

THE COMFORT WOMAN STORY AND THE PACIFIC WAR NARRATIVE

The Ethical Challenge of a Micro-Narrative

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1. Introduction

During World War II, the Japanese Imperial Army adopted various strategies for its conduct of War in the Asia-Pacific Region. One of those strategies required the maintenance of a military barrack's *ianjo* (comfort station or military brothel)¹ for the following reasons:

First, it was a means to reduce the rape of civilians by members of the Japanese armed forces... Second, military leaders believed that it was important to gratify their men's carnal desires... Third, military-controlled prostitution was regarded as an effective preventive measure against venereal disease... Finally, the tight control of brothels by the military authorities was believed to be necessary for security reasons.²

These Four Reasons were considered greater evils than the creation of the *ianjo* – justifying, to the minds of the War leaders, the employment of *jugun ianfu*.³ Those Four Reasons produced the Asia-Pacific comfort

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¹See Chunghee Sarah Soh, "Sexual Enslavement and Reproductive Health Narratives of *Han* among Korean Comfort Women Survivors," in Neils Teunis and Gilbert H. Herdt, eds., *Inequalities and Social Justice*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007, 86-104; Yuki Tanaka, "Introduction," in Henson, *Comfort Woman: A Filipina's Story of Prostitution and Slavery under the Japanese Military*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999, ix.

²Tanaka, "Introduction," xi.

³"Military comfort women" is a translation of the phrase *jugun ianfu*. This term has been initially used in a post-war novel titled *Jūgun Ianfu* published in 1973 by the Japanese writer Kakō Senda. Terms like "women and girls forced into sexual slavery," "war-rape victims," or "sex slaves," "war-rape victims" are also used in the literature. About two hundred thousand women were war-rape victims of Japan. See Karen Parker and Jennifer F. Chew, "The *Jugun Ianfu* System," in Roy L. Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn't Enough: The Controversy Over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice*, New York: New York University Press, 1999, 95-100.

stations where systematic rape-slavery of ‘comfort women’ became part of a soldier’s discipline. In the forcible conscription of women to become sex-workers in army camps, injuries were committed (like utilizing a woman to satisfy the pent-up sexual drives of thousands of soldiers, to become a pleasurable and functional receptacle of war-driven males’ libido, to become an extension of war logistics in the service of soldiers, to be deprived of care befitting a human being). The Japanese recognized these as evils of war, but labelled as lesser evils compared to the four greater evils the authorities purportedly sought to avoid.

Since the early 1990’s, news about the conscription of women for the *ianjo* have been publicized. These were backed-up by comfort women’s stories. Maria Rosa Henson was the first Filipino comfort woman who came out to tell her story. She responded to a radio broadcast by women activists, calling for Filipino comfort women to come forward. “One after another, women followed Maria’s lead. Eventually, 169 women were identified as former ‘comfort women.’”⁴

Maria Henson later revealed the details of her conscription in her autobiography, *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny*.⁵ This micro-narrative stood in contrast to the larger Pacific war story waged by the Japanese Imperial Army. The justification that *ianjo* was just a minor damage which was necessary to Japanese army’s efficient fulfilment of their military duties largely subscribe to denial of moral and legal responsibilities for establishing military brothels. Times of war are governed by international rules that uphold a sense of humanity even in the war zones. Upholding a ‘collateral damage’ justification veers away from the ethical question of liability that has caused tremendous suffering to women and children.⁶

Henson’s narrative uncovers the atrocities of war and its destructive effects that are long-felt even after the war. Her specific story galvanized public opinion and pushed organized groups to rally behind the comfort-women war victims. Her narrative interrupted, disturbed, questioned and challenged the legitimacy and morality of the *ianjo* as a war strategy. Her autobiography embodies a particular disturbing counter-story to a global war that swept women under the four reasons. The micro-narrative compelled people to rethink and re-assess the damaging assumptions of comfort stations.

⁴Parker and Chew, “The *Jugun Ianfu* System,” xviii.

⁵Maria Rosa Henson, *Comfort Woman: Slave of Destiny*, Pasig Metro Manila: Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, 1996.

⁶Parker and Chew, “The *Jugun Ianfu* System,” 95.

