 10,000 to 60,000.²⁷ Although all sides of the war experienced rapes, it was the Serbs committed the violence against Muslim women in a systematic manner through rape camps.²⁸ Of all the rapes that occurred during this conflict, it is estimated that 80% took place within these camps.²⁹ While the role of rape during the war was not initially clear, it has become evident that a Serbian policy of institutionalized rape was enacted against Bosnian Muslims.³⁰

Scholars have identified a prevalent pattern of sexual violence by the Serbian forces that illustrated the systematic pattern of their mass rape policy. Sexual violence, including rape, was first utilized to terrorize civilians in their local communities and homes in an effort to force Bosnian Muslims to flee the territory.³¹ Any remaining population was then sent to detention facilities where women were separated to be repeatedly assaulted and/or raped.³² Again, those who survived were transported to existing facilities, such as schools and hotels, that were re-established as rape camps.³³ Rape for forced impregnation was the primary objective of these camps in order to create

²⁵ Bos, *Feminists Interpreting the Politics*, p, 1014.

²⁶ Heidi Nichols Haddad, "Mobilizing the Will to Prosecute: Crimes of Rape at the Yugoslav and Rwandan Tribunals," *Human Rights Review* 12, no. 1 (2010):p. 110.

²⁷ Lisa Sharlach, "Rape as Genocide: Bangladesh, the Former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda," *New Political Science* p.22, no. 1 (2000):p. 96.

²⁸ Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p.p.p.355.

²⁹ Karen Engle, "Feminism and Its (Dis)Contents: Criminalizing Wartime Rape in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *American Journal of International Law* 99, no. 4 (2005): p.p.785.

³⁰ Bos, *Feminists Interpreting the Politics*, 1012.

³¹ Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p.358; Haddad, *Mobilizing the Will to Prosecute*, p.113.

³² Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p.358.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.359.

offspring of the desired Serbian ethnicity.³⁴ This policy was based on a belief of the patriarchal Serbian society that only the father's sperm provided the genetic makeup for their offspring.³⁵ Thus, any children produced from the rapes of Bosnian Muslims were considered ethnically Serbian. If a woman was impregnated, she would be forcibly detained to prevent an abortion and to ensure the birth of "Serbian children."³⁶ Furthermore, women were also transported and detained in "bordello camps" where they were used through sexual slavery for soldiers returning from the front lines.³⁷ Through these actions perpetrated by Serbian forces, proponents of the strategic rape theory have determined a policy of systematic rape was enacted in a campaign of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

From the perspective of the strategic rape theory, the Bosnian conflict demonstrated an intended policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide by the Serbs. Advocates of this theory label systematic rape as "genocidal rape" for its intentional design of mass annihilation of Bosnian Muslim people and their culture.³⁸ While rapes against women occurred on all sides of the war, it was distinguished that the organized and strategically intended nature of the Serbian rapes was more significant as a policy of genocide compared to the rapes by Muslims and Croats.³⁹ Rapes throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina were reported to have similar characteristics as well as occurring simultaneously across different regions of the country, illustrating the systematic nature of the Serbian policy.⁴⁰ This was especially more evident through the existence of rape camps and detention centres, which were also noted for having identical layouts.⁴¹ It was clear that the goal of Serbia was to establish their own ethnically homogenous state.⁴² Therefore, systematic rape was chosen as a tool to achieve this goal by inducing Bosnian

³⁴ Bos, *Feminists Interpreting the Politics*, p.1016.

³⁵ Engle, *Feminists and Its (Dis)Contents*, p.793.

³⁶ Sharlach, *Rape as Genocide*, 97; Haddad, *Mobilizing the Will to Prosecute*, p.114.

³⁷ Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p.359.

³⁸ Gottschall, *Explaining Wartime Rape*, pp. 131-132.

³⁹ Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p.355; Bos, *Feminists Interpreting the Politics*, pp.1015-1016.

⁴⁰ Sharlach, *Rape as Genocide*, p.97.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.97.

⁴² Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p.349.

