

# **“Double Veterans”: An Analysis of the Role Multiple Perpetrator Rape Played During the Vietnam War<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Content Warning:**

This thesis deals with sensitive and graphic content which may be triggering for readers. While many graphic details have been omitted out of respect for victims, there are instances where details are presented, which might be difficult to emotionally navigate. I acknowledge my identity and privilege as a female Caucasian settler researching sensitive information pertaining to other racialized groups.

## **Abstract:**

Sexual violence committed by United States (US) troops during the Vietnam War remains overlooked and neglected in the historiography of the conflict. Furthermore, when this type of violence is discussed, it is perceived to be confined to the 1968 My Lai Massacre. This perception is simply not the case as sexual violence during the war was both rampant and significant. Through the use of feminist historiography and critical discourse analysis, I investigate the role Multiple Perpetrator Rape (MPR) played in the Vietnam War and what this means for our understanding of wartime rape and the war more broadly. My utilization of qualitative sources ranging from feminist scholarship to military investigations suggests MPR may have acted as a mechanism to promote camaraderie and cohesion among units.

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<sup>1</sup> A “Double Veteran” was a term used by American troops for soldiers who raped and then killed a Vietnamese woman, see: Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books, 1992), 129.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

When interviewed about sexual violence during the Vietnam War, US soldiers used the term “omnipresent” to describe its frequency.<sup>3</sup> The alleged omnipresence of sexual violence has only recently emerged as a phenomenon in the historiography of the war. However, these accounts rarely touch on forms of sexual violence such as MPR.<sup>4</sup> This neglect may lend itself to the fact in literature and western society, the My Lai Massacre remains the perceived pinnacle of sexual violence during the war, preventing discussions of other violence. The partial lack of acknowledgement of rape, external from the massacre, has continually reinforced a perception that this type of violence was merely unimportant or simply nonexistent. Albeit when sexual violence *is* occasionally drawn upon, historians tend to construct a narrative of these rapes being individual, sexually charged incidents that possess no larger structural implications.

Nevertheless, evidence which highlights the presence of MPR during the Vietnam War indicates that it possessed larger societal and cultural implications pertaining to conceptions of gender-based violence, militarized masculinity, socialization among troops, and the war as a broader subject. Both historically and academically, I find that the situation of sexual violence in Vietnam tends to be excluded in broader discussions of wartime rape; the explicit focus of the My Lai Massacre as the crux of rape during the war weakens the visibility of this violence elsewhere, in turn constructing both inaccurate and problematic narratives.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I continually refer to the Vietnam War throughout this thesis utilizing the start date indicated by the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964. The resolution acted as an official declaration following an armed maritime squabble and granted the US war-waging abilities in North Vietnam. Thus, this thesis continues under the assumption that the war officially started in August 1964. See: Max Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic History of a Tragic War* (William Collins, 2018), 186-187, 191.

<sup>3</sup> Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (Picador, 2013), 164.

<sup>4</sup> My definition of MPR draws from Elisabeth Wood’s definition of rape as the “coerced penetration of the vagina or anus by a penis or another object” which is included under a larger umbrella of sexual violence see: Elisabeth Wood, “Variation in Sexual Violence During War,” *Politics & Society* 34, no. 3 (2006): 308, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329206290426>. Additionally, perpetrators are described as those who “aid, abet, conspire, and are immediately responsible” in acts of MPR, see: Elisabeth Wood, “Multiple Perpetrator Rape During War,” in *Handbook on the Study of Multiple Perpetrator Rape: A Multidisciplinary Response to an International Problem*, ed. Miranda Horvath and Jessica Woodhams (Routledge, 2013), 134.

<sup>5</sup> Doris Buss, “Rethinking Rape as a ‘Weapon of War’,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 155, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/s10691-009-9118-5>.

The exclusion of Vietnam within dialogue surrounding wartime rape can be attributed to a lack of systematic documentation and the chronological timeframe of the war. We often discuss wartime rape in relation to the Second World War due to its continual documentation. The mass rapes of women by the Germans and Red Army alongside the sexual slavery of Japanese women indicates a notable systematic variable.<sup>6</sup> The situation in Vietnam, however, does not indicate the same systematic implications. Additionally, sexual violence during the Vietnam War remains excluded due to the fact wartime rape only obtained legal status much after the war, following developments in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Therefore, Vietnam seemingly falls through the cracks in our discussions on wartime rape due to its lack of systematic characteristics, documentation, and chronological distance from legal consideration as a warcrime. To be clear, regardless of these factors, what took place during the Vietnam War is not merely a niche case study, it is indicative of a larger “continuum” of sexual violence seen in conflict which inevitably exists in society.<sup>7</sup>

To echo a sentiment expressed by journalist Christina Lamb, rape is one of the “cheapest” weapons “known to man.”<sup>8</sup> The historical presence of rape in conflict has led to its binary conceptualization, to which rape is commonly understood as an inevitable part of war. Presenting rape as inevitable or as collateral to war leads to the “active failure” to condemn and acknowledge the reality in which rape can be and is used as a strategic weapon of war.<sup>9</sup> Wartime sexual violence manifests in many forms with numerous underlying motivations, all of which require individual research and analysis, beyond the scope of this thesis.

However, through this thesis I intend to examine one form of wartime sexual violence, MPR, not only as an act, but the active role it played during the Vietnam War. Furthermore, the choice to focus on MPR as the subject of research was difficult, yet guided by the fact MPR

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<sup>6</sup> See: Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese Warcrimes* (Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Cynthia Cockburn, “The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace,” in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, ed. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (University of California Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>8</sup> Christina Lamb, *Our Bodies Their Battlefield: What War Does to Women* (William Collins, 2020), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Jeanne Vickers, *Women and War* (Zed Books, 1993), 21.

seemingly possessed larger, strategic implications. Through my research I found that while rape was deemed inevitable or even normalized during the Vietnam War, there was something of note about the way veterans had discussed MPR; rarely was it ever discussed as an individualistic, sexual act and was more commonly referred to as “endemic.”<sup>10</sup> Testimonies from veterans through interviews alongside government investigations reinforced my suspicions and prompted me to look further into how MPR can act as a strategic tool compared to acts of Lone Perpetrator Rape (LPR). Therefore, the choice to research MPR as opposed to LPR was due to the fact available evidence indicates that it was utilized for reasons far beyond the individual, in turn revealing information about the strategic and structural use of wartime rape in Vietnam.

Although wartime rape has existed and inflicted harm for centuries, the legal construction of rape as a warcrime, or a legitimate weapon of war, is a fairly recent phenomenon. Wartime rape gained legal traction following the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, where rape was institutionalized and systematically used to ethnically cleanse the population.<sup>11</sup> Estimates of female rape victims during the conflict range from 20,000 to 60,000 women and girls.<sup>12</sup> During the same period, widespread rape was being utilized by militant groups during the Rwandan genocide.<sup>13</sup> While there had been similar instances of systematic wartime sexual violence seen during the Second World War and the Korean War, what took place in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda transcended conceptualizations surrounding the impacts of rape. In 1995, following numerous conferences, tribunals, and recommendations, the United Nations (UN) deemed rape a warcrime.<sup>14</sup> Categorizing rape as such attaches weight to the act and provides a framework for prosecution. However, I wish to reiterate that the classification of rape as a warcrime has not

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (University of Massachusetts Press), 53.

<sup>11</sup> Inger Skjelsbæk, *The Political Psychology of War Rape* (Routledge, 2011), 65.

<sup>12</sup> Doris Buss, “Rethinking Rape as a ‘Weapon of War’,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 147, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/s10691-009-9118-5>.

<sup>13</sup> Myriam Denov and Djamila Saad, “Umwana w’umugore: The Gendered Realities of Girls Born of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Their Mothers in Post-Genocide Rwanda,” *Journal of Health Psychology* 29, no. 13 (2024): 1504, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1177/13591053231223883>.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Höglund, “Justice for Women in War? Feminist Ethics and Human Rights for Women,” *Feminist Theology* 11, no. 3 (2003): 356, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1177/096673500301100308>.

resulted in a decrease in the incidences of rape in conflict zones, nor has it aided the analysis of rape in conflicts prior to such classification.

External from the Vietnam War, MPR remains an understudied subject within our understandings of sexual violence, leading to an opportunity to strengthen preexisting arguments and contribute original research.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the lack of MPR being seen as something potentially larger than mere individualistic sexual need during the Vietnam War also provides an opportunity for an original contribution to the historiography of the war. Therefore, I aim to employ current understandings, literature, and scholarship surrounding wartime rape and synthesize them with research on MPR and the war to answer the question: what role did MPR play during the Vietnam War and what does this mean for the historiography of the war and wider understandings of wartime rape?

### **Methodologies**

Due to the inherent difficulty to quantitatively measure both rape as an act, but the harm it inflicts, I intend to use qualitative research methods to answer the proposed research question. Furthermore, I will be paying specific attention to feminist scholarship due to its ability to address complex questions pertaining to gender-based violence and amplify narratives in opposition to western-centric interpretations. In order to answer my research question, I use Critical Discourse Analysis and Feminist Historiography as a mixed-method approach to my research.

### ***Critical Discourse Analysis***

Brought forth by scholar Teun A. van Dijk, CDA is an approach which places an emphasis on the dimension of discourse in relation to power relationships and the inequality that emerges from them.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Dijk defines discourse as something that is “produced, circulated, distributed, and consumed in society.”<sup>17</sup> Essentially, discourse may underpin certain phenomenon and thus provide further analysis of their occurrence, especially that of sexual

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<sup>15</sup> Karen Franklin, “Enacting Masculinity: Antigay Violence and Group Rape as Participatory Theater,” *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 1, no. 2 (2004): 28, <http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/>.

<sup>16</sup> Teun A. van Dijk, “Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Discourse & Society* 4, no. 2 (1993): 448, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42888777>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 448.

violence in war. As argued by Dijk, CDA is a research methodology that is inherently political in nature; the inherent political characteristic of CDA as a method means that “those who employ it must accept” the fact their research will reflect a “political stance.”<sup>18</sup> This thesis has a clear political stance that works to analyze the prevalence of MPR during the Vietnam War in opposition to traditional, pro-American understandings of the conflict that have presented these acts as collateral or incidental in an effort to erase these experiences from history.

### ***Feminist Historiography***

I analyze a specific historical event throughout this thesis, thus it is imperative that I utilize a method situated in historical research. The purpose of historiography as a research method is so one can “assess the value of historical works in order to compile historical knowledge on hand, about specific events.”<sup>19</sup> While predominantly western scholarship surrounding the Vietnam War has always been prominent and has emerged to offer more critiques with time, it tends to neglect marginalized experiences during the war, especially pertaining to that of rape. When the large breadth of literature that constructs the historiography of the war *does* discuss instances of rape, they are often confined to the My Lai Massacre and lack further analysis or application to the entirety of the war. This is to not say that these historiographies of the war are inherently incorrect, but they tend to follow western-centric, masculine narratives which overlook the “taken-for-granted narratives” around the conflict.<sup>20</sup>

Feminist historiography places marginalized voices at the forefront of history which is dominated by masculine narratives and hierarchies.<sup>21</sup> Similarly to CDA, feminist historiography is inherently political in nature and is an act of resistance against male-centric understandings of

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<sup>18</sup> Teun Dijk, “Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Discourse & Society* 4, no. 2 (1993): 448, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42888777>.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Becker, “What is Historiography?” *The American Historical Review* 44, no. 1 (1938): 20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1840848>.

<sup>20</sup> Ilaria Boncori and Kristin Williams, “Reclaiming Space in Family Histories: Impressionistic Memory Work as a Feminist Approach to Historiography and Storytelling,” *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* 18, no. 5 (2023): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-11-2022-2446>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



history.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, especially in the study of military history, women are often neglected as vital actors as are their experiences and individually constructed stories.<sup>23</sup> Thus, in relation to the Vietnam War and the study of the experiences of Vietnamese women, feminist historiography is vital to my thesis. Throughout this thesis I shed light on the horrors of war which are silenced by the dominant narratives that have defined the conflict for decades, through my own critique and analysis, a process fundamental to this research approach.