Through her autobiography, this article will look into the *ianjo* and its four reasons which treat comfort women as inevitable collateral damage. Along with the evils inflicted on comfort women, I will show that the creation of comfort stations to avoid the four evils is logically and morally flawed. This corrective use of the literature of a victim would thus serve to illustrate how a powerful narrative of negative experiences should disturb and challenge the sweeping claims of the dominant narrative.

The conscription of comfort women is neither a minor evil nor a necessary collateral damage, but a major and fundamental damage when viewed from a more inclusive way of thinking that considers small stories as integral to the War’s grand story. I will adopt a high-context perspective by pulling war intentions, events, and structures into the whole course and coordinates of the history of War (with the interruptive-inclusion of Maria Rosa Henson’s narrative that completes the War story) and to make more explicit the less visible *major* harm which “collateral damage” or “minor damage” argument does not intend to include. I will discuss the “integral place” of collateral- or minor-damage stories within the broad story of War and argue that the nature of “minor” damage cannot be simply swept aside collaterally and, thus, dis-coordinated from War structures that logically create interlocking networks of events or mechanisms whose effects are still felt long after the War is over.

2. The Broader Pacific War Story: A Dominating Narrative

When the Japanese soldiers were deployed into war zones, they carried within them, in their bodies, identities and roles, the mark of their nation, the ethos of ultra-nationalism, and the ambitious intentions of their leaders. Implied in their conscriptions were the moving spirit of their nation and the disposition-forming wishes of their state leaders. It was thus logical to interpret that the establishment of comfort stations and the forcible conscription of comfort women were consistent with the overall direction of Japan’s intentions in the wars it waged in China, Korea, and other nations of the Pacific region, including the Philippines. Japanese soldiers embodied such intentions.

World War II was one of the most notorious conflicts recorded in human history. With an estimate of 50 to 70 million fatalities, the world witnessed the most heinous crimes war-driven men could commit in defence of ambitions and alliances. Both the Allied and the Axis sides have incurred great losses, deliberate killing, genocide, and rape. The world has witnessed, in those atrocities, the arbitrary suspension of human

fellowship or camaraderie and the deliberate affirmation of belligerent qualities, such as boldness, militancy, suspiciousness, wariness, distrust, arrogance, roughness, fury, cunning, unrelenting bravery, unforgiving character, murderous and destructive temper. Those who were thus qualified fought the battle; those who won it were deemed powerful and superior. There were, however, the countless vulnerable victims, like the women, children, and the elderly whose lives depended on men who could fight for them or ensure their safety. Some women took up arms to protect themselves but most of them were subjugated and the war, which was instigated by men, had far-reaching effects on the world at large.⁷

While Germany, under Hitler, expanded its foothold on European territories, Japan in 1931 had invaded Manchuria, conquered much of mainland China in 1937, was drawn into a sustained conflict with Russia, and had entered into alliance with Italy and Germany for mutual support to “assist one another with all political, economic and military means.”⁸ Japanese leaders, dominated by army/navy officers and riding on ultranationalist sentiments, wanted further to secure the natural resources their country lacked. Japanese army leaders wanted these not only in Manchuria but also in Mongolia, China proper, and South Asia.⁹ The ultimate objectives of expansion for the Japanese leaders were both racial and economic: to create a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, along the lines of the New Order in East Asia, which would include the Netherlands East Indies, French Indo-China, Thailand, Malaya, Burma and the Philippines. In this sphere, Asian (but largely Japanese) leadership would prevail, and the peoples of the region (but, again, mainly of Japan) would enjoy access to the important raw materials and markets it contained. In the course of 1940, as the German armies overran much of Europe, the vision of the Japanese government expanded considerably.¹⁰

These intentions of Japan set the background of war activities and atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army at the onset of the Pacific War. Indeed, this war reflected Japan’s wish to accelerate its

⁷Alfonso P. Santos, *Heroic Virgins and Women Patriots: Female Patriotism During the Japanese Occupation*, Diliman, Quezon City: National Book Store, 1977, 10ff.

⁸Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the Second World War, 1933-1941*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 2005, 40.

⁹Spencer C. Tucker, “Origins of the War,” in Spencer C. Tucker, ed., *World War II: A Student Encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara, California: ABC CLIO, 2005, 6ff.