Muslims to flee the region, causing societal breakdown from social ostracism experienced by victimized women, and finally, through forced impregnation.⁴³

Wartime rape was determined as a necessary weapon in the Serbian strategic policy to achieve its objective of establishing a “Greater Serbia”. In the effort to “cleanse” the land from Bosnian Muslims, rapes were determined to be useful in forcing them to move out of the territory.⁴⁴ As previously mentioned, the Serbian military would initially terrorize towns through rapes and other forms of assault before offering the residents safe passage out of the region if they promised to never return.⁴⁵ Strategic rape theorists clearly understand rape in this situation as a tool used to force the displacement of civilians from their homes. In addition, they consider rape as strategically useful in undermining the cohesiveness of the targeted group and ultimately destroying its existence through long-term damage.⁴⁶

The sociocultural and religious factors of the Balkan society contributed to the strategic use of rape to cause societal breakdown. In this society, an ethnic group’s identity and individual family honour were correlated with female chastity.⁴⁷ Therefore, survivors of rape were often blamed, and they faced ostracism from the community and their families.⁴⁸ The genocidal nature of wartime rape is displayed by the attempt to split a group by turning communities against the Muslim women who were raped.⁴⁹ In addition, in the Islamic religion and Muslim patriarchal culture, a woman’s purity is deemed sacred and also considered essential in maintaining the stability of their culture and society.⁵⁰ The rapes against Bosnian Muslim women were a direct attack on their community and culture by attempting to break down their social structures by targeting their values. Finally, the rapes conducted in designated camps to force the impregnation of Bosnian Muslims are understood by strategic rape theorists as the most forceful attempt at genocide and ethnic cleansing.

⁴³ Bos, *Feminists Interpreting the Politics*, 1016.

⁴⁴ Engle, *Feminism and Its (Dis)Contents*, 780.

⁴⁵ Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, 361.

⁴⁶ Janine Natalya Clark, “Making Sense of Wartime Rape: A Multi-causal and Multi-level Analysis,” *Ethnopolitics* 13, no. 5 (2014): 469.

⁴⁷ Sharlach, *Rape as Genocide*, 96.

⁴⁸ Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, 366.

⁴⁹ Engle, *Feminism and Its (Dis)Contents*, p. 792.

⁵⁰ Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p. 367.

The policy of forced impregnation illustrated a key intent of the Serbian military. According to the patriarchal logic of the Serbs, as only the father carries the ethnic identity of his offspring, any child with a Serbian father is also considered a Serb.⁵¹ In contrast to forcibly displacing populations, this policy aimed at ending the continuation of the Muslim population by ensuring the next generation would be perceived as Serbian.⁵² Evidence of rape camps detaining pregnant women, until they could not terminate their pregnancy, corroborated the strategic intent of the Serbian military of genocide and ethnic cleansing. The rapes of Bosnian Muslim women were not just individual attacks but were used as a strategic tool to achieve their political objectives. While this war brought international recognition of systematic rape in armed conflicts, similar occurrences in the past did not receive the same attention. The “comfort women” system established by the Japanese Imperial Army provided a more historical case of institutionalized rape as a policy during war.

The “Comfort Women” System and the Japanese Imperial Army

The “comfort women” system was first established in Shanghai, China in 1932, and continued its operation throughout Asia until the end of WWII.⁵³ This system consisted of “comfort stations” where soldiers were permitted to have sex with “comfort women.”⁵⁴ The controversial term “comfort women” is derived from a male-centric Japanese euphemism, *ianfu*, that implies comfort, warmth, and love, which is highly contradictory to what those women were subjected to in these stations.⁵⁵ The “comfort

⁵¹ Ibid., 365.

⁵² Engle, *Feminism and Its (Dis)Contents*, p. 793.

⁵³ Thomas J. Bellows and The United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights (UNESCO), “An Analysis of the Legal Liability of the Government of Japan for ‘Comfort Women Stations’ Established During the Second World War,” *American Journal of Chinese Studies* 6, no. 1 (1999) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44288602>: pp. 77-78.