Thus, through the use of CDA and feminist historiography, I intend to qualitatively analyze the relationship between the construction of MPR through discourse as well as historiographically consider its impact during the war. The sources and inspiration for my thesis draw heavily on preexisting feminist scholarship on wartime rape as well as critiques on the conduct of American troops during the war. The inherent difficulty of measuring mass acts of violence, especially during the Vietnam War, is often due to the strict classification of US military or government documents, a general lack of documentation of events, and linguistic barriers between the US and Vietnam.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, while quantitative methods may provide insightful data trends and explain phenomena, qualitative approaches are best suited for the content of this thesis.

### **Contextual Framework: Material**

Throughout this thesis I employ sources pertaining to wartime rape, feminist international relations, and military history. I utilize feminist scholarship created by Claudia Card, Cynthia Cockburn, Catharine MacKinnon, Christina Lamb, among others, to highlight the significance of wartime rape. In alignment with many of these feminist works, I utilize scholarly work which critique the Vietnam War, most notably from Nick Turse, Michael Bilton, and Kevin Sim. I apply the arguments and structural framework presented in these works to legal documents pertaining to the war to conduct my research and strengthen my analysis.

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<sup>22</sup> Ariella Rotramel, "Feminist Historiography," in *Companion to Feminist Studies*, ed Nancy Naples (John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2021), 304.

<sup>23</sup> Ilaria Boncori and Kristin Williams, "Reclaiming Space in Family Histories: Impressionistic Memory Work as a Feminist Approach to Historiography and Storytelling," *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* 18, no. 5 (2023): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-11-2022-2446>.

<sup>24</sup> Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (Picador, 2013), 243.

The legal document I continuously use in the thesis is the *My Lai Inquiry*, which was a military investigation conducted after the massacre. The inquiry was spearheaded by General William R. Peers after he was made aware of the massacre in 1969 following ex-GI Ron Ridenhour sending a letter to congress after hearing about its severity from fellow soldiers, which made the massacre known to the American public.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Peers was tasked to conduct an investigation into the claims made in the letter which suggested the torture and killing of unarmed civilians.<sup>26</sup> The inquiry took place in tandem with a similar investigation being conducted by the Criminal Investigation Unit, which was already investigating warcrimes and atrocities committed by troops.<sup>27</sup> While the panel was encouraged to have somewhat of a civilian presence, it was predominantly composed of retired military personnel or those familiar with the legal system. Peers had claimed that these were “carefully selected” experts who would work together in order to complete the task at hand, which included figuring out what exactly happened in March 1968.<sup>28</sup>

Within the timeframe of the inquiry and official investigation, Peers had visited the village numerous times and conducted interviews alongside field research in order to gain a broader understanding of what happened.<sup>29</sup> When conducting research, Peers was specifically asked to not look into the “criminality” of the massacre, which meant that the inquiry was unable to persecute individuals who actually carried out the operation.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the inquiry mostly interviewed those in leadership positions about the massacre, many of which either denied its abnormality or had claimed it was “VC propaganda.”<sup>31</sup> This conception of the massacre being a fictitious piece of propaganda was all too common within the both the US military and American public and acted as an obstacle to uncovering further information.

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<sup>25</sup> William Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1979), 4-5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

While the investigation interviews officers in-depth and discusses what occurred during the massacre based on testimonies, there is very little mention of rape or violence towards women. Throughout the document, the terms “noncombatant death” and “casualties” come up quite often and are the focal point of these witness testimonies.<sup>32</sup> However, a brief discussion of one example of rape and then one example of MPR does not emerge until one of the last summaries of the investigation.<sup>33</sup> The frequency and language used surrounding the killings contrasted with the mention of rape seemingly leads to its consideration as a secondary characteristic of the massacre, which lacks significance.

Therefore, the lack of acknowledgement of rape in the investigation leads to an inconsideration of its presence and significance within literature and the historiography of the war. The formal discussion of casualties and non-combatant deaths is reiterated by numerous testimonies, quantitative data, and further discussion whereas the rapes are constructed as secondary, lacking legitimate figures and further elaboration. Additionally, the casual tone when discussing rape compounded on the repeated theory of rape as a propaganda tactic underscores not only the frequency of rape but its larger implications. The discrepancies within the inquiry create an opportunity to synthesize my other sources to further investigate the role of MPR during the war.

### **US Involvement in Vietnam**

Before delving into the remainder of the thesis, it is crucial that I briefly outline American involvement in Vietnam to provide a historical context. While this thesis focuses on the events which took place during the war, Vietnam has been subject to centuries of colonial occupation, oppression, and involvement. Notably, the French had colonized Vietnam towards the end of the nineteenth century by establishing colonies in the region.<sup>34</sup> At the time, Vietnam was referred to as Cochinchina and acted as somewhat of a colonial protectorate and possession, with French influence plaguing the country<sup>35</sup>. As the French further entrenched colonial institutions into

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Schulzinger, *A Time for War: The United States and Vietnam, 1941-1975* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

Vietnam, which led to the exploitation and disruption of Vietnamese lives, Vietnamese nationalism grew stronger.

While spats between the two occurred throughout the next few decades, the decolonization movement following the Second World War mobilized further pushes for Vietnamese independence. Led by Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese independence movement was in opposition to French rule by operating under the guise of communist ideology.<sup>36</sup> The Vietnamese employed partially communist characteristics due to the fact communism was seen as the opposite of western, capitalist nations and ultimately, French colonialism.<sup>37</sup> The rise of communism within the country compounded on rising levels of nationalism and insurgencies ultimately led to the two engaging in armed conflict with one another. The First Indochina War not only led to the Vietnamese demonstrating superior military capabilities, but placed the situation in Vietnam at the forefront of the US's foreign policy.

Following the Second World War, the US were employing the policy of containment which directly meant that the underpinning of foreign involvement would be to halt the spread of communism to vulnerable nations.<sup>38</sup> In the midst of the Cold War, Vietnam falling under communist (essentially Soviet) influence posed challenges in such a hostile period of ideological competition. Therefore, when the Vietnamese had started outmaneuvering the French militarily, the US began keeping a close watch on the region. However, the French sought deeper US involvement by not only requesting aid and military assistance, but for a legitimate US presence in Vietnam.<sup>39</sup> Thus, after much deliberation the US began sending military advisors and even went so far as to placing a puppet regime in South Vietnam.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, the Vietnam War did not officially start until the declaration was made in August 1964, yet it is crucial to highlight the fact the US had been economically, politically, and militarily involved in Vietnam prior to the war.

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<sup>36</sup> Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945-1990* (Harper Perennial, 1991), 4-5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>38</sup> Max Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic History of a Tragic War* (William Collins, 2019), 60.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 92.

In seeing this history of colonial occupation, many Vietnamese viewed US involvement as merely a colonial power taking the place of another. Colonial and imperial origins in Vietnam underpin much of the harmful discourse seen from the Americans during the war. Although I do not have the room to discuss in-depth, the credibility behind US involvement has been questioned since its conception and still remains a contested topic with the historiography of the war today. Therefore, while not favouring specific arguments pertaining to the legitimacy of US involvement, a brief historical overview is necessary at this point in the thesis.

## **Thesis Structure**

### ***Chapter 1***

Following my introduction, chapter I of this thesis intends to conceptualize MPR and discuss it within the context of the Vietnam War by using the My Lai Massacre as a key case study. I utilize research conducted on MPR and LPR to discuss the significance of both in conflict. Furthermore, I apply the characteristics of MPR to the Vietnam War before discussing the My Lai Massacre to add context and a theoretical framework to my analysis. After a literature review and providing the groundwork for understanding the role wartime rape plays in conflict, I then discuss the My Lai Massacre and bring forth details pertaining to military conduct in Vietnam. I want to clarify, while the massacre remains a tragedy, I will not be discussing the widespread violence that occurred during it and rather will narrow my focus to MPR and mutilation. Additionally, I do not intend to discuss details beyond what has been provided in government reports and investigations in order to limit the objectification of Vietnamese suffering. The intention of chapter I is to provide a framework to MPR in war by discussing its underpinnings and characteristics and apply them to the My Lai Massacre in order to conduct an informed analysis. Furthermore, through this chapter, I demonstrate that while the massacre remains a pivotal example of MPR, it may not be the *only* example during the war.

### ***Chapter 2***

Chapter II of my thesis delves deeper into instances of MPR throughout the war and highlights its frequency as well as its strategic and systemic use in Vietnam.<sup>41</sup> I survey the cases highlighted in government documents and veteran interviews in order to gain a stronger

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<sup>41</sup> This thesis chapter essentially acts as my original contribution to the historiography of the war.

understanding of how MPR was conceived among troops, with specific attention to discourse constructed and used. More specifically, how discourse represented the normalization of MPR and the dehumanization of Vietnamese women as deserving targets. I bring forth evidence and analytically approach the role that MPR played during the Vietnam War and reiterate the fact it was not confined to the parameters of the My Lai Massacre. Understanding wartime rape as an individualistic act is not uncommon, yet directly leads to conception that MPR was not a structural issue during the war.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, in my thesis I adopt qualitative research methods to contribute original research to the historiography of the Vietnam War, by arguing that MPR indirectly became a tool for bonding and camaraderie among US troops. While there were acts of MPR that were for individual objectives and sexual gratification, there is a larger structural implication and role that MPR played during the war that has been overlooked in research. Furthermore, I utilize existing research conducted on MPR to discuss its correlation to ritualistic bonding to guide my argument. My thesis is political in nature and driven by a sense of retribution for the events which occurred throughout the Vietnam War. As time goes on, the war, more importantly the experiences of Vietnamese women, will remain overlooked if not discussed. So, I must counter the dominant narratives around the war to bring these experiences to the forefront in order to reveal the true nature of the Vietnam War, the role MPR plays, and what this means for the study of wartime rape moving forward.

## CHAPTER I: “Something Rather Dark and Bloody”<sup>42</sup>

This chapter aims to discuss the concept of rape by analyzing literature pertaining to wartime rape and MPR, alongside documents surrounding the My Lai Massacre to better understand the “nexus of sex, war, and power.”<sup>43</sup> Additionally, I provide a brief overview of the events that occurred prior to the My Lai Massacre, including an introduction to the unit responsible and the accompanying discourses and attitudes. After initial conceptualizations of MPR and the events prior to the massacre are established, I discuss the massacre briefly. Moreover, after introducing the massacre I intend to allocate special attention to acts of MPR and accompanied acts of sexualized violence, such as mutilation. Lastly, I address common counterarguments that reappear in literature as well as dialogue surrounding the massacre. While I have been careful in my selection and omission of details for this chapter, there still will be descriptions of graphic events which occurred during the massacre, but have only been included to portray the grim reality of what happened to avoid any confusion, misinterpretation, or inconsideration. My main objective for this chapter is to demonstrate the fact that MPR can be used for pursuing goals external from pure sexual gratification through the discussion of the My Lai Massacre.

Within the context of war and through the process of weaponization, rape has the ability to inflict both short-term and long-lasting damage, which transcends the boundaries of race, ethnicity, and most notably, gender.<sup>44</sup> Albeit the underlying motivations behind acts of rape as well as specific characteristics of attacks may lie beyond the scope of this thesis, there are still overarching trends present. More recently within literature and academia as a wider avenue for study, rape has been understood as being used to inflict domination rather than being used for purely individualistic, sexual needs. Further, almost every feminist conceptualization of rape will assert the claim that the “main functionality” of rape is the “exercise of power through

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<sup>42</sup> William Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1979), 4.