¹⁰Henig, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 40.

development. The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere slogan was really a euphemism for “Asia for the Japanese.” Even if some Japanese leaders and influential thinkers considered Japan as the liberator of Asia against imperialism (of Britain and the United States), Japan’s Pacific War was still imperialist, albeit an anti-imperialistic imperialism.¹¹ Japan did not want others to share its appropriated Asian earth.

When the Pacific War broke out, three armies were brought under the command of Imperial General Headquarters: the China Expeditionary Army, the Southern Army and the Kwantung Army. The Southern Army was given the task of occupying the Southeast Asia. This was divided into four individual armies: the 14th, 15th, 16th and 25th Armies. The hierarchy depicts the structure or order that placed the Emperor at the top, followed by the Imperial General Headquarters, area armies, armies, divisions (brigades), regiments, battalions and finally companies. This implies the total mobilization of the administrative organs or hierarchy at the national and local levels.¹² The 14th Army or the Philippines Attack Force under Lt. Gen. Homma Masaharu, composed of two divisions, or roughly 26,000 to 30,000 men, was deployed to the Philippines.¹³ These were a portion of the 1.7 million military personnel of the entire Imperial Japanese Army in 1941 (which increased to 5.5 million in 1945).

Conquest of the territory of the enemy, its defeat and subordination, was the way to winning Japan’s war. This ‘male-centred’ war intent, being on the offensive, also aimed at neutralizing the American fleet with a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour and seize America’s central Pacific bases at Guam and Wake islands and then invaded the Philippines. Thinking it had crippled American naval power, Japan headed its way to seize Burma, Malaysia, Singapore and Dutch Indies, thereby, establishing an offensive and defensive ring in the South and the central Pacific.

Japanese territorial and economic expansionism became the driving motive of the Pacific War. Central to this motive was the Japanese nation-state already gripped by the ambitions of its male leaders. It was a fact that the Japanese military leaders enjoyed a great deal of independence from

¹¹Kenneth G. Henshall, *A History of Japan: From Stone Age to Superpower*, 2nd ed., New York: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2004, 114ff.

¹²Hayashi, Hirofumi, *Structure of Japanese Imperial Government involved in Military Comfort Women System*, <http://www32.ocn.ne.jp/modernh/eng09-1.htm>, / accessed 26 March 2013.

¹³Gordon L. Rottman, *Japanese Army in World War II: Conquest of the Pacific 1941-42*, Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2005, 26ff.

the elected civilian government. The Meiji Constitution provides that the War Minister was held accountable only to the Emperor himself, and not to the government. The Japanese Army's support was, thus, indispensable to the survival of the civilian administrations. The Japanese culture of appreciating its people as direct "descendants of deities" fuelled further its dominant centrist consciousness as the War Conqueror.¹⁴

The insatiable urge towards territorial and economic expansion is a distorted view that engenders further nationalist-advocacy, racial-supremacy, arrogance, and utilitarian dispositions. The Japanese people had long enjoyed a self-understanding that their nation descended from deities. This perspective, which fosters superiority, messianic complex, and sows militancy and belligerence, was a fertile soil to concoct war of dominance that entails the submission and subjection of others. To keep their role in the Empire of the Sun and in the Axis network, Japan's leaders must virtually display its deified conviction to eliminate opposing forces and utilize all means available, including innocent women-civilians.

3. Maria Rosa Henson's Experience of War and Violence

Maria Rosa Henson's quiet life in Pampanga had been altered by the Japanese military presence in the Philippines. Her family fled every time they heard of Japanese soldiers' roaming in towns and cities. Their simple life was disrupted by the abuses and victimization by the Japanese military. When she was raped by a Japanese officer and two soldiers, while she was fetching firewood, she felt deeply violated. Her painful experience brought so much sorrow and bitterness that she sought for a way to divert her attention to a meaningful cause. Thus, she became a member of the *Hukbalahap* (Armed National Resistance against the Japanese). While in a mission to collect some sacks of dried corn from the nearby town, she was informed that their task was to supply guns and ammunition to their comrades. These were hidden behind the sacks of corn. When they passed the checkpoint, she was terrified but pretended unaffected. She was stopped and the guard led her at gunpoint to the second floor of the building, the town hospital turned into the Japanese headquarters and garrison. There she saw six other women. She was given a small room with a bamboo bed that had no door, only a curtain. That night nothing happened to her but the following day was hell, signalling her initiation into being a comfort woman.