⁵⁴ Hayashi Yoko, “Issues Surrounding the Wartime ‘Comfort Women,’” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 11/12 (1999) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42800182>: p. 54.

⁵⁵ Elisa Lee, “Behind the Mask of Human Rights: ‘Comfort Women,’ Heteronormativity, & Empires,” *Tapestries: Interwoven Voices of Local and Global Identities* 4, no. 1 (2015)

stations” were located in close proximity to battlefields and Japanese troops in Japan, China, Korea, and throughout Japan’s expanding empire, including areas such as the Philippines, Singapore, and Indonesia.⁵⁶ As a result of the vast distribution of these stations, “comfort women” came from all across Asia, with European women from the Dutch East Indies, or present-day Indonesia, also being forced into the system.⁵⁷ However, due to the colonization of Korea in the early twentieth century, it has been suggested that the majority of “comfort women” were Korean.⁵⁸ While the exact number of women mobilized in this system is unknown, estimates have ranged from 80,000 to 280,000 young women and girls.⁵⁹ Only 25% of the “comfort women” have been estimated to have survived the extensive abuses of these camps.⁶⁰ On average, “comfort women” were forcibly raped and sexually assaulted by around 30 to 40 soldiers per day, or otherwise held as prisoners with restricted freedom of mobility.⁶¹ While the Japanese government continually denied the existence of the “comfort women” system, incriminating documents were discovered by historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki in 1992 in the library of the Japanese Self-Defence Force.⁶² Although this discovery prompted a limited apology from the government,⁶³ the Japanese policy of systematic rape was able to be further analyzed for its strategic objective.

<https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1090&context=tapestries.:2>; Tomo Shibata, “Japan’s Wartime Mass-Rape Camps and Continuing Sexual Human-Rights Violations,” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal. English Supplement* 16 (1999)
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42772140>: p.52.

⁵⁶ Chunghee Sarah Soh, “From Imperial Gifts to Sex Slaves: Theorizing Symbolic Representations of Comfort Women,” *Social Science Japan Journal* 3, no. 1 (2000): p. 64.

⁵⁷ Yoko, *Issues Surrounding the Wartime “Comfort Women,”* p. 56.

⁵⁸ Pyong Gap Min, “Korean ‘Comfort Women’: The Intersection of Colonial Power, Gender, and Class,” *Gender and Society* 17, no. 6 (2003): p. 939.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 940.

⁶⁰ Bellows and UNESCO, *An Analysis of the Legal Liability*, p. 76.

⁶¹ Kazuko Watanabe, “Trafficking in Women’s Bodies, Then and Now: The Issue of Military ‘Comfort Women,’” *Peace and Change* 20 no. 4 (1995): p. 20; Ustinia Dolgopol, “Women’s Voices, Women’s Pain,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1995): 137.

⁶² Watanabe, *Trafficking in Women’s Bodies*, p. 21.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 21.

It was determined that the major rationales of the military for institutionalizing rape were to prevent soldiers from raping local women in colonized territories and war zones, as well as to protect soldiers from venereal disease.⁶⁴ In particular, after the Rape of Nanking/Nanjing in 1937, the international outcry led to the Army establishing “comfort stations” more systematically to prevent similar incidences from happening in the future.⁶⁵ Rapes of local women were also becoming detrimental to Japanese security and control over invaded areas of China as local populations began to retaliate in response to the crimes against their women.⁶⁶ In their desire to expand their empire, it was critical for the Japanese Imperial Army to avoid possible anti-Japanese sentiments that resulted from rapes and other crimes against colonized populations.⁶⁷ Unmonitored sex was also dangerous for soldiers because of the high risk of contracting a sexually transmitted disease (STD). The problem of STDs was quite severe and widespread among Japanese soldiers.⁶⁸ Therefore, the military targeted young women who were virgins, thus free from disease, for the “comfort women” system to ensure the health and fighting capability of their soldiers.⁶⁹ The military institutionalized “comfort stations” to protect their international reputation and power over their colonies, and to protect their fighting force from STDs by providing space for their soldiers to have monitored recreational sex that would not undermine their strategic objectives. The implementation of systematic wartime rape is clearly established according to the operations of the “comfort women” system.