<sup>43</sup> Amanda Boczar, *An American Brothel: Sex and Diplomacy During the Vietnam War* (Cornell University Press, 2022), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Michèle Harway and James O’ Neil, *What Causes Men’s Violence Against Women* (Sage Publications Inc, 1999), 21.

violence.”<sup>45</sup> Now, this is not to say that rape is *not* an individualistic issue or that it is *not* committed for purely sexual needs, rather I am highlighting the fact that theories of rape have evolved to encompass wider understandings of rape which add significance to its presence and strategic use in conflict. As scholar Beverly McPhail stated, when acts of rape start to harm and impact numerous people, it no longer remains an individual issue and instead manifests as a “widespread political issue.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Literature Review**

As I have discussed previously, there remains a breadth of literature on the Vietnam War as well as wartime rape (especially following its categorization as a warcrime) yet there lacks an intersection of the two. The themes I have recognized in my review of the literature available has widened my understanding and appreciation for scholarship done on my topic, but also forced me to recognize the shortcomings. Due to the nature of military history as a male-dominated field and war traditionally being perceived as a male-centred act, I have found much more neglect of sexual violence in the historiography of the Vietnam War rather than feminist approaches to war. Thus, my survey of the literature intends to discuss the strengths and shortcoming of the themes that underpin my research.

### ***Biological Theories of Rape***

Brought forth by evolutionary biologists Randy and Nancy Thornhill, preliminary biological theories of wartime rape attribute its underlying motivations to biological factors, such as hormones or an inherent need for sexual gratification.<sup>47</sup> One of the main arguments in scientific disciplines such as biology, is that rape and other forms of sexual violence are not entirely socially constructed and are therefore dependent on hormones that “erupt uncontrollably” into the perceived “realm of culture.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, biological theories suggest

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<sup>45</sup> Beverly McPhail, “Feminist Framework Plus: Knitting Feminist Theories of Rape Etiology Into a Comprehensive Model,” *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 17, no. 3 (2016): 314, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26638128>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>47</sup> Michèle Harway and James O’ Neil, *What Causes Men’s Violence Against Women* (Sage Publications Inc, 1999), 64.

<sup>48</sup> Peggy Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus* (NYU Press, 1992), 83.



that acts of rape are motivated by “sexual starvation” or the need to be “satiated” through some sort of sexual activity.<sup>49</sup> These understandings of rape are narrow, outdated, and neglect the complexity of rape and its larger impacts as a strategic form of violence. Unfortunately, much of the language used to refer to the rapes during the Vietnam War echoed a similar narrative that is perpetrated by these theories. For example, many of those in higher up military positions had claimed that American troops had to “get it somewhere” when referring to sex during the war, indicative of an understanding that sex was a necessary activity.<sup>50</sup>

Further, one specific biological theory worth mentioning, due to its prevalence in literature, is Thornhill’s Rape Adaption Hypothesis. Essentially, the hypothesis claims that rape originates from a string of evolutionary processes to which men had to rape in order to achieve certain biological aims, such as reproduction.<sup>51</sup> While I do not have space to analyze the problematic factors of this theory, one factor of note is that this theory not only discredits the multi-faceted nature of rape but subsequently alleviates any blame directed towards the male perpetrator. Insinuating rape is a byproduct of human nature to which can only be understood as strictly being a biological phenomenon, seemingly justifying its use, is incredibly damaging to not only research on the topic, but to rape victims themselves. Further, categorizing rape this way ignores the true extent of harm it can cause, directly excusing and condoning its continual perpetration, which is argued by feminist scholarship.

### ***Psychological Theories of Rape***

Alternatively, as highlighted by Beverly McPhail, psychological theories attempting to explain the underlying motivations of rape differ from biological theories by stating that rape may be a “sexual act” but with the “primary service of non-sexual needs.”<sup>52</sup> The Massachusetts

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<sup>49</sup> Beverly McPhail, “Feminist Framework Plus: Knitting Feminist Theories of Rape Etiology Into a Comprehensive Model,” *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 17, no. 3 (2016): 315, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26638128>.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books, 1993), 129.

<sup>51</sup> Michèle Harway and James O’ Neil, *What Causes Men’s Violence Against Women* (Sage Publications Inc, 1999) 64.

<sup>52</sup> Beverly McPhail, “Feminist Framework Plus: Knitting Feminist Theories of Rape Etiology Into a Comprehensive Model,” *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 17, no. 3 (2016): 315, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26638128>.

Treatment Centre (MTC), a facility which directly deals with those who commit sex crimes, utilized quantitative research conducted to develop a typology of rapists and outlined four primary motivations for rape: “opportunity, pervasive anger, sexual gratification, and vindictiveness.”<sup>53</sup> I find that these primary motivations adequately address much of the motivations of rape, especially to those which occurred during the Vietnam War. However, it is important to note that while psychological theories may provide a more suitable framework for wartime rape than biological theories, the distinct characteristics studied are not mutually exclusive and rather work in tandem with a larger network of factors in conflict. Additionally, specific accounts of biological and psychological theories examined in isolation, may not address concerns expressed by other fields.

### ***Rape and Sexual Violence as a Continuum***

As highlighted by academic Cynthia Cockburn in her work in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, the sexual violence and gendered relationships we see in conflict are reflective of a “continuum” of this violence in everyday life.<sup>54</sup> This approach adds dimension to arguments outlined previously, and works in tandem with McPhail’s analysis, which agrees with the notion that rape is much more entrenched in our society than perceived. Cockburn centres her analysis among power relations within the global south and reiterates the fact that asymmetric relationships between wealthier, more powerful nations and vulnerable regions plays a large role in the relationship between those of men and women.<sup>55</sup> In turn, Cockburn argues that this unequal geopolitical relationship between societies “generates cultures of masculinities prone to violence.”<sup>56</sup> Cockburn’s analysis reinforces a common feminist approach to wartime rape which places the act in a wider context of gender-based violence, asserting that its underpinnings are not confined to the parameters of conflict. Furthermore, this analysis accurately depicts factors

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>54</sup> Cynthia Cockburn, “The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace,” in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, ed. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (University of California Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 44.

underpinning the situation in Vietnam, to which a seemingly more powerful nation engages in unequal relations with a vulnerable region, leading to adverse affects at the micro level.

### ***Wartime Rape***

Literature surrounding wartime rape has developed to analyze rape as an act that is not only for mere sexual gratification but is used as a strategic weapon in war. In her book, *Our Bodies Their Battlefield: What War Does to Women*, Christina Lamb argues that theories of war are inherently gendered, yet the experience of women often remains overlooked, leading to them being labelled as “passive victims.”<sup>57</sup> The continual neglect of the experiences of women in conflict, specifically being constantly subjected to sexual violence, often leads to this behaviour to continue without consequence. Much of Lamb’s book utilize examples of Yugoslavia and Rwanda, among other contemporary conflicts, to discuss this argument.<sup>58</sup> These examples and the evidence used gives credibility to the argument being made, especially in a climate to which wartime rape is becoming more understood as a weapon of war rather than a consequence of it. Dependent on the researcher, within this body of literature pertaining to wartime rape, the motivations are broad and plentiful, but fortunately do acknowledge the strategic objectives of using rape in conflict.

Similarly, Laura Sjoberg has added depth to this analysis by paying specific attention allocated to the role that gender norms play in the use of rape in conflict. War is seen as the pinnacle of the expression of masculinity and thus is used as an opportunity to express these norms through acts of rape, typically onto women in conflict zones. Sjoberg reiterated this phenomena in her book, *Gender, War, & Conflict* by suggesting that gender roles in conflict are often characterized by certain attributes; masculinity being associated with rationality, strength, aggression, independence, and the ability to protect.<sup>59</sup> Whereas traits associated with femininity represent the antithesis of male attributes, such as physical weakness, passivity, and requiring protection.<sup>60</sup> Many scholars who discuss the formation of gender roles in conflict attest to the

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<sup>57</sup> Christina Lamb, *Our Bodies Their Battlefield: What War Does to Women* (William Collins, 2020), 148.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 148

<sup>59</sup> Laura Sjoberg, *Gender, War, & Conflict* (Polity Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 6.

fact that placing genders in these binary roles in war leads to unequal power relations between the two genders, and places women in a one-dimensional category without the agency to possess other traits. Furthermore, long-standing gendered conceptions of women and men in war neglects the nuance, complexity, and significance of individual experiences of wartime rape and can indirectly lead to a lack of acknowledgment of how these acts impact individual victims differently. Therefore, Sjoberg's contribution strengthens preexisting understandings of wartime rape by placing it in a theoretical context to explain its occurrence.

One of the most prominent environments in which rape occurs where it is normalized, condoned, and strategically used, is in conflict. The presence of rape can be attributed to numerous factors, yet the literature I have surveyed for this project suggests that conflict produces higher levels of militarized masculinity and the need for dominance.<sup>61</sup> I am not stating that there is something "inherent" about men that causes them to commit acts of rape; instead, I am merely suggesting that there remains an evident linkage between masculinity and war, which perpetuates wartime sexual violence.<sup>62</sup>

Scholar Dara Cohen and her book, *Rape During Civil War*, synthesizes Lamb and Sjoberg's positions to construct a broader approach to wartime rape. Cohen argues that in war, rape can be used as a mechanism to assert dominance, inflict harm, and is an act where "norms of masculinity are best expressed."<sup>63</sup> However, Cohen's work takes a stance that somewhat contrasts from previous scholars, such as Sjoberg, due to her lessened responsibility placed on men. Additionally Cohen suggests that wartime rape "augments the humiliation" of the victim and inflicts continuous suffering upon not only victims, but families and nations.<sup>64</sup> As I have stated previously, our scholarly understanding of wartime rape has only recently been developed due to traction gained during the events witnessed in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Yet, it is important

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<sup>61</sup> Militarized masculinity is a term that is used to describe the process in which traits of masculinity, as outlined by Sjoberg, are both proven and gained in conflict, see: Maya Eichler, "Militarized Masculinities in International Relations," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 21, no. 1 (2014): 81, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24591032>.

<sup>62</sup> Laura Sjoberg, *Gender, War, & Conflict* (Polity Press, 2014), 77.

<sup>63</sup> Dara Cohen *Rape During Civil War* (Cornell University Press, 2016), 30.

<sup>64</sup> Irina Astashkevich, *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917 to 1921* (Academic Studies Press, 2018), 40.

to use contemporary frameworks regarding wartime rape to previous conflicts, in order to analyze similar trends of sexual violence. Therefore, as rape remains both a prominent and widespread characteristic of war, research is imperative to understanding its occurrence and use.

Recent research conducted by Cohen, suggests that while wartime rape may possess similar motivations behind its occurrence in domestic contexts, there may be a distinct correlation between the level of violence wartime rape entails and the strength of cohesion that emerges.<sup>65</sup> In other words, there seems to be a concerning relationship between the severity and publicity of an assault and its strategic use for developing camaraderie within military units. I find this analysis to adequately address the situation at hand as it reiterates the common notion that wartime sexual violence may vary in severity due to its external environment. However, this research may prove to be limited due to its specific focus on civil wars rather than conventional war, as the two possess differing characteristics, forms of violence, and actors.

In tandem with Cohen's analysis, Claudia Card argues that the "fundamental aim" of rape is to "display, communicate, and produced or maintain social dominance over victims."<sup>66</sup> The deliberate and public humiliation of female victims in acts of wartime rape is often turned into a spectacle by perpetrators which reflects a normalized encouragement of this type of behaviour among units. Furthermore, the normalization of wartime rape through the form of public display may prompt involvement from troops external from the initial perpetrator, leading to a category of rape known as MPR; this variation of rape is the central focus of this thesis due to its prevalence during the Vietnam War.