¹⁴Akira Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War, 1941-1945*, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Without warning, a Japanese soldier entered my room and pointed his bayonet at my chest. I thought he was going to kill me, but he used his bayonet to slash my dress and tear it open. I was too frightened to scream. And then he raped me. When he was done, other soldiers came into my room, and they took turns raping me.

Twelve soldiers raped me in quick succession, after which I was given half an hour to rest. Then twelve more soldiers followed. They all lined up outside the room waiting for their turn. I bled so much and was in such pain, I could not even stand up. The next morning, I was too weak to get up. A woman brought me a cup of tea and breakfast of rice and dried fish. I wanted to ask her some questions, but the guard in the hall outside stopped us from saying anything to each other.

I could not eat. I felt much pain, and my vagina was swollen. I cried and cried, calling my mother. I could not resist the soldiers because they might kill me. So what else could I do?¹⁵

Later on, she even viewed this as ‘work’ of a sex-slave for Japanese soldiers during World War II.¹⁶

My work began, and I lay down as one by one the soldiers raped me. At six p.m., we rested for a while and ate dinner. Often I was hungry because our rations were so small. After thirty minutes, I lay down on the bed again to be raped for the next three or four hours. Every day, anywhere from ten to over twenty soldiers raped me. There were times when there were as many as thirty: they came to the garrison in truckloads. At other times, there were only a few soldiers, as we finished early.¹⁷

She (and her fellow worker-slaves) had to endure more excruciating and humiliating treatments, while hope and despair played inside her:

Every day there were incidents of violence and humiliation. These happened not only to me, but also to the other women there. Sometimes I heard crying and the sound of someone being beaten up... When the soldiers raped me, I felt like a pig. Sometimes they tied up my right leg with a waist-band or belt and hung it on a nail on the wall as they violated me. I was angry all the time. But there was nothing I could do. How many more days, I thought. How many more months? Someday we will be free, I thought. But how?¹⁸

¹⁵Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 60-61.

¹⁶Chunghhee Sarah Soh, *The Korean “Comfort Women:” Movement for Redress*, *Asian Survey* 36, no. 12, December 1996, 1227-1240.

¹⁷Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 64.

¹⁸Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 66.

4. Ethics of the ‘Collateral Damage’ on Comfort Women

War is often referred to as an actual and wide-spread armed conflict between contending forces. It is an intentional entry into armed hostilities and a test of the military, political, economic, and cultural mettle of engaged nations. The use of force and violence to annihilate and conquer the other party (the enemy) “engaged in harm” is taken for granted. Even the collateral damage inflicted on ecology and on those who are *not* actually “engaged in harm” (civilians, children, women, and elderly) is downplayed. War, nevertheless, has its own continuing and expanding story of destructiveness, which grows beyond the narrow intent to enter into war, beyond the spaces of combat, beyond the casualties among combatants, and beyond actual periods of engagement.

An unadulterated truth is that a war’s story spawns more destructions than war intentions could predict; it produces destruction beyond the calculated (low-context) harm inflicted and directed on those immediately ‘engaged in harm.’ It generates destructive effects, which are felt even in times of concord. Under international law and the traditional ethics of war, the question of damage or harm inflicted on those ‘not engaged in harm’ is still framed within the subject of collateral damage or viewed as unintended consequence of actual exchange of hostilities or structured and obliquely constructed by the intent and deployments (structures) to win the war.

Collateral damage is not a question that is directly and categorically linked to the intent to enter into war. The meaning of damage is swiped collaterally and around the more central questions regarding which rules to observe when dealing with the enemy and its armed forces. One of these rules includes the ‘collateral’ obligation to discriminate between the civilian population and the legitimate military, political and industrial targets involved in war-engagement. Three things may be raised regarding this obligation: 1) non-combatants/civilians are to be treated differently; 2) that it is wrong to deliberately target or harm civilians, and 3) if civilian casualties cannot be avoided, these may be excusable if brought about collaterally (that is, unavoidable casualties in the course of legitimate offense and defence against those ‘engaged in harm’).¹⁹

However, this ‘collateral damage’ position of international law and the traditional ethics of war regarding the wrongness of the harm inflicted