Despite the Japanese government’s denial of the “comfort stations” as an officially sanctioned policy, the military’s involvement in the operation demonstrated the contrary.⁷⁰ First, historical documents revealed that a prominent military officer, Colonel

⁶⁴ John Lie, “The State as a Pimp: Prostitution and the Patriarchal State in Japan in the 1940s,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 38 no. 2 (1997): 253.

⁶⁵ Dolgopol, *Women’s Voices, Women’s Pain*, 133; Soh, *From imperial gifts to sex slaves*, p. 64.

⁶⁶ Dolgopol, *Women’s Voices, Women’s Pain*, 133.

⁶⁷ Bellows and UNESCO, *An Analysis of the Legal Liability*, p. 77.

⁶⁸ Li Hongxi, “The Extreme Secrecy of Japanese Army’s ‘Comfort Women’ System,” *Chinese Studies in History* p. 53, no. 1 (2020): 36.

⁶⁹ Watanabe, *Trafficking in Women’s Bodies*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ Dolgopol, *Women’s Voices, Women’s Pain*, p, 132.

Okamura Yasuji, was the inventor of this military rape camp system.⁷¹ In addition, the Japanese military was closely involved in planning and implementing the system along with the national government.⁷² While there were some “comfort stations” owned by private contractors, the Japanese Imperial Army was known to have been directly involved with the establishment, management, furnishing, and transportation of those operations as well.⁷³ For example, the military provided their own doctors to regulate the health of “comfort women” and imposed the mandatory use of contraceptives.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the recruitment process of “comfort women” was primarily a military affair. Historical documents revealed communications between the field and military headquarters in Tokyo that included requests for more “comfort women” and referrals to operations of “recruiters” in Korea.⁷⁵ Military officials often used coercion, deception, abduction, and physical violence to obtain women and girls for their system.⁷⁶ They were also responsible for transporting these “recruited” women to stations throughout Asia and the Pacific, implying a strong organizational capacity that could only be possible through the cooperation of the Japanese Imperial Army and the state.⁷⁷ Proponents of the strategic rape theory would support that the “comfort women” system was clearly an institutionalized policy of rape during an armed conflict.

Through the strategic rape theory, the “comfort women” system is considered a tool utilized by the Japanese Imperial Army to achieve its political objectives during WWII. This strategic policy was adopted for the benefit of Japanese soldiers and the international and domestic reputation of Japan and its military. As previously described, the “comfort stations” were established for soldiers to relieve themselves of their sexual desires in a safer environment free from STDs. By providing soldiers with women to rape, it was believed that would prevent rapes of local women on war fronts and colonized territories. These incidences previously damaged their reputation and risked the security

⁷¹ Yoko, *Issues Surrounding the Wartime “Comfort Women,”* p. 55; Shibata, *Japan’s Wartime Mass-Rape Camps*, p. 57.

⁷² Hongxi, *The Extreme Secrecy*, p. 33.

⁷³ Bellows and UNESCO, *An Analysis of the Legal Liability*, 78; Dolgopol, *Women’s Voices, Women’s Pain*, p. 134.

⁷⁴ Bellows and UNESCO, *An Analysis of the Legal Liability*, p. 78.

⁷⁵ Dolgopol, *Women’s Voices, Women’s Pain*, p. 134.

⁷⁶ Bellows and UNESCO, *An Analysis of the Legal Liability*, p. 77.