### **Conceptual Understandings of Multiple Perpetrator Rape (MPR)**

To reiterate the definition provided previously, MPR is a type of rape committed by at least two or more perpetrators, with its use in conflict being attributed to the primary aim of developing camaraderie. One overarching trend that distinguishes MPR from that of LPR is that it often includes other forms of sexual violence, such as mutilation, as well as higher rates of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>66</sup> Irina Astashkevich, *Gendered Violence: Jewish Women in the Pogroms of 1917 to 1921* (Academic Studies Press, 2018), 40.

completion due to the increased inability of the victim to resist the attack.<sup>67</sup> In conflict, MPR manifests into a public display of the assertion dominance and tends to solidify social status within military units committing the act. Further, the strategic use of MPR may increase in frequency and severity in situations where units lack initial cohesion or in circumstances where soldiers are vying from approval within a unit.<sup>68</sup> This cohesion is constructed in-part both by the brutality and publicity of the attack as well as the collective responsibility of the perpetrators which emerges.

While the severity and details of each MPR may differ, many acts of MPR follow a structure which entails a model in which someone, typically of status, initiates the attack with others following suit, ensuring the completion of the bonding ritual.<sup>69</sup> The initiator, commonly referred to as the “group leader” in research, is typically someone possessing higher status or popularity.<sup>70</sup> During the Vietnam War, this possession of status is evident as many MPR included the involvement of GIs. The group leader constructs the model of attack which co-offenders can follow in order to gain not only individual sexual gratification, but the guarantee of social positioning and homogeneity within the group.<sup>71</sup> The involvement of senior military personnel as group leaders in instances of MPR during the war led to a normalization and inherent permissibility of the attacks, leading to higher levels of completion and decreased levels of regulation.

### **The Soldier Experience**

In conflicts such as the Vietnam War, in part due to the introduction of the draft alongside other factors, American units were predominantly composed of young and inexperienced males. Furthermore, these characteristics and the inherent issues they posed were exacerbated by the

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<sup>67</sup> Teresa da Silva, Jessica Woodhams and Leigh Harkins, “Heterogeneity Within Multiple Perpetrator Rapes: A National Comparison of Lone, Duo, and 3+ Perpetrator Rape,” *Sexual Abuse* 26, no. 6 (2013): 506, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063213497805>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 507

<sup>69</sup> Louise Porter, “Participative Leadership and Hierarchical Structures in Multiple Perpetrator Rape: Replicating and Extending a Scale of Influence Among Offenders,” *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 25, no. 3 (2019): 227, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2019.1617903>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>71</sup> Karen Franklin, “Enacting Masculinity: Antigay Violence and Group Rape as Participatory Theater,” *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 1, no. 2 (2004): 28, <http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/>.

environment of the Vietnam War. This environment not only included harsh physical conditions such as temperature and terrain, but psychological factors due to the nature of guerrilla warfare.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, there remained a sense of vulnerability among troops, which weakened the overall strength of units. Thus, there was a need for some sort of mechanism which not only strengthened the American presence in Vietnam, but solidified camaraderie and cohesion. While there remains a gap in research regarding MPR during the Vietnam War, one integral example that is typically cited in literature is the My Lai Massacre; an event in which this vulnerability, need for cohesion, and masculinity was at the forefront of strategy.

### **The My Lai Massacre**

#### ***Charlie's Company Pre-Massacre***<sup>73</sup>

Before discussing such a pivotal event such as the My Lai massacre, it is vital to introduce the unit at the centre of it, known as Charlie's Company (CC).<sup>74</sup> Partially trained and led by Captain Ernest "Mad Dog" Medina, CC was thought to be comprised of some of the most "well-equipped" and prepared American units to serve in Vietnam.<sup>75</sup> However, CC lacked critical education and never underwent the entirety of their training period in Hawaii, due to the ongoing escalation of the war and the continual need for military assistance.<sup>76</sup> In seeing this reality, the company once seen as a superior force during the war was quickly referred to as a "grunt unit" whom knew better how to "blindly follow" orders instead of questioning them, which forced the company to "fall into an easy pattern of violence."<sup>77</sup> Drawing from veteran interviews and literature, CC was alleged to possess some of the "worst rapists" among troops in Vietnam; a claim which can be attributed to numerous factors.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See: Laquer, Walter. *Guerrilla: A Historical And Critical Study*. Routledge, 2019.

<sup>73</sup> It is important to note that the initial task force was comprised of three companies who were present during the massacre, however CC became the centre of investigation and public attention, hence my choice to only discuss CC.

<sup>74</sup> Seymour Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (Random House, 1970), 16.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books, 1993), 129

The lack of training compounded on a lower age demographic meant that CC was susceptible to an inherent dysfunction and weak intracompany ties. Furthermore, the lack of unification that plagued CC prior to their arrival in Vietnam was due to the demanding nature of the war, which required large numbers of troops to be sent constantly. Moreover, the constant replenishment of troops meant that CC lacked a fundamental sense of familiarity and cohesion among the unit.<sup>79</sup> Evidently, there was an explicit opportunity to strengthen social ties within the unit, by whatever means necessary, even if it meant the utilization of Vietnamese civilians.

In order to target Vietnamese civilians and to decrease the weight of these acts in a soldier's mind, there has to be a level of dehumanization present, which was directly fostered by Medina's alleged public hatred for Vietnamese people.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, this hostility towards Vietnamese people, combatant or non-combatant, led to a company-wide dehumanization campaign. However, it is crucial to note that this distain was not a characteristic exclusive to Medina, as many of those in similar military positions within and around the company shared similar narratives; these narratives were so widespread, dehumanization and derogatory ideals about Vietnamese people were implemented into training exercises prior to CC's arrival in Vietnam.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, while these dehumanizing rhetorics were not officially infiltrated into military strategy on paper, verbally, this attitude seeped into everyday conduct during the war. For example, a private from Texas had claimed that, "no one sees the Vietnamese as people, therefore it doesn't matter what you do to them."<sup>82</sup> This statement is indicative of the ideology at the forefront of CC's methods of operating prior to the massacre, which was only reinforced by Medina to construct a unified company in the face of war.

### ***Fostering Resentment Among Troops***

Alongside the discourse constructed within CC surrounding the status of Vietnamese civilians, an event which triggered even further distain, was the detonation of a VC booby trap a

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<sup>79</sup> William Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1979), 26.

<sup>80</sup> Seymour Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (Random House, 1970), 17.

<sup>81</sup> Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism During the Vietnam War Era* (Cornell University Press), 257.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books, 1993), 60.



few days prior on March 14, 1968. While conducting a standard sweep of a heavily forested area, members of CC including Sergeant George Cox, who was “well-loved,” triggered a VC booby trap which resulted in his death and the additional injuring of other soldiers.<sup>83</sup> Medina not only accredited the trap to the VC but directly blamed villagers in the surrounding area, without any concrete evidence.<sup>84</sup> Allegedly, Medina directing blame towards unsuspecting villagers was not an uncommon practice, which only strengthened the perceived correlation between villagers and involvement with the VC. After the booby trap, troops allegedly entered the nearby village and terrorized civilians by inflicting bodily harm and murder.<sup>85</sup> Thus, Medina made the executive decision that CC needed to conduct a search-and-destroy mission on a village within close vicinity of the trap: Son My village and its subsequent hamlet system.

While booby traps were not uncommon during the war nor were they a surprise due to the nature of guerrilla warfare, CC used this specific instance as the underpinning to inflict greater harm. Medina capitalized off of the resentment that emerged following the death of Sergeant Cox, with soldier Henry Bedrock claiming that the company were upset and were seeking “revenge.”<sup>86</sup> Verbalizing the mission as an opportunity for revenge indicates a lack of not only proper military conduct, but provides insight on the functioning of CC surrounding the treatment of Vietnamese civilians. Conveniently, when briefing troops on the upcoming mission on Son My, Medina left out critical details on how troops were meant to distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, which meant that the treatment villagers faced was up to the discretion of young, untrained troops with a need for revenge.<sup>87</sup>

### ***Before the Massacre***

The upcoming mission focused on the Son My village was intended to be a standard search-and-destroy mission. Furthermore, these types of missions were not deliberately meant to cause harm to non-combatants and were rather used as mechanisms to eliminate the enemy's

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<sup>83</sup> Seymour Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (Random House, 1970), 35.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>87</sup> William Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1979), 170.

“storing of weapons, ammunition, and other military equipment.”<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the specific objective and motivation guiding the search-and-destroy mission targeted towards Son My was not in alignment with instructed conduct in Vietnam. This violation of standard proceedings through the framing of the mission as one meant for revenge, created a dangerous situation that would be soon reflected in the acts seen during the massacre.

As I will demonstrate moving forward, CC not only violated guidelines outlined in standard military procedure in Vietnam, but strategically used Medina’s vagueness to inflict animalistic types of violence onto unsuspected villagers. Furthermore, the presence of an institutionally implemented hatred and racial prejudice against the Vietnamese people as a whole only worsened this infliction of violence. The perception of the villagers alongside the mission itself constructed by discourse and behaviour demonstrated a complete lack of consideration for Vietnamese civilians, warranting behaviour such as MPR, mutilation, and murder. Prior to the operation, officer Herbert Carter had claimed that once troops arrived at Son My, they were under the impression it was “open season” and once they left, “nothing would be living.”<sup>89</sup> With this absence of instruction and presence of resentment and hatred, one can see there being an opportunity in which these factors would manifest themselves into unnecessary harm onto Vietnamese civilians, and specifically Vietnamese women.

### ***The Massacre***

Located in the lush highlands of the Quang Ngai province, Son My village and its subsequent hamlet system, was a site reflective of Vietnamese culture and everyday customs. The village was made up of four subhamlets which included Tu Cung, My Khe, Co Luy, and My Lai.<sup>90</sup> On American military maps, the village was referred to as “Pinkville” due to the fact it was deemed as a “hotspot” for VC activity; allegedly acting as a “logistical support base” for the 48th Local Force of VC.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, prior to “Operation Pinkville,” Medina and Lieutenant

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books, 1993), 129.

<sup>90</sup> Joseph Goldstein, Burke Marshall and Jack Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up: Beyond the Reach of Law?* (The Free Press, 1976), 59.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 44.

William Calley had advised troops that they would be met with an onslaught of firepower and to anticipate high levels of VC sympathizers.<sup>92</sup> Yet, as troops descended upon the village on the morning of March 16, 1968, there was no indication of VC presence or affiliation and rather was occupied by elderly Vietnamese civilians alongside women and children. Regardless, troops embarked on a destructive campaign of murder and sexual violence.

### ***MPR During the Massacre***

While CC engaged in acts of brutality against Vietnamese civilians, with approximately over 500 civilians killed within four hours, this thesis is focused on the unprecedented levels of MPR during the massacre and the accompanying mutilation.<sup>93</sup> The instances of MPR were not only done publicly in front of other soldiers, but in certain areas of the village which would expose family members and villagers to this harrowing display. Research suggests that acts of MPR often begin outside and are then moved to an inside location due to fears of getting caught, yet the prevalence of MPR committed outside during the massacre indicates a lack of this fear, leading to a more considerable consideration of how MPR was normalized within CC.<sup>94</sup>

Arguably, one of the main reasons as to why troops did not fear getting caught was due to the fact that numerous GIs and those in authority positions either initiated, encouraged, or participated in the rapes.<sup>95</sup> Further, this involvement was reflected in the public display of the acts, which communicated a ritualistic opportunity for cohesion through the completion of the act; many soldiers allegedly waited in line during the massacre to “get in on the action.”<sup>96</sup> For example, women and girls who were already being raped by numerous servicemen had lines of additional servicemen waiting to participate, oftentimes exceeding ten.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, the

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<sup>92</sup> Claude Cookman, “An American Atrocity: The My Lai Massacre Concretized in a Victim’s Face,” *The Journal of American History* 94, no. 1 (2007): 154, <https://academic.oup.com/jah/article/94/1/154/843037>.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>94</sup> Teresa da Silva, Jessica Woodhams and Leigh Harkins, “Heterogeneity Within Multiple Perpetrator Rapes: A National Comparison of Lone, Duo, and 3+ Perpetrator Rape,” *Sexual Abuse* 26, no. 6 (2013): 515, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063213497805>.