¹⁹Collateral damage is a U.S. Military term for unintended or incidental damage during a military operation. The meaning can be expanded to refer to friendly fire, or the killing of non-combatants and the destruction of their property. <http://english.turkcebilgi.com/Collateral+damage/> accessed 26 March 2013.

on civilians hardly recognizes the fact that the term ‘collateral’ virtually snatches the meaning of ‘harm’ away from its logical source and connection: the intention to enter into war and to win it. This position treats collateral damage as an excusable event because of the claim that it has no direct connection with the deliberate war intent and the will to win the war. This position is questionable on two counts. First, localizing the intent by circumscribing it within the actual exchange of hostilities cuts fragments of war stories away from the global story of war, we know, via a holistic or high-context thinking,²⁰ that this is arbitrary and artificial, prejudicial to and discriminatory against potential victims. Second, by fixing intent on actual hostilities and de-linking the original war-intent from the so-called ‘collateral’ damage is a clear effort to find a justification for something that is clearly structured by, and thus part of, the intent and hostilities of war. The argument is clearly an escapist’s cunning way of rationalization for cases that, in the first place, should not be compartmentalized and fragmented away from the whole context of a war. What is basically wrong with this approach is that we are forced to believe that selective judgments by the dominant should rule the judgment game, that smaller war stories are not coordinates of the war intent, and that the results are just those visible and quantifiable ‘collateral’ damage, thus, the non-visible and so, non-quantifiable, could neither be the subject of scrutiny nor of moral judgment.

The comfort women issue is clearly one that involved infliction of harm on persons during and after the war. Conservative sentiments among the Japanese authorities and citizens did not raise the issue of “collateral” damage in their reference to comfort women but affirmed that the forcible conscription of women to act as sex-slaves for Japanese soldiers was a necessary evil to avoid greater or other evils, like the commission of a generalized rape by the same Japanese soldiers on countless women and the spread of venereal disease. Clearly, this form of justification mirrors the collateral-damage rationalization. While the collateral damage argument denies direct responsibility for the unintended “minor” harm

²⁰In a communication process, conversation partners will arrive at better understanding if they share a common knowledge of their physical worlds or internalize aspects of their cultures. In that case, they are said to be in a high-context communication. There is not much need to verbalize through explicit codes what are implicit in their worldviews. On the other hand, two conversation partners who do not share contexts may have to be more explicit with their transmitted codes to bring about understanding. The latter are said to be in a low-context communication. Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, New York: Anchor Books, 1977, 91.

caused on non-combatants, the comfort woman conscription justifies a perpetrated ‘minor’ harm on non-combatants to avoid the imagined and anticipated ‘greater’ harms. Thus, by intention and effect, the ‘minor’ harm of sexual slavery imposed on comfort women is deemed a ‘collateral damage, a result of the avoidance of greater damage.

The Japanese occupation was replete with stories of human rights violations and sexual abuse.²¹ Male combatants were mainly concerned about following orders and winning the war. The milieu itself during World War II bred violence, destructiveness, and abuse. It was not just the scores of people driven by hatred that brought about greater atrocities, but it was also the climate of war, ambitions, restlessness, revenge, and hard-heartedness that fuelled the fire of violence. Woman, being the weaker sex in the perspective of male strength and domination, had to serve the order in society by becoming the means for the male and for his sexual drive. It is against the male’s more encompassing and bigger war story that one must view the story of Maria Rosa Henson as well as the fate of woman’s dignity.

5. Abuse of Maria Rosa Henson: Challenging the Male’s War Story

The *jugun ianfu* were utilized to release and satisfy the pent-up sexual drives of soldiers. It is assumed that to be more effective combatants, soldiers must be more confident and freed from (or less disturbed by) the physiological and psychological effects brought about by the prospect of facing death or mutilation in war zones.

Henson was subjected to sex slavery in April 1943, when the war was already turning in favour of the Allies and the Japanese troops were more war-strung. War zones expose soldiers to death and destruction. The ways these zones translate into bodily troubles were averted and given prior prescription by War strategists by eliminating emotional troubles in order to make soldiers more functional and battle-ready. The forcible conscription of *jugun ianfu* was considered an apt solution: to provide ‘comfort’ to soldiers and officers in order to keep them on the battlefields for long periods of time without the prospect of taking a leave.²² Whether the sex-drive release or anxiety-reduction regimen for soldiers suited them well or not, it still caused the utter dehumanization of women. It brought

²¹Zhang Kaiyuan, ed., *Eyewitnesses to Massacre: American Missionaries Bear Witness to Japanese Atrocities in Nanjing*, Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001.