⁷⁷ Lie, *The State as a Pimp*, p. 254.

of the Imperial Army. In addition, the use of primarily Korean and other Asian women of colonized territories illustrated an effort of the military to maintain their domestic image. While Japan had a long history of a public and government-licensed prostitution system, the military did not want the public to distrust or criticize their activities by utilizing brothels that already existed.⁷⁸ There were some Japanese “comfort women”, however, they were mainly prostitutes who were already involved in this industry and experienced better treatment than their counterparts from elsewhere.⁷⁹ The majority of the women recruited by the military were from conquered territories in Asia and the Pacific, illustrating Japan’s perception of their colonial subjects as “expendable military supplies.”⁸⁰ In particular, the Japanese colonization of Korea was known for its immense mobilization of both men and women labourers to aid their war effort since the late 1930s, resulting in Koreans comprising the majority of “comfort women.”⁸¹ The view of colonized women as resources for the Japanese military contributed to the institutionalization of wartime rape as it was perceived that they would be useful for achieving Japanese objectives in WWII. While the Japanese “comfort women” system occurred over fifty years before the Bosnian War, these two cases shared similarities in their policies of systematic wartime rape.

Comparing and Contrasting the Bosnian War and the Japanese “Comfort Women” System

Both cases of the Bosnian War and the Japanese “comfort women” system illustrated a governmental policy of mass wartime rape. In both situations, wartime rape was utilized in a coherent and systematic manner that illustrated the organizational capacity of both governments to adopt this policy as a specific military strategy. They both involved military participation in the gathering of women to the established rape camps. Resources and personnel were also expended for these operations by the state and military, implying their importance for greater strategic objectives. The most

⁷⁸ Min, *Korean “Comfort Women,”* p. 944.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 944.

⁸⁰ Soh, *From Imperial Gifts to Sex Slaves*, p. 66.

⁸¹ Min, *Korean “Comfort Women,”* 943; Dolgopol, *Women’s Voices, Women’s Pain*, p. 131.

significant similarity rested on the patriarchal societies of both perpetrating states that facilitated the decision to institutionalize wartime rape. In the former Yugoslavia, the perception of Serbian women's role within the patriarchal society was exploited by the Serbian government to fuel ethnic nationalism.⁸² Females were largely reduced to their reproductive capabilities, emphasizing their responsibility to produce more Serbian children to contribute to the nation, and this attitude was extended toward the perception and treatment of non-Serbian women as well.⁸³ In addition, the belief that the father's sperm carried all the genetic material for his offspring contributed to the policy of forced impregnations.⁸⁴ As all women were simply seen as objects for producing children for a nation, Bosnian Muslim women were attacked in this manner for the larger political objective of creating a "Greater Serbia." Similarly, the treatment of "comfort women" reflected the notions of the patriarchal state in the Meiji period of imperial Japan. In this society, every family was subordinate to the state and emperor, with women's ability to produce future soldiers marking their importance within the system.⁸⁵ As a result, within the state and military, it was established that women were to be utilized in any way that served the Japanese government and the emperor.⁸⁶ The particular victimization of Korean women for the "comfort women" system further demonstrated the objectification of the female sex as resources that could be used to achieve objectives in the interest of the state. Within this similar patriarchal background of the societies, wartime rape emerged as a strategically effective policy. Despite this similarity, the inherent sexualization of male soldiers was a distinctive factor of the Japanese rationale for the "comfort women" system that was not apparent in the Bosnian War case.

While the systematic rapes of Bosnian Muslim women were part of a direct initiative of genocide, the Japanese "comfort women" system arose as a solution to control the behaviour of their soldiers. The establishment of the "comfort women" system was a strategic policy that objectified Japanese men in addition to women. As evident in the Rape of Nanking/Nanjing, Japanese soldiers were perceived to be uncontrollable in their sexual impulses, which threatened the overall power and credibility of the Imperial

⁸² Salzman, *Rape Camps as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p. 349.

⁸³ Salzman, *Rape Camp as a Means of Ethnic Cleansing*, p. 349.

⁸⁴ Engle, *Feminism and Its (Dis)Contents*, p. 793.

⁸⁵ Min, *Korean "Comfort Women,"* p. 947.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 948.