<sup>95</sup> Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books, 1993), 80.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 129.

presence of additional servicemen to the initial core group of offenders was not to put a stop to this behaviour but rather used to aid in the completion of the act by holding the victim down or joining in.<sup>98</sup> While numbers differ based on a plethora of factors beyond the scope of this thesis, a legal estimate reflected in the Peers Investigation indicates around two or three definite instances of MPR. Yet, through conducting research based on interviews and eyewitness testimony, it seems as though this recorded number is not reflective of the extent to which MPR was present during the massacre. Thus, one can see that MPR most definitely played a role during the massacre and its occurrence can be accredited to its normalization due to widespread involvement.

### ***Mutilation During the Massacre***

A characteristic of MPR suggested by research is the fact it is accompanied by higher levels of other forms of violence, such as mutilation, which is a correlation evident during the My Lai Massacre.<sup>99</sup> Additional research surrounding group bonding and socialization indicates that the severity and brutality of these acts can determine the strength of cohesion that emerges. During the massacre, Vietnamese women and girls were sodomized with objects such as weapons, which caused immense bodily harm, internally and externally, leading to both immediate or secondary death.<sup>100</sup> Further, Vietnamese women had body parts slit or “ripped open” with pocketknives or other weapons and were found on the ground with the CC logo carved into their chests.<sup>101</sup> These acts of mutilation indicate not only a form of physical domination but to also signal some sort of unified and collective responsibility for the violence.

Thus, the level of violence and severity of harm seen during the massacre caused by the collective involvement of troops contributed to processes of strengthening camaraderie and maintaining social status. Furthermore, much of the events which took place were celebrated among troops, leading to further validation and encouragement of these acts. Most notably, this

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>99</sup> Karen Franklin, “Enacting Masculinity: Antigay Violence and Group Rape as Participatory Theater,” *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 1, no. 2 (2004): 29, <http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/>.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books, 1993), 80.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 129.

celebratory encouragement is best displayed by the term “double veterans,” which is the title of this thesis.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, one can deduct that the infliction of unnecessary harm towards Vietnamese women through MPR and mutilation strengthened camaraderie and cohesion among CC members during the massacre.

### ***Conceptualizations of My Lai***

While the My Lai Massacre has undergone numerous investigations and subsequent legal proceedings, at the time and occasionally within current dialogues, it is deemed as a singularity in the greater context of the war. The massacre was essentially labelled as a search-and-destroy mission which had gone wrong due to the actions of a few individuals who did not reflect the behaviour and conduct of the military in Vietnam as a whole.<sup>103</sup> Although the massacre did not come to the public’s attention until 1969, the US military repeatedly overlooked the severity of the massacre by neglecting statements from veterans and even failed to conduct proper investigations into the matter.<sup>104</sup> One of the main reasons the massacre and acts of MPR were overlooked both publicly and privately was not only their exclusion from warcrime classification, but also the way Vietnamese victimhood was constructed.

Vietnamese women who were victims of MPR during the massacre were not considered to be legitimate victims due to racial, ideological, and misogynistic factors. For example, these women were deemed “willing participants” alongside other derogatory language by authorities in Vietnam, which seemingly justified the acts and removed any wrongdoing.<sup>105</sup> Further, the verbal construction of the narrative that these women were not only willing participants but essentially the “spoils of war” generalized Vietnamese women and essentially condoned the acts which occurred.<sup>106</sup> The lack of acknowledging Vietnamese victimhood directly removes blame from American troops who inflicted this harm, a notion that will be further elaborated on in Chapter II.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>103</sup> Joseph Goldstein, Burke Marshall and Jack Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up: Beyond the Reach of Law?* (The Free Press, 1976), 200.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 315-316.

<sup>105</sup> Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (Picador, 2013), 169.

<sup>106</sup> Christina Lamb, *Our Bodies Their Battlefield: What War Does to Women* (William Collins), 148.

## Counterarguments

While conceptions of the My Lai massacre may continuously be up for interpretation and subject to personal experience and bias, there remains counterarguments to what occurred which are in direct opposition to factual evidence. Based on surveying the literature, conducting research, and from general discussion with peers, I have anticipated possible arguments that seek to essentially provide a justification for what had happened. The massacre is commonly deemed a mission gone wrong due to a lack of training or communication, which has subsequently removed blame from perpetrators and overlooks the preconditions to the massacre.<sup>107</sup>

Additionally, if one accepts the fact that soldiers were equipped with physical aids to prepare themselves alongside training, an argument is often made that training or physical aids may not provide much use in the face of an active firefight. Additionally, the last notable trend I have observed is the fact that the massacre is often considered being perpetrated by a few bad apples whom exploited the situation for personal sexual gain. While this may not be entirely untrue, it neglects direct testimony and evidence that suggests the massacre was indicative of broader trends and behaviour during the war.

### *Lack of Training*

As stated previously, one of the counterarguments I have encountered in scholarship and to my own research is that troops just genuinely lacked training or were unsure of how to deal with civilians in a guerrilla environment.<sup>108</sup> While this is somewhat credible due to the lack of training CC had received prior to their deployment, the existence of conduct handbooks remains a rebuttal to this counterargument. During the war, especially during the My Lai Massacre, troops would have had the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) “Enemy in Your Hands” pocket card, which would have provided distinct instruction on how to deal with non-combatants in tactical operations.<sup>109</sup> This specific guide outlined that Vietnamese civilians, even if there were suspicions of VC affiliation, were not to be “tortured, mutilated, or degraded” while

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<sup>107</sup> Joseph Goldstein, Burke Marshall and Jack Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up: Beyond the Reach of Law?* (The Free Press, 1976), 204.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>109</sup> William Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1979), 265.

in the hands of American troops.<sup>110</sup> More specifically, female civilians were expected to be treated with “all due respect due to her sex,” which were instructions evidently ignored by CC during the massacre.<sup>111</sup> Instead of utilizing a key resource pertaining to proper conduct during the mission, CC embarked on a four hour campaign of bloodshed and sexual butchery, which in turn acted as a pivotal opportunity for bonding among the unit. Furthermore, while the lack of training argument may possess some credibility due to Medina’s vagueness, it quickly erodes due to the presence of guides and secondary instructions.

### ***Active Firefights***

Arguably, when soldiers are engaging in an active firefight with the enemy, there is reason to assume that accessing these guides is nearly impossible. Yet, when troops entered Son My village, they were met with no return fire which has been highlighted by numerous testimonies and investigations.<sup>112</sup> Thus, the counterargument is constructed around the fact that CC would have had lacked an opportunity to access handbooks and field guides while under enemy fire. This was not the case. As demonstrated within the congressional investigation of the massacre, troops would have possessed ample opportunity to examine and follow the handbooks and approach the situation using the correct procedure.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, one can conclude that the behaviour displayed during the My Lai Massacre possessed motive and worked to violate instructed military conduct. Additionally, the behaviour and neglect of the directions presented in the handbook might also bring forth questions about the normalization of this violence towards civilians.

### ***Bad Apples***

Lastly, one of the most common counterarguments that is often reoccurring in discussions about not only the Vietnam War but atrocities in conflict, is that the violence was inflicted by a

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>112</sup> Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books, 1993), 107.

<sup>113</sup> William Peers, *The My Lai Inquiry* (W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1979), 172.

few individuals who did not represent the military in its entirety.<sup>114</sup> While I agree that many of the rapes were committed by individuals with individual objectives during the massacre and that not every single person committed an act of rape, the overarching similarity among the cases seen was that they were done publicly and with numerous perpetrators to promote cohesion within the unit. The sheer evidence not only during the massacre but throughout the war, of rape, violence towards civilians, dehumanization, and of the construction of Vietnamese women is indicative of a larger issue than a few bad apples. Furthermore, categorizing the mission as a tactical operation that went wrong due to the exploitation of a few individuals dismisses the complexities and structural issues at play, ones that this thesis aims to dissect. MPR during the Vietnam War was not confined to the parameters of Son My village and was rather a normalized and frequent occurrence during the war for strategic cohesion among units.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, through examining research pertaining to MPR in conflict and the events during the My Lai Massacre, MPR played a prominent role in creating camaraderie and strengthening social ties within CC. MPR is often more violent and executed publicly with aims of achieving unity through collective guilt among perpetrators and witnesses. Seeing the acts of sheer brutality committed during the massacre by a dysfunctional and disjointed “grunt unit” this research proves to be credible.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, the conceptualization of the massacre as a singularity is one that is all too common in the historiography of the war. Yet, it is evident that the behaviour shown stems from a deeper and more structural incentive to which punishment, prosecution, and impermissibility were all ruled out. The My Lai Massacre and the levels of MPR and brutality associated with it, was indicative of larger structural issues in Vietnam and merely provided a snapshot of how US troops were functioning throughout each village, all across the country. While difficult to acknowledge, broadening our perspective regarding the ability to inflict atrocity and mass violence allows our conceptions of such events to be analytically strengthened.

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<sup>114</sup> Joseph Goldstein, Burke Marshall and Jack Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up: Beyond the Reach of Law?* (The Free Press, 1976), 206.

<sup>115</sup> Seymour Hersh, *My Lai 4: A Report on the Massacre and Its Aftermath* (Random House, 1970), 18.



## CHAPTER II: Boots on the Ground

*“Every brigade sized unit has their My Lai Hidden someplace.”<sup>116</sup>*

### Introduction

Currently, MPR remains one of the most understudied forms of sexual assault, especially in the historiography of the Vietnam War.<sup>117</sup> A lack of research in both fields is not a reflection of a lack of frequency or importance but rather indicates a clear gap to which this thesis aims to contribute to. As demonstrated previously, the My Lai Massacre, regardless of its legal status, still remains a contested event around the issue of rape during the war. Furthermore, if My Lai and the notion of wartime rape in Vietnam *is* acknowledged, it is often deemed as a singularity, without correlation to any larger systematic issues. Yet, as I demonstrate throughout this chapter, sexual violence in the form of MPR was a frequent, systemic, and strategic feature of the entire Vietnam War.

First, I discuss the frequency of MPR directed towards male victims to reiterate not only the overwhelming presence of this type of violence during the war but to also analyze socializing factors within these instances. Second, I examine the theorized relationship between troops and women within villages to further understand the construction of discourse surrounding the perceived entitlement to these women. Then, I highlight evidence of these frequent instances of MPR and provide further analysis on why these acts occurred and what larger implications does this have for our understanding of the war. While this chapter does not possess the same volume of historical background as the previous chapter, it synthesizes discussions on the massacre with larger trends observed during the war.

### Literature Review

#### *Colonialism and Wartime Rape*

Scholar Catharine MacKinnon contributed to preexisting debates by offering an approach that focuses on the intersection of race and gender surrounding wartime rape. This breadth of literature places aspects of colonialism and imperialism at the forefront of conceptualizations of

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<sup>116</sup> Marcel Burni, “Excessive Violence in a War Without Fronts: Explaining Atrocities in South Vietnam (1965-1973),” in *Genocide and Mass Violence in Asia: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Frank Jacob (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 129.

<sup>117</sup> Karen Franklin, “Enacting Masculinity: Antigay Violence and Group Rape as Participatory Theater,” *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 1, no. 2 (2004): 28, <http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/>.

wartime rape and attributes much of its motivations to racial relationships.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, MacKinnon takes previous research of wartime rape and provides a new dimension to which this type of violence is multi-faceted with numerous factors to consider. Utilizing this literature, one could apply it to different conflicts in alternative colonial contexts and examine the intersecting factors at hand.

Due to the fact the American war in Vietnam was a canvas of a longstanding history of colonial and imperial relationships, this area of literature is fundamental to understanding sexual violence during the conflict. I find this approach to be refreshing and incredibly needed in the field of wartime rape as many previous approaches, albeit funding and political context, often neglect the inclusion of race and colonialism into analysis of sexual violence. It has been argued by MacKinnon that the “colonization” of women’s bodies in conflict is often “symbolic of the territory which these troops occupy.”<sup>119</sup> Thus, it is vital that examinations of wartime rape include approaches that consider prominent factors such as colonialism and racial relationships.