²²Hayashi Hirofumi, *Japanese Comfort Women in South East Asia*, Japan Forum 10, no. 2, September 1998, 211-219. <http://www32.ocn.ne.jp/~modernh/eng04.htm>, accessed 26 March 2013.

about the destruction of the meaning of sexual intercourse as a celebration of mutual-giving and sharing of love; engendered a blatant disrespect of a woman as man’s partner; diminished man as anxiety- and pleasure-driven individual; and sowed insult to the woman’s family; her ‘job’ was an absolute torture of a nation’s citizen. Such dehumanisations were de-linked from war intentions and construed as collateral effects of war.

Henson’s story unveiled the presence of military brothels in the Philippines and revealed the sufferings endured by comfort women reduced into functional receptacles. A woman who is turned into sex slave suffers the most humiliating pain and anguish for being treated like a toilet bowl for scores of men’s semen. When she is forced to ‘welcome’ men (a whole or couple of platoon sometimes), the meaning of intercourse even becomes more demeaning than a beastly copulation. Among humans, respectful desire, care, affection, and intimacy are vital to the meaning of sex. These values of human sexuality are totally absent inside a Japanese comfort station. Only pain, insult, injury, harm, damage, offense, suffering, ruin, cruelty – all effects of war imposed on a tool to ensure that the Pacific War soldiers are ‘relieved’ and comforted. A woman then, is accounted for, marked as an acquired useful war instrument, and set as a human implement for soldiers’ momentary return to homeostasis. Such diminution of a person to a tool like this deprives a human person of respect due to her. She has become part of the whole war arsenal for the Pacific War’s success. She is listed thus as one among armaments, vehicles, and supplies. Similar to food or water to be consumed, a woman is no longer afforded the appropriate rituals of courtship or seduction.

Comfort stations treated women as objects. Oblivious to women’s suffering, military soldiers considered them as war instruments whose existence must serve the purpose of ‘comforting’ Japanese soldiers. While scores of soldiers preen at pleasurable orgasmic spasms, a woman could only painfully squirm and with tortured endurance must patiently wait until the last soldier signal the end of the day’s ‘comforting sessions.’ Henson endured this kind of humiliation, torture, and abuse from the Japanese soldiers. Every day she had to service a number of soldiers in succession. Sometimes, however, she was given some breaks in the middle of a long comfort-session in order to clean and relax herself, and change the sheets to prepare for the next excruciating series of assaults.²³ She eventually suffered a miscarriage as a result of rape-sessions while

²³Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 61.

suffering from an untreated malaria infection. After nine months of sexual servitude, Henson must have serviced more than ten thousand soldiers.²⁴

Abduction, rape and cycles of sexual assaults are abominable acts of violation of a person's dignity. Utilizing women as living container of men's semen is even more atrocious and devious than the actual killing of an enemy engaged in harm. It is a vicious attack on her person, her worth, her life, her destiny. To treat her lower than Japanese soldier's enemy is to treat her in wicked contempt of her dignity and worth as a person. But, since every Japanese soldier conscripted for the Pacific War was driven by the logic of military rulers' dominance and ambition, low-context or compartmentalized thinking afforded them little of the essential affective capacities.

Ethics of war (in *jus in bello*) most often remain as a body of principles that are not translated into practice particularly in pre-established comfort stations. The absence of care and compassion served its deemed 'correct' intentions in times of war. The moral question however, still haunts them to this day: Were comfort stations vital and hence, inevitable to the imperialist scheme of Japan?

Henson's story elicits valid questions about the morality of *ianjo* and questions the devaluation of women as sex slaves.

6. Henson's Narrative: Unmasking the Moral Flaws of Four Reasons

This section serves to unmask the moral flaws of Four Reasons using Henson's story. I shall argue against the justification that *ianjo* prevented rape and endemic spread of venereal diseases. The alleged Four Reasons are morally wrong because these (1) disregard the intrinsic value and dignity of a person, (2) perpetrate harm and violence through sexual slavery and (3) inflict harm to the social body.