Army. Therefore, the government and military determined that systematically providing soldiers with “comfort women” would allow them to release their sexual desires without damaging the Japanese war effort. In this perspective, Japanese soldiers were essentially dehumanized and objectified as they were simply considered weapons of war by the state, similar to the “comfort women.”⁸⁷ Japanese soldiers were reduced to their sexuality and fighting capabilities and thus were provided with the “comfort women” system to address their weaknesses.⁸⁸ In contrast, the Serbian government did not possess the same sexualized rationale for establishing its policy of institutionalized rape. The case of the Bosnian War demonstrated the utilization of systematic wartime rape as a more direct strategy of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Bosnian Muslim women were specifically targeted to achieve the political goal of creating an ethnically homogenous “Greater Serbia”. In addition to the focused sexual component of the Japanese “comfort women” system in contrast to the Bosnian War, the functional use of institutionalized wartime rape was another clear difference.

The means by which wartime rape was utilized in the state’s strategic policy differed between the two cases. In the Bosnian conflict, strategic rape theorists referred to the situation as “genocidal rape” for its purpose to eliminate a targeted people and their culture.⁸⁹ During the war, the Serbian government and military employed wartime rape as a weapon against their perceived enemy of the Bosnian Muslim population. Wartime rape was used as a weapon of terror to force displacement of Bosnian Muslims. Forced impregnation was an alternative method of eliminating the Bosnian Muslim ethnicity by using women to create “Serbian” children. These two strategies institutionalized wartime rape for the overall political effort to establish a sovereign “Greater Serbia”. In contrast, the establishment of systematic wartime rape in Japan was not for the same function as genocide or ethnic cleansing. The “comfort women” system was not a direct attack on the enemy of the Japanese during WWII. Instead, institutionalizing rape was intended to prevent soldiers from tarnishing the reputation and functionality of the military itself. By establishing “comfort stations”, the Japanese state and military sought to maintain the health of their soldiers from venereal diseases while also preventing rapes of local women in battle fronts and colonies that could

⁸⁷ Watanabe, *Trafficking in Women’s Bodies*, p. 23.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁸⁹ Gottschall, *Explaining Wartime Rape*, pp. 131-132.

potentially undermine their authority. The strategic value of the “comfort women” system was to monitor soldiers and maintain power over colonies within the war efforts by the Japanese state in WWII. As primarily colonial subjects, “comfort women” were viewed by the Japanese government and military as expendable instruments for their larger war purpose.⁹⁰ The differences between the case studies of the Bosnian War and the Japanese “comfort women” system demonstrated the multi-functionality of institutionalized wartime rape as a strategic policy.

Conclusion

Through the analyses of the Bosnian War and the Japanese “comfort women” system, this paper addressed the greater investigation of the strategic rationales for institutionalizing wartime rape. These cases were examined utilizing the framework of the strategic rape theory in order to gain an improved understanding of this phenomenology and its implications for military policies. Similarities were found between the sociocultural contexts of the societies involved in the armed conflicts. The similar patriarchal values and norms within the Balkan and Japanese societies established a necessary background that contributed to considering systematic wartime rape as a beneficial policy. However, differences between the perception of male soldiers within these policies, as well as the direct objectives of utilizing wartime rape, demonstrated the multiple ways wartime rape could be perceived and institutionalized during armed conflicts. While the Serbs employed rape as a weapon of war for the genocide and ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims, the Japanese Imperial Army established a system for regulating the sexual activities of their soldiers to prevent complications to their larger war efforts. The comparison between these two cases illustrated the complexity of institutionalizing wartime rape.

The strategic value of this policy must be examined within a wider field of political, social, and cultural factors to identify the true reasons for its implementation. Made apparent by the Japanese “comfort women” system, the victims of systematic wartime rape were revealed to not always be the perceived enemy of a belligerent of war. Therefore, this research emphasized the importance of conducting deeper analyses that include multiple factors, such as sociocultural context, towards war policies of

⁹⁰ Min, *Korean “Comfort Women,”* p. 944.

governments to understand the reasoning behind their execution. Future research can expand on this topic by establishing prevention methods for similar policies of mass wartime rape and sexual violence. As the field of security studies broadens, concepts of wartime rape and gendered violence are becoming increasingly prominent. Growing attention to these issues will greatly internationalize connections between gender and security, ultimately improving prevention efforts of further victimization in the future.

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