### ***Multiple Perpetrator Rape***

Depending on the conflict, MPR can be the dominant form of rape and possesses numerous motivations and can serve multiple objectives.<sup>120</sup> A common trend I have noticed in the literature, mainly proposed by Elisabeth Wood, is that MPR may be used to pursue the primary aim of asserting dominance and building cohesion among perpetrators, in male-dominated institutions such as the military. While I acknowledge that this is not the only type of rape used in war nor is it only for assertions of dominance or cohesion, I find that its strategic underpinnings differ from motivations behind LPR, which is worth investigating further.

In conjunction with quantitative data, much of the literature presented by Wood alongside Cohen, suggests that MPR is more brutal than peacetime rape and that the level of brutality which accompanies an act of MPR will invoke different levels of camaraderie among

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<sup>118</sup> Catharine Mackinnon, *Are Women Human?: And Other International Dialogues* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 29.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>120</sup> Elisabeth Wood, “Multiple Perpetrator Rape During War,” in *Handbook on the Study of Multiple Perpetrator Rape: A Multidisciplinary Response to an International Problem*, ed Miranda Horvath and Jessica Woodhams (Routledge, 2013), 133.

perpetrators.<sup>121</sup> I value this approach to wartime rape as it separates itself from constructing MPR as a consequence of human nature and rather widens dialogue to consider how MPR can be used as a distinct military tactic in conflict. Unfortunately, attributing acts of rape to human nature and external factors such as hormones and evolution is still present in discussions around MPR in war. However, Wood investigates this long-standing trope by separating the act of sex from the act of rape, broadening our understanding of the purpose of this type of violence in conflict. Thus, it is vital that research is conducted and brought to the forefront to counter this long-standing and narrow understanding.

Within research regarding MPR there remains internal debate among researchers, such as Wood, on whether or not MPR belongs in a separate category than other forms of sexual violence or if it aligns with predetermined understandings and definitions of rape.<sup>122</sup> Behind this debate is often data utilized from acts of domestic MPR which includes factors that may differ from that of the majority of domestic LPR. For example, literature surrounding wartime rape often places different acts into categories such as opportunistic or strategic rape (titles which reflect their distinct meanings) yet the fluidity and uncertainty around MPR alongside additional factors relating to the amount of perpetrators fails to fall under one or more of these distinct categorizations.<sup>123</sup> Using these definitions as the *only* way to analyze wartime rape may lead to the assumption that those inflicting MPR may only have objectives that align with specific academic definitions, which is evidently not possible. Thus, within approaches to MPR and as suggested in the literature, there should be a separate definition and field of research for MPR as it inherently differentiates itself from other forms of rape.<sup>124</sup> In agreement, I believe that the

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<sup>121</sup> Dara Cohen *Rape During Civil War* (Cornell University Press, 2016), 19.

<sup>122</sup> Elisabeth Wood, "Multiple Perpetrator Rape During War," in *Handbook on the Study of Multiple Perpetrator Rape: A Multidisciplinary Response to an International Problem*, ed Miranda Horvath and Jessica Woodhams (Routledge, 2013), 136.

<sup>123</sup> Roland Littlewood, "Military Rape," *Anthropology Today* 13, no. 2 (1997): 10, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2783037>.

<sup>124</sup> Elisabeth Wood, "Multiple Perpetrator Rape During War," in *Handbook on the Study of Multiple Perpetrator Rape: A Multidisciplinary Response to an International Problem*, ed Miranda Horvath and Jessica Woodhams (Routledge, 2013), 136.

complexities and differences of MPR as well as its objectives can be better analyzed and acknowledged with its own definition or area of study.

### ***Takeaways***

In seeing the evidence presented in the previous chapter in conjunction with literature, it is not naive to conclude that sexual violence, specifically MPR, ran rampant during the Vietnam War. With attacks being not only utilized for individual sexual needs, but for larger socializing objectives such as cohesion, it is clear as to why MPR may have been perceived by troops as “virtually SOP”<sup>125</sup> Through interviews conducted after the war, troops had alleged that MPR was so common that they learned the “sound” of it, which occurred almost “every other day.”<sup>126</sup> Additionally, the constructed discourse surrounding the war indirectly attached a sexual undertone to it, with Saigon being referred to as a “whorehouse” and Vietnam as a whole referred to as a “brothel.”<sup>127</sup> Characterizing the physical country of Vietnam as a symbolic site for sex leads to a psychological correlation between Vietnamese women and male entitlement. Furthermore, while Vietnamese women were the core target of American sexual violence, our understanding of the far reaching impact of MPR can be strengthened by analyzing male rape during the war.

### **Male Rape During the Vietnam War**

Before unpacking the role MPR played during the Vietnam War, it is vital to allocate attention to the impact that MPR had on male troops stationed in Vietnam. Male rape is often overlooked in literature regarding wartime rape with men being primarily constructed as perpetrators rather than victims. While I acknowledge the predominance of male perpetrators and female victims, especially in the case of the Vietnam War, highlighting this phenomenon as one that surpasses gendered constraints directly widens the field of research on this topic. Thus, while this thesis places an emphasis on Vietnamese women and girls subject to this violence, I would like to briefly address the frequency of male rape during the war.

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<sup>125</sup> Gina Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* (State University of New York Press, 2010), 57.

<sup>126</sup> Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (Picador, 2013), 167.

<sup>127</sup> Gina Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* (State University of New York Press, 2010), 50.

### ***Characteristics of Male MPR***

While acts of rape, whether they be with one or numerous perpetrators, may differ in their motivations, research suggests certain trends pertaining to male rape. Men who are subject to acts of rape often suffer a greater loss of gender identity and sexual orientation, as the violation of consent that occurs during rape seems to challenge traditionally understood male gender norms such as dominance and strength.<sup>128</sup> In addition, men may experience larger amounts of shock after the initial attack due to the perceived sense of protection often associated with their gender.<sup>129</sup> For example, women are often accustomed to the higher possibility of rape and are therefore anticipatory of it occurring whenever, yet men do not share the same level of concern and thus will occasionally possess higher levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following an attack.<sup>130</sup> Numerous veterans who had fought in the Vietnam War suffered from this disorder due to experiences of being raped in places such as foxholes, by fellow servicemen; this phenomenon speaks to the frequency of rape and its normalization during the conflict.<sup>131</sup>

As I highlight numerous times throughout this thesis, MPR is used to display dominance and perpetuate male gender roles. Yet, if there was a high frequency of rape against male soldiers, who are often understood to possess these gender roles, the question arises: why would MPR be used against men to perpetuate characteristics that they *already* possess due to their gender? While a specific answer to this complex question may be hard to develop, it is evident in research that many men who were perceived to not possess these characteristics were the targets of this type of violence; in other words, men who were considered to have similar traits that would be attributed to female Vietnamese victims.

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<sup>128</sup> Jennie Leskela, Michael Dieperink and Cynthia Kok, "Group Treatment with Sexually Assaulted Male Veterans: A Year in Review," *Group* 25, no. 4 (2001): 305, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41718986>.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

To reiterate, during acts of MPR a group leader will often direct the assault with co-offenders making the choice whether or not to conform to homogeneity and join.<sup>132</sup> Troops who did not participate were often deemed as “queer” and feminine; essentially as possessing traits traditionally associated with the female gender.<sup>133</sup> The heterosexual concept of celebrating the domination of women in conflict, essentially objectifying them is integral to military institutions and oftentimes implemented into training.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, male troops who were an obstacle to this universally understood status quo, threatened the patriarchal foundations of military conduct in Vietnam and ultimately prevented bonding. In seeing this violation of normalcy, these soldiers would come to face a similar infliction of violence that was inflicted onto Vietnamese women.

### ***Constructions of Male Victimhood***

Men are more likely to be victims of MPR in conflict, which follow a similar assault structure and construction of victimhood to that of women.<sup>135</sup> As with female victims of MPR, there are increased levels of violence that accompany the assaults, often with the use of weapons to commit acts of sodomy.<sup>136</sup> However, one difference I have seen in my research is that during the Vietnam War is that assaults on females seemed to be accompanied by increased levels of bodily harm and death. Although individual assaults may differ on the inclusion of these specificities or in terms of the severity, MPR among men and women in conflict share similar features.

Another similar feature among MPR between men and women during the Vietnam War and more widely in society, is the construction of victimhood. Due to the fact men who were targeted allegedly displayed non-masculine and non-heterosexual traits, they were often

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<sup>132</sup> Louise Porter, “Participative Leadership and Hierarchical Structures in Multiple Perpetrator Rape: Replicating and Extending a Scale of Influence Among Offenders,” *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 25, no. 3 (2019): 227, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552600.2019.1617903>.

<sup>133</sup> Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (Picador, 2013), 166.

<sup>134</sup> Marsha Henry, “Problematizing Military Masculinity, Intersectionality and Male Vulnerability in Feminist Critical Military Studies,” *Critical Military Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017): 187, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1080/23337486.2017.1325140>.

<sup>135</sup> Damon Mitchell, Richard Hirschman and Gordon Nagayama Hall, “Attributions of Victim Responsibility, Pleasure, and Trauma in Male Rape,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 36, no. 4 (1999): 369, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3813721>.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

considered to be homosexual and thus in the process of rape, experiencing enjoyment.<sup>137</sup> This narrative is all too common in the discussion of victimhood within sexual assaults, with women also being portrayed as participants rather than victims. Furthermore, the construction of male victimhood during these assaults as one of enjoyment due to perceived homosexuality, dilutes the significance of these assaults in research and society. Additionally, portraying male victims this way seemingly exonerates blame from male troops who committed acts of rape, which in turn narrows reports of this violence during the war.

### **Villages as Sites of Violence**

Using existing archival and ethnographic research, it is clear that the primary victims of MPR were female Vietnamese civilians in villages throughout the country. Moreover, villages housed higher concentrations of women and children, who were deemed vulnerable to sexual violence. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that many instances of MPR were undocumented and under-reported not only due to their permissibility, but the remoteness of villages. The limited literature surrounding rape and the Vietnam War, specifically proposed by Amanda Boczar, suggests two distinct factors that contribute to the prevalence of MPR in villages: isolation and proximity.<sup>138</sup>

### ***Isolation***

When conducting research for this project, the discussion of sexual violence that occurred during the war seemed to have been often communicated verbally with many troops either seeing or *hearing* that these acts occurred. In other words, due to the isolation of villages and distance between different units stationed in Vietnam, there was little to no regulation of these acts due to the fact there was a universally understood perception that they were not necessarily bad nor were troops at risk of persecution. As I mentioned earlier, a factor that contributed to this perception is most likely the involvement of those in higher military positions as group leaders in acts of MPR. Furthermore, the presence of isolated villages predominately inhabited by women

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 370.

<sup>138</sup> Amanda Boczar, *An American Brothel: Sex and Diplomacy During the Vietnam War* (Cornell University Press, 2022), 140.

and girls created conditions in which sexual violence became almost institutionalized as part of military doctrine.<sup>139</sup>

### ***Proximity***

In addition to isolation, Bozcar suggests that the proximity between American troops and Vietnamese female civilians played a role in the frequency of MPR during the war.<sup>140</sup> This is not to say that I believe that proximity alone is the main motivation behind MPR, nor am I claiming that without proximity, MPR would decrease, I am merely stating that the correlation between the perceived sexual availability of women in the villages and proximity might have contributed to instances of MPR. For example, some troops had stated that women were “available” and when you go into the village you can essentially “take what you want.”<sup>141</sup> Additionally, this correlation between villages and sexual availability was a known phenomenon to Vietnamese civilians, with many women and girls being hidden before troops were supposedly entering a village.<sup>142</sup> Evidently, there seems to be an inherent entitlement present and erosion of Vietnamese agency to which these women had no choice but to be the vessels in which troops asserted dominance and larger objectives.