The four justifications (curbing the rising number of rapes committed by Japanese soldiers, sexually satisfying the soldiers for combat-readiness, preventing the spread of venereal diseases throughout Japan's territory, and maintaining tighter security) actually revolve around its alleged purpose, that is, to curb high incidence of rape. It is a fact that 'comfort stations' are organized prostitution dens which legitimize rape and sexual

²⁴“By now, I had served thousands of soldiers. Sometimes I looked at myself in the small mirror in my room and saw that what I had been through was not etched in my face. I looked young and pretty. God, I thought, how can I escape from this hell? Please God, help me and the other girls free ourselves from here.” Henson, *Comfort Woman*, 69.

assaults. Rape or any form of sexual abuse is blind to the intrinsic value of the human person. This intrinsic worth does not come from a person’s quality, achievement or personal merit; but because of the very fact that she is a person. Hence, she should not be used as a *means* for some other end. As Kant says, “Rational beings are called persons because their nature already marks them out as an end in itself, that is, something that may not be used merely as a means, and hence so far limits all choice (and is an object of respect).”²⁵

When rape was legitimized via the use of military brothels, it posits a thwarted view of the inherent worth of a human person. Comfort stations were not humane centres that minimize harm on individuals. These were extensions of war zones that maltreated human beings and perpetrated sexual slavery. Therefore, *ianjo* is a direct assault on a human person, who is valuable and dignified. It destroys one’s intrinsic worth and reduces a woman into a sex object. It subjected women to violence, mutilations, torture, and servitude. Testimonies of comfort women reveal the desecration of the human being in the military brothels.²⁶

Dignity is an essential part of every human being. It cannot be bought or acquired. It cannot be violated, diminished or taken away because it is stamped in our being and flows from our connectedness with God. Thus, sexual assault on a woman devalues and injures this inherent dignity. Human dignity is trampled upon when women are treated as War implements or dispensable instruments.

Henson’s narrative attests to the innumerable cruelties done to comfort women. Henson had to endure brutalities and inhumane treatment in comfort stations. Inside the military brothel a woman is unnamed and uncared for because she is considered merely a tool designed to provide ‘comfort’ to men.

Harm inflicted on Henson takes us further to a symbolic connection between a harm done to a person and to a social body. Sexual abuse of a woman is symbolic of an assault to a nation. Henson is a citizen of a nation; a representative of a people; and thus, a part of a whole. Her identity is connected to her clan, her roots, her social circle, her nation. Therefore, her raped body is a desecration of her being, a violation of her

²⁵Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, New York: Cambridge, 1998, 37.

²⁶Sarah C. Soh, *Japan's Responsibility toward Comfort Women Survivors*, Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper 77, May 2001, See <http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp77.html>/accessed 27 March 2013.

dignity and an expunction of her name. The subjugation of her body may also be construed as a subjugation of her nation.

The justification that *ianjo* curbs incidence of rape and prevents venereal diseases is a male-centred scheme to discredit the fundamental value of a human person and undermine a woman's inherent dignity. It is subtly framed as a remedy but it is in reality a victimization of woman – a form of hostility.

Like the concept of 'collateral damage' any justification for harm inflicted on comfort women is a form of linguistic arsenal.²⁷ Collaterality is an escapist's excuse for indirect casualties, which justifies harm yet removes accountability for the consequences of an action under the cloak of unintended effects or unavoidable casualties; thereby, allow necessary, lesser evil. Such utilization of language promotes half-truths and legitimizes inhumane acts. George Orwell has this to say:

In our time political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible... Political language – and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists – is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.²⁸

Language in the hands of the dominant can justify even the most heinous crimes.

To proffer that organized prostitution precludes greater harm and posits it as a 'good' is a fallacy. A person utilized for a military-schemed prostitution is a victim. *Ianjo* is neither a remedy nor a cure to venereal disease. There had been no guarantee that brothels had been exempt from venereal diseases.²⁹ Testimonies of War victims and prisoners in fact, acknowledged its endemic spread even in the military brothels where violent assaults on women were common and evidence of a breeding ground for sexual abuse was taking place.³⁰ Hence, the four reasons for establishing *ianjo* are morally flawed.

²⁷Zygmunt Bauman, "Collateral Casualties of Consumerism," *Journal of Consumerism*, 7.25 (2001). See <http://joc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/>accessed March 25, 2013.

²⁸George Orwell, *A Collection of Essays*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1953.

²⁹Soh, *Japan's Responsibility toward Comfort Women Survivors*, 2.

³⁰Karen Parker and Jennifer Chew, "Compensation for Japan's World War II War-Rape Victims," *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review* 17 (1994), 498-510.

Henson’s story still questions the delinked ‘collateral damage’ from real and actual hostilities done to women. One cannot just cut fragments from the intentions of War and argue that victims of war were uncalculated casualty. Henson’s abduction, rape, enlistment as comfort woman, her failed marriage, her struggles to regain her confidence and overcome shame form part of the fabric of her life. Hence, she is neither an unanticipated casualty nor an unintended consequence. She is a victim. Harm inflicted on her and hundreds of thousands of women denied them of their rightful value and dignity.

If respect must be accorded to every person, every woman has the inviolable right to be regarded as a human being, deserving of what every man enjoys under the sun. Hence, considering her intrinsic value, woman must not just serve the purpose of filling in man’s insatiable desire for success or comfort or pleasure. To be forcibly conscripted, then, in the ‘comfort stations’ is to be rendered a woman depersonalized and violated.

6. Conclusion

During war, intended or unintended harm directed to civilians must not be misconstrued as inevitable. There is a logical connection between the intent and the story of the unregulated will to win the war by all means. This will to win can be read in the practices of war leaders and their subordinates. Oftentimes, such a will to win even if difficult to document is given away by the ways it has violated the set of benevolent principles, like respect, care, and compassion. But could such a set of benevolence be really translated into practice via war rules or international laws? What sorts of teeth have the rules and laws of war on people engaged in atrocities that they should be expected to show respect, care, and compassion to their enemies – when these human affective qualities are really supposed to flow from respectable, caring, and compassionate characters? Granted there are respectable, caring, and compassionate characters among soldiers, would the structures of war and atrocities not transform them into parts of war machines?

The actual cruelties done on women through comfort stations are symmetrical to the World War II stories of annihilation and conquest where the civilians, particularly women and children, were the victims. These cruel acts should not be dis-coordinated with armed conflict. Rather they must be seen as fundamentally part of the actual exchange of hostilities.

Maria Rosa Henson's story is a validation of cruelty to and neglect of woman as person. The Japanese occupation brought with it greater hostilities due to their focused interest on expansionism, territorial, cultural and economic ambitions. The Japanese soldiers who were deployed in the battles were indoctrinated to fight, annihilate, and conquer. Thus, women became just extensions, as war logistics – and were utilized to produce comforts for men. The military brothels and its justification through the Four Reasons are morally flawed. The devaluing of a woman is a neglect of her intrinsic value; her connectedness to humankind; a desecration of her being; an assault to her nation. The male-driven desire to win the battle and the low-context disposition of male psyche that rationalizes sexual abuse as inevitable in war should be rectified by restoring the dimmed image of God in a comfort woman. Henson, who braved exposure as a comfort woman affirmed the inviolable dignity of the human person. Her story unmasked the ills and wills of War and disturbed preconceptions about 'collateral damage' and comfort stations. It proved that War and the establishment of *ianjo* dehumanized women and bereft the world a place of care.

Maria Rosa Henson's story, thus, is not a compartmentalized account of what transpired during the Japanese Occupation. Her story is integral and substantial to the male-dominated language of War. Her life is a strong evidence that a comfort woman is not just an incidental damage but an intended harm that is tantamount to direct hostility to civilians. An organized and systematic brothel could not have otherwise served its purpose if its intent was de-linked to the original intent of war.

Her narrative could be an indirect, but fundamental, gateway to our present or to a future that looks to woman as genuinely an indispensable partner, a significant collaborator of man, and a companion in a life that should not be dominated by the male's utilitarian compartments.

The case of Maria Rosa Henson seems to be a mere story of the past, but it continues to be a relevant point of assessment of how a male-dominated social order operates and even allows dehumanization of women. Henson's life still questions systems and every process of colonization and their effects on a nation and the identity of human persons.