### ***Sexual Availability***

The evidence provided above outlines some sort of indication that sexual availability was synonymous with the presence of women in villages, which prompts the question: what factors contribute to this correlation? Evidently, there are numerous factors at play which include functions of masculinity, different dimensions of the expression of dominance, and individualistically constructed narratives, which all lie beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, one distinct characteristic which may begin to explain the correlation troops possessed between Vietnamese women and the presence of villages, is the long-standing sexualization of Asian women by western institutions, such as the US military.

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<sup>139</sup> Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (Picador, 2013), 6.

<sup>140</sup> Amanda Boczar, *An American Brothel: Sex and Diplomacy During the Vietnam War* (Cornell University Press, 2022), 140.

<sup>141</sup> Gina Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* (State University of New York Press, 2010), 34.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.



### **Sexual Objectification of Asian Women**

The sexualization of Asian women or the categorization of Asian women as sexual objects during the Vietnam War is a long-standing theme in western society, to which feminist methodologies, among others, have aimed to critically analyze. As sociologist Stuart Hall claimed, the west has developed “models of sexuality” that places an emphasis on “sexual domination” and “submissiveness” which are often correlated with imperialism and territorial conquest.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, in times of colonial conquest, geographic areas were oftentimes “allegorized as women” as entities which can be dominated.<sup>144</sup> Thus, the notion that Vietnam was a new and unfamiliar geographical area to troops which had to be militarily conquered, directly implicated Vietnamese women as something to also be conquered or dominated. Hall’s analysis directly correlates with MacKinnon’s arguments pertaining to colonialism and wartime rape.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, the conceptualization of Asian women as objects for sexual gratification is evident during the Vietnam War, with many troops viewing these women as subservient to the American presence and subsequently there for their own use.

### ***Playboy Magazine***

An example that represents the correlation between Asian women and sex during the Vietnam War was the prevalence of *Playboy* magazine, which featured its first Asian model which coincided with US troops arriving in Vietnam. *Playboy* allegedly provided an “escape” from the war for American troops with the magazine displaying supportive sentiment for the American experience.<sup>146</sup> This particular type of consumable media, which features the sexual objectification of women, reinforced structures of masculinity in Vietnam and arguably encouraged the objectification of women. In 1964, the same year of the official declaration of

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<sup>143</sup> Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Duke University Press, 2018), 165.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>145</sup> Catharine Mackinnon, *Are Women Human?: And Other International Dialogues* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 145.

<sup>146</sup> Amber Batura, “The “Playboy” Way: “Playboy” Magazine, Soldiers, and the Military in Vietnam,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 22, no. 3 (2015): 224, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43898424>.

war, *Playboy* had strategically placed their first Asian women on a spread in the magazine.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, the hyper-sexual imagery of “China Lee” within the magazine conflated the conception of Asian women as subservient, sexual objects to troops, whom were already possessing dangerous misconceptions about the status of Vietnamese non-combatants.<sup>148</sup> Literature pertaining to the impact of hyper-sexual media and the levels of sexual violence during the Vietnam War is scarce. Yet, it is still vital to discuss factors which might have had some sort of contribution to the sexualization of Asian women that was present during the Vietnam War.

While *Playboy* might not have played a significant role in the occurrence of MPR during the Vietnam War, it plays a direct role in many of the counterarguments surrounding the preference of sexual violence. Furthermore, one of the largest counterarguments that continuously surfaces in literature regarding the Vietnam War and MPR is that the innate human need for sexual gratification is one of the largest contributors to incidents of rape. Moreover, that these acts, while viewed as morally problematic and sometimes acknowledged as a domestic crime, were not done with malice. Therefore, this counterargument, in close alignment with biological theories presented earlier in the thesis, asserts the claim that male troops *needed* sexual gratification and that women in villages were there to essentially fulfill this need; rapes were not carried out with the intention of harming or violating Vietnamese women, they were simply used as vessels for individual sexual needs. Or as one soldier puts it, “nature is nature.”<sup>149</sup> However, I find it hard to consider this argument to be credible not only due to much of the brutality that accompanied rapes, but the fact that Vietnam possesses an intricate and systemic brothel system, constructed for American troops.

### **Brothels During the Vietnam War**

Regrettably, I do not intend to analyze the problematic factors of wartime sex work nor do I have the space to discuss the specific brothel system in Vietnam, I am simply drawing on it as an example in the process of addressing this counterargument. Additionally, by placing the

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>149</sup> Gina Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* (State University of New York Press, 2010), 34.

existence of brothels in Vietnam seemingly as an alternative to rape is not done to diminish the imaginable prevalence of rape and violence within brothels. In alignment with common scholarly and societal concepts of the war, the presence of a brothel system *should* answer questions regarding the presence of rape during the war, as it would act as the outlet that these troops so desperately needed. If the underlying motivations for MPR during the Vietnam War were not for larger systemic purposes such as cohesion among troops and rather for individual sexual needs, then an intricate and expansive brothel system would act as an outlet for these soldiers.

The brothel system in Vietnam did act as an outlet for sexual gratification during the war and was utilized by both soldiers and military officials alike. I do not intend to discuss specific details of this institutionalized sex work, but it is important to note that these brothels were essentially “everywhere.”<sup>150</sup> Brothels were typically located within basecamps, with women and girls operating in cubicle systems or externally in the surrounding area.<sup>151</sup> Additionally, brothels included “little tickets”, which were colour-coded to correspond to different sexual services that troops could pay for.<sup>152</sup> Girls as young as six often lingered outside of base entrances, who were employed by these brothels.<sup>153</sup> Numerous problematic factors were at play, yet the status of the brothel was one of significance during the Vietnam War. Brothels were utilized during the war as places to fulfill the needs of soldiers who were “sexually hungry all the time.”<sup>154</sup> Therefore, one can deduct how this common counterargument to MPR may lack legitimacy, due to the fact there were indeed opportunities to which soldiers could fulfill their sexual needs, without deliberately engaging in external acts of MPR.

### **Brutality and MPR**

As journalist Nick Turse argued throughout his book, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*, something larger was at play that underpinned the rapes during the Vietnam War, especially MPR. The sheer brutality that accompanied acts of MPR indicated

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<sup>150</sup> Nick Turse, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam* (Picador, 2013), 165.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 165.

an objective that superseded any personal, sexually motivated needs. As I have stated previously, research suggests that acts of MPR may entail higher levels of brutality, promoting stronger bonds among those committing the act. Additionally, acts of MPR that encompassed violence such as mutilation and bodily harm act as “community forming violence” with the intent of “ideological integration.”<sup>155</sup> Thus, through acts of MPR, which included additional acts of violence, a “paradox of mutual subordination” emerges to which troops deepen interpersonal relationships via collective responsibility.<sup>156</sup> As one can see, what was reported and displayed to the public regarding the My Lai Massacre was not a singularity nor was it an instance of a small number of rogue servicemen who exploited the situation, it seems to be a reflection of indirect military policy during the war. Thus, arguments and scholarship which discuss the war fail to address why these acts were so brutal, which I argue is due to the fact there remains a reluctance to suggest these acts were more strategic than initially theorized.

As Boczar suggested, in a similar vein to other approaches to wartime rape, there can be subcategorizations of wartime rape which all include different motivations and objectives.<sup>157</sup> Thus, while one can argue that the rapes seen in Vietnam belonged to a specific category that outlines no strategic gain, I can equally argue the opposite. One categorization that is pertinent to this thesis is the notion of “rapes of practice” which are “due to leadership pressure” for the objective of “bonding among soldiers.”<sup>158</sup> Acts of MPR were occasionally preplanned or almost a given during village sweeps, with many units possessing structural plans which allowed rapists to “hang back” and “do their thing” while soldiers moved through villages.<sup>159</sup> Yet, MPR, especially those of practice, were not always preplanned but were also not random and thus seemed to be the predominant type of rape conducted. Sharing both the “fear and danger” of committing acts of MPR is often another factor that contributed to strengthening cohesion among

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<sup>155</sup> Sven Reichardt, “Violence and Community: A Micro-Study on Nazi Storm Troopers,” *Central European History* 46, no. 2 (2013): 276, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43280583>.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>157</sup> Amanda Boczar, *An American Brothel: Sex and Diplomacy During the Vietnam War* (Cornell University Press, 2022), 140.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>159</sup> Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (Penguin Books, 1993), 129.

units, which indicated the fact that these types of rapes possessed the ability to construct larger systemic and strategic objectives during the war.<sup>160</sup>

### ***Brutality and Mutilation in Vietnam***

The animalistic brutality of the MPR that occurred during the Vietnam War is often a phenomenon not discussed in literature, but is vital to understanding the role MPR played in the socialization of troops and the war itself. Often during sweeps of villages, women were found dead on the ground, naked, or in trees with cloths stuffed into their mouths.<sup>161</sup> Additionally, acts of MPR would typically includes acts of bodily harm such as breasts being “sliced” off or specific areas of the body being “cut open” as well as objects such as weapons or tree limbs being used to sodomize victims, subsequently, inflicting internal damage.<sup>162</sup> As reiterated previously, using the fact that many of the acts of MPR included significant amounts of secondary violence to victims through mutilation and deliberate killing, there is something concerning about MPR during the Vietnam War. The brutality which accompanied these acts of MPR were central to the construction of socializing processes among troops and provided validation or status to which these troops would not obtain in everyday life.

### **Construction of Discourse Around MPR**

When discussing masculine values in the Vietnam War and the conduct of troops, one soldier had claimed he “felt like a god” in the process of inflicting harm onto civilians.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, this trend of attaining a sense of power or heightened social status through the completion of MPR is common in research. Available research suggests that men who felt disenfranchised in everyday life felt a sense of superiority when engaging sexually or committing crimes against Vietnamese civilians; a sense bolstered by the absence of

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<sup>160</sup> Karen Franklin, “Enacting Masculinity: Antigay Violence and Group Rape as Participatory Theater,” *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 1, no. 2 (2004): 29, <http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/>.

<sup>161</sup> Gina Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* (State University of New York Press, 2010), 35.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

accountability to their commanding officers.<sup>164</sup> Thus, troops had attested that soldiers “repeatedly abused their powers and status” to “rape girls.”<sup>165</sup> In addition, soldiers had also claimed they could commit an act of rape and “nobody could say nothing.”<sup>166</sup> This statement is indicative of not only the perceived permissibility of rape during the war but also the collective responsibility which emerged. The experience troops underwent while committing acts of MPR, knowing they were acts of rape, solidified interpersonal ties and built trust based on the fact members committed the acts *together* and were thus almost equally responsible for the act. Therefore, it is clear that the level of brutality accompanied by the mutual completion and experience of the act of MPR facilitated the promotion of bonding and camaraderie.

While these acts might have been seen as brutal, atrocious, and irrational, they held little to no moral weight for some soldiers even following the public knowledge of the My Lai Massacre. One might have assumed the revelations around My Lai would have focused US authorities on the likelihood of similar incidences occurring elsewhere in Vietnam. Yet, it is highlighted by the persistence of these acts that this was not a problem taken seriously by officials. In alignment with my central argument, it seems as though it would prove to be problematic to the military to regulate and essentially remove indirect military policy or an act that is integral to functioning in Vietnam. The unofficial acceptability of MPR led to its continual use past both the initial occurrence of the My Lai Massacre and its societal ramifications.

### **The Monolithic Guerrilla Enemy**

An additional reason as to why rape was not considered as serious was due to the construction of Vietnamese female victimhood as non-existent, due to the alleged nature of guerrilla warfare. While this remains beyond the scope of this thesis and belongs to a wider breadth of study, guerrilla warfare is one of the defining features of the Vietnam War and is in direct opposition to conventional ways of waging war. In Vietnam, the VC were seen as an illusive enemy that prioritized elements of surprise and small attacks spread out throughout the

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<sup>164</sup> Karen Franklin, “Enacting Masculinity: Antigay Violence and Group Rape as Participatory Theater,” *Sexuality Research & Social Policy* 1, no. 2 (2004): 36, <http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/>.

<sup>165</sup> Gina Weaver, *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* (State University of New York Press, 2010), 56.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

country.<sup>167</sup> Most often, they would utilize underground tunnels, traps, and other strategies and mount the attack on US troops and retreat back into the jungle and move throughout the country with the help of local sympathizers.<sup>168</sup> This relationship between VC guerrillas and locals came to guide much of the US combat strategy as the war progressed. Yet, most of the acts inflicted towards women who were non-combatants were not done so in the aim of fighting guerrillas. Further, *even if* troops encountered female guerrillas, which is not an uncommon phenomenon, raping them does not seem to achieve any direct military objectives.

### ***Construction of Female Vietnamese Victimhood***

Unfortunately, the assumption that village women were local to VC forces led to these women being treated as an enemy. This conclusion is often accompanied by the other justifications cited previously, which categorized these women and girls as active participants. Constructing Vietnamese women as an enemy through racial subordination had damaging consequences for victims of rape. Research conducted by MacKinnon suggests that, “ethnic hostility” during an attack occasionally leads to increased levels of arousal because it is being inflicted towards a “designated enemy.”<sup>169</sup> Therefore, much of the justification that accompanies MPR has to do with the perception of Vietnamese women as either willing participants or as the enemy, who in turn are deserving of whatever treatment they receive at the hands of troops, no matter the brutality. These justifications are both frustrating and problematic when addressed by feminist theories and frameworks, yet reveal crucial information regarding the narrative shared among troops.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, the frequent and strategic use of MPR during the Vietnam War was not only confined to the My Lai Massacre. The role MPR played not only in reinforcing militarized masculinity by being inflicted onto women or perceivably feminine men but also in forming increased bonding and camaraderie among troops, is one of significance. Furthermore, the

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<sup>167</sup> Joseph Goldstein, Burke Marshall and Jack Schwartz, *The My Lai Massacre and Its Cover-up: Beyond the Reach of Law?* (The Free Press, 1976), 198-199.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>169</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?: And Other International Dialogues* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 145.

inherent correlation between Vietnamese women and sexual availability was one that was entrenched not only in military policy directly relating to the Vietnam War, but to the development of Vietnam as a site of colonial conquest. Exotic and sexual connotations being attached to women during French rule in Indochina established a long-lasting perception of the female population before the first US soldier came ashore. Only exaggerated by sexual material such as *Playboy* featuring an Asian model, the correlation between Asian women and the entitlement of American troops was most definitely used as both an excuse and outlet for sexual activity during the war. However, the accessibility of sex work institutions during the war in tandem with the sheer brutality seen during the acts of MPR indicate that claims that excuse this behaviour, using our current understanding of wartime violence, have lost credibility.

Therefore, through the evidence I have presented above, it is clear that there is an underlying objective underpinning the acts of MPR during the Vietnam War that surpasses the needs and desires of individual servicemen. Approaching the war with a conceptual framework which both acknowledges the widespread sexual violence external from the My Lai Massacre and which understands current approaches to wartime rape, the Vietnam War is a complex case study of the role sexual violence plays in conflict. The intersecting factors of race, sex, power, colonialism, and militarism, all contribute to the acts which happened, and their lack of acknowledgment in broader public discourse.



## CONCLUSION

How does one reconcile with atrocity and injustice? How do our understandings of dominant narratives, pertaining to wartime rape, change with time? These questions both rely on individual perceptions and are shaped by societal factors, yet are crucial to discussing violence in past conflicts. The Vietnam War, considered a proxy war by many, occurred over five decades ago; the contents in this thesis, such as MPR and accompanying forms of militarized violence, took place over five decades ago. Yet, this type of violence is still ubiquitous in present-day conflict. Approaches to the study of wartime rape as well as military history have broadened in scope to further understand the role that rape plays in war as a distinct weapon, strategy, and tactic with objectives far beyond sexual needs. These developments in academia can be attributed to societal and cultural shifts, as well as the continual presence of rape in conflict following landmark cases seen in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Our understanding of wartime rape have changed drastically due to new revelations in conflicts globally, but why is this not applied to the war in Vietnam?

### Conceptualizations of American Victimhood

Over the course of my undergraduate education, my verbal and written claim of sexual violence committed by the US military has oftentimes been met with doubt, hostility, and neglect. I have been repeatedly advised by male peers and lecturers that despite my research and evidence of widespread, strategic sexual violence in Vietnam, it was merely collateral. My mention of acts of violence committed by American troops during the war have quickly been countered with statements that someone has done *worse*, which overshadowed any responsibility I tried attaching to the US. Yet, these same peers and lecturers were quick to discuss sexual violence in other wars, typically wars which the US were seen as liberators rather than perpetrators. I found that my discussion of mass sexual violence against Vietnamese women was seen as synonymous with disparaging the experiences of Vietnam veterans, which is not the case. Constructed as the victims of the “horrors of war,” the responsibility and victimhood of Vietnam veterans are not mutually exclusive.<sup>170</sup> I can acknowledge the experience of veterans without

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<sup>170</sup> Sandra Scalón. *The Pro-war Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 341.

discrediting the violence which many inflicted on Vietnamese women; the recognition of one the inherent denial of the other. These uniform responses to my inquiries are what inspired my project and what has driven my interest in wanting to understand more of what took place in Vietnam.

### **Key Findings**

As I demonstrated in both my introduction and first chapter of my thesis, wartime rape has historically been conceived as something collateral or inevitable when conflict occurs. Further, that wartime rape is for the obtainment of purely individual sexual gains which are merely a byproduct of human nature or psychological motivations. By providing arguments presented by feminist scholarship as well as journalists, it is evident that wartime rape is used as an instrument of military strategy in conflict. As seen in the wars in Yugoslavia and genocide in Rwanda, the use of widespread rape as a form of ethnic cleansing allowed for its legal conception to emerge. Furthermore, understanding rape as something that can be strategically used and weaponized to inflict harm, assert dominance, display gendered norms, and achieve military aims, widens our understanding of violence during conflict and the nuanced role it can play.

### ***MPR as Strategy***

The widening of scholarship on wartime rape, especially with its presence in mainstream theories and historiographies, has worked to shed light on other forms of violence in conduct, such as MPR. MPR has a distinct role in forming increased levels of cohesion and bonding among military units, particularly that of units stationed in Vietnam. Research suggests MPR brings forth higher levels of completion, accompanying violence, and possesses larger strategic variables in war. Acts of MPR are often initiated and directed by a group leader, who is that of social status or representative of ideal masculinized values, to which co-offenders will follow suit. After following through with the act, which was typically violent and involving numerous perpetrators, a swarm of collective responsibility emerges, strengthening impersonal ties. Furthermore, the true nature of the war in Vietnam was represented by the My Lai Massacre, which acts as a cornerstone for discussions of wartime rape in Vietnam.

The My Lai Massacre will always remain in conversation about the Vietnam War yet theorizing beyond the massacre by positioning it within a larger structural context, is evidently divisive. The division around the massacre emerges from patriotic sentiment in the US that has been present since the beginning of the war. Vietnam veterans have representations of “national” and moral guilt attached to them, regardless of personal actions in Vietnam.<sup>171</sup>

In my first chapter, I outlined the horrific events which occurred during the My Lai Massacre along with counterarguments that have appeared frequently in both academia and my own personal life. Furthermore, I presented evidence regarding the discourse surrounding the mission as well as how language used to describe Vietnamese civilians acted as a key strategy for dehumanization and the permissibility of the acts which occurred. In addition, I presented evidence of CC requiring a distinct need for cohesion and socialization during their arrival in Vietnam, which allowed me to introduce the role MPR would have played in bringing this unity to them. Analyzing both patterns and uses of MPR from research and observing the acts which occurred during the massacre, it is evident that the presence of MPR represented a distinct role as a tool for bonding and camaraderie within CC. However, my investigation of the role MPR played during the war was meant to be expansive and not confined to March of 1968.

Sexual violence during the Vietnam War was widespread and MPR played a pivotal role in the functioning of the military. While the scale of the massacre is one of its abnormal features, the activities which took place is in alignment with US conduct throughout the war and the continuous violence inflicted onto Vietnamese women. Racist and sexualized perceptions of Asian women as being sexual or exotic objects present for US sexual gratification or as representative of imperial domination, is partially responsible for the levels of widespread MPR present during the war. Furthermore, the dialogue surrounding MPR as a normalized activity during the war as well as the animalistic brutality which accompanied it, is indicative of a larger systemic issue at play.

In my second chapter I outlined this notion by presenting evidence that seemingly supports this systemic characteristic and constructed an argument on how this was used for

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<sup>171</sup> Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (University of Massachusetts Press), 63.

bonding among units. I utilized government documents, preexisting interviews with veterans, feminist scholarship, as well as other sources of qualitative research. As research suggests and as I have demonstrated, the level of brutality of an attack of MPR indicates the levels of cohesion which will emerge from it, thus the more violent the act which took place in Vietnam, the stronger the bonding will be among units. While I am not discrediting the fact that acts of MPR occur for individualistic sexual needs, I am stating the fact that there is something worth investigating about acts of MPR during the Vietnam War as an overarching, indirect part of military strategy. Conceptualizing sexual violence which took place during the war as something that has larger implications than individual infliction is vital to broadening our understanding of wartime rape and the historiography of the Vietnam War.

### **Understanding the American War in Vietnam**

As time goes on the Vietnam War will remain further from public conscious and the continual use of wartime rape in conflict may direct our attention away from Vietnam as a legitimate example of strategic rape. While the acts themselves may have occurred decades ago, the underpinnings such as racism, sexual objectification, and the need for cohesion will remain as staple characteristic of conflict for many women. Vietnam remains overlooked possibly due to a lack of legal framework at the time, but additionally its political weight and patriotic legacy within the US; what occurred in Vietnam may never surface to the forefront of our approaches to wartime rape, which is not an unreasonable prediction.

Perhaps our struggle to reconcile with what happened stems from an internal reluctance to acknowledge that what occurred was not perpetrated by monsters nor was it perpetrated by only a mere few. The acts of brutal rape and mutilation were perpetrated by many “ordinary” men who possessed the capability to inflict such harm.<sup>172</sup> As Catharine MacKinnon stated, “what men do in war, they do in peace,” which I believe is not only a difficult statement to reckon with, but also a difficult statement to disagree with.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>173</sup> Catharine Mackinnon, *Are Women Human?: And Other International Dialogues* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 148.

## Moving Forward

This research project has been the culmination of my specific interests, experiences, and understandings of the relationship between military history, wartime rape, and feminist scholarship. Researching this topic has been challenging as it has not only forced me to become aware of the acts of violence during the war, but has also forced me to be aware of the larger societal underpinnings to rape in conflict. Yet, this project has also been one of the most rewarding processes and has equipped me with knowledge about the Vietnam War and MPR that have been not only invaluable to my degree, but also the trajectory of my future. I hope my contributions have not only welcomed dialogue pertaining to wartime rape during the Vietnam War, but also the construction of victimhood, the process of reconciling with atrocity, and the importance of discussing the experiences of victims of sexual violence due to US militarism.

To close, reiterating Cockburn's argument, our understandings of wartime rape are embedded into the "continuum" of sexual violence in our everyday life.<sup>174</sup> Further, we need to be aware of how acts of wartime rape are echoed into different structures in society whether they be economically, politically, militarily, or legally expressed. We need to be conscious of this reality. Additionally, our movements, critiques, acts of resistance, and support need to be "capable of acting in many places, at many levels, and on many problems simultaneously."<sup>175</sup> Thus, what I have presented in this thesis and what occurred in Vietnam is not merely a historical case study nor is it a singularity, it is indicative of larger cultural, societal, and gendered issues we face everyday.

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<sup>174</sup> Cynthia Cockburn, "The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace," in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, ed. Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (University of California Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 44.

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